

*International Mountain Day Social Media Campaign 2023*

*Review by:*

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*Mountain: Nature and Culture* (2016) by Veronica della Dora has prominence from several angles, the historical, the geographical, the sensorial, the geological, the ethereal, and the environmental. I would say that all the chapters have interesting perspectives to offer as they make audiences travel from the past, the ephemeral, to the day-by-day of mountaineers of all times. She masters a cross-disciplinary display of facts and readers realize that the mountains that we see have not been there and won't be there forever with the same shape and forms, nor their glaciers and the sounds, or their beauty and lushness. When della Dora refers to the Appalachian Mountains and other mountains damaged by the neo-extractivism practices, it is sad to think that communities could lose their sense of place when seeing their heritage destroyed. This is the case when Appalachians overlook their beloved mountains and the damage produced to them by these transformations.

The theological paradigms come from ancient civilizations and we have inherited many of their experiences with the sacred. The mountains' wilderness are tied to our collective unconscious, which produce indelible marks in brains and hearts, which are passed from generations to generations. Mountains can also hide terrible, terrible things, and acts, like human and animal sacrifices for gods and demons. People's extreme beliefs, sublime or perverse, have always found a place in the mountains. At the same time, mountains on the horizon can be the most important reference for coastal navigation. "Mountains and promontories acted as essential landmarks for sailors and were often topped by temples . . . They were the first familiar feature the seamen would have glimpsed on return to his homeland" (35). Driving to Boone from the coast of North Carolina, I experience the same as the sailors when I finally visualize the mountains. Leaving behind the heat, the highway, and the traffic, the view from afar of the mountains I choose to live the rest of my life in, makes me feel "in heaven." This can be seen as a common saying but when I'm five minutes from home at almost 4,000 feet, I can stop in one of the overlooks in the parkway or I drive slowly through the fog which many times involves the surroundings. Calm and relaxed, even after five hours of driving, I feel the balm of being in the highland on my back and bones. "The belief that mountains are the places nearest to heaven," (39) makes us feel eternity right there, as they are like bridges between us and the divine, interlacing history, culture, land, and spirituality.

Mountains are linked to hope, to awe, and good vibes. But tragedy, death, and despair, usually hit the ones that don't build community. In June of 2020, the US Army National Guard removed the world famous bus shelter in which Chris McCandless, alias Alexander Supertramp, died slowly following his desire of being away from all forms of civilization. In 1990, and without

any community resources, he began his solitary journey to the peaks of Alaska, “the wild mountains end up becoming his grave” (74). The bus, an old bus which MacCandless found, retreated, and died in the middle of the winter, was airlifted and stored in an undisclosed site so his fans could not reach it. The American died from starvation and weighed only sixty-seven pounds when found dead.

Almost two decades before, in 1802, baron Karl von Humboldt climbed the 20,700 feet to reach Chimborazo’s peak. Humboldt’s ascent to Chimborazo, no doubt they were both brutal. Humboldt counted on three local indigenous people and Humboldt came back victorious. “The Ecuadorian peak was employed by Humboldt in his famous diagram *Physical Portrait of the Tropics*,” which he published five years later (170). “His maps allowed Humboldt to order nature at a glance” (171). Besides, Humboldt was accompanied by French botanist Aimé Bonpland and Ecuadorian Carlos Montúfar. Humboldt would end up as McCandless without the support of his community.

Humans have been removing, digging, destroying, and polluting the mountains and all the natural resources that they hide. The author walks us through her own study of mountain functions, and sometimes we see them powerful, reigning with their aesthetic aura over us. But then, we realize that as every living thing, they’re weak, fragile, and the worst, they can be transformed into truncated formations, which give us a feeling of mourning, of loss. This is part of the dark side of Appalachia, mountaintop removal, which I have felt deep in my heart when traveling to West Virginia. “The modification of the mountains is perceived as a moral threat... Why is the modification of the mountain morally unacceptable? ... The answer lies in the modern perception of mountains as heritage” (201). Once, they were the source of clean water and food, of pleasure and sense of community, and now the Appalachian people think of them as death and destruction. Chopped off by the carbon industry here, gold, copper and mineral mining in Venezuela, Chile, Guyana, Suriname and Brazil, elevations are being dynamited and blown into pieces. As a part of the audience of *della Dora*, I wonder together with her, how mountains, and ourselves, will come out of it.

della Dora, Veronica. 2016. *Mountain: Nature and Culture*. IL: University of Chicago Press.