

RE-THINKING MOUNTAINS: ASCENTS, AESTHETICS, AND
ENVIRONMENT IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE

Dawn L. Hollis

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



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Re-Thinking Mountains: Ascents, Aesthetics, and Environment in Early Modern Europe

Dawn L. Hollis



University of
St Andrews

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of PhD
at the University of St Andrews

30th September 2016

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Abstract

Mountains are among the most visible and culturally loaded landforms of the modern world. From the late eighteenth century onwards they have, in western contexts, acted as sites of nationalism, masculinity, heroism, and environmentalism, shaped largely by the defining activity of modern mountaineering. This thesis will explore the position of mountains in British and European culture before the apparent advent of climbing 'for its own sake'. What did people think, feel, or know about mountains in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and early eighteenth centuries? Did they ever climb mountains, and, if so, for what reasons? What cultural associations - good or bad - were attached to the mountains of the early modern mind?

Drawing upon natural philosophical debates, travellers' accounts, and poetry, this thesis will examine the nature and contexts of early modern mountain knowledge, activities, aesthetics, and literary representation. In so doing it will present a picture of varied and often enthusiastic mountain engagement, whether on an intellectual or physical level, which runs contrary to the accepted historiographical perception that mountains were generally feared, disdained, and avoided before the advent of mountaineering. It will therefore also interrogate the origins of the idea of premodern 'mountain gloom', proposing that it is not so much a statement of historical fact as a key tenet of the modern cultural discourse of mountain appreciation.

Acknowledgements

Just over three years ago I found myself standing at the fork of two roads diverging 'in a yellow wood'. One path led to teacher training in an idyllic Oxfordshire school; the other to a Ph.D on the Scottish coast. That I found myself facing this conundrum at all is thanks to the support of the AHRC. That I took the second path is thanks to Dr. Bernhard Struck, whose warmth and generosity convinced me that if I took the leap I would at the very least be working with an excellent and supportive supervisor. Bernhard, thank you for lending your home as a base for house-hunting, for many schooners bought over the years, and for turning an old-fashioned Oxbridge graduate into a slightly more theory-driven historian (even if she still isn't entirely sure about Foucault).

Warm thanks are also due to Dr. Sarah Easterby-Smith, who gamely came on as my second supervisor halfway through the project, offering her intellectual support and advice in addition to the friendship and good company she had already provided. I have been extremely lucky to have had both. Sarah, thank you so much for the dedication and enthusiasm which you brought to my project. I look forward to spending time with you in the future wearing different hats.

I am also extremely grateful to Professors Peter Hansen and Richard Whatmore for acting as my examiners and for providing a memorable and rewarding culmination to my PhD journey. Their expertise, insightful commentary, and collegial generosity was warmly appreciated. Particular thanks must go to Professor Hansen for travelling across the Atlantic in order to attend my viva.

The roots, and debts of this Ph.D. project date back far beyond my time at St Andrews. My fascination with the history of mountains, as well as with the climbing of them, was first encouraged by Amanda Richmond, a teacher who truly fulfilled the definition of 'inspirational' by becoming the oldest British woman to climb Everest. My aspirations for further study beyond my undergraduate degree were supported by Professor Lyndal Roper, a historian as generous as she is brilliant. My early investigations into the topic of early modern mountain knowledge were overseen with great thoughtfulness and dedication by Professor Alexandra Walsham, who supervised my MPhil at the University of Cambridge.

Presenting and discussing my work at conferences, seminars, and lectures has provided me with the opportunity to develop my work over the past three years and to gain valuable insights from those in attendance. Special thanks go to the Alpine Club for allowing me to speak to them, and for their very thought-provoking responses; I can only apologise that I have not entirely re-thought my basic thesis, as they strongly encouraged me to do. I would also like to particularly acknowledge the value of the 2015 triennial Thinking Mountains conference, hosted by the University of Alberta in the stunning Jasper National Park, to the development of my ideas.

Although, as one of my supervisors once commented at a social event, I ‘always seem to be talking about mountains’, there has been play alongside much work. I would like to thank the inhabitants of the Scriptorium (‘studying a long time ago in an office not far from here’) through the years for their shared coffee, snacks, and well-timed impromptu breaks. My family in Suffolk have always succeeded in keeping me grounded, for example with the production of two wonderful nephews who could not care less about early modern mountains. Meanwhile in Scotland the Crail Coastal Rowing Club has distracted me from the hills by dragging me out onto the water at every spare opportunity, although its members have also worked hard to keep me on the straight and narrow by regularly asking after my progress. Thank you to the Partan Army for being my Fife family. Particular love must also go to Nick and Tanya, who to my great surprise have managed to turn me into a boardgame-addicted extrovert. Thank you for a whole lot of companionship and fun.

Finally, and above all, even 80,000 words would be insufficient to express the debt that I gladly owe to my best friend and husband, Kelsey Jackson Williams. This project has been part of our marriage since its very beginning and no one could have been more dedicated in reading drafts and providing not just insights and advice but also endless cups of tea and tireless cheerleading. More importantly, Kelsey, you have kept me silly, happy, and healthy, and I know my work has been the better for it. *Tha gràdh agam ort, mo mucmhara adharcach.*

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Introduction: Re-Thinking Early Modern Mountains

Philippe de Champaigne's 1657 *Christ Healing the Blind* (fig. 1) depicts an extraordinary scene. In the foreground, a crowd floods up a rocky, tree-lined pathway. The figure of Jesus, conspicuous in blue cloak and lilac robes, is stretching his right hand towards two men crouching at the entrance of a hut built into overhanging crags. In their grey robes, they almost blend into the landscape around them, in stark contrast with the colourfully-dressed disciples and followers. These are 'the blind', and their arms - one pair stretched up in praise, the other forwards in supplication - direct the viewer's eyes upwards and outwards towards the background of the painting, which dominates the canvas. The blue sky and water and glowing limestone crags and buildings stand out against the duller greens and browns of the foreground, but harmonise with the bright cloaks and robes worn by many of the human figures, most particularly those of Jesus. On the other side of the river, white towers stretch from the pinnacle of a lofty mountain crag, depicting the city of Jericho but also alluding to the heavenly New Jerusalem promised at the end of times.¹ Beyond, a series of taller mountains, blue and perhaps even snow covered, recede into the distance; the French painter has equipped the Holy Land with a topography which would not be out of place in the Pyrenees. The position of the blind men is such that the first thing their newly-healed eyes would fall upon is the very same vision the viewer of the painting is encouraged to admire: the glory of God's creation, in the form of the built ingenuity of man nestled amidst the greatness of His natural landscape.

Just over two centuries later, the Alpine Club inaugurated the use of an embossed and gilded image (fig. 2) which would decorate the hardback covers of its flagship publications, from the first issue of *Peaks, Passes, and Glaciers* in 1858 to the *Alpine Journals* of the present day.² An almost perfectly diagonal mountain slope runs from the upper left-hand corner of the image to the lower right. The imagination is left to fill in the backdrop of glistening peaks. In any case, the two figures in the image are not looking around them; their focus is on the ascent. The lower figure grips a rope in one hand and

¹ The painting is based on Matthew 20:29-34. For New Jerusalem, see Revelation 21:2 (c.f. Ezekiel 40, *passim*).

² The standard embossed covers were replaced with gloss covers during the mid- to late-twentieth century, but members of the Alpine Club can still choose to have their *Journals* rebound in the traditional boards at additional expense. As of 2016 approximately 40 members do so (with thanks to Glyn Hughes, Honorary Archivist of the Alpine Club).

an alpenstock in the other. The lead climber's frozen pose is a dynamic one, with an axe lifted high above his head in advance of a downward swing to either grab purchase on snow or cut footholds into ice. The direction of travel is upwards; the summit is out of view, but every line of the image points to its existence and to the intention the mountaineers have of reaching it.

These two images are emblematic of the key cultural associations bound up with mountains in early modern and modern Europe, and are indicative of the congruence and contrast between the two periods. Champaigne's masterpiece captures a glorification of mountains steeped in religious imagery and closely associated with belief in the Christian God. The Alpine Club cover art highlights the pre-eminence of modern mountaineering as a heroic engagement with the landscape, placing man high and alone upon – and victorious over – the mountain. Both images represent wider cultural contexts in which mountains were valued and enjoyed. The difference is that in the earlier context they were crucially enjoyed through a belief in God, whilst in the latter context the relationship between man and mountain no longer required this divine mediation, and was instead tied up with the modern activity of mountaineering.

This suggested shift – and the suggestion of an early modern appreciation for mountains – differs starkly from the generally accepted narrative regarding human engagement with mountains in European history. It is not so much a historiographical argument as a tenet of general historical knowledge that the modern-day enjoyment of mountains is unique to the period. Academic monographs followed by popular mountaineering histories followed by newspaper articles have repeated the widespread historical belief that, before modernity, mountains in Europe were, at best, places to be avoided as uncomfortable and unappealing, and at worst objects of superstitious terror, inhabited by dragons.³ Where, then, does a seventeenth-century image such as Champaigne's *Christ Healing the Blind* – in which the sight of a mountain landscape is the miraculous result of the capacities of Christ and thus representative of the glory of God – come from?

³ E.g., Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (1963; first published 1959); Robert Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind: A History of a Fascination* (2003); Jonathon Jones, 'The magic of mountains in art', *The Guardian*, 8 February 2011, <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2011/feb/08/mountains-leonardo-giambologna-art>> [03.08.2016].



Fig. 1: Phillipe de Champaigne, *Christ Healing the Blind* (c.1657), oil on canvas, Timken Museum of Art.

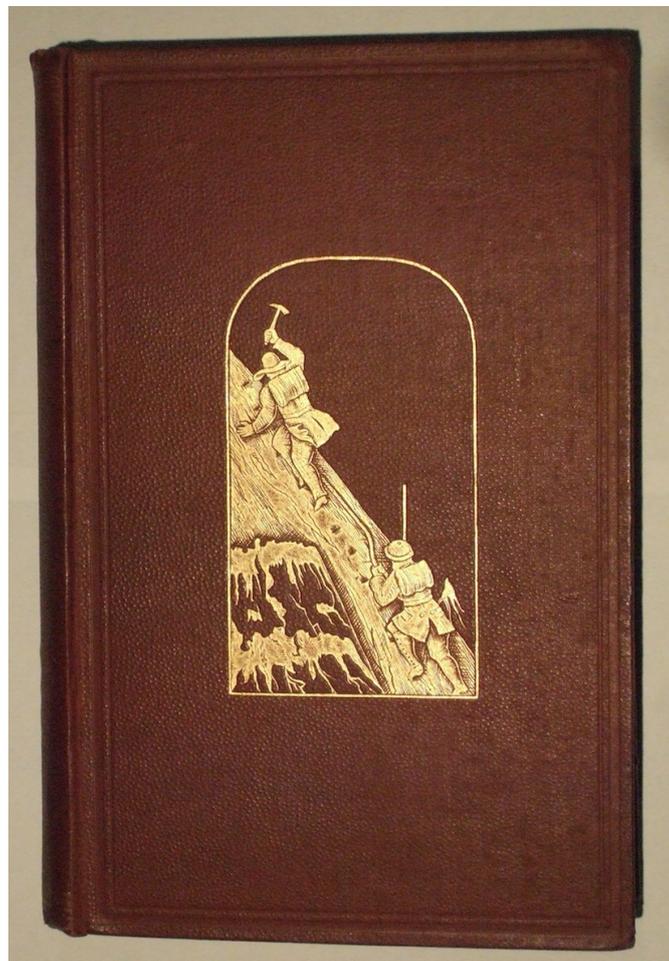


Fig. 2: Alpine Club cover art. Volume pictured *The Alpine Journal* vol.1 (1863).

Under the prevailing narrative sketched above, such examples are cast as curious aberrations, as the exceptions which prove the rule. Indeed, this thesis began life as a research project which accepted the basic proposition of early modern mountain distaste, and which sought to understand what it looked like when expressed across a variety of contexts. Mountains, after all, are difficult to completely avoid. What did travellers think when they were forced to journey over them? How did natural philosophers write about mountains in particular when describing and analysing the world in general? In the course of investigating these questions I encountered so many 'exceptional' examples of early modern mountain appreciation that I began to consider it might be time to re-think the rule. This thesis will demonstrate that the historiographical pre-eminence of the narrative of premodern 'mountain gloom' giving way to modern 'mountain glory' is the result of its implication in the terms, presumptions, and discourses of modernity. As such it has coloured readings of premodern mountain interactions for at least two centuries. This thesis will attempt to set those lenses aside.

The title 're-thinking mountains' represents not just the revisionist claims of this thesis but also the new historical narrative it seeks to trace. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, mountains began to be 're-thought' in European discourse in ways that would lay the ground for later developments, including the articulation of the sublime and the founding of a passionate, modern love-affair with mountain climbing. These re-thinkings were located within natural philosophical debates which saw many assumptions that had previously been taken for granted – for example regarding the age and origins of the world and the reliability of Scripture – called into question. Mountains formed a key mental laboratory within which the vital religious ramifications of these doubts were untangled. Such discussions not only affected 'scientific' understandings of the world but also aesthetic discourses and the immediate experiences of travellers who visited or passed over mountains. By the early eighteenth century, the intellectual framework that had informed early modern mountain experiences and attitudes had been stripped away. The nineteenth-century commentators who then took the lead in re-thinking mountains for modernity did so with explicit reference to a stark break between past mountain distaste and their own, self-consciously positive engagement. In so doing, they bequeathed to posterity a distorted vision of premodern mountain attitudes.

Frameworks for Inquiry

At the most basic level, this thesis is a study of attitudes towards mountains in early modern Europe. This statement may seem straightforward, but it is not. It prompts several questions that are crucial to methodology, source selection, and remit. How is 'early modern' defined or, for that matter, 'in Europe'? How best to recover the ephemerality of attitudes, reactions, or experiences, and to communicate them analytically? What, precisely, is a 'mountain'? The answer to the final question informs the critical frameworks upon which this thesis will draw. The apparently straightforward signifier of 'mountain' has, after all, been taken to refer to a variety of different things, and to demand a variety of critical tools, across a range of different scholarly fields.

One could answer that a mountain is an element of the landscape. The study of landscape in historical perspective has, however, engendered contrasting approaches over time. This thesis is not concerned with the physical geological processes which acted upon mountains during the early modern period. Nor is it primarily concerned with taking what Ian D. Whyte has termed an 'objective approach' to landscape, considering the physical changes caused over time 'by natural and especially human forces'.⁴ This approach characterises the earliest, pioneering work in the field of landscape studies. Geographer Carl Sauer and historian W.G. Hoskins emphasised the ways in which landscape could be viewed as a cultural construct, highlighting the 'palimpsest' of layers of change and continuity imprinted upon it by different generations and the choices they made with regards to habitation, agriculture, and production.⁵

More recently, scholars have come to consider the lived experience of and values associated with the landscape to be an inseparable part of the physical 'cultural landscape' as originally defined by Sauer. For Denis Cosgrove, a key proponent of the field in the 1980s and 1990s, 'landscape' was more than just an area of physical space and the mountains, trees, or buildings which that space contained: instead, the term should be

⁴ Ian D. Whyte, *Landscape and History since 1500* (2002), pp.15-17.

⁵ Carl Sauer, 'The Morphology of Landscape', *Land and Life: A Selection from the Writings of Carl Otwin Sauer*, ed. J. Leighley (1963), pp.321-323; first published in *University of California Publications in Geography*, 2 (1925); W.G. Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape* ([2006]), p.xvii.

taken to denote the external world as ‘mediated through subjective human experience’.⁶ Christopher Tilley, an archaeologist of prehistoric Europe, has put forward the concept of ‘landscape phenomenology’, which includes a particularly relevant emphasis on the embodied nature of human experience of the natural world; from a historical perspective, it is all too easy to forget the ‘lived body’ through which past human beings accessed space, place, or landscape.⁷ My approach is informed by the insights of both Cosgrove and Tilley, understanding early modern ‘mountain engagement’ as including both the meeting of minds - complete with attached cultural baggage - and the encounter of bodies with the physical realities, pleasures, and harshnesses of the mountain landscape.⁸

In attempting to parse the nature and content of these encounters into manageable and logically coherent categories, I have drawn from the work of the philosopher Henri Lefebvre, whose approach has already informed the ‘spatial turn’ in history.⁹ In his *Production of Space* (1974), Lefebvre distinguished between ‘absolute [natural] space’, and ‘social space’. Human experience, he posited, was of the latter, and could be analysed according to three different categories; spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space. The definition of spatial practice is fairly self-evident, encompassing the usage of space (whether domestic, institutional, interior or exterior), patterns of human movement, and questions of either physically-imposed or individually-maintained areas of segregation. Representations of space, for Lefebvre, are those documents designed to shape the way in which space is used and perceived; for example, architectural plans, or the official demarcation of state parks. Such

⁶ Denis Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (1984), p.13. Whyte, *Landscape History*, pp.21-22, defines Cosgrove’s as an example of a ‘subjective approach’ to landscape.

⁷ Christopher Tilley, *The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology* (2004), pp.2-6.

⁸ This thesis will refer to what might be termed ‘emotional reactions’ (such as pleasure) with a full awareness of debates within the history of emotions regarding whether emotions are biologically constant or culturally constituted. My approach is intended to concur with the consensus view that emotions have ‘a neurological basis but... [are] shaped, repressed [and] expressed differently from era to era’. Moreover, my research has followed the work of historians of emotion in considering that the past may conceal ‘lost emotions’ (or reactions) for which no modern-day equivalent seems to exist, and which are explicable only in their full historic context. However, this thesis does not belong, analytically speaking, to ‘the’ history of emotions, since no recourse is made to the categories and vocabularies established by scholars in the field, such as ‘emotionology’ (societal standards of basic emotions) or ‘emotives’ (the speech act of expressing feelings). C.f. Susan J. Matt, ‘Current Emotion Research in History: Or, Doing History from the Inside Out’, *Emotion Review* 3:1 (2011), p.118; Ute Frevert, *Emotions in History: Lost and Found* (2011); Peter N. and Carol Z. Stearns, ‘Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards’, *American Historical Review* 90:4 (1985), particularly p.813; William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (2001), pp.105-110.

⁹ Richard White, ‘What is Spatial History?’, *The Spatial History Project* (2007), pp.2-3.

representations are often aspirational (indicating not the space as it 'is' but how the author wishes it to be) but also signify the power dynamics inherent to the production of space; a particularly potent example of a spatial representation occurring in a context of complex and unbalanced power dynamics might be Sir Cyril Radcliffe drawing his hasty line for the Partition of India in 1947. Finally, representational space indicates the web of associations and symbolic realities which overlay physical space: it is what makes a church a holy building rather than just a hall with particularly high rafters.¹⁰ This division is, of course, a pragmatic one; all three forms of space overlap and impact upon one another.

The research questions underlying this thesis fall into three broad categories: those which relate to establishing, in general terms, the attitudes towards mountains prevalent in the early modern period; those which interrogate elements of change and continuity between the early modern and modern period; and those which seek to explicate the development of the modern historical concept of past mountain distaste. These, particularly the first, are all large questions, and an adapted form of Lefebvre's tripartite division of space has provided a valuable mental framework for handling them throughout the development of this project. The adaptation has been to define 'representations of space' more literally than Lefebvre did, and to take it to mean any attempt to record or describe the mountain space, whether in painting, poetry, or prose.

Therefore, my basic question – 'what did people think and feel about mountains in early modern Europe?' – can be broken down into three categories. There is that of early modern mountain practice: in what different contexts did people engage with mountains or make use of the mountain landscape? How did individuals go on to represent mountains, and what sort of values or qualities did they ascribe to them in discussing them? What was the 'representational space' of the early modern mountain landscape? What contours of knowledge, culturally valued texts, and unspoken assumptions lay behind mountain experiences and the records that people left of them? The traditional narrative of premodern mountain distaste can easily be rephrased to provide answers according to these categories: that people avoided mountains at all costs (spatial

¹⁰ C.f. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (1991; first published 1974), pp.33-39.

practice), that they wrote or depicted them only in terms of disapprobation (representation of space), and that they viewed them in light of naïve superstitions (representational space). This thesis will problematise each of these implicit claims.

Moreover, just as Lefebvre's tripartite division of space allows for more precise analysis of sources in specific temporal contexts, it also enables greater comparative specificity. Throughout, this thesis will consider the ways in which mountain practice, representations of mountains, and the representational space of mountains developed between the early modern and modern periods, and how they related to each other. Utilising Lefebvre allows for greater nuance and for the elucidation of a story that incorporates both change and continuity; change, for example, in mountain practices, partial change in representational space, and notable continuity in representations of mountains. Finally, in seeking to understand and explain the development of a historiographical background which has told only of a dichotomous change, this thesis will set the production of key texts within the context of contemporaneous mountain practices and will consider the ways in which they contributed to the construction of a new, modern-day representational mountain space.

Contexts, Past and Present

If there is any one historiographical text to which this thesis may be viewed as a response, it is Marjorie Hope Nicolson's 1959 monograph, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*. A literary scholar, Nicolson set out to respond to 'a basic problem in the history of taste: why did mountain attitudes change so spectacularly in England' during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries?¹¹ This change, she wrote, was from an early modernity in which 'most men who climbed mountains climbed them fearfully, grimly, resenting the necessity, only on rare occasions suggesting the slightest aesthetic gratification', to a modern context in which 'The "Mountain Glory" dawned, then shone full splendour.'¹²

Nicolson looked for her answer in a place that was, for her discipline and era, a novel one; reading the natural philosophical writings of Thomas Burnet, author of the *Sacred Theory of the Earth* (first published in Latin in 1681), as a literary text embedded in and

¹¹ Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom*, p.vii.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp.2-3.

expressive of the attitudes of its time. Although *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory* has frequently been cited largely for the dichotomous narrative inherent in its pre-colon title, Nicolson's overarching argument was in fact more complex. As her subtitle elaborates, she posited that the eighteenth century saw the inauguration of 'the Aesthetics of the Infinite', in which the 'emotional responses previously evoked by God' were gradually transferred to an appreciation of the greatness and grandeur of the natural world.¹³ Nicolson located the late-seventeenth-century natural philosopher Thomas Burnet at the crux of this shift. In his *Theory of the Earth* he simultaneously denigrated mountains as the ruins of Creation whilst nevertheless acknowledging their immense emotional impact upon him. He therefore appeared in Nicolson's narrative as the first early modern who was torn between the then 'accepted' aesthetic principles of proportion and symmetry, which inclined him towards viewing mountains with 'distaste and repulsion', and an involuntary rapture in the mountain environment that represented the earliest inklings of the modern sublime.¹⁴

Nicolson developed her argument with reference to a wide range of texts from across the early modern period. She first elaborated what she termed the 'Literary Heritage' available to writers and poets in both seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England, identifying three key strands of influence: the Greek classics, the Roman or Latin classics, and Christian Scripture.¹⁵ According to her overview, a more positive vision of mountains was available in ancient Greek literature, but she argued that 'the distaste of the Romans... [and] the distrust of the primitive Christians for "that which is high"' had the greatest formative influence on early modern perceptions.¹⁶ Nicolson then went on to survey a series of early modern English poems which made reference to mountains, from John Milton's *L'Allegro* ('Mountains on whose barren breast') to Marvell's *Upon the Hill and Grove at Bill-borow* ('ye Mountains more unjust').¹⁷ Significantly, she emphasised extracts which suggested negative perceptions of mountains, discarding more positive allusions as merely reflecting 'derivative' terms, allegorical language, and 'conventional

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.393. C.f. Cian Duffy and Peter Howell, eds., *Cultures of the Sublime: Selected Readings, 1750-1830* (2011), p.2.

¹⁴ Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom*, p.34.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.34-71.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.45.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.8, p.34, and p.40.

stereotypes'.¹⁸ Having made her literary overview, Nicolson went on to place early modern theology and geology - aptly presented as essentially intertwined concerns - front and centre, positing that the shifting sands of religious understandings of the landscape combined with new theories and realisations about the physical state of the world created the conditions necessary for a dramatic break in aesthetic thought.

Received with cautious positivity in the years immediately following its publication, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory* has since gone on to gain the status of a historiographical classic.¹⁹ It is that rare thing: a work of mid-century scholarship which is still cited, for its conclusions and its arguments, to the present day. It is known and utilised across fields and across genres; from academic monographs in landscape history to journal articles on aesthetic theory.²⁰ Despite its age, Nicolson's text remains highly influential and relevant, and this thesis will therefore engage with it directly. It is also representative of a wider strand of historical discourse. Not only is *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory* cited directly across contexts, the basic idea that it posited, of early modern distaste and fear giving way to modern passion, also appears - without reference

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.36, p.50, p.54, p.59, p.68.

¹⁹ Derek Roper critiqued some of Nicolson's chosen examples of 'the early contempt for mountains', suggesting that a few were somewhat forced, but concluded that her study was an illuminating one; Jean H. Hagstrum made similar criticisms, but termed *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory* 'the definitive exploration of its subject'. Derek Roper, review of Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, in *The Review of English Studies*, N.S. 12:45 (1961), 90-91; Jean H. Hagstrum, review of Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, in *Modern Language Notes*, 76:1 (1961), 48-51. C.f. the more exclusively positive review by Alan D. McKillop in *Modern Philology*, 57:3 (1960), 206-207. *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory* was initially reissued in 1963 by the Norton Library and again by the University of Washington Press in 1997; c.f. Louise Westling, review of *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory* in *Environmental History*, 3:2 (1998), 245-246 on the occasion of the reissue.

²⁰ See, respectively, Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity, and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford University Press, 2011), pp.381-391; Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind*, pp.14-15, 22-31, p.285; Alexander Rueger, 'Experiments, Nature and Aesthetic Experience in the Eighteenth Century', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 37:4 (1997), p.313; Glenn Parsons, 'Freedom and Objectivity in the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 46:1 (2006), p.22; and Sandra Shapsay, 'Contemporary Environment Aesthetics and the Neglect of the Sublime', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 53:2 (2013), p.184. For other recent citations of Nicolson in various fields see eds. Duffy and Howell, *Cultures of the Sublime*, pp.2-3; Stephen C. Bourassa, *The Aesthetics of Landscape* (1991), p.12; Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500-1800* (1983), pp.258-260 and p.290; T.C. Smout, *Nature Contested: Environmental History in Scotland and Northern England since 1600* (2000), pp.10-18; Allen Carlson, *Aesthetics and the Environment: The Appreciation of Nature, Art, and Architecture* (2000), p.72 and pp.83-85; Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (1995), pp.45-453; Noah Heringham, *Romantic Rocks, Aesthetic Geology* (2004), pp.83-85; and Maurice Isserman and Stewart Weaver, *Fallen Giants: A History of Himalayan Mountaineering from the Age of Empire to the Age of Extremes* (2008), p.457, c.f. p.27, which termed Nicolson's work as 'the classic and still indispensable study of the origins of the mountain aesthetic'. The assumption of early modern mountain gloom is taken as a given in the introduction and several of the chapters of Françoise Besson, ed., *Mountains Figured and Disfigured in the English-Speaking World* (2010), p.xxi.

to Nicolson - in a multitude of mountaineering histories, published both before and after 1959.²¹ The precise genealogy of the *concept* of mountain gloom and glory will be elucidated in detail in the final chapter of this thesis. For the time being, it suffices to say that the vision of history against which this thesis is positioned extends beyond Nicolson's single monograph, methodologically ground-breaking though it was. Therefore, general references to 'the idea of mountain gloom and glory' - although utilising the catchy dichotomy borrowed by Nicolson from John Ruskin - should be taken as pointing towards the discourse as a whole, rather than as targeting Nicolson repeatedly and in particular. Moreover, this thesis will also engage with statements made both in 'popular' histories and in other scholarly fields, as it is in these texts - particularly the former - in which the idea of an early modern disapprobation for mountains is rearticulated and recirculated.

The identification of Nicolson's work as simply a node in a complex nexus of texts that assert and re-assert the idea of early modern mountain gloom (even if they do not all use the same terminology to do so) is an idea which can be unpacked further. Even in 1959, the 'basic problem' of the changing mountain tastes between early modern and modern Europe was not a historical hypothesis, up for discussion or debate; Nicolson merely sought to explicate a shift that the scholarship of her time already took for granted. Today, the concept has become a 'ghost theory', defined by Daniel Lord Smail as 'old ideas that continue to structure our thinking without our being fully aware of their controlling presence'.²² The idea of early modern mountain gloom is ubiquitous; even mentioning the subject of this project to a non-historian is, almost without fail, met with a wrinkled brow and a cautious 'they didn't like mountains then, did they?' More than this, it has shaped the direction of historical inquiry. The ghost theory of early modern mountain gloom, stating as it does that people avoided or ignored mountains, suggests that there is nothing of interest to find in interrogating premodern sources of mountain interaction.²³

²¹ E.g. Claire Éliane Engel, *A History of Mountaineering in the Alps* (1950), pp.13-27; Francis Keenlyside, *Peaks and Pioneers: The Story of Mountaineering* (1975), pp.9-11; Fergus Fleming, *Killing Dragons: The Conquest of the Alps* (2000), pp.1-10.

²² Daniel Lord Smail, *On Deep History and the Brain* (2008), p.3.

²³ Vittoria Di Palma expresses such an assumption of source absence regarding 'marginal or repellent landscapes' (among which she included mountains, for the premodern period): 'Lingering in order to pen an extended description or to delineate a view was simply out of the question when the goal was to put as much space between one's self and the offending environment as quickly as possible'. Di Palma, *Wasteland: A History* (2014), pp.10-11.

The field of premodern mountain studies has therefore been relatively unchanged since Nicolson ploughed her famous furrow.

This thesis therefore responds to a rare opportunity: to provide an overview of a broad topic which has long been left under-researched. It seeks to reset the terms of the study of mountains in early modern Europe, to approach a rich variety sources without any automatic assumption that they will only reveal either genuine mountain gloom, or 'conventional', meaningless mountain praise. But there is a methodological cost to this. The reset button cannot be pressed by an in-depth and detailed consideration of a few rich sources, for these could easily be discarded as exceptional cases. Instead, this thesis must attempt to be, as best as it can, a compendium of mountain reflections and attitudes as expressed in a variety of different contexts. To do so is to sacrifice the ability to take a fine-grained view of each and every source and its contexts; but, in doing so, it moves towards a revision of the historiographical context within which more detailed analyses of individual sources might subsequently be made.

For all that this thesis is positioned - unapologetically - as a work of revisionist history, it is nonetheless informed by the previous examples and by the general historiographical context sketched above. Amongst the variety of sources utilised are many that have appeared both in Nicolson's work and elsewhere. This is partly a pragmatic necessity; with certain historical figures appearing again and again as the 'exceptional precursors' to modern mountaineering, their writings must be engaged with in order to establish that they were in fact representative of their eras. In other cases it is a recognition of the value of previous insights. For example, this thesis will follow Nicolson in asserting the importance of Thomas Burnet in changing understandings of the landscape between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but instead of arguing that he provided the first glimmer of 'mountain glory', it will posit that he created the circumstances necessary for the development of the Sublime precisely by denigrating mountains and disproving their divine origins, directly against the consensus of his countrymen.²⁴

²⁴ I have previously written on the Burnet debate as the subject of my MPhil dissertation. Although some of the arguments within this thesis have their origins in this research they have since undergone significant development and adaptation. I have not consciously reproduced any portion of text (other than quotes from primary sources) from my MPhil in this thesis; Dawn Jackson Williams, *Late Seventeenth-Century British Attitudes Towards Mountains and the Debate Surrounding Thomas Burnet's Theory of the Earth* (2013), unpublished MPhil dissertation, University of Cambridge.

Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory, with its focus on the ‘Literary Heritage’ behind early modern mountain attitudes, also pointed to a key assertion of this thesis, which is that classical and scriptural writings and associations were absolutely central to how educated elites in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe understood the natural world around them. Nicolson’s methodology of analysing this ‘heritage’ was recently reasserted in a PhD thesis by William Barton, *The Aesthetics of the Mountain*, in which he largely agreed with the overall concept of a dichotomous aesthetic shift but argued that it could be identified in Neo-Latin writings some decades earlier than Nicolson had located it in vernacular texts.²⁵ Both Nicolson and Barton looked directly to classical texts and to Scripture for assorted mountain references, suggesting a heavy cultural weight of negative allusions.²⁶ This thesis, in contrast, will consider the classics and Scripture with an eye to establishing what types of mountain understandings were ‘literarily inherited’. In terms of understanding early modern attitudes towards mountains, it does not matter if it is possible to interpret certain Biblical passages as equating mountains with pride, or as obstacles to be brought low, if the writers of the time made little or no reference to this idea, and instead alluded to verses which termed mountains as ‘glorious’ and which demonstrated that they were created by God for the benefit and pleasure of mankind. Emphasising that which was literarily inherited, rather than surveying the available literary heritage, is to focus upon that which was actively engaged with, and as such had a demonstrable, rather than hypothetical, effect on mountain experiences and perceptions.

Although this thesis is the first large-scale work to challenge the specifics of the assumption of premodern mountain gloom with particular reference to the early modern period, it is not alone in taking a critical approach to the supposed dichotomous shift. *Heights of Reflection*, an edited volume published in 2012, considered the depiction of mountains in German history and literature from the Middle Ages through to the modern day, and opened with a firm challenge to the

²⁵ William Barton, *The Aesthetics of the Mountain: Latin as a Progressive Force in the Late-Renaissance and Early Modern Period* (2014), unpublished Ph.D. thesis, King’s College London.

²⁶ Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom*, pp.38-45, and Barton, *The Aesthetics of the Mountain*, pp.27-89. Janice Hewlett Koelb, ‘“This Most Beautiful and Adorn’d World”: Nicolson’s *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory* Reconsidered’, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 16:3 (2009), 443-468, critiques Nicolson’s readings of ‘Christian distrust’ and ‘Roman distaste’.

oversimplified assumption that human interaction with mountains is a distinctly modern development, one that began with the empowerment of the individual, whether in the wake of Enlightenment rationalist or Romantic subjectivity.²⁷

However, only two of its eighteen chapters consider mountains before the eighteenth century, and its potential revisionism with regards to the earlier period is somewhat qualified; later in the introduction, for example, the editors seek simply to show that mountains were 'not altogether shunned by premodern Europeans'.²⁸ Nevertheless, the volume represents a rare example of published exception to the rule of premodern mountain gloom.

Work is also in progress reconsidering mountain attitudes pre-dating the early modern period. Jason König has argued that classical depictions of landscape - expressed through distinctive 'landscape narratives' woven into many ancient texts - display a far more nuanced and complex appreciation and understanding of mountains than the historiography epitomised in Nicolson would allow.²⁹ He has also posited that many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century experiences of 'mountain glory' were articulated and experienced through the language and imagery of ancient texts.³⁰ This thesis will demonstrate that, in fact, a reliance on classical texts in understanding and experiencing the landscape was a key element of continuity in mountain perceptions between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. More recently, Anthony Bale has noted the emotional experiences facilitated by mountains during late medieval pilgrimages through the Holy Land, in which summit viewpoints were mentally constructed (and frequently named) as mountains of 'joy', a complex and theologically-implicated sensation associated with setting eyes upon the pilgrim's ultimate destination. He has argued that an emotional reading of pilgrim narratives enables a revision of the 'dominant - and incorrect - modern

²⁷ Sean Ireton and Caroline Schaumann, 'Introduction: The Meaning of Mountains: Geology, History, Culture', in eds. Sean Ireton and Caroline Schaumann, *Heights of Reflection: Mountains in the German Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Twenty-First Century* (2012), p.5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.7.

²⁹ Jason König, 'Strabo's Mountains', in eds. Jeremy McInerney and Ineke Sluiter, *Valuing Landscape in Classical Antiquity* (2016), pp.46-47.

³⁰ Jason König, 'Oros: Mountains in Ancient Greek and Roman Culture', Inaugural Lecture, University of St Andrews, 4 November 2015. C.f. <<http://memos.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/2015/10/23/inaugural-lecture-professor-jason-konig-school-of-classics-5-15pm-on-4-november-in-school-iii/>> [03.08.2016]. This argument has also been made elsewhere, e.g. in Duffy and Howell, eds., *Cultures of the Sublime*, pp.15-16.

understanding that people in the Middle Ages had no or little appreciation of the landscape'.³¹ This thesis will attempt to do the same with reference to the early modern period.

Less directly, but still significantly, this thesis is set within the context of a burgeoning critical literature of historical mountain studies. Although this thesis will allude to a number of histories which have straightforwardly cast mountaineering as the epitome of mountain appreciation, it is indebted to works which have, by contrast, sought to deconstruct the sociological and cultural contexts of the pursuit.³² This thesis will draw in particular upon the insights of Peter H. Hansen, who has argued that mountaineering was both constituted by and constitutive of discourses central to Western modernity, such as post-Enlightenment individualism and political self-determination. In his *Summits of Modern Man* Hansen traces - among other things - the contested traditions surrounding the question of 'who was first' upon the summit of Mont Blanc in the late 1780s. Was it Michel Paccard, the Savoyard doctor who climbed the mountain in 1786? Or Jacques Balmat, the crystal hunter who led - or accompanied - him up, but apparently simply for pay, or Horace Bénédicte de Saussure, who reached the top the following year, but who carried out far more exhaustive scientific observations at the summit? That all have been claimed as 'first' by posterity at various points is expressive of the constructed nature of the 'summit position' in modern mountaineering: the vision of an individual alone, and, ideally, first upon a mountain-top.³³ The construction of modernity is, in fact, a summit position in and of itself; the very term locates the period at the pinnacle of human development. This thesis will build upon Hansen's formulation, arguing that narratives of mountain gloom and mountain glory are attempts to claim the 'summit position' of mountain appreciation for modernity.

³¹ Anthony Bale, 'What did it mean, and how did it feel, to look out from a mountain in the Middle Ages?', University of Edinburgh, Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 9 February 2016; <<http://www.iash.ed.ac.uk/news-and-events/event/anthony-bale-birkbeck-university-of-london-what-did-it-mean-and-how-did-it-feel-to-look-out-from-a-mountain-in-the-middle-ages/>> [12.07.2016]. For quote; <<http://blogs.bbk.ac.uk/research/tag/holy-land/>> [12.07.2016]. Bale's project is still at a preliminary stage.

³² For an excellent overview, see Paul Gilchrist, 'Gender and British Climbing Histories: Introduction', *Sport in History* 33:3 (2013), pp.223-225.

³³ Peter H. Hansen, *The Summits of Modern Man: Mountaineering After the Enlightenment* (2013), particularly pp.2-3 and 11-12.

Whose Mountains? Sources and Discourses

The above has set out the main research questions and ambitions of this thesis, the frameworks within which they are to be answered, and the wider scholarly context of the project. Ultimately, this thesis sets out to discover what people thought and felt about mountains in early modern Europe. However, although it is a useful shorthand, there was clearly no unitary 'people' in early modern Europe, all thinking and feeling the same things about mountains. Mountain experiences and encounters took place in different national, socioeconomic, generational, geographical, political, and gendered contexts. Moreover, such experiences were physically, emotionally, and intellectually constituted and reconstituted. Encounters with mountains could take place at the windy top of an Alpine pass, but travellers might draw upon classical references learnt in their youth in order to understand and express their experiences. Likewise, mountains could be re-encountered in the confines of a scholar's study as they called upon recollections of viewing a mountain panorama in order to pen a dense natural philosophical argument. In most cases, the evidence available for these encounters is written - or sketched or painted - after the fact and is, as such, subject to the vagaries of self-censorship, memory, and narrational construction.

The challenges facing this project are therefore twofold: how best to access mountain experiences and to interpret them in a meaningful way; and how to move from the specificities of individual accounts towards a discussion of mountain attitudes in general? In responding to the first challenge, this thesis will utilise the concept of discourse.³⁴ At one level discourse is simply 'that which is expressed', but it also captures the ways in which individual speech acts can engage or conflict with an existing cultural consensus. Writers in the early modern period were influenced by, engaged with, and contributed to discourses of knowledge, aesthetics, and experience relating to mountains. Mountain experiences, and the ways people depicted them, were not spontaneous expressions of uniquely original reactions to the landscape. People went to mountains - whether from

³⁴ Although this draws upon traditions of discourse analysis inaugurated by scholars such as Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, it is more directly informed by understandings of discourse within gender studies, which emphasise the ways in which discourses or expressions of gender standards impact upon human relations at both personal and structural levels. Jane Sunderland, *Gendered Discourses* (2004), pp.20-22, provides a valuable overview of the field.

their armchairs or in person – with a store of both unconscious and conscious associations. When they wrote about mountains, they often did so in ways that reflected their implication in these pre-existing discourses. In doing so, they were also contributing to and in some cases shifting the contemporaneous discourses available regarding the high peaks and hills. The modern-day repetition of an idea of premodern mountain gloom is also a discourse, expressing a belief about history which informs modern-day mountain interactions. Discourses shaped (and continue to shape) the mountain experiences that it was possible to have, but these experiences, and the texts which came out of them, informed and altered subsequent mountain experiences. Discourses – the surviving expressions, whether textual, visual, or archaeological, of mountain encounters – are the visible arch of a buried circle at the base of which is concealed the irrecoverable moment of meeting between the individual and the landscape. Thinking in terms of discourses enables the recovery not just of impressions of experience, but of the material which constituted subsequent experience as well.

The use of the plural above is not incidental. Just as there was no unitary ‘early modern mountain experience’, there was also no one ‘discourse of mountains’. As noted above, even dominant discourses can be surrounded by multiple thriving, subversive and contrary discourses. In order to make general arguments based upon individual and contrasting sources, this thesis will draw upon and adapt the insights provided by Daniel Chartier’s concept of a ‘grammar of the idea of North’. The idea of North is a multivalent cultural construct upon which various and sometimes contradictory meanings have been inscribed. Chartier’s grammar of North is based upon a study of a large number of texts in an attempt to identify recurring qualities, characteristics, and narratives associated with the idea of North.³⁵ These characteristics provide the criteria for the selection of new relevant texts, which can in turn expand the base criteria, and so on. In many ways, the idea of North and the idea of mountains are surprisingly similar - both relate to a space or landscape feature that has ‘real’ existence but to which a wide variety of cultural values have been attached over time. Methodologically, the idea of a grammar of mountains allows for diversity whilst also emphasising commonality. One early modern writer expressing mountain appreciation in a certain way can be seen as an exception; multiple

³⁵ Daniel Chartier, ‘Towards a Grammar of the Idea of North: Nordicity, Winterity’, trans. Elaine Kennedy, *Nordlit: Tidsskrift i litteratur og kultur*, 22 (2007), pp. 44-47.

sources alluding to a shared sense of appreciation rooted in a similar interpretation of the world can be seen as suggesting a rule, or the nature of the dominant mountain discourses of the time.

These two concepts – discourses and grammars of mountains – have informed the selection of sources utilised throughout this thesis. One might naturally expect the remit to be a geographical one. Is there a particular mountain or mountain range which forms the focus of this thesis? Discourses, however, belong not to mountains but to people; the key question of source selection is therefore not ‘which mountains’, but, rather, ‘whose mountains?’

This thesis will focus primarily upon mountains within British discourses. This does not necessarily mean writings by Britons, although these will be prominent. Rather, it encompasses anything which circulated within British culture. In the multi-lingual context of (elite) Britain this would undoubtedly have included texts in Latin and in vernacular European languages. For purposes of clarity this thesis, when dealing with foreign texts, will largely be limited to those translated into English, as their ‘membership’ within British discourses is self-evident. It will also largely confine itself to published texts rather than manuscript sources as the former can generally be assumed to have enjoyed wider circulation, and thus had greater potential to be substantive of new mountain discourses. To focus on sources which either emanated from or circulated within early modern Britain also allows for the most robust response to the largely Anglocentric discourse of mountain gloom and glory. Nicolson’s eponymous monograph, for example, draws almost exclusively on English writers, although her conclusions have since been extended to apply to Europe-wide contexts. To critique the discourse at its British roots is to challenge the viability of its extension to a broader European sphere.

In keeping with the concept of a grammar of mountains, texts which fall outside of a British ambit will also be drawn upon, particularly when they seem to engage with the same ideas and reflect the same impressions as the central set of sources. It is also important to note that it is, cautiously, possible to make statements regarding the ‘European discourse of mountains’ even when taking British discourses as the central object of inquiry. In particular, it will be made evident throughout this thesis that the

cultural preconceptions drawn upon within British mountain discourses were overwhelmingly shaped by scriptural impressions and the insights of the Greek and Roman 'ancients'. In the context of late Renaissance Europe these were central cultural pillars whose influence extended far beyond national boundaries. The application of the concept of both the interlocking nature of pan-European cultural discourses and of the grammar of mountains therefore enables the cautious extension of conclusions based on British discourses across Europe, although such conclusions must be seen as merely preliminary and suggestive of further research in different national and regional contexts.

Within the subcategory of British discourses this thesis will also seek to represent experiences of mountains within a range of socioeconomic contexts, albeit within the limitations of source survival. The majority of voices will, inevitably, belong to male elites - those with the literacy, education, and financial and social means to record and publish their understandings of mountains in written formats that would survive the vicissitudes of centuries. Notably, in the context of the learned culture of the period, these were also the individuals most likely to engage with and contribute to a pan-European discourse of mountains. Somewhat ironically, female voices and experiences are most retrievable within either culturally marginal or economically underprivileged contexts, such as in Scottish Gaelic bardic poetry and in scant archaeological and ethnographic evidence pointing towards landscape usage among subsistence communities. This thesis will show that, to a considerable extent, elite writings and non-elite mountain experiences generally reflected one another; where the latter directly benefited from and engaged with the fecundity of the mountain landscape, the former reified this characteristic as a key element of their mountain discourses.

Having defined such apparently straightforward nouns such as 'mountains' and 'people', there remains one final terminological difficulty in laying out the remit and limitations of this thesis. Throughout, I will utilise three different periodic terms: 'early modern', 'premodern', and 'modern'. For the purposes of this thesis I define the early modern period as broadly extending from 1500 to 1750, and the modern period as around 1750 onwards (although in the context of changing attitudes to mountains I will consider the eighteenth century as an important interim period). The earlier period constitutes the central focus of this thesis, whilst the later will receive attention as the context in which

the discourse of mountain gloom and glory was developed. The use of the term 'premodern' is a response to that very discourse. As will be seen in the latter chapters of this thesis, the supposed novelty of modern mountain attitudes has frequently been contrasted not just with the early modern period but with all European history predating mountaineering. Marjorie Hope Nicolson, for example, made claims not just regarding the seventeenth century but also regarding classical and medieval attitudes to mountains.³⁶ When the term 'premodern' is used herein it is an attempt to accurately characterise and respond to the historical specificity or generality of discourses of mountain gloom.

As this would suggest, periodic terms are more than just neutral markers of chronological boundaries, particularly when considered as nouns rather than adjectives. 'Modernity' in particular is a heavily loaded and debated term and is intended to be read as such when utilised in this thesis. By 'modernity' I specifically refer to the Western construct of modernity which identifies post-Enlightenment, European developments as the pinnacle of human advancement.³⁷ In this context, 'early modernity' also has a polemical edge: its existence is a symptom of the need for modernity to have something to define itself against.³⁸ The discourse of mountain gloom and glory is just one element of its self-construction. As such, even when using the terms as temporal markers, this is not done uncritically, and indeed the thesis as a whole can be read as a critique of the exceptionalism of modernity and its continuing impact on historical and cultural perspectives.

Ascents, Aesthetics, and Environment

The post-colon title alludes to three themes which are central to the coverage and arguments of this thesis. 'Ascents' stands not just for isolated climbs to specific summits, but for all forms of spatial practice which prompted a physical engagement with

³⁶ Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom*, pp.34-51.

³⁷ Such a definition recognises that Western modernity is in reality one of many modernities, and that its claims of exclusivity have had troubling repercussions in contexts of both territorial and cultural imperialism. S.N. Eisenstadt, 'Multiple Modernities', *Daedalus* 129:1 (Winter 2000), 1-29.

³⁸ Lynn Hunt, *Measuring Time: Making History* (2008), pp.47-52. Discourses of Western modernity have also defined it against the contemporaneous as well as the temporal 'other', including social or cultural groups coded as un-modern. E.g. Peter H. Hansen, 'Modern Mountains: The Performative Consciousness of Modernity in Britain, 1870-1940', eds. Martin Daunton and Bernhard Rieger, *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War II* (2001), pp.196-197.

mountains. It also alludes to the position taken in this thesis that, if there was a stark shift with regards to mountains between early modernity and modernity, it was in the development of the sport of mountaineering, and the modern viewpoint which sees climbing as the purest and best form of mountain activity. When an early modern European climbed a mountain, they did not do so with the same motivations as modern mountaineers. In spite - or perhaps because - of this, it is necessary to analyse non-mountaineering engagements in their specific contexts, and to find them wanting against a metric of success and heroism which did not develop until the nineteenth century. A lack of mountaineering spirit does not necessarily indicate the existence of mountain gloom.

If the narrative of mountain gloom and glory is partially one of activities - the idea that there were 'few ascents', defined against what modern mountaineering would term an ascent - then it is also one of aesthetics; that people found mountains ugly until the development of the idea of the sublime in nature. This thesis will trace a different narrative of aesthetic change, arguing that many of the modern values associated with mountains have their analogue in the early modern period. These values have hitherto gone unnoticed because they drew upon principles which have since fallen outside of the modern aesthetic consciousness. This thesis will argue that these principles enabled an appreciation of both the beauty and grandeur of mountains until the beliefs which underpinned them - regarding the nature of the world, God, and Creation - came to be challenged towards the end of the seventeenth century. During the eighteenth century, viewers of mountains were temporarily left bereft of the intellectual framework with which to enjoy the sight, and as such were left either to articulate highly negative reactions to mountains, or to take the first steps towards formulating the sublime. Early modern mountain aesthetics are not the contrast against which the modern sublime shines more brightly: they are causally linked to and intertwined with it.

The final theme, 'environment', alludes to the prominent recognition in early modern sources of the value and impact of the mountain environment. The development of environmentalism is typically cast as another phenomena inherent to the modern world, and in a sense this is true; this thesis cannot point to any early modern source demonstrating a sense of anthropocentric self-awareness. Their mountain appreciation,

instead, was rooted in the belief that the entire natural world was created by God for the benefit of human beings. However, whilst this negated any potential form of concern regarding the impact of people upon the environment, it equated to a heightened consciousness of the ways in which the environment benefited humanity. Scholars studied the natural world as a form of revelation of God's goodness. This thesis will emphasise the volume of early modern sources which elaborated upon the pleasing diversity of flora and fauna amidst the mountains, and upon the function which mountains served in watering and protecting the wider landscape, prominently including cities and other centres of civilised habitation. As such, mountains were explicitly coded as a human environment, which added to the convenience and beauty of life on earth.

These themes – in addition to others regarding the representational impact of Scripture and classics, and the interplay of status and power in the mountains – will recur throughout the first four chapters of this thesis. These chapters are organised according to different forms of mountain engagement, broadly defined. The first chapter, 'Knowing Mountains', will consider engagement at an intellectual and empirical level: what did people know or wonder about mountains during the period – about their height, form, and origins? It will emphasise some of the surprising underlying assumptions made regarding mountains in the early modern period, a full appreciation of which is necessary to the appropriate interpretation of mountain attitudes. It will introduce the debate surrounding Thomas Burnet's *Theory of the Earth*, considering it in the context of contested visions of mountain origins. It will also establish the extent of local, practical knowledge relating to mountains, and explore the ways in which it was recorded and represented by learned travellers who benefited from the assistance of those who possessed it.

Chapter Two, 'Mountain Ventures and Adventures' will in turn consider the ways in which the mountain landscape was utilised by those dwelt near them, presenting them alongside the reflections of the elites who passed through them. It will emphasise the extent to which the experiences of the latter group were actively filtered through impressions and associations drawn from the classics and Scripture. It will also suggest that a historiographical emphasis on 'exceptional' individuals who climbed mountains for the sake of doing so (i.e., in the 'modern' fashion) has decontextualised these texts, and

obscured what they can tell us about early modern mountain climbing in general.

The third chapter, 'Mountain Aesthetics', will bring together the natural philosophical discourses and the travellers' accounts of the preceding two in order to gauge the nature of early modern aesthetic judgement of mountains. It will turn again to the Burnet debate, this time exploring the arguments made not about the origins of mountains but about the value of them. Many such arguments made repeated reference to the usefulness of mountains, reflecting an extant - but now forgotten - aesthetic ideal of beauty in utility. This chapter will compare the explicit aesthetic discussions of the Burnet debate with the implicit assessments made in travellers' narratives, positing that they demonstrated a similar appreciation for the colour, diversity, and fecundity of the mountain landscape. It will also suggest that the shift towards the modern articulation of sublimity was not the result of a new appreciation of the aesthetic greatness of mountains, but rather a response to the challenge posed by Thomas Burnet regarding the divine origins of mountains' aesthetic value.

Chapter Four, 'The Poetry of Mountains', will explore creative representations of mountains in early modern British literature, with an eye to evaluating the extent to which such poetry reflected the ideas, experiences, and attitudes discovered in the preceding three chapters. It will engage with the historiographical suggestion that positive poetic references, in so far as they merely followed classical 'convention', were inexpressive of genuine feeling, and will highlight that this particular, literary strand of the narrative of mountain gloom and glory is rooted in a post-Romantic idealisation of originality.

The fifth and final chapter, 'Mountain Gloom: The History of an Idea', will complete this departure from the early modern context in order to trace the complex genealogy of articulations of a stark historic shift between premodern and modern mountain attitudes. It will focus particularly upon mountaineering narratives, exploring the ways in which they reflected many of the same features and prejudices as literary articulations of the theory, and demonstrating that both discourses were rooted in innate assumptions of the primacy of modern phenomena, whether mountain climbing or Romantic poetry. It will establish that the present-day perception that mountains were despised and avoided in

the early modern period is the result not of listening to the past tell its own story, but of the generations that followed constructing and repeating a narrative of their own exceptionalism.

Chapter One: Knowing Mountains

In 1638 an energetic Jesuit polymath named Athanasius Kircher climbed into the active crater of Vesuvius. He was delighted by the opportunity, afforded by perilous earthquakes which had arrested his voyage home from Sicily, 'of learning many Secrets of Nature'. He hired a local guide with whom he 'ascended the Mountain at midnight, through difficult, rough, uneven, and steep passages'. At the mouth of the crater Kircher saw roiling fire, smelt the stench of sulphur and bitumen, heard the volcano roar, and retched from breathing the thick black smoke which surrounded him. In his account of the visit, Kircher wrote that he thought he viewed 'the habitation of Hell', which wanted nothing but 'the horrid fantasm and apparitions of Devils' to complete it. This prompted an immediate and somewhat surprising litany of praise for the God who had created the overwhelming space:

O the depth of the Riches of the Wisdom and Knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are thy ways! If thou shewest thy power against the wickedness of mankind in so formidable and portentous Prodiges and Omens of Nature; What shall it be in that last day, wherein the Earth shall be drown'd with the Ire of thy Fury, and the Elements melt with fervent heat?³⁹

Kircher's account of Vesuvius blended the terrible with what, had it been written a century later, would have been termed the sublime. The volcano resembled hell - but even whilst coughing up smoke Kircher's thoughts turned to God, and to the fact that Vesuvius and all phenomena like it had been created to provide the mechanism for the apocalypse. To a devout believer such as Kircher, this thought was not a negative one: although the process itself would hardly be pleasant, the End of Days, by virtue of the Paradise it heralded, was a consummation devoutly to be wished. The eschatological significance of volcanoes meant that, for individuals like Kircher, they were 'awe-full' in the original meaning of the word.

