SIMON BAINBRIDGE

Mountaineering & British Romanticism

The Literary Cultures of Climbing 1770–1836

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For Anne-Julie, Charlie, and Grace

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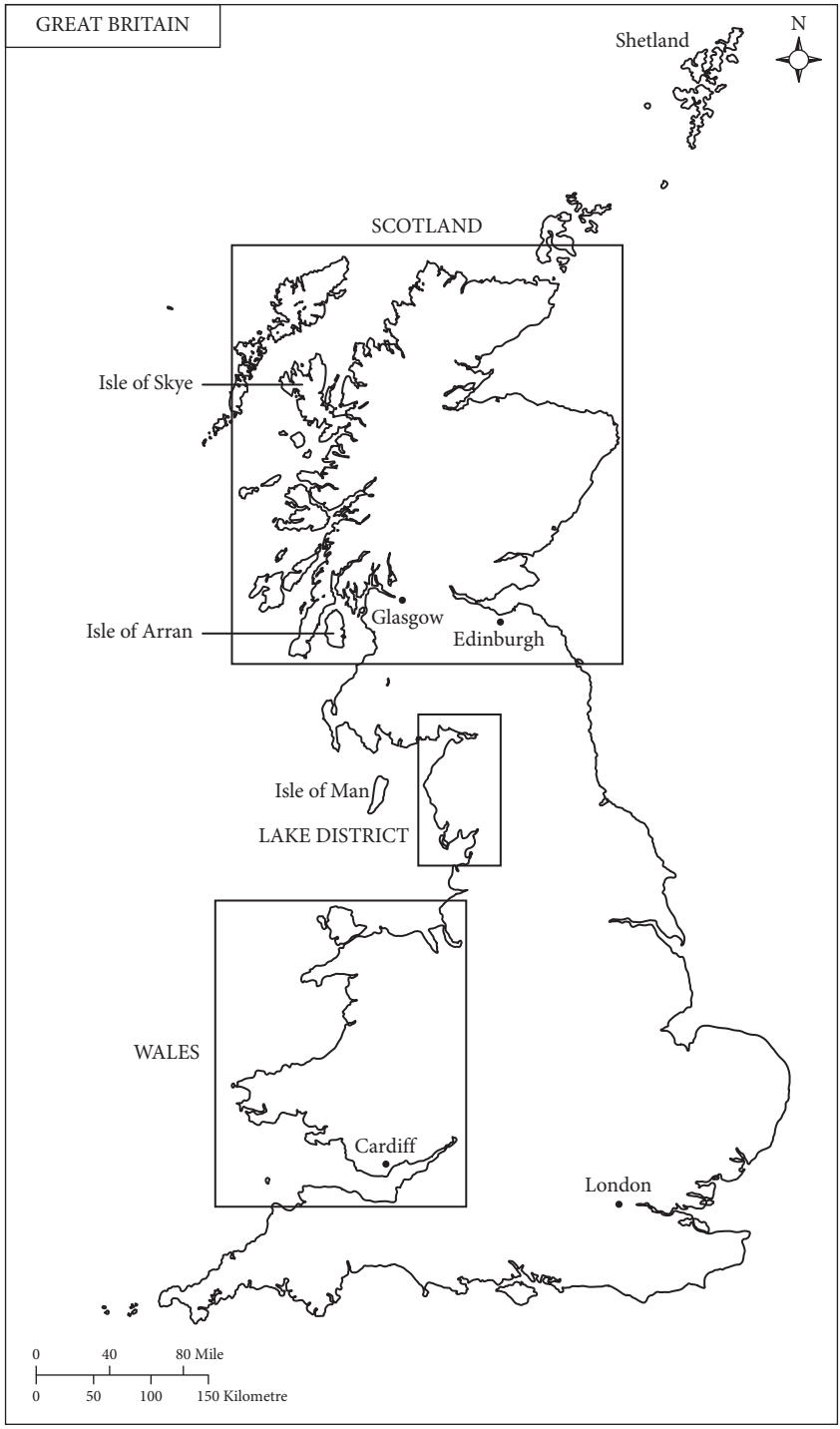
Abbreviations

CL	Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956–71). References are given by volume and page number.
CNB	Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn, 3 double vols (London: Bollingen Series and Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957–73). References are given by volume and entry number.
EY	William Wordsworth and Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, The Early Years, 1787–1805*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, 2nd edn, rev. Chester L. Shaver (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).
GJ	Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Grasmere and Alfoxden Journals*, ed. Pamela Woof (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
KL	*The Letters of John Keats, 1814–1821*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958). References are given by volume and page number.
LY, I	William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: IV: The Later Years: Part I: 1821–1828*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, 2nd edn, rev. Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).
MY, I	William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: Volume II: The Middle Years: Part I: 1806–1811*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, 2nd edn, rev. Mary Moorman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).
MY, II	William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: Volume III: The Middle Years: Part II: 1812–1820*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, 2nd edn, rev. Mary Moorman and Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970).
TE	William Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, ed. Sally Bushell, James A. Butler, and Michael C. Jaye (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007). References are given by book and line number, unless otherwise stated.
TP	William Wordsworth, *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979). Unless otherwise stated, quotations are from the 1805 text in this edition and are given by book and line number.



