

Introduction

In his monograph *Karpaty i Podkarpacie* [*The Carpathian Mountains and the Carpathian Foothills*] (1st edition 1939) published shortly before WWII in the prestigious “Poland’s Miracles” series, F. Antoni Ossendowski wrote:

The Carpathians! A huge wall, 1300 km-long, stretches in an impressive arc from the point where the Morava River flows into the Danube — to the Iron Gates near Orsova at the Romanian-Yugoslav border. [...] The Carpathians are an extension of the Alps and have been closely connected with this mountain range throughout the hundreds of millions of centuries of their turbulent history. The oldest part of the Carpathians — the Tatra Mountains — is a relic of an ancient Hercynian massif which emerged during the orogenesis in the Carboniferous and the Permian periods in the Palaeozoic Era; it is an island that has exited from times immemorial, when the range began to emerge from the shallow sea in the Cretaceous System.¹

The first chapter of this fascinating book, which can interest even today’s readers, is entitled *Milczące dziejów świadki* [*Silent Witnesses to History*].² When showing in it both the beauty of nature in the mountains, particularly taking into account the beauty of the local landscape for centuries attracting artists and travellers, and the richness of the multicultural tradition of the region encompassing the Carpathians and the Carpathian Foothills, Ossendowski quite deliberately referred to an interpretation of the mountains popularised by the romantics and often used in the modernist period — heroic and somewhat hierophanic, showing mountains in the convention of an indestructible monument of nature and silent witness to history. When examining the role and significance of the phenomenon of Carpathian nature in the light of the history of Central European civilisation, he emphasised the cultural values of this huge mountain range, stretching on the peripheries of Western Europe. Depending on the perspective determined by the place of observation and the origin of the potential observer, often a scholar studying nature and culture of the Carpathians, the region was sometimes seen as central, sometimes as peripheral. Inhabited for a long time by people of various ethnic and national backgrounds, to this day it has retained clear features of a borderland and is perceived as a type of space with a strong impact on the imagination of both indigenous inhabitants and those coming from outside, a favourable ground for the creation of various legends and myths. In the historical aspect, especially when it comes to the creation of modern Central European nations and societies, the Carpathians as an area rich in valuable raw materials was a region of great strategic and economic importance.

¹ F.A. Ossendowski, *Karpaty i Podkarpacie*, Poznań 1939 (reprint), pp. 7–9.

² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Today, with the growing environmental awareness, the spread and commercialisation of tourism and popularisation of thinking in terms of Euroregions, we see another stage of increased interest in the Carpathians regarded as an enclave encompassing large areas of primeval nature, sometimes perceived as mysterious mountains still waiting to be discovered.

Just like the previous volume, focused on the Alps, the present volume of the *Mountains — Literature — Culture* series is also a monograph, as it is devoted to the Carpathians. It opens with a series of articles concerning the ways of presenting the Carpathians, and the pastoral and settlement culture associated with them in the literature of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. To a large extent, the literary works as well as the paraliterary and paradocumentary accounts discussed here refer to the emergence of stereotypical images of the Carpathians, a process that was closely linked to the beginnings of Carpathian tourism and to the discovery in the region of oil deposits and the entry of capital-based civilisation into the wild Carpathian region. A separate group of sketches encompasses works discussing the functions and meaning of images and motifs associated with the Southern Carpathians and the legendary Transylvania, popularised in the western European Gothic novel of the 19th century as a land of vampires and phantoms.

We are happy to inform our readers that the *Mountains — Literature — Culture* series has become an annual publication. Successive volumes will thus be published on a regular basis, continuing the current numbering sequence. The present volume is slightly different. In addition to the periodical's regular sections containing studies, sketches and various articles devoted to mountain themes, it has acquired two new sections: "Notes" and "Reviews."

The editorial team would be happy to collaborate with any authors who love the mountains and would like to present them not only from the perspective of the humanities but also that of natural and environmental sciences. All information concerning the submission of texts and the editorial process can be found on the website of Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, www.wuwr.com.pl, under the "Serie i czasopisma" ["Series and periodicals"] tab and on the *Czasopisma Naukowe w Sieci* [Academic Periodicals on the Web] website, www.glk.wuwr.pl.

Future editions of the periodical will not be strictly monographs, but will continue to present groups of texts with a specific profile. Volume 7, planned for 2013, will be to a large extent devoted to the symbolism and semantics of the mountains. The two new sections will be substantially expanded in it.

Ewa Grzęda