It may seem strange to open the first chapter of a thesis on mountains with an anecdote

³⁹ [Athanasias Kircher], *The Vulcano's or, Burning and Fire-vomiting Mountains Famous in the World: With their Remarkables. Collected for the most part out of Kircher's Subterraenous World* ed. and trans. anonymous (London, 1669), p.35. This anonymous compilation of volcanic knowledge was prompted by the 1669 eruption of Etna, and translated key portions of Kircher's Latin *Mundus Subterraeneus* (1665), with the claimed intent of repairing the ignorance of people in England regarding volcanoes (sigs. A2r-A2v).

about the early modern experience and appreciation of volcanoes. They are not, after all, the same thing: the average mountain does not offer the same threat of erupting beneath one's feet as it is climbed. Notably, in the early modern period the two were very much conflated. Volcanoes were often described as 'fiery mountains' or 'burning mountains'.⁴⁰ It was suggested that mountains were hollow, with the only real difference being that the hollow spaces of a non-fiery mountain were filled with water, whereas those of a volcano were filled with fire.⁴¹ Some writers even used the term 'vulcano' to refer to the fire *within* a mountain, rather than to the landform as a whole.⁴² Essentially, volcanoes were a sub-category of mountains. Moreover, whilst today there is an awareness that volcanoes can become extinct and transform into harmless hills, early modern mountains were viewed as potential volcanoes. A mountain that, through earthquakes or human interference such as mining, lost its 'Natural Feeders' of water, could fill instead with fire, whilst it was anticipated that the apocalypse, in addition to setting off every existing volcano in the world, would also see 'new Mountains in every Region... break out into smoke and flame'.⁴³ Volcanoes *were* mountains in early modern Europe, but they were not an object of straightforward fear. Rather, they were an object of fascination and awe.

The example of early modern volcanoes therefore provides an ideal starting point for a wider discussion of the nature of early modern knowledge of mountains. Put crudely, a general knowledge quiz about the origins, structure, and nature of mountains would have had very different answers in 1650 than it would in 2016. These answers were built upon

⁴⁰ Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation Made by Sea or Ouer-land* (London, 1599), p.459 and 560; Robert Boyle, *An Essay of the Great Effects of Even and Unheeded Motion* (London, 1685), p.78; Anonymous, *A Full and True Account of the VVonderful Eruptions of a Prodigious Burning Mountain...*, (London, 1687).

⁴¹ 'Mountains... have empty Spaces and Kettles, which serve not only for Cisterns of Water, but also for Receptacles of Fire', Bernardino Ramassini and Robert St. Clair, *The Abyssinian Philosophy Confuted: or, Telluris theoria Neither Sacred, nor Agreeable to Reason* (London, 1697), p.73, c.f. 138; 'As Nature hath constituted various Store-houses of Waters, in the highest Mountains; so it has distributed various Receptacles of fire, within the bowels of the highest Mountains also', Anon., *The Vulcano's*, p.5.

⁴² 'All *Vulcano's*, or subterraneous fires, are in the Bowels of some Mountain', William Whiston, *A New Theory of the Earth from its Original to the Consummation of all things* (London, 1696), p.78, first pagination; 'For all this wonderful Appearance [referring to smoke, fire, and lightning above Mount Sinai at the giving of the Ten Commandments] was in all probability only a *Vulcano* in that Mountain', William Nicholls, *A Conference with a Theist. Part II* (London, 1697), p.219.

⁴³ Thomas Robinson, *Anatomy of the Earth* (London, 1694), p.13, noted that 'Cross-cutting' (a type of mining shaft) could result in mountains being drained of their springs, and thus erupting into fire; for earthquakes see Robinson, *New Observations on the Natural History of this World of Matter* (London, 1696), pp.65-66; for the apocalypse, see Thomas Burnet, *The Theory of the Earth: Containing an Account of the Original of the Earth, and of all the General Changes Which it Hath Already Undergone, or is to Undergo, Till the Consummation of all Things*, 2 vols. (London, 1684-1691), vol.1, pp.62-63.

assumptions, beliefs, and approaches to knowledge that are in the modern era largely divorced from what people think and feel when they look at the landscape around them.

During the early modern period, scholars sought to understand the world through investigation of the ‘two books’ of divine revelation: Scripture and Nature.⁴⁴ Sir Thomas Pope Blount, an intellectually curious English baronet, summarised the seventeenth-century understanding of the latter in his 1693 *Natural History*, a collection of extracts relating to subjects as diverse as pearl-diving and tornadoes. ‘Every Flower of the Field,’ he wrote, ‘every Fibre of a Plant, every Particle of an Insect, carries with it the *Impress* of its *Maker* and can... read us Lectures of *Ethicks* or *Divinity*’.⁴⁵ Such speaking objects had been designed, according to Blount, by a God who sought not only to satisfy humanity’s animal needs, but their intellectual ones as well. The idea of the natural world as part of God’s revelation, and as the result and evidence of his deliberate and benevolent act of Creation, had an immense impact on the emotional content of people’s reactions to physical landforms – even those as destructive and deadly as volcanoes.

It also indelibly shaped the early modern pursuit of knowledge. As Stephen Toulmin and June Goodfield have emphasised, seventeenth-century natural philosophers were drawn to their pursuit in order to better understand both God and His Creation, and the great debates of the era were ‘not between science and religion: they were *within science*, as men then conceived it’.⁴⁶ This chapter will consider examples of natural philosophical discussions and debates that are quite foreign to the modern representational space of mountains, from in-depth considerations of the changing height of Mount Ararat to passionate invectives written against the mere idea that mountains were the result of the Flood rather than part of God’s original Creation. It is important to appreciate that these were not trivial or ancillary questions at the time but were rather among the most

⁴⁴ For the overwhelming importance of Scripture see William Poole, *The World Makers: Scientists of the Restoration and the Search for the Origins of the Earth* (2010), pp.2-6.

⁴⁵ Sir Thomas Pope Blount, *A Natural History: Containing Many not Common Observations: Extracted out of the Best Modern Writers* (London, 1693). C.f. eds. Klaas van Berkel and Arie Johan Vanderjagt, *The Book of Nature in Early Modern and Modern History* (2006); Michael T. Walton, ‘Genesis and Chemistry in the Sixteenth Century’, eds. Allen G. Debus and Michael T. Walton, *Reading the Book of Nature: The Other Side of the Scientific Revolution* (1998), pp.1-3.

⁴⁶ Stephen Toulmin and June Goodfield, *The Discovery of Time* (1965), pp.87-88; c.f. Ann Blair, ‘Natural Philosophy’ and Rivka Feldhay, ‘Religion’, both in eds. Katharine Park and Lorraine Daston, *The Cambridge History of Science Volume 3: Early Modern Science* (2008).

significant issues facing the pursuit of natural knowledge and understanding.

These issues were significant because they arose alongside the 'discovery of deep time', the ramifications of which ranked alongside the Copernican and Galilean revolutions.⁴⁷ Paolo Rossi has expressed the two extremes of this temporal revolution with inimitable eloquence:

Men in Hooke's time had a past of six thousand years; those of Kant's times were conscious of a past of millions of years. The difference lies... between living in a present relatively close to the origins (and having at hand, what is more, a text that narrates the *entire* history of the world) or living instead in a present behind which stretches the "dark abyss"... of an almost infinite time. Similarly, it is a different matter to live on an earth that is to this day as it was shaped by the benevolent hands of God and is populated by plants, animals, and men that He created, or, on the other hand, to be conscious of the mutability of the forms of nature and the forms of life...⁴⁸

At the beginning of the Renaissance it was widely accepted that the history of the world – which amounted, according to traditional Mosaic chronology, to just under six thousand years - could be straightforwardly accessed through the reading of Scripture. Moreover, the world in its present form was the same as it was when created by God for the benefit of man and as such could be studied in order to understand God Himself. During the seventeenth century new ideas and insights came to threaten these basic preconceptions. Discussions surrounding fossils, in particular Nicolas Steno's development of stratigraphy, cast doubts on the veracity of Scriptural revelation regarding Creation. Did the existence of fossils indicate earlier stages of Creation? Had God made mistakes which He then had to correct?⁴⁹ At the same time, traditional understandings of the age of the world came to be questioned as scholars explored the perplexingly long histories of other civilisations, particularly China; so the Bible might be said to no longer tell the full story of human history.⁵⁰ Other new theories, such as the idea of a plurality of worlds, endangered the other book of revelation, that of Nature. If there were other worlds,

⁴⁷ Stephen Jay Gould, *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time* (1987), pp.1-2

⁴⁸ Paolo Rossi, *The Dark Abyss of Time: The History of the Earth & the History of Nations from Hooke to Vico*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (1984), p.ix.

⁴⁹ Rossi, *The Dark Abyss of Time*, p.3; c.f. Toulmin and Goodfield, *The Discovery of Time*, pp.88-91.

⁵⁰ Rossi, *The Dark Abyss of Time*, pp.133-136; Poole, *The World Makers*, pp.39-44.

habited or not, did that mean the Earth was not made uniquely for man?⁵¹ If the world was older than had previously been imagined, had it perhaps undergone changes since the time of Creation – meaning that it was no form of direct revelation at all?

Many early modern discussions of the nature, origin, and purpose of mountains were rooted in these incredibly significant issues; even the most apparently prosaic ones regarding questions of height and measurement. Understanding past knowledge of mountains - what that knowledge claimed, and upon what sources it was based - is the first step towards appreciating all other interactions with mountains in the same period, whether they took the form of painful physical ascents, or metaphorical poetic allusions. This chapter will trace some of the many ways in which mountains were ‘known’ in early modern Europe. In doing so it will establish the unique contours of early modern mountain knowledge whilst also suggesting aspects of continuity between it and the factual and technical understandings underlying modern mountain experience. The chapter will also begin to suggest some conclusions, to be built upon in later chapters, regarding the emotional significance of different elements of early modern mountain knowledge.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first will sketch the ‘basics’ of early modern mountain knowledge: what was a mountain? How were hills or mountains defined and measured? Which peak was known as the highest mountain in the world in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? Which ranges loomed largest in the early modern mind? This section will reveal the actors’ categories which early modern Europeans brought to their interactions with mountains, and will serve as an important contextual introduction to the thesis as a whole.

The second section will explore the contested origins of early modern mountains: by what mechanism were they created and, more importantly, when? It will explore theories from across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but will take the Burnet debate as its focal point. Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer have suggested that moments of debate provide historians with unique insights into those beliefs or tenets of knowledge that are so

⁵¹ Stephen J. Dick, *Plurality of Worlds: The Extraterrestrial Life Debate from Democritus to Kant* (1984), 104-105, 112, 116, 122-123, 149-150.

embedded and taken for granted by historical actors that they are generally left unspoken until they are threatened.⁵² As such, the controversy surrounding the publication of Thomas Burnet's 1684 *Theory of the Earth* - in which he claimed that mountains were not the original creation of God but the result of the Flood, or Deluge - provides a particularly valuable source for this chapter.⁵³ Previous scholarship has seen Burnet, in the negative attitude to mountains suggested and necessitated by his theoretical claims, as representative of early modern visions of mountains.⁵⁴ In contrast, this chapter will establish that the writings of his respondents, though each uniquely nuanced, collectively suggest a consensus regarding the nature of mountains as part of God's original creation which was at odds with Burnet's hypothesis. As a whole this section will argue that the question of God's involvement with and intention in creating mountains was central not only to natural philosophical understandings but also to issues of aesthetic appreciation, a theme to be expanded upon in Chapter Three.

The final section will provide an overview of the existence of 'practical knowledge' circulating regarding mountain landscapes, setting such largely local knowledge against the elite discourse of the previous two sections. This section in particular will establish connections between early modern mountain knowledge and practice, and that of modernity. It will highlight that many of the basic skills of mountain survival belonged to local inhabitants long before they were possessed by visiting mountaineers. It will also suggest that the long and sometimes troubling tradition of elite travellers claiming status and insight over those local to mountains whilst simultaneously benefiting from their aid was enacted in the early modern period as much as it still is in the modern.

In addition to arguments specific to these three areas of mountain knowledge, this chapter also seeks to establish several more general arguments. As alluded to above, it will emphasise the extent to which mountain knowledge and debates were shaped by theological concerns regarding the need to present the results of 'rational' investigation in keeping with the letter and spirit of Scripture. Secondly, this chapter will also

⁵² Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (1985), p.7.

⁵³ Paolo Rossi, *The Deep Abyss of Time*, pp.33-41, sets Burnet's *Theory* in the context of the revolution in understandings of time and sacred history.; c.f. Poole, *The World Makers*, pp.56-68.

⁵⁴ Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom*, pp.212-217.

demonstrate the ways in which mountain knowledge was influenced by the reception of classical texts and through the analysis and re-articulation of classical understandings.⁵⁵ Throughout, the chapter will establish that there was a lively early modern interest in mountains - in their heights, origins, and use. It will show that mountains were used as physical spaces for experimentation and that they were deployed as key and revealing examples in discussions as abstract as the question of life on other planets, and as significant as the issue of the impeachability of the Bible. Far from being ignored, mountains were fascinating and vitally important spaces for thinking with and about during a period of great intellectual change and development.

Physical Height, Cultural Prominence

In 1995 a fresh-faced Hugh Grant starred in a film entitled *The Englishman Who Went Up a Hill but Came Down a Mountain*. It told the story of a pair of English cartographers who, visiting a small Welsh village in 1917 to measure its local 'mountain', caused outrage to the inhabitants by reporting that, at less than 1,000 feet in height, it was only a hill. In gently comedic style, the cartographers are delayed from leaving to give the locals time to build up the top of the hill so that it could officially be designated a mountain.⁵⁶ Although all is not as simple as this feel-good film would suggest – modern geographic agencies still differ on the precise definition of 'mountain', or whether one even exists – the modern era has also given rise to sub-categorisations which attach cultural eminence to groups of higher or highest peaks, and to successful ascents of them, such as the Munros in Scotland, or the worldwide 'eight-thousanders'.⁵⁷ Within a modern Western context in which mountains can scarcely be disassociated from the activity of mountaineering, size matters, and – questions of technical difficulty aside – bigger is

⁵⁵ This continuing reference to classical insights is notable given that, towards the end of the seventeenth century, it occurred against the backdrop of the 'Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns', which challenged the relevance and value of the classical texts which had shaped the minds of educated elites from the Renaissance onwards. Joseph M. Levine, *Between the Ancients and the Moderns: Baroque Culture in Restoration England* (1999), p.xiii and p.13; Toby E. Huff, *Intellectual Curiosity and the Scientific Revolution: A Global Perspective* (2011), pp.150-152; Anthony Grafton, *Defenders of the Text: The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science, 1450-1800* (1991).

⁵⁶ Christopher Monger, dir., *The Englishman Who Went Up a Hill but Came Down a Mountain* (Miramax Films, 1995). The UK *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000*, chapter 37, now defines a mountain as 'any land situated more than 600 metres above sea level' <<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/37/contents>> [30.06.2016].

⁵⁷ John Gerrard, *Mountain Environments: An Examination of the Physical Geography of Mountains* (1990), pp.3-7. The 'eight-thousanders' are the fourteen mountains higher than 8,000 metres above sea level.

usually better. There is a difference between a ‘hillwalker’ and a ‘mountaineer’, one that touches not only on the style of activity being carried out but also on the scale of the landform being engaged with. It would be as inappropriate to call Mont Blanc ‘a hill’ as it would be to call the *Titanic* ‘a boat’.

The early modern attitude towards size was far less clear-cut. In an era in which travel was, for most people, relatively circumscribed, and impressions of the wider world were circulated by books and engravings in lieu of photographs and films, the traveller James Brome in 1700 could describe the Welsh hills as Britain’s veritable ‘Alps’, worthy of much the same lofty descriptors.⁵⁸ Even those who did travel widely do not seem to have been driven to distinguish in terms of height: William Lithgow, a lively Scottish traveller, describing two very different prominences, namely Mount Parnassus (2,457m) and Mount Quarantine (366m), variously used ‘hill’ and ‘mountain’ to refer to both.⁵⁹ Adjectives describing impressive height could be attached to either noun, and applied to landforms of quite differing proportions: thus Brome could term the Black Mountains in Wales (highest peak 811m) ‘towering mountains’, whilst Thomas Herbert, amidst the Taurus Mountains (in modern-day Turkey, highest peak 3,756m) found them to be ‘stupendous Hills’.⁶⁰ To some extent this is a question - to be discussed shortly - of measurement, but it is also indicative of the early modern mindset regarding mountains, in which size was not the most important characteristic in terms of shaping how a mountain was viewed and experienced. Approaching early modern accounts of ‘mountain’ engagement from a modern perspective, it would be very easy to reject descriptions of ascents of relatively low hills as irrelevant. However, this would overlook the fact that, regardless of size, a 300m crag and a 4000m peak both contributed to and were viewed according to the same discursive concept of a ‘mountain’.

A visual corollary to these examples can be found in the evolution of an Aberdeenshire promontory from its first cartographic sketch to its inclusion in the Scottish volume of Joan Blaeu’s 1662-1665 *Atlas Maior*. Mormond Hill (230m; the name is from the Gaelic,

⁵⁸ James Brome, *Travels over England, Scotland and Wales* (London, 1700), sig. A3v.

⁵⁹ William Lithgow, *A Most Delectable, and True Discourse, of an Admired and Painefull Peregrination from Scotland, to the Most Famous Kingdoms in Europe, Asia and Affricke* (London, 1614), sigs. G4r and P4r-v.

⁶⁰ Brome, *Travels over England, Scotland and Wales*, pp.20-21; Thomas Herbert, *A Relation of Some Yeares Travaile, Begvnne Anno 1626* (London, 1634), p.107.

A'Mhormonadh, meaning 'the great moor') is a notable feature within its local landscape, but it could certainly not be described as being 'mountainous' in the sense of possessing great height, jagged peaks, or rocky cliffs: it is really a gentle mound (fig. 3). Timothy Pont (1565-1614), the earliest surveyor of Scotland, depicted 'Moir mont' fairly naturalistically, albeit with perhaps slightly more triangular prominences than it actually possessed (fig. 4). By the time Robert Gordon (1580-1661), an Aberdeenshire man, came to revise Pont's maps, 'Moirmond Hill' had become a veritable mountain range of steeply-sloped peaks (fig. 5). Once the 'Hill of Mormond' had been revised one last time, for the *Atlas Maior* of 1662-5, it had grown sheer cliff faces, contrasting notably with Blaeu's standard dented-pillow shape used to represent the majority of hilly or mountainous areas (figs. 6-7). In a world atlas, it stood out alongside the great peaks of the world (figs. 8-9), just as James Brome's Welsh peaks provided a worthy domestic substitute for the Alps. In both cases, what dictated mental, visual, and descriptive scaling was the local significance of a hill, not its actual height.⁶¹

For all that bigger was not necessarily better in early modern Europe, people were still very much interested in measuring the objects which they defined as hills or mountains. The methods available to them fell under two umbrellas: geodetic and barometric.⁶² Geodetic methods drew upon trigonometric principles and were often closely associated with attempts to define the overall size of the earth. They had a long history dating back to the classical period and early modern discussions of mountain heights often drew upon - and revised - the estimates of classical writers. Some such methods were relatively crude; several authors noted that Pliny the Elder (c.23 – 79 C.E.) had gauged the extraordinary height of Mount Athos based on the fact that it cast its shadow on the island of Lemnos many miles away, and this method was applied by early modern naturalists in attempting to estimate the heights of the mountains on the moon based on shadows

⁶¹ However, mountain heights do frame modern understanding of mountains. Therefore, throughout this thesis I will give the elevation (height from sea level) of a mountain in metres the first time it is referred to. Where relevant I will also give prominence (height from the base of the mountain). This is both to provide the reader with context, but also to highlight that early modern writers applied the same epithets, and experienced similar emotions or aesthetic reactions, when faced with or on top of a small 'hill', as they would a large 'mountain'.

⁶² Florian Cajori, 'History of the Determinations of the Heights of Mountains', *Isis*, 12:3 (1929), 482-514, provides a dated, but excellent, overview of the technologies for measuring mountains from the classical era up to the twentieth century. It was prompted by a query in *Isis* by Lynn Thorndike, historian of medieval science and alchemy, on the subject. Lynn Thorndike, 'Measurement of Mountain Altitudes', *Isis*, 9:3 (1927), 425-426.



Fig. 3: A photographic view of Mormond Hill. By Ken Fitlike, CC BY-SA 2.0.



Fig. 4: Timothy Pont's survey of Mormond Hill (drawn between 1560 and 1614). Detail from Pont 10, [Buchan], Adv.MS.70.90, National Library of Scotland.



Fig. 5: Robert Gordon's draft of Mormond Hill (ca. 1636-1652). Detail from Gordon 33, Lower part of Bu[quhan]; Laich of Buquhan, Adv.MS.70.2.10, National Library of Scotland. The Hill of Mormond also features on Gordon 25 and 34 (same manuscript).



Fig. 6: Mormond Hill from map of 'Aberdonia & Banfia', Johann Blaeu, *Atlas Maior*, 1662-1665, vol.6, p.102. The exaggerated size and craginess of the hill represents its prominence in the (fairly flat) local landscape.



Fig. 7: 'Generic' (unnamed) mountains from map of 'Aberdonia & Banfia', Johann Blaeu, *Atlas Maior*, 1662-1665, vol.6, p.102.



Fig. 8: 'Pico de Terda' (The Peak of Tenerife, Mont Teide) from map 'Insulæ Canariæ', Blaeu *Atlas Maior* vol.9, p.178. The triangular prominence of this peak amidst its surrounding mountains emphasises its nature as the 'highest mountain in the world'.



Fig. 9: Mount Sinai from map 'Terra Sancta', Blaeu *Atlas Maior* vol.10, p.22. Here the Biblical significance of the peak is emphasised through its distinction from the surrounding mountains in size, cragginess, and of course the illustration of Moses at its summit.

visible through telescopes.⁶³ Writers were aware that in most cases mountains could only be measured from their base on land, but that their actual height was in fact far greater and included the height from sea level of the continent that they were on.⁶⁴ One method for gauging the height of a mountain from sea level could only be applied to mountains visible from water, and involved the computation of the distances involved at the point at which the mountain either dropped below the horizon from the point of view of a departing vessel, or the point at which said vessel vanished from the perspective of an individual standing on top of the mountain.⁶⁵ Modern trigonometric methods, which are the basis of most current mountain measurements, are based on refined versions of the same principles applied in these early modern examples.

Early modern natural philosophers were also actively engaged in developing barometric methods for measuring heights, for which mountains provided not only the subject but also the laboratory. Built prominences such as church spires were insufficiently tall to affect barometric readings. So it was that Blaise Pascal sent his brother-in-law to the top of the Puy de Dôme (1,465m) with mercury in hand in 1643, whilst George Sinclair selected four locations in southern Scotland – including the summits of Tinto Hill and Arthur’s Seat – upon which to carefully fill a baroscopic tube with mercury, painstakingly removing any air bubbles with an iron wire, in attempts to better understand the effects of altitude on the equipment.⁶⁶ These investigations were hampered by the relative inaccuracy of geodetic measurements. Without exact height measurements, attempts to formulate the relationship between altitude and pressure could only be preliminary.⁶⁷ The constants required to compute mountain height based on barometric reading were refined in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and modern-day altimeters for mountaineering are based on the same technology, although they continue to be

⁶³ Edward Stillingfleet, *Origines Sacrae, or a Rational Account of the Grounds of Christian Faith*, (London, 1662), p.545. Stillingfleet had doubts regarding Pliny’s estimate of 87 miles, commenting that seventeenth-century geographers had given much lower figures. For mountains on the moon, see [John Wilkins], *The Discovery of a World in the Moone* (London, 1638), pp.130-131; Henry More, *An Antidote Against Atheisme* (London, 1653).

⁶⁴ E.g. Whiston, *A New Theory*, pp.323-324: the ‘absolute or intire height of this Mountain [Ararat] arises not only from its proper Altitude above the neighbouring Plains, but also from the Elevation of the whole Continent, or particularly of its middle Regions above the Ancient Surface of the Seas’.

⁶⁵ Cajori, ‘Heights of Mountains’, pp.494-495.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 499 and pp.501-502.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.503.

subject to the vagaries of pressure changes based on weather.⁶⁸

The height of mountains was the subject not just of practical investigation but also of significant theological and scholarly discussion. They appeared most prominently in relation to the Universal Deluge, during which God had destroyed mankind, sparing only Noah, his family, and the animals who went in two-by-two. By the seventeenth century it was no longer enough to believe that the Deluge occurred: writers wanted to be able to explain, according to natural principles, how it had happened. One prevailing view, based on the reference in Genesis to the breaking out of the 'fountains of the great deep', was that the water required for the Deluge came from storehouses of water beneath the Earth's surface.⁶⁹ Genesis also related that 'the mountains were covered' with water, and their tops not seen again for ten months.⁷⁰ With these considerations in mind, writers were motivated to underestimate or downplay the height of mountains relative to the diameter of the earth. Sir Walter Raleigh, citing a diameter of 7,000 miles (and a depth to the centre of 3,500), concluded that as there was no mountain higher than 'thirtie miles vpright', then there could be no possible challenge to the account of the Deluge, as 'this thirtie miles vpright... [could be] found in the depths of the earth one hundred and sixteene times'.⁷¹

Almost fifty years later, the theologian Edward Stillingfleet saw fit to revise Raleigh's ratio, taking for his authority the calculations of Pierre Gassendi (1592-1655), who had found the diameter of the earth to be 8,355 miles, and the proportion of the highest mountains to that whole only 1 in 1,670.⁷² Stillingfleet opined that this perspective - which saw him conclude that there was no mountain in the world above 'five direct *miles* in *height*' - made the reality of the Deluge even harder to deny.⁷³ He went on to contrast the estimates made by classical authors with those given by Gassendi, and utilised a

⁶⁸ Graham Jackson and Chris Crocker, 'The use of altimeters in height measurement', *The Database of British and Irish Hills*, <<http://www.hills-database.co.uk/altim.html>> [01.03.2016].

⁶⁹ Genesis 7.11, KJV.

⁷⁰ Genesis 7.20 and 8.5, KJV.

⁷¹ [Sir Walter Raleigh], *The History of the World* (London, 1614), p.106, first pagination. Raleigh was cited throughout the seventeenth century for his discussion of mountains: e.g. Wilkins, *A World in the Moone*, p.133, and Whiston, *A New Theory*, pp.120-121.

⁷² Stillingfleet, *Origines Sacrae*, p.544.

⁷³ Assuming that Stillingfleet is referring to an English statute mile (5,280 feet) then he is not in fact far wrong, as five miles of perpendicular height would suggest a total height of 26,400 feet, or 8,047m, 801m less than the height of Mount Everest.

practical metric for establishing the height of a mountain, claiming that a man would take one day to gain 'eight furlongs' (or one mile) of altitude, and could find no report of any mountain which took more than three or four days to climb.⁷⁴

The Biblical account of the Flood also provided another mountain-related problem, namely the fact that the first dry land to appear was that which the Ark came to rest on: the peak of Mount Ararat. This would suggest that it was the highest mountain in the world. However, by the early modern period it was generally acknowledged that the world's tallest mountain was in fact the 'Peak of Tenerife' - a volcano now known as Mount Teide (3,718m).⁷⁵ This required natural philosophers to establish a mechanism by which Ararat could have changed in height since the Deluge.⁷⁶ William Whiston (1667-1752), Isaac Newton's successor to the Lucasian Chair of Mathematics at Cambridge, put this Scriptural oddity to active use in his *New Theory of the Earth* (1696). His naturalistic explanation for the Deluge was that a passing comet had affected the Earth's gravity, resulting in great disruption to the 'Tides in the Abyss'.⁷⁷ This comet, Whiston explained, had also distorted the continents, in particular the northern continent upon which Ararat rested, elevating the mountain, temporarily, to the status of the highest mountain in the world.⁷⁸ Somewhat circularly, he concluded that the contemporaneous prominence of the 'Pike of Teneriff' over Mount Ararat therefore proved his original theory, that a comet had caused the Deluge.⁷⁹ The relative heights of modern-day mountains could thus form the

⁷⁴ Stillingfleet, *Origines Sacrae*, pp.545-546. Stillingfleet cited Gerardus Joannes Vossius for his metric of altitude gain per day, taking the average between Vossius' estimate that a 'mountainer born' might ascend 10 perpendicular furlongs per day, whilst an ordinary man would only manage 6.

⁷⁵ For the Peak of Tenerife as the highest in the world see Matthew Mackaile, *Terræ Prodromus Theoricus* (Aberdeen, 1691), p.26; Stillingfleet, *Origines Sacrae*, pp.545-546; Raleigh, *History*, p.106 and p.124. Its primacy was not completely unquestioned; Stillingfleet, though he asserted that it was 'reputed the highest of the world', noted that it took three days to ascend, but later made note of 'those lofty mountains of Peru, in comparison of which they say the *Alpes* are but like *Cottages*, may be ascended in *four dayes* compass' (*Origines Sacrae*, above, and p.546). Meanwhile, the cataloguer of Athanasius Kircher's *Musæum Celeberrimum* (first published in 1678), made particular note of a manuscript description of Chile which described the Andes as the highest mountains in the world; Athanasius Kircher, *The Celebrated Museum of the Roman College of the Society of Jesus*, trans. and ed. Peter Davidson et. al. (2015), p.165. C.f. fig. 8, herein.

⁷⁶ Erasmus Warren, *Geologia: or, a Discourse Concerning the Earth before the Deluge. Wherein the Form and Properties ascribed to it, In a Book intituled The Theory of the Earth, Are Excepted against* (London, 1690), pp.327-329, and Raleigh, *History*, pp.123-128. Warren used Ararat's deficient height to argue that the reference in Genesis to the highest mountains being 'covered' referred only to their sides (as otherwise the Ark could not have rested on the summit of Ararat when the flood was at its height, as it would have been deep underwater), whilst Raleigh used it to question the geographical location of the Scriptural mountain.

⁷⁷ William Whiston, *A New Theory*, pp.323-324.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.324-325.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.325.

basis for a new mechanical theory of one of the most revolutionary events described in Scripture.

The revelation that as far as an educated early modern individual was concerned, the highest mountain in the world was the 3,000m summit of a volcanic island may be a surprising one, but it leads to a final and important point regarding the fundamentals of early modern mountain knowledge. Today, most people would probably be unable to name Mount Teide unless they had some specific reason for knowing of it, but in the early modern period it possessed a mental prominence by virtue of its assumed physical prominence. This assumption was drawn from a context in which questions of height were answered with reference to the classics and Scripture as much as to measurement and observation. Meanwhile, the Greek mountains – Olympus, Parnassus, Athos – were frequently on the tongues or pens of participants in mountain discussions, for these were the peaks described and measured in the classical texts which formed a significant portion of an educated early modern’s mental map of the world.⁸⁰ In terms of ranges rather than peaks, early modern writers were aware of most of the mountain ranges of the known Western world and the Alps were acknowledged as the highest in Europe.⁸¹ However, the Atlas, Taurus, and Caucasus ranges were also frequently first to hand, reflecting the cultural prominence of contemporaneous travel narratives relating to their geographic regions.⁸²

By contrast, the average modern Westerner asked to name the first mountain ranges or individual peaks that came to mind would probably start with the Alps, the Himalayas, and their most famed constituents: Mont Blanc, the Eiger, K2. They would take for granted the following facts: that Mount Everest is the highest mountain in the world and that it measures 8848m in elevation according to the results of refined modern techniques. That

⁸⁰ Stillingfleet, *Origines Sacrae*, pp.544-545; Raleigh, *History*, pp.123-124. Moreover, early modern writings did not always syntactically distinguish between mountain ranges, and individual peaks, referring to an entire range by a singular term. For example Raleigh, *History*, sig. a2v, writes of the Ark resting ‘upon part of the Hill *Taurus*’ (meaning a peak in the Taurus range), whilst on p.106, asking the reader to ‘Take then the highest mountaine of the world, *Caucasus, Taurus, Olympus, or Atlas...*’ he directly compares three ranges with a single individual peak (Olympus). C.f. John Chardin on ‘Mount Caucasus’, chapter 2, p.70.

⁸¹ Burnet, *The Theory of the Earth*, vol.1, p.142.

⁸² *Ibid.*, vol.2, p.111: in listing the ‘everlasting Hills’ to be destroyed at the Conflagration Burnet includes the Alps, the African (Atlas) mountains, the Caucasus and Taurus mountains, and the Riphean Hills; c.f. Raleigh, above, and John Ray, *Miscellaneous Discourses Concerning the Dissolution and Changes of the World* (London, 1692), p.145. C.f. Chapter Two for the geographical spread of physical travel to various mountainous areas.

when someone talks about a 'hill' they mean something that is qualitatively as well as quantitatively distinct - indeed, lesser - than a mountain. That mountains and volcanoes, though they share some topographical features, evoke very different emotional responses based on disparate sets of cultural imagery and associations; the natural disaster of a volcanic eruption has nothing to do with the tragedy or triumph of climbers scaling mountainsides. The legends which promote the 'best known' modern mountains are human ones, with the names of past famed climbers ringing in the minds of those seeking to follow in their footsteps.

'Mountain knowledge' is not and was not a simple matter of objective fact: it is part of the representational space of mountains, shaped by and shaping the cultural contexts of a given period. The peaks that serve as mental models for mountains in the modern mind were either unknown or unmentioned in the early modern period. Peaks with classical or religious associations and significance were far more likely to have been at the back of the minds of early modern natural philosophers, travellers, or poets when they thought about, looked at, and described mountains, than the mountaineering Alps or Himalayas of the modern European mind. What 'made up mountains' in early modern Europe - their physical characteristics, height, and cultural significance - was radically different from today.⁸³

Contested Origins

The question of the Deluge framed discussions of mountain height and problematised the widely-accepted status of the Peak of Tenerife as the highest mountain peak in the world. The same question also saw Thomas Burnet, in 1684, place the origins of mountains at the heart of his controversial *Theory of the Earth*.⁸⁴ Burnet set out with 'a sincere intention to justify the Doctrines of the *Universal Deluge*... and protect them from the

⁸³ C.f. Hansen, *Summits of Modern Man*, pp.38-39.

⁸⁴ Burnet's *Theory* was first published as *Telluris Theoria Sacra*, printed in two volumes in 1681 and 1689. The English edition, *The Theory of the Earth*, was printed in two volumes in 1684 and 1690. Although Burnet claimed in the preface to the first volume of the English edition that it 'is not so properly a Translation, as a new Composition upon the same ground', the two texts were substantively the same; Thomas Burnet, *The Theory of the Earth*, vol.1, sig.a1r. Moreover, the majority of Burnet's respondents wrote in English and made reference to the English edition. Subsequent reprints also gave prominence to the English version, for which reasons it is the version cited here.

Cavils of those that are no well-wishers to Sacred History'.⁸⁵ For Burnet, the doctrine of the Deluge was particularly vulnerable to scepticism: it described an earth-changing event which, in his opinion, required more water than the world contained. Explanations that relied on the miraculous intervention of God – in creating and then later annihilating extra water – were unacceptable.⁸⁶ The idea that God could not have foreseen the need for the Flood, and thus had to retroactively 'edit' His creation, threatened belief in His omniscience.

Burnet therefore determined to produce an account of the Deluge which depended only on natural, 'rational' causes, and which did not rely on claims of divine intervention in the world beyond the six days of creation. One traditional account, of water being drawn out of the abyss, failed to satisfy Burnet. Firstly, the mechanisms by which this occurred were unclear, and secondly, it was impossible to envisage waters being taken out of the deeps of the Earth which did not immediately drain back in: as he put it, if you emptied one vessel to fill another, you would still have one empty vessel.⁸⁷ Nor did this solution provide enough water to, as Scripture claimed, cover the tops of the highest mountains. This was the square which had to be turned into a circle, or the foundations of the Christian faith - the authority of Scripture - would be called into doubt.

Burnet resolved this urgent question with a subtle and remarkable solution: if the waters of the Earth were not enough to cover the mountains of the Earth, then the world to which the Deluge occurred could not have included those mountains. Instead, Burnet proposed, God's original creation had taken the form of a smooth-surfaced 'mundane egg', without mountains or seas.⁸⁸ This form was the only rational result of the original Chaos out of which the world was built. The Chaos was 'the matter of the Earth and Heavens... reduc'd into a fluid mass... mingled in confusion' which, over time, developed form and order according to natural principles laid down by God at the beginning of Creation. These principles saw the densest matter of the Choas (fire, then earth) gather together first, to be followed by a great mass of liquid.⁸⁹ The motion of the Chaos also resulted in small

⁸⁵ Burnet, *The Theory of the Earth*, vol.1, sig.A3r.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.19-20.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.14-15.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.51-52 and, for the 'Mundane Egg', p.72 and pp.269-270.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.53-54.

'earthy particles' becoming caught up in the lightest element, the air. Ultimately, these settled upon the smooth surface of the waters below the air, forming the earth's crust, which was 'equal and uniform, and without Mountains', with the sea enclosed inside rather than residing upon the surface of the earth.⁹⁰ Over time, the heat of the sun warmed the earth and the water beneath it, and at the time 'that All-wise Providence had design'd for the punishment of a sinful World', the vaporous 'Exhalations' of the waters broke apart the egg-shell, and produced an explosion of waters which revealed, once they had calmed, a new world, of seas and mountains: 'a World lying in its rubbish'.⁹¹ Mountains were therefore the result of the Flood, and a testament to God's need to punish a humanity that had gone beyond the pale.

Burnet's was not, of course, the first theory of mountain origins to be articulated; indeed, he alluded to a few, albeit with derision:

The truth is, the generality of people have not the sence [*sic*] and curiosity enough to raise a question concerning these things... You may tell them that Mountains grow out of the Earth like Fuzz-balls, or that there are Monsters under ground that throw up Mountains as Moles do Mole-hills; they will scarce raise one objection against your doctrine; or, if you would appear more Learned, tell them that the Earth is a great Animal, and these are Wens that grow upon its body. This would pass current for Philosophy; so much is the World drown'd in stupidity...⁹²

This was something of a misrepresentation of extant and preceding mountain theories, many of which had combined observation with the best intellectual frameworks of the time.⁹³ In 1543 the botanist Conrad Gesner wondered whether the shape of mountains gave the hint to the original formation of some of them, at least, as volcanic explosions. He posited that where fire threw itself up, earth was compelled to follow, and solidified as it went, explaining peaks formed 'in a point like a sword, mimicking the nature of fire'.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, vol.1, pp.57-59.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.71-72 and p.110.

⁹² *Ibid.*, vol.1, p.140.

⁹³ Some of Burnet's contemporaries did not even agree that the examples he gave were as ridiculous as he suggested. John Beaumont responded to Burnet's mockery of the idea that mountains might be produced like mole-hills or wens, arguing that 'I know not why the Earth may not be judg'd better able to produce the one, than the Mole, or Man's Body the others'. John Beaumont, *Considerations on a book, entituled the Theory of the Earth* (London, 1693), p.29. On this 'anatomical' vision of the earth, c.f. Roy Porter, *The Making of Geology: Earth Science in Britain 1660-1815* (1977), p.70.

⁹⁴ Conrad Gesner, *On the Admiration of Mountains*, ed. W. Dock and J. Monroe Thornton, trans. H.B.C. Soulé

Another theory which Burnet discarded early on in his first book seems to have already been dated by 1638, when John Wilkins - *en route* to explaining how the existence of mountains on the moon demonstrated that there must be life there - referred to those who thought mountains had been 'beate up by the flood'.⁹⁵ For Burnet, however, the Deluge had not so much roughened the world up around its edges as it had completed reformed it.

Burnet's reanimation of the idea of the postdiluvian origin of mountains was met with a fierce response. Those who took up their pens in opposition to Burnet were concerned not only with his arguments regarding mountains, but with his entire approach to natural history. The first individual to publicly object to Burnet's theory was Herbert Croft, Bishop of Hereford, whose *Animadversions* enumerated the theological concerns that most of Burnet's respondents would express, in a variety of ways, as the debate rumbled on over the subsequent decade and a half. Croft argued that Burnet had been so determined to make Scripture match his theories that he had made it 'a Nose of Wax, to be shaped and fitted... [to] vain superstitions'.⁹⁶ He was concerned by Burnet's insistence that God could only be involved in the world at the moment of creation, suggesting that Burnet was a 'kind of Deist', with an understanding of divine revelation quite at odds with that of the Church.⁹⁷ Later respondents would support this, accusing Burnet of setting his reason above the truth of Scripture, and, worse, of being no more than 'an infidel'.⁹⁸ In his attempt to justify Scripture by explaining the physical processes underpinning the events it described, Burnet found himself cast in the role of the very type of doubting sceptic he had hoped to convince.

(1937), p.9.

⁹⁵ Wilkins, *A World in the Moone*, pp.117-118. Burnet, *The Theory of the Earth*, vol.1, pp.146-147, rejected the idea that the 'bare rowling and agitation of the waters' would have sufficient force to create mountains. It is possible that Wilkins referred to the writings of Godfrey Goodman who, in a book arguing for the general corruption of nature, posited that 'the vn-eueenes of the earth (the hills and the vales) were much caused by this general deluge'. Godfrey Goodman, *The Fall of Man, or the Corruption of Nature, Proued by the Light of our Naturall Reason* (London, 1616), pp.286-287. Goodman's ideas were reanimated in 1635 by George Hakewill's published critique of them; c.f. f.n. 317, below

⁹⁶ Herbert Croft, *Some Animadversions Upon a Book Intituled the Theory of the Earth* (London, 1685), sigs. A8v-a2r.

⁹⁷ Croft, *Some Animadversions*, sigs.a4v-a4r. Deists 'advocated the argument that the existence of God could be based upon natural reason alone, without reference to revelation'. David Boyd Haycock, "'Claiming Him as Her Son': William Stukeley, Isaac Newton, and the Archaeology of the Trinity', eds. John Brooke and Ian MacLean, *Heterodoxy in Early Modern Science and Religion* (2005), p.298.

⁹⁸ Archibald Lovell, *A Summary of Material Heads Which May be Enlarged and Improved into a Compleat Answer to Dr. Burnet's Theory of the Earth* (London, 1696), p.14.

If Burnet's apparently casual treatment of the claims of Scripture had raised the hackles of his contemporaries, many were also deeply disturbed by the vision he presented of mountains as the ruinous remnants of the Deluge. Most of them rejected the idea outright, whilst some formulated their own counter-theories. One such respondent was Erasmus Warren, a Suffolk rector who became Burnet's most virulent opponent.⁹⁹ Warren's theory of mountain origins was somewhat tortuous. He noted that Scripture recorded that the surface of the Earth lay under the waters until the third day of Creation, at which point the waters were gathered into one place. He supposed that at that time God created the sea by 'pressing down the Ground... lower there, than it was in other places', with the water quite naturally rushing in to fill the void. The dry land that then appeared was full of moisture which, newly exposed to the heat of the sun, turned to vapours, which expanded until it 'heaved up the Earth above; somewhat after the manner that Leaven does dough'. Thus, according to Warren, 'Mountains were made of all shapes and sizes'.¹⁰⁰ What is fascinating about Warren's account of mountain origins is not so much the intellectual contortions he went through to articulate it, but the fact that he deemed it necessary, in defence of mountains, to risk such an 'arrogant presumption' as attempting to explain the ways of God.¹⁰¹

In spite of his undoubted passion Warren was ill-equipped to provide a counter-theory to Burnet's which would not in turn open itself up to the exact same criticisms he had made of the original work.¹⁰² John Keill, a mathematician and follower of Isaac Newton, was better qualified to write his *Examination of Dr. Burnet's Theory* in 1698. Stating that he would leave Scriptural analysis to those with a greater understanding of such issues than he, Keill, like several other respondents in the debate, turned to the mechanical

⁹⁹ He was also the only respondent to whom Burnet directed published responses. Their dispute consisted of the following: Warren, *Geologia* (1690); Thomas Burnet, *An Answer to the Late Exceptions Made by Mr Erasmus Warren Against the Theory of the Earth* (London, 1690); Erasmus Warren, *A Defence of the Discourse Concerning the Earth Before the Flood* (London, 1691); Thomas Burnet, *A Short Consideration of Mr Erasmus Warren's Defence of His Exceptions Against the Theory of the Earth* (London, 1691); and Erasmus Warren, *Some Reflections upon the Short Consideration of the Defence of the Exceptions Against the Theory of the Earth* (London, 1692). In Roy Porter's words, the two 'danced the same steps with greater exasperation' over and again; Porter, *The Making of Geology*, p.85.

¹⁰⁰ Warren, *Geologia*, pp.208-210.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.209.

¹⁰² Burnet picked apart the 'great many palpable defects or oversights in this new Hypothesis' at length. Burnet, *An Answer to the Late Exceptions*, pp.45-51. Burnet also critiqued Warren's own forced interpretations of Scripture, p.70.

question of the form of the Chaos.¹⁰³ He took issue with Burnet's representation of it, asking why it should not have contained 'huge lumps of firm and solid matter' swimming within it - a circumstance which, he posited, seemed more genuinely chaotic than the ordered sphere put forward by Burnet.¹⁰⁴ Some of these lumps would sink to the centre of the Earth as the Chaos gathered together, but others, Keill argued, would float to the top, forming mountains - after all, as late seventeenth-century writers knew well, mountains were full of just such hollow and cavernous spaces that would make them lighter than the generality of the Chaos.¹⁰⁵

This all seems very abstract. Why did it matter that Burnet thought mountains were formed one way and his respondents thought another? Keill provided the answer in another *Examination*, published a year later, after he had been pressed by an anonymous defender of Burnet to justify what they termed his 'Chimerical and ridiculous' theory:

For my part, I think it absolutely indifferent to the question, what way Mountains were made at the beginning of the World, whether by Mechanical causes, or by the immediate hand of God Almighty, or if by the hollowing and making a channel for the Sea, the Earth was rais'd and laid upon the dry land to form Mountains... it was sufficient to my purpose to shew, that there was no necessity that the face of the Primitive Earth should be without Mountains.¹⁰⁶

It mattered to Keill, and those who ranged alongside him to object to Burnet, that mountains had existed before the Deluge - and had been deliberately designed in their current form by God. According to Keill, 'there is scarce any thing in nature that shews more of wisdom and contrivance than they do', and his testimony was just one of a

¹⁰³ John Keill, *An Examination of Dr. Burnet's Theory of the Earth* (Oxford, 1698), pp.26-27. C.f. Samuel Parker, *Six Philosophical Essays Upon Several Subjects* (London, 1700), pp.7-8, and letter from Isaac Newton to Thomas Burnet, after 13 January 1681, King's College Cambridge, Keynes MS 106. Parker - in a somewhat tongue-in-cheek dialogue - proposed a lumpy Chaos, in which matter accreted into multiple solid masses, ultimately creating a 'very uneven and mountainous' Earth. Newton concluded that Burnet's theory of mountain origins was a 'plausible account', but theorised that a uniform Chaos could have coagulated into mountains much as solutions of compounds such as saltpeter could coagulate into an uneven solid. C.f. Scott Mandelbrote, 'Isaac Newton and Thomas Burnet: Biblical Criticism and the Crisis of Late Seventeenth-Century England', eds. James E. Force and Richard H. Popkin, *The Books of Nature and Scripture: Recent Essays on Natural Philosophy, Theology, and Biblical Criticism in the Netherlands of Spinoza's Time and the British Isles of Newton's Time* (1994), p.165.

¹⁰⁴ Keill, *An Examination of Dr. Burnet's Theory*, pp.47-49.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.50-51.

¹⁰⁶ Anonymous, *Reflections Upon the Theory of the Earth, Occasion'd by a Late Examination of it* (London, 1699), p.9; John Keill, *An Examination of the Reflections on the Theory of the Earth* (Oxford, 1699), p.23.

clamour of voices asserting the value and usefulness of mountains in providing the source of rivers, offering habitats for a diversity of flora and fauna, and even for limiting and controlling the weather.¹⁰⁷ Only one respondent agreed with Burnet, and they happily concluded that the ruinous appearance of mountains was a message from Providence that they were the last remnants of the Deluge.¹⁰⁸ Burnet's other respondents also saw mountains as a message from the deity, but not as one of destruction: rather of Divine Providence. Burnet's *Theory* was subjected to fervent criticism because it threatened the place of mountains within the Book of Nature. This position held that they were made by a generous God for mankind's use and, as chapter three will elaborate, could therefore be appreciated as objects of aesthetic value. Burnet's respondents were of course rallying in defence of the basic principles of adherence to Scripture - but they were also rallying round in defence of mountains. The *Theory of the Earth* forced them to express that which had previously gone unspoken, but which clearly mattered a great deal: the intellectual framework which enabled them to value and enjoy mountainous landscapes.

This brief overview of what was an involved and decades-long controversy has gone some way towards demonstrating that Burnet was far from being representative of the views of his age towards mountains; his position was extremely inflammatory, even heterodox. In general terms, the *Theory of the Earth* sparked the furious response it received because it represented a threat to the authority of Scriptural revelation as the most important insight into matters of natural philosophy. His argument regarding mountains attracted particular attention because it gave the landscape a history which set it apart from God's original Creation. Burnet was not the first to theorise that mountains had not been part of Creation, but his *Theory* coincided with the climax of concerning discourses of natural history and theology which had been building throughout the century, resulting in its unprecedented rhetorical impact. Ultimately, the *Theory* did nothing more or less than remove mountains from the Book of Nature; indeed, it dealt a severe blow to the idea of natural revelation altogether. Burnet set out to protect sacred history; he categorically failed.

He did succeed in starting an intellectual avalanche. Less than ten years after the

¹⁰⁷ Keill, *An Examination of Dr Burnet's Theory*, p.172 and pp.54-55. C.f. Chapter Three, pp.105.-107.

¹⁰⁸ Anon., *Reflections*, pp.14-15.

publication of the first English volume of the *Theory*, it was placed in the position of honour at the head of Thomas Pope Blount's brief compendium of mountain knowledge in his *Natural History*.¹⁰⁹ Burnet's notorious work was frequently reprinted well into the eighteenth century, and by the time Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, came to write an entry on Burnet in his *Théorie de la Terre* (1749) he could already retrospectively declare that Burnet was 'the first who has treated this subject [the history of the Earth] generally, and in a systematical manner... His work acquired great reputation'.¹¹⁰ As will be established in the subsequent chapters, Burnet's ideas were read and absorbed by early eighteenth-century travellers who went to mountains equipped with his vision of them as ruins of the Deluge. Such travellers, no longer able to appreciate mountains as a chapter in the Book of Nature, either found them distasteful - providing the articulations that would go on to become the historical basis for modern claims of early modern mountain gloom - or would seek out a new vocabulary for enjoying them, and in so doing become the earliest articulators of the British 'natural sublime'. The question of where mountains came from and how they came to be was central to the ways in which people could understand and appreciate them in face-to-face encounters.

Practical Knowledge

One of the most famous remnants of non-elite, premodern mountain knowledge is epitomised in a series of engravings of dragons. At the very start of the eighteenth century the Swiss naturalist Johann Jakob Scheuchzer (1672-1733) made a series of journeys through the mountainous regions of his home country. Posterity has chiefly remembered Scheuchzer's account of his travels for the fact that he sombrely reported having encountered honest men who assured him that they had seen dragons in the high mountains. Although he expressed incredulity regarding the specific accounts, like any good naturalist Scheuchzer devoted space in his text to classifying different types of

¹⁰⁹ Blount, *A Natural History*, pp.368-371. Blount also provided extracts from Edward Stillingfleet and John Wilkins, and his collection included texts which directly opposed Burnet's view of mountains as the result of the Deluge.

¹¹⁰ Translated (in this instance fairly directly) in *Barr's Buffon or Barr's Natural History*, 10 vols. (London, 1792), vol.1, pp.128-129. C.f. Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, *Histoire naturelle générale et particulière*, 13 vols. (Paris, 1749-1789), vol.1, pp.180-183. Buffon's acknowledgement of Burnet's primacy is not to say that the rest of his comments on the first *Theory of the Earth* were complimentary.



Fig. 10: One of Scheuchzer's several dragons. Johann Jakob Scheuchzer, *Ouresiphoites Helveticus, sive itinerar per Helvetiæ Alpinas regiones*, 4 vols. (Leiden, typis ac sumptibus Petri Vander Aa, 1723), vol.3, facing p.395.

dragons and speculating on the uses of their gallstones (bezoars).¹¹¹ The engravings in Scheuchzer's work depict several different breeds of dragons: one that is little more than a snake; another furred and with a bifurcated tail. The most emblematic image is one that depicts a man – presumably one of Scheuchzer's honest informants – encountering a huge dragon, with a plated torso, clawed front feet, a long neck, and a cat's face (fig. 10). Both the dragon and the human stand in mirrored postures; the natural assumption is that the man's hands are raised in terror, the creature's paws in preparation to attack. Within modern scholarship, this elite representation has long stood for the state of local mountain knowledge and engagement in the Alps; where genteel visitors were aesthetically disgusted, the locals were terrified and superstitious.¹¹² One might reasonably expect that they rarely ventured up into the high mountains and, as such, never learnt anything beyond how to live in a valley beneath the shadow of the most ominous of landscape features.

In fact, mountain knowledge was gained and utilised on a daily basis by those who lived and worked among the heights and is evidenced through (elite) sources attesting to the existence of technologies, techniques, and practices for managing and navigating through mountain landscapes.¹¹³ Such expertise incorporated many of the basic principles and understandings which underpin modern practices of mountaineering. One text in particular provides a fascinating insight into the late sixteenth-century awareness of mountain dangers, the equipment and techniques utilised by those who spent time in the mountain landscape, and the efforts that local communities went to in order to maintain the passes and pathways and to ensure the safety of those who used them. Josias Simler's 1574 *Vallesiae et alpinum descriptio* has been described as the first known 'guide to the Alps', and in it he included a detailed treatise 'On the Difficulties and Dangers of Alpine

¹¹¹ Johann Jakob Scheuchzer, *Ouresiphaites Helveticus, sive itinera per Helvetiæ Alpinas regiones*, 4 vols. (Leiden, 1723), vol.3, pp.367-397. C.f. J.J. Scheuchzer, 'The Swiss Mountain Roamer', in Alan Weber, *Because It's There: A Celebration of Mountaineering from 200 B.C. to Today* (2003), pp.40-41.

¹¹² G.R. de Beer, *Early Travellers in the Alps* (1930), pp.89-90. Fleming, *Killing Dragons: The Conquest of the Alps*, the title of which casts modern mountaineering as driving the 'dragons' of early modern mountain gloom out of the Alps; c.f. Hansen, *Summits of Modern Man*, pp.6-7. Scheuchzer's dragons are utilised as a key example of premodern mountain distaste in Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, pp.412-413; Keenlyside, *Peaks and Pioneers*, p.9; etc. C.f. Chapter Five for the ubiquity of Scheuchzer in early formulations of mountain gloom.

¹¹³ Throughout, it should be noted that the mountain landscape of early modern Europe was most likely harsher than that of today due to the effects of the Little Ice Age, which was at its peak during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. C.f. Sam White, 'The Real Little Ice Age', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 44:3 (2014), 327-352.

Journeys, and the Manner in Which They Are Overcome', which recorded the ways in which communities local to mountains ensured the safety both of themselves and of outsiders when travelling in the higher regions.¹¹⁴

For almost every difficulty or danger that Simler recorded, there was a known and practical antidote: paths lost, perhaps due to rockfalls, would be reclaimed by 'a beam... thrown across... as a bridge'; a traveller suffering from vertigo, or 'dizzying terror', would find their hand taken by their guide, whose head was inured to the heights; slippery pathways could be safely navigated through the use of 'batons with an iron point... called alpenstocks', or 'iron soles... equipped with three sharp points', i.e., crampons.¹¹⁵ Where there was no path down a particularly steep slope, individuals would glissade, sitting upon tree branches and sliding down 'as if they were on a horse', whilst carts or baggage would be lowered by 'great ropes, worked by capstans and tackle'.¹¹⁶ Locals knew to be cautious upon the glaciers, and were aware that freshly-fallen snow could conceal dangerous crevasses. Simler described a practice that sounds fairly similar to the 'gentleman's belay' used in the early years of modern mountaineering, whereby guides would 'gird themselves with a rope to which they attach several of those who are following them'.¹¹⁷ The guide would carry a long pole, with which to search the ground ahead, but if they did fall into a crevasse then they would (hopefully) be caught by those behind them. Those who needed to get animals across crevasses would 'carry beams with them with which they make culverts for their passage'; a solution not so very dissimilar from the modern use of ladders to span crevasses amidst the Khumbu Icefall on Everest.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Josias Simler, 'Vallesiae et Alpinum descriptio' in ed. and trans. Weber, *Because It's There*, 22-28. C.f. Josias Simler, *De sedunorum thermis et aliis fontibus medicatis de Alpibus commentarius Vallesiae descriptio* (Zürich, 1574).