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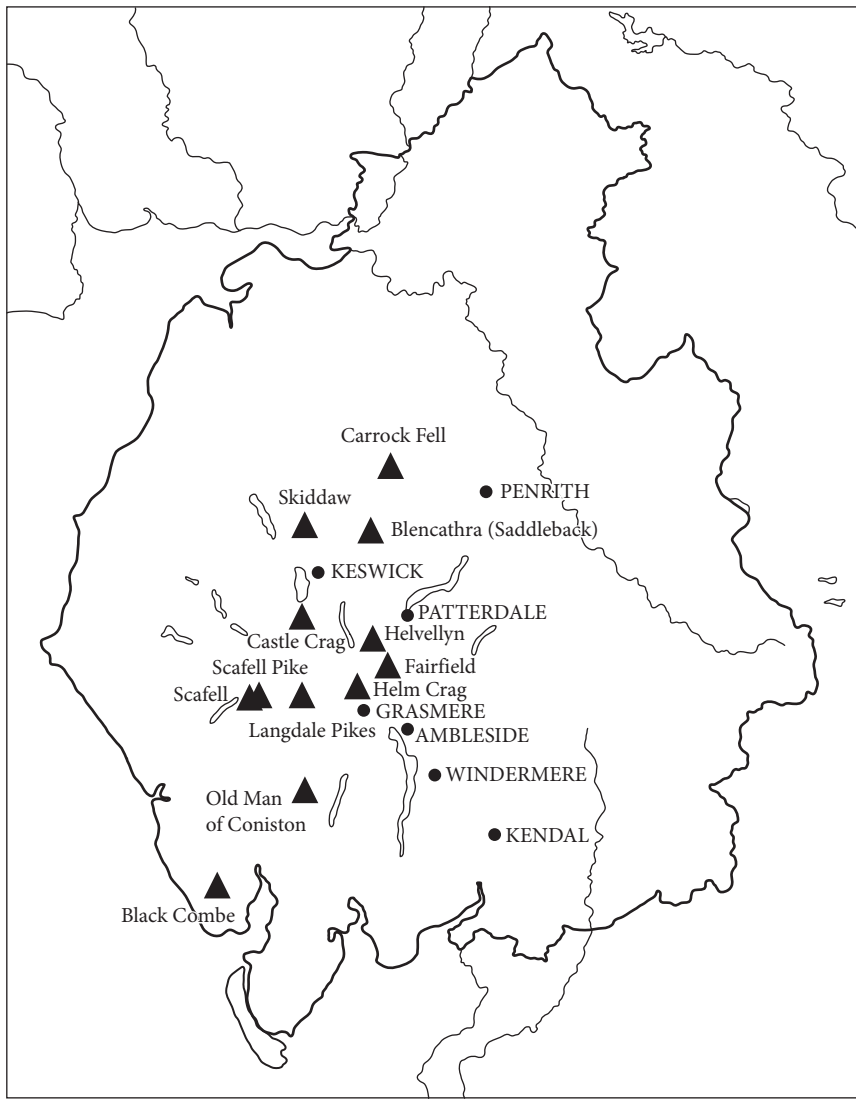

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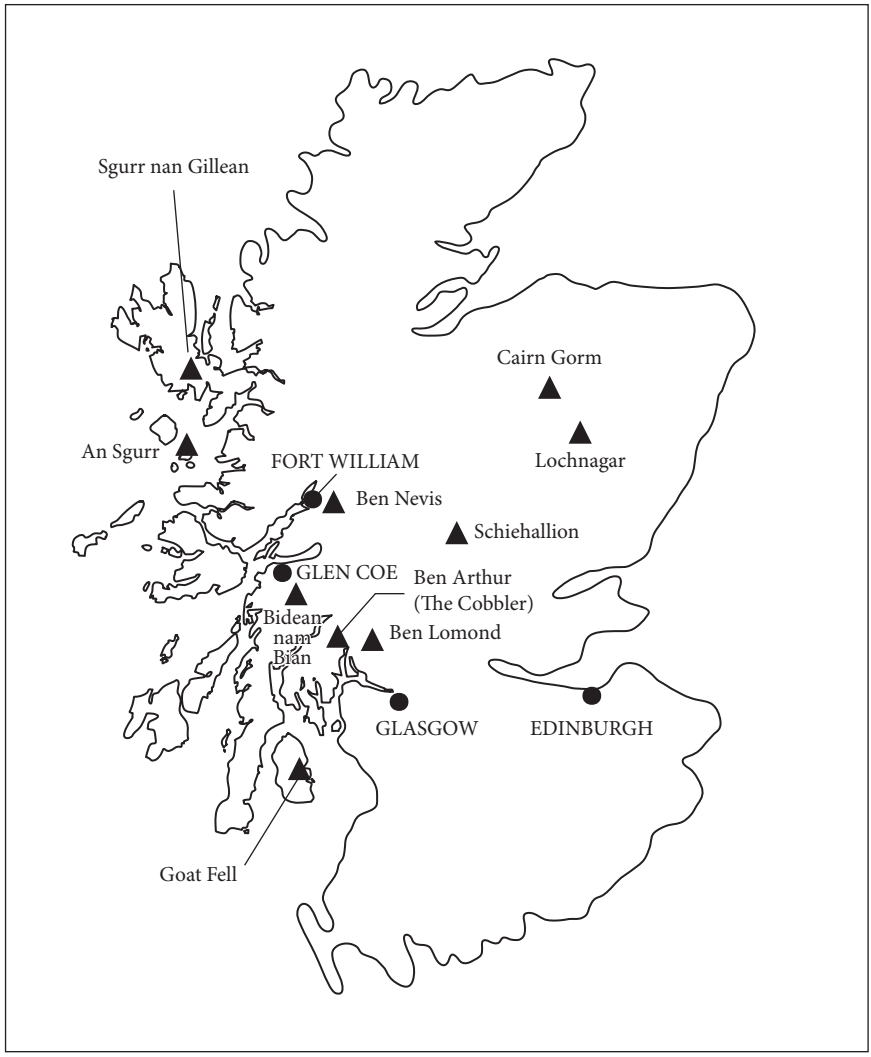

