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## Not Much Has Been Written about the Mountains... On the Subject of Mountain Studies

### Abstract

The article discusses the research subject of mountain studies. The standpoints of two scholars, representative for Polish literary studies, are distinguished, that of Jacek Kolbuszewski's and Tomasz Stępień's. While Kolbuszewski argues that the term "mountain literature," however popular, is imprecise and it is more justified to speak of a theme or a motif of mountains in literature, Stępień draws upon the developments in media studies and adopts a broader definition encompassing all literature somehow related to mountains. Both researchers are united in their conviction that mountaineering literature (the works written by climbers) is a separate phenomenon in literature.

**Key words:** mountain, mountain literature, mountaineering literature, Tomasz Stępień, Jacek Kolbuszewski

**Parole chiave:** montagne, letteratura di montagna, letteratura di arrampicata, Tomasz Stępień, Jacek Kolbuszewski

## Introduction: “A Considerable Amount Has Been Written about the Mountains”

In his book *Góry niewzruszone. O różnych wyobrażeniach przyrody w dziejach nowożytnej kultury europejskiej* [The Immovable Mountains. On Various Representations of Nature in the History of Modern European Culture], after referring to the famous praises of the mountain landscape by Carl Gustav Carus and John Ruskin, Polish art historian and mountain lover – Jacek Woźniakowski adds: “And above all, there have been quite a few mountains painted” (Woźniakowski 2011: 12). The statement does not so much reflect the enormity of the material to be examined as it has bitter and sceptical overtones. However, in the preceding pages, while summarising his search for mountains in European painting, he declares: “Nowhere in these works of art, did I find mountains” (Woźniakowski 2011: 9). As soon as in the introduction Woźniakowski mentions “mountain kitsch” and signals numerous doubts related to the possibility of depicting summits in paintings. He discusses what precisely stymies the efforts of painters who undertake this task:

So is there any particular difficulty to be overcome if one wishes to duly depict mountains? Is it perhaps in the contrast between the matter of the subject and the matter of the painting? [...] How can one render the crystalline resistance of a rock, the jagged line of a ridge, the glaring whiteness of snow, the hard tonal contrasts with the use of oil or the watercolour? How can one enclose colossal size differences within picture frames [on canvas – E. D.]. (Woźniakowski 2011: 10)

In an analogous way, paraphrasing Woźniakowski words, a literary scholar might note: “A lot has been written about mountains.” As in the case of painting, the abundance of mountain-themed literary works seems to promise much. However, here too, enthusiasm is mixed with scepticism.<sup>1</sup>

Mountains are a challenging topic for writers. Mountains are also a problem for literary scholars, who, in their search for summits in literature, make use of tools suggested by various methodological schools and research trends: from thematology to regionalism and geopedics to comparative and intersemiotic approaches. In recent decades, a distinct study of mountain space – namely, the field of mountain studies – has crystallised in the global scholarship. This is a new terminolo-

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1 Jacek Kolbuszewski mentions his conversation with Wiktor Ostrowski, a renowned Polish mountaineer, in 1978, during which the latter “remarked that the ‘absence of mountains’ is strikingly characteristic of contemporary mountaineering literature” (Kolbuszewski 1982: 623).

gical proposal and a new approach to the issue. To a certain extent, however, it is a continuation of scientific and scholarly thinking about mountains, the tradition of which dates back to the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries.<sup>2</sup> In Poland, mountain studies are present, among others, through the Mountain Series of the Universitas publishing house. On the covers of successive volumes published in this series, mountain studies are characterised as research conducted “primarily from an ecological perspective,” testifying to “the importance of mountains, seen as natural and cultural enclaves, in terms of the development and survival of modern civilisation” (Kolbuszewski 2019a: back flap).<sup>3</sup> It is also noted that there is now “a clear need to expand this perspective to include an in-depth reflection from the broadly-understood humanities and related fields,” as the history of cognition, exploration and conquest of mountains is “a very important part of the history of civilisation and culture” (Kolbuszewski 2019a: back flap). The new approach is more holistic than the previous ones and distinguished by transdisciplinarity, a particular sensitivity to ecological and environmental issues combined with an interest in the human dimension of mountains and the arts related to mountain landscapes (Sarmiento n.d. [online]).

