



Reflections on Mountaineering: Third Edition: A Journey Through Life as Experienced in the Mountains

Alan Goldman

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The musing poems in Reflections on Mountaineering chart a course through a personal, enigmatic relationship with mountain landscapes.

Alan V. Goldman's poetry collection *Reflections on Mountaineering* explores the challenge and euphoria of climbing in extreme alpine weather, and on vertical rock faces and icy expanses.

Most of the poems are addressed to an individual mountain, resulting in a recurring I and thou relationship, making them reminiscent of verses addressed to a deity. Several, including "A Complicated Relationship Bathed in Wonder," begin with the phrase "Mountain, mountain," and go on to ask existential questions, or to pronounce spiritual claims about the poet's ability to provide "human meaning":

*Surely my quest to attain your summit
Must have revealed my flawed
Attempt to use you as a test of my limit*

Where descriptions of the physical actions of climbing, and the state of flow that athletes and others fall into when under an imperative to be in the moment, arise, they are evocative. This is true in "The Power of Now," which observes that "nothing else counts or occurs except the next step taken now."

Elsewhere, figurative language is applied to landscapes themselves, helping to translate the mountaineer's experience for novice audiences. A possible avalanche site becomes visible as "a shadowy dimple in the snow"; in "Ice Climbing in Box Canyon," the poet is "Fixed into a hollow ice screw lodged deep into the bluest ice, which secures me for now / Unless the whole shelf shears off and cracks up, like smashed dinner plates."

But in form, these free verse entries often read like prose, if prose that has been broken into poetic lines. Even then, their line breaks have a random sensibility, sans enjambment or other resonant techniques. When musicality arises, it occurs because of short lines and predictable patterns, as in "Early Winter Winds":

*Vertiginous virgin standing tall;
How do I deal with you, if at all?
Roaring, raging, whipping winds,
Do you cloak yourself where intruders fall?*

Throughout, the book uses language of romance and eroticism to address individual mountains as beloved forms, or as disapproving or inaccessible lovers. Romantic phrases like "locked in your embrace" alternate with explicit erotic imagery:

Thrusting upward like a potent spire,

*The gleaming rock-wall lured us to its tower,
Beckoning us with the meretricious allure of its raw power,
Gleaming white in wind-scoured sandstone
Emerging upright from a mantle of some perpetually snow-clad throne.
Would this vertical formation yield to our collective groan
And allow us to enter onto its forbidden zone?*

Unified and musing, the poems in *Reflections on Mountaineering* chart a course through a personal, enigmatic relationship with mountain landscapes and the magnificent forces of nature.

MICHELE SHARPE (April 20, 2022)

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