

## CHAPTER 12

### UPLAND ON MONT VENTOUX

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‘At the summit of the mountain, among pebbles, the terra-cotta trumpets of the men of the ancient white frosts chirped like little eagles.’<sup>2</sup> So wrote René Char in the poem ‘Les dentelles de Montmirail’ in 1960 after learning that archaeologists had unearthed terracotta trumpets atop Mont Ventoux. Since the nineteenth century, excavations to build meteorological observatories on the summit had uncovered many objects of piety from the last 500 years and fragments of terracotta trumpets that appeared to be from a much earlier date. The semi-circular pattern of trumpet fragments heralded the ruins of an ancient temple. In 1960, archaeologists thought the trumpets dated from antiquity, though more recent estimates place them in the twelfth or thirteenth centuries.<sup>3</sup> Twentieth-century potters still made terra-cotta trumpets for ecclesiastical clients in the region. Like summit chapels rebuilt on the mountain, the trumpets remained part of a living tradition.

Yet archaeological or poetic accounts barely influenced the prevailing interpretation that Petrarch’s ascent of Mont Ventoux marked the arrival of the first modern man. A century earlier, in 1860, Jacob Burckhardt identified Petrarch’s account of an ascent of Mont Ventoux, in a letter dated 26 April 1336, as the epochal moment when individual modern man broke the darkness that followed classical antiquity. Burckhardt took literally Petrarch’s rhetorical claim that he had wanted to climb the mountain solely to enjoy the view. Since the 1960s, the remainder of Petrarch’s letter has been read more often as an allegory for his own spiritual development. Petrarch ignored warnings to turn back from an aged shepherd and slowly mounted winding switchbacks while his brother climbed more directly to the top. After surveying the horizon from the summit of Ventoux, Petrarch reportedly opened Augustine’s *Confessions* and read at random that men admire high mountains but pass themselves by. Chastened by precedents from scripture as well as late antiquity, Petrarch then descended the mountain in silence. Petrarch’s ascent has prompted much commentary, but Burckhardt’s view of the event as marking the arrival of the Renaissance and Western Civilization has remained surprisingly persistent.<sup>4</sup>

Burckhardtian images of Petrarch as the first modern man on Mont Ventoux are consistent with a cultural preference for epochal breaks between the past and present. Marjorie Hope Nicolson’s *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory* (1959) echoed earlier dichotomous interpretations, especially John Ruskin’s, with brevity, elegance, and alliterative rhythm in her title. Dawn Hollis<sup>5</sup> and other contributors to this volume have effectively questioned the wisdom of such a stark contrast across early modern and modern periods. Petrarch and those that followed in his footsteps on postclassical mountains have been in dialogue not only with classical or biblical precedents but also

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with local and provincial successors who view Petrarch and other predecessors as their contemporaries.

Archaeologists are not the only observers to identify multiple strata at the summit of Mont Ventoux. The palimpsestic layers at the highest point in Provence, the original Roman *Provincia*, also may provincialize the universalizing histories that so often accompany the summit position. The intersecting narratives of pagan practices, classical precedents, religious traditions and philosophical critiques on Mont Ventoux do not lead inexorably to the advent of modern man. In this respect, Mont Ventoux also provides a standpoint to reassess some contemporary representations of the Anthropocene with rhetorical echoes of Burckhardt that view our own time as the first to recognize human dominance of the earth. Scholars have noted that religious traditions, natural histories, nuclear war or the space age have offered earlier responses and examples of awareness of a changing climate.<sup>6</sup> René Char and his contemporaries were among many people reinterpreting postclassical mountains, and their local and provincial histories may help to locate our present predicaments in this longer continuum.