In the thus outlined framework of mountain studies, literature and literary studies can play a pivotal role. The problem, however, turns out to be merely specifying the object of mountain studies literature research. There is no doubt that it is literary works, but how to define and name them is far from obvious. The term “mountain literature,” which immediately comes to mind, is one of the “disputed problems” in Polish literary studies.<sup>4</sup> Researchers have been discussing the validity of distinguishing this type of literature for years, and various definitions have been

2 The impetus for mountain exploration came with the first ascents of the highest peaks of the Alps (of Mont Blanc in 1786 and of the Matterhorn in 1865). In world science, the work of Alexander von Humboldt was pioneering. In Polish research, Stanisław Staszic’s work *O ziemiorództwie Karpatów i innych gór i równin Polski* [On the Terrogenesis of the Carpathians and Other Mountains and Plains of Poland] (1815) and the Romantic theory of regional schools, to which reference was made in discussions about the Podhale/Tatra school in literature, played an important role. The scientific mountain activities intensified in the second half of the 20th century, and have now assumed particular importance in connection with the development of environmental humanities.

3 The characteristics of mountain studies were repeatedly discussed in subsequent volumes of the series *Od Kaukazu po Sudety. Studia i szkice o poznawaniu i zamieszkiwaniu gór dalekich i bliskich* [From the Caucasus to the Sudetes. Studies and Sketches on Exploring and Inhabiting Distant and Near Mountains], and also in Pigon (2022) and Ngyuen (2022).

4 I refer here to a number of published literary studies/monographies in which, however, mountain literature issues were not addressed. See, among others: *Sporne i bezsporne problemy współczesnej wiedzy o literaturze polskiej* [Disputable and Indisputable Problems of Contemporary Knowledge of Polish Literature]; *Sporne sprawy polskiej literatury współczesnej* [Disputable Problems of Polish Contemporary Literature].

accepted. The development of mountain studies prompts an attempt to resolve such a key issue. In this article I will analyse the different standpoints on the subject of “mountain literature.” My focus shall be the representative yet significantly divergent stances of Jacek Kolbuszewski’s and Tomasz Stępień’s. Juxtaposing their works should highlight the differences in the understanding of mountain literature as well as how reflection on the writing in question has been changing over the previous half a century. The issue has also been a recurring one in the works of Marek Pacukiewicz (2010a; 2010b), Przemysław Kaliszuk (2018) and other researchers. The discussion on mountain literature that has been going on for years seems a good ground on which mountain studies can develop.

## Mountain and Mountaineering Literature

The term “mountain literature” is now widely used by mountain enthusiasts, in the specialist press or online,<sup>5</sup> it also appears in academic journals.<sup>6</sup> However, from a literary point of view, the issue is more complex. Opinions are divided regarding the legitimacy of differentiations within mountain literature, how does mountain literature function and what is the proper nomenclature to be used.

Various doubts related to mountain literature are voiced in works by Jacek Kolbuszewski, a scholar who spent several decades researching mountain issues. He can be credited as having written the most about mountains among Polish literary

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5 “Mountain bibliography” is published in the pages of *Wierchy* [Peaks]. *Wierchy* is a yearbook devoted to the mountains, published since 1923. Initially, the publisher was the Towarzystwo Tatrzańskie [Tatra Society], and since 1951, *Wierchy* has been published by the Polskie Towarzystwo Turystyczno-Krajoznawcze [Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society]. An extensive and very detailed bibliography of mountain literature has also been posted on the website of the Students’ Mountain Club of the University of Warsaw. The inventory is divided into two parts: *Mountain Literature 1945–85* and *Contemporary Literature* (Mountain Literature...). Many websites and portals devoted to mountain literature could be pointed out, such as: *Mountain Books*; *Mountain Literature – what’s worth reading?*