¹¹⁵ Simler, 'Vallesiae', p.22 for constructed pathways; p.23 for vertigo and slipping. Seventeenth-century travellers in other regions also reported paths cut into exposed rock; e.g. Adam Olearius, trans. John Davies, *The Voyages and Travels of the Ambassadors of the Duke of Holstein, to the Great Duke of Muscovy, and the King of Persia. Begin in the year MD.C.XXXIII and Finish'd in M.DC.XXXIX* (London, 1662), p.387.

¹¹⁶ Simler, 'Vallesiae', p.23.

¹¹⁷ A 'gentleman's belay' is the use of a rope to attach one climber to another without the use of an anchor to secure them to the mountain: in the case of one climber falling the survival of both therefore depends upon the quick reaction of the second. This was one of the scarce safety techniques available to George Mallory and Sandy Irvine on their doomed Everest attempt in 1924; Conrad Anker and David Roberts, *The Lost Explorer: Finding Mallory on Mount Everest* (1999), p.72, p.153 and p.168.

¹¹⁸ Simler, 'Vallesiae', p.24.

Simler's text also depicted local mountain communities as actively engaged in maintaining the safety – and economic accessibility – of the surrounding landscape. He made references to locals taking 'care that travelers come to no harm' from gorges hidden in the midst of apparently easy passages, but particularly keeping an eye out for 'the shepherds who lead herds of large cattle or horses along their sides'. There seem to have been strict rules to ensure that livestock-jams did not occur on narrow pathways, with herders agreeing upon times to leave from either side, so that they would meet on the plateau of the col. If they did meet en route, then they would follow known rules 'which determine which of the two groups can stay on the path, and which must yield the right of way'. Should deep snow fall, 'the locals often plant long poles' to mark the way, or, if they were in an enterprising frame of mind, consciously avoided doing so in order 'to force the travelers who don't know the route to hire their services'.¹¹⁹ Mountain passes were energetically maintained, with residents on either side of a col 'compelled by the local magistrates to maintain the path... almost every day the men... on each side of the slope explore the path towards the col, and if they see any danger they warn the travellers and repair the path'. If a pass was closed by snow, then cattle and even hired workers would be brought in to open it again - although someone needing to cross in the meantime could always create a large trellised frame to attach to their shoes, to 'enlarge the imprint of the step' and enable them to walk without sinking; in other words, snow-shoes.¹²⁰ In terms of the spatial practice of mountains, Alpine dwellers actively managed the landscape in order to maintain access to them, utilising technologies and techniques that are still extant today.

These, according to Simler, were the daily challenges of living and working in the mountains, and 'the manner in which they were overcome'. He also summarised the understanding of - and ways inhabitants had of dealing with - more extraordinary mountain dangers such as avalanches. Simler's description makes it clear that the sixteenth century had as good a practical appreciation of avalanches as many mountaineers do today. He recorded that they were known to occur 'on the steep slopes

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.24-25.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.25. C.f. John Chardin, *The Travels of Sir John Chardin into Persia and the East-Indies* (London, 1686), p.116, crossing the Caucasus mountains with guides who wore 'a sort of Sandals proper to walk upon the Snow... the bottom of it being made about the shape, and about the length of a Racket without a handle'.

from which the ground has been deforested', and were a particular risk 'when the heat of spring causes the snows to melt and soften, or when in autumn and in winter great masses of new snow fall suddenly on the old snow which is icy and solid'. He also distinguished two different types of avalanche, one made mostly of new snow and the other, by far the more dangerous, 'which also drags old snow and carries with it a thick covering of earth'.¹²¹ Early modern Alpine dwellers knew very well in what circumstances they might need to look askance at a snow-slope above them, or, as Simler put it, 'The mountain inhabitants, who know these regions well and who can guess the imminence of the peril by observing certain signs, warn the travelers of the precautions they should take'.¹²²

They knew how to avoid them, too: building their homes far away from avalanche fields, and leaving early in the cool of the day. Even if the worst happened, and a chamois hunter or traveller was caught in an avalanche, all was not lost. Once again, the advice related by Simler seems to come straight from a modern climbing handbook: 'if the unfortunate victim thus buried can move his hands under the snow and manages to create a little space in front of his face, he can possibly breathe and perhaps stay alive there for two or even three days'. This alleged length of survival is unrealistic, but thanks to local practices help would hopefully be on the way far sooner: upon seeing an avalanche start, 'the mountain people ask themselves immediately if any travelers had set out that day, and calculating the elapsed time, they can guess where they were buried', and bring them out alive.¹²³ Early modern mountain-dwellers could not only predict and avoid avalanches, they also knew how to react when the worst did happen.

Throughout his recounting of sixteenth-century practical mountain knowledge, Simler - a typical humanist scholar - was at pains to set these current practices in their full historical context. When describing the dangers of spending a great deal of time in the snow - including snow-blindness (which locals prevented through the use of a 'dark vizor') and the potential for hypothermia - he quoted a passage from Xenophon (c.430-354 B.C.E.), the Greek soldier and historian, who recommended rousing any man who sat

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p.26.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p.27.

¹²³ Simler, 'Vallesiae', p.26.

down in the cold, lest he fall asleep and perish. Apparently conscious of the temporal dissonance of his example, Simler concluded by commenting that ‘Similarly our Swiss peasants, instructed not by Xenophon but by their own long experience, protect themselves against the cold’ by remaining in motion.¹²⁴ When touching upon the ‘disagreeable’ phenomena of false summits, he referred to Silius Italicus (c.28-103 C.E.), a Latin poet of the Second Punic War for insight into ‘the state of mind’ of climbers in the Alps. Such comparisons occur throughout: reports of séracs or cornices provoke a comment on Strabo’s (64/63 BCE-c.24 CE) description of ‘blocks of ice, perilously situated on the heights’, whilst Simler pointed out, regarding the use of snow-shoes, that similar equipment was also mentioned by Xenophon.¹²⁵ Throughout, Simler was fascinated by the parallels between contemporary and classical mountain knowledge and experience, highlighting the significance of the impressions of ‘the Ancients’ in shaping elite early modern understandings of the landscape.

Of course, practical mountain knowledge was no more confined to the late sixteenth-century Alps than it was to the pages of Simler’s classical authors. One earlier text which depicts similar levels of knowledge and equipment is *Theuerdank*, a poetic work loosely based on the youthful escapades of (and commissioned by) Emperor Maximilian I and published in 1517. The eponymous protagonist, Theuerdank (representing Maximilian) undertakes an adventure to rescue his intended bride, Ehrenreich (representing Maximilian’s short-lived and cherished wife, Mary of Burgundy).¹²⁶ The story is a princely *Bildungsroman*; its setting the mountain landscape, and the perils invoked by Theuerdank’s allegorical enemies (representing the follies of youth, the ‘misadventures of maturity’, and political intrigue) are typical mountain dangers: rock falls, slipping and falling off a cliff.¹²⁷

Theuerdank was illustrated by woodcuts, which, like Simler’s *Vallesiae*, reveal the nature of early modern mountaineering equipment. The hero is depicted in warm clothing, with a horn hung around his waist and carrying a long staff, taller than himself, with a metal

¹²⁴ Simler, ‘Vallesiae’, p.27.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.24 and p.25.

¹²⁶ J. Monroe Thorington, ‘The Mountaineering of Theuerdank’, in *On the admiration of mountains*, ed. W. Dock and J. Monroe Thorington (1837), p.44. C.f. Albrecht Classen, ‘Terra Incognita? Mountains in Medieval and Early Modern German Literature’, in eds. Ireton and Schaumann, *Heights of Reflection*, pp.49-52.

¹²⁷ Thorington, ‘Theuerdank’, p.45.

point. The horn and the staff could serve a double purpose, firstly as the equipment both of chamois hunting (with the horn to call in beaters and the staff to drive chamois onto ledges or over cliffs) and of mountain safety (the staff for balance and the horn for calling out in distress). The staff is even shown being used as a vaulting pole to cross a dangerous gap (fig. 11). Most notably, Theuerdank's boots are variously depicted as being hobnailed, or augmented by four-claw 'climbing irons', or crampons.¹²⁸ Throughout, the prince responded with calm capability to all of the challenges of the mountain landscape; better, indeed, than the hunters and servants instructed by his enemies to lead him into danger.¹²⁹

In 1744 William Windham, an English landowner, published *An Account of the Glacieres or Ice Alps in Savoy*, based on an expedition he and several companions had made in 1741. This adventure is generally regarded as the first 'discovery of Chamonix' (the modern-day mountain space *par excellence*, with its location at the base of Mont Blanc), but the extensive technical and historical commentary contained within its footnotes point towards long traditions of local engagement.¹³⁰ In the context of describing his own experiences, Windham saw fit to translate passages from Abraham Ruchat's *Delices de la Suisse* (1714) discussing local mountain practices. Ruchat's text reveals that, at least from the perspective of an elite writer, relatively little had changed in terms of general practical knowledge for surviving amongst mountains between Simler's *Descriptio* and the early eighteenth century. The chief novelty is an extensive description of how best to treat the hypothermic symptoms of a man drawn, as Ruchat described, from beneath an avalanche:

...the first Remedy is to plunge him in cold Water. To some it will appear both barbarous and ridiculous to dip a Man, who is frozen... into cold Water; but let them know that it would be certain death to any one to give him heat suddenly when he is frozen... afterwards he is put into luke-warm Water, then proceeding by Degrees, they get him into a Bed well warmed...¹³¹

¹²⁸ Thorington, 'Theuerdank', pp.46-47. C.f. Stephan Füssel, *The Theuerdank of 1517: Emperor Maximilian and the Media of His Day: A Cultural-Historical Introduction* (2003), pp.58-73, for a summary of Theuerdank's mountain adventures, and *passim* for general context.

¹²⁹ Füssel, *The Theuerdank of 1517*, p.61.

¹³⁰ Duffy and Howell, *Cultures of the Sublime*, p.15.

¹³¹ [William Windham], *An Account of the Glacieres or Ice Alps in Savoy* (London, printed for Peter Martel, 1744), p.7, quoting and translating Abraham Ruchat, *Delices de la Suisse* (1714). Ruchat mentions avalanche avoidance, the use of crampons, and the crossing of crevasses by jumping or laying down a board; *An*



Fig. 11: Theuerdank leaping down a mountain. Reproduced in Stephan Füssel, *The Theuerdank of 1517: Emperor Maximilian and the Media of His Day: A Cultural-Historical Introduction* (2003), p.70.

This treatment for hypothermia - in particular the strict avoidance of a hot bath in the first instance - more or less approximates modern-day advice for the condition.¹³² That early eighteenth-century mountain inhabitants had reached this very conclusion suggests considerable experience of (and, possibly, deadly trial-and-error with) the dangers of the mountain environment.

These are examples of the few elite sources that attest in detail to local, practical mountain knowledge and experience. The value of local support to travellers passing through mountain regions is also implicitly attested to in texts which, ironically, denigrate the wherewithal of those who provided aid. William Lithgow, climbing Mount Lebanon to see the cedars in the early seventeenth century, complained that 'our ignorant guide mistaking the way, brought vs in a laborinth of dangers', whilst John Ray, a botanist setting out to climb Snowdon at the start of September 1658, hired a guide to take him to the top, but was disgusted when the guide expressed reluctance to ascend in foul weather.¹³³ William Windham, less critical but perhaps a little proud of his group's apparent boldness, noted a similar sense of caution among the local people of Chamonix, who told him that their proposed ascent of Montanvers was 'very difficult and laborious', and usually only attempted by local hunters, and never by travellers.¹³⁴ In reality, the caution of Ray's guide and Windham's locals was almost certainly justified by their knowledge of the area, but it certainly seems to have been the case that in the early modern period there existed a strand of discourse by which elite visitors to mountain regions, even as they paid locals for the benefit of that knowledge, assigned superiority to their own insights.

It is therefore compelling to consider the different modes in which local mountain knowledge was depicted in the texts considered above. At the most benign level, it was a

Account of the Glacieres, p.6 and p.9.

¹³² The application of rapid heat to a person with hypothermia can cause rapid vasodilation, a sudden fall in blood pressure, and potential cardiac arrest.

<<http://www.nhs.co.uk/conditions/Hypothermia/Pages/Treatment.aspx>> [13.10.2015].

Simler recommended a similar method (of slowly increasing water temperature) for treating frostnip in one's feet; Simler, 'Vallesiae', p.27.

¹³³ Lithgow, *Painfull Peregrination*, L1v-L2r and John Ray, *Select Remains of the Learned John Ray* (London, 1760), pp.125-126.

¹³⁴ Windham, *An Account of the Glacieres*, p.4. Windham also recorded the 'great Astonishment of all the People of the Place, and even of our Guides', upon their safe and successful return.

curiosity to be compared with classical knowledge (accessible only to the elite observer), or a set of heroic skills to be adopted by an allegorical prince playing at being a chamois hunter. At the other end of the scale, it was dismissed out of hand, allowing the positioning of external, elite knowledge over local, experiential knowledge by travellers who were probably incapable of passing through the mountain landscape without guides. Whose mountains? The answer is, ironically, not those who knew them best.

Knowing and Experiencing

This chapter has told a story of both continuity and change. It has revealed elements of continuity which establish the history of early modern mountain knowledge as relevant to histories of mountaineering in particular, demonstrating that the methods and technologies for both measuring and coping with the mountain landscape have in large part been inherited from the early modern period. In terms of change, this chapter has revealed some stark shifts between the early modern and modern periods in terms of some of the most basic assumptions held about mountains: how they were defined, how much their height mattered, and which mountains and which ranges possessed particular cultural significance. This chapter has detailed the specific and perhaps surprising contours of early modern mountain knowledge. It has done so with a very important purpose in mind. To understand other aspects of early modern mountain engagement – from travelling to the writing of poetry – on their own terms, it is important to put aside the baggage of current-day mountain assumptions and to take up that which was carried by earlier travellers and writers. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries those who described mountains, who defined them as beautiful, or who put them to work as metaphorical images, did so through the lenses of a hitherto-unappreciated set of cultural understandings. A hill could be framed, described, and experienced in all the same ways as a mountain; a mountain could become a volcano; and mountains that have dropped out of modern familiarity loomed large in the early modern mind.

In addition to these general points, this chapter has also introduced specific sources and themes which will be carried forward in the subsequent chapters. Thomas Burnet's *Theory of the Earth*, in the threat it represented to the rightful inclusion of mountains in the Book of Nature, prompted more than a theological or natural philosophical debate: it

ignited an aesthetic controversy. The virulent arguments put forward regarding the origins and utility of mountains will be vital in untangling the complex story of early modern mountain aesthetics, to be explicated in Chapter Three. The Burnet debate also highlights the centrality of Scriptural associations within the construction of mountain knowledge, a theme that is constant in all areas of early modern mountain experience. Moreover, this chapter has served to introduce the significance of classical texts in shaping visions of mountains. A radical interpretation of Xenophon might not quite attract furious accusations of religious heterodoxy, but the classical canon – and the mountains which received prominence in them – mattered a great deal. They tacitly shaped the early modern worldview, and as such played an important role in how mountains were experienced in the period.

Finally, the history of mountain knowledge is important and interesting as more than just the backdrop to physical interactions: the construction of knowledge was a form of mountain experience in and of itself. One of Burnet's respondents, the philologist Richard Bentley, was scathing of his concept of a 'paradisiacal', mountain-less globe. Bentley pointed out that without mountains from which to gain a broad view of the world, the inhabitants could never gain an understanding of the shape of the Earth which they lived in, and would thus remain in ignorance.¹³⁵ Bentley meant this literally, but the comment, taken metaphorically, can be applied to the role of mountains within early modern knowledge as a whole. In addition to being objects of interest in and of themselves, mountains also provided important spaces for knowledge construction. On a physical level, they provided the venue not just for the development of practical mountain expertise but also for the testing of methods of altitude measurement which would enable a better understanding of the world as a whole. Mountains were the nexus around which discussions of topics as diverse and significant as the nature of Creation, the mechanics of the Deluge, the question of life on other planets, and the operation of the apocalypse could crystallise. People did not ignore or overlook mountains in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe: they knew them well, in diverse, fascinating, and uniquely early modern ways.

¹³⁵ Richard Bentley, *Sermons Preached at Boyle's Lecture*, ed. Rev. Alexander Dyce (London, 1838), p.198.

Chapter Two: Mountain Ventures and Adventures

'What I pray you,' asked a late-sixteenth-century oration on the benefits of travel,

is more pleasant, more delectable, and more acceptable unto a man then to behold the heighth of hilles... to see the mountaines Taurus and Caucasus? to view the hill *Olympus*, the seat of *Iupiter*? to pass ouer the Alpes that were broken by *Annibals* Vinegar? to climbe vp the Appennine promontory of Italy? from the hill Ida to behold the rising of the Sunne before the Sunne appears? to visite Parnassus and Helicon, the most celebrated seates of the Muses?¹³⁶

These were the 'prophane monuments' that one could court in the mountains: the oration went on to tell of the holy ground that a traveller might also tread upon at altitude: the site where the ark rested; the summit where God gave down his laws; the spot upon which Moses beheld the burning bush.¹³⁷ The reader, if they were not content with such associations, could also 'conuert thine eyes to the wondrous workes of Nature', such as the volcanoes *Ætna*, *Vesuvius*, and *Hecla*.¹³⁸ The orator concluded his digression into mountains with an apology: like one sailing for pleasure, he had been 'deceiued by the sense of delight' and not realised how far he had strayed from the shores of his more general argument.¹³⁹

These reflections, in which mountains and their attractions - physical, classical, and Biblical - are seen as justifications for travel, strike at the heart of the questions posed in this chapter. Why did people go to, up, across, or through mountains in early modern Europe, and what kind of experiences did they have whilst doing so? This chapter will propose a number of answers to the first, simpler question: people utilised the mountain landscape for economic survival and stability; they crossed mountain passes in order to get to the other side; they went, as the passage above urged, to invoke the 'sweet memory of worthy matters'. They also, sometimes, went to mountains simply in order to climb

¹³⁶ Quoted in Thomas Coryate, *Coryat's Crudities Hastily Gobbled Up in Five Moneths Trauells in France, Sauoy, Italy* [etc.] (London, 1611), sig. C6r. Coryate translated this from 'An oration made by Hermannus Kirchnerus', i.e. Hermann Kirchner (1562-1620), the Marburg professor of history, poetry, and rhetoric. C.f. Hermann Kirchner, *De gravissimis aliquot cum juridicis tum politicis quaestionibus in utramque partem discussis, orationes* (Frankfurt, 1599), pp.71-72.

¹³⁷ Coryate, *Crudities*, sig. C6r-v.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, sig. C6v-C7r.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, sig. C7r.

them. The second question is somewhat thornier: how can historians access the immediate experience that farmers, travellers, and climbers had as they interacted with the mountains of the past? The answer is 'with difficulty': the detailed experiences of many are lost to the historical record, whilst those that were written down were subject to the vagaries of memory, if written after the fact, and of self-presentation, even in the moment of experience.

This chapter will explore the activities and experiences of two broad groups of people: non-elites, who lived and worked in the mountains and left behind no personal written records, and elite travellers, who by virtue of their education and relative wealth were able to travel for trade, diplomacy, education, pleasure, or pilgrimage, and who produced published accounts of their journeys. The spatial practices of the former group are attested to largely in sparse, factual records or in the archaeological remnants of pathways and buildings. Such records have been ably explored by many historians of rural life, upon whose work this chapter partly relies. Other evidence - such as twentieth-century ethnographic or oral records of traditions that dated back to early modernity - can point towards the nature of the social or even spiritual experience of the mountain landscape, but can only ever stand as hypothetical, albeit compelling suggestions of past representational space.

Sources relating to the experiences of elite travellers are more colourful and detailed but come with their own unique set of difficulties. Mary B. Campbell has suggested that travel writing, in its intention to bear witness to an 'other' world, is 'generically aimed at the truth', but travel writers also employed rhetorical tactics of hyperbole and digression to ensure the greatest effect upon their readers.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, those who came home from their journeys and produced accounts of them were not just writing the places they had seen; they were also writing their selves. Analysing the ways in which travellers utilised the mountain landscape in order to represent themselves can in turn produce a deeper understanding of how mountains were viewed and related to. It is telling if a travel writer seems to anticipate their readers being impressed by a tale of derring-do on a

¹⁴⁰ Mary B. Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing, 400-1600* (1991), pp.2-3 and Chloe Chard, *Pleasure and Guilt on the Grand Tour: Travel Writing and Imaginative Geography 1600-1830* (1999), pp.4-7.

mountainside, or conversely invites mockery for a failure to traverse a pass under their own steam. Furthermore, travel narratives – even if self-consciously constructed – were vital in contributing to the recorded discourse of mountains circulating during the period.

The sections of this chapter will provide four different answers to the question of ‘why go to a mountain?’ The first, ‘living and working’, will consider economic usages of mountains, ranging from summer pastures and droving to the sourcing of snow from their slopes. It will set the early modern evidence against a historiographical trend which has back-projected eighteenth-century ideals of arable cultivation and ‘improvement’ onto mountain attitudes of earlier eras. ‘Just Passing Through’ will explore the experience of travellers who did not set out specifically to go to mountains, but passed through or over them *en route*. ‘Mountain Pilgrimage’ will then consider a type of traveller who made their way to specific peaks due to their religious history, and - as in Chapter One - will emphasise the significance of such Biblical associations in forming the early modern representational space of mountains. Finally, ‘Labour is Pleasure’ will analyse examples of individuals in the early modern period who seem to have climbed mountains simply for the sake of getting to the top. It will also problematise narratives that have sought to either claim or reject these individuals as forerunners to modern mountaineering, arguing that doing so disregards the specificities of their own, pre-mountaineering contexts.¹⁴¹ Each of these types of mountain encounter will be explored through the lens of two or three specific texts, enabling an in-depth analysis of the specific travellers, their backgrounds, and their techniques of self-representation.¹⁴² The conclusion will take the story into the eighteenth century, and will introduce the idea that these later years saw the emergence of a single strand of distinctly negative mountain discourse which has generally been taken by historians to stand for the entire early modern period.

Each of the travellers considered in this chapter went to the mountains with at least

¹⁴¹ Key examples of such narratives will be explored in Chapter Five, particularly pp.170-172 and 174-175.

¹⁴² The key travel sources utilised in this thesis have been drawn from a survey of approximately two dozen published travel accounts from the late sixteenth century and the seventeenth century which make reference to mountains. Throughout, central examples are cross-referenced with a selection of other accounts either expressing similar ideas or relating to the same locations. However, it has been impossible to completely exhaust even a single source in terms of analysing each and every mountain reference within it. Nor does this thesis claim to have incorporated every single early modern travel account relating to mountains. As will be alluded to in the conclusion, the findings of this thesis point to a much wider field still to be explored.

partial reference to a shared set of intellectual and cultural assumptions, sketched out in the previous chapter. They went to them with a variety of motivations, and came away with a range of experiences and impressions. Some found the sheer precipices of mountain paths daunting or even stomach-turning, and lamented the exhausting weather and terrain. Many - sometimes even the same travellers who found so much cause to complain - also experienced moments of delight, enjoyed rare views and revelled in being at a great height above the rest of the world. Many travellers reacted much as a person with minimal mountain experience might be expected to react today: with a mixture of discomfort and novel enjoyment. Those who knew the mountains better could set out to proselytise concerning their benefits or refer casually to significant ascents. In disdaining, enjoying, and describing the mountains they drew upon and expressed the unique characteristics of the early modern 'representational landscape', taking pleasure in standing upon the same spot as a saint or even the Son of God, and becoming distracted from the view to discuss local superstitions and their basis in truth. When driven to poetic outbursts they thought of the Muses. Throughout, this chapter argues that it is better by far to unpick these interactions on their own terms, rather than attempting to divide them straightforwardly between expected 'mountain gloom' and exceptional 'mountain glory'.

Living and Working

In the Tarentaise Alps, near what is now the French-Italian border, is a famous, idyllic little village called Le Monal. Nestled at the end of a high path halfway up the mountainside, it attracts flocks of tourists, eager to inspect the perfectly formed, classic Alpine houses and chapel, and to sample traditionally-made cheese. Behind Le Monal another path, less wide and easy, leads higher into the mountains, up to a collection of ruined buildings called Le Clou. The local tourist board describes this as the remains of an 'alpage', or a high summer pasture, and it sits in the bowl of a circuit of peaks, the remnants of glaciers almost close enough to touch (fig. 12). A little way to the south of Le Clou, and perhaps ten minutes climb up the col, stand ruins now known as *l'ancienne Chappelle de Saint-Jacques*. Only the footprint of the building - perhaps six feet by ten, a tiny space - remains, with an undulating modern stela marking the site of the altar. Standing within the ruins, the visitor can look out and see the sight that would have greeted the summer users of the chapel as they entered and left: a panoramic view of and

across the Tarentaise valley (fig. 13). The eye is caught by the Pointe du Nant Cruet, to the south-east, and the glacier tumbling down its north-west side, which on a sunny day gleams bright and blue. Of course, it could be argued that such a depiction, with its focus on views and gleaming glaciers, reflects a specifically modern reaction, but standing in such a spot it is hard not to wonder - if mountains were feared and disliked, why build the chapel inconveniently away from the settlement, and upon a site where worshippers would be so intensely confronted with them?

The settlement at Le Clou points to one important form of mountain usage that was prominent across northern Europe in the early modern period. The deserted buildings are an archaeological remnant of what is known as 'vertical transhumance', featuring the movement of herds - and people to care for them - up to higher altitudes in the summer months. This transhumance is often described as a response to the 'marginal landscape' of mountainous areas in which viable space for arable cultivation may be limited.¹⁴³ As the previous chapter demonstrated, people did live amongst mountains and developed the knowledge and expertise to safely navigate their higher reaches. Such local communities did not solely spend their time aiding hapless and often ungrateful travellers; they also made their living from the land around them. Rather than simply confining themselves to the valley floor, these 'mountaineers' (in the early modern sense, which simply referred to those who dwelt in the hills) made active use of the high slopes around them. Mountains were a vital and integrated part of upland economies.¹⁴⁴

Vertical transhumance occurred under a variety of terminological guises across northern Europe. As noted, in France and other parts of the Alps one might stumble across the remains of 'Alpages'. The Norwegian equivalent is called the 'seter', the Swedish the 'fabodar', or summer farm. In the British Isles, particularly in Scotland, the summer months saw the relocation of members of upland communities to the 'shielings', with the tradition continuing into the early twentieth century in some parts of the Outer Hebrides.¹⁴⁵ Such temporary settlements were located away from the home farm and generally at a higher altitude. The purpose of the summer farms was twofold: it gave the

¹⁴³ Albert Bil, *The Shieling, 1600-1840: The Case of the Central Scottish Highlands* (1990), p.1

¹⁴⁴ C.f. f.n. 74, herein.

¹⁴⁵ Bil, *The Shieling*, pp.1-2; Alexander Fenton, *Scottish Country Life* (1976), p.126.



Fig. 12: The remnants of the alpage at Le Clou in the Tarentaise Alps. (Photo Dawn L. Hollis)



Fig. 13: The altar stela and footprint of the alpage chapel, dedicated to Saint Jacques, and the view beyond. (Photo Dawn L. Hollis)

home pastures, exhausted by the winter's feeding, a chance to recover, and it kept the herds from trampling the unenclosed, growing crops.¹⁴⁶ Whatever arable cultivation was possible in marginal landscapes could not happen without the movement of herds to higher, more distant ground, and it was possibly the only way to ensure herds remained well fed. It was vital to achieving a balance in a mixed-farming context in which farmers relied equally upon pastoralism and cultivation for their subsistence.

As well as being essential to economic survival, the use of high pastures also had a wider social and experiential significance. In Sweden, for example, working as a herder on the *fabodar* was an almost exclusively female occupation, and served both as an opportunity for younger women to learn the important skills of animal husbandry and dairy making (across all summer farms, the only way to transport the produce of the milch cows home was to churn them into butter and cheese), and as one of the few occupations available to unmarried and widowed women. It has been suggested that the *fabodar* provided an important space of female agency, giving women independence and control over their own labour during the summer months, and thus increasing their status within the household for the rest of the year.¹⁴⁷ In the case of the Scottish shielings, different sources and regional contexts point to differing divisions of labour. In some cases it seems likely that during the shieling months (generally April to August) women and children managed the shielings alone whilst the men returned to the home farm to tend to the crops.¹⁴⁸ Sometimes whole families went, or just a few individuals, tasked with herding, who might be visited during the summer by smaller family groups.¹⁴⁹ In contexts in which women did go to the shielings in larger groups they often took with them the means to continue other activities within the domestic economy, such as wheels for spinning. They would also work to collect herbs and lichen for dying cloth.¹⁵⁰ In all cases, the summer farms served to ensure the continuance of a range of economic activities and an efficient division of labour between different members of the community.

¹⁴⁶ Bil, *The Shieling*, pp.41-41 and 172-173; John Mitchell, *The Shielings and Drove Ways of Loch Lomondside* (2000), p.7.

¹⁴⁷ Jesper Larsson, 'Labor division in an upland economy: workforce in a seventeenth-century transhumance system', *The History of the Family*, 19:3 (2014), 393-410.

¹⁴⁸ Mitchell, *Loch Lomondside*, pp.7-8; Fenton, *Scottish Country Life*, p.124.

¹⁴⁹ Bil, *The Shieling*, pp.202-203.

¹⁵⁰ Mitchell, *Loch Lomondside*, p.9; Fenton, *Scottish Country Life*, pp.130-131.

At the most general level, it is hard to imagine that communities whose livelihood was centred around an annual move of at least some of their members to the higher reaches of the mountains viewed those landforms with dread. Unfortunately, there are no early modern 'eyewitness' accounts of shieling life to point towards the experiences of those who went into the mountains. Ethnographic evidence does survive in the form of oral accounts of late shieling practices in the Outer Hebrides, gathered in the early- to mid-twentieth century from individuals who could remember going to the shielings as children. Such accounts depicted the move to the shieling as the high point of the year, a chance for children and cattle alike to experience the greater freedom of the hills, with both the first and last night of the stay - before the men departed and when they came to help with the move home - as times of great revelry.¹⁵¹ It would be simplistic to assume that such late nineteenth-century experiences reflected those of the early modern users of the shielings, and it must be emphasised that the narratives were related through the distorting lenses of nostalgia for both childhood and a departed tradition.¹⁵² Nevertheless, it is compelling to hypothesise as to the ways in which early modern farming communities might have ritualised and come to define the annual 'flitting' into the hills. Archaeological evidence of whisky stills at Scottish shieling sites may be emblematic of the role that the shielings and other summer farms served within upland communities: as spaces that combined sociability with important economic activity and production.¹⁵³

Although a wide range of animals were taken up to the summer farms, including sheep and even poultry, the most important pastoral participants in the move were cattle, both dairy herds and young animals being fattened for market.¹⁵⁴ A herd was probably the most valuable property an early modern farmer possessed: dairy cattle were vital for subsistence, whilst the rest (save for a crucial bull or two) were a commodity to be sold.¹⁵⁵ Crucially, the demand for meat that gave cattle their value in the British Isles came not from the surrounding valleys, but rather from the large urban centres - in particular

¹⁵¹ Donald McDonald, 'Lewis Shielings', *Review of Scottish Culture*, 1 (1984), 29-33; c.f. Mitchell, *Loch Lomondside*, p.9.

¹⁵² Bil, *The Shieling*, p.194.

¹⁵³ <<http://www.scottishheritagehub.com/content/case-study-transhumance-and-shielings>> [18.04.2016]

¹⁵⁴ Bil, *The Shieling*, pp.159-171.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.65-67; Mitchell, *Loch Lomondside*, pp.14-15.

London - and their ever-growing populations.¹⁵⁶ After having grazed on the fresher grass of the mountain pastures a portion of the herd would then be driven many miles from the rural uplands - whether in Scotland, Wales, or northern England - to the southerly reaches of the British Isles.

Droving, therefore, developed in Britain from the medieval period onwards and increased in intensity until the nineteenth century.¹⁵⁷ The most famous droving roads were the cross-border routes between Scotland and England, but wherever there were cattle, paths were traced away from the upland watersheds on which they grazed and towards centres of demand.¹⁵⁸ Josias Simler, in the sixteenth century, attested to the herding of a 'great number of cows and horses... over the transalpine regions from Switzerland and Germany into Italy'.¹⁵⁹ Whatever the region, droving did not merely feature the movement of herds who had benefited from hillside grazing: they were also frequently driven over the hills, rather than via lower-altitude routes. One historian of droving has contrasted the modern experience of the Northumbrian hills as a barrier to movement (with only one road, now the A86, traversing them) with an early modern context in which they provided 'a favoured corridor for the large-scale movement of livestock'.¹⁶⁰ Higher-altitude routes offered significant advantages over lowland routes, which frequently took in expensive tolls, metalled roads that put stress upon the hooves of the cattle, and towns within which the disruption of an entire herd of cattle passing through would engender significant ill-feeling. Moreover, the hillsides offered greater potential for uninhibited wayside grazing.¹⁶¹ The emptiness of the mountains represented multiple advantages to drovers.

So, in mountainous areas farming and related domestic activity was by no means confined

¹⁵⁶ Ian Roberts, Richard Carlton & Alan Rushworth, *Drove Roads of Northumberland* (2010), p.9.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.50-51. The droving trade between Scotland and England gained particular prominence after the Union of the Crowns in 1603.

¹⁵⁸ The authoritative text on Scottish droving is A.R.B. Haldane's, *The Drove Roads of Scotland*, first published in 1952. Not only seminal on the topic of droving but a classic of Scottish history, it has been re-issued many times, most recently by Birlinn in 2008 and 2011.

¹⁵⁹ Simler, 'Vallesiae et Alpinum descriptio' in ed. Weber, *Because It's There*, p.23.

¹⁶⁰ Roberts et. al., *Drove Roads*, p.20.

¹⁶¹ W.A.J. Provost, 'The Drove Road into Annandale', *Transactions of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History & Antiquarian Society* (Third Series), 31 (1952-1953), p124 and p.127; Roberts et. al., *loc. cit.*; A.R.B. Haldane, *The Drove Roads of Scotland* (2011), p.123; Richard J. Colyer, *The Welsh Cattle Drovers: Agriculture and the Welsh Cattle Trade Before and During the Nineteenth Century* (1976), p.99.

to the valley floor. The hills may not have provided permanent habitation or opportunities for cultivation, but they did enable solutions to the problems of mixed farming and the need to move large herds of animals across great distances. More than that, mountains also contained resources that were not available elsewhere. Elite commentators were very much aware that, whilst mountains could not produce the crops of the valleys, they were not without their own unique advantages. James Brome (d.1719), an Anglican clergyman travelling in northern England and Wales towards the end of the seventeenth century, commented that

Carmathenshire, though a most Hilly Country, yet it hath a wholesom Air, and though the Soil be not very fruitful in Corn, 'tis well stored with Cattle, and in some places yields good Pit-Coal for Fuel...¹⁶²

The theme of hidden mountain-riches continues throughout his text; the Mendip hills in Somerset are noted for 'their richness of leaden Mines', whilst in Yorkshire he concluded that 'Providence hath so wisely distributed her Blessings, that what one [part] wants the other enjoys', providing ore for fuel where cornfields could not grow.¹⁶³ One of the many intellectual skirmishes between Erasmus Warren and Thomas Burnet centred upon the question of metals within mountains: Burnet argued of precious metals that 'I believe they had none in the first Earth; and the happier they'.¹⁶⁴ Warren was more concerned with practical materials, arguing that mountains had to exist before the Deluge in order to provide iron for the tools required to build the Ark.¹⁶⁵

Economic activities centring around mountain resources are also attested to in seventeenth-century artworks (figs. 14-15). Such artworks could be read as depicting a sense of destruction of a previously unspoilt landscape, although whether this is a case of straightforward aesthetic concern or is tied up in expressions of social status (in Savery's *Mountain Landscape* one might note the lofty blue castle high above the sweating labourers and the groping couple) is not clear. Nevertheless, it seems evident that the existence of resources buried within mountains offered opportunities for those who lived

¹⁶² Brome, *Travels*, p.24.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp.30-31 and pp.149-150.

¹⁶⁴ Burnet, *Theory*, vol.1, p.244.

¹⁶⁵ Warren, *Geologia*, p.215.



Fig. 14: Lucas van Valkenborch, *Landscape with Iron Mines* (1595), [oil on wood], 41x64cm, Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain.



Fig. 15: Roelandt Savery, *Mountain Landscape with Woodcutters* (1610), oil on copper, 27x36cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria.

nearby - although the bulk of the profit most likely went to landowners or elite managers. More informal economic opportunities for locals also included the hunting of chamois and crystals.¹⁶⁶ Melissa Calaresu has pointed towards the hitherto-unresearched existence of a thriving snow-trade, in which high mountainsides were regularly raided for stores of snow and ice to preserve food and, later, make frozen desserts such as ice-cream.¹⁶⁷ The precise mechanics and local variations of the snow-trade have yet to be elucidated, but it seems likely that the task of collecting and carting snow added one more potential activity to the long list of economic opportunities available to the early modern mountain dweller.

Mountains were therefore highly integrated into local economies in upland regions. They provided numerous opportunities for local inhabitants seeking to support themselves, either through subsistence, profit, or pay. They were key to the successful pursuit of mixed farming of both herds and crops in a marginal landscape. In many ways this is hardly a surprising conclusion: human beings adapt to their environments. Yet it is surprising in the context of the relevant historiography. The term 'marginal landscape' is a technical one, but it also assumes an automatic preference for arable cultivation. This default assumption has likewise been adopted by historians writing on the history of landscape and landscape perception, in which a frequent canard states that ordinary people (along with elites) in the premodern era could not appreciate mountain landscapes or find them beautiful as beauty, for them, meant a useful, cultivated landscape.¹⁶⁸ This concept, I would argue, derives from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discourses of 'improvement', which identified upland zones as barren wildernesses which stood as challenges to purely arable cultivation.¹⁶⁹ However, this attitude cannot be straightforwardly back-projected onto earlier centuries: early modern mountain dwellers and travellers did not see mountains as challenges to overcome but as valuable solutions to problems.

¹⁶⁶ Roger Frison-Roches and Sylvain Jouty, *A History of Mountain Climbing* (1996), pp.22-23. Crystal- and chamois-hunters would go on to become the first modern mountaineering guides in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

¹⁶⁷ Melissa Calaresu, 'Making and Eating Ice Cream in Naples: Rethinking Consumption and Sociability in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present*, 220 (2013), pp.40-45.

¹⁶⁸ E.g. Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, pp.254-258.

¹⁶⁹ Fredrik Albritton Jonsson, *Enlightenment's Frontier: The Scottish Highlands and the Origins of Environmentalism* (2013), p.1, 95-96.

In the current day, ideas of improvement have given way to discourses of environmental protectionism and even reconstruction. Mountains are prominent among areas of land designated as 'wild space' to be protected as best humans can: take only photographs, leave only footprints. At the far end of the spectrum is the desire not just to preserve such spaces but to return them to a state of nature, 're-wilding' them with native animals and plants, ejecting imported populations of grey squirrels and rhododendrons.¹⁷⁰ The modern representational space of wilderness implicitly imagines the premodern mountain landscape to have been empty of human interference. This, alongside narratives of improvement and of early modern mountain gloom, papers over centuries of daily engagement with these spaces.¹⁷¹ In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries mountains were actively utilised as a human environment.

There is a gulf between suggesting that mountains were useful to the average early modern farmer, to claiming that the same individual found them beautiful. Even more fragile is the tantalising idea, suggested by such remains as *l'ancienne chapelle du Saint Jacques* - so unnecessarily situated in view of so fine a mountain prospect - that those who earned their daily bread on the mountainside sometimes stopped, perhaps moments before or after worshipping God, to enjoy the landscape that they benefited from economically. However, in practice, if not in sentiment, mountains in early modern Britain and elsewhere in Europe formed a useful, vital part of the livelihoods of those who lived among them.

Passing Through

As noted in Chapter One, local communities also frequently engaged with and profited from the elite travellers who passed through their mountains. Many Europeans who

¹⁷⁰ The constructed nature of the modern idea of wilderness is explored in William Cronon, 'The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature' in ed. William Cronon, *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (W.W. Norton, 1995), 69-90; J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson, eds., *The Great New Wilderness Debate* (1998); Michael P. Nelson and J. Baird Callicott, *The Wilderness Debate Rages On: Continuing the Great New Wilderness Debate* (2008).

¹⁷¹ William Cronon has emphasised the contemporary difficulty of promoting and protecting 'wilderness' space whilst also acknowledging the human history of these environments: Cronon, 'The Riddle of the Apostle Islands: How Do You Manage a Wilderness Full of Human Stories?', eds. Nelson and Callicott, *The Wilderness Debate Rages On*, 632-644. C.f. Steve Carter, Andy Evans, and Steffen Fritz, 'Wilderness Attribute Mapping in the United Kingdom', *International Journal of Wilderness*, 8:1 (2002), p.25.

wrote about mountains did so in the context of accounts of journeys during which they passed close by, through, or over high mountains and passes. Such travellers were motivated by a range of different goals. The oration cited at the beginning of this chapter highlights a key element of the early modern rhetoric of travel as a vital stage in the education of a young man. Individuals also travelled for purposes of trade, diplomacy, and - particularly when they saw fit to write and publish about it - potentially to gain fame and notoriety. They also encountered and described mountains across a wide variety of locations, from the Alps to Persia. In these various contexts, they frequently drew on common cultural associations and expressed overlapping impressions of the mountain landscape.

Thomas Coryate (c.1577-1617) was one of the more irrepressible travel writers of the early seventeenth century. Known as the 'Odecombian Leg-Stretcher', he prided himself on undertaking long journeys by foot.¹⁷² He also seems to have deliberately set himself up as a figure of fun. His travel texts are curious works with lengthy paratexts made up of parodic encomiums by authors ranging from the poet John Donne to the architect Inigo Jones; some of them complimentary, many mocking.¹⁷³ Coryate excused these numerous addendums by explaining that many of them had been unsolicited by him, but that his patron Prince Henry insisted that he include them all.¹⁷⁴ Notably, this rhetoric is all of a piece with Coryate's construction of himself as self-appointed court jester. In addition to the fact that the frontispiece, with a series of images of Coryate in a number of ridiculous or dramatic situations, was paired with a poem from Ben Jonson - which must surely have been specifically commissioned - Coryate's central text is far from a solemn one. It includes engravings and descriptions of him standing atop the seventeenth-century iteration of the Great Tun of Heidelberg, which he compared to the Colossus of Rhodes and the Hanging Gardens of Babylon as a wonder of the world, and upon which 'sociable Germans' encouraged him into such sampling of the wine as caused 'giddiness' and stumbling climbing down.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Michael Strachan, *The Life and Adventures of Thomas Coryate* (1962) and R.E. Pritchard, *Odd Tom Coryate: The English Marco Polo* (2004). Pritchard introduced Coryate as 'a young man of... more wit than wealth, and yet of more wealth than wisdom', p.1.

¹⁷³ Coryate, *Crudities*, sig. c3r-l3v.

¹⁷⁴ Coryate, *Crudities*, sig. c1v. C.f. Strachan, *Thomas Coryate*, pp.124-125.

¹⁷⁵ Coryate, *Crudities*, pp.486-489. There have been four 'Great Tuns of Heidelberg' since 1591. Coryate viewed the first incarnation. The most recent tun (built in 1751) is currently empty.

For all of his sense of the ridiculous, Coryate - who claimed comradeship with the Queen of Sheba and Pliny the Elder in travelling in pursuit of new knowledge and wisdom – took seriously his responsibility to record the regions he passed through, and mountains make frequent appearances in his text.¹⁷⁶ When travelling through Savoy he noted evidence of cultivation or natural beneficence upon several mountainsides, marvelling at the existence of vineyards and rye-fields on high slopes, and at the thought that farmers brought their ploughs to such places, and emphasising the ‘wonderfull abundance of pine trees’ around mountain tops.¹⁷⁷ He also frequently alluded to rivers and springs which had their source high in the mountains; a point to be considered further in Chapter Three.¹⁷⁸ Mountains also appeared in Coryate’s text as the setting for cities, often positively so; Padua, in close sight of the Euganean hills, ‘heretofore... esteemed the very receptacle and habitation of the Muses’, was ‘as sweetly seated as any place of the whole world can be’.¹⁷⁹ Even as mere ‘background’, Coryate wrote of mountains as interesting and beneficial aspects of the landscape.

Coryate also described mountains as objects in and of themselves, and descended into lyricism when describing what he called ‘Roch Melow’ (now known as Rocciamelone or Rochemelon, 3,538m):

[it is] said to be the highest mountain of all the Alpes, sauing one of those that part Italy and Germany. Some told me it was fourteene miles high: it is couered with a very Microcosme of clowdes. Of this mountaine there is no more then a little peece of the toppe to be seene, which seemeth a farre off to be three or four little turrets or steeples in the air.¹⁸⁰

He also related a ‘pretty history concerning this mountaine’ that was told him by the horse conductor who took his company from Lyon to Turin of a ‘notorious robber’ who, suffering from an attack of conscience for a life ill-lived, decided to spend the rest of his

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, sig. b4r-b5r.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.72-73 and p.75.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.58, p.75, p.308, and p.441. Other travellers made similar note of rivers running down from mountains to ‘fructiferate’ the valley below. John Cartwright, *The preachers trauels* (London, 1611), p.30; Fernão Mendes Pinto, *The Voyages and Adventures of Fernand Mendez Pinto* (London, 1653), p.90.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.130.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.79.

life in contemplation upon what was ‘in his opinion... the highest of all the Alpine hills’, carrying with him a picture of the Virgin Mary and a picture of Christ. Whilst upon this mountain, the reformed robber received a miraculous gift of another two pictures, which apparently communicated to him that he had got the wrong mountain, whereupon he travelled to the summit of Rocciamelone and ‘neuer came downe’.¹⁸¹ Coryate discarded this as a ‘tale or figment’, probably due to the narratively confusing miracle (rather than any doubt regarding the possibility of ascending such a mountain). Indeed, his view of the Rocciamelone was gained whilst crossing the ‘Mount Senys’ (Mont Cenis) pass, 2,081m high.¹⁸² In spite of the ‘two hundred’ switchbacks of the winding route, he met ‘many people ascending, and mules laden vwith carriage, and a great company of dunne kine driuen vp the hill vwith collars about their neckes’.¹⁸³ Coryate’s mountains were full of traffic, and prompted the telling and re-telling of both charming stories, and compelling word-pictures of castles in the sky.¹⁸⁴

Well-trodden though the mountains were, they were still difficult to travel through, a fact Coryate made no secret of. Approaching Mont Cenis, he found himself proceeding by horseback ‘on the sides of the mountaines’ along paths overlooking precipices ‘foure or fiue times as deepe in some places as *Paules* tower in London is high’. This disconcerted him sufficiently that he, ‘prouidently preuenting the worst’, dismounted from his horse and led the beast. Perhaps in the spirit of poking fun at himself, Coryate acknowledged that ‘my company too aduenturously rod on, fearing nothing’.¹⁸⁵ Coryate’s most expansive description of climbing a mountain pass came earlier in his *Crudities*, with an

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp.79-80. The ‘pretty history’ given in modern-day guidebooks and newspaper articles is that the first ascent of the Rocciamelone was made by a knight (not a thief), Bonifacius Rotarius of Asti, who also carried a metal image or statue of the Virgin to the summit in gratitude for his safe return from captivity in the Holy Land. This has also led some writers (notably Italian ones) to claim Rocciamelone as ‘the birthplace of Alpinism’. Jonathan Trigell, ‘High school: mountaineering in Chamonix’, *The Guardian*, July 26 2008; ‘L’alpinismo? È nato sul Rocciamelone’, *La Stampa*, July 30 2008; Brendan Sainsbury, *Hiking in Italy* (Lonely Planet, 2010), p.26.

¹⁸² Coryate, *Crudities*, p.78 and p.80.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.80.

¹⁸⁴ Other travellers paused to speak and even make friends with their fellow climbers. The Scot James Spittal of Leuchat, ‘In passing the Alps’ in the late seventeenth-century, struck up conversation with a countrywoman when he heard her singing a Scottish folk-song and wearing a tartan plaid; John Ramsay of Ochertyre, *Scotland and Scotsmen in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Alexander Allardyce, 2 vols., (Edinburgh and London, 1888), vol.2, p.290. This was a posthumous edition; Ramsay of Ochertyre (1736-1814), as a young man, knew Spittal of Leuchat in his old age (pp.289-290). William Lithgow, encountering a fellow pilgrim for the second time on his journey, wrote of ‘out acquaintance being first made... vpon the Mountaines of *Terrara* in *Burgondy*’; Lithgow, *Painefull Peregrination*, C3r.

¹⁸⁵ Coryate, *Crudities*, p.78

account of the ascent of what he called 'the Mountaine Aiguebelette'.¹⁸⁶ Here, as on Mont Cenis, Coryate was happier on foot than on horseback. Unfortunately, the famous 'Leg-Stretcher' had met his match, for his company became attached to 'Certaine poore fellowes' who earned a living by carrying travellers across the pass in sedan chairs. Coryate was not eager to employ their services, but his companions were, and he endeavoured to keep pace with the men so that he would not become lost on the winding, wooded path. Sighting a profit, the chair-bearers increased their pace, until poor Coryate, 'at last finding that faintnesse in my selfe that I was not able to follow them any longer, though I would euen breake my hart with striuing', gave in and paid them to carry him the last half mile to the top. As upon the back of a horse, Coryate felt deeply uncomfortable in the chair, and expressed amazement at the 'miserable pains' that his carriers undertook for the sake of eighteen pence: 'I,' he stated fervently, 'would not haue done the like for fiue hundred'.¹⁸⁷

Once at the top (Coryate, like many early modern travellers, made no distinction between the top of a pass and the top, or summit, of a mountain), he paused and made two reflections. The first was upon a quote from Virgil, '*Forsan & haec olim meminisse iuuabit*', which translates strictly as 'a joy it will be, perhaps, to remember even this', or, more loosely, as 'one day I'll look back on this and laugh'. Immediately following this Latin tag, Coryate told his reader

then might I iustly and truly say, that which I could neuer before that I was aboue some of the clowdes. For though that mountain be not by the sixth part so high as some of the others of them: yet certainly it was a great way aboue some of the clowdes. For I saw many of them very plainly on the sides of the Mountaine beneath me.¹⁸⁸

In his crossing of Mount Aiguebelette, Coryate captures the apparent - but not really surprising - contradiction that runs through many accounts of mountain ascents, both

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.68. Current usage does not recognise a 'Mont Aiguebelette', although the Lac d'Aiguebelette, which Coryate referred to as 'an exceeding great standing poole', is famed for being one of the largest natural lakes in modern-day France. It is likely that Coryate either crossed the Col du Crucifix (915m) or the Col Saint-Michel (903m) across the Chain de l'Épine ridge to reach Chambéry.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 69-70.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.70. For discussion of the translation of the phrase, see <<http://www.beatrice.com/archives/000328.html>> [15.10.2015].

modern and early modern.¹⁸⁹ The experience of riding, walking, or being carried over narrow, winding mountain paths could be both exhausting and hair-raising, but even in the moment of relief at the top of the mountain, it could be identified as a future memory to look back on with a smile. Finally, Coryate was far from immune to the appealing novelty of being at altitude - once he had caught his breath, he could revel in being able to see the clouds below him, and enjoy the fact that he could now say that he had once been at such a great height.

Thomas Coryate therefore expressed nuanced and complex sentiments regarding mountains that can be read in multiple ways. He took note of the productivity of the mountain environment, whether cultivated or spontaneous. He saw them as attractive backdrops to cities and took time to describe them in evocative imagery. He also appears to have made mountains a conscious part of his intriguingly self-deprecating self-representation. The image of Coryate, forced to submit to the gentle services of chair-bearers who outwalked the famous walker, was one of the seven vignettes included on the frontispiece to the *Crudities* (fig. 16) and was lampooned in a series of explicatory lines from Ben Jonson - a fellow competitor for the crown of most famous walker in England.¹⁹⁰ It seems that Coryate deliberately 'played up' his failure and relative caution in the mountain landscape - dismounting his horse, racing to keep up with the locals and left wheezing for his troubles - for comical effect. This might suggest both that Coryate exaggerated the experience of his difficulties, and also that it was more generally expected that travellers would behave as his companions did, riding coolly on and taking up local help wherever it was offered. Ironically, Coryate took pains to present himself as comically hapless, but at the same as more adventurous and self-sustaining than the average mountain tourist.

Travelling in the 1660s and 1670s, Sir John Chardin (1643-1713), journeyed for profit rather than wisdom and produced a more serious and more prestigious text than his forerunner in the mountains. A jewel merchant, Chardin made his ventures to the East Indies, India, and Persia, in pursuit of trade, and his *Travels* - published concurrently in

¹⁸⁹ C.f. Conclusion, pp.186-189.

¹⁹⁰ Jonson's lines in relation to the vignette noted that 'Here up the Alpes... / Hee's carried like a Cripple'. Coryate, *Crudities*, A3r. C.f. eds. James Loxley, Anna Groundwater and Julie Sanders, *Ben Jonson's Walk to Scotland: An Annotated Edition of the 'Foot Voyage'* (2015).

French and English - were a correspondingly rich production, with numerous fold-out maps and plates.¹⁹¹ Chardin was credited by later writers for the accuracy and clarity of his descriptions of places hitherto unrecorded by any early modern Western European.¹⁹² Both in word and image, Chardin made regular reference to mountains, although like all of the travel texts utilised in this chapter, he also dedicated many pages to descriptions of cities and to semi-scholarly historical accounts of the regions through which he passed.

Chardin's *Travels* incorporate descriptions of several significant mountain experiences. During his journey through modern-day Iran, Chardin passed through and over what he called 'Mount Caucasus' (apparently using the singular term to refer to an extensive mountain range).¹⁹³ He recorded the variety of the environment which surrounded him, noting that '*Caucasus* produces' not only 'a great number of Eagles and Pelicans', but also 'a great number of Wild Beasts, as Tigres, Leapords, Lyons, VVolves, and *Chacalls* [jackals]'.¹⁹⁴ The lower reaches of the Caucasus range were 'extreamly fertil in Honey, Wheat, and Gom... in Wine, in Fruits, in Pigs, and large Cattel', whilst higher up the slopes were 'perpetually cover'd with snow' up to ten feet deep at the time of his ascent.¹⁹⁵ Chardin noted the same contrast - between the warm and welcoming and the cold and harsh - in the different peoples he encountered living within the mountains. The 'Mountaineers of *Caucasus*' who received most attention - and disapprobation - in the *Travels* were the Mingrelians (an ethnic sub-group of Georgians, from the Samegrelo region of Georgia). Chardin depicted the Mingrelians as physically prepossessing but morally defective. The men were 'well-shap'd, and could sit their horses and fight well, whilst the women were so handsome that Chardin 'always accoasted 'em, extreamly taken with their Beauty', but found that their 'Rank Whiffs' soon 'still'd all my Amorous Thoughts'. Moreover, the women hid 'Haughty, Perfidious, Deceitful, Cruel, and Impudent' natures beneath their beautiful appearances and civil manners, whilst of the

¹⁹¹ Born Jean-Baptiste Chardin, he left France to escape the persecution of Huguenots and immigrated to London in 1681, where he attracted the attention and approbation of the Royal Society, of which he became a Fellow in 1682. Amanda Eurich, 'Chardin, Sir John (1643-1712)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5138>> [19.04.2016].

¹⁹² Ronald W. Ferrier, ed. and trans., *A Journey to Persia: Jean Chardin's Portrait of a Seventeenth-Century Empire* (1996), p.xii, 1, 11, 17, 20.

¹⁹³ Chardin, *Travels*, pp.166-167.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.83.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.166-167.