### Modern Provençal pilgrimages

On 14 September 1851, a large group of ‘modern pilgrims’, including the printer François-Joseph Seguin and the poet Joseph Roumanille, ventured to the top of Mont Ventoux to celebrate a Provençal amalgam of local, religious and regional identities. As the pilgrims ascended, they paused ‘at the stations of this new Calvary until reaching the summit with the first light of dawn’. According to Seguin, the chapel near the summit was too small for the 2,000 pilgrims so ‘an altar was improvised on the highest point’. Re-occupying the place that had been used to make trigonometrical observations for maps of France, the pilgrims added stones to the base of an iron cross and replied to the sermon on this mount with cries of ‘Vive la Croix/Vivo la Crous!’ Seguin and Roumanille located their pilgrimage in a longer tradition by publishing an account of their ascent in French and Provençal along with contemporary translations of Petrarch’s Ventoux letter and other documents as guides for excursionists.<sup>7</sup>

The summit of Mont Ventoux had been a pilgrimage site long before a cross or chapel was built in the eighth or ninth century, and continued to be so throughout the proceeding centuries.<sup>8</sup> In the fifteenth century, a bishop consecrated a summit chapel reputedly with a fragment of the ‘real cross’ guarded by a hermit. Annual summit pilgrimages were active in 1598 when the Swiss humanist Thomas Platter Jr made an ascent in search of medicinal plants, and in 1711 when the Jesuit priest Antoine de Laval measured Ventoux’s longitude, latitude and height.<sup>9</sup> The surrounding region, known as the *Comtat Venaissin*, remained subject to papal control into the eighteenth century. Summit chapels were periodically repaired, and one was substantially rebuilt in 1818 before the dedication of the new iron cross in 1851.

Roumanille’s 1852 anthology of poetry in Provençal, or Occitan, one of the *langues d’oc*, declared that he and his contemporaries were inheritors of the medieval troubadours

of Provence.<sup>10</sup> In 1854, they founded the *Félibrige*, an association devoted to Provençal language, landscape and sociability that sponsored a literary almanac and cultural festivals. In his memoirs, Roumanille's pupil Frédéric Mistral described himself as the son of yeoman farmers 'who make a link between peasant and bourgeois', and the *Félibrige* self-consciously adopted this translational role. Mistral reported that they followed the advice of Romanian poets: 'when they wanted to revive their national language, which the bourgeois class had lost or corrupted, they sought it in the country and in the mountains among the least civilized peasants.' At the founding of the *Félibrige*, Mistral declared himself 'all ready to hurl the rallying cry to the mistral, to "hallo" (as the shepherds of the mountains say), and to plant the banner on Mont Ventoux'.<sup>11</sup>

During his ascent of Mont Ventoux in 1857, Mistral did not, in fact, plant a banner or occupy the positions attributed by contemporaries to Petrarch or to Catholic pilgrims. At the summit, Mistral's attention was drawn to 'the wide shadow of Ventoux extending its great triangular point down over the whole width of the Comtat Venaissin'. Under this benevolent shadow, Mistral celebrated the sociability of Provence in contrast to the officiousness of the French state. Mistral had felt humiliation when forced to speak French in school and vowed to 'raise and revive in Provence the traditional spirit that was being destroyed by all the schools and their false and unnatural education'.<sup>12</sup> Mistral was not at that time a religious pilgrim, though he converted to Catholicism decades later. On the descent, Mistral and his companions were arrested by a French policeman in one village and accosted by the mayor of another who both refused to believe they were artists on a walking tour of Ventoux. They were released after a prosperous farmer spoke up on their behalf because they spoke Provençal well and could confirm that 'it's true as they say that the sun hops three times when it rises on the summit of Mont Ventoux'. Shortly afterward, on learning they had come from Ventoux, a sunburned old man told them: 'Wise is he who does not go back, and mad is he who does'.<sup>13</sup>

Ventoux was climbed frequently by the *Félibres* and the many ascents by the entomologist and early member, Jean-Henri Fabre, illustrate his shifting positions on the summit. In 1842, Fabre climbed the peak at age eighteen with a former schoolmate. They received advice from a grey-haired herder who pointed out a winding path, but like others before them, they took a steeper and more direct route.<sup>14</sup> The summit cross, pilgrims' candles, and monuments of nature all prompted prayers before they admired the view and watched swallows flying above the peak.<sup>15</sup> Fabre then taught at a local lycée and became an entomologist. During a sunrise at the summit in 1865, the highlight was a 'glimpse of the sweet joys which await the naturalist on the summit of Mont Ventoux' – birds, wasps, ladybugs and butterflies fluttering among flowers.<sup>16</sup> In a later lecture, Fabre juxtaposed the swallows with summit observatories: 'Man has not the bird's strong wing, but he has something better – the strong will that laughs at obstacles'. During the second half of the nineteenth century, Fabre's object of awe had shifted from God in nature to the indomitable will of man. Man had built airships, planted observatories on mountaintops, and scaled the highest peaks: 'With what indomitable courage, with what ardent love of learning must he not be animated to brave the dangers that confront one on those awe-inspiring heights!'<sup>17</sup>

