Introduction:
Mountaineering and the Imagining of
Imperial Masculinity

In the Spring 1994 issue of the mountaineering and adventure magazine Summit, an article by Richard Bangs salutes the first man to stand on the summit of Mount Everest, Sir Edmund Hillary. Lamenting what he sees as the end of an era, Bangs explains, "Hillary was ... part of a historical narrative that is essentially over. He was a figure in that great story of heroic adventure that includes Marco Polo, Columbus, Lewis and Clark, Stanley and Livingstone, Peary and Scott, Amundsen, Lindbergh—all those manly men with knives in their teeth and icicles in their beards and whatnot" (49). Comparing Hillary's achievement to contemporary mountaineering, Bangs complains, "When Ed climbed ... he belonged to a time when 'because it is there' was good enough reason to climb a mountain. But this was 1993. Man-against-nature has taken on a new meaning, I told myself" (49). Bangs's sentiment alludes to the antiseptic version of contemporary mountaineering. Climbing routes up major peaks such as Mount Everest and Denali (Mount McKinley) are so well established that the mystery of the unknown and thus the "manly" prowess formerly necessary to confront the unknown have been lost. Moreover, with enough money and time, virtually any fit person can pay a guiding service to be led up the mountain, even if—as was illustrated on Mount Everest two years after Bangs's article appeared—clients and guides might occasionally perish.
Bangs may be correct in his assessment of contemporary mountaineering. But his albeit humorous romanticization of adventurous masculinity and the seemingly innocuous nature of mountain climbing—that to climb mountains was to climb them “because they’re there”—obscure the ideological context of heroic masculinity and mountaineering adventure. It has, after all, become commonplace in literary, historical, and cultural criticism to regard Columbus, Lewis and Clark, Stanley and Livingstone, Peary and Scott as “manly” icons of imperial or national identity or both. As a member of this famous group of male explorers in the “great story of heroic adventure,” Hillary is no exception, and the same can be said for many other heroic mountaineers. Although these mountaineers were shaped by a variety of cultural media, this book focuses primarily on how classic mountaineering adventure narratives helped to create these heroic masculine figures. At the same time, I argue that other mountaineering narratives contest received norms of heroic masculinity and its imperial and nationalist underpinnings.

The first three chapters of this book concentrate on American narratives that recount expeditions to Alaska’s Denali (Mount McKinley)—Frederick Cook’s *To the Top of the Continent* (1903), Belmore Browne’s *The Conquest of Mount McKinley* (1913), and Hudson Stuck’s *The Ascent of Denali* (Mount McKinley) (1915). Chapters 4 and 5 critique British narratives about expeditions to Nepal/Tibet’s Mount Everest—Sir Francis Younghusband’s *The Epic of Mount Everest* (1926) and Sir John Hunt’s *The Ascent of Everest* (1953), respectively. In Chapter 6 I analyze Sherpa Tenzing Norgay’s autobiography *Tiger of the Snows* (1955), and in Chapter 7 I examine the American Jon Krakauer’s narrative *Into Thin Air* (1997), which depicts the disastrous 1996 guided expeditions to Mount Everest.

The American and British narratives I analyze in this study are intimately tied to the literary and cultural tradition of imperial adventure. Bill Ashcroft has written that “while the mode of imperialism as a policy is economic, its historical energy is profoundly cultural” (*Post-colonial Transformation* 211); and one of the more powerful means for injecting cultural energy into the United States’ and England’s imperial projects as these nations built their empires were fiction and nonfiction male imperial adventure narratives. In their romantic portrayal of heroic masculinity, these narratives helped forge a sense of U.S. and English national purpose and identity by helping to shape, codify, and justify some of the central ideologies of imperialism. Because of their supposed racial or cultural superiority or both, imperial adventurers could, it seemed, tackle any challenge that came their way—whether the rigors of the “wilderness” or the “savagery” of “natives.” Their successes, both real and imagined, energized young and old males alike—offering them an imaginative framework from which to think about the attractions of empire—and fueled their own imperial ambitions, whether in the “Wild West” of the American frontier or the far outposts of the British Empire.