Fig.16: Vignette from frontispiece of Thomas Coryate's *Crudities* (1611), depicting him being carried across a mountain pass on a chair.

men, Chardin commented that 'Assassination, Murder and Lying are among them esteem'd to be noble and brave Actions'.¹⁹⁶ In contrast, the people who lived among the lower slopes of honey and fruits were 'fresh Complexion'd' and 'infinitely better disposition'd' than the Mingrelians, and described by Chardin as generous to a fault: for, though he fell on food they offered him 'like a Wolf', he was never permitted to give any payment for the hospitality they provided.¹⁹⁷

Such reflections upon the flora, fauna, and peoples of the Caucasus range are more than just interesting anecdotes. In describing the variety of animals and expanding upon the fertility of the mountains Chardin acknowledged the utility and productivity of that landscape. His conflicting depictions of the Mingrelians and the inhabitants of the lower ranges reflects not only a potential reality or travellers' prejudice (one has to wonder whether the compelling Mingrelian women refused his advances, given the asperity of his denigration of them), but also the tension inherent to a common early modern view of the influence of environment upon the creatures and people dwelling there. Writers throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries asserted that the mountains produced a particular 'sort' of people by virtue of various characteristics of the environment, but like Chardin they could not decide whether the clear air produced honesty, witty people, whether the harsh topography produced strong, hardy men, or whether the stones and caves concealed duplicitous, dangerous individuals.¹⁹⁸

That same environment also acted upon Chardin during his journey through it. After a discomfiting day and night wrangling with the customs house at a place Chardin called Goniè, he at last began his journey to 'Akalzikhè' (Akhaltzikhe, near the present-day border of Georgia and Armenia), which consisted of a nine-day crossing during which he encountered the peoples described above. Although Chardin described it as 'the highest mountain, and most difficult to pass over that I ever beheld', stocked 'full of Rocks and

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.84-87.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.167-168.

¹⁹⁸ Compare Chardin's comments above with Thomas Tucker, *Report by Thomas Tucker Upon the Settlement of the Revenues of Excise and Customs in Scotland, A.D. MDCLVI*, ed. by John A. Murray (Bannatyne Club, 1824), pp.37-38 and Daniel Defoe, *A Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain, divided into Circuits or Journies*, 3 vols (London, 1724-27), vol.2, pp.220-221 and p.225, both on the Scottish Highlanders. Contrast with John Beaumont's comments on mountain inhabitants in Chapter Three, p.105 and Thomas Churchyard's *Worthines of Wales*, Chapter Four, p.134-136, 138-139.

dismal precipices', the physical exertion did not trouble him once his mind was relieved of worldly cares:

I ascended Mount *Caucasus* with such a nimbleness of Heels, that my Porters stood in Admiration: so nimble is the Man that has no burthen upon his Heart. And I may truly say without any Hyperbole's or Metaphors, that I was like one, from whose Shoulders they had remov'd a Mountain, so that me thought I could have flown i' the Air.¹⁹⁹

It is not clear which summit or pass Chardin ascended, but it was high enough and risky enough that his guides paused to offer prayers at 'the Top of the Mountain' to pray for the wind to remain calm so that the group should not be 'Buried in the Snow' that lay thick on the ground.²⁰⁰ Although meteorological phenomena caused consternation to his guides, Chardin enjoyed ethereal sensations on the descent, as he gazed at clouds which 'roll'd under my Feet, as far as I could see, so that I could not but think of my self I' the Air, though I felt at the same time that I trod upon the Ground'.²⁰¹ The mountain landscape possessed charms that could heighten the sense of release from man-made trials, and more than make up for the undeniable difficulties of traversing rugged ground.

Although he did not climb it, Chardin also visited and commented upon Mount Ararat. At 5,137m in height it is hardly surprising that Chardin found it to be 'altogether uninhabited, and from Half-way to the Top... perpetually cover'd with Snow that never melts, so that all Seasons of the year it appears like a Prodigious Heap of nothing but Snow'.²⁰² Like Coryate at the Rocciamelone, Chardin was told a 'pretty history' of Ararat by the local Armenians, who recounted the tale of a fourth-century monk, Jacob of Nisibus, who, determined to see the site where the Ark lay, 'resolv'd to ascend to the Top, or die in the Attempt'. Jacob got halfway up the mountain, and then lay down to rest, but when he awoke the next day he was back at the foot of the mountain. He repeated his attempt over and again, but each time lay down to sleep, and each time woke up where he had started. Eventually, God took pity on the monk and sent an angel to him with a

¹⁹⁹ Chardin, *Travels*, pp.165-166.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.166-167. Chardin apparently spent a night sleeping on the snow shortly before reaching the summit.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.167.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, pp.253-254.

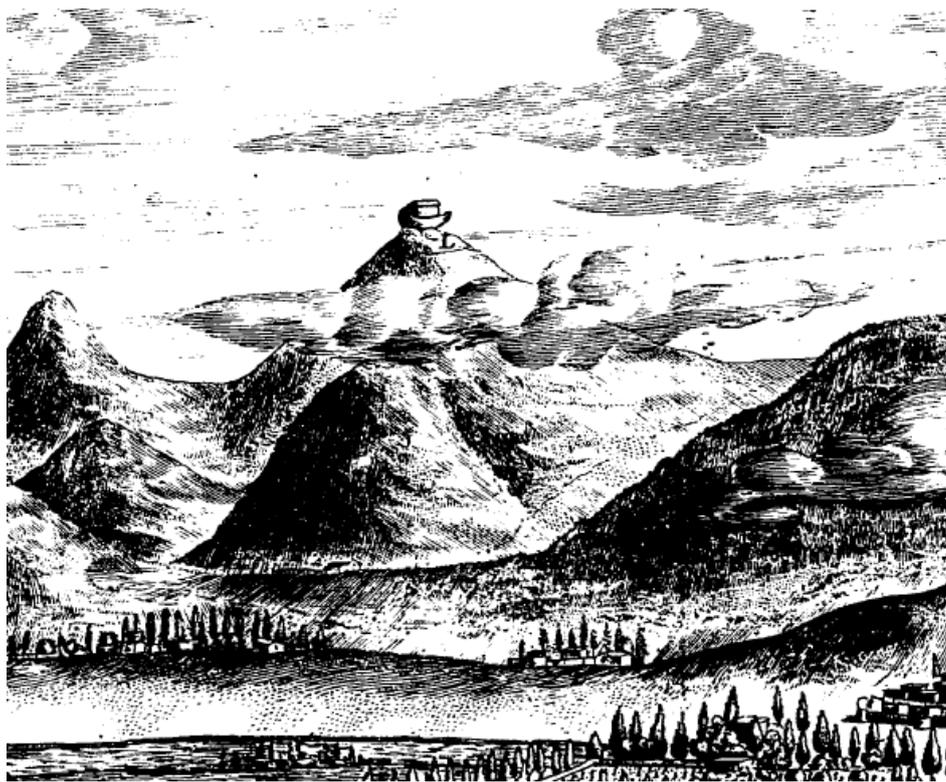


Fig. 17: Detail showing Mt. Ararat. Plate 7 in John Chardin, *The Travels of Sir John Chardin* (London, 1686), facing p.244 (Irvan).

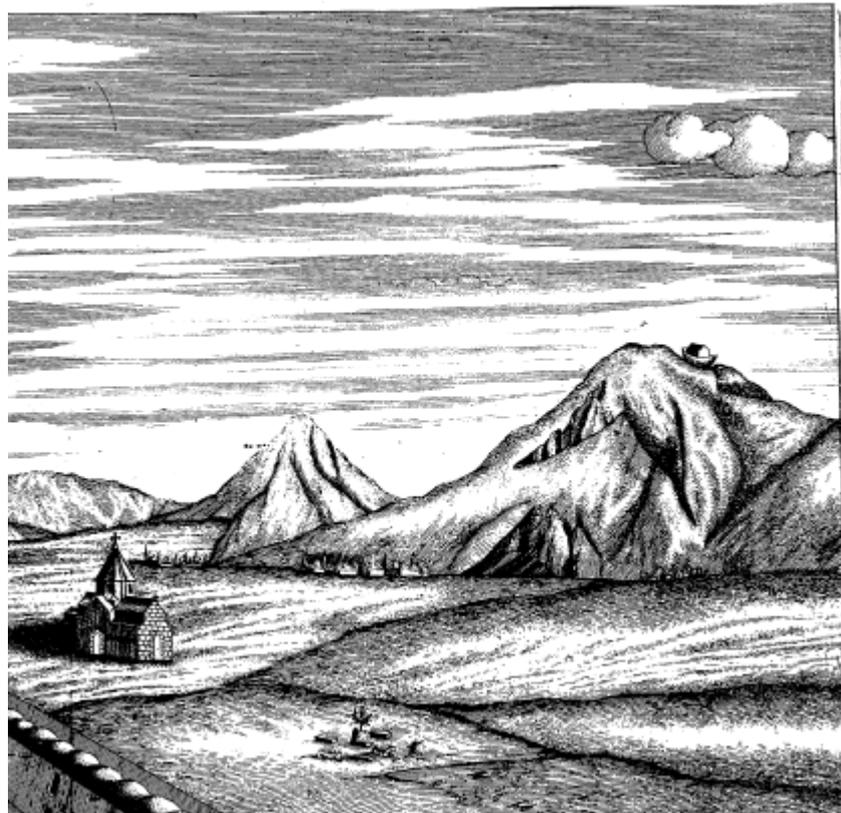


Fig. 18. Detail showing Mt. Ararat. Plate 9 in John Chardin, *Travels*, facing p.248 (Ecs-Miazin).

piece of the Ark by way of consolation - and the message that He had 'debarr'd from Mortals access to the Top of that Mountain'.²⁰³ In visual representations of Ararat, engravings in Chardin's volume emphasised the continuing representational significance of the Ark, showing it perched, as whole and complete as if it had just landed there, upon depictions of the mountain (figs. 17-18)

Chardin's commentary on the story of the monk was to express surprise that it was necessary to explain the unclimbable nature of the mountain by way of a miracle - the real miracle being, in his view, that anyone should climb even halfway up so daunting a peak.²⁰⁴ On the one hand this could be seen as evidence for the expected quality of early modern 'mountain gloom'; rather than seeing the peak as a challenge, Chardin saw the potential ascent of it as patently ridiculous. On the other hand, Chardin was more than capable of 'flying' across a snow-swathed mountain range, and even thrilling at the vista of clouds before him. However, this contradiction is only evident from a modern perspective in which mountain appreciation is tied up with the urge to climb to the summit. As can be seen in the examples of both Coryate and Chardin, an early modern traveller did not need to experience summit-fever (or even be particularly good at hiking up a steep pass) in order to experience and depict both the hardships and pleasures of mountain crossings.

Mountain Pilgrimage

Chardin's visit to Ararat provides a useful segue into the experience of mountains as objects of pilgrimage. The history of the relationship between mountains and pilgrimage is a long one; many prominent pilgrim routes, established in the medieval period, traversed mountainous areas, even taking in high roads rather than confining themselves to the valleys.²⁰⁵ Accounts of medieval pilgrimages also frequently feature landforms

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.254. Over two centuries later a member of the Alpine Club, setting out to climb Ararat, referred to 'the well-worn tradition that no mortal could ever reach the top', still repeated by locals to visitors. G. Percival Baker, 'An Ascent of Ararat', *Alpine Journal* 9 (1878-1880), p.318. For early modern visitors to Ararat, c.f. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Collections of travels through Turkey into Persia, and the East-Indies* 2 vols. (London, 1684), vol.1, p.15.

²⁰⁴ Chardin, *Travels*, p.254.

²⁰⁵ Martin Locker, *Landscapes of Pilgrimage in Medieval Britain* (2015), pp.116-119; Sarah Hopper, *To Be a Pilgrim: The Medieval Pilgrimage Experience* (2002), pp.97-98 and pp.116-117. F. Thomas Noonan, *The Road to Jerusalem: Pilgrimage and Travel in the Age of Discovery* (2007), has emphasised the continuing significance of pilgrimage travel and narratives in the early modern period.

given the name 'Mount Joy'. Such hills or peaks often marked the moment when a pilgrim, ascending to a height, would first gain a prospect of the object of their pilgrimage in the distance. In the medieval and Renaissance eras, sight and touch were intertwined: to see Jerusalem was to arrive there, and as such the visual experience of standing on a mountain and looking down upon the holy city could inspire an intense emotional and spiritual reaction.²⁰⁶ Mountains, in close reach of Jerusalem itself, also feature heavily in Scripture, and so a traveller to the Holy Land, though the climax of their journey might be visiting the Stations of the Cross (including the diminutive Hill of Calvary), could also frequently be tempted to make excursions to mountains marked - either physically or imaginatively - by key moments in the lives of saints or of Jesus himself.

William Lithgow (1582-1645) was, like Coryate, a tireless walker. He was also a 'zealous Protestant' and a Scot of such patriotism that he had a tattoo representing James VI inked onto his shoulder.²⁰⁷ He published an account of his first journey, which took in 'the most famous kingdomes in Europe, Asia, and Affricke', but which had at its declared heart a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, under the title of *A most delectable, and true discourse, of an admired and painefull peregrination from Scotland* (1614).²⁰⁸ In it, he writes tellingly in the preface of his 'double paines, of a twofold Pilgrimage' - the first of the physical journey he had undertaken, and of 'a second Peregrination of [the] mind, in reueiw[i]ng the same in the Map of my owne Memory'.²⁰⁹ An individual 'who seems to have attracted adventures to himself like iron filings to a magnet', and anxious to depict himself as a pious and dedicated Protestant, it seems highly likely that this second pilgrimage saw Lithgow engaging in hyperbole and exaggeration in order to emphasise both the difficulties of his journey, and the heroism or Christian dignity of his reactions.²¹⁰ For example, early in his journey, on Crete, Lithgow wrote of being set upon by bandits, who

²⁰⁶ Suzannah Biernhoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (2002), pp.80-107. Danijela Kambaskovic and Charles T. Wolfe, 'The Senses in Philosophy and Science: From the Nobility of Sight to the Materialism of Touch', ed. Herman Roodenburg, *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Renaissance* (2014), pp.114-116.

²⁰⁷ Lithgow, *Painefull Peregrination*, R3r-v.

²⁰⁸ Lithgow published a poetic account of his second journey as *The Pilgrims Farewell, to his Natiue Country of Scotland* (Edinburgh, [1618]), and a 'complete' and expanded version of both, along with an account of a third journey, were published together as *The Totall Discourse, of the Rare Aduentures, and Painefull Peregrinations of Long Nineteene Yeares Trauayles from Scotland* (London, 1632). This was reprinted in 1640 and posthumous editions of Lithgow's writings were produced in 1682, 1692, and 1770.

²⁰⁹ Lithgow, *True Discourse*, A2r.

²¹⁰ Clifford Edmund Bosworth, *An Intrepid Scot: William Lithgow of Lanark's Travels in the Ottoman Lands, North Africa and Central Europe, 1609-21* (2006), p.xvi.

not only beat him and robbed him, but also stripped him of his clothes. They subsequently relented, with one thief pleading with the others to spare Lithgow's life, and returned his clothes and letters of recommendation, but not his money. Moving on with 'counterfeit thanks', the penniless Lithgow came to a village filled with such 'barbarous and vnciuil people' that the noble Scot went to such lengths to 'shunne their villany', that he slept in a cave by the sea rather than accept their tainted hospitality.²¹¹

Lithgow, as noted in Chapter One, took interest not only in Scriptural mountains but also those of classical fame. Early in his 1614 *Discourse* he informed his readers that he would not indulge in 'vnecessary discourse' of such places as 'France, Sauoy, the Ligurian Alpes, and almost all *Italie*', these already being oft-reported upon within Britain, but in Greece he turned his eyes and pen towards such peaks as Mount Ida, the highest mountain (as he well knew) in Crete, which he gave as six miles high 'by the computation of Shepherds feet', and Mount Parnassus, the seat of the Muses.²¹² He described the latter peak in the context of its fantastic heritage, noting that of its two summits, one was 'drie, and sandy, signifying that Poets are alwayes poore, and needy', whilst the other was 'barren and rockie, resembling the ingratitude of wretched, and niggardly patrones', with the col between the two 'pleasant, and profitable, denoting the fruitfull, and delightfull soile, which painfull Poets, the *Muses* plowmen, so industriously nurture'.²¹³ Lithgow went on to conflate Parnassus with another classical mountain, that of Helicon – source of the Hippocrene spring – and mused sadly that he would leave it for others to find those waters of poetic inspiration, for otherwise he would have drunk them dry 'to haue enlarged my poore poetical veine'.²¹⁴

Lithgow apparently gained confidence in his poetical abilities over the years, for in his *Totall Discourse* (1632) - which included revised and enlarged accounts of his two journeys - he added a number of poems, several of them dedicated to mountains. Notably he added an laudatory verse to his description of Parnassus and, from his second journey, a sonnet on Mount Ætna, which he claimed to have written on the spot to gift to an old

²¹¹ Lithgow, *Painefull Peregrination*, F1v-F2r.

²¹² *Ibid.*, F3r and G4r.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, G4r. C.f. William Biddulph, *The trauels of certaine Englishmen into Africa, Asia, Troy...* (London, 1609), p.10.

²¹⁴ *Loc. cit.*

friend whom he encountered in Sicily:

High stands thy top, but higher lookes mine eye,
High soares thy smoake, but higher my desire...
High bends thy force, through midst of *Vulcans* ire,
But higher flies my spirit, with wings of loue...
Meanwhile with paine, I climb to view thy tops,
Thy height makes fall from me, ten thousand drops.²¹⁵

It is hard to deny the interpretation that this sonnet shows Lithgow - whether immediately or retroactively - 'moved by the grandeur of nature'.²¹⁶ It is also notable that in it, Lithgow explicitly connects the spirit-raising sight of looking up at a high mountain with the painful, sweat-and-tear-inducing experience of ascending one.

In the *Total Discourse* Lithgow also added panegyric verses on the rich fecundity of Mount Lebanon, where the original text had elaborated only on the adventures he enjoyed there.²¹⁷ As they ascended the mountain to see the Cedars of Lebanon, their 'ignorant guide' mistook the way, and 'brought vs in a laborinth of dangers' which resulted in two of their donkeys falling off the path and breaking their necks, and one of Lithgow's merchant companions almost drowning in a fast-flowing waterfall - twice. Fortunately, they were rescued by a passing Christian Amorite.²¹⁸ After surviving this interlude, Lithgow was by no means deterred from climbing mountains: forced, to his great irritation, to travel with a caravan rather than solitarily, he begged the leader in vain to make a diversion to Mount Tabor, 'a pretty round mountain, beset about with comely trees', that he might see the site of Jesus' Transfiguration.²¹⁹

He did get the opportunity, later, to visit Mount Quarantine, where Jesus had been tempted by Satan. The 350m altitude of the rocky hill grew, in the course of Lithgow's 'painefull experience', to 'aboue six miles' in height. The route, Lithgow reported, was

²¹⁵ Lithgow, *Total discourse*, p.119: 'Through thickest cloudes, *Pernassus* bends his height, / Whose double tops, do kisse the Starres so bright'. Poem to *Ætna* p.397. The latter was also published in *The Pilgrims Farewell*, sig. Fr.

²¹⁶ Bosworth, *An Intrepid Scot*, p.134.

²¹⁷ Lithgow, *Total discourse*, pp.193-194, 'Long and large Mount, whose rich-spreed mantle, see!'

²¹⁸ Lithgow, *Painefull Peregrination*, sig. L1v-L2r.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, sig. M4r. For Lithgow's exasperation with caravan travel, c.f. Bosworth, *An Intrepid Scot*, p.73 and 77.

'hewen out of the Rocke, by the industry of Men', with sharp switchbacks, and he made a point of highlighting that only he and seven other travellers out of his whole caravan 'durst attempt to clim the mountaine'. After 'diuers dangers, and narrow passages', they entered the cave where Jesus had fasted and rebuked Satan.²²⁰ The descent provided an opportunity for Lithgow to demonstrate his daring,

For one Frier *Laurenzo* had fallen fiue hundred fadomes ouer the rocke, and broke his necke, if it had not beene for me; who rashly and vnaduisedly endangered my owne life for his safety...²²¹

Throughout his published accounts, Lithgow appears to have been at the very least an enthusiastic hiker, who took real pleasure in the variety of the mountain landscape, from the fecundity of Mount Lebanon to the awesome height of Ætna. Mountains famed for either their classical or religious associations exerted the strongest attraction. Crucially, he was at pains to represent himself as a traveller who was hardy and brave, but who also went through the suffering and exhaustion necessary of a true pilgrim. This resulted in claims - of the great danger of climbing a few hundred feet up a really tiny hill - that might make a modern mountaineer laugh, but that is exactly the point. It was not necessary to climb the highest mountain in order to boast of it - rather, it was necessary to truly struggle up a mountain of spiritual significance in order to claim one's identity as a successful and dedicated pilgrim.

A later traveller to the Holy Land, Jean de Thévenot (1633-1667) was less preoccupied with depicting himself as a pious or suffering pilgrim.²²² A French traveller, linguist, natural philosopher, and botanist, he made a series of journeys through Europe, Persia, and the East Indies between 1652 and 1667. Three volumes of his travels were published in French between 1665 and 1684, with a single-volume English language edition produced in 1687.²²³ Thévenot depicted himself as a learned and critical traveller, immune to the superstitious or even duplicitous ways of local peoples. In 1655, visiting

²²⁰ Lithgow, *Painefull Peregrination*, sig. P4r-v.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, sig. P4v.

²²² Noonan, *The Road to Jerusalem*, p.148, has noted that although Thévenot visited many pilgrimage sites, 'the experience... was now reduced, for Thévenot, to a simple marking of the traditional spots of sacred ground'.

²²³ Jean de Thévenot, *The Travels of Monsieur de Thévenot into the Levant* (London, 1687).

Mount Stromboli, he described seeing

the fire of the Mountain... and I was told that they who were near it heard great howlings, which proceeded not from Hell (of which the silly people of the Country think the top of this hill to be the mouth) but from the violence of the Winds...²²⁴

In addition to such credulous misunderstandings of natural phenomena, Thévenot was also concerned with the deliberate deceptions he believed were practised upon credulous travellers, particularly in the Holy Land. At Mount Sinai, he observed that an apparent imprint of a camel's foot upon a rock, said to be that of a camel bearing the prophet Muhammad, was likely an invention of 'the *Greeks*' to attract Muslim pilgrims to the mountain.²²⁵ Such scepticism and irritation at the pecuniary nature of those who managed the holy landscape is evident throughout Thévenot's writings; a perhaps gentler form of Lithgow's heavy-handed attempt to present the front of a good Christian traveller, contrasted with the heathen and greedy 'other'.

Like Lithgow, Thévenot was an energetic traveller. Between the first and fourth of February 1668 he visited, and in most cases ascended, no less than four mountains with religious associations. The mountains are foregrounded in his account, with chapter headings making direct reference to the featured peaks. Most notably, he and his companions climbed Mount Catherine (2,629m), leaving at one o'clock and

taking with us a little Arab Boy, who carried a small Leather Bucket full of Water, that we might drink when we were dry. We were near three Hours in getting up that Mountain, we stopt... several times by the way to drink Water; but besides, the Hill is full of sharp cutting Stones, and many steep and slippery places to be climb'd up, that hinder People from going fast.²²⁶

The sites to visit on the mountain included a basin, filled by a spring which had miraculously spouted to slake the thirst of the exhausted monks who had carried the body of St Catherine down the mountain. At the time of Thévenot's visit it was frozen

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.2.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.169. C.f. fig. 9 for a cartographic depiction of Mount Sinai.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.168.

solid; he and his companions tested it by banging their sticks upon it. Venturing further up the snowy mountain, they visited the dome under which the body of St Catherine was allegedly placed by angels. Though Thévenot was dubious of a tradition which claimed that depressions in the rock had been made by the body (he thought them likely to 'hath been done by the Hands of Men'), he and his companions paid their devotions at the spot, before descending 'with a great deal of trouble'.²²⁷ The next day they explored Mount Sinai, stopping off at the monastery of St Catherine, from which vantage point both mountains could be seen. Mount Sinai, he noted, was augmented by steps, and 'not so high, nor so hard to ascend', as the mountain of the previous day.²²⁸ Thévenot emphasised the even greater height and difficulty of ascending Mount Catherine; 'One may judge of the height of St. *Catharine's* Mount, by this [Mount Sinai], which certainly is not so high by a third, and yet hath fourteen thousand steps up to it'.²²⁹ Whether Thévenot's motivations were quite the same as Lithgow's is unclear, but he was likewise inclined towards emphasising the scale of the physical challenges he had surmounted.

That said, Thévenot was not ashamed of admitting his limitations. Just over two months after the intense weekend of mountain exploration and pilgrimage described above, his company ventured to Mount Quarantine. In what may have been a jibe at the hyperbolic tendencies of writers such as Lithgow, he commented that

it is not so hard to go up, as some have been pleased to say, unless it be in some places, which are very dangerous, for one must climb with Hands and Feet to the Rock, that is smooth like Marble, and when we went up it Rained, which rendered it more slippery, but we assisted one another.²³⁰

At this point, in spite of his insouciance climbing up the slick rock, Thévenot stopped at the 'Grott' where Jesus had fasted, whilst some members of his party went 'up to the top of all the Hill', to see the spot where He had been tempted. Thévenot was 'so spent and weary' that he would not go on, commenting that 'There are dangerous places in it [the ascent], where the way is not two foot broad, and there is a great Precipice on the side of

²²⁷ *Loc. cit.*

²²⁸ *Loc. cit.*

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.169.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.194. C.f. R.B. [Nathaniel Crouch], *A Journey to Jerusalem, or, a Relation of the Travels of Fourteen English-Men in the Year 1669* (London, 1672), pp.74-76, for another ascent of Mount Quarantine.

it'.²³¹ Although Thévenot himself did not make the final ascent, his description both of the earlier climb and of what his companions underwent afterwards gives some insight into the intensity of mountain 'scrambling' that early modern Europeans were willing to attempt – at least in the interest of visiting sites of religious significance. It is also worth noting that whilst Lithgow could utilise an ascent of Mount Quarantine as part of a narrative of bravery, there was no sense of embarrassment or apology attached to Thévenot's 'unsuccessful' ascent of the same peak. It is clear from Lithgow's account that mountain climbs could be coded as hardy and brave and noble and as a vital part of the pious suffering of a good Protestant pilgrim. On the other hand, Thévenot could stop without any humiliation. This both intersects and contrasts with the coding attached to modern mountaineering ascents, in which gaining a summit can confer heroism and fame, whilst turning back before the top is a lamentable result, forced upon the climber by weather, diminishing sunlight, or accident.

Labour is Pleasure

In 1892, the librarian of the Alpine Club firmly rejected the suggestion that mere mountain journeys, such as those discussed above, had any direct relationship with the 'history of mountaineering proper'. A traveller only became a mountaineer when they could say 'from a full heart, *Labor ipse voluptas*' – labour is pleasure.²³² Variations upon this theme have echoed through modern mountaineering discourses, most prominently in the immortal words of the early twentieth-century climber George Mallory, who when asked by a journalist for probably the hundredth time why he wanted to climb Mount Everest, replied simply 'because it is there'.²³³ Within this mindset, one does not require a secondary reason, such as a holy monument or the siren-call of classical associations, to drive them up the mountain; the summit itself is justification enough. This 'disinterested' motivation is central to the way modern mountaineering defines and has defined itself.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, p.194.

²³² Sir Frederick Pollock, 'The Early History of Mountaineering' in ed. C.T. Dent, *Mountaineering* (London, 1892), pp.1-2.

²³³ The quotation originally appeared in 'Climbing Mount Everest is Work for Supermen', *The New York Times*, Sunday 18 March 1923. Tom Holzel and Audrey Salkeld, *The Mystery of Mallory and Irvine* (1986), pp.186-190, have proposed that the phrase that has become Mallory's epitaph was in fact the invention of a journalist in search of a catchy phrase; Peter and Leni Gillman, *The Wildest Dream: Mallory, His Life and Conflicting Passions* (2000), p.231, have cast doubt on this theory.

The ramifications this has had for the study of past mountain engagements cannot be underestimated. As Chapter Five will demonstrate, the discourse of premodern mountain gloom has been shaped, at least partially, by the histories told and re-told by modern mountaineers. Many of these histories dismissed travel accounts of premodern mountain engagement that seemed to instrumentalise the mountain – as the site of monuments, as the route by which to pass into another valley – as irrelevant to the history of their pursuit and by extension as irrelevant to the history of mountain appreciation. They cast only certain figures – those who apparently climbed for the mere sake of it – as exceptions to this rule.²³⁴ These interpretations, which represent some of the most extensive analyses of premodern climbing, have analysed accounts against the metric of whether they depicted ascents made in the modern mountaineering spirit. The result has been the disassociation of past climbs from the contexts in which they were occurred.

In April 1336, Francesco Petrarch undertook an ascent that would earn him the qualified honour of being termed the ‘father of Alpinism’, and ‘one of the first truly modern men’.²³⁵ His ascent was of Mont Ventoux (1,912m), and he was seized by an ‘irresistible desire’ to climb the peak, which he had seen every day for years, whilst reading an account in Livy of a classical ascent of Mount Haemus. There is much that is familiar in Petrarch’s account; he agonised, for example, over his choice of climbing companion, finding it hard to choose one who would walk at the right speed, and talk neither too much nor too little.²³⁶ He eventually settled upon his brother, and the two of them marched out, deaf to the protests of a local shepherd, who told them their goal was impossible (it seems there is always a local to throw cold water on an intended ascent in climbing narratives).²³⁷ Petrarch’s brother marched straight up the slope; Petrarch, saying he would find an easier route, promptly became lost. He sat down and gave himself a pep talk, first quoting Ovid to himself - ‘to want counts little; to triumph, you must ardently desire’ - and then thinking of the climb in the metaphorical terms of an ascent away from the gross pleasures of the

²³⁴ C.f. f.n. 142, above.

²³⁵ For Petrarch as the father of Alpinism see, e.g., Evan Berry, *Devoted to Nature: The Religious Roots of American Environmentalism* (2015), p.33. Jacob Burckhardt identified Petrarch as one of the first ‘modern’ men; Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S.G.C. Middlemore (1990), p.193. C.f. Peter H. Hansen’s commentary on this interpretation as a ‘time knot’; Hansen, *Summits of Modern Man*, p.15 and p.18.

²³⁶ Francesco Petrarca, ‘Petrarch Climbs Mont Ventoux’, ed. and trans. Alan Weber, *Because It’s There*, pp.9-10.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.10.

world up to 'the heights of blessedness'.²³⁸ Thus heartened, he finally achieved the summit, where he stood for some time, stunned by the view and the clouds beneath his feet. Shortly, he turned his thoughts to an internal vista, regretting that he had not yet arrived at a correspondingly 'safe harbour' from which to view the prospect of his own 'stormy past'.²³⁹

From this point onwards Petrarch sought to place the ascent in a spiritual context. He had taken with him a volume of St. Augustine, and his brother asked him to read from it at the summit. His eyes fell on a striking passage: 'men go to admire mountains... and they abandon themselves'.²⁴⁰ As he descended, he compared the physical struggle he had undergone to drag his 'body a little closer to heaven' with the spiritual struggle necessary for man, so noble in soul but so sinful in nature, to drag himself to redemption. He concluded that 'With great ardor we should strive to trample beneath our feet not the earthly heights, but the passions which arouse human impulses in us'.²⁴¹ This closing passage has been read as evidence of Petrarch's rejection of the climb he had just made, and as signifying that, though he climbed a mountain, he did not fully achieve the level of mountain appreciation gained in modernity.²⁴² Such a reading seems to ignore precisely what is historically interesting in Petrarch's (highly constructed) account. Petrarch was not 'the first modern man' - instead, he was very much a product of his time, his physical experience prompted by and mediated through the classical and religious texts which shaped the life of any early Renaissance gentleman.²⁴³ To read his ascent of Mont Ventoux for evidence of 'inklings' of the modern mountaineering spirit is both anachronistic and ultimately futile. Attempts to cast Petrarch as climbing in the modern style - 'for its own sake' - will always strain against the distinctly premodern nature of his summit experience.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.11.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.12.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.13.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.* p.14.

²⁴² Richard W. Bevis, *The Road to Egdon Heath: The Aesthetics of the Great in Nature* (1999), p.19, summarises preceding literature that has both seen Petrarch as rejecting 'the pleasure of the climb' and suggested that the account was a mere construction. C.f. Lyell Asher, 'Petrarch at the Peak of Fame', *PMLA*, 108:5 (1993), 1050-1063, on indications of the literarily constructed nature of the text.

²⁴³ C.f. Dan Hooley, 'Prelude: Classical Mountain Landscapes and the Language of Ascent' in eds. Ireton and Schaumann, *Heights of Reflection*, pp.22-23, critiquing the mountaineering historiography regarding Petrarch.

Another famous 'forerunner' to Alpinism can be found in the person of the Swiss botanist Conrad Gesner (1516-1565), who recorded his love affair - it cannot be called anything else - with mountains in two texts.²⁴⁴ The first, 'On the admiration of mountains', took the curious form of a prefatory letter attached to a book about milk. The letter is most famous for Gesner's professed determination to climb at least one mountain a year, 'when the vegetation is flourishing, partly for the sake of becoming acquainted with the latter, partly for the sake of suitable bodily exercise and the delight of the spirit'.²⁴⁵ However, much of his commentary is spiritual and natural philosophical in nature; he comments that those who turn to mountains find that 'the mind is overturned by their dizzying height and is caught up in contemplation of the Supreme Architect', and discusses the natural benefits and potential origins of the mountain environment.²⁴⁶ He also emphasises that they are 'most fruitful in plant life'; a strong motivation for a botanist.²⁴⁷

Gesner's second text on mountains, a description of his ascent of Mount Pilatus (2,128m), likewise problematises narratives which claim him as an 'early' mountaineer. He wrote at length about the physical joys of climbing a mountain: of the pleasure of taking a cool draught of water when thirsty from exertion; of the enjoyment of camaraderie; of the views to be had and the silent removal from the world to revel in.²⁴⁸ He conceded that mountaineering was not without its challenges but, possibly calling upon the same classical tag as Coryate on Mount Aiguebelette, assured the potential climber that 'it will be pleasant thereafter to recall the toils and the dangers; it will gratify you to turn over these things in your mind and tell them to your friends'.²⁴⁹ He also acknowledged that one did not always reach the summit, but if so, noted calmly that 'It is something to have got so far, if farther is not granted'.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁴ These are found in Gesner, *Libellvs de lacte, et operibvs lactariis, philologus pariter ac medicus. Cum episotla ad Iacobum Auienum de montium admiratione* (Tiguri, apud Chrisophorum Froshouerum, [1541]) and *Conradi Gesneri medici, de raris et admirandis herbis... eiusdem descriptione Montis Fracti, siue Montis Pilati, iuxta Lucernam in Heluetia* (Tiguri, apud Andream Gesnerum F. & Iacobvm Geserum, [1555]). The English translation used is from Gesner, *On the Admiration of Mountains*, ed. W. Dock and J. Monroe Thorington, trans. H.B.C. Soulé (1937)

²⁴⁵ Gesner, *On the Admiration of Mountains*, p.5.

²⁴⁶ *Loc. cit.*

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.14.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.26-28.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.30-31.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.32.

So far, so modern (though a modern mountaineer may not be so quietly fatalistic as the last example), but his description of the summit is telling. Rather than describing the view, Gesner noted that ‘On the summit rises an eminence of rock on which it is believed that [Pontius] Pilate used to take his seat and rouse up dreadful tempests’, upon which previous visitors had scratched graffiti in a style apparently innate to human nature: name of visitor and date of visit.²⁵¹ Gesner was fascinated by the local superstitions relating to both the rock and the nearby lake, which had been named the pool of Pilate, in which he allegedly drowned, recording that it was also said that if a person threw a stone or rock into the pool, the ‘entire region is threatened with storm and flood’. Gesner commented sceptically that Pilate had never lived in the area, and ‘even if he had he would have had no power to do good or evil to men’.²⁵² Of the subsequent descent he gave no detail, other than that the ‘onslaught of rain’ delayed them as they made their way down.²⁵³ If Gesner found enjoyment on the mountains, as he clearly did, it was through cultural and intellectual lenses that have little to do with modern mountaineering.

Petrarch, Gesner, and a very few others have been represented in the historiography of early modern mountain engagement as being extraordinary - sometimes, even, of being modern men displaced in time in, arguably, climbing mountains just because they were there.²⁵⁴ Was this necessarily the case? They were certainly not alone in setting out to climb to the top of a mountain and referenced it so casually as to imply that it was far from an unusual endeavour. John Ray, as noted in Chapter One, was frustrated in the failure of his guide to lead him to the summit of Snowdon, whilst the Scotsman William Brodie wrote from Fort William in early September 1702 that

I was... [yesterday] upon the top of Benavis which is the highest mountain that I ever saw: I cut out a lump of frozen snow with a board of ice the breadth of my hat which I brought to the garrison...²⁵⁵

Brodie concluded his letter - written some seventy years before the first acknowledged

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.33.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, pp.33-35.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.36.

²⁵⁴ C.f. f.n. 142, above.

²⁵⁵ Letter of William Brodie to Robert Wodrow, 11 September 1702, National Library of Scotland, Wodr. Let. Qu. III, fol.63.

ascent of Ben Nevis - with the comment that he was 'very well pleased' at his expedition, and longed for another 'that I might see more of the country'. Yet, as with Petrarch and Gesner, it is easy to cast doubt on the relevance of their ascents to the category of 'premodern mountaineering'; Ray, like Gesner, climbed partly to collect botanical samples, whilst Brodie's ascent of Ben Nevis was more of a chance excursion than the central intention behind his visit to Fort William.

As alluded to above, the attempted division is really a false one. Although Petrarch's ascent obviously belongs to a distinct historical context, Gesner's experiences were not that far apart from those of other mountain 'climbers' discussed above. It is a modern viewpoint - which sees the 'truest' form of mountain interaction and appreciation as climbing to the very top, for the sheer sake of it - which sets apart Gesner, who apparently climbed at least partly for joy, and apparently to the very top, from someone like Coryate, who climbed because he had to and didn't even make it to the top of a pass under his own steam.²⁵⁶ Ironically, this reveals exactly what is distinctive about modern mountaineering - and that is not that the first mountaineers were also the first to properly appreciate mountains. Rather, it is that mountaineering is a uniquely modern phenomenon which exists within a specific sociological and cultural context and which contains within it specifically modern values. The summit position, with its post-Enlightenment mythos of the individual alone and victorious upon the top of a mountain, did not exist within early modern European discourse.²⁵⁷

Gesner's motivations for being among the mountains may have differed from those of Coryate, Chardin, Lithgow, and Thévenot, but his experiences and his accounts of them do not therefore belong in a different category of activity in the same way modern mountaineering would, today, be set apart from someone climbing over a mountain 'because they had to'. Accounts of early modern mountain experiences should not be discarded as irrelevant or unrevealing of real sentiment simply because they do not fit the constructed paradigm of modern mountaineering. Indeed, even the most apparently 'modern' ascents are more interesting when viewed in their own historical context, in

²⁵⁶ See Frison-Roches and Jouty, *A History of Mountain Climbing*, pp.9-11, for a laudatory definition of mountaineering as a 'disinterested', aesthetic activity as against early 'utilitarian' ascents.

²⁵⁷ Hansen, *Summits of Modern Man*, p.3, etc.

which the experience of nature was shaped by thoughts of God, by the memories of ancient and holy events, and the desire to learn from the natural world in an era during which a botanist with a head for heights could still discover exciting botanical samples in the middle of Wales.

Into the Eighteenth Century

This chapter has sketched just a few forms of early modern mountain experience. Above all, these are characterised by their variety. Travellers could experience hardship, pain, enjoyment, and spirituality, sometimes within the same mountain journey. Many travellers had much to say and share about mountains: how it felt to stand above the clouds and how they tested their mettle against them. They also looked at and out from mountains, and the nature of what they saw and appreciated in such views will be further explored in the next chapter. The general picture is of a period of genuine interest and enthusiasm for visiting in and being among mountains, regardless of the reasons for being there. However, the story is not a static one. Around the end of the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth a great deal came into flux: the ways that people travelled changed, the discourses articulated in published travel writing gave prominence to new and particular spaces, and – in some cases – the ways that mountains were described shifted.

One important development was the expansion of the Grand Tour which, as was previously noted, had its heyday in the 1700s. This eighteenth-century Tour saw many more people crossing the mountains - specifically the Alps *en route* to or on the way back from Italy - and coming home to write about them. Amongst the greater volume of eighteenth-century Grand Tour travellers were some who were perhaps less inclined than their seventeenth-century forbears to enjoy the physical challenges of being amongst mountains. Horace Walpole (1717-1797) is sometimes alluded to as a late example of 'early modern' mountain gloom for a letter written shortly after crossing the Alps in which he exclaimed 'Such uncouth rocks and such uncomely inhabitants! my dear West, I hope I shall never see them again!'²⁵⁸ Walpole might be excused for this attitude;

²⁵⁸ Ed. W.S. Lewis, *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence* 48 vols. (1937-1983), vol.13, p.189. Letter of 11 November 1739 to Richard West.

during the crossing his pet spaniel was consumed by a mountain wolf before his very eyes. Nevertheless, the image of him shuddering as he was carried across the Mont Cenis pass on a chair - to which he had transferred from a comfortable carriage rather than from foot - 'swathed in beaver bonnets, beaver gloves, beaver stockings, muffs, and bear-skins' epitomises the stereotype of the mountain-fearing early modern.²⁵⁹ However, Walpole, as a pampered aristocrat, on his way to enjoy the cultural and artistic treasures of Italy, was a very different traveller from many who wrote about their mountain experiences in the seventeenth century.

The eighteenth century was not just a different context in terms of the motivations of travellers, their relative levels of athleticism and the modes of transport that they were likely to take. An eighteenth-century Briton who ventured to the Alps would be taking with them a very different set of intellectual frameworks from, for example, Conrad Gesner who saw them as revelatory of the work of a Supreme Architect who had made them for the enjoyment of mankind. Instead, many of them were equipped with Burnet. Some travellers took his vision of mountains as the 'ruins of the Earth' to heart, and found mountains, when seen face-to-face, very much wanting. One such was Daniel Defoe, whose *Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain* (first published 1724-1727) drips with disdain for those landforms when he finds himself within the blasted regions of the country that boast them. He had clearly read and enjoyed Burnet; in describing Poole's Hole in Derbyshire he stated that its form 'seems a Confirmation' of Burnet's theory of the 'great Rupture of the Earth's Crust or Shell'.²⁶⁰ A post-Burnetian, he was at a loss to understand the apparent taste of his forbears for the Peak District; he deemed it a wonder that learned men such as Thomas Hobbes and Charles Cotton should have celebrated such a 'houling Wilderness' in verse.²⁶¹ It was an even greater mystery to him that 'any man who had a Genius suitable to so magnificent a Design' as Chatsworth House 'would build it in such a place where the Mountains insult the Clouds'.²⁶² He disliked travelling

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.189.

²⁶⁰ Defoe, *Tour*, vol.3, pp.58-59.

²⁶¹ Defoe, *Tour*, p.44. C.f. Thomas Hobbes, *Ad nobilissimum Guilelmum Comitem Devoniae, &c. De mirabilibus Pecci* [London, printed by G. Purslow, 1627], first English edition *De mirabilibus Pecci being the Wonders of the Peak in Darby-shire* (London, 1683); Charles Cotton, *The Wonders of the Peake* (London, 1681). C.f. f.n. 413, below. Fascination with the 'wonders' of the Peak District continued into the Romantic period and beyond; Heringham, *Romantic Rocks*, pp.245-251.

²⁶² Defoe, *Tour*, pp.70-71.

over mountains, complaining that the hills between Halifax and Leeds were ‘so steep, so rugged, and sometimes too so slippery’ that they all but prevented the traffic of carriages.²⁶³ Westmorland and Cumberland, now enshrined in modern affections as the beautiful Lake District, struck Defoe as ‘the wildest, most barren and frightful’ place he had ever seen, full of ‘Horror’ and ‘frightful Appearances’.²⁶⁴ Further north, in Scotland, the hills seemed even more ‘hideous’, possibly by virtue of their correspondingly wild inhabitants.²⁶⁵ A historian seeking an example of whole-hearted early modern mountain gloom need look no further than the eighteenth-century writings of Defoe.

I propose that, rather than a context of continuous mountain gloom throughout the early modern period, there was instead a temporary and partial surge in negative discourses of mountains during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. A chorus of texts with particularly gloomy visions of mountains - starting with Burnet - appeared from the late seventeenth century onwards as the result of historically-specific shifts in discourses of natural history and in practices of travel. As will be explored further in Chapter Five, these texts have been assumed by the writers of early modern mountain history to be representative of the mountain attitudes of the entire premodern era.

However, even as Burnet’s ideas gained traction there were still many travellers who engaged with the landscape in more positive terms - some of which were rooted in older traditions, and some of which were novel responses to the challenge posed by Burnet’s *Theory*. John Dennis, travelling through the Alps in 1688, certainly seems to have read Burnet:

But if these Mountains were not a Creation, but form’d by universal Destruction, when the Arch... dissolv’d and fell into the vast Abyss (which is surely the best opinion) then are these Ruines of the old World the greatest wonders of the New. For they are not only vast, but horrid, hideous, ghastly Ruins.²⁶⁶

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp.113-114.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.223-224.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, second pagination, pp.216-221. The relationship between perceived nordicity, landscape, and regional character is further explored in Dawn Hollis, ‘The Contours of the North? British Mountains and Northern Peoples, 1600-1750’ in eds. Dolly Jørgensen and Virginia Langum, *Visions of the North in Premodernity* (forthcoming, Brepols, 2017).

²⁶⁶ John Dennis, *Miscellanies in Verse and Prose* (London, 1683), p.139. C.f. Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom*, pp.276-289; Bevis, *Egdon Heath*, pp.30-31; Philip Shaw, *The Sublime* (2006), pp.30-32.

Yet, Dennis responded to these 'ghastly ruins' as wonders, and expressed a reaction that many historians of aesthetics have identified as an early articulation of the sublime when he stood at the top of the very same pass scaled by Coryate, enjoying 'a delightful Horrour, a terrible Joy, and at the same time, that I was infinitely, pleas'd I trembled'.²⁶⁷ The poet Thomas Gray, Walpole's companion, expressed himself in only slightly gentler terms when visiting the Grand Chartreuse and beholding 'one of the most solemn, the most romantick, and the most astonishing scenes I ever beheld'.²⁶⁸ Even the shivering Walpole wrote poetically of being one of a pair of 'lonely lords of glorious desolate prospects' in the midst of the mountains of Savoy.²⁶⁹

Therefore, it seems evident that there exist (at least) two strands of mountain reactions - of discomfort and distaste opposing awe and enjoyment - that run throughout the early modern and eighteenth-century history of human engagement with them. An individual traveller could experience and contribute discursively to both sides of the mountain story. In terms of the modern historical understanding of past landscape experiences it is simply a case of which 'strand' has possessed the most and loudest voices at different points in time - and which voices historians' ears have been most attuned to hear.

To begin with the latter question of historical selection, it is important to highlight that many of the sources explored in this chapter are extra-Alpine. Relevant to this is another eighteenth-century development which saw the 'discovery of the Alps' as a scenic, exploratory (and, later, sporting) destination in and of themselves.²⁷⁰ This shift towards Alpine tourism and mountaineering transferred a mental prominence onto that range that exists, so innately as to be virtually unrecognised, to the present day, a circumstance which has led to an interesting historiographical blind spot. The modern history of

²⁶⁷ Dennis, *Miscellanies*, p.134.

²⁶⁸ Thomas Gray, *The Works of Thomas Gray*, 2 vols., ed. Thomas James Mathias (London, 1814), vol.1, pp.185-186.

²⁶⁹ Ed. Lewis, *Walpole's Correspondence*, vol.13, pp.189-190 and p.181.

²⁷⁰ Jim Ring, *How the English Made the Alps* (2000). C.f. Hansen, *Summits of Modern Man*, pp.32-35, on the 'making up [of] discovery' in discourses allocating primacy to William Windham in uncovering Chamonix and Mont Blanc. Reference to the eighteenth-century 'discovery of the Alps' is not to imply that this was in any way a straightforward or easily explicable process but rather to highlight the fact that it was during this century that several contingent events occurred (the identification of Mont Blanc as the highest mountain in Europe and its first ascent among them) which paved the way for the Alps to gain their modern-day significance and a cultural primacy which they did not possess during the early modern period.

European mountain engagement is so tied up in the Alps that it seems natural to look for its 'pre-history' in the same location; the result being that the historians who do so find no ascents, but many expressions of discomfort from eighteenth-century Grand Tourists. Spreading the net wider, as above, tells a story of far more active and nuanced mountain engagement in a broader geographical arena.

That story is one in which for the majority of the early modern period, positive mountain experiences were discursively prominent. These experiences were motivated by and filtered through some of the most influential ideas in early modern culture - those of the classical and Biblical past. Travellers looked around them and made note of the same fertile, useful mountain landscape that the local inhabitants of such regions relied on and actively interacted with in order to earn their daily bread. Being among the mountains was, of course, hard and tiring, but individuals could also experience excitement and aesthetic appreciation in the midst of these challenges. Some found them to be frightening, some found them inspiring and beautiful; many found them to be both. It was not until after Burnet and after the expansion of the Grand Tour that more exclusively negative discourses gained volume. Mountains, in early modern thought and practice, were far from empty - they were busy and very, very useful.

Thomas Burnet's *Theory* prompted a brief but intense increase in discourses of 'mountain gloom'. Ironically - as hinted at in the case of John Dennis - he also posed the problem which came to be answered with the articulation of the sublime, an aesthetic experience which characterises narratives of modern 'mountain glory'. The following chapter will seek to unravel this Burnetian knot and to trace the shift in aesthetic thought regarding mountains from the early modern to the sublime. It will reveal that central to early modern elite mountain aesthetics was a perception and appreciation of the very same mountain utility that the drovers, farmers, and ice-cream makers of this chapter so benefited from.

Chapter Three: Mountain Aesthetics

The previous chapter elucidated some of the different spatial practices - from pasturage to pilgrimage - that occurred amidst the mountain landscape. It also began to consider the nature of early modern experiences of mountains, from Thomas Coryate marvelling at being above the clouds, to tantalising archaeological suggestions of a representational equation between religious worship and the sight of mountains. This chapter digs deeper into the question of the aesthetic values attributed to mountains during the early modern period. Were mountains generally seen as beautiful, sublime, ugly, or simply bereft of aesthetic interest, and according to what terms were such judgements made?

Firstly, it is necessary to define precisely what might be meant by the phrase 'mountain aesthetics'. As understood here, the term 'aesthetics' encompasses both the analytical and the experiential. Aesthetics as a field of philosophical inquiry is concerned with why humans find certain things beautiful and compelling and other things ugly or disturbing.²⁷¹ In doing so, it interrogates both the nature of the object regarded and the experience of the 'felt' reaction to it. Like any discourse, aesthetic experience and aesthetic articulation form a feedback loop; reactions 'in the world' may be shaped by formal understandings of what beauty is, but those understandings are in turn informed by new experiences and the texts resulting from them. Finally, the concept of 'aesthetics' has an emphasis on the visual, particularly when considered in its most classic context of aesthetics in art. It also captures a reaction to external stimuli which can, particularly when considering the aesthetics of nature, incorporate senses that go beyond sight.²⁷²

In keeping with the above, this chapter will engage with the topic of 'mountain aesthetics' on three different levels. It will explore examples of reported aesthetic experience: what

²⁷¹ J. Colin McQuillan, *Early Modern Aesthetics* (2016), pp.4-9, has emphasised that aesthetics, as a distinct aspect of philosophy, is a relatively modern field, and as such the very concept encompassed in his title (and in this chapter) is an anachronistic and 'ironic' one. However, this does not negate the fact that individuals before the development of the modern philosophical field had reactions to the world around them which were framed by and articulated in response to definitions of beauty articulated in wider discourse, for all of which the term 'aesthetics' seems to be a valuable shorthand.

²⁷² For viewpoints regarding the formal definition of aesthetics (and distinctions between aesthetic experiences, attitudes, and values), see James Shelley, 'The Concept of the Aesthetic', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/aesthetic-concept/>> [04.08.2016]; Harold Osborne, 'Aesthetic Experience and Cultural Value', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 44:4 (1986), 331-337; and eds. Richard Shusterman and Adele Tomlin, *Aesthetic Experience* (2008), pp.1-3, *passim*.

did people say they saw or felt when they looked at or spent time upon mountains? It will analyse the nature of contemporaneous aesthetic theory and debate. What understandings underlay experiences of mountains in the early modern period, or were articulated in order to explain and express those experiences? Finally, it will consider the question of mountain aesthetics in historical perspective: how did the discourses and experiences of the seventeenth century give way to, presage, and continue into those of later centuries? The first two levels aim to engage directly with actors' categories; the latter traces a story of aesthetic change and continuity with the benefit of hindsight and the expanded aesthetic vocabulary of modernity.

This vocabulary is a complex one that has been implicated in a multitude of scholarly discourses. As Richard Bevis has put it, 'sublimity has become a modern academic hobby horse whose meaning varies with the rider'.²⁷³ Bevis' solution was to speak instead of 'the Great' in nature, where Nicolson utilised the 'aesthetics of the infinite'. The term 'the natural sublime' has also been used to distinguish between the aesthetic reaction as a response to landscape rather than art.²⁷⁴ It is important to emphasise that, whatever the terminology, the idea of greatness or sublimity is frequently distinguished from that of beauty.²⁷⁵ This has had a historiographical impact on narratives of premodern mountain aesthetics. For example Bevis has acknowledged that many of the respondents within the Burnet debate recognised beauty in the mountain landscape, but failed to appreciate 'the Great'.²⁷⁶ It might be admitted that some early modern commentators or travellers managed to see mountains as pretty, but not in the 'full radiance to which our [modern] eyes have become accustomed'.²⁷⁷ This chapter will therefore set out to consider whether, in addition to acknowledging the beauty of the mountain landscape, early modern sources ever revealed a sense of the greatness of mountains.

²⁷³ Bevis, *Egdon Heath*, pp.11-12.

²⁷⁴ This term is utilised in Duffy and Howell, *Cultures of the Sublime*, p.1.

²⁷⁵ This follows from the formulation of the sublime put forward by the Enlightenment philosopher Edmund Burke in 1757. C.f. Shaw, *The Sublime*, pp.4-5, 11-18, 27, 30; Malcolm Heath, 'Longinus and the Ancient Sublime' and Rodophe Gasché, '...And the Beautiful? Revisiting Edmund Burke's "Double Aesthetics"', both in ed. Timothy M. Costelloe, *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present* (2012). 11-23 and 24-26.

²⁷⁶ Bevis, *Egdon Heath*, p.35.

²⁷⁷ Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom*, quote from p.3. Nicolson considered the aesthetic content of some of the responses to Burnet (pp.259-270), but dismissed most as rooted in 'the pragmatic argument', or (in the case of Warren) genuinely concerned with beauty but inexpressive of greatness.

It will begin by considering self-conscious discourses of mountain aesthetics, on the basis that they give context and weight to remarks made in the way of primary aesthetic experiences. It will focus once again on the Burnet debate, establishing it not only as a natural philosophical discussion of the origin of mountains but just as importantly as an aesthetic controversy about their beauty. Whilst the aesthetic discourses of the debate have received attention before, this analysis will differ from the current historiographical consensus on two key points. Firstly, several historians, in explaining Thomas Burnet's apparent distaste for mountains, have stated that he was simply following the central aesthetic principle of his age: a classically-inherited preference for order, regularity, and symmetry. Furthermore, they have depicted this principle as the sole or overriding one available during the period, making it inevitable that an educated early modern individual would find mountains - so very disordered and asymmetrical - inherently disturbing and displeasing.²⁷⁸ This chapter will instead establish that contributors to the Burnet debate articulated a variety of different aesthetic principles which enabled them to justify an appreciation of mountains, and that these principles can in turn be seen at work in travellers' accounts. Moreover, it will question the extent to which the 'irregularity' of mountains was either recognised or perceived as a barrier to aesthetic appreciation.