Ventoux/Ventour appeared frequently in verse, and Mistral's epic poems remained ambivalent about this expression of masculine will. The mountains provide the background for a love story in *Mirèio*,<sup>18</sup> which represents Ventour as a benevolent old shepherd watching over its flock. Ventoux takes a more decisive role in *Calendau*,<sup>19</sup> the story of a fisherman who wins a beautiful Provençal princess who had been married against her will to a brigand. She escapes to a mountain cave where the fisherman, Calendau/Calendal, sees a vision that persuades him to win her hand through deeds of valour. After a series of adventures, he makes the ascent of Mont Ventoux and realizes that 'on this mountain God only came at night'<sup>20</sup> Calendau resolves to cut down the forest that covers Ventoux and for nine days trees fall and groan in a 'somber death rattle'. When he boasts of his conquest, the princess Estrello reprimands him for his machismo: 'You have dishonored the face of the Ventour! ... The mountains, the elevated and imposing peaks, belong to God!'<sup>21</sup> In penitence, he makes a pilgrimage to the grotto of Mary Magdalene and wins her favour by reconciling factions of quarrelling Provençal journeymen. After the brigand perishes in a fire, the pair weds and love triumphs.

Ernest Renan, a decade after his influential lecture asking '*Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?*', told the Parisian *Félibres* in 1891 that he had first seen mountains in Provence and been enchanted by them. Provence, along with his native Brittany, still preserved the 'kingdom of enchantment, the only good that exists on earth'. He toasted these regions and 'our beloved French homeland, mother of these diversities, each amiable and excellent in its own way'.<sup>22</sup> Aspirations of a 'nation' did not require the erasure of particular identities, and their modernity was reaffirmed by the award to Mistral of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1904, which he shared with a Spanish playwright and used to establish a museum devoted to Provençal culture. *The Nation* thought the Nobel Prize for Mistral and others from 'minor nationalities' demonstrated that 'the spirit of modern imperialism is far from carrying everything before it'.<sup>23</sup> An appreciation of Mistral noted his emphasis on the landscape and legends of Provence: 'A particular discrepancy, in the midst of very human affairs, is the introduction of the supernatural. The fantastic side of Mistral's genius is evinced here, as well as his folkloristic desire to dwell on his compatriots' superstition'.<sup>24</sup> Mont Ventoux continued to cast shadows of discrepancy and provinciality that resisted incorporation into universalizing narratives of the metropolises. As the poet Roy Campbell observed in the 1950s: 'Calendal, as a character, exists to this day, wherever on the coast of Southern France it is uncomfortable for rich tourists to go'.<sup>25</sup>

## Return to origins

Rebirth or a return to origins were understood very differently by historians, mountaineers or artists. Mistral's *Lou Tresor dóu Félibrige*,<sup>26</sup> a Provençal encyclopaedia, recorded that Ventoux owed its name to Ventour, a deity for the wind. Camille Jullian, historian of Gaul, confirmed 'Saint-Victoire and Mont Ventoux, the two most popular mountains in Provence, have their point of origin in the same Celtic or Ligurian name appropriate to the two summits which are partly covered in snow and wind'. The translation of names

had led to variations: on Sainte-Victoire the deity took a Roman then Christian name, while on Ventoux it 'conserved its virile allure, secular and indigenous'.<sup>27</sup> An archaeologist likewise wrote that Ventoux was Ventour, 'undoubtedly derived from the divinity Venturius', the divinity of mountains in the region. Pilgrims on Mont Sainte-Victoire, near Aix-en-Provence, re-enacted pagan traditions that did not date from Christianity or the victory of Marius at the battle of Aix in 102 BCE. Rather, he argued that they owed their origins to the festival of the sun at the summer solstice, 'which was celebrated from time immemorial by Indo-European-speaking populations and of which traces remain in many of our villages'. The intervening years had blurred 'the eternal god of the sun, the Ligurian and pagan saint Venture, and the Christian Sainte-Victoire . . . Three conceptions absolutely distinct and irreducible one to another'.<sup>28</sup>