6 For example, Antonina Sebesta characterises the written sources on which she based her research as follows: “These include both the so-called mountain literature: memoirs (including obituaries), interviews, letters, diaries, journals, reports, columns, short stories, poems, as well as reports, statistical materials and other official data contained in *Wierchy*, *Pamiętniki Towarzystwa Tatrzańskiego* [Yearbook of the Tatra Society], *Pamiętniki Polskiego Towarzystwa Tatrzańskiego* [Yearbook of the Polish Tatra Society] or chronicles of mountain organisations. Supplemented by reading manuals, guidebooks, training materials, many mountain and tourism periodicals, portals and websites” (Sebesta 2014: 18).

scholars.<sup>7</sup> The bibliography of his works on the subject includes more than a hundred items (Kolbuszewski: *Spis publikacji o tematyce górskiej* [An Index of Mountain-Oriented Publications] [online]).

In 1975, summarising mountain themes in Polish literature, Kolbuszewski emphasised that, through several literary generations, the mountains had become an important cultural factor. It is significant, however, that an expert on mountain issues in literature writes with a reserve about the “so-called mountain literature” (Kolbuszewski 1975: 41). The researcher distances himself from the popular term which integrates the milieu of “professionals” (mountaineers, climbers, mountain people), but is less useful for literary scholars due to its imprecision. At the same time, he emphasizes the significance of the phenomenon. According to Kolbuszewski, literature on mountains is not isolated from the main development trends of Polish literature but has a substantial share in them (Kolbuszewski 1975: 41).

Particularly in his earlier works, Kolbuszewski emphasised categories such as motif, theme, image of mountains in literature, and wrote mainly about “literature about the Tatras” (Kolbuszewski 1992: XXII; 1982). Following these findings, by analogy, one would have to use the term “literature about mountains,” or write about mountain themes in literature. However, from the perspective of contemporary mountain studies, such terms seem inadequate, as they suggest a methodological limitation (with regard to thematology research).

Less dubious, according to Kolbuszewski, are the narrower terms denoting works written by climbers: literature related to tourism in the Tatra Mountains and in the Alps. He notes that mountaineering literature started to emerge in the first half of the 20th century, when the community of mountaineers became more and more numerous, although it was still connected with the intellectual ethos and a certain elitism. The process is documented by the anthology of mountaineering prose *Czarny szczyt* [Black Peak] (Kolbuszewski 1976), edited by Kolbuszewski. He writes the following about this “professional” climbing literary work and its relationship to literature:

The mountaineering environment grew in numbers, but became more hermetic and closed, while literary creativity was actually limited to intra-professional circulation, which did not prevent it from reacting vividly to the phenomena occurring in “official” literature. Hence, all the “-isms” that existed in “the grand literature,” such as expressionism (Jan Humpola), psychologism

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<sup>7</sup> “In the relatively small group of Polish scholars scientifically interested in the place and role of mountains in literature and culture, he is probably the only one who has consistently dealt with this issue for more than half a century and has an unquestionably great output in this field of literary and cultural exegesis” (Wójcik 2016: 8).

(Wincenty Birkenmajer), constructivism (Wiesław Stanisławski), avant-garde tendencies (Jan Alfred Szczepański), catastrophism (Wiesław Stanisławski), and vitalism (Zdzisław Dąbrowski), were manifestly and promptly reflected in the professional works on Tatra Mountains. At the same time, however, mountaineers themselves treated literary creativity as “a path beside the path” – as a secondary and not the most important aspect accompanying the main content and the sense of their endeavours, that is, climbing, which was considered by some to be the self-realisation and creativity par excellence (Jan Alfred Szczepański). Hence, a new kind of aestheticism appeared in mountaineering itself, while a kind of perfectionism appeared in literary works, which – and of course thanks to the literary talents of such mountaineers as Stanisławski and Birkenmajer – resulted in works of great artistic merit [...]. (Kolbuszewski 1992: LIX)

In a similar vein, Stanisław Jaworski – the author of a selection of poems by avant-garde poets *Odpowiem ci przestrzenią* [I Will Answer You with Space] – set apart mountaineering poetry. The researcher considered the first mountaineering poems to be the works of Jan Alfred Szczepański, who was active as a poet alongside Julian Przyboś and Jan Brzękowski, and later became an outstanding mountaineer, editor of the magazine *Taternik* [Tatra Climber], and an organiser and activist of mountaineering movement in Poland. Mountaineering in Szczepański's poetry is “conceived of as a source of ‘joy of life, strength enchanted in beauty’, as an arena of clashes, where ‘with a frail climb’ one breaks ‘the resistance of the element’” (Jaworski 1976: 87).