Cook’s, Browne’s, and Stuck’s narratives follow the literary and cultural adventure tradition of works such as John Filson’s account of Daniel Boone’s life, the journals of Lewis and Clark, Cooper’s Leatherstocking novels, and Fremont’s exploration narratives, to name but a few of the narratives of the frontier. The creation and valorization of the white male imperial adventure hero in U.S. literature had always played an important role in the imagining of U.S. national identity and empire, and it continued to do so during the time in which the American mountaineering narratives were published. Martin Green maintains that the United States “came into existence, as fact and as idea, during the modern period, when the first adventure novels were being written, and as an idea it was the political product of the forces that found their literary expression in adventure tales” (*Seven Types of Adventure Tale* 99). As such, these tales helped to define “what it meant to be an American” (99) in their portrayal of rugged, resourceful masculine individualism—at least in the eyes of white males—and they helped to justify the westward expansion of empire. In specific historical contexts, these heroic frontier tales reminded Anglo-Saxon males of the supposed natural masculine virtues they had to mirror if U.S. masculinity were to remain healthy. During the Progressive Era, for instance, many middle- and upper-middle-class Anglo-Saxon males identified with the supposed virility of the individualistic frontier hero to combat the perceived threat of “overcivilization” that risked feminizing white American males and undermining the health of national identity.

Younghusband’s and Hunt’s narratives are part of the British imperial adventure literary and cultural tradition, having their roots in such works as Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, Stanley’s *Through the Dark Continent*, and Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines*. In fact, Reuben Ellis has pointed out that “as mountain exploration and ascent gained a firm place alongside other activities more traditionally thought of as exploration, mountaineering narratives came to occupy a more prominent place in the journals, magazines, and publishing houses [of the twentieth century] that published the nineteenth-century exploits at lower elevations of such explorers as Henry Morton Stanley, Richard Burton, and John Speke” (24). In British literary and cultural history, the adventure hero realized himself through the “frontiers” of the British Empire.
By performing heroic acts on the empire’s frontiers, these adventurous males not only reinforced and justified imperial ideologies, but—like their heroic American counterparts—they also simultaneously represented manly exemplars against which English males could measure their masculinity. If established masculine norms were under duress in the metropolis, the heroic actions within the empire helped to reassure English males of the health of their supposedly essential masculine virtues—such as bodily virility, rationality, leadership, self-sacrifice—that in turn reassured them that English national identity was healthy.7

Although imperial adventure could be realized in many venues, exploration in particular offered males one of the more attractive opportunities for adventure. In perhaps the most often quoted passage of British imperial literature, Joseph Conrad captures this attraction in Heart of Darkness when Marlow states, “Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, When I grow up I will go there” (10). As Marlow’s phrase “at that time” suggests, by the twentieth century the “blank spaces”—an obviously ideologically loaded rubric, effectively erasing the presence of indigenous peoples—for fulfilling the imperial desires of British male adventurers were in many respects regretfully exhausted, severely limiting the ideal proving grounds for forging imperial masculinity. The same limits were imposed upon American male adventurers because by the twentieth century the greater part of U.S. territory, particularly what was to become the “lower 48,” had been explored and mapped. Two potential outlets for eager white male adventurers hungering for unexplored geography were the North and South Poles. Yet even before the North and South Poles were reached, American and British male adventurers also began to focus their ambitions on unexplored mountains. Although recent scholarship calls attention to the fact that women mountaineers also participated in this imperial endeavor, with few exceptions mountaineering was a male enterprise.8