For Ernest Cézanne, founding President of the *Club Alpin Français* (CAF), mountains retained traces of 'ancient races' but were more important as national resources for engineering the future. As an engineer, this Cézanne built railways in France, Austria, Russia and the Ottoman Empire before returning to Paris during the Franco-Prussian war in 1870. After French defeat, Cézanne proposed brigades of alpine mountain troops to the National Assembly in 1873 and created the CAF with similar aims the next year. The club would foster national rebirth and 'snatch young people from the enervating idleness of cities' by exercising their minds and bodies on the mountains.<sup>29</sup> Following the example of alpine clubs in Britain, Switzerland, Germany and Italy, mountaineering for Ernest Cézanne was shaped by 'thinking like a state'.<sup>30</sup> 'In our age of compulsory service, a prudent mother wants to familiarize her son with the trials of the mountain. France is certainly not disposed to provoke anyone; but, if attacked, it is in the Vosges, Jura and the Alps that it will repel the assault'.<sup>31</sup> In this pursuit of national regeneration, the CAF organized hundreds of school trips and thousands of club outings to the mountains over the following decades. The CAF graphically represented its patriotic ideals in its *Annuaire* (1903) with a shield depicting snow cliffs and an edelweiss flower below the motto 'Pour la patrie, par la montagne'.<sup>32</sup> The CAF celebrated the autonomy of its provincial sections which organized their own activities. A road was built to the top of Ventoux for a scientific observatory and the peak soon became the scene for automotive and bicycle races. Sainte-Victoire also became a popular destination for members of the Provence section of the CAF.

The artist Paul Cézanne refused the summit position of the alpinists and engineers. Among Parisian painters, Cézanne was a proud and recalcitrant provincial and he became an opponent of metropolitan, bourgeois manners and practitioner of a self-conscious, vernacular *provençalisme*.<sup>33</sup> He returned to Provence and painted Mont Sainte-Victoire from perspectives that aligned him with his friends among the *Félibrige*. An early Saint-Victoire painting from 1882–5, now at the Metropolitan Museum (Fig. 12.1), portrays this artistic cohabitation of mountain and modernity. A horizontal railway viaduct would cut the painting in half but for the dominant verticality of the mountain which, doubly framed by pine trees, anchors the composition, softens the railway line and waters the farms of the region. Nature abhorred straight lines, according to Cézanne, and mountains cannot be subdued by railway builders: 'To hell with the



**Figure 12.1** Paul Cézanne (1839–1906). *Mont Sainte-Victoire and the Viaduct of the Arc River Valley*, 1882–1885. Oil on canvas. 25¾ x 32½ in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

engineers!’, he told a friend, ‘we’re not road surveyors.’ Instead, for this Cézanne ‘everything is connected’, a sensibility that provided him a ‘vague cosmic religious feeling’.<sup>34</sup>

Cézanne’s series of Sainte-Victoire paintings searched for the remotest origins. He studied the mountain’s structure and Neolithic sites and took crash courses on geology and philosophy.<sup>35</sup> Cézanne painted the mountain from quarries to plant its roots in the soil. He told his friend Joachim Gasquet, an active member of the *Félibrige*, that he hoped to discover geological foundations dating from the primordial collision of atoms and reaction of chemicals: ‘I see rising these great rainbows, these cosmic prisms, this dawn of ourselves above the void. I saturate myself in them by reading Lucretius’.<sup>36</sup> Cézanne was proficient in Latin and admired and translated Virgil’s *Eclogues* at an early age. Like Gasquet and other *Félibres*, Cézanne sought to re-envision Provence as a modern and French Arcadia based on Roman antecedents.<sup>37</sup>

The view from Les Lauves, on a hill above Cézanne’s atelier, provided the point of view for his artistic ascents. Thick brush strokes of tawny yellows and burnt ochre, dabs of green, convex shadows and iridescent hues of blue that evaporate into grey. This palette provides a continuum from base to summit in which the mountain is poised in upward thrust, in a momentary equilibrium between earth and sky. Cézanne told Gasquet that everything was