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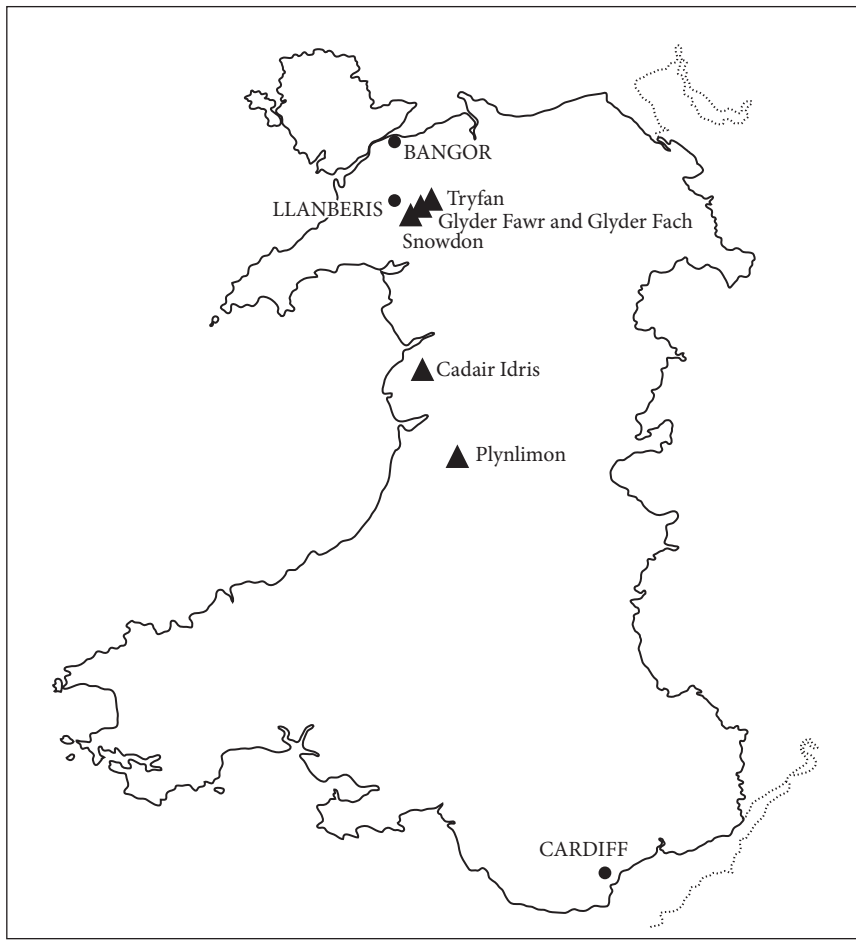

Map 1d. Principal Mountains of Wales

Introduction

> 'I will assay to reach to as high a summit in Poetry as the nerve bestowed upon me will suffer'.
>
> – John Keats, Letter to Richard Woodhouse, 27 October 1818 (*KL*, I, 387)

This book examines the relationship between Romantic-period writing and the activity that Samuel Taylor Coleridge christened 'mountaineering' in 1802 (*CL*, II, 846). It argues that mountaineering developed as a pursuit in Britain during the Romantic era, earlier than is generally recognized, and shows how major writers including William and Dorothy Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Ann Radcliffe, John Keats, Lord Byron, and Walter Scott were central to its invention. Locating these writers within the wider context of the period's emerging genre of mountaineering literature, the book explores how the desire for physical ascent shaped Romantic-period literary culture and illustrates how the figure of the mountaineer became crucial to creative identities and literary outputs. By reading the work of canonical writers alongside a wide range of other types of mountaineering literature, it reassesses key Romantic-period terms and ideas, including vision, insight, elevation, revelation, transcendence, and the sublime. However, the book also uses the focus on mountaineering to challenge the prioritization of concepts of vision and the imagination in Romantic studies, arguing instead for a greater emphasis on the role of embodiment and movement in the creation of Romantic-period texts.

While the mountain has long been recognized as a key symbol in the writing of the period, there has been surprisingly little critical analysis of the links between the physical activity of mountaineering and Romantic-period literature.[1] For example, Percy Shelley's 'Mont Blanc' is often cited as the paradigm of the Romantic mountain experience, with its stationary poet looking at the mountain from below and speculating about its hidden summit. Similarly accounts of Wordsworth's ascent of Snowdon in *The Prelude* have frequently concentrated on the poet's

[1] The major study of the change in the aesthetic response to mountains is Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1959). For an excellent wide-ranging analysis of the culture of mountains and mountaineering, see Robert Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind: A History of a Fascination* (London: Granta, 2004).

Mountaineering and British Romanticism: The Literary Cultures of Climbing, 1770–1836. Simon Bainbridge, Oxford University Press (2020).
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description of his summit vision without considering the relationship between that vision and the arduous climb undertaken to enable it. Rather than focusing on the static observation of mountains, this book emphasizes the embodied experience of ascent and decent in the period's literature. As an enquiry, it seeks to build on the distinguished scholarship on the Romantic-period literature of walking that can be traced back to works such as Anne D. Wallace's *Walking, Literature, and English Culture: The Origins and Uses of Peripatetic in the Nineteenth Century* and Robin Jarvis's *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel*.[2] These studies have significantly enhanced our understanding of the rich cultural meaning of pedestrian activity, but their analyses of how mobility shaped literary texts make little distinction between walking on a level surface and ascending or descending. They show brilliantly what it means for William Wordsworth to walk to-and-fro, forwards and backwards—particularly in relation to his composition of blank verse—but they do not explore what it might mean for Wordsworth's poetry for him to hurry, plod, toil, climb, clamber, and scramble up or down, 'like a roe' to 'bound o'er the mountains', to 'pant up' Snowdon 'With eager pace', to experience 'pantings of dismay' on the top of Helvellyn, to hang by 'knots of grass / and half inch fissures in the slippery rock', or 'greedy in the chance . . . [to roam] . . . from hill to hill, from rock to rock, / Still craving combinations of new forms'.[3] Wordsworth's poetry of movement presents his mountain adventures as embodied; they involve various vigorous physical activities that strain his fingers, legs, and lungs. Coleridge's writings about climbing frequently emphasize a kinaesthetic and haptic relationship with the world, defined by movement and touch: 'descended / as I bounded down, noticing the moving stones under the soft moss, hurting my feet' (*CNB*, I, 798). To adopt Byron's famous phrase, for Wordsworth, Coleridge, and other writers of the period, high mountains were a feeling, part of a tangible world experienced by a moving, sensing body. With its emphasis on embodiment and movement, Romantic-period mountaineering literature complexifies conceptions of Romanticism that prioritize vision and imagination. It opens up new ways of understanding the relationship between the writers and the world that they experienced through their feet and hands, as well as their eyes, as they moved through the challenging landscape of the mountains.