Reuben Ellis states that during the modern period, “Mountains increasingly came to embody a sense of ‘lateness,’ representing the last places left for Western explorers to discover and traffic” (22). And although the exploration and ascents of other mountains were wrapped tightly in the ideologies of imperialism,9 Denali and Mount Everest were particularly attractive to the imaginations of American and British adventurers. As a rule, in the modern period nations worked feverishly to control space around the globe. David Harvey maintains that the major imperial powers—Germany, France, Britain, the United States—all recognized the political, military, and aesthetic value of space. Within a progressive version of Darwinist discourse, to control and dominate space conferred “favoured status upon” a nation and its peoples (Harvey 275). Everest and Denali offered modern nations symbolic potential far beyond just any unexplored space or mountain, something akin to the value placed on the space of the North and South Poles—which in their unique location at the “top” and “bottom” of the world were romanticized as powerful symbols for displaying imperial and national identity to the world at large. Everest, in fact, was romanticized as the “third pole” in the minds of British adventurers, and Denali was romanticized as one of the last great exploratory challenges in U.S. territory. In their distinctiveness as the highest mountain on earth and the highest mountain in North America, respectively, Everest and Denali became powerful imperial and national icons.10

Everest’s and Denali’s status as imperial and national icons was channeled through distinctly masculine discourse. As these mountaineering narratives show, Everest and Denali offered white men particularly unique symbolic spaces on which to enact their masculine fantasies, figuratively elevating their supposed masculine virtues to “new” heights given the stature of these mountains. For British males, particularly the upper class, mountaineering had long played a role in the production of masculinity. Going on holidays to the European Alps—known as the “Playground of Europe”—underscored their desire to display their masculine “virility.”11 What could be more attractive for British males than climbing the highest mountain on earth, particularly when it could be linked to proving their imperial prowess? For white American males, Denali’s status as the highest mountain in North America made it particularly attractive as a challenge for proving their masculinity as well. In both British and American mountaineering narratives, the construction of masculinity might mean “elevating” the supposed virility of the imperial male body to dominate the natural environment, or the rational, masculine imperial mind that coolly and systematically manages the challenges of the natural environment or the indigenous people encountered and used on the expeditions.12

The North and South Poles, as Lisa Bloom has argued, offered British and American males an opportunity to construct imperial masculinity and project national identity without the “disfigurations” associated with imperialism because the poles and their proximate geography were materially
uninhabited (3). As materially uninhabited spaces, Everest and Denali allowed British and American male adventurers, respectively, the opportunity to imagine their masculinity and project national identity without the “disfigurations” of imperialism. But these mountains differed from the poles in an important respect. Everest was “conquered” discursively by the British when it was named in 1865 after being “discovered” in 1852 during the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India, despite the fact that Everest is located between Nepal and Tibet and was named Chomolungma and Sagarmatha by the local Sherpas; similarly, Denali was named “McKinley” by a white prospector in 1896 despite the fact that “Denali,” among other Native names, had long been established as its name by Tanana-speaking Alaska Natives. Although the mountains were not inhabited in a material sense, they represented (and still do) religious symbols for the cultures living in and around their flanks. The naming of these spaces was a powerful gesture that effectively usurped the mountains from the indigenous populations, making it easier to configure expeditions within British and American imperial discourses. In turn, the geography of Everest and Denali was useful symbolically to reinforce the notion that the materially inhabited spaces of empire were, and continued to be, essentially blank spots on the map before they were imaginatively configured to serve the imperial desires of England and the United States, regardless of the actual presence and desires of indigenous peoples.