‘a bit of solar heat that has been stored up and organized, a reminder of the sun.’ Cézanne wanted to extract its essence: ‘Perhaps the earth’s diffused morality represents the effort it’s making to return to its solar origin. Therein lies the idea of God, its feeling, its dream of God.’ He looked beyond arcadian models and wanted to free lines and colours and capture the spiritual quality of the light. ‘Look at Sainte-Victoire there. How it soars, how imperiously it thirsts for the sun! How melancholy it is in the evening when all its weight sinks back . . . Those blocks were made of fire and there’s still fire in them.’<sup>38</sup>

## Base and summit

For René Char, the Nazi and Vichy regimes in the 1940s had discredited a naïve search for origins in the mountains or elsewhere. A native of Provence whose poetry was inspired by the mountains, springs and rivers of the region, Char also identified the war with a broader threshold of religious doubt: ‘the abandonment of the divine.’<sup>39</sup> Char had been part of the Surrealist movement in the early 1930s and a leader in the Resistance during the Second World War. Attempts by Surrealists, psychoanalysts and others in the 1930s to reconstruct the humanist individual had led, paradoxically, to theories of its dissolution and to Char’s poetics of fragments, ‘the taking apart of the self.’<sup>40</sup> Char was also deeply influenced by Heraclitus, whose ‘poetry runs immediately to the summits, because Heraclitus possesses this sovereign ascensional power.’<sup>41</sup> Char’s wartime journal, *Feuillets d’Hypnos*, recorded aphorisms of mountains, friendship and beauty. The mountains recur as a complex motif during the war, with men smelling of glaciers, resistance as hope, and poetry itself in a combative stance of ‘furious ascension.’<sup>42</sup>

After the war, the cave drawings at Lascaux, discovered in the 1940s and then considered the earliest examples of human art, illustrated the suspicion Char shared with the philosophers Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot of the very notion of origin. To some, Lascaux represented the first ‘modern art’ if not the first ‘modern man,’ and Bataille located the origins of art and of transgression at Lascaux.<sup>43</sup> In contrast, Char wrote that the only human figure painted on the walls of Lascaux was not the ‘first’ human representation but rather an ‘abyss dancer, spirit, yet to be born.’<sup>44</sup> Blanchot compared Char to Heraclitus and Xenophanes and celebrated in Char’s poetry the absence of origin and the presence of nature, not of earthly things – sun, water, wisdom or the infinity of the cosmos – but ‘that which is already there before “all” . . . Nature is the test of first things, a test in which poetry is exposed to the impact of a measureless freedom, a total absence of time, and from which its consciousness dawns, becoming the word of commencement.’<sup>45</sup> Reinterpreting earlier traditions, beginnings for Char and Blanchot were moments of open possibility that could not provide the panoramic perspective of the summit.

Mountains appear frequently in Char’s works, but the only summit ever reached was Mount Everest in *L’Abominable homme des neiges* (1953), an argument in the form of a ballet. After Dr Hermez, the expedition leader, unties his rope to the Sherpas, an avalanche carries him over a precipice. A half-man, half-animal creature covered in fur emerges

from the debris with a smaller figure and they both remove their disguise to reveal Venus with a young satellite star. Venus covers Hermez with her fur and falls in love with him. The climbers and Sherpas return Hermez to camp before making their final bid for the summit. The jealous satellite star dons Venus's disguise and fools Hermez into falling into an abyss where the climber dies.

In the distance, one hears the voice of the explorers: 'Victory! The Mountain is conquered! Everest is climbed!' Thus succeeds what was only a limited material objective, while the hero succumbs, overcome by the imbrications of his sovereignty and his destiny ... Everest trampled, Venus will no longer return to earth. Impossible is now to be found in human affairs. What have we conquered, won?<sup>46</sup>

The summit was an illusion and conquest was annihilation. In this period Char compared the poet to the 'mountain climber constantly slipping backwards who is set on his feet again by the repeated assault of summits ... On the rasp of ridges and dizzying needles, exulting, he makes a smile. Meanwhile he dies'.<sup>47</sup>