[2] Anne Wallace, *Walking, Literature, and English Culture: The Origins and Uses of Peripatetic in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Robin Jarvis, *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 1997).

[3] William Wordsworth, 'Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey', ll. 68–9, in *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems, 1797–1800,* ed. James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 118; *TE*, XIII. 31–2; 'To ———, On Her First Ascent to the Summit of Helvellyn', l. 8, in William Wordsworth, *Shorter Poems, 1807–1820,* ed. Carl H. Ketcham (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 221–2; *TP*, 1805, I. 341–2 and XI. 189–91.

The Creation of 'Mountaineering' and the Transformation of the 'Mountaineer'

On 9 August 1802, Samuel Taylor Coleridge returned to his home in Keswick at the end of a nine-day 'Circumcursion' of the more remote parts of the Lake District, the mountainous area in the North West of England (*CL*, II, 848). This vigorous tour had included a pioneering ascent of Scafell and had left the poet's trousers in tatters and his boots in need of repair. That evening the poet sent an excited account of his adventures to his friend Robert Southey, writing that he had 'Spent the greater part of the next Day mountaineering' (*CL*, II, 846). This is the first recorded use of the word 'mountaineering'.[4] Coleridge was using a new word for an evolving activity. While there is a long history of mountain ascents undertaken for non-utilitarian purposes, perhaps most famously Petrarch's climb of Mont Ventoux in 1338, it was during the closing decades of the eighteenth century that an increasingly large number of people started to explore the mountain areas of Great Britain for a variety of reasons.[5]

Another of the period's etymological developments further illustrates the emergence of mountaineering in Britain during the Romantic period and its significance for those who undertook it. While Coleridge made the first recorded use of the verb 'mountaineering', the noun form of the word—'mountaineer'—was also undergoing a transformation of meaning. Long used to define 'a person who is native to or lives in a mountainous region', it was during the Romantic period that 'mountaineer' also began to denote 'a person who engages in or is skilled at mountain climbing'.[6] Though the *Oxford English Dictionary* dates its first example of this new use of the word to 1860, the shift in meaning can be traced back to at least the 1790s. As early as 1792, the pioneering mountain climber and travel writer Captain Joseph Budworth described his guide Robin Partridge in *A Fortnight's Ramble to the Lakes* as 'so bold a mountaineer, he can go any where that a sheep can; and I dare say thinks every person can do the same'.[7] Here Partridge's identity as one from a mountainous region is also being used to describe his skill at negotiating the environment's challenging terrain and his ability to reach places not normally accessible to two-legged climbers. In the third

[4] 'Mountaineer, v.', *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2019, <www.oed.com/view/Entry/239553>. Accessed 15 December 2019. See Mark English, 'Cragsman and Mountaineering: The Romantic Poets Add to the Language', *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, 125 (2004), 17–22.

[5] For an account of Petrarch's climb and a discussion of its significance as signalling the arrival of a 'first modern man' through ascent to a summit, see Peter H. Hansen, *The Summits of Modern Man: Mountaineering After the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), pp. 12–22.

[6] 'Mountaineer, *n.* and *adj.*', *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2019, <www.oed.com/view/Entry/122896>. Accessed 15 December 2019. The *OED*'s examples for the latter definition, dating from 1860 and after, are much later than those I discuss here.

[7] Joseph Budworth, *A Fortnight's Ramble to the Lakes in Westmoreland, Lancashire, and Cumberland* (London: Hookham and Carpenter, 1792), p. 159.

edition of *A Fortnight's Ramble*, published in 1810, when recounting what he claims to be the first ascent 'for pleasure' of Pike o' Stickle in the Lake District in 1797, Budworth tests the applicability of the word to himself, describing how he and his guide 'started like hardy mountaineers'.[8] Born in Coventry, Budworth's pioneering attempt on the Langdale peak enables him to claim for himself a new identity, that of the mountaineer.

Like Budworth, many of the period's writers were keen to prove themselves and be recognized as 'hardy mountaineers', individuals who were at home in challenging terrain and able to achieve heights beyond the reach of others. William Wordsworth, born within sight of 'lofty Skiddaw', could claim to be a mountaineer on the basis of being a native of the Lake District. However, the Cumbrian poet played on the emergent double meaning of 'mountaineer' in *The Prelude* when he described himself and his undergraduate friend Robert Jones setting out on their continental walking tour of July to September 1790:

> A fellow student and myself, he too
> A mountaineer, together sallied forth,
> And, staff in hand on foot pursued our way
> Towards the distant Alps.
>
> (*TP*, VI. 339–42)

Jones was a 'mountaineer' like Wordsworth in both senses of the word. He grew up near the rugged Snowdonia area of North Wales and enjoyed climbing peaks; he and the poet would also ascend Snowdon together in 1791. By 1837, when Wordsworth described himself as 'an Islander by birth, / A Mountaineer by habit', the word had become capable of referring specifically to an individual who participates in mountain-climbing rather than one who lives in mountainous regions.[9] It was this version of the mountaineering identity that appealed to the 'Cockney' poet John Keats, who declared that 'I am comparitively a a [*sic*] mountaineer' on his 1818 pedestrian tour of Northern England and Scotland, during which he attempted to climb Skiddaw and successfully reached the summit of Ben Nevis (*KL*, I, 342). British writers were also strongly attracted to the Alpine variant of this mountaineering identity, with Coleridge declaring in 1803 that 'I think, that my soul must have pre-existed in the body of a Chamois-chaser' (*CL*, II, 916). While the figure of the chamois hunter was central to Coleridge's self-conception, Byron incorporated it into the identity of his aspiring hero Manfred, who reaches 'A height [on the Jungfrau] which none even of our mountaineers, / Save our best hunters, may attain', as the character of the Chamois Hunter

[8] Joseph Budworth, A *Fortnight's Ramble to the Lakes in Westmorland, Lancashire, and Cumberland*, 3rd edn (London: John Nichols, 1810), p. 266.