Everest and Denali had the added benefit of being closely linked to the Western cultural tradition of the sublime, a tradition several of the British and American mountaineering narratives in this study exploit both explicitly and implicitly in their celebration of imperial masculinity. As Marjorie Hope Nicolson has shown in her Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory, from the eighteenth century onward writers have used mountain topography to represent what we have come to know as the romantic sublime. Christine Oravec has pointed out that beginning with Kant, “To be ‘sublime’ was to display outstanding moral or religious qualities,” a belief realized in both British and American conceptions of the sublime (66-67) and often reflected in mountaineering narratives. As reflected in Wordsworth’s famous portrayal of Simplon Pass in “The Prelude,” Shelley’s “Mont Blanc,” and Thoreau’s “Kraadn,” the distant summits of mountains represent the mystery of a sublime, transcendent power that resides figuratively “above” the tribulations of human existence. Reuben Ellis has pointed out that the discourse of the sublime had all but vanished in mountaineering narratives of the modern period; instead they followed the convention of exploration narratives of the period, which were descriptive and rational rather than romantic in their discourse (11-13). Although this is generally the case in mountaineering narratives of the period, in several of the narratives in this study the writers explicitly use the topography of mountains to make it seem as if mountaineers, by ascending mountains, are somehow literally able to bridge the gap between the material world and a sublime, powerful ideal, suggesting that their versions of masculinity—and by extension nationalism and imperialism—are metaphysical and not historically situated constructs. In this respect these narratives follow the convention of the well-established Romantic ideology of the sublime, which a number of scholars in both American and British literature and culture have linked to the production of masculinity and imperialism. And in her critique of Kant’s Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime, Laura Doyle argues that the “gendering of the sublime has various repercussions . . . but for my purposes it is sufficient to note that it strengthens the racial and national distinctions [Kant] goes on to make” (27), a maneuver that serves imperial ambitions (28)—in this case the ambitions of the writers of mountaineering narratives. Sir John Hunt’s and Jon Krakauer’s narratives are the relative exceptions to this rule, yet even Hunt’s narrative contains the residues of the romantic sublime—particularly in its inclusion of a number of photos that offer recognizably sublime images of Everest draped in clouds; and on the cover of Krakauer’s narrative is a photograph of Everest clearly meant to invoke the mountain sublime. In his Ideology of the Aesthetic, Terry Eagleton explains how in the Kantian sublime the subject, or the mountaineer in the context of specific narratives, is travelling to that higher location where it will find its true home, the phallic law of abstract reason which quite transcends the sensible [body]. To attain full moral stature we must be wrenched from the maternal pleasures of Nature and experience in the majesty of the sublime the sense of an infinite totality to which our feeble imaginations will never be equal. Yet in the very moment of being thus subdued, sharply recalled to our true finitude, we know a new kind of exultant power. (91)

In varying degrees, a number of these narratives reflect aspects of the Kantian sublime, particularly as it applies to the notion of the “exultant power” generated by an individual’s contact with the sublime. The image of an “exultant power” is used in various narratives to serve a conception of masculinity that has supposedly experienced the sublime’s regenerative power because mountaineers have climbed near or to the top of Denali or Mount Everest. In turn, the male adventurer figuratively projects his supposed transcendent
power over the world, imaginatively enveloping it within the sublimity of imperial masculinity.

All of the white writers in this study define white masculine identity over and against indigenous peoples. In regard to the role of the Orient in the self-definition of European imperial powers, Edward Said has written, "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (Orientalism 3), a dynamic often realized in the relationship between the British hero and the "native" in British imperial adventure tales. In these tales the "native" of the Orient is nearly always represented and stereotyped as backward and inferior compared to the "enlightened" and "superior" westerner, an image very much present in the British mountaineering narratives. Similarly, in the adventure tradition of the American frontier, the hero of the American mountaineering narratives is constructed through and against the imagined stereotypes of the "primitive" "Indian." Although these white males might admire and identify with specific virtues of the "native," white masculinity is always presented in a fashion that ultimately ensures that these males rise above the "primitive native" as "enlightened" westerners.17

Although the relationship between the westerner and the "native" in these narratives seems to comfortably bolster the superiority of the westerner, this relationship in great part reveals the porous nature of "colonial discourse." This discourse is highly ambivalent in that it simultaneously subverts and reinforces ideologies of imperialism, helping to underscore the instabilities of imperial ideologies. For instance, each of these narratives constantly repeats images of the stereotypical "native," whether a Sherpa or a Native American, which in one sense fixes the "native" as inferior to the westerner. According to Homi Bhabha, however, the repeated invoking of these stereotypes "points to a 'lack' in the colonizer's psyche, which is further exemplified . . . by the way that stereotype requires the colonizer to identify himself in terms of what he is not while at the same [time] potentially undermining his identity as his identity then depends partly upon a relationship with this potentially confrontational Other for its constitution" (Moore-Gilbert 117).18