Earlier commentary has also defined Burnet as very much 'of his time' in following this principle of regularity and in so doing finding mountains woefully lacking in beauty, whilst casting him as 'ahead of his time' in his apparently contradictory praise for them as among the 'greatest objects of Nature'. Such accounts in turn suggest that Burnet prefigured or even prompted the eighteenth-century development of what has variously been called the sublime, the aesthetics of the infinite, or the aesthetics of the great.²⁷⁹ This chapter will contend that a thorough analysis of the responses to Burnet's theory reveals

²⁷⁸ Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom*, p.209; Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind*, pp.23-24 ('Even though his age demands that he finds them hostile and repulsive, Burnet is unaccountably affected by the mountains'). C.f. Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, pp.256-258, and Shaw, *The Sublime*, p.30. Shaw draws heavily on Nicolson in tracing the early development of the natural sublime, pp.27-31. C.f. Andrew Lothian, 'Landscape and the philosophy of aesthetics: is landscape quality inherent in the landscape or in the eye of the beholder?', *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 44 (1999), pp.182-183; N.B. Lothian's equation of 'the influence of classicism' and 'the antipathy felt towards mountain landscapes'.

²⁷⁹ Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom*, pp.207-217; Bevis, *Egdon Heath*, p.34, casts Burnet's work as 'seminal', although he does acknowledge that 'mountain gloom' was 'less widespread' in the seventeenth century than has hitherto been assumed.

a contemporaneous consensus which suggests the exact reverse: that Burnet was quite ordinary in appreciating mountains, and quite extraordinary - and heavily criticised - for denigrating them. This section will also seek to fulfil one of the promises made in the introduction to this thesis by demonstrating precisely what was 'literarily inherited' from classics and Scripture, highlighting the texts chosen by respondents in the Burnet debate to bolster their arguments for the beauty and value of mountains.

The second section, focussing on reported aesthetic experience, will tell the story of one more traveller: Adam Olearius, a member of a diplomatic mission from the Duke of Holstein to Muscovy and Persia during the 1630s. His account has been chosen as a central exemplar not because he made any particularly extraordinary or unusual statements with regards to mountains, but rather because his journey was a lengthy one and he engaged with mountains in a range of different contexts. As such, his *Travels* are an ideal and representative thread upon which to pin further texts, which taken together can help to establish a set of commonly articulated forms of aesthetic mountain experiences. In tracing Olearius' journey this section will enquire how far his reported experience aligned with or contrasted with the discursive aesthetics explored in the previous section.

Finally, the chapter will conclude by considering the long-term story of mountain aesthetics. It will briefly elucidate both the aesthetic discourses and some reported aesthetic experiences that came after the early modern period. Drawing once again upon the historiographical issue raised in the first section, it will argue that whilst Burnet did help to create the circumstances in which it was possible for the sublime to be formulated, he did not do so by suggesting for the first time that mountains were great, but rather by casting doubt on their nature as the original creation of God. The shift between the two periods was not one of mountain gloom to glory but rather of the leap from an aesthetics that relied upon an understanding of the existence of God and His role as Creator to one that, whilst it could easily include the Divine, could also exist without it. The concluding section will argue that in spite of this, many of the early modern principles for mountain beauty continued in 'post-sublime' writings, whose connection to the earlier period has hitherto gone unrecognised.

Useful Beauty: Aesthetic Debates

Although travellers throughout the early modern period reported aesthetic experiences of mountains, it was not until Thomas Burnet's late-seventeenth century threat to the idea of the divine value of a mountainous Earth that an entire host of scholarly commentators found it necessary to articulate and defend the principles underlying a sense of aesthetic appreciation that had hitherto been taken for granted. There are therefore only a few late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century examples of explicit discussions of the aesthetics of mountains to consider before delving into the twists and turns of the Burnet debate. The first example is Conrad Gesner. Although his ascent of Mons Pilatus, recounted in chapter two, largely falls under the category of reported mountain experience, his earlier and more famous discussion of mountain climbing, 'On the Admiration of Mountains', featured an abstract argument for the value of mountain engagement in general, in which he gestured towards extant aesthetic ideals.

For how great the pleasure, how great, think you, are the joys of the spirit... in lifting one's head among the clouds. In some way or other the mind is overturned by their dizzying height and is caught up in contemplation of the Supreme Architect. Those... whose spirits are sluggish wonder at nothing, they remain idly at home, do not enter the theatre of the universe... [but] The followers of wisdom will proceed to contemplate with the eyes of the body and the spirit the sights of this earthly paradise: among which are by no means of least account the steep and lofty slopes of the mountains, their inaccessible precipices, the hugeness of their flanks stretching to heaven, their high crags, their dark forests.²⁸⁰

Gesner's words were, in some respects, extraordinary. Few others would expand with such eloquence upon the greatness of mountains in either the sixteenth or the seventeenth centuries. However, to acknowledge that Gesner was unique in his expression is not to say that he was alone in the concepts he articulated. Later writers would recognise and allude to the greatness of mountains; they would also, overwhelmingly, make the same equation that Gesner did between the sight of mountains and the thought of the God who had been designer, or 'Supreme Architect' of them.

This question of design reappeared in two English examples of aesthetic mountain

²⁸⁰ Gesner, *On the Admiration of Mountains*, pp.5-6.

discourse in the early seventeenth century. John Wilkins, in his *Discovery of a World in the Moone* (1638) made a glancing but significant reference to the appreciation of mountains.²⁸¹ The argument of Wilkins' book as a whole was that the Moon was capable of supporting life and had been subject to the same providential design as the sublunar world. His ninth proposition put forward a compelling piece of circular logic: there were mountains on the Earth, and as such the moon, were it habitable, ought to possess 'the same conveniences' as the Earth. Meanwhile, the observations of Galileo and Kepler gave visual evidence of mountains on the moon; therefore, the moon, having mountains, which were clearly designed to make the Earth better and more habitable, must itself also be designed for life. Issues of 'convenience' and habitation do not at first glance have a great deal to do with aesthetics, but it is worth quoting Wilkins' introduction to the subject:

Though there are some who thinke Mountaines to bee a deformity to the earth, as if they were either beate up by the flood, or else cast up like so many heaps of rubbish left at the creation, yet if well considered, they will bee found as much to conduce to the beauty and convenience of the universe as any of the other parts.²⁸²

Here, Wilkins' alluded to what was clearly one extant aesthetic vision of mountains, though it is worth noting that he alluded to it mainly as a convenient straw-man against which to pose his own argument.²⁸³ He cited Pliny in stating that mountains served 'many excellent uses', such as taming the violence of rivers, and safeguarding both men and beasts, a point which he further elucidated with reference to the psalmist's claim that '*The highest hills are a refuge for the wild goates, and the rocks for conies*'.²⁸⁴ He also pointed to the barren yet 'unconquered' nature of kingdoms such as Wales and Scotland, which were 'fortified with Mountains'.²⁸⁵ Wilkins promised to write of 'beauty', and spoke of use: an equation that would continue throughout the century. Likewise, the contrast he drew between the apparent deformity and irregularity of mountains and their beauty and convenience would also be returned to again and again, with the vast majority of commentators expressing similar sentiments in defence of the aesthetics of the uplands. As far as the lunar scholar was concerned, mountains were part of Providence's design

²⁸¹ For an overview of Wilkins' arguments, see Dick, *Plurality of Worlds*, pp.97-105.

²⁸² Wilkins, *A World in the Moone*, pp.117-118.

²⁸³ C.f. f.n.95 for the potential source of Wilkins' comment.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.118, referencing Psalm 104:18.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.119.

for the world, and as such served quite well for his argument that the mountainous Moon must also have been designed to support life.

Fifteen years later, the Cambridge Platonist Henry More would make mountains a buttress, and design a central pillar, of his *Antidote Against Atheisme* (1653). More set out to prove the existence of God, and laid out his argument from design with a mountainous image:

Suppose two men got to the top of mount *Athos*, and there viewing a stone in the form of an *Altar* with *ashes* on it, and the *footsteps of men* on those ashes, or some *words* if you will, as *Optimo Maximo*... and one of them should cry out, Assuredly here have been some men here that have done this...²⁸⁶

The second climber - More's atheist - is then depicted as going to absurd lengths to deny the truth of this obvious conclusion. The analogy with the earth is clear: if signs of deliberate design could be traced in nature, then it was obvious that God must have been their originator. In his third chapter, More duly 'course[d] over the *Vallies* and *Mountains*... and let the *Atheist* tell... which of all these places are silent and say nothing of a *God*'.²⁸⁷ To 'begin at the Top first', he considered 'those rudely scattered *Mountains*, that seeme but so many Wens and unnaturall Protuberancies upon the face of the Earth'. His response to this strand of negative aesthetic discourse was the same as Wilkins': 'if you consider but of what consequence they are, thus reconciled you may deeme them ornaments as well as usefull'. Vitaly, More argued, mountains serve as 'Natures *Stillatories*' for water, thus sustaining all life on earth.²⁸⁸

Although Wilkins and More both referred to the supposed irregularity of mountains only as the jumping point for their own, far more positive, arguments, Thomas Burnet grasped the concept with both hands. Indeed, he claimed that the sight of mountains inspired his *Theory*, stating that when it was his 'fortune' to cross the Alps and Apennines, he was so struck by 'the sight of those wild, vast, indigested heaps of Stones and Earth' that he could not be at ease until he 'could give... some tolerable account of how that confusion came

²⁸⁶ More, *An Antidote Against Atheisme*, p.3.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.53.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.52-53.

[to be] in Nature'.²⁸⁹ Burnet acknowledged that his was an unusual view, noting that if someone were to create a globe that was a 'true model of our Earth', depicting both the hollow of the sea and the irregularities of mountains, then 'we should see... what a rude Lump our World is which we are so apt to dote upon'.²⁹⁰ Of mountains, he elaborated that they

are plac'd in no order one with another, that can either respect use or beauty; And if you consider them singly, they do not consist of any proportion of parts that is referable to any design, or hath the least footsteps of Art or Counsel. There is nothing in Nature more shapeless and ill-figur'd than an old Rock or a Mountain, and all that variety that is among them is but the various modes of irregularity...²⁹¹

It was these mountains - which, for Burnet, spoke not at all of the guiding hand of providence - which led him to assert confidently that the current Earth was nothing but a ruine, or 'a World lying in its rubbish'.²⁹² Burnet's aesthetic experience of mountains was of an overwhelming sense of confusion and irregularity, and he transformed this experience into a natural philosophical and aesthetic discourse which cast them as the remnants of the Deluge, an everlasting reminder of mankind's sinfulness and God's ensuing destruction of the original, paradisaical world.

However, Burnet was not unmoved by the sight of mountains. Indeed, his *Theory* features an encomium upon them that echoed and approached the rhetorical heights of Conrad Gesner's earlier words of praise:

The greatest objects of Nature are, methinks, the most pleasing to behold; and next to the great Concave of the Heavens, and those boundless Regions where the Stars inhabit, there is nothing that I look upon with more pleasure than the wide Sea and the Mountains of the Earth. Here is something august and stately in the Air of these things that inspires the mind with great thoughts and passions; We do naturally upon such occasions think of God and his greatness, and whatsoever hath but the shadow and appearance of INFINITE, as all things have that are too big for our comprehension, they fill and over-bear the mind with their Excess, and cast it into

²⁸⁹ Burnet, *Theory*, vol.1, p.140.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.150-151.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.145-146.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, pp.110-111.

a pleasing kind of stupor and admiration.²⁹³

It is this passage that has earned for Burnet his laurels as an early precursor of the eighteenth-century formulation of the sublime. Indeed, the contradiction he presented - between a sense of distaste and disgust on the one hand, warring with involuntary and overwhelming admiration on the other, does capture the 'delightful Horrour' reported by later mountain enthusiasts.²⁹⁴ Crucially, Burnet did not throw himself into his sublime aesthetic experience; rather, he drew back from it, and was prompted instead to consider the unholy origins of such incredible objects. The answer he provided placed much more weight on what he depicted as the deficient aesthetic qualities of mountains than it did on any sense of overawing greatness.

Herbert Croft, the elderly bishop of Hereford, was Burnet's first published respondent, but he was by no means the last to recognise the inherent contradiction in Burnet's mountain aesthetics. His paraphrases of the *Theory* dripped with sarcasm.²⁹⁵ Croft rejected Burnet's basic principle that irregularity was the same as ugliness, pointing out that the human body would likewise be deemed 'misshapen' and 'deformed'. Croft asserted that, in fact, 'we are mightily taken and in love with our form', and that though individual parts might 'seem thus uneven and disproportioned, we greatly commend the beauty of them altogether, and much admire the wonderful structure and usefulness of every part'. So, Croft argued, should 'our Philosopher' consider the Earth, and mountains in particular. These mountains 'represent unto us the infinite Power and Majesty of God', and Croft was quick to quote Burnet's words on that exact point back at him. Moreover, he insisted upon the universal nature of Burnet's more positive vision:

Surely he much forgot his former thoughts of the rude Earth, when he uttered these words: for what can be more agreeable with the goodness and greatness of God, than to set forth this lower Earth in such a form, as may lift up our minds to contemplate that Divine Omnipotent Power, which wrought these mighty works, such as strike our minds with a pleasing astonishment? And surely all men who behold these things have the same delightful contemplation, as he [Burnet] acknowledges to have felt, when he beheld them; and yet we never looked upon

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp.139-140.

²⁹⁴ C.f. John Dennis, Chapter Two, p.88.

²⁹⁵ E.g. Croft, *Some Animadversions*, pp.136-137.

them as broken ruined fractions of a former Structure, which we poor Souls never dream'd of, till his Theory gave us notice of them.²⁹⁶

Croft went on to 'turn our Eyes from the Hills down the pleasant Valleys below', to depict the fine prospect of a lush and variegated landscape that could be gained from the top or the side of a mountain. He mourned that mankind would be 'deprived' of such sights in Burnet's proposed antediluvian earth, 'where we find all to be of one uniform shape, without any variety to raise up our minds to the contemplation of God's Greatness and Goodness'. Whatever Burnet said, the bishop was quite clear in his own mind: were he forced to dwell in Burnet's smooth, spherical Earth, his only wish would be to be transported back to 'this misshapen irregular World', with its mountains, seas, and rocks.²⁹⁷

Throughout his *Theory*, Burnet had made repeated reference to a passage from the Book of Job, which asked the reader of the Earth, 'Who hath laid the measures thereof... or who hath stretched the line upon it?'²⁹⁸ With the answer being, of course, 'God', Burnet's argument was that a perfectly spherical Earth far better fitted this image than the current, irregularly-shaped Earth.²⁹⁹ Erasmus Warren, a Suffolk rector writing in 1690, picked up on this claim in particular when making his own argument for the beauty of mountains. He disagreed that the concept of the measure and line had to equate with a perfectly smooth surface, arguing that instead it merely suggested that 'the Earth was made with fitting accuracy; of necessary and convenience, of regular and comely dimensions and proportions'. As far as he was concerned, the current Earth fulfilled these terms just as well, if not better, than Burnet's imagined sphere. If it lacked 'that smoothness and entireness, which is pretended to have been in the first Earth', then it offered, more importantly, 'the raised work, of the Hills; the Embossings, of Mountains; the Enamellings, of lesser Seas; the Open-work, of vast Oceans; and the Fret-work, of Rocks'. It was, in essence, a far finer and more embellished work of creation.³⁰⁰

Beyond such 'endless particulars', the current Earth outdid *that imaginary one*, in Two

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.141-142.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.142-143.

²⁹⁸ Job 38:5, KJV.

²⁹⁹ Burnet, *Theory*, vol.1, p.88.

³⁰⁰ Warren, *Geologia*, p.143.

general and chief things, *Comeliness*, and *Usefulness*'. In considering the question of comeliness, Warren proposed that beauty was a relative term; that, for example, what made a beautiful dog was not the same as what made a beautiful horse or man. Thus, the Earth's 'natural pulchritude is made up of such things as Art would call rudenesses; and consists in assymetries and wild variety'.³⁰¹ Warren was therefore unsurprised that Burnet, in spite of disparaging mountains, also found himself 'transported into a pleasing rapture or pang of Admiration' at the sight of them. Indeed, Warren agreed that 'to thinking Men', such features would 'appear to be as the Tornings, and Carvings, and ornamental Sculptures, that make up the Lineaments and Features of Nature, not to say her Braveries', revealing to 'a quick and piercing Eye' the 'marvellous and adoreable Skill' of her Maker.³⁰² An Earth bereft of its 'deformities' of hills, mountains, seas and rocks would be, according to Warren's aesthetic principles, a far less beautiful one.

Warren completed his critique of Burnet's 'line and measure' with an enumeration of the ways in which 'Mountains also... are most eminently serviceable', for example in 'Dividing Kingdoms; in Yielding Minerals; and in breeding and harbouring innumerable wild Creatures'. Far from depicting them as barren, Warren suggested that the greater surface area of mountains, compared to a flat plain, increased the amount of fertile or usable ground available to those who dwelt near them.³⁰³ Moreover, the mountains provided water that ran down to the valley; an absence that, in Burnet's supposed smooth Earth, would leave its inhabitants taking a great deal of trouble 'in a manual wating of Fields'. Warren supported these points with reference to Scriptural depictions of Palestine as a 'land of hills and valleys', which 'drank water of the rain of heaven'.³⁰⁴ Warren concluded that an Earth such as the current one, 'most *comely* and decent in it self, and also most *Useful* and convenient for Men' must surely 'be said, to be *laid in measures* and to have had *the line stretched upon it*'.³⁰⁵ In assessing the value of mountains to the earth Warren, just like Wilkins and More, spoke of use and beauty in the same breath.

One of the more eccentric contributions to the Burnet debate came in 1691 from the pen

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.144.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, pp.145-147, quoting Psalms 104:24, KJV.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.148.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.148-149, quoting Deuteronomy 11:10-11.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.149.

of Matthew Mackaile, an Aberdonian surgeon. His *Terræ Prodrumus Theoricus* was a slim volume intended as a summary of and precursor to a more extensive work (never published), and as such alluded to complex arguments in a telegramatic and breathless style. Mackaile set out his stall early on, with his choice of Psalms 3:2 as one of four Bible verses quoted on the title page: ‘The Works of the LORD are great; sought out of all them that have pleasure therein’ (or, to give a more modern translation, ‘studied by all who delight in them’).³⁰⁶ That he saw mountains as one of the ‘Works of the LORD’ is made explicit in the dedicatory poem, written by a friend, John Barclay, in response to the *Prodrumus*, which asserted, creed-like, the certainty:

That *Mountains* were brought forth by the *Flood*.
I firmly do believe, that Holy Writ,
Which sayes, the *Mountaines* covered were by It.
These usefull Swellings doe appear to Me,
No Gastly, Monstrous, Ugly Things to be:
And it is to the MAKERS Skill no Stain,
To say, the *Earth* was ne’re on spacious Plain.³⁰⁷

The dichotomy of the fourth and fifth lines quoted above makes it apparent that the question of usefulness was tied up in that of beauty. Later in his text, Mackaile made a firm if somewhat alarming assertion for the use and value of mountains, musing that Burnet ‘may be also displeased, at the Mountain-like *Scrotum* of a healthfull Man (which hath many Wirncles [*sic*] upon it)... by which the Race of *Adam*, hath been... propogated upon the Earth’.³⁰⁸ Just as Croft had suggested, visual irregularity did not necessarily mean that God had not deliberately designed something (be it testicular or topographical) for the benefit and approbation of humankind.

Mackaile, more than any other respondent to Burnet, also delved into Scripture for insight on the value of mountains. Michel Foucault has argued that the Renaissance episteme was characterised by a conceptual framework of similitude, resemblance, analogy, and adjacency; for an object to be compared to or described as being proximate to another

³⁰⁶ Mackaile, *Prodrumus*, title page. Psalm 3:2, KJV and NASB.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, sig. ¶¶2r-v.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.22.

was a significant reflection on the innate nature of both.³⁰⁹ In this respect Mackaile, at the close of the seventeenth century, was undoubtedly a Renaissance man. Some of his points are straightforward, such as his argument that Biblical references to 'The everlasting Mountains, and perpetuall Hills' would suggest that mountains had always existed upon the Earth.³¹⁰ He likewise noted that Scripture 'attributed *Gloriousness*' to mountains, as in Daniel 11:45, 'In the glorious holy Mountain'.³¹¹

Elsewhere, his train of thought relied upon the logic of proximity and adjacency, pointing out, by way of an important intellectual objection, that according Burnet's theory the most beautiful version of the Earth would be the '*Theatre*' for the Devil to perform his 'greatest of Wonders' (i.e. prompting the Fall of humanity), only for 'a most deformed *Ruine* (as Mr. B calleth it)' to provide the backdrop to God's great act of salvation.³¹² He also thought it unlikely that God would have chosen mountains and hills as the setting for 'the most considerable Acts of his Providence', such as the near-sacrifice of Isaac, the passing down of the Ten Commandments, and the Crucifixion of Christ, if they truly were 'the most ruinous' parts of a broken Earth.³¹³ That such undoubtedly good acts had occurred upon mountains meant that mountains themselves were also good. Likewise the Bible would not see God compared to a rock, his church to a mountain, paradise to a hill, or termed mountains his pasture, if such irregularities were not original and good creations.³¹⁴

Echoing Warren, Mackaile also drew on the Song of Solomon, speaking not of mountains but of jewels, to support his argument that 'A smooth piece of any *Metallick work*, doth not so much commend the skill of the Artificers, as one which hath Eminencies upon it' - a statement which he in turn applied to the Earth and its mountains.³¹⁵ These were not meaningless or trivial allusions for Mackaile. If the Bible allowed mountains to receive the adjective 'glorious', or told of great events happening on their summits, then they

³⁰⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (2002, first published 1966), pp.20-50.

³¹⁰ Mackaile, *Prodromus*, p.24.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.26. Also quoting Psalm 76:4.

³¹² *Ibid.*, p.15 and p.23.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, p.15.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.15 and p.23, quoting Isaiah 2:2, Psalm 5:10, Psalm 89:26, Psalm 15:1 and Psalm 24:3.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.15, quoting Song of Solomon, 1.10-11.

themselves were incontrovertibly great and glorious.

If Mackaile's mountain-like scrotum seems an unlikely analogy (he elsewhere asserted that the Peak of Tenerife, as the highest mountain of the world, should be thought of as the '*Penis Terræ*') then John Beaumont, two years later, would draw on a rather more obvious anatomical analogy, in which the interdependence of beauty and utility was made crystal clear;

We find the Ancients call'd the Earth... our Mother Earth; for as *Plato* says, the Earth does not imitate a Woman, but a Woman the Earth: and they compar'd the Mountains on the Earth, to the breasts of a Woman: and indeed if the thing be duly consider'd, we shall find that the Mountains are no less ornamental, and of necessary use to the Earth, for affording continual streams of fresh Water to suckle her Productions; than the protuberant Breasts of a Woman are, both for beautifying her Person, and yielding sweet streams of Milk for the nourishment of her Children.³¹⁶

As can be seen above, Beaumont turned to classical rather than Scriptural authorities for aesthetic guidance, and elsewhere asserted that the Ancients rarely spoke of Paradise 'without naming Mountains'. Indeed, Beaumont agreed, both with the classics and with Burnet's 'fair Encomium' on the greatness of mountains. Unlike Croft, he did not claim to speak for 'all Mankind', but believed that 'a great part will agree with me, that a level Country can never be so pleasant, as a Country diversified... with Mountains, Valleys, Plains, Woods'.

The idea of diversification was Beaumont's central aesthetic principle for finding mountains beautiful, drawing on earlier commentators for the authority to assert that 'the whole Ornament of Nature, is from the admirable variety of things found in it', and that natural variety, 'serving for Ornament, Use and Delight, might... serve to set forth the Wisdom, Power, and Goodness of the Creator'.³¹⁷ Mountains, he insisted, helped to provide this all-important natural variety and diversity. In their height they induced

³¹⁶ Beaumont, *Considerations*, pp.56-57.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.57, citing Johannes Reuchlin, *De verbo mirifico* (Basel, [ca.1494]), sigs.a2v-cv, and George Hakewill, *An Apologie or Declaration of the Power and Providence of God in the Government of the World*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1635), sep. pag. 68-71. The 3rd edition was the first to feature Hakewill's arguments regarding the value of mountains.

variations of temperature and habitat that one would have to cross many degrees of latitude to gain at the level of a plain. Moreover, for all that mountainous soil was 'barren' compared to that of the valleys, it could be found to support flora and fauna that would wilt in richer grounds (here Beaumont invoked Virgil's *Georgics*). As for the human inhabitants of mountains, they were found to be 'stronger of Limb, healthier of Body, quicker of Sense, longer of Life, stouter of Courage, and of Wit sharper than the Inhabitants of the Valley'.³¹⁸ Mountains might be harsh, cold, and rocky, but they produced and supported life which was correspondingly hardy and healthy. There was no leap to be made between discussions of beauty to questions of the utility of the physical environment; for Beaumont, the one naturally led to and encompassed the other. The naturalist and botanist John Ray - holding up the 'Isle of Ely' as a shuddering example of a 'perfectly level Countrey' - likewise asserted that a 'variety of Hills, and Valleys, and Inequalities... [is not] only more pleasant to behold, but more commodious for habitation' than a flat plain, going on to emphasise the variety of animals and rare plants to be found only on mountainsides.³¹⁹ The beauty of mountains was not merely a matter of the view one could gain of or from them, but of the mental appreciation of a diverse and valuable habitat. The environmental was the aesthetic.

For the mathematician John Keill the vital importance of mountains went beyond providing a 'refuge for wild Goats', to (drawing on the work of Edmond Halley on the circulation of waters) enabling the continued existence of mankind through the provision of rivers.³²⁰ Keill was challenged by an anonymous 'defender' of Burnet, who accused him of limiting God's power by implying that He could not create a world that was habitable in spite of lacking mountains, and imagining the planet Jupiter (which the anonymous author thought might well be inhabited) as such a smooth-featured paradise.³²¹ The same defender was also the only respondent who shared Burnet's apparent adoration of regularity, musing that mountains *could* have been 'design'd for beauty' by being 'rang'd upon the Earth in rank and file, or in a quincuncial order'.³²² Keill did not deign to justify

³¹⁸ Beaumont, *Considerations*, pp.58-59. C.f. John Chardin, pp.70-71.

³¹⁹ John Ray, *Miscellaneous Discourses*, pp.165-166. The *Discourses* are not framed as a direct response to Burnet's *Theory*, but they do engage with many of the same issues, and Ray clearly alludes to Burnet's aesthetic argument regarding mountains.

³²⁰ Keill, *Examination of Dr. Burnet's Theory*, p.55. C.f. Psalms 105:19. C.f. Chapter One, pp.

³²¹ Anonymous, *Reflections*, p.13.

³²² Anonymous, *Reflections*, pp.14-15.

the latter comment with a response, but he did curtly respond that whilst God could easily 'make Men subsist without Mountains, Rivers, Water', He had not chosen to do so in his design of the human beings who lived upon the Earth. Thus, whilst a Jovian may well suit a mountain-less planet, Keill firmly believed that if his interlocutor were to find themselves in 'the most pleasant country house in all *Jupiter*', they would soon 'desire to change and come down again to his old Rocky Mountainous Planet the Earth'.³²³ The earth, with its mountains, was made for man, and so too was man made for the mountainous earth.

Is this necessarily about aesthetics? It is worth setting Keill's commentary on mountains within the context of his more general thoughts on nature and philosophy. Early in his *Examination*, he bemoaned the fact that many men 'in this age' failed to consider as their first and most important inquiry 'the great end for which the God of Nature made any thing'. All 'wise and considering men', on the other hand, should make it their aim to consider what uses God intended different parts of nature for, in order to better appreciate 'his care and providence over the world'.³²⁴ These reflections can be more fully understood in the light of one final challenge to Burnet's aesthetics of regularity, made by Richard Bentley, the philologist and theologian, in the course of a series of 1692 sermons on 'A Confutation of Atheism'. Much like Henry More almost half a century earlier, Bentley turned to the form of nature to prove the existence of God, and in so doing met Burnet's *Theory* head-on.³²⁵ He asked those who thought the current form of the Earth to be a mere ruin to consider:

that this objected deformity is in our imaginations only, and not really in things themselves. There is no universal reason... that a figure by us called regular, which hath equal sides and angles, is absolutely more beautiful than any irregular one. All pulchritude is relative; and all bodies are truly and physically beautiful under all possible shapes and proportions, that are good in their kind, that are fit for their proper uses and ends of their natures.³²⁶

³²³ Keill, *Examination of the Reflections*, pp.25-26 and p.30.

³²⁴ Keill, *Examination of Dr. Burnet's Theory*, pp.52-53.

³²⁵ Bentley does not name Burnet at any point in his sermon, but it is quite clear from his paraphrasing of 'some men' who would imagine the horrendous aspect of the sea emptied of water, and who would propose a perfectly smooth earth, that he is referring to Burnet. Bentley, *Sermons*, p.193. C.f. Burnet, *Theory*, vol.1, p.128.

³²⁶ Bentley, *Sermons*, p.196.

Such an analysis is quite alien to the modern aesthetic mindset, but it was a coherent and classically-inherited principle in the early modern period. Today, the categories of utility and beauty are entirely separate; indeed, for something to be described as ‘utilitarian’ is generally an apology for its lack of visual appeal. According to the principle of fitness for purpose, in contrast, a shield made of gold is far less beautiful than a steel dustbin lid, for the former is useless in fulfilling its ostensible end; use *is* beauty.³²⁷ Responses to Burnet that spoke of ‘beauty and conveniency’ in the same breath, and then focused mostly on the usefulness of mountains in supporting goats and rivers, were not scraping the aesthetic barrel to defend something that they secretly disliked: they were, in fact, proving its beauty. Why this mattered is elucidated by Keill’s discussion of God’s intended ends. The thought of mountains’ utility was more than a mere intellectual pleasure at something fulfilling its purpose: it pointed, just as their overwhelming size did, to the God who made them. This underlay all expressions of the aesthetic superiority of mountains articulated until, and in response to, the *Theory* of Thomas Burnet.

It was therefore a weighty point indeed when Bentley explained, in a rapidly escalating argument, that mountains were useful in condensing vapours which produce rains and rivers, ‘giving the very plains and valleys themselves the fertility they boast of’, that they provided plants that could otherwise not be grown, and that they are the source of ‘all our metals’, without which mankind would be bereft of tools, and therefore of civilisation, and therefore of writing, and therefore of the Holy Writ.³²⁸ Bentley was scathing of the idea that anyone ‘would part with these solid and substantial blessings for the little fantastical pleasantness of a smooth uniform convexity and rotundity of a globe’.³²⁹ Among Herbert Croft’s sarcastic objections to Burnet’s smooth globe was that ‘There is not a Mountain in all his World to carry you (as the Devil did our Saviour) from whence you might have a large prospect of this delicious Land’, and Bentley took this one step

³²⁷ The philosopher and aesthetician Władysław Tatarkiewicz termed this ‘the aptness theory of beauty’. He argued that whilst the ‘Great Theory’ of beauty in the early modern period was indeed that of beauty in proportion, regularity, and symmetry, it was not the sole principle available. Tatarkiewicz, *A History of Six Ideas: An Essay in Aesthetics* (1980), pp.125-133 and pp.171-174. More recently, Glenn Parsons and Allen Carlson have termed this idea ‘functional beauty’ and traced its development through time, including its decline over the eighteenth century. Parsons and Carlson, *Functional Beauty* (2008), pp.2-24, 124-130.

³²⁸ Bentley, *Sermons*, p.197.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.197-198.

further: even if Burnet's antediluvian man could be lifted into the air by magic, he would perceive not a globe but a flat disc, just as the Moon appears from Earth, and so would be incapable of appreciating the spherical perfection of the Mundane Egg.³³⁰ Moreover, Bentley was doubtful that there were 'such ravishing charms in a dull, unvaried flat', to compensate for the removal of '*the chief things of the ancient mountains, and for the precious things of the lasting hills*' (Deuteronomy 33:15).³³¹ Bentley finally compared these Scriptural allusions with the insights of the ancients, who cast 'the Tempe of Thessaly, so celebrated...for their unparalleled pleasantness', as a valley 'divided with a river and terminated with hills', and who could not 'imagine even Paradise to be a place of pleasure, nor heaven itself to be heaven' without the diversity of 'depressed valleys and swelling ascents'.³³² These are merely supporting footnotes to Bentley's central argument – of the beauty of mountains in their fulfilment of their intended use and end – but it is apparent that the 'literary heritage' that he drew upon in appreciating mountains had little to do with a supposed Christian disdain for high places, or a classical terror towards rocky terrain.³³³

It is therefore clear that natural philosophers during the seventeenth century had access to, and took advantage of, multiple aesthetic principles - beyond and even overriding that of regularity - which allowed, justified, and supported an appreciation of mountains. These included a sense of mountains as beautiful in representing ornamentation to the Earth (Warren's 'fret-work'), in providing visual and environmental diversification and variety, and - most importantly and surprisingly – in their utility to the wider world and to the human beings, animals, and plants designed to live upon that world. Many of these principles were explicitly supported by reference to older texts and influences, and Burnet's respondents drew upon classical and Scriptural allusions that gave an overwhelmingly positive sense of mountain aesthetics. It is also clear that Burnet was not remotely unique in favouring mountains; indeed, his description of being awed by them was one of the only points his respondents were able to agree with him upon.

In an era long before the beginnings of modern 'environmentalism', these writings reveal

³³⁰ Croft, *Animadversions*, pp.135-136; Bentley, *Sermons*, p.198.

³³¹ Bentley, *Sermons*, p.198.

³³² *Ibid.*, p.199.

³³³ C.f. Introduction, p.12.

an acute awareness of mountains as unique habitats and as landforms which interacted in vital ways with the wider environment. Mountains provided water which gave fruitfulness to the valleys, but without the valleys the mountains themselves would no longer possess the virtue of variety or diversification. Moreover, environmental encomia presented the mountains not only as optimal habitats for specific types of flora and fauna, but *for* which certain plants, animals, and people had been intentionally designed: the relationship was symbiotic and deliberate. This question of God's design was central, underpinning all of the various aesthetic principles and further communicated in the choice of some of the Scriptural allusions utilised. Mountains were deemed to be beautiful at the level of aesthetic discourse because they were of use to the world and created variety within it, but this use and variety was given real spiritual and emotional weight by an unquestioned - until Burnet - belief that they were created by God for the sake of humanity.

Pleasant Prospects: Aesthetic Experience

Adam Olearius (1599-1671), mathematician, geographer, and librarian, undertook a series of far-flung journeys between 1633 and 1639. Secretary to a pair of German ambassadors, he journeyed to and through Muscovy (Russia) and Persia.³³⁴ Although their target destinations were generally urban centres of power, the embassy covered vast distances in less than luxurious circumstances, travelling generally on sea and river by boat or over land by horseback and sometimes on foot. Between cities and towns the diplomats often found themselves exposed to the weather, travelling through difficult terrain and in sight of great tracts of natural landscape, all of which Olearius noted with as much attention as he did the clothing and customs of the foreign peoples he encountered. His *Travels* were first published in German in 1647, and first translated into English in 1662.³³⁵ Variations in orthography and the vicissitudes of translation have resulted in place- and mountain-names that are sometimes irreconcilable with modern

³³⁴ Samuel H. Baron, ed. and trans., *The Travels of Olearius in Seventeenth-Century Russia* (1967), pp.11-24, and Elio Brancaforte, *Visions of Persia: Mapping the Travels of Adam Olearius* (2003), pp.8-11.

³³⁵ This translation was republished in 1669, suggesting an enthusiastic readership. In the eighteenth century Thomas Gray described Olearius as one of 'the best of our modern travellers'. In essays of history and geography he drew heavily on the writings of other travellers cited in this thesis, namely John Chardin, Jean de Thévenot, Thomas Herbert, and Pietro della Valle. Mathias, ed., *The Works of Thomas Gray*, vol.ii, pp.187-192 and pp.253-255.

locations. Nevertheless, it matters less which mountains Olearius took note of in his account, and more that he did so, over and over again.

The earliest mountain encounter recorded in Olearius' *Travels* introduced several of his different modes of describing mountains. On 25 August 1636, he recorded seeing 'a Mountain out of which the *Muscovites* get Salt' on one side of the River Ussa (a tributary of the Volga). Across the river he saw further mountains, including 'the Mountain *Diwisagora*', or 'the Maids Mountain':

It is very high and steepy towards the River, whence it may be seen divided into several Hills, pleasant to the eye by reason of the diversity of the colours, some being red, some blew, some yellow, &c. and representing, at a great distance, the ruins of some great and magnificent structure. Upon every Hill or Bank is a row of Pine-Trees, so regularly planted, that a man might doubt whether it were not Artificial, were it not that the Mountain is inaccessible of all sides.³³⁶

He recorded similar reflections upon sights seen a few days later, firstly at the 'Mountain of *Achmats Kigori*', which 'affords a very pleasant Prospect, in as much as the top of it is clad with a perfectly-excellent verdure, the ascent chequer'd with a soil or mold of several different colours'. The skirt of this mountain was 'a very great bank, so even, that it seems to have been done by hand', and another, 'called *Millobe*', or 'Chalk', possessed a 'top as even as if it had been done by a Level'. Not much further on, Olearius and his companions viewed a peak 'on which we bestow'd the name of the Mountain of Pillars', out of which the rain had washed away strips of earth, leaving what 'look'd, at a distance, like so many Pillas [*sic*], out of order, of several colours, Blew, Red, Yellow, and Green'.³³⁷ In these examples Olearius takes note of both the productivity and fecundity of the mountain landscape - filled with salt and covered with verdure - but above all appreciates the visual variety offered by a multitude of colours and textures.

Although Olearius thought that *Diwisagora* represented 'the ruins of some great and magnificent structure', he did so with admiration, and elsewhere emphasised the apparent *regularity* of the mountain landscape, with wild trees that seemed to have been

³³⁶ Olearius, *Voyages and Travels*, p.159.

³³⁷ Olearius, *Voyages and Travels*, pp.162-163.

planted in order and slopes and plateaus apparently drawn with the very measure and line that Burnet thought could never refer to a mountainous earth.³³⁸ He was not alone in such perceptions; William Lithgow, regarding Mount Quarantine (upon which he had enjoyed such supposedly life-threatening adventures), observed that it 'groweth from the bottome still smaller and smaller... not vnlike to the proportion of a Pyramede'.³³⁹ Curiously, when he saw the actual pyramids at Cairo, Lithgow wondered 'to behold such great masses, and (as it were) erected mountaines all of fine marble'.³⁴⁰ This same sense of slippage - between whether nature imitated art or the other way around - can be found in the *Northern Memoirs* of Richard Franck, a euphistic dialogue describing a journey through Scotland made in the 1650s. Franck, although mostly interested in fishing, wrote poetically of the hills, and at Dumbarton one of his interlocutors asked:

What lofty domineering Towers are those that storm the Air... that shade the Valley with their prodigious Growth, even to amazement? because to display such adequate and exact Proportion, with such equality in their Montanous Pyramides, as if nature had stretch'd them into Parallel Lines.... [must] amuze the most curious and critical Observer.

The second dialogist answered that 'These are those natural, and not artificial Pyramides, that have stood... since the beginnings of Time', created by nature 'to invalidate Art, and all its Admirers, since so equally to shape a Mountain, and to form it into so great and such exact Proportions'.³⁴¹ It seems that, 'in the field', observers of mountains gave even less credence to Burnet's sense of mountain irregularity than his respondents did. Mountains were beautiful creations to which human artifice could only aspire.

Olearius and other travellers went even further than merely admiring the rich colours and smooth lines of mountain landscapes. From an island in the Caspian Sea, looking towards the continent, the diplomats viewed 'such high Mountains, that we took them at

³³⁸ The early modern fascination with ruins has long been acknowledged; Henry VS Odgen and Margaret S Odgen, *English Taste in Landscape in the Seventeenth Century* (1955), pp.43-44 and pp.138-139; Robert Ginsberg, *The Aesthetics of Ruins* (2004), highlights the value of ruins as aesthetic objects in their own right, *passim*; ed. Brian Dillon, *Ruins* (2011), p.12, has noted the Renaissance origins of this phenomena.

³³⁹ Lithgow, *Painefull Peregrination*, sig. P4r-v.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, sig. S1v.

³⁴¹ Richard Franck, *Northern Memoirs, Calculated for the Meridian of Scotland* (London, 1694), p.92.

first for Clouds'. This was 'the Mountain *Salatto*' also known as Mount Caucasus, which was 'famous in height, which indeed is extraordinary, in as much as it seems to extend it self to the Stars'.³⁴² Olearius noted the belief that it was from the top of this lofty range that Prometheus stole fire from the sun.³⁴³ The following year, 'Between *Pirmaras* and *Schamachie*', Olearius recorded seeing 'a Mountain of *Lapis Specularis*, which, when the Sun shone upon it, look'd like a heap of Diamonds'.³⁴⁴ Some years later Edward Browne, a Norwich physician and the son of the virtuoso and physician Sir Thomas Browne, was travelling through Hungary when he passed over 'the Mountain Clissura':

We were much surprised at the gallant appearance thereof, for the Rocks and Stones of this Mountain shine like Silver, and by the light of Sun and Moon, afforded a pleasant glittering show, as consisting of *Muscovia* glass...³⁴⁵

Whether perceived as impossibly high clouds or as glittering diamonds, mountains as distinct subjects could catch the eye and garner the admiration of travellers.

Olearius and his diplomatic comrades also did more than just look at mountains from afar, sometimes climbing them even when it was not demanded by the exigencies of their journey. On Christmas Day 1636, after their morning devotions, some of the travellers 'had the curiosity' to climb a peak named Mount Barmach, or 'finger', so called because the rocky pillar on the summit 'looks like a finger stretch'd out above the other adjacent Mountains'. Ill-informed, the group failed to take the path that they were later told would 'commodiously enough bring one to the top', and instead spent their Christmas running 'great hazard of our Lives in getting it up by dreadfull precipices'. Upon the mountain, Olearius observed that 'the Grasse... was all cover'd with a white frost as with Sugar candy', a remarkable contrast with conditions at the foot of the mountain, where the weather 'was fair and mild'. The group explored the remains of a fortress, near to which they discovered rock-cut steps which brought them to the top.³⁴⁶ At the summit, the

³⁴² Like Chardin, Olearius used the singular term to refer to an entire mountain range.

³⁴³ Olearius, *Voyages and Travels*, p.187.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.313.

³⁴⁵ Edward Browne, *A Brief Account of Some Travels in Hungaria, Austria, Servia [etc]* (London, 1673), p.44. In a combined and expanded edition of his different travels, Browne added that this mountain was surely not unlike 'that mentioned by *Olearius* in his *Travels into Persia*'; Edward Browne, *A Brief Account of Some Travels in Divers Parts of Europe* (London, 1685), p.30.

³⁴⁶ Olearius, *Voyages and Travels*, p.205.

group rested, sang *Te Deum*, a hymn of praise, and ‘renew’d among our selves the friendship, which we had before mutually promis’d each other by most unfeign’d protestations’ (perhaps a festive bottle assisted in this), and, having gathered figs from trees growing out of the surrounding rocks, made their way down ‘with lesse trouble and danger by the ordinary path’.³⁴⁷ This anecdote - complete with visual, spiritual, and social details - suggests a day of genuine enjoyment had upon the mountainside. The summit-side *Te Deum* is of particular significance; as Matthew Mackaile might point out, it would be very strange for Olearius and his fellows to praise God in a place which did not put them in mind of the Divine.

A modern mountaineer might notice one curious omission in Olearius’ account of the Christmas Day climb: at no point did he describe the view. The following April, lodging at a village called ‘*Shecmmurat*’, he related an ascent ‘up a very high Mountain... to take a view of the adjacent Country’. It proved to be a fool’s errand, for ‘the other nearer Mountains, which were higher than that we were upon, absolutely depriv’d us of the sight’. Other travellers were more successful, and more laudatory of what they found. Edward Browne, crossing the Apennines, ‘with the Clouds continually about us, either a little over us, under us, or passing through them’, still enjoyed an ‘admirable variety of prospect’. In his opinion:

to see a valley with Houses, and Towns in it, and then the clouds creeping over the next hill to cover the whole valley between them, and make it look like a lake, and the top of the clouds gently waving, and to describe the Suns, rising, and coming to shine upon the upper parts of them, and to beautifie, and gild them all, is beyond the expression of words.³⁴⁸

If further proof is needed that the desire for and appreciation of a good prospect was more than a trope of aesthetic discourse, then it can be found in the example of James Spittal of Leuchat (b.1663 or 1664), a young Scotsman who, in addition to his nominal estate of Leuchat, also possessed the estate of Blairlogie, near Stirling, which he did not often visit. In the late 1680s or early 1690s, he found himself at a gathering in Rome ‘when the conversation turned upon striking prospects from mountains or hills’. Each of the

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.206.

³⁴⁸ Browne, *Travels in Divers Parts of Europe*, pp.220-221.

interlocutors spoke proudly of mountains in their own countries, but then ‘an old Scottish priest said the most picturesque, if not the most extensive, prospect he knew was from Topmiat’, which lay within the boundaries of Spittal’s neglected estate.³⁴⁹ Whilst in company Spittal kept to himself the somewhat embarrassing fact that he owned the mountain, but had never enjoyed its fine prospect. However, ‘one of the first things he did on his return home was to go to the top of Topmiat’.³⁵⁰

Furthermore, the aesthetic experience of mountains went beyond the visual. Adam Olearius, crossing a mountain pass into ‘the Province of *Kilan*’, reported a path that was bounded on one side by a rock face that ‘reach’d up into the Clouds’, and on the other by a ‘dreadfull Abyss, wherein the River made its passage, with a noyse, which no less stunn’d the ear, than the Precipices dazzled the eye, and made the head turn’.³⁵¹ Like Coryat on the Mont Cenis pass, Olearius and his companions dismounted in response to this ‘most dangerous and most dreadfull way of any, I think, in the World’. At the top of the mountain, they stepped from one world to another:

this very Mountain, which was so steepy, teadious, and dreadfull on the one side, had so pleasant and delightfull a descent on the other, that it was no hard matter for us to forget the fright and trouble we had been in, in coming it up.

It was carpeted with a ‘resplendent verdure’, and lined with fruit trees that had dropped so many oranges and lemons on the ground that some of the diplomats, ‘who had never seen such an abundance of them, made it their sport to fling them at one another’s heads’.³⁵² The aural input, the physical danger and the silliness borne of relief were all elements of mountain experience in the early modern period, just as they are today.

³⁴⁹ Topmiat, now known as Dumyat, is 418m high and located at the western end of the Ochil Hills, north of Stirling.

³⁵⁰ Ramsay of Ochertyre, *Scotland and Scotsmen*, vol.2, p.291.

³⁵¹ Olearius, *Voyages and Travels*, p.387. The description of the noise of the river is reminiscent of Thomas Gray’s comments, over a century later, on crossing Mont Cenis and listening to the echoes of a rushing torrent below; Thomas Gray, letter of 13 October 1739 to Dorothy Gray, in Mathias, ed., *The Works of Thomas Gray*, vol.1, pp.185-186.

³⁵² Olearius, *Voyages and Travels*, p.387. Biddulph, *Trauels of Certaine Englishmen*, pp.104-105, reports a similar enjoyment in the flora of a mountain near Galilee said to be the location of Jesus’ feeding of the five thousand (John 6), although it is the flowers, rather than the travellers, who take the role of revellers: ‘This mountaine was not very steepie, but exceeding pleasant and fertile, for (being the springtime) it was beset with such varietie of flowers among the greene grasse, that they seemed to flire [*sic*] in our faces, and to laugh and sing (as the Psalmist speaketh) as we went. Psal.65.13.’ (Psalm 65.12-13, KJV: ‘...the little hills rejoyce on every side... the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing’).

Olearius' description, above, also acknowledged the fertile nature of the mountain slopes. A noble Italian traveller, Pietro della Valle, reported a similar excess of lush growth when crossing Mount Gat in India in 1624, which was 'so water'd with Rivulets and Fountains, and so cloth'd with Grass and Flowers, that, me-thought, I saw the most delightful place of the Appennine in Italy', a statement suggestive not just of his view of the Indian mountains but of the Italian ones too.³⁵³ Across the mountain and describing the province of Kilan itself, Olearius would follow Thomas Coryate in acknowledging the importance of mountains within the human landscape. Kilan, 'a kind of terrestrial Paradise', was 'encompass'd like a Theatre, with a high Mountain, out of which arise several Rivers, which refresh the plain Country, and make it very fruitful'.³⁵⁴ Travellers, as well as natural philosophers, clearly recognised and appreciated mountains as a key element in creating a fertile environment. In this instance, Olearius did find the valley beautiful, and certainly more enjoyable than the peak itself - but he knew that it could not exist without the mountain. To appreciate a 'plain' and to value a mountain were not mutually exclusive.

Thus, through Olearius, it is possible to discover aesthetic experiences that reflect many of the principles expounded in favour of mountains during and beyond the Burnet debate. Visual and environmental variety, height and greatness, prospect, and a sense of the role of mountains in provisioning and improving the valleys around them are all evident in his *Voyages and Travels*. Moreover, travellers were also struck not so much by the irregularity of the mountain landscape but by lines and lineaments that suggested the hand of design. Regardless of whether the discourses that were articulated in natural philosophical texts already underlay aesthetic experiences such as those of Olearius, or whether they were framed in order to more fully explain such reactions, one thing is clear: the early modern traveller by no means went to the mountains and found them merely ugly or frightful.

From Utility to Sublimity

To conclude, it is necessary to briefly sketch what came after the discourses and

³⁵³ Pietro della Valle, *The Travels of Sig. Pietro della Valle, a Boble Roman, into East-India and Arabia Deserta* (London, 1665), p.107. C.f. George Bull, *The Pilgrim: The Travels of Pietro Della Valle* (1990), pp.ix-xvi.

³⁵⁴ Olearius, *Voyages and Travels*, p.388.

experiences described above. John Dennis' 'delightful Horror', and Daniel Defoe's outright mountain gloominess, have already been touched upon in Chapter Two, with both being identified as readers of Burnet and followers not just of his theory of mountain origins but also of some of his principles of mountain aesthetics. In terms of aesthetic discourses there was another key figure who took Burnet's vision of the world to heart: Joseph Addison (1672-1719), sometime poet, essayist, politician, and early articulator of the sublime in nature.³⁵⁵ Although now more famous for his foundation of and contributions to *The Spectator*, in his earlier years Addison earnestly forayed into the composition of Neo-Latin as well as English poetry.³⁵⁶ One such composition, first published in 1699, was a Latin ode to Thomas Burnet asserting Addison's whole-hearted approval of Burnet's *Theory*.³⁵⁷ In 1705, Addison would write of the Alps as 'broken into so many Steeps and Precipices, that they fill the Mind with an agreeable kind of Horror, and form one of the most irregular mishapen Scenes in the World'.³⁵⁸ Seven years later, *The Spectator* would carry Addison's essay on *The Pleasures of the Imagination*. This essay, which identified mountains as belonging to the superior category of 'the great' (as opposed to the uncommon or the beautiful) and which asserted that both disgust and awe could be prompted by the sight of the same object, is widely acknowledged to be a foundational text in the British development of the concept of the natural sublime.³⁵⁹

The sublime then continued to be re-articulated and re-formulated by subsequent mountain visitors and by further aesthetic philosophers. In the hands of Immanuel Kant

³⁵⁵ Shaw, *The Sublime*, pp.35-38; Timothy M. Costelloe, 'Imagination and Internal Sense: The Sublime in Shaftesbury, Reid, Addison, and Reynolds', ed. Costelloe, *The Sublime*.

³⁵⁶ Estelle Haan, 'Vergilius Redivivus: Studies in Joseph Addison's Latin Poetry', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, New Series, 95:2 (2005), pp.1-7, argues that though his Neo-Latin compositions have largely been overlooked, they were in fact more successful performances than his more well-known 'body of minor English verse'.

³⁵⁷ Joseph Addison, 'Ignissimo viro Thomæ Burnet D.D. Theoriæ Sacræ Telluris Authori' in *Examen Poeticum Duplex: sive Musarum Anglicanarum Delectus Alter* (London, 1698), pp.49-54. The former was an unauthorised edition, with Addison responding by publishing the poem as 'Ad Insignissimo Virum D. Tho. Burnettum, Sacræ Theoriæ Telluris Autorem', in *Musarum Anglicarum Analecta*, vol.2 (Oxon, 1699), pp.284-286; c.f. Haan, 'Joseph Addison's Latin Poetry', p.5. The ode was reproduced and translated into English in Addison, *Poems on Several Occasions* (London, 1719), pp.9-16, and reprinted again as a separate pamphlet (with both Latin and English text) as *Mr Addison's Fine Ode to Dr. Thomas Burnet, On His Sacred Theory of the Earth* (London). It was also appended as a preface to later editions of Burnet's *Theory*; e.g. *The Sacred Theory of the Earth* (London, 1719), pp.iii-x.

³⁵⁸ Addison, *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy, &c.* (London, 1705), p. 455.

³⁵⁹ Joseph Addison, essay no.412, *The Spectator*, vol.6 (London, 1713), pp.88-93. For the significance of Addison within natural aesthetics see Bevis, *Egdon Heath*, p.xii, p.5, p.7, p.9, and pp.11-14; Vybarr Cregan-Reid, *Discovering Gilgamesh: Geology, Narrative and the Historical Sublime in Victorian Culture* (2013), pp.10-11.

the sublime nature that had once dwarfed human observers became a mirror that reflected the rationality of man.³⁶⁰ This enabled Samuel Taylor Coleridge – who had read and admired Kant – to lie down on a rock after becoming lost trying to cross from Broad Crag to Doe Crag in the Lake District, and to marvel not at the sublime greatness of the landscape around him but at the sublime greatness of his own human rationality, by which he remained calm and confident throughout it all.³⁶¹ Of course, for most people today, talk of the subtleties of the different formulations of Addison, Edmund Burke, or Kant, will have little impact on their own experience of the sublime – unlike Coleridge, who self-consciously engaged with their discourses. In general, the modern sublime is probably still mostly a sense of awe in the presence of a grand object in nature – a mountain range or the wild sea.³⁶²

The sources explored in this chapter have indicated that mountains were appreciated as being visually attractive, pretty, or beautiful, and that this, far from being a minority viewpoint, was a widespread and generally accepted tenet of the early modern vision of the natural landscape. But were they experienced as being sublime? I argue that a sense of mountains as ‘great’ – and an emotional reaction that may resemble the modern experience of the sublime – was present in early modern discourses and descriptions of mountain beauty. Many of the sources explored in this chapter made explicit equations between the beauty, use, and design of the mountain landscape. For a mountain to be useful – in providing rivers that were the source of all life, in hoarding precious and practical metals in its roots, in being the habitat for plants and animals that would wither in the valley – was one of the things that made it beautiful. Because this utility was intentionally fashioned by the hand of God, mountains were also great. The physical greatness of mountains was widely acknowledged to lead to thoughts of God, but so too

³⁶⁰ Kiene Brillenberg Wurth, ‘How the Dwarf Became the Giant: S.T. Coleridge’s Kantian Appreciation of Sublime Nature in the Lake District’ in ed. Amanda Gilroy, *Green and Pleasant Land: English Culture and the Romantic Countryside* (2004), p.28.

³⁶¹ Brillenberg Wurth, ‘How the Dwarf’, pp.26-28.

³⁶² That is not to say that discourses surrounding the sublime have not undergone significant changes and vicissitudes during the course of the modern period. Ann C. Colley, *Victorians in the Mountains: Sinking the Sublime* (2010), pp.13-55, argues that the ‘sublime experience’ of the Alps in particular suffered over the course of the late-nineteenth century in the face of increasing tourism, commodification, and indeed climbing. Alan McNee, ‘The Haptic Sublime and the “cold stony reality” of Mountaineering’, *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* (2014), meanwhile, has suggested that the pursuit of mountaineering has seen an increasing emphasis placed on the embodied, close encounter with the sublime object. Available at <<http://www.19.bbk.ac.uk/articles/10.16995/ntn.697/>> [03.06.2016].

did apparently highly 'unaesthetic' thoughts of rocks and conies. With this endpoint in mind, such apparently cool statements of approval are revealed to have important spiritual underpinnings. Adam Olearius' hymn of praise on top of Mount Barmach is, if anything, emblematic of the early modern mountain aesthetic, which pointed to and depended upon God. They were beautiful and great because they were part of the 'Book of Nature' within which the divine 'aesthetics of the infinite' could best be read.