[9] 'Musings Near Aquapendente. April, 1837', in William Wordsworth, *Sonnet Series and Itinerary Poems, 1820–1845*, ed. Geoffrey Jackson (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 742.

exclaims (I. II. 61–2).[10] Indeed, Manfred proves himself so courageous and agile on the summit rocks that the same character informs him: 'You should have been a hunter' (I. II. 124–5). In characteristically Byronic fashion, the poet's semi-autobiographical hero matches the mountaineering exploits of even the most exceptional Alpine climbers.

Romantic Mountaineers

Almost all the canonical male Romantic poets were active mountaineers at some point in their lives or were keen to present themselves as such, while many women writers participated in the developing culture of ascent in Britain. As a self-proclaimed 'mountaineer', William Wordsworth embodied the word's shifting definitions. He was both a 'Child of the mountains' (*TP*, X. 1006), who felt that the elevated environment in which he grew up was the ideal classroom for a poet's education, and an active climber of mountains throughout his life. Early in the *Two-Part Prelude*, Wordsworth describes himself as 'a rover . . . / In the high places, on the lonesome peaks, / Among the mountains and the winds' (*TP*, 1799, I. 54–6) and in the 1805 version he details a number of his climbing feats, including his schoolboy scrambling for birds' eggs on Yewdale Crags, his 1790 Tour of the Alps, and his 1791 revelation on Wales's highest peak, Snowdon—three of the poem's most celebrated passages. In 1805 the poet made an ascent with Humphry Davy and Walter Scott up the perilous ridge of Striding Edge to the summit of Helvellyn, a mountain close to his Grasmere home that he continued to climb for the rest of his life, including an ascent in 1840 when he was aged 70.

Mountain-climbing is one of the key activities in Wordsworth's poetry and it not only provides significant content for his greatest work but also shapes its conception and form. The writer emphasizes the importance of mountaineering to his ambitious poetic project by conceiving *The Prelude* as a mountain that the reader (or his or her proxy, Coleridge) must also climb if they are to experience the same revelation as the poet. He frequently calls upon the metaphor of mountain-climbing when describing his own poetic activity, as in Book II when he nervously describes setting out on his epic task through comparison with a steep and challenging ascent:

> . . . it is a path
> More difficult before me, and I fear
> That in its broken windings we shall need
> The chamois' sinews and the eagle's wing.
>
> (*TP*, II. 287–90)

[10] Lord Byron, *Manfred* in *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980–93), IV, pp. 51–102. References are given by Act, Scene, and line number.

At this early stage in the poem, Wordsworth figures his poetic anxiety as a lack of confidence in his climbing ability. However, by the end of his epic, the poet triumphantly claims for himself one version of the mountaineering identity, that of the chamois hunter, describing how he has 'tracked the main essential power— / Imagination—up her way sublime' (*TP*, XIII. 289–90). Wordsworth's mountaineering conception of the poetic task he shares with his reader is perhaps best seen in Book III when he announces the exciting new theme for his epic, his own inner life. Addressing Coleridge, he begins the passage: 'And here, O friend, have I retraced my life / Up to an eminence' and ends: 'Enough, for now into a populous plain / We must descend' (*TP*, III. 168–96). By adopting such a framework of ascent and descent for the key statement of his new-found epic purpose, Wordsworth reveals the extent to which the concept as well as the activity of mountaineering structures one of the key texts of Romanticism. His mountaineering poetry is far more extensive than the critical focus on *The Prelude*'s Alps and Snowdon passages would suggest, with the identity of the 'mountaineer' central to some of the works that the poet himself felt were his most important, such as *The Excursion*.

While Wordsworth was a lifelong mountaineer, Coleridge had his own brief but glorious golden age of mountaineering, lasting from the walking tour of the Lake District he undertook with Wordsworth in November 1799, which included an ascent of Helvellyn, until his departure for Malta in early 1804. As Molly Lefebure has argued in her excellent essay 'The First of the Fellwalkers', Coleridge's feats could be seen to earn him the title of 'the patron saint of fellwalkers'.[11] By his own account, Coleridge became 'much addicted' (*CL*, II, 841) to the more dangerous elements of mountain adventure and his climbing exploits included the following: the first known traverse of the ridge that runs from Keswick to Grasmere, by way of the Dodds and Helvellyn; the exploration of the mountains in the Newlands Valley, including his pioneering completion of what is now known as the Coledale horseshoe; the 'Circumcursion' of the Lake District, including the first recorded ascent of Scafell and the famous life-threatening descent of Broad Stand; and his scramble up Moss Force in Buttermere. Unlike Wordsworth, Coleridge never travelled to the Alps, but he did plan such a trip, carefully designing a nailed boot for the purpose. Also unlike Wordsworth, Coleridge did not absorb mountaineering into the content and texture of his poetry, despite his desire to do so. Rather it was in his letters and experimental notebooks that he sought to capture the embodied experience of movement within the mountains, producing some of the greatest mountaineering literature of any age.

Second-generation Romantic poets may not have been quite as pioneering, dedicated, or outstanding climbers as Wordsworth and Coleridge, but they still

[11] Molly Lefebure, 'The First of the Fellwalkers', in *Cumberland Heritage* (London: Gollancz, 1970), pp. 131–47. See also William Ruddick, ' "As much diversity as the heart that trembles": Coleridge's notes on the Lakeland fells', in *Coleridge's Imagination: Essays in Memory of Pete Laver*, ed. Richard Gravil, Lucy Newlyn, and Nicholas Roe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 88–101.