This lack and its challenge to the white hero's identity are more pronounced in some narratives than others. And these instabilities are not simply the result of a deficiency in the colonizer's psyche but are a result of resistance by indigenous peoples. Scholars have argued that power did and does not simply flow in one direction from the cultural epicenter of empire to seamlessly totalize the "native," as if the peoples of empire simply rolled over to accommodate white imperial desires without resisting or transforming them in the colonial encounter, or what Mary Louise Pratt calls the "contact zone" between cultures.19 As Bill Ashcroft has written, "Colonized cultures have often been so resilient and transformative that they have changed the character of imperial culture itself. This 'transcultural' effect has not been seamless or unvaried, but it forces us to reassess the stereotyped view of colonized peoples' victimage and lack of agency" (Post-colonial Transformations 2).

This being said, I do not want to overstate the agency of the "native" and the tenuousness of imperial discourses in these narratives, for to do so would be to make the mistake of romanticizing discursive agency while wishing away what was—and arguably still is—a historical trajectory of material exploitation by the West, something I emphasize in Chapter 7. I think it is right to heed Terry Eagleton's warning in regard to imperialism, that "in denying that this constitutes a metanarrative, one should be careful as a Westerner that one is not subtly defusing it. It is curious that so much postcolonial theory should want to deny the systematic, world-historical nature of the imperial history it examines, its repetitions as well as its differences, thus in some sense letting it off the hook" (The Illusions of Postmodernism 111). Even when shaped by the "colonial encounter," the white writers of these narratives have the uncanny ability to elide any challenge to their identities by reinforcing their dominance over the "native." To say something has happened in the mind of a colonizer in terms of his subconscious recognition of the Other's power to shape his identity does not mean this recognition was (or is) brought to the forefront of his consciousness in a way that seriously undermined the power relationship between the colonizer and the colonized (Native American history, of course, has never been at a "postcolonial" stage).20 Even today, as Louis Owens has argued, "In order to be recognized, and to thus have a voice that is heard by those in control of power, the Native [American] must step into that mask and be the Indian constructed by white America. Paradoxically, of course, like the mirror, the mask merely shows the Euro-American to himself, since the masked Indian arises out of the European consciousness, leaving the Native behind the mask unseen, unrecognized for himself or herself," invisible like the protagonist in Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man (17). Or, as he says later, "After five hundred years of war, colonial infantilization and linguistic erasure, cultural denigration, and more, how and where does the Native writer discover a voice that may be heard at the metropolitan center" (19).
The three American narratives in this study intersect historically with the deployment of frontier ideology during the U.S. Progressive Era, in which middle- and upper-middle-class Anglo-Saxon males invoked frontier ideology as a means of regenerating national vitality in response to the "official" closing of the frontier with the 1890 census. William Cronon has pointed out that in the decades following the Civil War, the notion of "wilderness"—imagined as a landscape unsullied by human contact—"came to embody the national frontier myth, standing for the wild freedom of America's past and seeming to represent a highly attractive natural alternative to the ugly artificiality of modern civilization" ("Trouble With Wilderness" 78). In recent years Cronon and other critics have pointed out that the concept of the "wilderness," as well as other notions about "nature," is hardly "natural" but reflects the cultural values of various historical contexts. Additionally, critics have challenged Frederick Jackson Turner's culturally influential essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893) and its analysis of the frontier as an open space of "free land." Susan Kollin has argued that historically, ideas about the frontier "wilderness" as "pristine or untouched natural landscape devoid of any human contact" have been effectively employed by the dominant culture to ideologically erase the legitimacy of indigenous peoples (20). Rather than an "untouched" landscape, however, the frontier should be seen as a place "where cultures make contact" (Lape 5). For many Progressive-Era Anglo-Saxon males, no place embodied the importance of the culturally invented idea of the frontier wilderness more than the colony of Alaska, and mountaineering narratives reflect a tension between the fantasy of Alaska as a "pristine or untouched" landscape and the reality of its Native inhabitants.21