The shift, therefore, was not one from a period in which mountains were disassociated from greatness to one in which they were equated with it. If within a seventeenth-century context the emotional significance of a sense of design was equal to the nineteenth-century impact of sublimity, then there was in fact relatively little change in terms of the essential aesthetic reaction being experienced. Except, of course, the route by which it was possible to experience the great in nature was almost completely re-written. Before Burnet, mountain greatness was divine – the very real sensations of beauty and awe which mountains inspired were inextricably linked with the belief that they were designed by God for the benefit of mankind. This contrasts considerably with the post-Burnetian aesthetic of the sublime, which could incorporate divinity in a numinous sense (with the overwhelming scale of mountains leading the spiritually minded viewer to a sense of being in the presence of God), but did not have to do so.³⁶³ In the seventeenth century an aesthetic appreciation of mountains was logically reliant on the presumed existence and involvement of God. The sublime, as formulated in the eighteenth century and inherited to the present day, had space for God but could also stand as an aesthetic category independent of religious beliefs or theology. Burnet, then, did not prompt a hitherto-unrecognised realisation of mountain glory. He prompted more and more people - in a wider context of intellectual doubt concerning the literal veracity of Scripture - to doubt that mountains (and the other great parts of nature) had been created by God. Armed with such doubt, some people, such as Defoe, went to the mountains and

³⁶³ Extract from Samuel Glover, *A Description of the Valley of Chamouni* (1819) in Duffy and Howell, eds., *Cultures of the Sublime*, pp.41-42, felt the presence of 'That Power, before whom rocks melt', and mused on the nature of hell; William Hazlitt, *Notes of a Journey through France and Italy* (1826) in Duffy and Howell, eds., *Cultures of the Sublime*, p.44, wrote more generally of his thoughts being 'raised' in the face of 'the grandeur and eternal forms of nature'. Leslie Stephen (1832-1904), the famous mountaineer and sometime Anglican clergyman, is a classic example of the spiritual multivalency of the sublime landscape, with the mountains becoming the object of his devotional passions once he embraced agnosticism. Catherine W. Hollis, *Leslie Stephen as Mountaineer: 'Where Does Mont Blanc End, and Where Do I Begin?'* (2010), pp.12-14.

found them bereft of all appeal. Others went to them, still found them involuntarily compelling, and sought to create new aesthetic principles that enabled them to explain and articulate these reactions. Burnet created an intellectual incoherence between people's new understanding of the natural world and their reaction to it which was ultimately solved by the concept of the sublime. However, the articulation of the sublime did not create the experience of mountain greatness *ex nihilo*.

Moreover, other early modern discourses of and ways of experiencing mountain beauty seem to have continued into post-Sublime accounts of mountain engagement. For example, Rousseau's depiction in *Julie, or, the New Héloïse* of nature in the mountains 'acting contradictory to herself', and displaying the flowers of spring, the fruits of autumn and the ice of winter across a narrow tract of land, repeats the comments of travellers such as Adam Olearius and theorists such as John Beaumont regarding the diversifying effects of the mountain landscape.³⁶⁴ George Wilson Bridges, in 1814, articulated anew the thoughts of Burnet on 'these colossal mountains, which we regard as a deformity of the globe', but drew on a remarkably early modern perception of their utility when he acknowledged their status as 'the eternal reservoirs of our rivers which distribute luxury and comfort to every part of Europe'.³⁶⁵ John Ball, Irish politician and first president of the Alpine Club, remarked as late as 1866 upon the contrast between the 'savage sterility' of the higher slopes, and the 'rich and luxuriant' lower reaches of the valley below.³⁶⁶ Moreover, the writings of classical authors continued to shape eighteenth- and nineteenth-century 'sublime' experiences of mountains, with many seeking not just the grand landscape, but also the 'classic ground' upon which they could recall the greats of classical poetry and history.³⁶⁷ These did not necessarily inform aesthetic discourse in the same way as the classical sources treated in this chapter, but the experiences seem to reflect the drive hinted at by Kirchner and acted upon by Lithgow and Thevenot to seek out the 'memory of great things', albeit classically rather than scripturally based. The

³⁶⁴ Extract from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie, or, the New Héloïse*, translated William Kenrick (London, 1761) in Duffy and Howell, eds., *Cultures of the Sublime*, p.17.

³⁶⁵ Extract from George Wilson Bridges, *Alpine Sketches, Comprised in a Short Tour... During the Summer of 1814* (London, 1814), in eds. Duffy and Howell, *Cultures of the Sublime*, p.35.

³⁶⁶ John Ball, 'Val di Genova and the Pisgana Pass', *Alpine Journal* 2 (1865-1866), p.18.

³⁶⁷ Duffy and Howell, *Cultures of the Sublime*, p.4 and p.15. They argue that, whilst peaks such as Vesuvius and Etna had long been considered 'classic ground', the eighteenth century saw the transferral of this sense to the Alps, 'a region largely unknown to European culture until the 1740s'.

modern mountain aesthetic, therefore, did not spring out of nowhere. Eighteenth-century 'sublimity' had a great deal more in common with seventeenth-century 'utility' than might at first be assumed, whilst travellers as late as the nineteenth century continued to draw on principles and vocabulary utilised in the early modern period in order to describe their mountain experiences.

In conclusion, it is apparent that early modern individuals did appreciate the mountain landscape as both beautiful and great. Both impressions were inextricably tied up in their belief in God's role in its design and creation. Such aesthetic experiences were often explained by tacit or explicit reference to aesthetic principles which (though we may still enjoy them in nature, such as visual variety) are no longer prominent in modern aesthetic theory, or are even - in the case of the principle of beauty in utility or fitness for purpose - alien to the ordinary modern experience of the landscape. Of course, mountain aesthetics did not exist in a vacuum - many of the theorists and travellers discussed in this chapter drew on images and utilised allusions that circulated elsewhere in early modern discourse. The next chapter will demonstrate that the appreciation of mountains through classical and Scriptural lenses, and according to a sense of grandeur and use, was also clearly represented in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century poetic literature.

Chapter Four: The Poetry of Mountains

In his aptly-named *English Parnassus* (1657), the Yorkshire-born schoolmaster Joshua Poole provided a handy list of epithets which an aspiring poet might wish to attach to the word 'Mountain':

Moss-thrumd, rocky, shady, cloud-headed, insolent, steep, ambitious, trowning, aspiring, mossie, hoary, aged, steepy, surly, burly, lofty, tall, craggy, barren, stately, climbing, sky-kissing, sky-threatning, cloud-inwrapped, high-browed, shaggy, supercilious, air-invading, hanging, brambly, desert, uncouth, solitary, heaven, shouldering, leavy, resounding, rebounding, ecchoing, thorny, inhospitable, shady, cold, freezing, unfruitfull, lovely, crump shouldered, ragged, unfrequented, forsaken, melancholly, clambering, sky-braving, pathless, lovely, cloud-touching, star-brushing, bushie, ascending.³⁶⁸

At first glance, the selection seems contrary: in it, mountains are twice 'lovely', but they are also 'melancholy'; they both kiss and threaten the sky; they are bushy and moss-covered but also 'desert' and barren. Much could be made of the more negative adjectives, or of the apparent emptiness of Poole's 'unfrequented, forsaken' mountain landscape. However, Poole's list was not straightforwardly descriptive, nor was it intended to be used or read holistically. Rather, it suggested a variety of epithets to be applied to mountains in different poetic contexts, and highlights the different tones and images which mountains could be used to invoke in mid-seventeenth-century poetic literature, from the cold and harsh to the airy and inspiring.

This chapter will explore the use and representation of mountains in poetry composed across the British Isles from the late sixteenth to the early eighteenth centuries. By 'use', I mean the symbolic or metaphorical roles which mountains and mountain imagery served to fulfil. Just as William Lithgow emphasised the rugged nature of the mountain environment in order to highlight his own identity as a suffering pilgrim, poets frequently invoked mountains not simply to describe them, but in order to capture a particular mood or communicate a certain impression regarding the central subject of their text. Of course,

³⁶⁸ Joshua Poole, *The English Parnassus: Or, a Helpe to English Poesie* (London, 1657), p.137 [sig.k5r]; 'heaven, shouldering' is most likely a printer's error for 'heaven-shouldering'. C.f. W. R. Meyer, 'Poole, Joshua (c.1615–c.1656)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22517>> [27.06.2016].

the relationship between symbolism and representation is a circular one; that mountains, for example, were alluded to in the context of stereotypically virile activities, or that women's breasts were frequently referred to as mountains, says something both about extant understandings of mountains, and about contemporaneous impressions of masculinity and the female form. Likewise, common representations of mountains as the proud, rugged providers of streams that watered the valleys below can serve to further explicate the representational significance attached to them as the Creation of a generous divinity.

This chapter will set out to consider whether poetic references to mountains reflect the same range of attitudes, ideas, and influences found at work in the discourses of natural philosophy, travel, and aesthetics already explored in this thesis. Did poets allude to the utility of mountains, or communicate a sense and appreciation of their greatness? Were the mountains of early modern British poetry as lonely as Joshua Poole's handlist of adjectives would suggest, or were they populated with some of the same ventures and adventures engaged in by mountain dwellers and travellers across Europe? Did poets draw upon the same classical and Scriptural allusions that so shaped the arguments of thinkers in the Burnet debate and the impressions of travellers such as Thomas Coryate and commentators such as Josias Simler? Crucially, these are all questions to which answers can be found in a corpus of mountain-related poetry that, set in the context of the current historiography on the subject, is surprisingly extensive.

The last word on mountains in premodern poetry was had many years ago. During the latter decades of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth literary scholars developed and then embellished the theory of the 'return to nature' which they claimed was evident in English poetry and literature from the Romantics onwards. This concept, in its broadest terms, argued that the advent of writers such as William Wordsworth in Britain and Jean-Jacques Rousseau in France saw the literary expression of an appreciation for the natural world that had been hitherto unexpressed or even unexperienced.³⁶⁹ Although articulations of this theory referred to nature more generally,

³⁶⁹ E.g. Alfred Biese, *The Development of the Feeling for Nature: In the Middle Ages and Modern Times* (London, 1905; first published 1888); Cecil Moore, 'The Return to Nature in English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century', *Studies in Philology*, 14:3 (1917), 243-291. Articulations of the return to nature are explored further in Chapter Five.

many also focussed on mountain attitudes as a central strand of the supposed shift. In his *Poetic Interpretation of Nature* (1877), John Campbell Shairp, one of the earlier scholars to highlight the change, sought to explicate 'the great movement towards Nature which is said to characterise this modern era'.³⁷⁰ He pointed out that William Shakespeare had never praised mountains. This led Shairp to conclude that as 'the power of mountains is not expressed in that poetry which expresses almost every other conceivable thing', then it was certain that 'the mountain rapture had to lie dumb for two more centuries before it found utterance in English song'.³⁷¹ For Shairp, Shakespeare was representative of all premodern poetry, and the literature of 'mountain rapture' did not exist until the very end of the eighteenth century.

In *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, Marjorie Hope Nicolson directly acknowledged the work of literary critics such as Shairp in highlighting the basic shift in attitudes, both towards nature in general and towards mountains in particular, but expressed surprise that they had 'made so little effort' to explain the mechanics by which the change occurred.³⁷² Nicolson did not find early modern literature utterly devoid of mountain references, but found that before the 'modern poets', mountains 'were for centuries described – when they were described at all – at best in conventional and unexciting imagery, at worst in terms of distaste and repulsion'.³⁷³ She placed particular emphasis on depictions by poets such as Andrew Marvell and John Donne, representing their 'hook-shoulder'd', earth-deforming mountains as representative of early modern attitudes.³⁷⁴ On the other hand, she discarded other, more positive, examples as mere echoes of 'convention and tradition'.³⁷⁵ She was particularly critical of classical allusions; of the oration on travel quoted at the beginning of Chapter Three, she commented that it demonstrated 'emotions... aroused by classical mountains... visited only between the covers of classical authors'.³⁷⁶ The implication was that conventional language and the

³⁷⁰ Notably, Shairp was reportedly inspired to take up poetry by hiking in the Highlands of Scotland. Richard Ovenden, 'Shairp, John Campbell (1819–1885)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25196>> [04.08.2016].

³⁷¹ J.C. Shairp, *On Poetic Interpretation of nature* (Edinburgh, 1877), pp.26-27 and p.170.

³⁷² Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom*, pp.17-27.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.17.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.28 and pp.34-35.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.40, 50, 54, 57, 59, etc. Nicolson also identified negative depictions of mountains as conventional or stereotypical, but in contrast took these as indicative of genuine distaste.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.60.

cultural prominence of the classical landscape had nothing to do with 'genuine' mountain attitudes.

Both Shairp and Nicolson's analyses were the product of trends within literary criticism and literary taste which were rooted in the development of modern Romanticism and which continue to shape the outlook of modern readers and scholars.³⁷⁷ Most prominently, the corollary to Nicolson's rejection of 'derivative' texts is the post-Romantic reification of originality. More recent criticism has suggested that this was an 'institution' constructed by the Romantic poets themselves, placing value on the very products of 'original imagination and creativity' with which they were so self-consciously engaged.³⁷⁸ Robert J. Griffin identified Wordsworth as a particular proponent of this, noting that modern-day notions of 'Romantic difference' largely derive from Wordsworth's unflattering reflections upon Alexander Pope; in attacking the earlier eighteenth-century poet, Wordsworth cast himself as doing something different and new.³⁷⁹ This sense is epitomised in Wordsworth's preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, in which he set out to explain his poetic approach, with its 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'. He feared that it was 'so materially different' from that which had gone before that his reader might not understand or appreciate it otherwise.³⁸⁰ Robert Macfarlane has challenged the claim that the Romantics themselves created this idealised discourse of originality, arguing instead that commentators in the 1830s and 1840s selectively emphasised statements from the earlier poets regarding originality and creativity.³⁸¹ Whether directly or not, the Romantics ultimately endowed modern English literature with an innate preference for the remarkable and the original.

³⁷⁷ John Roger Paas, 'Towards a Reevaluation of Early Modern Poetry', *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 40:1 (2009), p.267.

³⁷⁸ Jessica Millen, 'Romantic Creativity and the Ideal of Originality: A Contextual Analysis', *Cross-sections*, vol.6 (2010), 91-104. discourses of originality can also be compared to those of 'imagination' and 'genius'; c.f. Forest Pyle, *The Ideology of Imagination: Subject and Society in the Discourse of Romanticism* (1995); Penelope Murray, 'Introduction', ed. Penelope Murray *Genius: History of an Idea* (1989), pp.1-2; Christopher Norris, 'Deconstructing Genius: Paul de Man and the Critique of Romantic Ideology', *Genius*, p.142.

³⁷⁹ Robert J. Griffin, *Wordsworth's Pope: A Study in Literary Historiography* (1995), pp.1-2.

³⁸⁰ William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads, with Other Poems*, vol.1 (second edition, 1800), pp.vii-viii and xxxiii-xxxiv. The preface appears only in the second edition and onwards.

³⁸¹ Robert Macfarlane, *Original Copy: Plagiarism and Originality in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (2007), pp.27-33.

Another relevant literary influence, evident in both Shairp's identification of Shakespeare as the bearer of all insights into early modern culture and Nicolson's focus upon poets such as Marvell and Donne, is that of canonicity. The literary canon has become a subject of increasing discussion since the 1980s.³⁸² The canon of English literature might best be described as the list of texts most likely to find their way on to an undergraduate reading list, featuring those writers who have become household names: Chaucer, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, and so on. These figures receive a disproportionate amount of scholarly – and popular – attention, and as such tacitly serve as literary representatives of their eras. Some scholars have begun to suggest that the perceived early modern canon is not, in fact, indicative of the literary, social, or cultural landscape of the period.³⁸³ William St. Clair, in particular, has argued that today's early modern canon is largely contingent upon the vagaries of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century publishing.³⁸⁴ Rather than providing a representative sample of past attitudes and ideas, it instead reflects the tastes of modernity.³⁸⁵

This chapter will seek to step beyond the Romantic institution of originality and the boundaries of modern canonicity. It will consider the conventional, derivative imagery of both famous and obscure poets as indicative of, rather than irrelevant to, past attitudes towards nature. As previous chapters have highlighted, the influences of both Scripture and classical literature had an enormous impact on how educated early modern commentators viewed the world, and upon the ways in which poets depicted it.³⁸⁶ The period was one in which poetic genius was demonstrated not through searing originality but through the erudite and apt application of tropes which displayed the author's wide and classically-inherited learning. In such a self-consciously intertextual age, the

³⁸² Scholars have noted the problematic nature of canon in reproducing privileged ideologies and cultural orthodoxies. See Jan Gorak, *The Making of the Modern Canon: Genesis and Crisis of a Literary Idea* (1991), pp.1-8, for a critical overview of the 'canon wars' of the 1980s. The problem (and potential) of canonicity has also been raised in a pedagogical context, e.g. Mike Fleming, 'The Literary Canon: Implications for the Teaching of Language as Subject', eds. Irene Pieper, Laila Aase, Mike Fleming, and Florentina Sâmihăian, *Text, Literature and 'Bildung'* (2007), 31-38.

³⁸³ Jeremy Lopez, *Constructing the Canon of Early Modern Drama* (2014), p.18. C.f. Kelsey Jackson Williams, 'Canon before Canon, Literature before Literature: Thomas Pope Blount and the Scope of Early Modern Learning', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol.77, no.2 (2014), 177-199.

³⁸⁴ William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (2000), pp.1-3.

³⁸⁵ Canons can also exist in multiple contexts and on multiple scales. Chapter Five suggests that the modern reading of the premodern mountain past has been shaped by a constructed 'canon' of relevant pre-mountaineering texts.

³⁸⁶ Miriam Jacobson, *Barbarous Antiquity: Reorienting the Past in the Poetry of Early Modern England* (2014), pp.8-12.

'conventional' was at once expressive and constitutive of genuine visions of the world. Crucially, to be derivative in the seventeenth century was not the same as being fake or second-rate.

This chapter will therefore examine a variety of types of poetic texts composed from multiple perspectives and locations across the British Isles, moving from a broad, synthetic overview of multiple texts towards a fine-grain analysis of individual works. It will consider whether a 'Poetic Grammar of Mountains' might be drawn from Joshua Poole's *English Parnassus* – itself a compilation of a variety of poetic extracts and perspectives – when taken in concert with a selection of the writings of other English poets from the seventeenth century. This section will suggest that, just as in the Burnet debate, early modern poetry demonstrated an aesthetic appreciation for both the 'beauty' and the 'greatness' of mountains. The second section will analyse a key mountain poem, Thomas Churchyard's 'Discourse of Mountaynes' (1587), alongside a range of poems composed by Scottish Gaelic bards, highlighting both the descriptive and metaphorical significance of energetic mountain activities and engagement. The final section will explore the winding paths of Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* (1622), a chorographical poem in which anthropomorphised mountains enumerated their own virtues. Throughout, this chapter will highlight the nuanced wealth of mountain poetry composed long before the 'Return to Nature'.

A Poetic Grammar of Mountains

In form, Joshua Poole's *English Parnassus* exists somewhere between an anthology and a handbook. Its subtitle proclaimed its intention to be 'a helpe to English Poesie'; a guide for aspiring versifiers in the correct application of the language of poetry. Printed posthumously in 1657, it contained a rhyming dictionary, a list of common poetic subjects with correspondingly popular epithets for them, and a compilation of verses from the pens of famous early modern writers, likewise organised in alphabetical order by chief poetic subject. Poole's compilations were cannibalistic and bereft of any direct citation; the reader can blink and miss the unmarked transition from the work of one poet to

another under a given heading.³⁸⁷ The *Parnassus* was not designed as a showcase of individual poetic genius but rather as an antidote against new poets becoming ‘fomenters of obscenitie’ and producing vulgar or downright bad poetry.³⁸⁸ The work is therefore emblematic of the ‘conventionality’ of the early modern poetic genre; far from seeking to be original, good poetry followed the best examples in the most stylistically effective way. As such, Poole’s work provides the ideal base text for a poetic grammar of mountains. Following the model suggested by Daniel Chartier for the ‘grammar of North’ – in which preliminary texts can in turn lead to the identification of further sources and depictions of (in this case) mountains – the insights offered by Poole’s work will be further developed by reference to verses found elsewhere which reflect upon similar themes or ideas.³⁸⁹

The very title of the *Parnassus* alludes to one of the more prominent mountain associations in English poetry. Mount Parnassus, as already seen in the writings of Lithgow, was a real mountain, but the name drew upon potent classical imagery. In Greek mythology, the double-topped peak was the seat of the Muses, and as such is invoked, in Poole as elsewhere, as intimately associated with the ideal of poetic inspiration. In his verse preface Poole addressed ‘the hopeful young Gentlemen, his Schollers’ at his school in Middlesex, and exhorted them to ‘Accept and use then this my book, aspire / Unto the Mountains top’.³⁹⁰ The ‘early blossoms’ he saw in his pupils must then surely bloom when they came to ‘Parnassus mount’:

If you so much can see
On plainer ground, what will they that shal be

³⁸⁷ E.g. Poole, *The English Parnassus*, p.344 [sig.Cc5v]: ‘As Mountains on whose barren breast, / The labouring clouds do often rest. / Whose stately eminence. / Vassals the under vales circumference, / So high as if they meant, / To ease strong Atlas of his punishment,’ The first two lines are taken from John Milton’s *L’allegro* (published 1645), the third and fourth from William Browne’s *Britannia’s Pastorals* (1613), and the final two are either Poole’s own composition or his own translation of one of the Latin texts included in his list of works ‘principally’ used in compiling the *Parnassus* (pp.41-42). Brendan O. Hehir, ‘Denham’s “Cooper’s Hill” and Poole’s “English Parnassus”’, *Modern Philology* 61:4 (1964), 253-260, emphasises the complexity of Poole’s use of sources (albeit whilst suggesting, arguably anachronistically, that Poole was a ‘plagiarist’). The *English Parnassus* has received relatively little secondary attention, although the inclusion of particular poets in it has been taken by modern scholars as indicators of their contemporaneous fame; Richard F. Kennedy, ‘John Cleveland in Joshua Poole’s *English Parnassus* (1657)’, *Notes and Queries* 56:2 (2009), 205-207.

³⁸⁸ Poole, *The English Parnassus*, sig. A6v.

³⁸⁹ C.f. Introduction, p.16.

³⁹⁰ Poole, *The English Parnassus.*, sigs. A5r and A6v.

Advantag'd by that hill, whose tops do rise
In stately height, to parly with the skies?³⁹¹

The mountain therefore represented the height of inspiration, which would elevate the poetic vision of those lucky enough to already possess a spark of genius. By contrast, false or unskilled poets would find 'the Sacred Mount, / Too high for them to climb'.³⁹²

Similar invocations of Parnassus occurred throughout English poetry of the seventeenth century. Michael Drayton, reflecting upon 'Poets and Poesy' (composed after 1621), recalled the moment in his youth when he told his tutor that he wished to become a poet. His tutor, following similar principles to those explicit in Poole's poetic handbook, pointed his student to the great writers of the past, such as Virgil. Drayton's reading experience was a remarkable one, and was communicated in imagery steeped in classical allusions: 'Methought I straight had mounted Pegasus, / And in his full career could make him stop, / And bound upon Parnassus bi-cleft top'.³⁹³ Drayton therefore suggested that the mere exposure to the writings of great, past poets was what lifted him up to the mountain's top and enabled his own discourse with the Muses. Other poets directly called upon Parnassus to aid them in the composition of individual works; Rachel Jevon (*bap.* 1627), in a poem bidding for the return of Charles II to the throne, appealed to 'Ye lofty muses of *Parnassus Hill*' that they might 'Auspicious be to my unlearned Quill'.³⁹⁴ John Denham (1614/15-1667), a Royalist poet writing shortly before the English Civil War, merged landscape with politics in his well-known *Cooper's Hill* (1642). Denham physically located himself upon the titular summit overlooking the valley of the Thames in Surrey, and used the vantage point to call upon the far-seeing vision alluded to by Poole in order to simultaneously describe the actual topography whilst meditating upon power and royalty. In his opening lines, he addressed the humble peak directly:

...as Courts make not Kings, but Kings the Court,
So where the Muses & their Troopes resort,
Parnassus stands, if I can be to thee,

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, sig. A5v.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, sig. A6v.

³⁹³ Robert Cummings, ed., *Seventeenth-Century Poetry: An Annotated Anthology* (2000), p.20.

³⁹⁴ Peter Davidson, ed., *Poetry and Revolution: An Anthology of British and Irish Verse, 1625-1660* (1998), p.493.

A Poet, thou Parnassus art to mee.³⁹⁵

Denham's point was subtly different from either Jevon's invocation or Drayton's experience of being transported to the summit from which he would start his poetic career. Denham did not depict himself as passively receiving the blessings of Parnassus but, rather, he constructed the mythological hill himself; it was his quality as a poet which transformed his local landscape into the classical site of inspiration. From that site he was able to see clearly, both literally and figuratively.

Of course, the poetic inspiration that was so idealised in the image of Parnassus was not the same as poetic originality, at least not in the modern sense. After invoking the muses, Poole proceeded to provide a selection of common epithets for the different subjects that his reader might want to address in their own verses. They could learn to write correctly of everything from butterflies (which could be, among other things, both 'Gaudie' and 'simple') to pigeons ('wanton', 'quaking', or 'loyal').³⁹⁶ Poole's contrary epithets for the heading 'Mountain' have already been quoted above, but mountains and hills also appeared elsewhere, for example as appropriate adjectives to attach to other subjects, such as the goats, wolves, strawberries, or snows that poets could choose to locate upon mountain-sides.³⁹⁷ These examples suggest an implicit awareness of the same ecological diversity that was consciously called upon by writers in the Burnet debate; the 'mountain-loving' mulberry likewise acknowledged the recognition that certain plants were uniquely suited to a high-altitude environment.³⁹⁸

Poole likewise provided glosses for specific mountains or mountain ranges. If a poet wished to follow the best of conventional examples, they could write of the Apennines as any or all of 'High, cold, naked, old, hoary, lofty, oakie, snowie, vast, stony, rockie, icie, hilly, craggy'.³⁹⁹ Meanwhile, the Caucasus mountains could potentially be described as

³⁹⁵ [Sir John Denham], *Coopers Hill. A Poeme* (London, 1642). C.f. W. H. Kelliher, 'Denham, Sir John (1614/15–1669)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7481>> [04.08.2016] and ed. Philip Major, *Sir John Denham (1614/15-1669) Reassessed: The State's Poet* (2016).

³⁹⁶ Poole, *The English Parnassus*, p.66 [sig. Fr] and p.155 [sig. L6r].

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.103 [sig. H4r], p.225 [sig. Qr], p.195 [sig. O2r], and p.188 [sig. N6v].

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.138 [sig. K5v].

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.50 [sig. Ev].

anything from ‘ragged’, ‘rough’, and ‘icie’ to ‘lofty, towring, [or] cloud-kissing’.⁴⁰⁰ Should the student of poetry wish to evoke the character of Parnassus itself, they could term it ‘Sacred, rugged, two-topt, two-forkt, loftie, learned, divine, Muse-haunted’.⁴⁰¹ Elsewhere, Poole tersely suggested three metaphors for mountains: ‘The rockie ribs of the earth. Earths warts. Blisters’, a passage which led Nicolson to conclude that in Poole, a ‘passing feeling for the grand and magnificent’ was ‘more than counterbalanced by adjectives of distaste’.⁴⁰² The ambivalence of Poole’s choice of epithets cannot be denied, but it is worth noting that mountains are not alone among landscape features in being given such a wide range of potential descriptors; valleys could be ‘flower-embroidered’ and ‘smiling’, but they could also be ‘gloomy’, ‘dejected’, or even ‘groveling’, whilst a stream might be ‘pearly’ or ‘silver-brested’, but could also be ‘impetuous’, ‘angry’, or ‘boyling’. The *English Parnassus* did not promote a unilateral view of the world for aspiring poets to repeat, but instead provided them with the vocabulary with which to depict their chosen subjects in a variety of shades.

The largest portion of Poole’s work is given over to ‘an ample treasury of *phrases*, and elegant expressions’. These took the form of longer extracts or of pairs of lines taken from separate authors that were run together to almost make a coherent whole, although the section also featured passages more akin to the earlier lists of ‘apposite *Epithets*’.⁴⁰³ The latter was certainly the case with Poole’s entry for ‘Hill’, in which longer samples quickly gave way to a relentless list of names of mountains and their ranges:

Two rockie hills lift their proud tops on high.
And make a vale beneath, Their lofty brows display.
Earths dugges, wart, rising, tumours, blisters.
Athos, Atlas, Hæmus, Rhodope, Ismarus, Eryx, Cithæra,
Taurus, Caucasus, Alps, Appenine, Oeta, Tmolus, Ætna.
Parnassus, Othrys, Cunthus, Mimas, Dyndimus, Mycale.
Pelion, Pindus, Ossa, Olympus, Helicon, Ida.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.69 [sig. F3r].

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.151 [sig. L4r].

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, p.409 [sig. Gg6r] and Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom*, p.35.

⁴⁰³ Poole, *The English Parnassus*, sigs.a7v-a8r.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.345 [sig. Cc6r].

The focus on Greek mountains with associations within classical literature was significant, and borne out elsewhere in Poole's selections, which contained multiple allusions to peaks such as Mount Hybla, flowing with honey, and Mount Latmos, where Endymion the shepherd prince enjoyed eternal youth and slumber.⁴⁰⁵ Where Biblical mountains and Scriptural impressions of hills and high places were of more import to travellers and natural philosophers, it would seem that the classical inheritance held the greatest sway over early modern English poetic discourse.

Mountains and hills also appeared in the context of poetic verses and phrases cited by Poole in relation to a wide variety of other objects. Some of these suggest a sense of a fruitful, useful, and comely mountain environment. Amidst Poole's compilations, hunters would 'The tops of Mountains scale', and merchants 'climbe steepe mountains for the sparkling stone' (i.e. gems), whilst grasses provided 'the mountains motley lock'.⁴⁰⁶ The compendium of choice phrases to be applied to '*Breasts*' makes, unsurprisingly, frequent reference to mountains: 'mounts of softer Ivory; 'warmer Alps'; 'Loves swelling Apennine'; 'sweetly rising hills'; 'The Lilly mountains where dwells eternal spring'.⁴⁰⁷ Similar imagery appeared elsewhere, most prominently in a plea from William Strode (1601?-1645), addressed to a woman whom he desired in vain:

Shutt from mine Eyes those hills of snow
Their melting valley doe not show
Those azure paths lead to dispayre...
For while I thus in torments dwell
The sight of heavn is worse than hell.⁴⁰⁸

In this verse, the analogy between mountains and breasts refers to more than just shape; every element of the mountain landscape can be mapped on to the female form, from the 'valley' of the gulf between two breasts, to the 'azure paths', or rivers, standing for the blue veins traced upon them. These extracts map directly onto the analogical and

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, Mount Hybla, p.258 [sig. S6v], p.266 [sig. S5v], p.385 [sig. Ff2r], and p.515 [sig. Oo3r]; Mount Latmos, p.243 [sig. R2r], p.276 [sig. Y4v], and p.396 [sig. Ff7v].

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.348 [sig. Cc7v], p.391 [sig. Ff5r], p.330 [sig. Bb6v].

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.266-267 [sigs.S5v-S6r].

⁴⁰⁸ C.f. William Drummond (1585-1649), *The Poetical Works of William Drummond of Hawthornden* ed. L.E. Kastner (Scottish Texts Society, 1913), Vol.1, p.9, which reverses the analogy: 'A place there is, where a delicious Fountaine / Springs from the swelling Paps of a proud Mountaine'.

aesthetic arguments drawn during the Burnet debate; mountains, like breasts, are comely in form and life-giving in function.⁴⁰⁹

The 'lovely' mountains hinted at, twice, in Poole's list of epithets are also revealed in further, more naturalistic extracts. Under the heading of '*Morning*', he included passages refulgent with praise not just of the beauty of the dawn, but also of the visual impact of the sunrise upon the mountains.⁴¹⁰ With the morning, 'Aurora now puts on her crimson blush. / And with resplendent raies gilds ore the tops / Of th'aspiring hills...'.⁴¹¹ Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle (1623-1673), wrote in a poetic description of Britain that 'Nature adorned this island all throughout / With landscapes, riv'lets, prospects... / Hills overtopped the dales', whilst Anne Kemp, in a 'Contemplation on Bassets down-Hill', described the 'prospect which this Hill / Doth show' as a veritable 'Elizium'.⁴¹² Mountains could reflect the beauty of other natural phenomena, provide adornment to a country, or offer a vantage point from which to enjoy fine prospects. This taxonomy demonstrates that the same aesthetic experiences and values that were articulated in late-seventeenth-century natural philosophical arguments were also evident in mid-seventeenth-century poetry.

The previous chapter also engaged with the implication inherent in modern aesthetics that an appreciation of beauty and an appreciation of 'greatness', or 'sublimity', represent two distinct strands of aesthetic experience, of which only the former was ever – and infrequently – applied to mountains in the early modern period. Charles Cotton (1630-1687), a Royalist poet looking back in 1676 on his politically expedient retirement to the Peak District after the execution of Charles I, found much to be thankful for in the peace, beauty, and freedom of his rural retreat. He would think himself happy indeed were he allowed to live 'sixty full years' in 'this desart place', which 'most men in discourse disgrace'.⁴¹³ Much of the poem praised the gentle and pastoral beauties of fields and

⁴⁰⁹ C.f. Chapter Three, p.104.

⁴¹⁰ Poole, *The English Parnassus*, pp.398-408 [sigs. Ff8v-Gg5v].

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.407 [sig. Gg5r].

⁴¹² Cummings, ed., *Seventeenth-Century Poetry*, pp.463-464. 'A Description of an Island' was first printed in 1653, with a later text (quoted) produced in 1664; Davidson, ed., *Poetry and Revolution*, pp.285-286. The 'Contemplation' is first recorded in a manuscript dating to around 1658 (p.537).

⁴¹³ Charles Cotton, *The Compleat Angler Being Instructions how to Angle for a Trout or Grayling in a Clear Stream* (London, 1676), pp.110-111. Cotton's comment on 'this desart place' must be set in the context of the contrast being drawn between a politically-engaged, urban career and the quiet retirement forced upon,

streams and the simple pleasures of clean food and a quiet night's sleep, but Cotton made space for an enthusiastic encomium on his experience of the mountain landscape:

Oh my beloved *Rocks* that rise
To awe the Earth, and brave the Skies:
From some aspiring Mountains crown,
How dearly do I love,
Giddy with pleasure, to look down.
And from the vales, to view the noble heights above!⁴¹⁴

It is worth noting the echoes of Poole's suggested epithets in Cotton's verses, such as the aspiring and sky-braving peaks. These were conventionalities that pointed towards a widespread acknowledgment – and promotion – of the impressive nature of the mountain environment.

The great could also be overwhelming or even terrifying. Under '*Cruell*' Poole's references pointed not just to vicious animals such as panthers, but also to 'cruel Caucasus hard mounts'.⁴¹⁵ Should a poet require an image to represent something violent, they could consider lightning on a hill-top: 'As heavens sulphureous flash / Against proud mountains, surly brows doth dash'.⁴¹⁶ Unsurprisingly, mountains also featured in the context of passages relating to that which was '*High*' and '*Cold*'; high, 'like old Apeninus rais'd... Into the Air, kissing the starrie skie', and as cold 'as the top of snowy Algidus', a mountain near Rome and site of a fifth-century BCE battle recorded in Livy.⁴¹⁷ Mountains had 'glitering tops, which fatall lightning fear[s]'; the Peak of Tenerife boasted a summit 'contiguous to the heavens'.⁴¹⁸ This vast, awesome landscape could also be used to represent eternity, with the term 'Ever' glossed with the phrase 'While shades the mountains cast'.⁴¹⁹

but relished by Cotton. The opening dialogue of *The Compleat Angler* sees a London visitor introduced to the Peak by a local gentleman (probably representing Cotton), who gently mocks the complaints of the former about the lengthy and difficult journey into the region (pp.1-11). This should also be compared with Cotton's later poetic exposition on *The Wonders of the Peake* (1681), in which references to a deformed, misshapen landscape run alongside enthusiastic depictions of the strange wonders of caves, rocks, and lofty mountains. C.f. f.n. 261, above.

⁴¹⁴ Cotton, *The Compleat Angler*, p.107 and pp.109-110.

⁴¹⁵ Poole, *The English Parnassus*, p.242 [sig. V2v].

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.540 [Pp7v].

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.344 [sig. Cc5v]. and p.284 [sig. T6v].

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.343-344. [sig. Cc5r-Cc5v].

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.297 [sig. Zr].

These awe-inspiring and frightening characteristics were brought together in Poole's compilation of phrases under the heading 'Caucasus':

The Scythians snowie mountains on whose top
Prometheus growing liver feeds the Crop
Of Joves great bird. Inhospitable rock
Whose craggie sides have oft endur'd the shock
Of the fierce north.
Which with lesse distance looks at heaven by far,
And with more large proportion shewes the stars.⁴²⁰

The final two lines alluded to the same idea communicated by Poole's earlier epithets for mountains as the 'aire-invading, star-brushing' heights of the world. Mountains, by virtue of their size, were closer than any other terrestrial body to heaven, and displayed their 'large proportion' even to the stars. *The English Parnassus* reveals, through its many and varied extracts and in concert with other works of English poetry from the same period, a highly nuanced poetic vision of mountains. Mountains could be described as 'supercilious', 'cruel', even as warts upon the Earth, but they were also depicted as aesthetically compelling in a range of different modes, from their gently swelling beauty to their proud altitude. They could be rocky, or grassy, or covered in snow, and trodden by the feet of diverse animals, including humans. They enlivened the dawn and brushed the stars.

'Both man and beast, delights to be thereon'

Thomas Churchyard (1523?-1604), soldier and poet, depicted mountains as a prized and valuable feature of the Welsh landscape. In 1587 he published *The Worthines of Wales*, a collection of original verses describing the country alongside a series of transcriptions and translations of key texts relating to its history.⁴²¹ Most of the poems focussed upon individual regions or even specific buildings such as castles, but Churchyard also saw fit to consider a more general subject in 'A discourse of Mountaynes'. In the work as a whole,

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.275 [sig. T2r].

⁴²¹ John Cramsie, *British Travellers and the Encounter with Britain, 1450-1700* (2015), pp.275-283, analyses the *Worthines* as a whole.

Churchyard laid out the multitudinous virtues of a country for which he proclaimed 'warm will & affection'. His discourse highlighted a sense of close, energetic human engagement with a mountain landscape which shaped and provided for those who dwelt within it.

This same immediate engagement is reflected in other texts in the early modern period, most notably in Scottish Gaelic bardic poetry of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, which alludes to elite activities occurring on the hillsides such as hunting. These references appeared in the context of songs either of praise or lamentation, and as such the mountain activities appear to have been implicitly equated with certain individual qualities. As such, in both Churchyard's 'Discourse' in and Scottish Gaelic poetry, mountains are depicted in order to redound upon the honour of something else, whether a country or the chief to whom a bard owed their patronage.⁴²² In doing so they also provide poetic acknowledgement of forms of mountain engagement which are evidenced in other types of sources, discussed previously, but which were arguably not as central to the poetic grammar of the urbanite English poets of the previous section.

Churchyard opened his poetic discourse with a deceptively simple statement:

Dame Nature drew, these Mountaynes in such sort,
As though the one, should yéeld the other grace⁴²³

This couplet captures a sense of a circular aesthetic relationship between nature and high hills. If, as Churchyard mused, 'all were playne, and smooth like garden ground', the world would lack both 'hye woods, and goodly groues', and the opportunities for fine prospects that gave 'the eyes delight'. Seeming to echo Gesner's account of Mount Pilatus, Churchyard described the multi-sensory experience of being on a mountain top:

⁴²² Scottish bards stood at the end of a long tradition of 'Gaelic court poetry' dating back to the twelfth century. Gaelic praise poetry - designed to raise the status and earn the fame of the author's patron - drew upon a rhetorical code and store of conventional stock motifs; M. Pia Coira, *By Poetic Authority: The Rhetoric of Panegyric in Gaelic Poetry of Scotland to c.1700* (2012), pp.1-3, 12-15, 26-31. Derick Thomson, *An Introduction to Gaelic Poetry* (1974), pp.99-155, provides a valuable overview of the period under consideration, although his criticism of poets repeatedly utilising 'basic ideas and phrases' (p.135) should be read against Coira's more recent emphasis upon a 'panegyric code'.

⁴²³ Thomas Churchyard, *The Worthines of Wales* (London, 1587), Mr.

On Hill we vewe, farre of both feeld and flood,
Feele heate or cold, and so sucke vp swéete ayre:
Behold beneath, great wealth and worldly good,
Sée walled Townes, and look on Countries fayre
And who so sits, or stands on Mountayne hye,
Hath halfe a world, in compasse of his eye...⁴²⁴

More than this, Churchyard populated his 'ragged Rocks' not only with prospect-seekers but with the 'playnest people' and 'hardest Horse' brought forth by such an environment. He acknowledged that mountain grasses were sparse, but described a diet of 'rootes and hearbs', and insisted that 'neere the Skye, growes sweetest fruite in déede'. By contrast, only 'rotten wéedes, and rubbish drosse' might be found in the meres and marshes of the lower ground. In his first three stanzas Churchyard captures many features present in the aesthetic discourses expressed in the Burnet debate over a century later; an appreciation of prospect, of the clean mountain air and of the harsh but fruitful nature of the mountain environment.

In Scottish Gaelic poetry, the mountainside is often coded less as a healthful space for hardy people and more as an opportunity for the retreat and solitude required for poetic contemplation. Iain Luim MacDhòmhnail (c.1624-c.1710) opened several of his poems with the conceit that the moment of composition took place in the midst of the mountainous landscape. In 'The Return of Ranald Og', his first line declared that 'I am sitting on the hill with no company, all alone'.⁴²⁵ In his lament for Alasdair Mac Colla he reflected in his grief that:

As I lie on my back on the stalking knoll, little inclination have I to mix with the rabble who would think bread sufficient sustenance...⁴²⁶

If poetic grief was located in the quiet solitude of the foothills, so poetic exultation could belong to the high places; Iain Luim opened his praise poem on the crowning of Charles II with the declaration that 'As I lie on my elbow in a high mountain glen, I have good

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, Mv.

⁴²⁵ Annie M. Mackenzie, ed., *Orain Iain Luim: Songs of John MacDonald, Bard of Keppoch* (1964), p.7. Iain Luim is also known by his Anglicised name, John MacDonald.

⁴²⁶ Mackenzie, *Orain Iain Luim*, p.35. C.f. p.109, in another lament 'I am sitting on the slope of a little hill near to Coire na Cleithe'.

reason to find joy in laughter'.⁴²⁷ He also took advantage of the literal prospect offered by mountains in order to gather news for his compositions. In 'The Battle of Inverlochy' (which took place near Ben Nevis in 1645) he depicted himself climbing a brae in order to get a good view of the battle as it unfolded, from whence he delighted in viewing his clan descending upon the 'wry-mouthed Campbells' in a 'frenzy' of courage and violence.⁴²⁸

The extended vision offered by the high ground could also prompt deeper reflections. Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh, better known in English as Mary MacLeod (c.1615-c.1707), bard and nurse to the children of Macleòid of Dunvegan, Skye, was briefly exiled to the Isle of Mull for being too profuse in her praise of his relative, Sir Tormod Macleòid of Berneray. In the 'lilt' composed during her exile she mused upon the strange hillside view to the south, but her confusion was transformed, through her meditation on the landscape, into a defiant reaffirmation of her admiration for Sir Tormod:

Sitting here on the knoll, forlorn and unquiet, I gaze upon Islay and marvel the while; there was a time I never thought, till my times took a change, that hither I should come to view Jura from Scarba.

Hither to come and view Jura from Scarba! Bear my greetings to the land that lieth shadowed by the rugged peaks, to the young renowned Sir Norman [Tormod] that hath won headship over an armed host...⁴²⁹

In the works of Iain Luim and Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh, then, the mountainside or top was a place of both enhanced visual and poetic vision. As in John Denham's *Cooper's Hill*, they deliberately located themselves – and by extension their poetic reflections – upon the high places of their local landscapes. In some respects, the opening descriptions of their surrounding landscapes could be seen as a more immediate expression of the invocations by their English counterparts of the classical peak of Parnassus. In Gaelic poetry the equation of the poet and the hillside seems to go even further; the natural

⁴²⁷ Davidson, *Poetry and Revolution*, p.505.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.467.

⁴²⁹ J. Carmichael Watson, ed., *Gaelic Songs of Mary MacLeod* (1965), p.37, notes p.117. Màiri was exiled several times during her lifetime, cf. Derick S. Thomson, 'Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh [Mary MacLeod] (c.1615–c.1707)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17675>> [04.08.2016]; and William Matheson, 'Notes on Mary MacLeod', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, 41 (1953), 11-25.

landscape provided not just a figurative or actual ability to see further, but also provided the solitude necessary for poetic contemplation, and physically separated the poet from 'the rabble' which, as bards, they were already socially set apart from.⁴³⁰

In spite of this occasional discourse of mountains as spaces of retreat, neither Churchyard nor his bardic counterparts in Scotland depicted the mountains as entirely empty. Continuing his themes both of the contrast between valley and hillside, and of the nature of the mountain inhabitants, Churchyard decried the 'noysome smels' of the 'vale belowe'. As such, 'the highest Hilles', most greatly removed from the low-lying miasma of clouds and mists, 'are best'.⁴³¹ Such an environment, according to Churchyard, produced a certain type of people:

The Mountayne men, liue longer many a yéere,
Than those in Uale, in playne or marrish soyle:
A lustie hart, a cleane complexion cléere
They haue on Hill, that for hard liuing toyle.⁴³²

Such toil did not go unrewarded; working with the sheep and goats that sustained them was depicted as 'play' for the mountain folk, and laughter came easily at the end of a 'wearie day'.⁴³³ More than this,

No ayre so pure, and wholesome as the Hill,
Both man and beast, delights to be thereon:
In heate or cold, it kéepes one nature still,
Trim neate and drye, and gay to go vpon.
A place most fit, for pastime and good sport,
To which wyld Stagge, and Bucke doth still resort:
To crye of Hounds, the Mountayne ecco yéelds,
A grace to Uale, a beautie to the feelds.⁴³⁴

The mountainside, for Churchyard, was a place of simple and wholesome pleasures. By contrast, the valley, 'a den of drosse, oft tymes more foule than fayre', boasted material

⁴³⁰ Thomson, *Gaelic Poetry*, pp.11-13.

⁴³¹ Churchyard, *The Worthines of Wales*, sig. Mv.

⁴³² *Ibid.*, sig. M2r.

⁴³³ *Loc. cit.*

⁴³⁴ *Loc. cit.*

wealth and with it pride and vice.⁴³⁵ Churchyard's extended and closing point was in praise of the lifestyle enjoyed by mountain-dwellers, who possessed no wealth but, thanks to the environment they inhabited, knew 'more loue' and 'hath more happie daies'.⁴³⁶ It would seem that Churchyard's dream home was a mountaintop.

In Churchyard's 'Discourse' the virtue and contentment of the mountain people reflected the value of their environment. In contrast, Gaelic songs of praise or lamentation frequently utilised the image of the mountain – and the activities which took place upon it – in order to represent the virtuous qualities of the male subject being addressed. One such activity was the hunt, so energetically depicted by Churchyard above. Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh, in a song for her dying lord, proclaimed that 'going to traverse the peaked hills thou didst love the active hounds, and the gun that answered readily the trigger'.⁴³⁷ In another poem traditionally ascribed to Màiri, but probably the work of another bard, a mourner cried 'alas for the hero' who would never again ride 'to the mountain-chase now'.⁴³⁸ Iain Luim, begging an absent laird to return from the urban vices of London, reminded him of the wholesome expeditions of his youth and homeland: 'When ascending the slope of Ladharbheinn there would be herds within your reach'.⁴³⁹ Although these examples may be seen as purely descriptive of spatial practice, reflecting hunting as a mountain activity in which Scottish nobles frequently partook, it is also important to acknowledge the underlying purpose that Màiri and Iain Luim would have had in mentioning such ventures. Their songs highlighted the qualities of the individual whom they were either praising or lamenting, demonstrated through actions. Hunting was an energetic, joyous, social, and productive activity, as revealed in Iain Luim's address to Sir Dòmhnall MacDhòmhnail of Sleat:

Your vigorous young men used to bend the yew bow as they traversed the rocky mountains on the care-free expedition, along with the company in front of whom the prizes of hunting would be displayed.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, sig. M2v.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, sig. M3r.

⁴³⁷ Watson, *Mary MacLeod*, p.23.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.100-101.

⁴³⁹ Mackenzie, *Orain Iain Luim*, p.125.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.147.

The hillside, as the site of such sport, was a cipher for praiseworthy masculine virility.

In a darker expression of male strength, the mountain was also identified as the site of heroic battles. Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh, in a wedding song for her lord, reflected that:

My darling would ascend
the summit of high peaks;

With thee the pipe
briskly playing in the pursuit

Bright sword-blades
that would make carnage...⁴⁴¹

Likewise, in a dirge for Iain Garbh mac Gille Chaluim of Raasay, she spoke of his possession of 'A gun that readily answereth, well would it become my dear warrior in the cairn's summit or on the elbow of the peaks; blood would flow in front of its discharge'.⁴⁴² Meanwhile, Iain Luim disdained the fact that in 1675 'It was on the slope of Ben Buidhe that the company halted who were not faint-hearted', and did not, as hoped, 'enter Glen Aray to cut the grin off the wry-mouthed Campbells'.⁴⁴³ The mountain landscape was the backdrop to martial ventures, both successful and unsuccessful. When successful, the 'summit of high peaks' could be contiguous with military victory.

It could also be the site of praiseworthy struggle, as in the 1587 edition of the *Mirroure for Magistrates*. The *Mirroure* gave imagined voices to historical figures, describing their lives and deeds so that others might learn from them. First compiled as early as 1555 (although the original text does not survive), the work went through multiple iterations, with new lives added to each.⁴⁴⁴ John Higgins (c.1544-c.1620) contributed twenty-three new 'reflections' from ancient Britons and Romans, including one for Brennus, a fourth-century B.C.E. Gaulish chieftain who briefly captured Rome only for his army to be ejected

⁴⁴¹ Watson, *Mary MacLeod*, pp.5-7.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, p.29.

⁴⁴³ Mackenzie, *Orain Iain Luim*, p.153, notes p.296.

⁴⁴⁴ C.f. Harriet Archer and Andrew Hadfield, eds. *A Mirror for Magistrates in Context: Literature, History and Politics in Early Modern England* (2016).

and eviscerated some few months later.⁴⁴⁵ Higgins depicted Brennus crossing the Alps in a multi-sensory, highly tactile passage:

Great mountaynes, craggy, high, that touch the skies,
Full steepe to climbe vnto, and penshot all,
The Seas allow doe rore, and foggy vapours rise,
And from the hills great streames of waters fall.
The pathes so stricke to passe the speede is small.
The ise, snow, cold, clouds, rombling stormes, and lights aboue,
Are able constant harts with doubtfull feare to moue.

For as your goe, sometimes y'ar fayne to reatch
And hand by hands, to wend aloft the way:
And then on buttockes downe an other breatch,
With elbowes and with heeles your selfe to stay.
Downe vnder well behold the streames you may,
And waters wilde which from the mountaynes faling flow:
Ore head the rockes hang down whence riuers rore of melting snow.⁴⁴⁶

This passage was, perhaps, at least partly parodic, with the images of the bold warriors slipping and sliding along on their backsides an omen of their ultimate failure. Nevertheless – in a poetic echo to Josias Simler's more practical guidance – it evokes specificities of mountain challenges in a manner that is highly suggestive of an early modern familiarity with struggling through the snow, rain, and ice of the hillside.

Although mountains could, as in the *Mirroure*, threaten to overwhelm a leader doomed to defeat at the hands of his enemies, they could also symbolise, simply and profoundly, the nature and power of a rightful ruler. Yet another of Churchyard's paeans on the landscape mused that:

A Mountayne is, a noble stately thing,
Thrust full of stones, and Rocks as hard as stéele:
A péereles place, compared vnto a King...⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁵ Philip Schwyzer, 'Higgins, John (b. c.1544, d. in or before 1620)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13233>> [04.06.2016]. For Brennus see Livy, *History of Rome*, v.34-39.

⁴⁴⁶ John Higgins, *The Mirroure for Magistrates* (London, 1587), fol.55r.

⁴⁴⁷ Churchyard, *The Worthines of Wales*, sig.M2v.

Likewise, for the aristocratic poet Sileas na Ceapaich (c.1660-c.1729), a mountain could represent the strength and protection which a good laird could provide. In her lament for Alasdair Dubh MacDhòmhnail of Glengarry (d.1721), she communicated his strength and reliability through features of the natural landscape: 'You were an undrainable loch... you were Ben Nevis above every moor, you were an unscaleable crag'.⁴⁴⁸ By the time Sileas na Ceapaich composed her poems, the implicit equation between the mountain landscape and the power and virtue of a clan chief had become explicit. The mountains of Churchyard, Iain Luim, Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh, John Higgins, and Sileas were meaningful, active, inhabited, vital spaces – of power, pleasure, grief, trial, or simply of the rhythms of daily life.

Giving voice to mountains

Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion*, published in two parts in 1612 and 1622, is not an easy work to summarise. A poetic chorography, depicting the landscape, history, and antiquities of England and Wales according to a county-by-county structure, it echoed the antiquarian traditions of William Camden's 1584 *Britannia*.⁴⁴⁹ Drayton, who had risen from humble origins to a position of well-connected popularity, called upon the services of his polymathic friend John Selden to provide an appropriately scholarly commentary.⁴⁵⁰ Unlike Camden's, Drayton's immense work was presented not in prose, but in iambic hexameter, and, in a stylistic choice of enduring fancy, Drayton had the landscape of each county literally speak for itself.⁴⁵¹ His anthropomorphisation of hills, rivers, and even cities was visually repeated in the maps of *Poly-Olbion*, which are densely populated with shepherds, nymphs, and other figures.⁴⁵²

⁴⁴⁸ Colm Ó Baoill, ed., *Poems and Songs by Sileas MacDonald, c.1660-1729* (1972), p.73.

⁴⁴⁹ William H. Moore, 'Sources of Drayton's Conception of "Poly-Olbion"', *Studies in Philology* 65:5 (1968), pp.786-787.

⁴⁵⁰ Drayton, *The Works of Michael Drayton* ed. J. William Hebel, 4 vols. (1931-1941), vol.4, pp.viii-ix; Anne Lake Prescott, 'Drayton, Michael (1563-1631)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8042>> [04.08.2016].

⁴⁵¹ For a wider reading of Drayton's depiction of nature as a whole see Stella P. Revard, 'The Design of Nature in Drayton's Poly-Olbion', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 17:1 (1977), 105-117.

⁴⁵² Richard Helgerson, 'The Land Speaks: Cartography, Chorography, and Subversion in Renaissance England', *Representations* 16 (1986), pp.59-64, considers the implications of Drayton's pictorial depiction of the English nation as a landscape.

Several passages nod to the early modern impression that mountains were the source of the rivers and other waters which fed the valleys below, although Drayton frequently alluded to a masculine, paternal origin rather than the feminine, maternal imagery used elsewhere. In his Lancashire ‘song’ Drayton gave voice to Ribble, a river, who described her Yorkshire origins:

From *Penigents* [Pen-y-ghent] proud foot, as from my source I slide,
That Mountaine my proud Syre, in height of all his pride,
Takes pleasure in my course...⁴⁵³

Elsewhere, the River ‘Lon’ (Lune) is described as having been ‘amongst the Mountaines nurst’, whilst Drayton blurred the lines between fact and fantasy in identifying a ‘Fountaine’ in Giggleswick as having originally been a ‘Nymph... in the Mountaines hye’.⁴⁵⁴ In Drayton’s verses multiple landscape features, particularly rivers, often debate with one another regarding their relative superiority; in such discussions, being ‘descended’ from a specific mountain could impart status to a given river. For example, in a face-off between the rivers Tees and Wear, the Wear began to list her various tributaries, including ‘*Kellop* comming in from *Kellop-Law* her Syre, / A Mountaine much in fame...’.⁴⁵⁵ Mountains were thus depicted in *Poly-Olbion* as an important element of the functional landscape.