felt the need to participate in mountaineering, or at least to present themselves as doing so, and they too aspired to the identity of the mountaineer. Percy Shelley was keen to present himself as a mountaineer in both senses of the word, writing in his 'Preface' to *Laon and Cythna* that 'I have been familiar from boyhood with mountains and lakes, and the sea, and the solitude of forests: Danger which sports upon the brink of precipices, has been my playmate. I have trodden the glaciers of the Alps, and lived under the eye of Mont Blanc'.[12] While Shelley rather overstates his climbing credentials here—he had visited the Mer de Glace and the Glacier des Bossons near Chamonix in 1816—he advocates such an adventurous upbringing in the mountains as 'an education peculiarly fitted for a Poet' (p. 39). This statement illustrates Wordsworth's developing influence and the increasing emphasis laid on the link between dangerous mountain experience and poetic creativity. Shelley's most famous mountain poem remains at ground level; he presents Mont Blanc as a symbol of inaccessibility even though its summit had been reached several times since the first ascent in 1786 and stimulated John Keats's climbing fantasies. But elsewhere Shelley makes excellent poetic use of an elevated viewpoint, as in 'Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills', and his imagination frequently aspires to the vertiginous position of the climber. In *Alastor*, the poem's hero climbs to the 'silent nook' that sits 'Even on the edge of that vast mountain, / Upheld by knotty roots and fallen rocks' (ll. 572–4), with the narrator noting that this is a first ascent: 'One step, / One human step alone, has ever broken / The stillness of its solitude' (ll. 588-90).[13] Whereas this perilous mountain-top setting becomes the scene of the protagonist's death, in the final speech of *Prometheus Unbound* a similarly life-threatening location provides the launch-pad for the coming into being of the new age that the poem has dramatized, as 'Love…from the slippery, steep, / And narrow verge of crag-like agony, springs / And folds over the world its healing wings' (IV. 557–61).[14] Here, Shelley figures universal transformation by reimagining the predicament of the mountaineer.

Like Shelley, John Keats saw mountaineering adventure as crucial preparation for the poetic vocation to which he aspired, though he interpreted this idea literally. Keats envisaged ascent as central to the 1818 pedestrian tour he undertook with Charles Brown through Northern England and Scotland that was 'to make a sort of Prologue to the Life I intend to pursue' (*KL*, I, 264). He even included the highest peak in Western Europe on his mountain tick-list, writing that:

> I will clamber through the Clouds and exist. I will get such an accumulation of stupendous recollections that as I walk through the suburbs of London I may

[12] Percy Shelley, *The Poems of Shelley: Volume One, 1804–1817*, ed. Geoffrey Matthews and Kelvin Everest (Harlow: Longman, 1989), pp. 39–40.

[13] Shelley, *Poems: Volume One*, pp. 484–5.

[14] Percy Shelley, *The Poems of Shelley: Volume Two, 1817–1819*, ed. Kelvin Everest and Geoffrey Matthews (Harlow: Longman, 2000), p. 64.

> not see them—I will stand upon Mount Blanc and remember this coming Summer when I intend to straddle ben Lomond—with my Soul! (*KL*, I, 264)

Keats would never attempt Mont Blanc but it is a sign of his ambition as both a poet and a mountaineer that he imagined himself on its summit. For the aspirant poet, the clambering and straddling afforded by the mountains of the Alps and the Scottish Highlands promised meaning and purpose, constructed against the humdrum suburban walking of everyday life. Mountaineering will enable Keats to 'exist' in the present while also creating a store of memories for the future.

On his 1818 tour, Keats began to realize his ambitious dreams. While the high price of a guide deterred him from tackling Ben Lomond, his route took him through the Lake District, which, with its 'magnitude of mountains' was the place where, he declared, 'I shall learn poetry' (*KL*, I, 301). Foiled by mist in an attempt to ascend Helvellyn, Keats and his companion Charles Brown set out 'to mount Skiddaw' but were again frustrated: 'there came a mist upon us & shut out the view' (*KL*, I, 306). As he travelled north through Scotland, Keats explained in a letter to Benjamin Bailey that he had undertaken the tour because 'I thought it would give me more experience, rub off more Prejudice, use [me] to more hardship, identify finer scenes load me with grander Mountains, and strengthen more my reach in Poetry, than would stopping at home among Books even though I should reach Homer' (*KL*, I, 342). For Keats, experiencing the mountain environment provided better training for the grand poetic role he identified for himself than reading the classics. It was by straining to gain summits rather than stretching for a copy of Homer that Keats intended to strengthen his own poetic reach. The poet's declaration in the same letter that 'By this time I am comparitively a a mountaineer' would suggest he felt his training programme was progressing well (*KL*, I, 342). He sought to prove both his mountaineering and poetic credentials by climbing Ben Nevis, becoming the only one of the canonical Romantic poets to reach the highest summit in Great Britain. On this most elevated spot, he enacted his equation of the mountaineer and the poet by writing a sonnet. Back in London after his tour, Keats continued to link his literary vocation with mountaineering, writing to Richard Woodhouse in his famous letter of October 1818 examining the 'poetical Character' that 'I will assay to reach to as high a summit in Poetry as the nerve bestowed upon me will suffer' (*KL*, I, 386, 387). For Keats, mountain-climbing provided both the essential training for the creative vocation to which he aspired and an analogy for the potential challenges and achievements of that career.

Both Walter Scott and Byron suffered from physical disabilities that limited their mountaineering careers, but they nevertheless undertook significant climbs. Scott ascended Helvellyn with Wordsworth and Davy in 1805, and his writing, particularly his poem *The Lady of the Lake* and his novels *The Antiquary*, *The Pirate*, and *Anne of Geierstein* had a significant influence on the development of

mountaineering in the nineteenth century. Like Shelley, Byron overstated his youthful climbing achievements in early writings such as the poem, 'When I rov'd a young Highlander', in which he claims to have 'clim'd thy steep summit, oh! Morven of Snow'.[15] But also like Shelley, in this and other early works Byron was keen to present himself as an 'active mountaineer' in both senses of the word. In his notes to 'Lachin Y Gair', for example, he describes himself as having 'spent some of the early part of my life' near the eponymous Scottish peak, while the poem itself declares that:

> England! thy beauties are tame and domestic,
> To one, who has rov'd on the mountains afar:
>
> (ll. 37–8)