In its discursive construction as a frontier wilderness, Alaska gained mythic stature as a repository of frontier ideals in the imaginations of many of these males, a place where they could resurrect the manly virtues of the frontier hero. To Anglo-Saxon males Alaska was not just another frontier, it was the last frontier, and for them just how this frontier was to be defined had important ramifications for the future of national identity. The expeditions to climb Denali were not a historical footnote in the imagining of masculinity on the Alaskan frontier. Rather, I argue that expeditions to climb Denali were a central fixture in the imagining of Anglo-Saxon masculinity and national identity in Alaska because they were squarely in the lens of the Anglo-Saxon elite. The narratives both reflect the reasons for these males' keen interest in these expeditions and work to shape the desires of these males and their imperial and nationalist fantasies about Alaska as the "last frontier." I also argue that the expeditions to Denali were not only a way of trying to reassure white males of the nation's health after the closing of the frontier but were a self-conscious means of projecting U.S. imperial masculinity on the world stage.

Although limited, the studies of literary and cultural constructions of Progressive-Era Anglo-Saxon masculinity set in Alaska (or the imagined extension of Alaskan territory in the Yukon) move little beyond analyses of Jack London's works22 and have little to say about how conceptions of indigenous peoples relate to the national project as realized in Alaska during this era.23 These mountaineering narratives bolster white racial superiority by defining white masculinity over and against indigenous peoples, yet the narratives also demonstrate that the historical reality of Alaska Natives posed a genuine problem for Anglo-Saxon males and their construction of white frontier masculinity, having to be "managed" both institutionally and imaginatively to preserve the moral coherence of the expansionist national narrative. Moreover, criticism on Anglo-Saxon masculinity in Alaska also makes it seem as if the "virile" white male was the only version of white frontier masculinity conceivable there. In a sense, the frontier myth—perhaps because of the critical focus on works of fiction—tends to overshadow the historical reality of Alaska during the Progressive Era. Although he is generally secure in this portrayal of frontier masculinity, Frederick Cook's To the Top of the Continent must respond to the pressure Alaska Natives impose on his conception of masculinity—a pressure even more pronounced in Belmore Browne's The Conquest of Mount McKinley. Hudson Stuck's The Ascent of Denali challenges the dominant white masculine ethos of the period through his portrayal of Alaska Natives.

Significantly, the British mountaineering narratives challenge the dominant scholarly assumption regarding the relevance of British imperial adventure in the modern period. Scholars writing (directly and indirectly) on the male adventure hero in modern British literature, with few exceptions, are perhaps overly preoccupied with how British writers of the modern period—Conrad, Orwell, Greene, and Forster, to name a few—undermine the heroic masculine ideals of British imperial adventure and by extension the ideals of the British imperial project.24 Martin Green has noted that the romance of imperial adventure did not simply disappear in the modern period, but he suggests that its audience "narrowed" (Dreams of Adventure 321). This supposition stems from the fact that scholarship on imperial adventure of the modern period tends to concentrate on high culture, or more "literary" adventure narratives, and often neglects popular cultural forms of imperial
adventure. I have no significant quarrel with scholarship on specific modern authors who are antiadventure, but the Everest expeditions suggest that the imperial adventure tradition was very much alive and well—and not just for a small audience.

Although Younghusband and Hunt unquestionably represent the aristocratic class that had a vested interest in keeping the imperial adventure tradition alive, the Everest expeditions and these narratives about them—and in Hunt's case the public interest in his narrative—help to show that imperial adventure was not just relevant to this class of men but was a highly relevant cultural artifact to serve or expose the historical needs of the English national imagination. These mountaineering narratives, I argue, are self-assured imperial adventure narratives, openly celebrating the virtues of the British adventure hero and his imperial masculinity, as well as the ideals of the British imperial project. Their message is anything but cynical. Reuben Ellis has noted that "when events began to appear about the [1920s] expeditions, even months before their departure from London, the tone was laudatory, even breathless," openly and confidently celebrating the romance of adventure in the imperial tradition (36). Younghusband's narrative taps into the wide public interest in the Everest expeditions in an effort to reinvigorate heroic British masculinity to combat the malaise of post-Great War England. Richard Phillips has argued that by the 1950s, traditional British imperial adventure stories and their heroic version of masculinity had seen their day: "The unbound confidence and optimism of Ballantyne [in his The Coral Island], plausible in Victorian Britain, at least among juvenile readers, was not at all plausible in the early 1950s" because of the horrors of the war and the decline of the British Empire and empire (147). But if this is the case, then John Hunt's 1953 The Ascent of Everest should not have been an immediate best-seller. Yes, Hunt's narrative betrays colonial ambivalence given the reality of the British Empire's decline, but he is not pessimistic and relates a nostalgic attitude about England and imperial masculinity. Hunt's narrative suggests that in the 1950s the British were finding ways to recuperate their imperial project, not as an institutional entity but as a morally justified history. In his critique of the 1953 expedition, Tenzing Norgay's narrative reveals the persistence of the British masculine imperial ethos.