When Polish climbers from the Tatra Mountains set off for the high mountains (Alps, Himalayas), mountaineering literature began to develop alongside literature related to tourism in the Tatra Mountains. In a paper delivered in 1978, on the margins of a consideration of how mountaineering literature exists, Kolbuszewski writes about “the so-called” and “broadly defined” mountain literature (Kolbuszewski 1981: 63)<sup>8</sup>:

Therefore mountaineering literature is a special variety of the so-called mountain literature, special in the sense that it concerns the most specialised forms of human conquering activity in the mountains, and an important distinguishing criterion for it is the respect of professional, specialised elements of knowledge of how man conquers mountains. In this sense, mountaineering literature, as opposed to mountain literature in the broadest sense, must be regarded as an effect of the professionalisation of the environment of moun-

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<sup>8</sup> Kolbuszewski's findings are referred to by Pacukiewicz (2010a: 218).

tain people, with the exception, however, that what we have in mind here is fine literature, and not specialised professional – “technical” literature (mountaineering manuals, climbing guides, etc.). (Kolbuszewski 1981: 55)

The researcher notes that the process of distinguishing mountaineering literature from the framework of literature (as a separate literary phenomenon) coincides with the process of the formation of mountaineering as “a specific, specialised form of human activity in the mountains” (Kolbuszewski 1981: 57). Unlike mountain literature, it is therefore a young, 19th- and 20th-century phenomenon (Kolbuszewski 1981: 57). Kolbuszewski regrets that mountaineering literature has not attracted the interest of literary criticism, too:

Scientific literary studies do not see the need to distinguish mountaineering literature, only occasionally, when prompted by the issues of greater importance for the national culture, taking up the notion of mountain literature (hence it is no coincidence that much nonsense has been written in our country about Asnyk, Witkiewicz, Nowicki or Tetmajer). The subject of separate studies of mountaineering literature in Poland has thus far not been a subject of study, whereas in Alpine countries it is understood as a manifestation of a mature form of mountain literature development. (Kolbuszewski 1981: 63–64)

In the conclusion of his 1978 work, the researcher writes about the need for a “bibliography of Polish mountain and mountaineering literature” (Kolbuszewski 1981: 66).

In his later works, Kolbuszewski returns to the problem of mountain literature, noting that the singling out of this type of writing (increasingly common in the 21st century) is done for more pragmatic than strictly academic reasons. For him, the growing popularity of the term in the readers’ circles, in bookshops and among mountain people is not a sufficient and convincing argument. As he states:

Colloquially, mountain literature is understood as a variety of open-ended professional narratives related to mountain themes and geared towards public reception. I do not like and do not use this name, [...] it is a broad-brush term under which all sorts phenomena are included: fiction and various genres of applied literature, creating specific classification systems *ad hoc*. Systems to which I would critically refer as literary folklore. When dealing with literature, the history of literature, I systematise things using a few basic categories: theme, motif, literary genre – their function and the way they enter into circulation, that is, to whom the works in question are addressed, how, by whom

and why they are read, and how they have a social impact. I therefore prefer to talk about mountain themes in literature. (Kolbuszewski 2019b: 82)<sup>9</sup>

The term “mountain literature” is therefore known and quite commonly used, although at the same time, it is questioned and turns out to be extremely difficult to define. This paradox is presented by Tomasz Stępień as follows:

The term “mountain literature” cannot be found in Polish dictionaries of literary terms, nor can it be found in compendia on genology. At the same time, in bookshops and antiquarian bookshops, we can find books which are part of specialist publishing series, such as *Literatura tatrzańska* [Tarta Mountain Literature] (published by Wydawnictwo Literackie), *Seria z trójkątem* [The Series with a Triangle] (AT Hudowski & Marcisz), *Literatura górską na świecie* [Mountain Literature in the World] (Stapis). We can also encounter publishing houses with distinctive names – Wydawnictwo Górskie [Mountain Publishing House] (with its seat in Poronin), Góry Books [Mountains Book] (Kraków). Internet bookshops affiliated with mountaineering and climbing websites (e.g. *wspinanie.pl*) also offer literature defined in this way. What, then, does the term “mountain literature” functioning among publishers and readers mean? (Stępień 2021: 187)

Stępień adopts a broad definition of mountain literature, encompassing “writing on various aspects of mountain space, functionally diverse (scientific, popular science, fiction, memoir, and guidebook literature), problem-oriented (geology, botany, zoology, folklore, history and theory of mountaineering), and geographically diverse (Tatra Mountains, Alps, Caucasus, Andes, Himalayas, etc.)” (Stępień 2012: 88). Such a broad outline of the framework of mountain literature is prompted by the expansion of the boundaries of literature in contemporary literary studies, moving away from narrowly conceived literary fiction. He also points out the sociological aspects of this literature and distinguishes four areas within it:

Contemporary “mountain” literature therefore encompasses a sector of texts whose collective protagonist and primary audience and target group is the Polish and international mountaineering community and a wide range of its sympathisers. It is poetry (relatively rarely) and prose written both by “professional” writers and the “mountain people” themselves (tourists, mountaineers, mountain rescuers) – the latter prefer fiction based on facts or various forms of documentary literature. Thus, poems, short stories and novels

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted from Mirek (2020).



using literary fiction thematically linked to mountains and climbing are one area of “mountain” literature, and the second is various forms of documentary literature (accounts of specific expeditions, biographies, autobiographies and memoirs of “mountain people”). The third area of mountain literature is specialised literature, namely, hiking and climbing guides and handbooks and manuals teaching techniques used in alpine tourism for learning rock climbing, different varieties of mountaineering, speleology, ski tourism and alpine skiing (ski mountaineering). The fourth area of this literature is popular and scientific literature related to tourism and mountain sports (encyclopaedic publications, works on the history of mountaineering, studies on mountain medicine). Separate types of publications (mountain photography) are albums depicting mountains in various parts of the world and catalogues and advertising brochures (clothing, equipment and gear).

Among the mentioned areas of “mountain” literature (writing), the literary scholar will be most interested in fictional texts – narratives that fall between documentary and fiction (i.e. “mountain” non-fiction and personal documentaries and “mountain” fiction). (Stępień 2012: 93–94)

Stępień justified his stance more precisely by conducting a research survey. He took as his starting point the broad definitions of mountain literature found in non-literature compendia (Kiełkowska, Kiełkowski 2003: 341; Radwańska-Paryska, Paryski 2004: 935–936). The editors of *Wielka encyklopedia gór i alpinizmu* [The Great Encyclopaedia of the Mountains and Mountaineering] and the authors of *Wielka encyklopedia tatrzańska* [The Great Encyclopaedia of the Tatra Mountains] explain that this is the entirety of literature on the mountains, which includes fiction in addition to scientific literature, guidebooks or tourist guides (Stępień 2021: 188). Stępień adds that there is historical justification for this approach (2021: 189–200). Mountain literature begins with the knowledge of the local mountain ranges and their inscription in the various areas of symbolic culture of a given community, and thus includes the most ancient records and accounts of the first travellers, folklore, journalism, etc. The Romantic interest in the mountains introduced them into fiction and documentary literature for good. However, the subject matter became exhausted in mainstream literature by the turn of the 20th century. The development of the mountaineering community then influenced the emergence of a professional writing, with the mountains as a space for the practice of a specific sport. At this point, Stępień, like Kolbuszewski, writes about the emergence of mountaineering literature and indicates the possibility of a more precise definition: on the one hand, there is “a broadly defined fiction (and other varieties of writing) dedicated to such or such mountains,” and on the other hand, “literature created and read within mountaineering subcultures” (2021: 196). With the development of mountaineering

and the increasing accessibility of the highest mountains, this second literature is emerging more and more from the closed circle of the community and appearing in wide public circulation. This is also fostered by the development of the media, disseminating accounts of high-mountain climbing. Stępień writes about mountain non-fiction, within which expedition books and reportages are popular, and about mountain personal document literature, represented by memoirs, autobiographies and biographies of outstanding mountaineers, often appearing in the form of interview-based books<sup>10</sup>:

This mountain documentary literature (expedition accounts and autobiographies) constitutes the most extensive sector of contemporary mountain literature in Poland and internationally. Of course, accounts of dramatic or tragic events in the mountains are in greatest demand, and bestsellers can in turn count on film adaptations. (Stępień 2021: 202)

The division into mountain literature and mountaineering literature highlighted by Stępień can be found in foreign studies. In English, it is well reflected in the play of sounds and meanings in the terms mountain literature and mountaineering literature (Macfarlane 2019: xvi), absent in the Polish translation: *literatura górską i literatura wspinaczkową* [mountain literature and mountaineering literature] (Macfarlane 2022: 19).

The proposed delineations seem justified and have already been adopted by researchers. Mountaineering works in particular are increasingly becoming the subject of literary and cultural studies analyses. An outline of the history of Polish “Himalayan literature” in the perspective of its evolutionary genre transformations (from expedition diary to road novel) has been proposed by Ewa Grzęda (2022: 70–96). The researcher draws attention to the writing of Adam Karpinski, Jakub Bujak, Adam Skoczylas, Wojciech Kurtyka, and Marek Raganowicz, among others. Julie Rak’s monograph *False Summit: Gender in Mountaineering Non Fiction* analyses the accounts of expeditions to three eight-thousanders, particularly significant for Himalayan climbers (i.e. Annapurna, K2, and Mount Everest) focusing on the exclusions made therein (2021: 7). Margret Grabowicz, on the other hand, while referring to various accounts of expeditions to the highest peaks, writes about Himalayan

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<sup>10</sup> Non-fiction and personal documentary literature are also identified by Przemysław Kaliszuk as points of reference. However, this researcher emphasises the borderline character of the Himalayan narratives, which are utilitarian-documentary texts, but at the same time “show characteristics inherent in literature”: “The Himalayan narratives are simultaneously expert (in terms of climbing and mountain knowledge) and amateur (in terms of literary competence). They expose this borderline positioning and belong fully neither to literature nor to applied or documentary writing” (Kaliszuk 2018: 60).

mountaineering as “a sort of symptom of European modernity” (2021: 2). The juxtaposition of the various accounts, ranging from John Hunt’s 1953 account of the first ascent of Everest (1953) to the film accounts of Alex Hohnold’s solo climb of El Capitan in Yosemite National Park (film *Free Solo* 2018), allows Grabowicz to trace not only the changes taking place in the way mountains and climbers are perceived, but also – more broadly – the processes taking place in culture.

However, sometimes these two types of literature: mountain literature and mountaineering literature (literature related to climbing in the Tatra Mountains, in the Alps, and in the Himalayas) are equated. This can be seen, for example, in an article by Andrzej Mirek, who, wondering whether the popularity of mountain literature is a transient fad or a permanent trend, states:

Once in a while, mountain literature is literature tout court. There is no denying that the combination of writing and climbing skills is something special. It seems possible that inferiority complex felt by mountain people towards literature has a paralysing effect on them. They themselves once read something that enthralled them, and they would love to write like that too. More often than not, however, wanting does not mean being able to. A large part of what is published on the market are technical accounts of expeditions. Even if the co-author of the book is a writer, taking the expedition memoirs to a higher level is most often not so much impossible as unsuccessful. Detailed accounts of the setting up of camps and the arduous ascent of the summit simply do not have the necessary potential. It is somewhat of a paradox that the best “mountain books” are written when ice and rock exploits are juxtaposed with details of life outside climbing. Distance, irony and vivid honesty are further ingredients, promising an interesting read, yet not guaranteeing it. (Mirek 2020)