During his 1816 Alpine tour, Byron extended such mountain roving beyond Scotland, climbing what he believed to be the 6,148 feet Wengernalp, though John Clubbe has argued convincingly that the peak was in fact the Lauberhorn (8,111 feet).[16] This summit experience contributed to the poet's descriptions of Manfred and Napoleon as versions of the figure who 'ascends to mountain-tops' in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage III*.[17] Like Keats, Byron conceived the literary landscape as a mountain, drawing his own triangular 'Gradus ad Parnassum' in his journal of 1813–14 and placing Scott on the summit while relegating Southey, Wordsworth, and Coleridge to the base, where they sit only marginally higher than 'The Many'.[18] Indeed, in *Don Juan*, Byron suggested that the equation made by Keats between mountain-climbing and literary ambition was something of a commonplace. Asking himself 'What is the end of Fame', the poem's narrator answers:

> . . . 'tis but to fill
> A certain portion of uncertain paper:
> Some liken it to climbing up a hill,
> Whose summit, like all hills', is lost in vapour;[19]

Here the literary career is less the heroic ascent of Keats's imagining than a damp and laborious trudge that fails to produce the hoped-for reward; instead of experiencing a glorious prospect, the poet-climber finds himself wrapped in cloud (the vaporous situation out of which Wordsworth emerges in the Snowdon

[15] Lord Byron, *The Complete Poetical Works*, I, 47.

[16] See John Clubbe, 'Byron in the Alps: The Journal of John Cam Hobhouse 17-29 September 1816', in John Clubbe and Ernest Giddey, *Byron et la Suisse:* Deux Études (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1982), pp. 24–6.

[17] Byron, *The Complete Poetical Works*, II, 92.

[18] *Byron's Letters and Journals, Volume 3, 1813–14*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand (London: John Murray, 1974), p. 220.

[19] Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto I, stanza 218, ll. 1737–40, in *The Complete Poetical Works*, V, 79.

sequence of *The Prelude*, of course). Despite Byron's scepticism as to the rewards of ascent here, like Scott he powerfully influenced the imaginations of future generations of climbers in both the Alps and Britain, and helped shaped the genre of mountaineering literature.

Mountaineering, then, was an important activity for several of the best-known male writers of the Romantic period who participated in the emergent activity and aspired to the role of the 'mountaineer'. These writers linked their climbing endeavours and identities to their own literary vocations, presenting both poetry and mountaineering as dangerous, daring, and implicitly manly undertakings that required courage, suffering, and what Keats terms 'nerve', if their respective summits were to be reached. Even that most metropolitan of poets, William Blake, who showed no known interest in scaling peaks, declared that 'Great things are done when men and mountains meet'.[20]

Great things were done when women and mountains met in the Romantic period too. Several women writers participated in the ascent of peaks and contributed to the development of mountaineering literature, in some cases highly influentially. Ann Radcliffe's description of her 1794 ascent of Skiddaw in her 'Observations during a Tour to the Lakes' became a key text in the writing of elevated experience, while Dorothy Wordsworth's narrative of her journey to the summit of Scafell Pike, the highest mountain in England, was incorporated into her brother William's *Guide to the Lakes* (it seems unlikely that William himself ever reached this summit). A number of women, including Sarah Murray, Ellen Weeton, and Elizabeth Smith, were notably adventurous climbers, undertaking daring scrambles that were frequently disconcerting to those who witnessed them. Much of the period's mountaineering literature by women was written in diary and journal form and circulated privately, though it sometimes reached a readership beyond that the writers initially intended, as proved the case for ascent narratives written by Wordsworth and Smith.

Relocating the Origins of British Mountaineering

Over the last two decades, mountaineering has become the subject of developing academic interest across a range of disciplines. Paul Gilchrist, the editor of a special issue of the journal *Sport in History* on 'Gender and British Climbing Histories', wrote in 2013 that there is 'a vibrant and vital strand of research currently being conducted on the cultures and practices of mountain climbing'.[21] In literary and cultural studies, one important stimulus for recent work was Robert

[20] *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman and Harold Bloom (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), p. 511.

[21] Paul Gilchrist, 'Introduction: Gender and British Climbing Histories', *Sport in History*, 33/3 (2013), 223–35 (p. 223).

Macfarlane's pioneering *Mountains of the Mind: The History of a Fascination* of 2004, which offered a wide-ranging, well-illustrated, and beautifully written examination of the development of mountaineering and its literature. Like much of the work in the area, Macfarlane built on Marjorie Hope Nicolson's foundational *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, which remains the major account of the transformation in mountain aesthetics during the eighteenth century. Nicolson argues that in the seventeenth century, mountains were generally unregarded, except by those for whom they were a place of work, and when they were noticed they were seen as aberrations and distortions and described as 'wens', 'warts', 'pimples', 'blisters', and 'impostures'. Gradually, but remarkably, during the eighteenth century attitudes towards mountains changed due to a range of factors, including the experience of the Alps on the grand tour and the influence of the discourse of the sublime. Nicolson herself particularly emphasizes the growing appreciation of ideas of vastness and infinity produced by scientific developments. Nicolson's work remains invaluable but she has little interest in mountaineering as an activity or a practice, something much more central to Macfarlane's study, which includes accounts of his own climbing exploits. This interest in mountaineering as an activity, rather than the static aesthetic appreciation of mountain landscapes, is also central to the most recent historical and cultural monographs examining the developing culture, which include the following: Ann C. Colley's *Victorians in the Mountains: Sinking the Sublime*, which details British Victorian middle- and professional-class activity in the Alps; Peter H. Hansen, *The Summits of Modern Man: Mountaineering after the Enlightenment*, which offers an extensive study of the history and ongoing construction of the early ascents of Mont Blanc, with some wider reference to the first ascents of Mont Ventoux, the Matterhorn, and Everest; and Alan McNee's *The New Mountaineer in Late Victorian Britain: Materiality, Modernity, and the Haptic Sublime*, which emphasizes 'a growing preoccupation with the physical basis of aesthetic sensation, and with physicality and materiality in general' as they influenced the mountaineering culture of late Victorian Britain.[22]

Despite this flourishing interest in the literature and culture of mountaineering, there has been remarkably little examination of the relationship with Romantic-period literature.[23] Macfarlane, for example, devotes a page to Coleridge's descent of Broad Stand and gives passing reference to Wordsworth. This tendency to

[22] Ann C. Colley, *Victorians in the Mountains: Sinking the Sublime* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Peter H. Hansen, *The Summits of Modern Man: Mountaineering after the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); Alan McNee, *The New Mountaineer in Late Victorian Britain: Materiality, Modernity, and the Haptic Sublime* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 2.