In fact, Tenzing Norgay's Tiger of the Snows responds directly to the imperial aura of both Hunt's book and the milieu of the 1953 expedition. Not content to remain under the patronizing umbrella of imperial discourse and imperial material reality, Tenzing Norgay challenges the cultural assumptions and degradations of imperialism and heroic white masculinity. Whereas the British eulogize the success of the expedition as an example of postimperial cooperation between the former imperial center and its former subjects, Tenzing Norgay exposes the expedition for its patronizing imperial aura. Employing the masculine rationalist discourse used to justify the imperial project, Tenzing Norgay debunks the central mythos of imperialism. Tenzing Norgay makes it clear that the former peoples of empire are not racially and culturally inferior as exemplified by the myths created by Western constructions of imperial knowledge. Tenzing Norgay counters English imperial masculine prowess and its rhetoric of power and conquest by offering a version of cooperation between peoples that is explicitly anti-imperial and antinationalistic.

Similarly, Jon Krakauer's best-selling Into Thin Air attempts to undermine heroic, imperial masculinity, implicitly exposing it for its bankrupt history in its connection to Mount Everest. Ultimately, Krakauer tries to deflect his own complicity with imperialism by assuaging his guilt about mountaineering on Everest. Not only does his narrative illustrate that masculinity is little more than a postmodern commodity to be bought and sold to the highest bidder, but it also exposes the invidious underbelly of the history of Everest expeditions and their relationship to Sherpas, as well as the contemporary fallout on Sherpa culture from imperialism as globalization.

Today, in fact, Everest is consumed by clients—paying up to $55,000 each—who want to be guided up the mountain. Sherpas die helping these clients (as well as experienced mountaineers) reach the top of Everest. These expeditions could not succeed without Nepalese Sherpas hauling much of the equipment up the mountain. Although one can easily understand how climbing expeditions economically benefit the Sherpas and the Nepalese economy, Babu Chiri Sherpa's response to why he climbed Mount Everest seems disconcerting. Babu Chiri Sherpa had reached the summit of Everest ten times, during nine of which he was a porter and guide to Western clients. Guiding and working as a porter, he also made the summit of Shishapangma two times, Cho Oyu six times, Dhaulagiri one time, Kangchenjunga one time, and Ama Dablam three times. Any time spent on a Himalayan mountain is dangerous, making Babu Chiri's résumé all the more impressive. When interviewed by Climbing magazine's Dave Pagel and asked why he climbed mountains, Babu Chiri replied that he climbed to make money to take care of his family and to build schools in the Solo Khumbu of Nepal. He made a dangerous speed ascent of Everest—setting a record of climbing from base camp to the summit in just under sixteen hours—to draw attention to himself so he could make more money. When Pagel asked, "If you had enough money to take care of your family and to build the schools, would you still
climb.” Babu Chiri responded, “If I have all the money, then I would put all my effort and energy towards the school project, and I wouldn’t be climbing. I wouldn’t have to climb” (35). Babu Chiri died on Everest on April 29, 2001, at age thirty-five. The fact that he risked his life for Western egos to provide basic human necessities and rights for his family and community underscores the sad reality of imperialism’s continuing legacy in regard to mountaineering.