Mountain utility also did not end with the provision of rivers. Writing of ‘th’*English Alpes*’ – Drayton’s tag for the Cheviot Hills – he observed that ‘as they runne along, / *England* and *Scotland* here impartially divide’.⁴⁵⁶ Such an impression coincides with the understanding expressed by Erasmus Warren during the Burnet debate that mountains served to peaceably divide kingdoms from one another, and also echoes the tradition expressed by the poet-historian William Habington (1605-1654), that ‘Some nation yet shut in / With hils of ice / May be let out to scourge his sinne’ (itself an allusion to passages from Jeremiah which refer to evils coming out of the north).⁴⁵⁷ Mountains could

⁴⁵³ Michael Drayton, *The Second Part, or a Continuance of Poly-Olbion from the Eighteenth Song Containing All the Tracts, Riuers, Mountaines, and Forrests* (1622), sep. pag. [throughout] p.131.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid* p.133, 142.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.152.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.141-142, 153.

⁴⁵⁷ Davidson, *Poetry and Revolution*, pp.141-142. C.f. KJV, Jeremiah 1:14 and 50:3 and Warren, *Geologia*, p.147.

both act as a neutral zone, by minimising contact and maintaining peace between two nations who might otherwise come to blows, and also take on the more active role of guarding against determined aggressors.

The height of mountains, and the view available from their peaks, could confer practical and aesthetic benefits. Drayton, describing the highest mountain on the Isle of Man, noted that:

...from *Scaefels* height,
A cleere and perfect eye, the weather being bright,
(Be *Neptunes* visage ne' so terrible and sterne)
The *Scotch*, the *Irish* Shores, and th'*English* may discern...⁴⁵⁸

He also depicted mountains as staging-posts for news, describing the involvement of different peaks in passing south the news of the Earl of Sussex's victory in Scotland during the reign of Elizabeth I (probably referring to the Rising of the North of 1569), with '*Black-Brea*, a mountain holding state' passing it down to Cocklaw, and then 'to *Cheviot*, who did rave, / With the report thereof, hee from his mighty stand, / Resounded it again through all *Northumberland*...' ⁴⁵⁹ It is possible that Drayton's anthropomorphic narrative depicts the real-life lighting of signal fires across the mountain-tops. Either way, the height of mountains imparted to them significant practical value as natural borders, summits that afforded wide prospects, and as sites of communication - qualities that appeared over and again elsewhere in the early modern discourse of mountains.

In terms of more explicitly aesthetic depictions of mountains, Drayton did not shy from describing their cold, rocky, and even forbidding nature, but he also emphasised their strength and size in ways which suggest he appreciated their grandeur. For example, he urged his 'Muse' to 'seriously pursue the sterne *Westmerian* Wilde', populated with 'Steep Mountaines', as an antidote to 'those rude vulgar sots' who inhabit the valleys.⁴⁶⁰ He went on to describe 'Copland' (Copeland, which Drayton, following Camden, assumed was an

⁴⁵⁸ Drayton, *The Second Part of Poly-Olbion*, p.135. Drayton was referring to Snaefell (620m). A current-day Isle of Man saying holds, echoing Drayton, that one can see the 'six kingdoms' (of England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Mann, and Heaven) from its summit.

<<http://www.iomguide.com/mountainrailway.php>> [accessed 27.09.2016].

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.157-158.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.161.

etymological reference to its copper-mines) in the following manner:

...What place can there be found in *Britain*, that doth show
A Surface more austere, more sterne from every way,
That who doth it behold, he cannot chuse but say,
Th'aspect of these grim hills, these dark and mistie Dales,
From clouds scarce ever cleer'd, with the strongst Northern gales,
Tell in their mighty Roots, some Minerall there doth lye...⁴⁶¹

The 'mighty' mountains could look forbidding, but this in fact alluded to the wealth that they had stored up within them. In describing Furness, a northern peninsula of Lancashire, Drayton wrote of its 'face':

With Mountaines set like Warts, which Nature as a grace
Bestow'd upon this Tract, whose Browes doe looke so sterne...⁴⁶²

This passage once again communicates a sense of a stern and harsh mountain landscape, but compellingly also suggests that to describe a mountain as a 'wart' (which Joshua Poole in the *English Parnassus* would later suggest as an appropriate epithet) did not necessarily communicate a sense of aesthetic distaste; a wart could be a 'grace', adding interest to a stark landscape. As suggested by John Beaumont and observed by Adam Olearius, mountains offered visual variety and a range of resources to the wider world. Elsewhere, English mountains were described as appearing from a distance 'like clouds, shap't with embattled towers', an image evoking a sense of far-off beauty and strength, and echoing the words not of natural philosophers, but of the traveller Thomas Coryate.⁴⁶³

Drayton did more than simply describe the visual impact of mountains; he also gave them their own voices, and pictured them in his maps as human figures (see fig. 19). He was not alone in his anthropomorphic approach – mountains were frequently personified, both in poetry and in print engravings, through the unfortunate character of the giant Atlas, turned to stone by the gaze of Medusa (see figs. 20-21) – but he was unusual in

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.164.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, Drayton, *The Second Part of Poly-Olbion*, p.135. Furness is now part of Cumbria.

⁴⁶³ Drayton, *The Second Part of Poly-Olbion*, pp.165-166. See Chapter Two, p.66.

allowing peaks to make their personal addresses to the reader. One mountain who discourses at length, mainly on his own virtues, is 'proud *Skiddo*', or Skiddaw, thought by Drayton to be the highest of the Cumbrian hills, and compared by him to Parnassus thanks to its 'double head' (Skiddaw has two conical summits separated by a saddle - Skiddaw proper and Skiddaw 'Little Man').⁴⁶⁴ Skiddaw's speech both suggests a level of experiential knowledge, either first- or second-hand, of the north Cumbrian landscape, and a sense of appreciation for the mountains there. With regards to the former, Skiddaw declaimed of himself:

And when my Helme of Clouds upon my head I take,
At very sight thereof, immediatly I make
Th'Inhabitants about, tempestuous storms to feare,
And for fair weather looke, when as my top is cleere...⁴⁶⁵

As any modern-day hiker who has had the misfortune to be caught in a hail-storm on Skiddaw when the regional forecast promised fine weather knows, the mountain's stature and position at the edge of the range means that much of the weather coming from the north or north-east breaks on its summit before sweeping down into the rest of the Lake District. In terms of appreciation, Skiddaw claimed that the river Derwent, on whom he looked down 'As some enamoured Youth', often 'lifts her limber selfe above her Banks to view, / How my brave by-clift top, doth still her Course pursue'; in Drayton's understanding of the landscape, no part was better than the other, but, just as the rivers and valleys were furnished by the mountains above, so too did they stand in mutual appreciation of one another.⁴⁶⁶ Finally, Skiddaw spoke out to his admirers:

O all yee Topick Gods, that doe inhabit here,
To whom the *Romans* did, those ancient Altars reare,
Oft found upon those Hils, now sunke into the Soyles,
Which they for Trophies left of their victorious spoyles,
Ye *Genii* of these Floods, these Mountains, and these Dales,
That with poore Sheapherds Pipes, & harmlesse Heardsmens tales,
Have often pleased been, still guard me day and night,

⁴⁶⁴ C.f. Brome, *Travels*, pp.205-206: '*Skiddaw* riseth up with two mighty heads, like *Parnassus*'.

⁴⁶⁵ Drayton, *The Second Part of Poly-Olbion*, pp.165-166.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.165-166.



Fig. 19: Detail from map of 'Cumberlande and Westmorlande', in Michael Drayton, *Poly-Olbion* (London, 1622), map between pp.160 and 161.



Fig. 20: Antonio Tempesta, *Atlas Turned into a Mountain* (1606), 97 x 115mm, Metropolitan Museum of Art. One of a series depicting scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.



Fig. 21: Abraham Aubry, after a design by Johann Wilhelm Baur, 'Atlas in Montem a Perseo Mutatus' in *Metamorphoses* (Nürnberg, [1703?]).

And hold me *Skidow* still, the place of your delight.⁴⁶⁷

This passage both depicted a long-running tradition of human engagement with the mountain landscape - from shepherds and herdsmen making their daily bread upon the hillside, to Roman worshipers setting up their shrines upon the slopes - and attested that the origin for this interaction was that mountains were actually the homes of the gods. The unspoken suggestion seems to be that if mountains could be 'the place of... delight' for spirits and genii, it is only natural that they should be so to mortal people too.

Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* depicted a natural and fantastic landscape in which mountains played an essential practical and aesthetic role. They separated potentially antithetical nations, they were the source of the rivers that caused the valleys to flourish, and they were strong, stern, and impressive elements of the landscape whose height offered great advantages to those willing to scale them. Marjorie Hope Nicolson allowed that Drayton may have experienced 'a personal feeling for grand nature', but concluded that on the whole *Poly-Olbion* simply proved 'the persistence of the literary conventions stemming from classics and Scripture'.⁴⁶⁸ I would argue that the two characteristics were not in conflict. Rather, the fact that Drayton drew upon established traditions of understanding and describing mountains suggests that his nuanced and largely appreciative depiction represents not merely his individual experience but instead points towards attitudes embedded in a widely shared seventeenth-century literary vision of the landscape. 'Conventions' and 'personal feelings' cannot be separated.

Expressing Mountains

As can be seen above, the poetic 'grammar' (or grammars) of mountains extant in early modern Britain allowed for a wide range of complex and nuanced depictions and symbolic uses of the high landscape. In a range of different contexts - from English Royalist poetry to Scottish Gaelic laments - poets acknowledged the challenging physicality of mountains whilst also highlighting their virtues as sites of good prospects and as awe-inspiring aesthetic objects in their own right. Mountains were closely

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.165-166.

⁴⁶⁸ Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom*, p.55.

associated with poetic inspiration, with strength, and with power. The verses considered also demonstrate the 'conventional' nature of early modern poetic imagery; the epithets suggested in the *English Parnassus* reappear in the quotations from other English poems dating both before and after it, whilst the oral, bardic compositions of the Scottish Gaelic poets relied upon the formulaic invocation of scenes and images. Common poetic epithets provided not just the language by which the landscape was described but also the terms through which it was understood and experienced; the 'literary heritage' with which an early modern English reader might go to mountains included a sense of them as 'warts', but also of them as 'star-kissing'. Some of the poems considered demonstrate that mountains could be loved, as the adornment of the British Isles, as one of the 'worthinesses' of Wales, or as the contours of a home for which a seventeenth-century gentleman had only satisfaction in retiring to. Perhaps such poems also prepared people to have similar feelings for mountains when they met them 'in the flesh'.

Previous critiques of mountain poetry – namely, the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century school of the 'return to nature', and Marjorie Hope Nicolson in following them – were unconsciously rooted in distinctly post-Romantic preconceptions of what 'genuine' landscape poetry looked like. Inheritors and perpetuators of modern ideals of originality and canonicity, they found early modern poems to be inexpressive of the sublime feelings that were, they believed, the product of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century 'English genius'. These conclusions led Nicolson, in particular, to confirm and re-articulate an overarching theory of early modern 'mountain gloom' giving way to 'mountain glory', a theory which has shaped narratives of mountain history ever since. This literary phenomenon was not an isolated one. The following chapter will trace the wider genealogy of the discourse of mountain gloom and glory. It will demonstrate that literary theorists and mountaineers alike wrote the mountain past in the context of values inherent to their pursuits and to modernity itself. In so doing, they unintentionally concealed the variety of mountain reactions and interactions that the preceding four chapters have revealed.

Chapter Five: Mountain Gloom: The History of an Idea

Daniel Defoe's *Tour Thro' the whole Island of Great Britain* (1724-1727) was not, as has previously been noted, particularly complimentary towards mountain landscapes. The sometime spy and author of dramatic shipwrecks found the Peak District to be a 'houling Wilderness', Lancashire to be populated with hills containing 'a kind of an unhospitable Terror in them', and the land that is now treasured as the Lake District to be 'the wildest, most barren and frightful of any' he had ever passed over.⁴⁶⁹ The *Tour* was a resounding success, with seven subsequent editions – revised first by printer and writer Samuel Richardson, and then 'by Gentlemen of Eminence in the Literary World' – released in the five decades following Defoe's death. The eighth edition, published in 1778, emphasised its improvements and enlargements upon the original:

Modern travellers have enabled us to give a more accurate description of the principality of *Wales*, than... in the former edition, many gentlemen having, since that time, traversed the *Welsh* mountains... The description of every county in the kingdom has been modernized, and many of their natural beauties, hitherto unnoticed, brought forth to view, particularly those of the northern counties, as *Yorkshire, Lancashire, Westmorland, and Cumberland*. The last two counties were formerly considered as little better than barren and inhospitable deserts, and, being so remote from the metropolis, were seldom visited as the objects of pleasure, till the amazing improvements lately made (and still making) in all the roads throughout the kingdom...⁴⁷⁰

This text looked back, from the vantage point of near historical hindsight, and commented upon the perceived changes that had taken place over the preceding fifty years. The eminent literary gentleman who revised Defoe's *Tour* identified an improvement in roads leading out to more remote regions of the British Isles which had apparently prompted an increase in the number of travellers to those regions. This closer acquaintance with mountain areas in turn enabled a development in taste, from an earlier attitude, articulated in Defoe's original text, which found them to be stark and distasteful, to a newer one, articulated in the revised edition, which saw them as 'objects of pleasure' to be actively sought out. The prologue to the eighth edition of the *Tour* could therefore

⁴⁶⁹ Daniel Defoe, *Tour* (1727), vol.3, p.44 and p.223.

⁴⁷⁰ Daniel Defoe et. al., *A Tour Through the Island of Great Britain, Divided into Circuits or Journeys*, 8th ed. (London, 1778), vol.1, sig.a2v-a3r. C.f. Betty A. Schellenberg, 'Coterie Culture, the Print Trade, and the Emergence of the Lakes Tour, 1724-1787', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 44:2 (2011), pp.206-207, 216.

be interpreted as the earliest articulation of a historical shift from mountain gloom to mountain glory.

It can also be read another way. The preface was telling a story about past editions of the *Tour* in order to justify the existence of the latest, updated edition which it introduced. It had a vested interest both in depicting the eighth edition as doing something new and contemporary in displaying a focus on mountains, whilst also implying that the original was a reliable representation of the tastes and circumstances of its time. Nuance - such as the fact that many seventeenth-century travellers, without the advantage of 'modern' roads, made it to Wales and the northern counties of England, or that many authors contemporaneous with Defoe reacted not with gloom but with the earliest articulations of sublimity to the sight of mountains - was irrelevant for the purposes of the above passage. It was not intended to display deep historical insight, rooted in intense engagement with earlier sources; rather, it was a glib and efficient way of selling the product that it offered, casting both itself and its readers as possessing novel tastes and advanced insights over earlier generations.

The introduction to this thesis, whilst acknowledging the scholarly and historiographical significance of Marjorie Hope Nicolson's *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, suggested that it had deep roots in older discourses. In 1959, Nicolson's aim was not to prove or disprove a dramatic shift in mountain attitudes - a historical fact more or less taken for granted - but to explain the mechanisms of it. The previous chapter has already introduced the literary discourse of a 'return to nature' upon which Nicolson built. J.C. Shairp's reflections upon the mountain-less poetry of William Shakespeare is just one of a complex network of texts which told the story of the mountain past long before Nicolson came to analyse it. *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory* was based on exhaustive historical research and the most cutting-edge methodology of its time, crossing generic and topical boundaries in new and innovative ways. It also represents the apex of a long process of polemical story-telling. This thesis has demonstrated that the basic concept of mountain gloom is unrepresentative of the reality of early modern mountain engagement. How, then, has it come to be such a generally-accepted historical fact?

This chapter will explore a selection of texts that told and re-told the history of human engagement with mountains in the century or so preceding the publication of *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*. The focus will largely be upon the ways in which mountaineers constructed the origin story and prehistory of their sport, but it will also explore the similarities between their discursive techniques and those employed by literary figures and theorists elaborating upon the idea of a new, modern taste for wild nature. Building upon the discussion in the previous chapter of the literary discourses of originality and canonicity, the first section, 'Building the Campfire', will elucidate some of the key discourses inherent to modern mountaineering which have affirmed the idea of a significant change in mountain attitudes. The second section, 'Constructing Mountain Gloom', will lay out two of the most extensive articulations of this shift before comparing and contrasting them with a selection of other accounts from the second half of the nineteenth century which made claims regarding the human history of mountains. The third section, 'A Truth Universally Acknowledged', will first trace the process – from the very end of the nineteenth century up to the mid-twentieth – by which the concept of early modern mountain gloom came to be a generally and popularly accepted fact; an idea to revise, repeat, and intellectually toy with. It will then consider Nicolson's work in the context of the texts which preceded it, before demonstrating the ways in which subsequent interpretations have further crystallised and replicated a vision of the past rooted in mountaineering myth-making and literary status-building.

This chapter will demonstrate that the idea of early modern mountain gloom as a historical fact is one that has reached the twenty-first century by way of a complex genealogical grapevine: of the claims of Romantic poets being absorbed and rearticulated by late-nineteenth-century literary theorists; of modern mountaineers accepting the accounts written by their Golden Age forbears; of modern-day academic articles summing up Nicolson's monograph solely by way of its title.⁴⁷¹ At each stage, texts were written and stories were told with specific motives that often had little to do with a disinterested desire for historical objectivity. Of each text explored, this chapter will ask what purpose was served for the author and the personal, social, cultural, or institutional

⁴⁷¹ The 'Golden Age' of Alpinism is dated between Alfred Wills' ascent of the Wetterhorn in 1854 and Edward Whymper's ascent of the Matterhorn in 1865, during which years a flurry of first ascents occurred in the Alps, mostly by British mountaineers and their guides.

context to which they belonged in emphasising a contrast between past and present mountain tastes. In many cases, it will be found that the early writers of mountain history – whose claims have informed the terms of twenty-first-century understandings of that history – were influenced by the implicit drive to establish either themselves, their pursuit, or key figures within their discipline as exceptional in admiring and enjoying mountains. The conclusion to this chapter will argue that the discourse of mountain gloom and mountain glory is itself a product of modernity seeking the ‘summit position’ of – as in many other things – the appreciation of mountains.

Building the Campfire

The concept of early modern mountain gloom was and is articulated at the nexus of other discourses, attitudes, assumptions, and ideas. There have been two key strands to the discourse of mountain gloom and glory: articulations made within the literary sphere, and visions of history put forward in the context of mountaineering literature. Retellings which fall outside of these two strands, such as popular histories for general readerships or, more recently, academic accounts in fields beyond literature, nevertheless draw heavily on these two traditions. Chapter Four has already deconstructed some of the influences that have acted upon post-Romantic literary criticism, such as the reification of originality and the mental limitations set by the canon.

However, it was around the campfire of modern mountaineering that the story of early modern mountain gloom was most repeatedly and energetically told, and where the most authoritative version of the ‘mountain canon’ was formed. Throughout this thesis I have asserted that mountaineering is a distinctly modern activity; but what is it, and when did it start? As this chapter will show, climbers could argue endlessly about whether one ascent or another should be defined as ‘true’ mountaineering, but I would argue that it was in fact the social and institutional contexts within which these debates take place that makes modern mountaineering truly exceptional. The first ascent of Mont Blanc took place in 1786, but it was not until 1857 that the (British) Alpine Club, the first of its kind, was founded to provide an organisational structure for mountaineering pursuits. Today,

Alpine or Mountaineering clubs exist around the world, from national clubs to student-led university groups. Mountaineering may not be a team sport, but it is a club sport.⁴⁷²

Mountaineering clubs serve and have served a number of purposes, not least the practical one of bringing together individuals who might go on to climb together. They also, prominently, act as discursive centres from which technical knowledge and safety advice can be distributed, and above all as spaces within which stories can be told. Six years after its foundation, the Alpine Club inaugurated the *Alpine Journal*, a still-extant annual publication which once again provided a model followed by countless other mountaineering clubs at all levels. From its earliest years onwards, then, mountaineering – in addition to being an adventurous and active sport – has also always been a highly literary pursuit. It is rarely enough to simply perform an ascent, come down to the bottom, and then return to daily life. It is likely that mountaineering has seen more ink spilt in terms of the publication of both technical and narrational works, and developed more extensive institutional libraries, than any other modern sport.⁴⁷³ As such, the pages of the early *Alpine Journal* – utilised extensively in this chapter – provide valuable insight into the self-reflective, self-defining nature of modern mountaineering.

These self-definitions have frequently expressed the nature of mountaineering in opposition to other mountain activities – an idea touched upon in chapter three with the exploration of Gesner and Petrarch’s mountain ascents. A telling example of this can be found in the *Alpine Journal* for 1875, in which an anonymous reviewer reflected upon the demerits of a volume entitled *The Abode of Snow* by Andrew Wilson, an account of a

⁴⁷² Peter H. Hansen, ‘Founders of the Alpine Club (act. 1857-1863), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/theme/96327>> [05.09.2016] and Peter H. Hansen, ‘Albert Smith, the Alpine Club, and the Invention of Mountaineering in Mid-Victorian Britain’, *Journal of British Studies* 34:3 (1995), 300-324, for the makeup of the early Alpine Club. The latter article in particular emphasises the almost exclusively middle-class nature of the Club and the significance of mountaineering in constructing a specifically middle-class Victorian masculinity.

⁴⁷³ There are not many sports that can boast a book-length bibliography, aimed at a popular rather than an academic audience, of texts relevant to its pursuit: Jill Neate, *Mountaineering Literature: A Bibliography of Material Published in English* (1996). The first librarian of the Alpine Club emphasised that mountaineers did not ‘ignore all interests but the gymnastic one’, claiming that the possession of a book collection set them apart from other ‘athletic or sporting clubs’. Frederick Pollock, ‘The Library of the Alpine Club’, *Alpine Journal* 12 (1884-1886), p.425. Zac Robinson, ‘Early Alpine Club Culture and Mountaineering Literature’, Ghazali Musa, James Higham and Anna Thompson-Carr, eds., *Mountaineering Tourism* (2015), 105-117, emphasises the self-consciously ‘learned’ nature of late nineteenth-century mountaineering. With thanks to Zac for kindly sending me a copy of his chapter.

journey through the mountains of Tibet and India.⁴⁷⁴ The reviewer's ire was raised by the fact that a *Times* review of the same work had described it as 'a record of "systematic mountaineering", such as is seldom undertaken or described by members of the Alpine Club'. This particular member of the club expressed their regret that such an esteemed publication should so expose its ignorance of 'the subject it is talking about, and of the meaning of the words it uses'. They further explained:

As we understand the word – and its introducers have perhaps the best right to define its meaning – Mr. Wilson's book is not a record of 'mountaineering' at all. It is the story of a journey made... on horseback or on a litter. This kind of mountain travel was the only sort known to our ancestors. The modern passion for foot-climbing as an athletic sport was felt to be so distinct that a new word 'mountaineering,' had to be invented for it.⁴⁷⁵

According to this review, mountaineering belonged to the mountaineers to define, and it was not the same as merely travelling through mountains. One late twentieth-century history of mountaineering emphasised that 'utilitarian' reasons for climbing mountains – whether for the pursuit of fame, science, or wealth – were distinctive from mountaineering as a 'disinterested activity' pursued for purely 'aesthetic considerations'.⁴⁷⁶ Mountaineering was defined against the very motivations which had taken most people in human history up mountains.

Hand-in-hand with the oppositional definition of mountaineering was the discourse of exclusivity that is inherent to the sport.⁴⁷⁷ The above article also decried the increasing 'mass interest' in mountaineering, suggesting that ascents carried out for fame, 'In a modern world... where the cult of stardom has reached fever pitch' have slowly deformed the 'initially pure attitude' with which the earliest mountaineers set out.⁴⁷⁸ The problem of the masses has also been raised in recent debates surrounding commercial versus

⁴⁷⁴ Andrew Wilson, *The Abode of Snow: Observations on a Journey from Chinese Tibet to the Indian Caucasus, through the Upper Valleys of the Himalaya* (1875).

⁴⁷⁵ Anonymous review of *The Abode of Snow* by Andrew Wilson, *Alpine Journal* 7 (1874-1876), p.338.

⁴⁷⁶ Frison-Roches and Jouty, *A History of Mountain Climbing*, pp.8-10.

⁴⁷⁷ This exclusivity has been constructed upon various lines. Michael S. Reidy, 'Mountaineering, Masculinity, and the Male Body in Mid-Victorian Britain', *Osiris* 30:1 (2015), 158-181, highlights the discursive (if not actual) exclusion of women and the feminine from high-altitude spaces in British mountaineering traditions, as well as the ways in which early mountaineers distinguished themselves against the 'common tourist'. Gilchrist, 'Gender and British Climbing Histories', pp.230-231, has touched upon implicit discourses among mountaineers regarding their exclusive possession of their history.

⁴⁷⁸ Frison-Roches and Jouty, *A History of Mountain Climbing*, p.8.

professional mountaineering, particularly on Mount Everest. Where professional mountaineers, whose livelihood centres upon their climbing and the talks and publications stemming from it, have the time and connections to form their own team to support and launch a summit attempt on the world's highest mountain, amateur or hobbyist mountaineers – albeit those with significant disposable incomes – generally join commercial expeditions, which provide the infrastructural support for an ascent at a hefty price-tag. The latter expeditions have come under criticism for allowing inexperienced climbers onto the mountain, risking their lives and those of others, whilst the general practice, in enabling more people to come to Everest, has led to increasing environmental pressures. Stephen Venables, a professional British mountaineer, proposed the provocative solution of banning supplementary oxygen on the peak, a measure that would limit climbers on its flanks to those with the rare physiological privilege of being able to breathe at 8,848m.⁴⁷⁹ This argument is a devil's-advocate response to a real problem, namely that the number of people attracted to Everest is such that they are destroying the very qualities of remote, adventurous purity which they seek in going to it. Although mountaineers may proselytise at length as to the beauties of their mountain playground, most do not want the hordes to descend on it. The very appeal and existence of mountaineering relies on the 'club' being exclusive and limited.

The literary drive within mountaineering has long been closely associated with an internal fascination with the history of the sport. Given that the *Alpine Journal* was founded to provide a forum for members to publish accounts of their contemporary climbs, it is remarkable how many notes, queries, and extensive articles were dedicated from early on to historical questions. In the first forty years of the *Journal* one can find queries and notes about the existence of medieval passes, translations of sixteenth-century texts revelatory not just of mountaineering history but also of the social history of mountaineering regions, philological discussions of the exact location of the pass famously crossed by Hannibal and his elephants, and countless discussions of 'early ascents', which had taken place before the formation of the Alpine Club.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁹ Stephen Venables, 'Tourism has devalued Everest', *The Telegraph*, May 23 2013, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/mounteverest/10075415/Everest-devalued-by-tourism-says-Stephen-Venables.html>> [04.02.2016].

⁴⁸⁰ Mr. George 'Mediæval Routes Across the Eastern Alps', *Alpine Journal* 6 (1872-1874), pp.371-2 and F.F. Tuckett, in response, pp.434-436; W.M. Conway, 'Life in the Vispthal at the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century', *Alpine Journal* 12 (1884-1886), pp.380-90; Douglas W. Freshfield, 'The Pass of Hannibal', *Alpine*

Mountaineering today continues to be a highly historically-engaged pursuit, which can now revel in an expanded history of countless Alpine and Himalayan expeditions, complete with stories of heroism and disaster.

As the following section will show, articulations of the idea of early modern mountain gloom were frequently prompted by this characteristic of historical fascination and were significantly influenced by discourses of the oppositional and exclusive nature of modern mountain engagement as epitomised in mountaineering. A final defining feature of modern mountaineering is that of the summit position. This attaches a sense of status to the constructed achievement of the individual alone upon a mountain-top. Peter H. Hansen has posited that, within mountaineering and historical discourses, this 'assertion of individual will is the essence of mountaineering and modern man'.⁴⁸¹ Certainly, as chapter three has suggested, the fever to gain a summit simply for the sake of doing so (rather than for 'instrumental' reasons, such as getting a wider view) seems to have passed early modern climbers by.

Closely associated with the summit position within modern mountaineering is the discourse of primacy: an obsession with 'firsts'. As early as 1883 one member of the Alpine Club, Clinton Thomas Dent, parodied this drive. Observing that most of the Alpine peaks had been 'climbed out' long since, Dent provided a modern metric which allowed a single mountain to 'be the means of bringing glory and honour to many climbers'. The first ascent, by 'A.', an unnamed chamois hunter, is automatically disregarded, giving 'B.' the joy of the first recorded ascent; 'C.' takes the first ascent 'from the other side'; 'D.' ascends one way and descends the other; 'E.', by scrambling up 'the wrong way' earns the first ascent by a particular arête; 'F. climbs it in the ordinary way', but is distinguished by being the first Englishman, or the first climber without guides, to do so. Finally, 'G.' is 'dragged up by his guides', an achievement defined as the 'First real ascent: because all the others were ignorant of the topographical details, and G.'s peak is nearly one metre higher than any other point.'⁴⁸² The drive for the 'prime summit position' may be seen at

Journal 11 (1882-1884), pp.267-300; F.F. Tuckett, referring to an 1804 ascent, 'Early Ascents of the Orteler Spitze', *Alpine Journal* 2 (1865-1866), p.302; 'G.O.S', referring to a 1779 account, 'A Very Early Attempt on the Aiguille du Dru', *Alpine Journal* 6 (1872-1874), pp.194-195; etc.

⁴⁸¹ Hansen, *Summits of Modern Man*, pp.2-3.

⁴⁸² C.T. Dent, 'Mountaineering in the Old Style' (read before the Alpine Club 5 June 1883) *Alpine Journal* 11 (1882-1884), pp.393-394.

actual, rather than comedic, work in the proliferation of ‘new records’ and constructed challenges of recent years: being the first person to climb all peaks of a particular type (such as the Seven Summits, the highest on each continent), or becoming the ‘most *x*’ or even ‘most *x-y*’ person (oldest, youngest, oldest woman, youngest man) to climb a certain peak. As will shortly be seen, the desire of the author to define themselves or their immediate forbears as ‘first’ in the honour of loving mountains was frequently an underlying motivation not just of mountaineering but also of literary articulations of early modern mountain gloom. Moreover, they frequently found it necessary to engage in the same sorts of mental gymnastics lampooned by Dent in order to disqualify early modern examples from the explicitly modern club of mountain enjoyment.

Constructing Mountain Gloom

Two of the most extensive and detailed tellings of the story of early modern mountain gloom were written by a pair of self-conscious pioneers in their field, now remembered respectively as a famous individual in the history of modern literature and as a key figure from the Golden Age of Alpine mountaineering. The Romantic poet, William Wordsworth (1770-1850), needs no introduction in any context; Sir Leslie Stephen (1832-1904) - most famous outside of sporting circles for fathering Virginia Woolf - was a lapsed Anglican clergyman, journalist, and the fourth president of the Alpine Club, from 1868 to 1871. In the last year of his presidency Stephen published what was to become his permanent mark on mountaineering literature, *The Playground of Europe*, which recounted his many first ascents in the Alps alongside his reflections upon the nature - and history - of mountaineering. The roots of Stephen’s interest in the subject of premodern mountain attitudes seem fairly obvious; Wordsworth’s motivations for dabbling in the waters of the early modern period somewhat less so.

In 1844, the elderly Wordsworth was driven out of peaceful retirement by the proposal to run a new railway into his beloved Lake District via Kendal, with a branch striking deep into the heart of the region at Windermere.⁴⁸³ In October of that year, he sent a regretful

⁴⁸³ For Wordsworth’s objections in the context of increasing railway travel and tourism, see Stephen Prickett, ‘Circles and Straight Lines: Romantic Versions of Tourism’, eds. Hartmut Berghoff, Barbara Korte, Ralf Schneider and Christopher Harvie, *The Making of Modern Tourism: The Cultural History of the British Experience, 1600-2000* (2002), 69-84.

sonnet on the subject to the editor of the *Morning Post*; three months later, in December, he followed the poem up with an extensive prose letter, again published in the *Post*.⁴⁸⁴ Although he would conclude with a dismal vision of his beloved home being taken over by the 'noisy pleasure' of tourists, the heart of his argument hung upon his articulation of the history of reactions to mountains.⁴⁸⁵ He suggested that thanks to the provision of a daily coach, the Lakes were already 'of very easy access for *all* persons'. He was ruffled by the suggestion, evidently made by supporters of the railway, that 'if they be not made still more so, the poor, it is said, will be wronged'. In defending himself from this potential charge, Wordsworth noted that 'The wrong, if any, must lie in the unwarrantable obstruction of an attainable benefit'.⁴⁸⁶ In other words: it was only cruel to deny the general populace convenient access to the Lake District if it could be found that they would actually enjoy being there. For proof that they would not, in fact, enjoy it, Wordsworth turned to the example of history.

His opening thesis statement was that 'the relish for choice and picturesque natural scenery... is of quite recent origin'.⁴⁸⁷ He went on to elaborate that if John Ray, 'one of the first men of his age... [was] silent upon the sublimity and beauty of those [Alpine] regions', then the taste for mountains must be 'neither inherent in mankind, nor a necessarily consequence of even a comprehensive education'.⁴⁸⁸ His gallery of past reactions to mountains encompassed the distress of John Evelyn, who 'giving an account of his journey through the Alps, dilates upon the terrible, the melancholy, and the uncomfortable', and concluded with the 'sensations' of Thomas Gray, who *did* address the mountains 'In a noble strain'. In between he discussed Thomas Burnet, emphasising his eulogy upon the sight of the Alps on the one hand and the sea on the other, remarking that 'Nothing can be worthier of the magnificent appearances he describes than his language'.⁴⁸⁹ He concluded that, up until the age of Gray, and with the notable *exception* of Burnet, there was 'not a single English traveller whose published writings disprove the assertion that, where precipitous rocks and mountains are mentioned at all, they are

⁴⁸⁴ William Wordsworth, *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart, 3 vols. (1876), vol.2, p.323.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.331-332.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.326.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.326-327.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.327-328. For Ray c.f. p.106, herein.

⁴⁸⁹ C.f. Burnet's panegyric, p.98-99.

spoken of as objects of dislike and fear, not of admiration'.⁴⁹⁰ He also cited more rustic evidence, quoting a 'shrewd and sensible woman' who had lived near him as a youth in Keswick, and who apparently frequently exclaimed 'Bless me! folk are always talking about prospects, when I was young there was never sic a thing neamed [such a thing named]'.⁴⁹¹

Wordsworth justified this historical exegesis by way of explaining that the type of landscape boasted by the Lake District could not be 'comprehended... without processes of culture or opportunities of observation in some degree habitual'.⁴⁹² The taste for 'romantic scenery' had to be acquired slowly, in individuals as in history, and Wordsworth had grave doubts as to whether simply transporting hordes of town workers to the Lake District for a summer holiday once a year was the way to develop it.⁴⁹³ He suggested that they might be better (and more cheaply) encouraged to wander regularly in the fields around their hometowns and feared that, if they were dragged to the Lakes against their taste if not their will, they would seek entertainments of a sort that would seriously damage the very qualities of peace and tranquillity from which they were supposed to be benefiting.⁴⁹⁴ The early modern traveller to the Alps, even an educated one, was analogous to the modern workman transported to the Lake District: ill-suited to appreciate its beauties. Wordsworth's articulation of premodern mountain gloom, then, was deeply implicated in a polemical argument, motivated by a desire to preserve the quiet exclusivity of the Lake District, and underlain with assumptions of social and historical superiority. The love of wild landscape was a refined view that had to be acquired and it was possessed by educated nineteenth-century gentlemen such as Wordsworth, but not by premodern elites or by members of the modern masses.

A quarter of a century later, the mountaineer Leslie Stephen would open his essay upon 'The Love of Mountain Scenery' with a similarly socio-economically loaded image. He

⁴⁹⁰ Wordsworth, *Prose Works*, p.327.

⁴⁹¹ *Loc. cit.*

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, p.328.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp.328-329. C.f. Jean Le Rond D'Alembert and Denis Diderot, et. al., 'Taste', *The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert Collaborative Translation Project*, trans. Nelly S. Hoyt and Thomas Cassirer (2003), at < <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.did2222.0000.168>> [05.08.2016]. First published in 1757, the *Encyclopédie* entry distinguished between knowing that something was beautiful, and being moved by its beauty. Taste as an innate reaction was therefore gradually developed, just as suggested by Wordsworth.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.329 and pp.331-332.

recounted that he and a 'highly intelligent Swiss guide' were sitting on a train, leaving London, and looking out over the chimney pots. He commented to his guide that the view was not as fine as that which the pair had shared from the top of Mont Blanc in days past: the 'pathetic reply' given by the guide was 'Ah, sir! ...it is far finer!' Such a reaction caused Stephen consternation: was his 'favourite guide a fool', or were his own 'most cherished prejudices' – that the Alps were preferable to London rooftops – quite mistaken? The contemporaneous scene segued naturally into a discussion of history for, according to Stephen, 'very similar shocks... await the student of early Alpine literature'.⁴⁹⁵ Stephen would characterise this past state of mountain attitudes as 'The Old School', in contrast with 'The New School' of modern mountain appreciation; an appellation that may well have stuck to this day, had Marjorie Hope Nicolson not borrowed the even catchier pairing of 'The Mountain Gloom' and 'The Mountain Glory' from John Ruskin.⁴⁹⁶

Stephen opened his survey of early – and unappreciative – mountain literature with Abraham Ruchat's *Délices de la Suisse* (first published 1713), a title which he implied was poorly chosen, for Ruchat apparently found little that was delightful in the 'prodigious height of the Alps'.⁴⁹⁷ Stephen suggested that during the early eighteenth century, mountains were viewed as 'monstrosities', 'treated like the small-pox', and a shock to the 'belief in a beneficent Providence'.⁴⁹⁸ He dismissed passages that praised the utility of mountains only by citing 'the number of cheeses produced in Alpine dairies' and identifying mountains as the habitat of 'fur-bearing animals' as 'palpably inadequate', akin to the protest of 'a sea-sick traveller [who] hates the ocean, though he may feebly remind himself that it is a good place for the fish'.⁴⁹⁹ At the most, Stephen permitted, the author of *The Delights of Switzerland* occasionally found mountains to be pretty. He likewise allowed that Joseph Addison showed some taste for mountain landscapes, but was distressed by the 'painful degree of disrespect' with which the essayist viewed the

⁴⁹⁵ Leslie Stephen, *The Playground of Europe* (London, 1871), p.1.

⁴⁹⁶ John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderman, 39 vols. (George Allen, 1903-1912), vol.6, containing vol.4 of John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, pp.385-466. Ironically, 'The Mountain Gloom' and 'The Mountain Glory' essays are not especially significant as historical constructions of the idea that took their name. They reverse Wordsworth's approach: the poet utilised past contexts to illustrate the level of non-elite mountain taste, Ruskin's focus was on the grim mountain experiences of Swiss peasants, which he vaguely implied was in common with past attitudes.

⁴⁹⁷ Stephen, *The Playground of Europe*, pp.1-2.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.3-4.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.2-4.

snowy mountains, and his preference for the Lake of Constance to the Lake of Geneva. In the modern context, Stephen emphasised, the latter stood as 'almost a sacred place to the lover of mountain scenery... tinged with poetical associations from Rousseau and Byron'.⁵⁰⁰

Apart from such brief digressions to describe, and praise, the modern mountain vision, Stephen continued to trawl backwards and forwards in time, picking up examples of premodern mountain gloom as he went. The seventeenth-century Bishop Gilbert Burnet, famous for referring to Mont Blanc by its older name of Mont Maudit, or Cursed, was compared with the eighteenth-century Edward Gibbon, who succeeded in admiring the mountains of Savoy 'from a safe distance', but who nevertheless failed to demonstrate any 'genuine enthusiasm in presence of natural sublimity'.⁵⁰¹ Samuel Johnson provided an entertaining example of supreme early modern, urbanite disgust for the mountains, in particular the Highlands of Scotland, writing of journeys among them as merely 'useless labours, which neither impregnate the imagination nor inform the understanding'. In a spirit of fairness, Stephen commented that 'It would be difficult to imagine a human being more thoroughly out of his element than Dr. Johnson on a mountain'. He went further musing that not only were Johnson's thoughts akin to those that 'a considerable number of modern tourists might probably discover at the bottom of their hearts', there was also 'a good deal' to be said for such views.⁵⁰² Ultimately, Stephen turned the problem on its head, proposing that the question was not why early modern individuals 'hate[d] objects which made them uncomfortable with so good reason', but rather, 'Why do we love them?' in the modern day.⁵⁰³

Stephen rejected the explanation, proposed by a previous commentator, that the increasing safety and ease of mountain travel in the nineteenth century enabled the contemporary 'sense of beauty' in wild landscapes.⁵⁰⁴ The modern appreciation of

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.4-5.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.6.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, p.8 (quoting Johnson) and p.10.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.11.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.10-12. Stephen referred to the hypothesis put forward by Thomas Babington Macaulay, regarding a perceived change in attitudes towards the Scottish Highlands, that 'A traveller must be freed from all apprehension of being murdered or starved before he can be charmed by the bold outlines and rich tints of the hills', and that it was not until recent improvements in roads and accommodation occurred

mountains was not, he thought, the result of the simple removal of danger. He pointed out that eighteenth-century mountain gloom was contiguous with a distaste for Gothic architecture, which it had never been dangerous to view. In Stephen's own, somewhat caustic words, 'it is sufficient to remark... that a man who could cite Westminster Abbey or Salisbury Cathedral as specimens of simple ugliness might very well shudder at the Alps'. He detected a similarity between Gothic architecture and the natural forms of mountain cliffs, and found the growing appreciation for both in the same root cause: not in 'the absence of disturbing causes, but the presence of a delicate and cultivated taste'. A taste for mountains was like the taste for music; without it, a 'complex harmony' would seem merely to be 'a chaos of unmeaning sounds'.⁵⁰⁵ What the nineteenth century possessed, uniquely, was an ear for mountains.

Stephen's narrative of premodern mountain gloom was not absolute and unbending. Even 'in those dark ages', he acknowledged, were some 'men of science... who surmounted their natural terror and disgust' and ventured physically and mentally into the mountains, their origins and phenomena.⁵⁰⁶ Stephen's first example was Johann Jakob Scheuchzer.⁵⁰⁷ For Stephen, Scheuchzer 'represents the intellectual stage at which a growing scepticism has made a compromise with old-fashioned credulity'; believing that dragons might exist but then applying the latest scientific methods to classify them.⁵⁰⁸ Stephen then contrasted Scheuchzer's mountain insights with those of Athanasius Kircher who, he implied, was more credulous, and so found yet more of the fantastic in the mountains; not only dragons but devils and demons.⁵⁰⁹ According to Stephen, such demons were the 'degraded' version of 'the old gods of the woods and the streams'.⁵¹⁰ His musing upon this subject provided a crucial wrinkle in his story of the mountain past:

Old travellers saw a mountain and called it simply a hideous excrescence; but then they peopled it with monsters and demons; gnomes wriggled through its subterranean recesses; mysterious voices spoke in its avalanches; dragons winged their way across its gorges... Was not this merely expressing in another way the

that visitors had any time for 'raptures'. Macaulay, *The History of England from the Ascension of James II* (1855), vol.3, pp.237-239.

⁵⁰⁵ Stephen, *Playground*, pp.12-14.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.14-15.

⁵⁰⁷ C.f. Chapter Two, pp.44-45.

⁵⁰⁸ Stephen, *Playground*, pp.15-17.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.18-19.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.20.

same sense of awe which we describe by calling the mountain itself sublime and beautiful?⁵¹¹

Thus, Stephen allowed that a sense of mountain wonder – albeit rooted in superstition and fantasy – may have found space within the premodern mindset. But by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries such wonders were ‘at the fag end of their existence’, real only in the minds of uneducated peasants.⁵¹² The above twist to the tale of premodern mountain gloom should thus be read against Stephen’s later, concluding assertion that ‘before the turning-point of the eighteenth century a civilised being might, if he pleased, regard the Alps with unmitigated horror’.⁵¹³ Low culture, before the growing rationalism of the seventeenth century, might have had a vocabulary and an appreciation for the wonders of the mountains: elite culture, lacking the fairies and dragons of their social inferiors, did not. Stephen’s concession to a more nuanced tale is not, therefore, quite as radical as it seems at first glance.

In the later seventeenth century, deprived of the fairies and gnomes of the earlier age, elites and commoners alike had to turn to new frameworks for understanding and drawing inspiration from mountains.⁵¹⁴ For Stephen, the only potential frameworks were scientific ones, the most prominent of which being, of course, the grim mountain vision of Thomas Burnet.⁵¹⁵ The schoolmaster’s ‘big chaotic lumps’ were, in Stephen’s words, ‘comparatively useless for poetical purposes’.⁵¹⁶ Stephen thus located the deepest period of mountain gloom in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries; the fairies were gone, the mountains, ‘like Burnet’s unskinned ruins’, left naked, and not yet covered by the ‘complicated net-work of associations’ that modern science and mountaineering would lend to them.⁵¹⁷ It would only be in the late eighteenth century, as scholars began to uncover the deep – and awesome – geological history of the mountain landscape that the Romantic writers could come to treat them with new poetic eyes.⁵¹⁸ In Stephen’s view, the new taste for mountains was therefore cultivated by the advances of modern science.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.21.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, p.22.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, pp.41-42.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.23.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.24-26.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.30.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.29.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.30-31.

This was the 'Old School' of mountain attitudes, against which Stephen proceeded to contrast the 'New School' of modern mountain appreciation. In the second half of his essay, Stephen set out to discover at precisely whose feet the honour of inaugurating the new attitude should be laid. His answer was fairly unequivocal. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), author of the Alpine novel *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), was surely 'the Columbus of the Alps, or the Luther of the new creed of mountain worship'.⁵¹⁹ Like any great man, he had his precursors and 'accomplices', not least among them being Horace-Bénédict de Saussure (1740-1799), who, though he did not become the first to climb Mont Blanc, did inaugurate the race for its summit.⁵²⁰ For the most part, however, those who preceded Rousseau caught only 'dim glimpses of the light before the rising of the sun'.⁵²¹

Leslie Stephen went to striking pains to emphasise this last point. 'Even in the depth of the much vilified eighteenth century', he admitted, there were literary 'traces' of the mountain taste, but with each example he gave he also provided an excuse to dismiss it as merely a partial expression of mountain glory.⁵²² Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713), was found to have described 'a rather big landslip', rather than a mountain, in reflecting upon the 'giddy horror' of the heights, whilst Horace Walpole's writings on the Grand Chartreuse were defined as having 'something of an artificial ring' to them.⁵²³ James Thomson (1700-1748), the Scottish poet famous for writing the lyrics to 'Rule, Britannia!', was given extra credit by Stephen for writing of mountains even though rotund; 'many as are the virtues which naturally fall to the lot of the fat, a true appreciation of mountain scenery can hardly be reckoned among them'. However, though his verses on thunderstorms among mountains included 'good sonorous lines', Stephen insisted that 'The mountains are... still in the background', and that Thomson clearly preferred mountains when viewed from afar.⁵²⁴ Even Samuel Taylor Coleridge failed to

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.39.

⁵²⁰ Hansen, *Summits of Modern Man*, pp.62-63, p.84, and pp.99-103.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, p.38. In delivering the 1903 Ford Lectures, Stephen would turn again to the subject of changing visions of nature, giving prominence to 'the true Rousseau version of Nature worship'; Leslie Stephen, *English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century* (1927, first published 1904) pp.120-133; quote pp.132-133.

⁵²² Stephen, *Playground*, p.53.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, pp.53-56.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.57-59.

receive full marks for genuine mountain appreciation, on somewhat flippant grounds: 'The mountain air', Stephen commented dryly, 'is not congenial to opium-eating'.⁵²⁵ At the very least, the peaks of the Romantic poets struck Stephen as 'genuine mountains', in contrast with the 'mere theatrical properties constructed at second-hand from old poetical commonplaces' of earlier writers.⁵²⁶ Ninety years before Nicolson, Stephen also dismissed the unoriginal as empty of meaning.

Certain features can therefore be traced as common to both Wordsworth's and Stephen's articulations of a shift from premodern mountain distaste to modern mountain appreciation. They both wove questions of modern socioeconomic status together with the idea of historical changes in mountain attitudes.⁵²⁷ Wordsworth did so most explicitly, suggesting that the contemporaneous masses could be compared to early modern elites, both less advanced in the development of taste than educated modern men such as himself. Stephen implied that individuals such as his Alpine guide epitomised the attitudes of the past, but contradictorily mused that the largest exception to the rule of premodern mountain gloom lay in folk beliefs and superstitions. Their accounts also featured some common characters – Thomas Burnet played a key role for both, although Wordsworth placed more emphasis on his positive appreciation of mountains than Stephen did – and both perceived the modern preference for wild landscapes as evidence of a developed, cultivated taste rather than an automatic result of improvements in physical access to remote areas.

Wordsworth's account was clearly motivated by contemporary concerns. In establishing that early modern individuals were incapable of enjoying mountains, he hoped to prove that denying the urban masses easy access to the Lake District would deprive them only of something that they were ill-suited to appreciate anyway. This raises a pertinent question; why did Stephen choose to spend so many pages analysing the nature of mountain experience before the advent of the mountaineering with which his *Playground* was really concerned? One could suggest that he was simply interested in the historical background to his sport, but the concluding flourish to 'The Love of Mountain Scenery'

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.61.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.63.

⁵²⁷ Hansen, *Summits of Modern Man*, pp.7-8, has emphasised the socio-economically loaded nature of Stephen's historical analysis.

suggests that there was a little more to it than that. His historical essay was, after all, the introduction to his *Playground of Europe*, a book largely concerned with recounting his various Alpine exploits. He thus segued from the past to the present with the assertion that:

it should be... the purpose of the following pages to prove that whilst all good and wise men love the mountains, those love them best who have wandered longest in their recesses, and have most endangered their own lives and those of their guides in the attempt to open out routes amongst them.⁵²⁸

In his historical explication of the rise of modern mountain appreciation, Stephen allowed the writer Rousseau the laurels of inaugurating the new taste. Nevertheless, having established the modern exclusivity of mountain glory, he then – with such brevity one could almost miss it – located mountaineers, just like himself, at the summit position of loving mountains ‘best’.

Another key contrast between Stephen’s and Wordsworth’s accounts is that the former attached far more weight to changing scientific understandings in shaping new aesthetic visions of mountains. He was not the only mountaineer to do so, nor the only one to view premodern science through the lens of Scheuchzer’s dragons. In 1867, four years before Stephen’s history, an anonymous essay on Scheuchzer’s 1708 *Itinera alpina* appeared in the *Alpine Journal*, rather delightfully in the book reviews section alongside publications more recent by some 150 years.⁵²⁹ The essay opened by asserting the recent origin of modern Alpine travel, identifying the activities of Saussure as the start of ‘the great epoch’ of glacier exploration. Before that point, Alpine travellers, who ‘had not yet learnt to appreciate the sublimities of mountains’, were like the modern-day British cockney, ‘to whom Snowdon is nothing but a dirty and inconvenient mound [but who] will fall into ecstasies at a rock shaped like the late Duke of Wellington’s nose’. The anonymous author of this pungent image saw the taste for mountains as a ‘faculty’ which lay ‘dormant’ in the early modern period.⁵³⁰ In introducing the intellectual context of Scheuchzer’s book, he compared this unused faculty to the state of scientific inquiry at the time:

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.68.

⁵²⁹ It has been suggested that this review was also written by Stephen. Hansen, *Summits of Modern Man*, pp.4-6 and 308 (n.7).

⁵³⁰ Anonymous, ‘Scheuchzer’s *Itinera Alpina*’, *Alpine Journal* 3 (1867), p.200.

these critics [natural philosophers] often remind us of children who still look upon nature as a great collection of quaint toys and ingenious puzzles, but whose curiosity is a proof of intelligence and will soon extract really valuable results from what is apparently mere play.⁵³¹

Scheuchzer epitomised this childish state: the engravings in his work were 'strange', with accurate representations of towns alongside 'curiously inferior' depictions of mountains; he exerted himself on the mountainside in the name of science but there was 'something pathetic' about his accounts of ascents; he viewed mountains 'with a certain horror' whilst also recognising and recording their utility to mankind.⁵³² In short, he glimpsed with the eyes of a child the knowledge, understanding, and aesthetic appreciation that would come to humankind with the adulthood of modernity. Couched in a fond, paternalistic tone, this reflection on mountain history clearly constructed a hierarchy of mountain knowledge and engagement in which the modern period came out on top.

In 1878, the *Alpine Journal* posthumously published a lecture written by William Longman, a previous president of the club, entitled 'Modern Mountaineering and the History of the Alpine Club'. Although Longman claimed he had no desire either to delve into antiquity or to rival the 'admirable account' given in Stephen's *Playground*, he could not resist telling his own story of some of the circumstances that preceded 'the remarkable development of the passion for mountain climbing' which led to the foundation of the Club.⁵³³ Just like Stephen, he equated knowledge and learning with a love of mountains, but with a slightly different twist. Considering 'the early lovers of the Swiss Alps before we pass on to their climbers', he credited the late fifteenth-century foundation of the University of Basel for 'bringing men of awakened minds into close and constant neighbourhood to the mountains' – referencing, among others, the figures of Conrad Gesner and Josias Simler. In such individuals, 'mountain passion was even then alive, smouldering... for two centuries before it burst out in Savoy into the blaze which has now spread across Europe'.⁵³⁴ The seventeenth century then took a backwards step,

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*, pp.200-201.

⁵³² *Ibid.*, pp.201-201 and p.204.

⁵³³ William Longman, 'Modern Mountaineering and the History of the Alpine Club', *Alpine Journal* 8 (1876-1878), sep. pag. p.3.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.39-40.

both in terms of mountain attitudes and knowledge. Echoing the anonymous reviewer of Scheuchzer, Longman found that

The books of the next century are more speculative and show at the same time a creditable enthusiasm for natural science and a childlike facility in swallowing wonders, or accepting the... most ludicrous explanations as adequate solutions to the problems presented by the mountain regions.⁵³⁵

It was therefore not until the eighteenth century that – once again following Stephen – Longman could conclude that ‘the eloquent voice of Rousseau found itself suddenly accepted as the interpreter of feelings towards nature which must have been gathering for some time’.⁵³⁶ Although Longman allowed a literary figure to be the first notable exponent of the modern feeling for nature, it was the climbers of the Alps whom he identified as the inheritors of the early flames of mountain glory fanned by Gesner and Simler. These exceptional early modern mountain lovers were incorporated by Longman into a history of the Alpine Club which implicitly identified the activities of its members as the epitome of progress in mountain appreciation.

The name of Jean-Jacques Rousseau was therefore a prominent one in early mountaineering accounts of the rise of mountain appreciation. He was also placed in this summit position by the German literary historian Alfred Biese, who in 1888 stated with certainty that ‘It was Rousseau who first discovered that the Alps were beautiful’.⁵³⁷ He prefaced his discussion of the attitudes that preceded Rousseau with a two-fold acknowledgement of the very different practical and scientific contexts of the earlier era. ‘To be just to the time’, he admitted, ‘security and comfort in travelling are necessary preliminaries to our modern mountain rapture, and in the Middle Ages these were non-existent’. Premodern travellers were likewise disadvantaged by the fact that ‘Knowledge of science, too, was only just beginning’.⁵³⁸ Both of these characteristics meant that, instead of ‘outbursts of admiration at the sight of great snow-peaks’, those who viewed mountains before at least the eighteenth century applied the then ‘current epithets’ of

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.41.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.45.

⁵³⁷ Biese, *The Development of the Feeling for Nature*, p.261.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.262. In spite of his reference to ‘the Middle Ages’ the majority of the sources Biese considered in tracing ‘the opinions of the preceding periods’ (p.261) are from the fifteenth century onwards.