[23] One notable exception here is Cian Duffy's *The Landscapes of the Sublime, 1700–1830: Classic Ground* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), which opens with an excellent chapter entitled '"We had hopes that pointed to the clouds": The Alps and the Poetics of Ascent'. Duffy's focus is very much on Alpine rather than British mountaineering. For other examinations of Romantic-period literature in relation to Alpine climbing, see Eric G. Wilson, *The Spiritual History of Ice: Romanticism, Science, Imagination* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); *Cultures of the Sublime: Selected Readings, 1750–1830*, ed. Cian Duffy and Peter Howell (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

overlook the link between British mountaineering and Romanticism is at least in part a result of two related assumptions about the development of mountaineering, one geographical and the other temporal. The geographical assumption is that mountaineering was an activity invented and practised in the Alps. Most histories of mountaineering focus on it as Alpinism and examine its evolution particularly through the attempts to climb Mont Blanc, the highest mountain in Western Europe, which was first climbed in 1786. Though the second ascent of Mont Blanc was made by a Britain, Mark Beaufoy, early Alpinism is generally seen as essentially a continental tradition with Horace Bénédict de Saussure and Marc-Théodore Bourrit acknowledged as the most intellectually influential figures. Linked to this identification of the Alps as the birthplace of mountaineering is the historical assumption that British climbers started to participate in this Alpine-based activity during the Victorian era, with Alfred Will's ascent of the Wetterhorn in 1854 frequently pointed to as the starting point of the 'Golden Age of Mountaineering'. This dual emphasis on the origins of British mountaineering as Alpine and Victorian has led historians and literary critics to overlook the pursuit's development in the Romantic period. For example, in one popular history of Alpine climbing, the well-received *Killing Dragons: The Conquest of the Alps*, Fergus Fleming writes that during the period of the Napoleonic Wars of 1799–1815, 'Britain's true mountains [as opposed to the crags around Matlock Bath in Derbyshire] were eschewed because they were too high and too barbarous'.[24] However, it was precisely in this period that some of the most exploratory pioneering climbs of Britain's high and barbarous peaks were being undertaken. It was during the Romantic period, rather than in the Victorian period, that mountaineering was established as a leisure pursuit in Britain.

This book then seeks to relocate the origins of British mountaineering both geographically and temporally by examining how it was practised in Britain during the Romantic period. It also aims to widen the critical focus beyond what might be termed the summits of Romanticism, the best known encounters with mountains in the most canonical works. Such summits would include Wordsworth's crossing of the Alps and climbing of Snowdon in *The Prelude*, Byron's eponymous hero standing on the Jungfrau in *Manfred*, and Shelley's 'Mont Blanc'. It is these canonical works that Marlon B. Ross has in mind in his powerful critique of the links between the Romantic poet and mountaineering in his essay 'Romantic Quest and Conquest':

> One reason Romantic poets are so obsessed with climbing mountains is that the activity perfectly emblematizes the poet's charge of self quest and world conquest. Mountain climbing and viewing is the ultimate sublime experience; testing the

[24] Fergus Fleming, *Killing Dragons: The Conquest of the Alps* (London: Granta, 2000), p. 76.

> power and limits of the self, it stresses the solitude of self-questing and pits the self against nature's power. The height of the mountain represents both the ever-spiraling ascent of imagination and the ever-present threat of falling, the loss of self-identity, the reabsorption into nature's overriding power. It is from mountains that prophets proclaim their truths; for the poet-prophet the mountain symbolizes the necessary solitude of the leaders of men and the necessary stance of truth – its transcendence, its elusiveness, and its immense might. It is another metaphor of masculine potency, which, through association, reinvests the poetic vocation with power and influence.[25]

This is a brilliant encapsulation of one set of reasons for the Romantic obsession with mountain-climbing and provides a valuable framework for thinking about some of the materials already introduced, such as Keats's statements of his climbing ambitions. However, in its focus on a very limited number of Romantic summits and texts, it fails to capture both the range of mountaineering experiences described in the period's literature and the extent to which that literature is questioning as well as questing. Ross's account of the Romantic obsession with climbing mountains is very much shaped by the heroic model of mountaineering that is in part created by the literature he critiques. Yet the activity and literature of climbing in the Romantic period were much more varied than his critique allows. The summit in Romantic-period writing was frequently not the 'solitary' location of Ross's argument, or indeed of Caspar David Friedrich's *The Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* that has influenced such visions of the mountain top. Rather the summit was regularly a place of encounter and exchange with others; it was the scene not only of the assertion of masculine identity but also of more equivocal processes in which gender and indeed class identities were challenged and negotiated, questioned and qualified. While Manfred's elevated Jungfrau soliloquy may seem to offer an exemplar of Ross's version of the Romantic male ego on the summit, we need to remember that the aspiring philosopher is quickly joined there by the Chamois Hunter, producing an encounter between the two different types of 'mountaineer' that re-enacts many of those that occur in the less familiar mountaineering literature of the age, particularly between 'stranger' and guide. By looking beyond the few well-trodden summits of Romantic poetry, including to lesser known works by major writers, we can discover a much more extensive literature that is itself already alert to the issues Ross raises of the gender and power politics enacted in the ascent to the mountain summit.

[25] Marlon B. Ross, 'Romantic Quest and Conquest: Troping Masculine Power in the Crisis of Poetic Identity', in *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. Anne K. Mellor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 44.