The summit was an unattainable limit-point rather than the seemingly stable position occupied by mountaineers on Everest or Petrarch on Ventoux. In *Recherche de la base et du sommet* (1955), Char wrote 'Base and summit, provided that men bestir themselves and diverge, crumble rapidly. But there is the tension of this search'.<sup>48</sup> Conventionally, the summit had been associated with good and 'base' with evil, but these terms were reversed by Georges Bataille, who linked the 'moral summit' with decline. Bataille posited the summit as a point where life was pushed to an impossible limit.<sup>49</sup> In 1966, Char opened *Retour Amont*,<sup>50</sup> a collection of poetry, with this quotation from Bataille: 'This flight headed towards the summit (which is the constitution of knowledge – dominating the realms themselves) is only one of the paths of the *labyrinth*. But we can now in no way avoid this path which we must follow from attraction to attraction in search of "being"'.<sup>51</sup> Tensions between solitude and society and the competition for knowledge and power broke Ariadne's thread through the labyrinth, and the summit of these postclassical mountains became poetically unattainable and philosophically inaccessible.

Returning upland toward summits could not lead to a renaissance or rebirth. For Char, '*Returning Upland* does not mean a returning to the source. Far from it. Rather a sally, a returning to nourishment that has not been deferred from the source, and to its eye, upstream, that is, to the most forlorn place possible'.<sup>52</sup> The return upland resists reduction to nostalgia or philosophical categories of the 'summit' or 'eternal recurrence'. Scholars rightly emphasize Char's debt to pre-Socratic philosophers and Nietzsche,<sup>53</sup> though Char told Blanchot: 'I am a poet, not a philosopher in verse'.<sup>54</sup> In an interview in *Le Monde*, Char said that 'the return to the sources is one of the great illusions of man in regret. On the contrary, it is necessary to go "above" the sources to that which permits the sources to exist; there, where the nature of being is most inhospitable and where one finds the first fruits'.<sup>55</sup>

Uplands were threatened in June 1965 when the French government announced that it would install intermediate-range ballistic missiles in silos in the Plateau d'Albion, next to Mont Ventoux. Char organized 'Partisans de la Paix' to rally against the nuclear missile



installation. During the war, Char and other members of the Resistance *maquis Ventoux* had taken refuge in the area chosen for the missile silos.<sup>56</sup> Char published a scathing pamphlet, *La Provence point oméga* (1965), which ridiculed the mayor of the village of Apt for trading hundreds of jobs for thousands of lives and poisoning the wells of the region. The *New York Times* compared displaced villagers to 'the inhabitants of various South Sea islands – primitives whose approval of the intrusion is clearly demonstrated by the absence – or weakness – of protest'.<sup>57</sup> Pablo Picasso joined Char's protest and issued a poster with a sketch of an eagle, sun and a satyr face sometimes considered Zeus hovering above the serrated summit ridge of the mountain. In 'Ruine d'Albion', Char identified this as the battle for the earthly crust: 'In our eyes this *site* is worth more than our bread, for it cannot be replaced'.<sup>58</sup>

Nuclear missiles elicited a more radical critique than that articulated during earlier protests against pollution of streams in Provence. After the launch of the Sputnik satellite, Char wrote in 1959 in 'Aux riverains de la Sorgue' that 'Space man, whose day of birth it is, will be a thousand times less luminous and reveal a thousand fewer hidden things than the stone man' of Lascaux.<sup>59</sup> As *point oméga*, the missiles on Mont Ventoux presented a deeper philosophical challenge. According to Blanchot, 'man has in a sense already rejoined the point oméga. This means that there is no longer any Other other than man, and that there is no longer any Outside outside him'.<sup>60</sup> Man had included and comprehended everything within a closed circle of knowledge. Stone man and space man were succeeded by 'scorched earth man' in a Char poem of 1968.<sup>61</sup>

For Char, returning upland could lead, if not to the summit, then towards one Other other than man – wolves. Wolves were eliminated from Mont Ventoux after the summit observatory opened in the 1880s, but they left their trace on the mountain and in Char's poetry. In a 1980 interview, Char recalled that when wolves ate a sheep his grandfather was tending on Mont Ventoux in the 1830s, the boy hid in a grotto, where wolves prowled outside until he was able to flee during the next day. Char represented wolves as ennobled by their disappearance and waiting with the poet for an 'upland amplitude'.<sup>62</sup>