## **Conclusions: Mountain Studies from the Literary Studies Perspective**

The main distinguishing feature of mountain literature – according to Stępień – is... mountains. The statement strikes one as obvious, but the way he explains it reflects well the transdisciplinary and holistic nature of mountain studies:

“Mountain” literature owes its existence to the mountains, it is constituted by this specific space, the mountains – that is, “areas of great height differences,

rising above the surrounding terrain from which they usually also differ in terms of geological structure and vegetation and fauna” determine its ontic status. (Stępień 2012: 87)

It also seems that this statement can be reconciled by literary scholars discussing the subject of mountain studies. References to mountains, the specific poetics of mountain space and the culture-forming role of mountains were pointed out by Kolbuszewski, although he added a caveat:

The concept of the culture-forming role of mountains is as much a metaphor as it is a vague mental shortcut, but it is worth using because of its illustrative and expressive character [...]. Mountains in the objective sense are not a “cultural fact”; as a phenomenon of nature, they do not actively perform any actions towards man that result in values *par excellence* cultural. Their persistence is an indifference to man, happening according to the laws of nature, and it is only when they are “discovered,” only when they are “constituted into a concept” – and thus when man adopts some kind of attitude towards them – that they begin to be treated as a culture-creating factor as a result of the peculiar “insinuations” made about them. (Kolbuszewski 1992: X)

What, however, are these references, these “insinuations”? I think they are well represented by two versions of the same quotation from a work by a mountaineer, Wawrzyniec Żuławski.<sup>11</sup> He recalls the moment when he realised that the notes from his expedition had ceased to be merely giving account or individual memory record and had become something more, namely, literature:

Numbers and notes are dry and objective, but when the thought stops for a moment at one of them – a small book with a red cover becomes lively. Numbers and notes take shape, clothe themselves in flesh, speak, narrate – and beyond them the mountains become the *inseparable background*. (Żuławski 1967: 251 [emphasis added – E. D.])

In a later edition, probably due to a printing error, the “inseparable background” [in Polish: *nieodstępne tło*] was changed to “inaccessible background” [in Polish *niedostępne tło*] (Żuławski 1985: 249). The most recent edition reverts to the version in the first printing (Żuławski 1958: 278) – the mountains again become “inseparable background” (Żuławski 2012: 126). A small alternation (a typo), but how significant, reflecting the complex ambiguity of space in mountain literature. On the one hand,

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<sup>11</sup> This is pointed out by Dutka (2018: 130).

mountains are the “inseparable background” – the most important, indispensable background, without them not only there would be no hikes and adventures, no accounts of high-mountain expeditions – that piece of knowledge about oneself, about being, which became part of mountaineer’s identity, but also the very subject of mountain studies. On the other hand, it is an “inaccessible background” that eludes language, does not lend itself to description (Pacukiewicz 2010a: 225). A considerable amount has been written about mountains...

*Translated by Katarzyna Strębska-Liszewska*

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## Abstrakt

### Napisano niemało o górach... O przedmiocie badań *mountain studies*

W artykule przedstawiono dyskusję na temat przedmiotu badań *mountain studies*. Wyodrębniono dwa stanowiska, reprezentatywne dla literaturoznawstwa polskiego: Jacka Kolbuszewskiego i Tomasza Stępnia. Pierwszy badacz dystansuje się od popularnego,

lecz nieprecyzyjnego terminu „literatura górską”. Kolbuszewski przekonuje, że bardziej uzasadnione jest mówienie o temacie, motywie gór w literaturze. Natomiast Stępień, uwzględniając rozwój medioznawstwa, przyjmuje szeroką definicję, obejmującą całe piśmiennictwo związane z górami. Badaczy łączy przekonanie o konieczności wyodrębnienia literatury alpinistycznej, czyli twórczości wspinaczy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** góry, literatura górską, literatura wspinaczkowa, Tomasz Stępień, Jacek Kolbuszewski