The popularity of Krakauer’s Into Thin Air points to the growing visibility of mountaineering worldwide. In addition to Krakauer’s narrative, the enormously successful IMAX film Everest and popular films such as K2, Cliffhanger, and Vertical Limit have brought mountaineering to the wider public’s consciousness. Additionally, recent replications of Younghusband’s and Hunt’s narratives—as well as a single-edition trilogy of Cook’s, Browne’s, and Stuck’s narratives—plainly illustrate the continuing interest these narratives hold on the imagination of contemporary readers, informing our assumptions about exploration and adventure on Everest and on the “frontier” of Alaska. My hope is that showing the context in which these narratives were written will help to shed light not only on how national identity was conceived and packaged to suit the needs of specific historical audiences but also on how and why we conceive of mountains the way we do today. For instance, one could argue that these narratives influence the way the United States, England, and other nations project their identities. It is not by accident that just as the British couched their efforts to climb Mount Everest in competitive nationalist and imperialist discourse, so too did subsequent well-publicized national expeditions to Everest by the United States, France, Russia, China, Taiwan, and a host of other countries. Even in 1996, a team from South Africa climbed Everest to symbolically validate postapartheid national identity. Countries such as Taiwan and South Africa are not, of course, imperial in the same way England and the United States have been historically, but I would argue that they have inherited much of the Western imperial tradition of mountain climbing, informing their values in regard to the reasons they climb mountains—particularly Mount Everest. I do not mean to claim that my reading applies univocally to cultural constructions of mountains and mountaineering, for mountaineering, like any cultural artifact, has a rich and varied history that also challenges the paradigms of this study.

Moreover, as a result of the legacy of climbing Denali and Everest (and many other mountains around the world), mountains have also become the sorry recipients of imperialism’s patriarchal, adversarial relationship to the natural landscape. In the desire to conquer Everest and Denali, climbers have discarded tons of trash at the base camps, and the South and North Cols of Everest (not to mention elsewhere on the mountain where tattered ropes, tents, and equipment have been left) and Denali have been polluted by human equipment and feces left behind by hordes of climbers trying to reach the summits. Moreover, mountaineers help to sustain the trekking industry—an industry that, although providing income for Nepalese, has helped lead to the deforestation of the countryside as wood is burned for fuel to support the increasing presence of tourists. Although recent noble efforts have been made to clean up this environmental degradation on both Everest and Denali and to protect the resources of the Nepalese countryside, much of the residue of an increasingly globalized consumer culture remains as evidence of the Western world’s disregard for the environment in lands that belong to the Nepalese or, in the case of Denali, that have been usurped from Alaska Natives. One can only imagine the reaction in the United States, for instance, if Nepalese climbers showed up there to climb a mountain and left behind a mound of trash.

In the end, then, Richard Bangs’s romantic analysis of the heroic tradition of mountaineering falls well short of describing its nature. Like any cultural phenomenon, mountaineering is produced in language, in this case the language of heroic imperial masculinity and its ideologies. In these narratives, mountaineering is an aesthetic extension, rejection, or both of imperialism and the progressivist vision of civilization. The geographic locations and topography of the mountains become contested sites of masculine desires for national identity. No, a mountain is not climbed “because it’s there” but because masculine imperial or anti-imperial ideologies fuel the impetus to climb a mountain.
Include library before calling serial functions. port, err = serial.open(device, params). Opens given port, returns: port handle, or, in case of error, nil plus error message. Parameters: device port device name, required. params parameters table, optional, (defaults are in bold): baudrate 300, 600, 1200, 2400, 4800, 9600, 19200, 38400, 57600, 115200, 230400. parity "none", "even", "odd". The ascent propulsion system (APS) or lunar module ascent engine (LMAE) is a fixed-thrust hypergolic rocket engine developed by Bell Aerosystems for use in the Apollo lunar module ascent stage. It used Aerozine 50 fuel, and N2O4 oxidizer. Rocketdyne provided the injector system, at the request of NASA, when Bell could not solve combustion instability problems.