This upland amplitude was a response to environmental awareness during the post-war years. 'Carelessly, we exalt and oppose nature and men', wrote Char in one of the Lascaux poems, and in other works he resembles a deist or refers to phenomena that appear supernatural.<sup>63</sup> Char's wolves on upland slopes embodied 'thinking like a mountain', Aldo Leopold's coinage from the 1940s in response to the disappearance of wolves in another provincial domain, the North American backcountry.<sup>64</sup> While Char's wolves in the 1940s echoed the *maquis Ventoux* of the Resistance, the wolves of *Retour Amont* in the 1960s evoked the search for being: 'We shall remain, to live and to die, with the wolves, filially, upon this teeming earth'.<sup>65</sup>

## Biospheres

A recent history of Mont Ventoux inevitably begins with Petrarch before describing in more detail the mountain's geology, geomorphology and hydrology, its climate, flora and

fauna, and its human use through forestry, hunting, agriculture, industry and tourism. The archaeologist Guy Barruol then locates the mountain in a comparative context. Ventoux's social role and prominent conical silhouette compare favourably to Olympus in Greece, Ararat in Turkey, Canigou in Catalonia, Viso in the Alps, Kilimanjaro in Africa, or Fujiyama in Japan.<sup>66</sup> Mont Ventoux had long been a sacred site and compared to other mountains, but associations with Fujiyama and other 'global' sacred peaks were more recent developments. Tourist guidebooks disseminate references to Ventoux 'with its white cap and the allure of Fujiyama' and such global comparisons now circulate widely.<sup>67</sup>

In 1990, UNESCO and the French government declared Ventoux a 'biosphere reserve' which more formally recognized its place in a global network that combines conservation and sustainable development. These biosphere reserves are the most tangible achievement of UNESCO's 'Man in the Biosphere' initiative launched in 1970 at the same time as intermediate-range ballistic missiles were planted in the Plateau d'Albion. Twenty years later, at the end of the Cold War, the creation of the biosphere reserve and decommissioning of the nuclear missiles recast the image of Mont Ventoux once again. Or, to put the matter differently, events since the 1990s have provincialized the Burckhardtian representations of 'modern man' central to narratives of Western civilization that were once embodied in images of Petrarch astride Mont Ventoux.

The temptation remains to follow Petrarch's footsteps. Reporters from the *New York Times* periodically repeat the ascent, with one driving most of the way to the final switchbacks, while another felt a sense of anti-climax on the summit, 'hoping for an epiphany that never quite came.'<sup>68</sup> Would you believe that I ascended Mont Ventoux on April 26, a few years ago, following one of the routes that Petrarch could have taken from Malaucène? Naturally, there is no consensus on the route of a possibly fictional ascent, but the 600th anniversary of Petrarch's letter prompted speculation.<sup>69</sup> During my ascent, after leaving the source of the Groseau, paths diverged and most of the way was little used and largely overgrown. False summits appeared on the long, exposed ridge with snow nestled in shadows and small clusters of ladybugs basking in the sun. The chapel below the summit was still filled with snow and bypassed by nearly all the people who drove cars or rode bicycles to the top. The massive television tower dominated the fenced-off summit. The gift-shop bustled, cyclists posed for pictures and celebrated convivially, a gentle wind touched everyone; it was a glorious day for a first ascent of Mont Ventoux.

Char's wolves illustrate the tensions of any search for a stable position in the biosphere or Anthropocene. René Char was not the first to say that 'everything is a new beginning, always: to attain the summit is an illusion. But it is "necessary" to try.'<sup>70</sup> It remains to be seen whether embedding 'man' in the biosphere or in the Anthropocene will clear a space for Others other than man. Thinking like a mountain provincializes the code of homogenous, secular time by entangling past, present and future.<sup>71</sup> In these histories, wolves are not only in the past, even on a mountain such as Mont Ventoux on which they are extinct.