'horrible' and 'dreadful'. In the earlier era, according to Biese, 'The prevalent notion of beautiful scenery was very narrow, and even among cultured people only meant broad, level country'.⁵³⁹ Only 'one voice', that of Conrad Gesner, saw fit 'to praise Alpine scenery... anticipating Rousseau' during this long barren period.⁵⁴⁰

Then, according to Biese, 'with the eighteenth century came a change'. Travellers began to go to the mountains with 'a new scientific interest', and as they became more acquainted with the 'glaciers, and regions of perpetual snow... first admiration, and then love, supplanted the old feeling of horror'.⁵⁴¹ Biese cast the recurring figure of Scheuchzer as the inaugurator of 'Modern methods', although he depicted the subsequent change in attitudes as gradual and inconsistent. For example, Albrecht von Haller, author of the poem *Die Alpen* (published in 1732), is held up as one who explored the Alps, but who - upon unspecified evidence - 'did not appreciate mountain beauty'.⁵⁴² Just like Stephen, Biese moved through a catalogue of writers whom he concluded approached a sense of mountain glory, but failed to fully enter into it. Such a preface enabled Biese to conclude, in a firm reiteration of his opening point, that:

Rousseau was the real exponent of rapture for the high Alps and romantic scenery in general. Isolated voices had expressed some feeling before him, but it was he who deliberately proclaimed it... He did not... discover our modern feeling for Nature... but he directed it, with feeling itself in general, into new channels.⁵⁴³

Once again, a determined interpretation of premodern texts as failing to communicate true mountain appreciation provided the bulwark for a narrative intended to assign prominence to a past 'great' literary figure. A similar tendency can be found at work in other literary accounts of the return to nature. Shairp, having found Shakespeare wanting, identified the writers who could be credited with the various stages of rehabilitating nature in the English tradition. He traced the 'Return to Nature begun by Allan Ramsay and Thomson'; noted the appearance of 'Nature in Collins, Goldsmith, Cowper, and Burns'; and concluded with a dissertation upon 'Wordsworth as an

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.263.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.264.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp.264-265.

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*, p.265. Haller is elsewhere held up as one who 'set the fashion of picturesque sentiment'; Pollock, 'The Early History of Mountaineering', p.22.

⁵⁴³ Biese, *The Development*, p.266.

Interpreter of Nature', a crowning position of which the Romantic author and articulator of early modern mountain gloom would surely have been proud.⁵⁴⁴ At the very least, Shairp identified specific and numerous precursors to the pinnacle of Wordsworth's vision of nature; Edmund Gosse, in his 1882 biography of Thomas Gray, perhaps displayed a little bias in insisting that his subject was 'the first of the romantic lovers of nature', citing a stirring letter upon the harsh enjoyment of mountain scenery long before Rousseau's development of his 'later and more famous attitude'.⁵⁴⁵

Just as literary theorists constructed a canon of pioneers for the return to nature in English poetry, contributors to the *Alpine Journal* sought to locate the precursors to their sport. Some were more catholic in their approach than others. In 1880, Douglas Freshfield submitted a paper on 'Placidus a Spescha and Early Mountaineering in the Bündner Oberland', which took a far broader view of the definition of 'mountaineering' and therefore of the individuals who rightfully belonged to its history. Its main focus was on the monk Placidus a Spescha (1752-1833), whom Freshfield claimed as one of the 'founders' of mountaineering. The introduction to his article abounds, indeed, with the inclusion of early modern figures in the history of modern mountaineering. He seemed to locate the shift from gloom to glory earlier in time than Stephen or others, commenting that 'Science and religion took it in turns to deal blows at the mediæval horror of the High Alps'. He held up the sixteenth-century Conrad Gesner as 'the morning star of mountaineering', and representative of the learned men of Zurich who were the first to 'wander in an observant spirit over the Alpine heights'. In favour of religion he noted that the Church had 'already familiarised men with the mountains' by inclining them towards seeing them as 'retreats from the turmoil and wickedness of the world'.⁵⁴⁶

These retreats took the form of religious houses long since nestled 'in the heart of the Alps', such as on the St. Bernard, Simlon, and St. Gothard passes.⁵⁴⁷ In such locations, 'Fathers of the Church became also fathers of mountaineering', with inmates of these retreats making the first ascents of 'their tutelary peaks'. Freshfield listed a series of now-

⁵⁴⁴ Shairp, *On Poetic Interpretation of Nature*, pp.182-270.

⁵⁴⁵ Edmund Gosse, *Gray* (1882), p.32. C.f. Chapter Two, p.89.

⁵⁴⁶ Douglas Freshfield, 'Placidus a Spescha and Early Mountaineering in the Bündner Oberland', *Alpine Journal* 10 (1880-1882), p.289.

⁵⁴⁷ *Loc. cit.*

obscure parish priests – including ‘Carrel of Aosta’ and ‘Gnifetti of Alagna’ – whom he claimed were ‘household words to every well-read mountaineer’.⁵⁴⁸ But among the ‘clerical mountaineers’, Pater Placidus came foremost in his estimation: dealing with ‘snow and ice-work’ long before it fell under the remit of adventurous Britons, he deserved to be given ‘a high place among the Founders of Mountaineering’.⁵⁴⁹ Freshfield’s vision of the history of mountain engagement, though it still made reference to a past ‘horror’ for the mountains, provides a marked contrast to those articulated above, willing to allow early modern religion as well as science to take credit for positive mountain attitudes, and happy to cast figures who could never have belonged to the Alpine Club as pioneers of mountaineering.

Freshfield’s inclusivity stands in contrast to the more representative discourses expressed by C.E. Mathews, whose closing lecture for his presidency of the Alpine Club was published in the very same volume. His subject was ‘The Growth of Mountaineering’. He praised his listeners, noting that the current generation of climbers were ‘making Alpine history’ with ‘extraordinary rapidity’. Yet, he remarked, ‘the prehistoric epoch’ was not so long ago – indeed, the switch from B.C. to A.D., in mountaineering terms, did not come until the flurry of British climbing activity that occurred shortly before, and precipitated, the foundation of the Alpine Club. He admitted that ‘Mont Blanc, of course, had been ascended many times’ before then, but these ascents were ‘not necessarily mountaineering’, for they were not performed by men ‘who practised climbing for its own sake’.⁵⁵⁰ Mathews went on to suggest that the publication of *Peaks, Passes, and Glaciers* (the collection of expedition reports that preceded the *Alpine Journal*) in 1859 ‘intimated as much as it created the popularity of mountaineering’.⁵⁵¹ He crowed over the fact that, though they lived relatively far from them, the English had been ‘the first to carry off the honours’ of the Alps, with other nations left only ‘to follow our example’.⁵⁵² This account makes explicit a trick of illusion that is at work in many of the above stories of the

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.289-290.

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.313.

⁵⁵⁰ C.E. Mathews, ‘The Growth of Mountaineering’, *Alpine Journal* 10 (1880-1882), p.252.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.253.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, pp.253-254. This is of a piece with the construction of modern mountaineering as a new form of British imperialism and national identity. C.f. Peter H. Hansen, ‘Vertical Boundaries, National Identities: British Mountaineering on the Frontiers of Empire, 1868-1914’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 24:1 (1996), p.50, 66.

mountain past: by defining mountain appreciation, or mountain climbing, in very narrow terms, the author could firmly claim the summit position for their chosen victor. In this case, Mathews placed on the summit English heroism, the Alpine Club itself, and the 'first' mountaineers in whose footsteps he was very closely following.

Stories of the mountain past therefore frequently claimed primacy either for those telling them, or for prominent figures respected within the author's field (whether literature or mountaineering). They did so by setting up a clear opposition between the modern-day reaction to mountains as sublime and beautiful, and the apparent premodern attitude towards them as unattractive excrescences. Different accounts of this contrast generally engaged with a common canon of texts, and – to varying extents – judged and found 'early' expressions of mountain appreciation wanting against modern standards of poetic and emotional expression. They were forced to exclude the majority of past 'exceptions' as somehow irrelevant in order to support the thrust of their argument, which was never one motivated by pure historic disinterest.

A Truth Universally Acknowledged

The first chapter of the *Mountaineering* volume of the Lonsdale Library of Sports, Games & Pastimes, published in 1934, opened with the assertion that 'it is common knowledge that mountains were once regarded as things of terror and horror'.⁵⁵³ Freshfield's article on Placidus a Spescha was a precise, detailed contribution to mountain history, written for a specific and expert audience of fellow mountaineers. From the 1890s onwards, visions of the human history of mountains were offered up to more general readerships and in broader brush-strokes. The Lonsdale volume was the third sporting library series to feature a tome on mountaineering, with an 1892 entry in the Badminton Library of Sports and Pastimes, edited by C.T. Dent (the above-noted critic of 'first' ascents), and an 1893 contribution to the All-England Series written by Claude Wilson preceding it. The latter treated the history of mountaineering in a mere four pages, two of which took it from Biblical times up to the foundation of the Alpine Club. To the break between premodern and modern activities it gave but two lines: one which commented that 'ancient and classical literatures' made reference only to 'utilitarian ascents', and the

⁵⁵³ T. Graham Brown, 'Early Mountaineering', ed. Sydney Spencer, *Mountaineering* ([1934]), p.17.

second which stated simply that ‘The earliest record of mountaineering for the love of the thing is only four hundred years old; and it was not until the latter half of the present century that the pursuit made any real headway’.⁵⁵⁴ Thus would the reader of the All-England series learn of mountain history in the final decade of the nineteenth century.

The interested reader would have had more luck with Dent’s *Mountaineering*, and the opening chapter on ‘The Early History of Mountaineering’, written by Sir Frederick Pollock. An English jurist, author of the *History of English Law* alongside F.W. Maitland, and first librarian of the Alpine Club, Pollock outdid himself with a thirty-eight-page essay, complete with footnotes and commentary upon different available translations of primary sources. He opened with a firm delineation of his topic:

The history of mountaineering proper has no direct concern with the journeys undertaken during the last twenty centuries or more by the people, famous or obscure, warriors, pilgrims, or travellers... who crossed the Alps because they stood in the way, and would have been better pleased had there not been Alps to cross.⁵⁵⁵

From this point of view, ‘the continuous history of mountaineering can be carried back only a few generations’ – or, echoing Mathews, to around 1850, by which point climbing Mont Blanc was no longer seen as an ‘astonishing feat’. In other words, the ‘modern period of mountaineering’ began with the Alpine Club.⁵⁵⁶

Nevertheless, the club librarian could not help but be aware of earlier examples that certainly looked a lot like modern mountaineering. He therefore followed the by-now familiar tactic of running through potential ‘precursors of the art’, either claiming them as early presumptive mountaineers – temporally-displaced members of the Alpine Club, as it were – or dismissing their experiences as irrelevant.⁵⁵⁷ His metrics included both the level of physical mountain activity undertaken and the proper expression of enjoyment. Pollock disdained Petrarch, for though he apparently climbed out of curiosity for the view, ‘there is nothing to show that he enjoyed the walk’. On the other hand, though Dante

⁵⁵⁴ Claude Wilson, *Mountaineering* (London, 1893), pp.6-7.

⁵⁵⁵ Pollock, ‘The Early History of Mountaineering’, p.2.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.4-5.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.5.

apparently displayed ‘much more of a climber’s feelings and observation’, Pollock could find no evidence that he undertook ‘any very high or remote excursion’.⁵⁵⁸ By contrast Leonardo da Vinci, ‘one of the most extraordinary men of any time’, was allowed into the club of mountain appreciation, as his ‘drawings show an admirable sense of mountain form’, and evidence could be found for his physical presence upon high mountain-tops.⁵⁵⁹

Pollock reserved his greatest approval, and his most intriguing reflection, for the sixteenth-century Swiss humanists: the ubiquitous Conrad Gesner and Josias Simler, who ‘studied and visited the mountains in the truest mountaineering spirit’. Pollock was struck by the fact that Gesner’s writings revealed sentiments generally ‘supposed to have been born with Rousseau two centuries later’. More than this, Gesner displayed ‘the love of earning the sight [from the top] by one’s own muscular toil, the genuine mountaineering spirit’.⁵⁶⁰ Twenty years after Gesner came Simler, who ‘for the first time [gave] practical advice... as to... excursions above the snowline’.⁵⁶¹ Pollock argued that Simler’s writings, following so closely on from Gesner’s joyous mountain expeditions, indicated that ‘a native Swiss school of mountaineering, with exactly the aims and the spirit of the modern mountaineers, was on the point of being formed by the scholars of Zürich’.⁵⁶²

This outcome was arrested, Pollock theorised, by the civil and religious disruptions of the seventeenth century. This led to a ‘barren period’ of many decades, during which mountains, if they were considered at all, were done so ‘with a pomp of exaggeration’ (mostly meaning the supposed presence of dragons) that the Swiss naturalists ‘would have laughed to scorn’.⁵⁶³ This era of gloom continued well into the mid-eighteenth century, with Pollock proposing that whilst Rousseau may have ‘set the fashion’ for mountain appreciation, most ‘Persons of quality’ who crossed the mountains during his time still found them ‘positively ugly’. Striking a blow against the Francophone centrality

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.8.

⁵⁶⁰ Pollock, ‘Early History’, pp.10-11.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp.15-16.

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*, p.17.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.18.

of Rousseau, Pollock took care to point out that ‘among Englishmen’ Thomas Gray showed himself ‘on this point, as on so many others, in advance of his time’.⁵⁶⁴

Pollock’s account – one of the denser articulations of mountaineering’s pre-history, in spite of its popular packaging – is significant in a number of ways. Uniquely, it hinted at the idea that the nineteenth-century inauguration of modern mountaineering was a historically contingent event that, but for the chance happenstance of the Reformation and its ensuing disturbances, could have occurred two hundred years earlier. In other words, he was at the very least comfortable with the thought that the Alpine Club might share their summit position as mountain pioneers with a select few premodern climbers. It is significant that the three individuals whom he allowed as genuine precursors to the modern mountain sentiment included one – Da Vinci – a legendary genius, and two – Gesner and Simler – who had long been viewed as honorary mountaineers by the modern exponents of the sport. They were, arguably, the only individuals to whom such laurels could be given; even Petrarch was not deemed worthy. Even whilst embracing a select few ‘precursors’, the exclusivity of the narrative of modern mountaineering held true.

Where the sporting library volumes offered the wider public a view of mountain history from the horse’s mouth of members of the Alpine Club, another 1892 publication, *The Story of the Hills*, demonstrates the absorption and distribution of the narrative of gloom and glory outside of the mountaineering context. The Rev. H.N. Hutchinson (fellow of both the Geographical and Royal Geographical Societies) wrote his book of popular science for ‘All who love Mountains and Hills’ in the hope that ‘a little knowledge’ of the geological processes that had formed them would add to ‘the wonder and delight’ with which they viewed them.⁵⁶⁵ His first chapter, ‘Mountains and Men’, opened with a discussion of the past relationship between the two. ‘In old times’, Hutchinson informed his General Reader, ‘people looked with awe upon the mountains, and regarded them with feelings

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.22.

⁵⁶⁵ Rev. H.N. Hutchinson, *The Story of the Hills. A Book About Mountains for General Readers* (New York and London, 1892), pp.v-ix. C.f. John and J.A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, 10 vols. (Cambridge, 1922-1954), Part 2, vol.3, p.503. C.f. Jonathan R. Topham, ‘Publishing “Popular Science” in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain’, eds. Aileen Fyfe and Bernard Lightman, *Science in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-Century Sites and Experiences* (2007), 135-168.

akin to horror or dread'.⁵⁶⁶ This explicit thesis statement matches closely to Hutchinson's conclusion, a few pages later, that over the years:

a very great change has taken place. Instead of regarding them [mountains] with horror or aversion, we look upon them with wonder and delight.⁵⁶⁷

In between these two assertions of a stark shift between the premodern and modern attitudes, Hutchinson elaborated upon illustrative examples of the 'awe', 'horror', 'aversion' and 'dread' of the earlier era. He succeeded in illustrating the first, more positive emotion far better than he did the latter three.

Hutchinson turned first to the Greeks, claiming that they took most pleasure in the plains and 'the vine-clad slopes of the lower hill-ranges'. He acknowledged that they peopled the mountains with their gods, but suggested that this religious awe, combined with 'a childlike fear of the unknown', led them to avoid the 'lofty and barren hills'.⁵⁶⁸ In the Middle Ages, the 'simple folk' of mountainous regions likewise filled the mountains with 'all sorts of strange beings', although Hutchinson did not elaborate on why or how this was significant.⁵⁶⁹ Turning to 'the Jews', he credited them with 'the greatest appreciation of mountain scenery' out of all the ancient nations. The mountains of the Old Testament, he highlighted, were the sites upon which the Laws were given and which smoked with the presence of God. Yet they were also associated with 'more comforting thoughts': the source of divine help. A geographical leap then swept the reader to India, where Hutchinson depicted the Himalayas as surrounded by a 'halo of glory' in the minds of those who viewed them as the source of the sacred Ganges.⁵⁷⁰ Yet, after all this, Hutchinson still re-asserted that before the modern insights of British writers and artists such as Sir Walter Scott, John Ruskin, and J.M.W. Turner, mountains were viewed with 'horror or aversion'.⁵⁷¹ Whether he drew it from the writings of Wordsworth, Stephen, or simply from the *zeitgeist*, Hutchinson had wholeheartedly absorbed the basic thesis of early modern mountain distaste. As early as 1892, such a tenet of general knowledge

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.3.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.9-10.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.4.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.5.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.5-6.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp.9-10 and p.13.

could not even be dislodged by the fact that the examples utilised to illustrate a context of premodern mountain gloom in fact contradicted it.

Within the confines of literary journals, discussion of the return to nature and the growth of mountain appreciation continued. As in the popular sphere, they took the form of repetitions and adaptations of a long-accepted basic principle. In 1917, Cecil Moore back-dated the origin point of nature worship against the consensus of the late nineteenth century, identifying Shaftesbury – so dismissed by Leslie Stephen – as a self-conscious ‘pioneer’, ‘promulgating an aesthetic view at variance with the literary creed of his time’.⁵⁷² From then on, literary interventions in mountain history tussled over the prime summit position with new answers to the old question of ‘who was first’ to express a passion for the high hills.

For example, in 1928 P.K. Das attempted to ascertain ‘The Earliest Expression of Delight in Mountains in the Poetry of the Eighteenth Century’. The article responded to a late nineteenth-century claim that a 1706 poem by John Phillips was the first expression of ‘that pleasure in high hills and wide prospects that was so marked a characteristic of later poetry’. Das offered an alternative candidate – indeed, one dating to the earliest time possible without requiring the more radical argument that the seventeenth century could possibly have seen an expression of mountain delight. This was Joseph Addison, and the passage of his mountain approbation was taken from his *Letter from Italy*, published in 1701 but relating to a journey of 1700. Das reflected that Addison’s ‘delight in hills and mountains’ was just as strongly expressed as Phillips’ somewhat anodyne comment that ‘Nor are the high hills unamiable’. Moreover, Addison, Das noted, had actually seen the mountains, whilst Phillips’ was ‘merely a general statement showing no evidence of real acquaintance with hill scenery’. As such, the ‘credit’ given to Phillips should ‘in all fairness, go to Addison’.⁵⁷³ The rehabilitation of Joseph Addison was continued in 1935 by Clarence DeWitt Thorpe, although he placed him – along with John Dennis – against the ‘older tradition’ which cast Thomas Gray as ‘the first literary gentleman of the century to

⁵⁷² Moore, ‘The Return to Nature’, p.265.

⁵⁷³ P.K. Das, ‘The Earliest Expression of Delight in Mountains in the Poetry of the Eighteenth Century’, *The Modern Language Review*, 23:2 (1928), 215-216.

find beauty in mountains'.⁵⁷⁴ In terms of the development of the literary discourse of past mountain attitudes, then, the early twentieth century was a time of revisionism, but only of the details of an unquestioned fact.

Nine years before Nicolson's *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, a French expert in mountaineering history, Claire-Éliane Engel, added her contribution to the Anglophone discourse.⁵⁷⁵ Engel was no stranger to the idea of a dramatic shift in mountain attitudes across time; between 1934 and 1936 she published a two-volume anthology of mountaineering literature entitled *Ces monts affreux et ces monts sublimes* (the hideous mountains and the sublime mountains), which provided translated editions of key extracts of mountaineering literature.⁵⁷⁶ She was also very familiar with earlier articulations of the concept, having translated Leslie Stephen's *Playground of Europe* into French in 1935. Her 1950 *History of Mountaineering in the Alps* was published by a major popular press and written in a style to engage a wide audience.⁵⁷⁷

Just as in Dent's *Mountaineering*, the first chapter of Engel's work was dedicated to the prehistory of the sport. Engel gave a rich and eloquent account of the 'slow process'

through which man came at last to appreciate the part played in the harmony of landscapes by high mountains, whose flame-like crags and snowy domes reared their heads about the horizon.⁵⁷⁸

With word-play echoing Stephen's sardonic tone in his *Playground*, Engel went on to follow many of the familiar tics of interpretation and presentation elucidated above. She acknowledged the long tradition of reactions of awe attached to mountains, particularly in the Bible, but discarded these with the ironic comment that 'It would be a bad joke to claim Alpine qualifications for Noah on the ground that he made the first descent or

⁵⁷⁴ Clarence DeWitt Thorpe, 'Two Augustans Cross the Alps: Dennis and Addison on Mountain Scenery', *Studies in Philology*, 32:3 (1935), 464-482, quote p.463.

⁵⁷⁵ Claire-Éliane Engel, *A History of Mountaineering in the Alps* (1950).

⁵⁷⁶ Claire-Éliane Engel and Charles Vallot, *Ces Monts affreux...: 1650-1810* (1934) and *Ces Monts sublimes...: 1803-1895* (1936). The only pre-eighteenth century text included in *Ces monts affreux* was an extract from John Evelyn's diary concerning his crossing of the Simplon Pass. C.f. Conclusion, p.187.

⁵⁷⁷ Leslie Stephen, *Le Terrain de Jeux de l'Europe*, trans. Claire-Éliane Engel (1935). *A History of Mountaineering* was originally written in English (Engel, *A History of Mountaineering*, foreword by F.S. Smythe, p.7) but released in French as *Histoire de l'Alpinisme* (1950) the same year.

⁵⁷⁸ Engel, *A History of Mountaineering*, p.13.

landing on Mount Ararat'.⁵⁷⁹ Following Pollock, she likewise distinguished between acts of what she termed 'compulsory mountaineering', and ascents made for sheer joy, proposing that 'Climbs are as old as the hills, but climbs wilfully or gratuitously undertaken belong only to recent times' Only 'a few people raised their eyes to the mountains' with admiration in the sixteenth century, and their writings – including those of Simler – marked the 'birth of mountain literature, but not of mountaineering'.⁵⁸⁰ Her second chapter identified the seventeenth century as the 'starting-point' of mountaineering, although this was firmly qualified. Those who had the most knowledge of the Alps of the time, the chamois-hunters and crystal gatherers, 'knew the glaciers and ridges', but they 'never tried to climb mountains from the sheer love of doing so'.⁵⁸¹ Well over half a century after Stephen, Engel's eloquent history built upon the same circular and cherished assumption: that to love mountains was to climb them, that 'true climbing' was what modern mountaineering defined it as, and, as such, that the birth of mountaineering and the origin of appreciative mountain sentiment were one and the same.

It should be evident by this point that Marjorie Hope Nicolson's 1959 *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory* was not, in its titular assertion, introducing a new or radical idea. Nicolson directly acknowledged the insights and debates of all of the literary scholars discussed above, although she did not cite any of the mountaineering histories.⁵⁸² Nevertheless, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory* shares with both strands of discourse many key characteristics, influences, and interpretative approaches. As already noted in Chapter Four, Nicolson found grounds to dismiss any potentially positive literary allusion to mountains due to its lack of originality, or because it expressed emotions aroused by mountains 'visited only between the covers of classical authors'.⁵⁸³ Elsewhere she – like Hutchinson – overlooked the contradictions before her very eyes. Her summary of Thomas Coryat's crossing of an Alpine pass (quoted at length in Chapter Two) is a particularly notable example:

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.16.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.17-18.

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp.25-27.

⁵⁸² Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom*, pp.17-22.

⁵⁸³ Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom*, p.60.

...[Coryat's] first ascent was made on foot, since, as he candidly acknowledged, he was afraid to go on horseback. Later his bravado failed, and he hired natives to carry him in a crude chair, rigged for the occasion. Terrified every moment, he experienced all the fear of later travellers, yet never for a moment their "rapture" or "ecstasy".⁵⁸⁴

One suspects that the 'Odcombian Leg-stretcher' would be somewhat offended by this paraphrase: it was not his bravado which failed him, but his breath, in racing to keep up with the chair carriers. And for one who was 'terrified every moment' he still succeeded in reflecting that he was 'truly... about some of the cloudes'.⁵⁸⁵ This is not to criticise Marjorie Hope Nicolson the historian; rather, it is to demonstrate how deeply Nicolson the writer and literary scholar was implicated in the discourse which formed the subject of her book. She gave one – unique and innovative – take on a story that had been told dozens of times before. It would be more surprising if the way she told it did not share a family resemblance with the narratives summarised above.

Crucially, in spite of the long genealogy of texts that preceded her, Nicolson has since become – in academic contexts at least – *the* authority on early modern mountain attitudes. In the introduction to this thesis, I noted that I would use the terminology provided by Nicolson – of mountain gloom and mountain glory – to refer not specifically to her work but to the concept of the shift as a whole. Ironically, it would seem that in borrowing such a simple, memorable, and binary title from John Ruskin, Nicolson provided one of the mechanisms by which her work claimed the summit position of fame over its numerous precursors. She has endured. A monograph that was ground-breaking in 1959 is, in the twenty-first century, a solid, reliable citation for an idea that is common knowledge anyway – that around the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, distaste for mountains gave way to love for them. What has been forgotten is that the common knowledge did not originate with Nicolson and with her careful, lucid research, but with – at the earliest – poets and mountaineers seeking, consciously or not, to cast themselves as pioneers.

⁵⁸⁴ *Loc. cit.*

⁵⁸⁵ Coryat, *Crudities*, p.70.

Between the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, the basic fact of early modern mountain gloom came to be increasingly taken for granted, and explications of it came to repeat earlier patterns of thought and earlier nuances of the idea over and over again. In some cases, it was simplified to a single sentence, or presented alongside examples that were almost incoherent. A similar process has occurred since Nicolson's time. Articles by modern philosophers cite her, briefly, to support the basic argument that the aesthetic taste for nature is subject to change over time.⁵⁸⁶ Many modern, general readers have most likely encountered her ideas through the work of Robert Macfarlane, whose bestselling *Mountains of the Mind* reiterated over a few pages her complex and specific articulation of Thomas Burnet's key role in the shift from mountain gloom to mountain glory.⁵⁸⁷ However, they would only have an inkling of Nicolson's involvement if they turned to Macfarlane's selected list of sources.⁵⁸⁸ Newspaper articles, referring to the eighteenth-century 'dread' of mountains, provide hyperlinks not to Nicolson, but to more recent historical works that build upon her work.⁵⁸⁹

Nor is Nicolson necessarily the root of all contemporary references to historic mountain gloom. Mountaineering histories, of course, continue to reiterate the change in attitudes that inaugurated, or accompanied, the birth of the sport, whilst some more general and academic accounts owe their ancestry more to *The Playground of Europe* than to *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*.⁵⁹⁰ But they are, in general, mere sketches compared to their ancestors. Gone is Leslie Stephen's artful twist of folk-tradition-as-mountain-awe; Frederick Pollock's fantasy of a sixteenth-century Swiss Alpine Club is forgotten. Conrad Gesner may still receive an obligatory mention as a notable precursor, but there is no need to make excuses against other potential exceptions; Placidus a Spescha has fallen

⁵⁸⁶ E.g. Holmes Rolston III, 'Does Aesthetic Appreciation of Landscapes Need to Be Science-Based?', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 35:4 (1995), p.375; Sandra Shapshay, 'Contemporary Environmental Aesthetics and the Neglect of the Sublime', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 53:2 (2013) p.184; Yuriko Saito, 'The Aesthetics of Unscenic Nature', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 56:2 (1998), p.101, opens with a reference to the 'change in the aesthetics of mountains which occurred during the early eighteenth century', but does not directly cite Nicolson.

⁵⁸⁷ Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind*, pp.20-31.

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.285.

⁵⁸⁹ Jones, 'The magic of mountains in art';

⁵⁹⁰ E.g. John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (2002), p.147, drew on Jim Ring, *How the English Made the Alps* (2000) to assert the premodern vision of the Alps as 'mountains of immense inhospitability, ugliness, and terror'. Ring, in turn, opened the prologue to his work with a quote from Stephen's *Playground of Europe* asserting the attitude of 'unmitigated horror'.

into cobwebbed obscurity. Even Rousseau barely receives a mention. The idea of mountain gloom and glory has lost its anchorage. It floats in the air, and it is accepted without question. Nobody asks where it came from; but doing so is the only way to understand what it really means.

A Discourse of Modernity

As Nicolson's title made explicit, early modern 'mountain gloom' does not stand on its own. Its sibling, modern 'mountain glory', is more than just the other half of the same coin: it is, in fact, the very reason for the existence of the idea. To tell a story about premodernity and its attitudes towards mountains is to also make a claim about modernity. In other words, to prove that modernity saw the inauguration of mountain glory, one has to illustrate an early modern context of mountain gloom.

This chapter has highlighted the influence which the desire to assert the summit position has had upon individual articulations of mountain history. Almost every account analysed above set about, either implicitly or explicitly, to assert the primacy of either a key figure, or of the mountaineering community in general, in expressing and achieving mountain glory. But, as Clinton Thomas Dent pointed out in 1883, 'firsts' are a tricky business; mountaineers had to discount the 'compulsory' or 'utilitarian' ascents of mere chamois hunters to claim the bridal-white summit for themselves. To claim primacy in appreciating mountains, writers over the last two centuries have had to explain away the false, incomplete expressions of mountain appreciation scattered throughout history. Those examples too explicit to ignore have been carefully absorbed into the modern club, defined as 'precursors' of today in order to avoid having to read them as representatives of their own times.

However, these narratives do not allocate the summit position merely to mountaineering, or Gray, or Wordsworth, or Rousseau, but to modernity itself. Just as in mountaineering, the discourses that underpin Western modernity are those of exclusivity and exceptionality. The summit position came about with modernity because modernity itself *is* the summit position: the implicit claim of developed superiority over the past (and, frequently, other cultures). The idea of mountain gloom and mountain glory is therefore

a vital element of the representational space of the modern mountain experience. Stripped of the specifics and at the most essential level, the narrative states that modernity invented the appreciation of mountains.

Mountain gloom and mountain glory is more than a representation – or misrepresentation – of the past. It is part of the heritage inherent to modern mountain experiences. Just as Scripture and the classics framed, informed, and affected early modern mountain encounters, so too does the perception of the mountain past inform modern mountain engagements. At the very back of the minds of those who look upon the mountains and glory in them is the whispered thought: in the great span of human history, this reaction is special and unusual. Mountain gloom and mountain glory is not a story of the early modern relationship with mountains; it is the story of ours.

Conclusion: Filling the Void

There is an anecdote which is sometimes used to illustrate the state of European mountain attitudes before the rise of modern mountain glory. It tells of travellers who, crossing Alpine passes by carriage, would pull down their blinds to avoid looking at the mountains which so distressed their sensibilities.⁵⁹¹ One particularly fanciful version, contrasting the Romantic outpouring of devotion to mountains with the 'previous classical period', recounted without citation that:

the Alps had appeared so chaotic and uncivilised that the man of sensibility on his way to Italy for the Grand Tour was supposed to pull down the blinds of his carriage lest he be driven mad by such grotesque excess; some people apparently even had landscapes with tidy Greek temples and other classical scenes painted on the inside of the carriage blinds to protect them against the vast disorder outside.⁵⁹²

The 'case of the carriage blinds', as Arthur Conan Doyle might put it, is a commonplace of mountain history, repeated not just in popular texts but in general conversation, a tenet of the *zeitgeist*. I was aware of it from early on in this project, and from the beginning I asked myself the question - who pulled down their carriage blinds, and when? Several years on, I have yet to find a single early modern (seventeenth century or earlier) example of such a phenomenon. Most mountain passes in Europe were not fit for carriages until the late eighteenth century at the earliest and most of the seventeenth-century mountain travellers considered over the course of this thesis either walked or rode along the narrow, winding paths. Later travellers, such as Walpole and Gray, were carried by sedan chair as their carriages had to be dismantled in order to be taken up.

And so my question remained - who pulled down their blinds? Some secondary accounts of the story allude to specific individuals. For example, one text claims that 'as late as the middle of the eighteenth century' the famous libertine Giacomo Casanova drew down his blinds 'to spare himself the view of those vile excrescences of nature, the deformed

⁵⁹¹ E.g. Ed Douglas, *Mountaineers: Great Tales of Bravery and Conquest* (2011), p.82; R. James Breiding, *Swiss Made: The Untold Story Behind Switzerland's Success* (2013), pp.74-75; David Irwin, *Neoclassicism* (1997), p.14; Tom Turner, *English Garden Design: History and Styles Since 1650* (1986), p.101; and Ian Thompson, *Ecology, Community and Delight: An Inquiry Into Values in Landscape Architecture* (2000), pp.25-26, quoting Turner.

⁵⁹² Sara Maitland, *A Book of Silence: A Journey in Search of the Pleasures and Powers of Silence* (2008), p.223.

mountains'.⁵⁹³ Again, no direct citation is given, and no such suggestion can be found in Casanova's lengthy biography. The romantic adventurer seemed perfectly relaxed at being amidst mountains on chairs or by foot, and mainly pulled down the blinds in his coach in order to conceal pretty young women nestled within.⁵⁹⁴ There is another suggestion, elsewhere, that Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768), the famous German art historian, had his curtains drawn to avoid the sight of the Alps, which 'were likened to ruins, piles of rubbish or wreckage'.⁵⁹⁵ Other sources point out that Winckelmann became ill and depressed during the journey, suggesting that his reported 'horror of the mountains' may have had its roots in physical and emotional discomfort.⁵⁹⁶ He may also, perhaps, have read Thomas Burnet, and followed Defoe rather than Addison in finding mountains therefore bereft of all pleasures. But his eighteenth-century reaction was by no means representative of premodern attitudes.

Nineteenth-century references to carriage blinds being pulled down during Alpine crossings took either fictional or moralistic forms. The first appeared in a play, *The Story of Mont Blanc*, composed and performed by the cockney entertainer Albert Smith after his 1851 ascent of the mountain. Two popular comic characters who featured in the play were a pair of old ladies who pulled down their carriage blinds whenever they neared 'a mountain precipice'.⁵⁹⁷ Two decades later, John Ruskin, in one of his *Fors Clavigera*, a series of letters addressed to British workmen, recounted sharing a railway carriage with a pair of spoilt American girls travelling through Italy, who fancied themselves sorely tried by 'the flies and the dust' of long-distance journeying. These girls 'pulled down the blinds the moment they entered the carriage, and then sprawled, and writhed, and tossed among the cushions of it'. Between Verona and Venice, they exchanged a single sentence each, having very briefly pulled up the blinds: 'Don't those snow-caps make you cool?'

⁵⁹³ Louise B. Young, *The Unfinished Universe* (1986), p.27.

⁵⁹⁴ Giacomo Casanova, trans. Willard R. Trask, *History of my life*, 12 vols. in 6 (1967-1972), vol.3, p.75, 77; vol.5, p.6; vol.9, pp.45-47; vol.10, p.303.

⁵⁹⁵ Sigfried Giedion, 'The new space conception: space-time', ed. C.A. Patrides, *Aspects of Time* (1976), pp.82-83, noted Winckelmann's reaction in order to demonstrate the ways in which artistic trends could presage 'new' feelings. Quote from Peter Becker, 'The Archaeology of the Outdoor Movement and the German Development: In the Beginning was the Curiosity About the Sublime', trans. Gudrun Vill-Debney, eds. Barbara Humberstone, Heather Prince, and Karla A. Henderson, *Routledge International Handbook of Outdoor Studies* (2015), p.492.

⁵⁹⁶ Ed. and trans. David Carter, *Johann Joachim Winckelmann on Art, Architecture, and Archaeology* (2013), p.10

⁵⁹⁷ Alan McNee, *Albert Smith: The Cockney Who Sold the Alps* (2015), p.135.

'No; I wish they did.'⁵⁹⁸ In these examples, the image of the blinds being drawn is intended to inspire amusement and to stand as a mocking warning; at fearful old ladies and against girls too young and silly to appreciate the undoubted natural beauty around them. These moments have even less than Winckelmann's infirmities to do with the reality of premodern mountain engagement.

The story of the carriage blinds is an exaggerated emblem of the process by which the idea of early modern mountain gloom has become a culturally-accepted article of general knowledge. It is an anecdote with no apparent basis in any historical source; there is certainly insufficient evidence to justify claims that the pulling down of blinds was a general practice among premodern mountain travellers. If there is any basis of 'historical truth' to the tale then it dates to an era late in the early modern period, or early in the modern; to the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, when this thesis has suggested mountains were being 'rethought'. For all this, it is an anecdote that has been repeated and adapted, unquestioned and uninterrogated, because it fits and confirms a paradigm - of early modern mountain distaste and terror - that is broadly acknowledged to be true. More than that, it is a paradigm which sets modernity apart from early modernity. It allows us in the modern day to feel that our experience of the landscape is exceptional within the long context of human history.

Touching the Same Void

This thesis has set out to explode that paradigm but, hopefully, not to replace it with a simplistically reversed narrative of unmitigated early modern mountain glory. There were certainly negative and ambivalent reactions to mountains in the early modern period, particularly during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, many of which have been included in this thesis and some, due to constraints of space and time, which have not. The aim of this thesis has never been to claim a pure sense of early modern 'mountain glory' but to establish that both individual sources and the periodic context as a whole demonstrate a greater diversity of mountain attitudes than has hitherto been acknowledged, and that the story of the shift from premodern to modern

⁵⁹⁸ Quoted in John D. Rosenberg, *Elegy for an Age: The Presence of the Past in Victorian Literature* (2005), p.88.

mountain engagement was far more subtle, complex, and interesting than a stark switch from gloom to glory. Such a narrative misrepresents both 'gloomy' early modern sources and 'glorious' modern ones.

One such supposedly negative text, not discussed thus far, is that recording the diarist John Evelyn's mountain experiences in 1644 and 1646. He has been identified as a man who 'hated every minute' of his time crossing the Simplon Pass, and as a persuasive example of the truism that 'as recently as the 1700s the Alps were generally abhorred'.⁵⁹⁹ In November 1644, he climbed to the summit of what he called a 'horrid rock', and looked out over a field of rocks that had tumbled from the mountainside, 'so strangely congested, & broaken... as would affright one with their horror and menacing postures'.⁶⁰⁰

Less than two years later, he made a crossing of the Simplon Pass, through 'strange, horrid, & firefull [*sic*] Craggs', ever on the lookout for 'Beares, & Wouolves, who have sometimes assaulted Travellers'.⁶⁰¹ He winced at the locals, with their 'monstrous Gullets or Wennis of flesse growing to their throats', and near the summit of the pass he and his companions were taken hostage and forced to pay a fee for their freedom.⁶⁰² On the snowy, slippery descent the pony carrying all of their baggage fell through a cornice and was almost lost, had they not pelted it with snowballs to cause it to thrash around and fall through another cornice to a lower path where they could recover it. Finally, 'affirted with the dissaster' of the horse, they 'trudg'd... & sometimes we fell, & sometimes slid' to the base of the pass.⁶⁰³ They were relieved, at last, by the approach to the Lake of Geneva which was 'as pleasant a Country, as that which before we had traveld, was melancholy & troublesome'.⁶⁰⁴ From a perspective which presupposes that Evelyn travelled and wrote during a period of overwhelming mountain gloom, these comments seem fairly damning.

It may be illustrative to set Evelyn's account alongside a text written in the late twentieth century, in the full light of 'mountain glory'. Joe Simpson's *Touching the Void*, first

⁵⁹⁹ Engel, *A History of Mountaineering in the Alps*, p.19; Ring, *How the English Made the Alps*, p.9.

⁶⁰⁰ John Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, ed. E.S. de Beer, 6 vols. (1955), ii, p.208.

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.509.

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*, p.510 and pp.512-513.

⁶⁰³ *Ibid.*, ii, pp.513-514.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.515.

published in 1988, tells the story of his ascent - and excruciating descent - of 6,334m Siula Grande in the Peruvian Andes in 1985. The ascent itself was uncomfortable, full of frights; at an awkward bivouac Simpson recalled a previous climb, in the Alps, in which the ground had simply fallen out from beneath the bivouac that he and his climbing partner had set up. Simpson was merely left with a lasting suspicion of potential sleeping platforms; his climbing partner, on the other hand, found that his 'desire to climb had been destroyed' and vowed 'never to go to the Alps again'.⁶⁰⁵ On the descent, Simpson fell and broke his right leg. His partner, Simon Yates, looked at the injury, 'and knew he was dead'.⁶⁰⁶ Nevertheless, Yates attempted a rescue, belaying Simpson down off the North Ridge. In worsening conditions, he accidentally lowered him over a cliff edge. Unable to pull him out, unable to hear him call, Yates made the decision to cut the rope and save his own life. Simpson fell deep into a crevasse. Throughout his ordeal he looked death in the face again and again. Before the rope was cut, he hung and thought of a climber from the 1930s, Toni Kurz, who had died on the Eiger:

He had never once stopped fighting, and he had dropped suddenly dead on the rope still fighting to live. Rescuers had watched him die. It seemed strange to be in the same situation and not be bothered...⁶⁰⁷

Later, waking in the depths of the crevasse after having sobbed himself to sleep, Simpson reflected again on his own death, at how it 'seemed pretty sordid.' He had never expected a 'blaze of glory', but nor had he predicted 'this slow pathetic fade into nothing'.⁶⁰⁸ He found no comfort in faith; his loneliness was punctuated only by the sense of a 'menace' in the crevasse, 'as if this thing had waited for a victim with the impersonal patience of the centuries'.⁶⁰⁹ Against all the odds, Simpson rescued himself, but his account is a harrowing read, full of pain and terror as the hours merge together and the embattled mountaineer awakes screaming from agonising nightmares.⁶¹⁰ One could, indeed, hold *Touching the Void* up as an example of a general trend in modern times towards books which focus on death and disaster in the mountains. John Krakauer's *Into Thin Air. K2 the*

⁶⁰⁵ Joe Simpson, *Touching the Void* (V1977), pp.36-39.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.76.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.99.

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.114.

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.135.

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.153.

Savage Mountain. The cheerily named *Mammoth Book of Mountain Disasters*.⁶¹¹ The peaks of modernity seem fairly deadly and awful.

Such an analysis hardly seems fair. There is death and disaster upon the mountains of modernity because so many people are driven to climb them. Joe Simpson was and is a mountaineer - he went to Siula Grande because he loved mountains. What occurred on the descent was a freak accident, an awful ordeal. It is natural that he was terrified but he pulled himself through, heroically. However, if such caveats are applied - as they should be - to *Touching the Void* and other highly ambivalent modern mountain writings, so should they be held in mind when considering the accounts of early modern climbers such as John Evelyn. It is true that he ascended the Simplon Pass in 1646 because he had to, rather than out of choice, but there does not seem to have been any necessity for him to ascend Mount Amiata (1,738m) in 1644. He described, at length, the strange experience of climbing through clouds and then out of them into a 'most serene heaven', in which the mountain-top seemed like an island amidst a 'Sea of thick Clouds rowling under out feete', every now and then revealing the summit of another peak in the distance, or breaking to display the 'Landskips and Villages' below.⁶¹² Evelyn found this to be 'one of the most pleasant, new & altogether surprizing objects that in my life I had ever beheld'.⁶¹³

Moreover, if it is fair to emphasise that Simpson's grim thoughts occurred in the context of an incredibly painful and frightening accident, the circumstances of Evelyn's crossing should also be highlighted. The Simplon Pass at the time was one of 'the most dangerous of the passes in ordinary use', the weather was unseasonably cold, and even the most enthusiastic modern mountaineer would probably be hard-pressed to enjoy being held up by bandits and almost losing all of their baggage.⁶¹⁴ Nor was Evelyn incapable; he commented that 'one had neede of a sure foote, & steady head to climb some of these

⁶¹¹ John Krakauer, *Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mt. Everest Disaster* (1997); Charles Houston and Robert Bates, *K2: The Savage Mountain* (first published 1954 and republished in 2008; the blurb made reference to the death of 11 climbers on the mountain that same year); ed. Hamis MacInnes, *The Mammoth Book of Mountain Disasters: True Accounts of Rescue from the Brink of Death* (2003).

⁶¹² John Evelyn, *Diary*, ii, pp.207-208.

⁶¹³ *Ibid.*, p.208. Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom*, pp.61-62, allowed that Evelyn was 'at least susceptible of emotions felt by later travelers', but suggested that most of his (negative) comments were 'conventional' of his age; Bevis, *Egdon Heath*, pp.19-20, allowed that his reaction was mixed, but that on the whole he found the Alps 'troublesome'.

⁶¹⁴ John Evelyn, *Diary*, ii, p.508, editorial footnote.

precipices'.⁶¹⁵ He was not terrified, but in control. Even his frequent appellation of the adjective 'horrid' to the surrounding mountains might be contextualised; as the editor of his diaries points out, the contemporaneous usage of the word meant something that was bristling and jagged, rather than something horrible or frightening; a circumstance that explains the apparent contradiction of Evelyn enjoying a 'very pleasant' passage with 'the horrid prospect of the *Alps*' visible throughout.⁶¹⁶ He therefore did not shy to look at the mountains: on the approach to the pass he noted that he could 'perfectly see the touring *Alps*' ahead, and picked out the highest peak among them, 'appearing some miles above the Clouds'. Nor was the pleasant landscape which he so relished after coming down from the snowy pass a wide open plain, but rather a sunny ravine walled with mountains 'on both sides'. As he ventured between these ranges, he looked upon the Rhone, and the lush fields of grass and corn, and noted that they were the result of 'the Snow which waters it from the hills, [and] brings down with it a fertil liquor that does wonderfully impregnat'.⁶¹⁷

Presupposing early modern mountain gloom, it seems natural to focus on the negative parts of Evelyn's account. It reads very differently if viewed in the context of an early modern period in which people had a reasonable level of practical experience navigating the mountain landscape, appreciated its scale and beauty, and viewed it as a vital part of the natural environment. The key point to make is that *Touching the Void* by no means reflects an unambiguous sense of mountain glory. Nor do the writings of John Evelyn point unproblematically towards mountain gloom. Such a simple, absolute dichotomy is insufficient for both periodic contexts. In fact, both texts point towards the same contrast, inherent in human engagement with mountains across time: that they are vast and amazing but also cold, dangerous, and overwhelming.

This thesis set out with a number of aims. It set about to explore different forms of engagement with mountains and to understand the different forms of mountain space – practice, representation, and symbolic, representational space – as they were experienced in the early modern period. It hoped to be able to establish three types of

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.510.

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.506, text and editorial footnote.

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.515.

narratives: to tell the story of the general 'grammar' of mountains extant in the early modern period; to trace elements of change and continuity between that grammar and the one of modernity; and to explicate the development of the discourse of premodern mountain gloom.

Chapter One laid out the state of knowledge relating to mountains in the early modern period. This included both extensive practical knowledge, rooted in local communities who well understood how to manage the dangerous, unpredictable environment around them, and elite debates regarding the origins and makeup of the earth's most outstanding landforms. These debates revealed a theme common to all elements of mountain engagement: the significance of religious beliefs to the representational space of mountains. In his *Theory of the Earth* Thomas Burnet, publishing in a context of growing doubt regarding the veracity of both Scripture and of natural revelation, lit the touch-paper which would ultimately see mountains removed from the Book of Nature.

This change would have significant effects upon the attitudes of travellers who visited mountains in the early eighteenth-century, but, as Chapter Two demonstrated, travellers for the bulk of the sixteenth and seventeenth century went to mountains with largely positive associations in mind. They did not ascend mountains to gain the summit position, but they nevertheless took pleasure in the view and, of course, endured pain during the climb. Mountains with Scriptural or classical significance featured particularly prominently in travel accounts of the era. Meanwhile, the spatial practices of non-elite mountain dwellers involved significant and beneficial interaction with the high landscape, whether in the form of 'flittings' to the shielings or the droving of cattle across convenient hillside routes. Today, mountain spaces are frequently designated as 'wild space', or national parks, with a focus upon environmental preservation and, indeed, tourism. The early modern mountain landscape was not a wilderness, and on a practical level the passage of travellers was secondary to the activities of those who gained their living from the mountainsides.

Chapter Three considered the nature of both aesthetic theory and aesthetic reactions relating to mountains. It suggested that early modern Europeans viewed mountains according to aesthetic values of visual and environmental diversity and practical utility.

These principles enabled mountains to be viewed as both beautiful and great. This chapter also argued that the vital aesthetic category of beauty as fitness for purpose relied upon the unquestioned belief that God had designed mountains to benefit mankind. This belief was dealt a shattering blow by Burnet's *Theory*, which in turn inaugurated a surge in negative mountain discourses epitomised in Daniel Defoe's *Tour*. At the same time, however, travellers and philosophers who found themselves admiring mountains developed a new aesthetic category which acknowledged their greatness without referring to their divine origins. The modern concept of the sublime was therefore not a stark break from the aesthetics of the early modern period but a development from them. Moreover, this chapter suggested that the aesthetic language of the early modern period, along with the representational significance of 'classic ground', continued to echo into the eighteenth and even nineteenth centuries.

Language formed the focus of Chapter Four, which analysed the representation of mountains in early modern poetry. Most significantly, these poetic sources served to demonstrate the widespread nature of the discourses discussed in the preceding three chapters. Classical and biblical allusions abounded, and poems alluded to the same energetic and extensive mountain engagement highlighted in Chapter Two. The admiration of travellers upon viewing mountains or the views from their summits were likewise echoed in poetic reflections upon the same. Most importantly, the poetic sources explored – particularly Joshua Poole's *English Parnassus* – highlighted the range of different visions of mountains. They could be empty or full, awe-inspiring or frightening, icy and cold or fertile and sun-touched. The grammar of early modern mountains was just as broad as that of today.

As Chapter Five demonstrated, that variety has been obscured in the modern period by the discourse of mountain gloom and glory, which has emphasised the negative features of early modern mountain engagement, and the positive ones of the modern era. It showed that this discourse, rather than reflecting the nuance of past contexts, was in fact the result of mountaineers and literary scholars alike seeking the 'summit position' for the inaugurators of their disciplines. Over the decades, this discourse came to make up part of the modern representational landscape of mountains.

Because It's There

This thesis therefore challenges something that is part of the modern enjoyment of mountains. When I began my research into early modern mountains, I took for granted the idea that people disliked them, and initially set out to better understand and contextualise this reaction of 'mountain gloom'. Instead, I found sources that pointed to an entirely different conclusion, one which forced me to write a new and revisionist account of premodern mountain attitudes. Over time, I have certainly had my doubts regarding the value and purpose of my re-thinking of mountains. Is it worth risking doing the same as Thomas Burnet, in taking away an assumption which underlies the terms of modern mountain appreciation?

Ultimately, I have done so for the same reason George Mallory climbed Everest - because it's there. Except, in this case, 'it' is not the highest mountain in the world, unclimbed, but a wealth of complex past mountain engagement, unexplored and previously unthought of. I felt that I owed it to the mad pilgrim William Lithgow, to the acerbic scholar Richard Bentley, and to the nameless worshippers of Le Clou, to bear witness to their mountain experiences and understandings.

Despite that - or perhaps because of it - this thesis has only scratched the surface of early modern mountain engagement, depictions, and discourses. The focus has largely been on British sources, although - following the principle of developing a grammar of early modern mountains - it has hopefully drawn in enough continental examples to suggest a general commonality of discourse. The idea of mountain gloom and glory has, moreover, always been an Anglocentric discourse, drawn from English sources and then applied unquestioningly to broader contexts. To peel it away I had to go back to those same sources. Now it is possible to revisit specific national, cultural, and social contexts without the assumption that the gloomy answer is already known, and that there is no point in searching further. Might further studies reveal the undoubted nuances between the British, French, and Swiss discourses of mountains? Or explore the tensions between those in power, who coordinated the management of mountain landscapes, and those who effected it? Or consider whether differing views of mountains contrasted according to particular lines - urban or rural, traveller or local?

Some of the more cautious suggestions of this thesis may also indicate further possibilities for historians not just of mountains but of landscape and the environment in general. Scientists and historians of climate have emphasised the significance of the impacts of the Little Ice Age on the early modern period.⁶¹⁸ Can sources of early modern mountain engagement be read for evidence of the impact of climate change on daily interactions with environments which, even in warmer periods, provide harsh challenges to human survival? An exploration of the aesthetics of mountains has also demonstrated the value which early modern natural philosophers attached to the diversity of flora and fauna which could exist upon the mountainside, and their recognition of the role that mountains played in maintaining the conditions of the valley. Does this early modern awareness *of* environment point towards deeper origins of modern (Western) environmental awareness, generally located in the eighteenth century at the earliest?⁶¹⁹ This thesis has also drawn upon a number of visual representations of mountains in a variety of artistic genres; what might a study of the ‘artistic grammar’ of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century mountains reveal?

These are all questions for historians of the early modern period. In revising the traditional narrative of mountain gloom and glory, this thesis also poses some big questions to historians of other periods. One fairly natural response to the argument of this thesis – that the early modern period was not defined by mountain gloom – is to ask whether the shift may have simply happened earlier. Perhaps ‘mountain gloom’ should be located in the mediaeval period? My strong suspicion – given the heavily constructed nature of the narrative of mountain gloom and glory – would be that this is not the case, but a detailed answer is not for me to give. However, in deconstructing this narrative this thesis may have hopefully better enabled other historians to explore the specificities of earlier periods. It may, perhaps, also support further critical readings of modern mountain experiences and of the cultural phenomenon of modern mountaineering.

After all, what is historiography but the communal map of the past which historians use to guide their subsequent endeavours? Previously that map, with regards to premodern

⁶¹⁸ Brian M. Fagan, *The Little Ice Age: How Climate Made History* (2000); Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century* (2013).

⁶¹⁹ E.g. Jonsson, *Enlightenment’s Frontier*, pp.7-8, which highlights the origins of environmentalism in the Scottish Enlightenment and eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ‘improvement’ drives.

mountain engagement, showed only a blank, and the inscription 'here be dragons'. Yet there is in fact a wealth of material relating to the early modern relationship with a landscape feature which was supposedly disdained and ignored. This preliminary study of a small selection of such sources has revealed rich and complex discourses of mountain understanding and engagement that, whilst partially replaced by the discourses surrounding modern mountaineering, the sublime, and Romanticism, also contributed to modern forms of seeing and talking about mountains in ways of which we are mostly unconscious. This thesis has therefore begun to sketch the outlines of a new map; not of dragons, but of a realistic acknowledgement of danger, rooted in physical experience. Not of emptiness, but of theological and geological debates, of a landscape contoured by classical imagery and deep belief.

The introductory address to the first issue of the *Alpine Journal*, dated March 1863, wondered whether it might already be too late to begin a project under such a name when 'so many of the great peaks of Switzerland have already been climbed'. Comfort was provided in the thought that 'the Himalayas... offer an unlimited field for adventure and scientific observation, not to mention the numerous ranges in all parts of the world which the Englishman's foot is some day destined to scale'.⁶²⁰ I would not want to make any such nationalistic claims for mountain history, nor would I wish to imply - in spite of the extensive and excellent corpus of work done in the field - that the Alps of modernity are all climbed out. And yet, just as in the late nineteenth century with regards to real peaks, there are more distant historical ranges - those of mountain engagement in the early modern period and before - still to be explored. There the analogy must end, for unlike the relationship between the real Alps and the Himalayas, the ranges of premodernity are not necessarily taller or better; they are simply different, full of nooks and crannies and stretches of technical climbing quite unlike those of the peaks nearer to temporal hand. At the risk of claiming a summit position of sorts for this thesis, I can only hope that my contribution may serve as a signpost for others to follow and explore.

⁶²⁰ [H.B. George], 'Introductory address', *Alpine Journal* 1 (1863-1864), pp.1-2.

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