My ascent of Mont Ventoux took one of many possible routes through the histories that intersect on its slopes and at its summit. Like other postclassical mountains, Mont

Ventoux's histories are plural, and the moments of its past are not as distinct as geological strata or archaeological layers. They often blur or overlap rather than demarcate boundaries between epochs. Each moment in Ventoux's history remains available as a resource for the present, without claiming to be universal, or awaiting a rebirth, return or renaissance. Searching 'above' the sources does not mean searching for a higher summit position. On the contrary, perhaps returning upland on Mont Ventoux may summon the humility to locate ourselves on a continuum of time that extends into the future. We all stand on postclassical mountains now. 'Our earthly figure', as Char wrote in 'Lenteur de l'avenir', 'is only the second third of a continuous pursuit, a point, upland'.<sup>72</sup>

## Notes

1. The author warmly thanks the editors and contributors in this volume for the stimulating discussion at St Andrews, and the Durham University Institute of Advanced Study for hospitality during revisions on this article.
2. Char 1995: 413.
3. Julliy 1961; Barroul, Dautier and Mondon 2007: 193.
4. See Hansen 2013, esp. 12–22.
5. Hollis 2019.
6. Chakrabarty 2009; Chakrabarty 2012 and 2020.
7. Seguin 1852: 7, 12–13; Julian 1937; Brun 1977; Mondon 2003.
8. Seguin 1852: 118; Barroul, Dautier and Mondon 2007: 198–9, 231–2.
9. Clap 1976 ; LeRoy Ladurie 1977; Mondon 2003.
10. Roumanille 1852; Martel 1986; Roza 2003.
11. Mistral 1985: 3, 81, 152.
12. Ibid. 131.
13. Ibid. 226–31.
14. For the symbolic significance of the earlier winding path taken by Petrarch, see Williams, 167–8, this volume.
15. Mondon 2003: 39–45; Julian 1937: 171–82.
16. Fabre 1879: 181–93.
17. Fabre 1923: 190.
18. Mistral 1859.
19. Mistral 1867.
20. Ibid.: 298–9; Weiss 2005: 34–6.
21. Mistral 1867: 299, 301.
22. Renan 1904: 310–14.
23. Lesser 1914: 354.
24. Dargan 1914.
25. Campbell 1951: 281.

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26. Mistral 1879: II, 1100.
27. Jullian 1899: 56–7; Jullian 1920: VI, 57, 329.
28. Clerc 1904: 278–82; Clerc 1906: 272, 274; Julian 1937: 337–9; d’Arnaud 1959.
29. Cézanne 1874.
30. Scott 1998.
31. Tissandier 1874; see Hoibian 2000; Drouet 2005.
32. Escudié 1903: 574.
33. Athanassoglou-Kallmyer 2003: 11.
34. Gasquet 1991: 165–6.
35. Athanassoglou-Kallmyer 2003: 176.
36. Gasquet 1921: 135–6; Tuma 2002: 56.
37. Athanassoglou-Kallmyer 2003: 187–92; Conisbee and Coutagne 2006.
38. Gasquet 1991: 152–4. The vision of mountains as coming from fire and thus still retaining some of the characteristics of fire can also be found in the writings of Conrad Gessner, discussed herein by Hooley, 25–6.
39. Char 1995: 255.
40. Caws 1977: 23; Dean 1994.
41. Char 1995: 720–1.
42. Ibid. 189.
43. Smith 2004.
44. Char 1995: 351.
45. Blanchot 1956: 37.
46. Char 1995: 1135.
47. Char 1956: 225; Char 1995: 1297.
48. Ibid. 631; Caws 1977: 32.
49. Bataille 1992: 33–40; Surya 2012: 429.
50. Char 1995: 656, 1377.
51. Bataille 1988: 86; Hollier 1990: 57–73.
52. Char 1995: 656; Caws and Griffin 1976: 199.
53. Née 2007.
54. Veyne 1990: 310.
55. Mora 1966.
56. Greilsamer 2004: 361–5; Coron 2007: 173–7; Leclair and Née 2015.
57. Schneider 1966.
58. Char 1995: 456. Picasso’s ‘La Provence – Point Oméga’ is reproduced in Czwiklitzer 1968: 238.
59. Char 1995: 412.
60. Blanchot 1993: 207.
61. Char 1995: 466.
62. Ibid. 433, 1385; Leclair and Née 2015: 350–1.
63. Char 1995: 353.

64. Leopold 1949; Flader 1994.
65. Char 1995: 656; Caws and Griffin 1976: 199.
66. Barroul, Dautier and Mondon 2007: 8.
67. Ibid. 169.
68. Kimmelman 1999; Woodward 2006.
69. Champeville 1937.
70. Mora 1966.
71. Chakrabarty 2000; Hansen 2013.
72. Char 1995: 435.

