

## ‘Standing on the verge of another world’: Romanticism on the Volcano

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In 1834, the Scottish botanist David Douglas wrote of standing on the summit of the Hawaiian volcano Mauna Kea that ‘Man feels himself as nothing, as if standing on the verge of another world’.<sup>1</sup> The summit position is often seen as the ideal location for Romantic self-assertion: think of Wordsworth on Snowdon in the triumphant conclusion to his epic autobiography *The Prelude* or Byron’s evocation of ‘He who ascends to mountain-tops’ in Canto III of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*.<sup>2</sup> For Douglas, however, elevation threatened self-annihilation and transportation into ‘another world’. The botanist’s comment introduces an alternative culture of climbing and mountain writing that takes place beyond the more studied European locations and that challenges many of the key tropes usually associated with ascent.<sup>3</sup> While critical examinations of the Romantic-period literature of mountains and mountaineering have focused primarily on activities undertaken in Europe, the development of cultures of ascent was a global phenomenon, with an extraordinary number of pioneering climbs made in the Himalaya, the Andes, North America, Asia, Australasia, the Pacific, and non-mainland Europe (e.g. Iceland and Tenerife). The Romantic period witnessed numerous first ascents, failed attempts, and assorted mountain adventures around the world, including Joseph Banks’s 1772 climb to the volcanic crater of Mount Hekla in Iceland, made after the naturalist’s plans to participate in Captain Cook’s second voyage collapsed;<sup>4</sup> the first known ascent of a major peak in New Zealand, Mount Sparrman, in 1773 and the first known attempt to climb the Hawaiian volcano Mauna Loa in 1779, both by members of Captain Cook’s expeditions;<sup>5</sup> the Prussian naturalist Alexander von Humboldt’s 1806 attempt on Chimborazo in the Ecuadorean Alps, the most notable feat in an impressive mountaineering

career;<sup>6</sup> David Douglas's own first ascent in 1827 of Mount Brown in the Canadian Rockies, which he described as 'the highest [peak] yet known in the northern continent of America';<sup>7</sup> and the British Deputy Commissioner G. W. Traill's 1830 crossing of the 17,400 feet Pindari Kanda Pass in the Himalaya, a feat replicated only twenty times since.<sup>8</sup> These astonishing achievements arose out of a complex range of overlapping contexts and motivations, including voyages of exploration linked to the expansion of trade, colonialism and empire; scientific pursuits of botany and vulcanology; aesthetic quests for the sublime; cultures of 'curiosity'; wishes to prove or disprove religious beliefs; individual ambitions; and the desire to reach previously unattained heights and locations.

Global mountaineering involved not only the 'movements across oceans and seas' highlighted by this special edition but also demanding climbs to summits that in some cases were more than 4,000 metres above sea level. Ascents to elevated sites were crucial activities for many Indigenous peoples of mountainous locations but it was often only with the arrival of European or American travellers that attempts were made to reach the highest points. For example, on the island of Hawai'i, which will be the focus of this essay, the Native Hawaiians regularly ascended to the elevated volcanic crater of Kilauea which stands at 1,247 metres above sea level (roughly the height of Britain's loftiest peak, Ben Nevis). Indeed, this extraordinary location was a crucial site for the Indigenous population, as it continues to be for many Islanders today.<sup>9</sup> As David Kalākaua, the nineteenth-century historian of Hawai'i and its last king, writes in his *The Legends and Myths of Hawaii*: 'The crater of Kilauea was especially sacred to the goddess [Pele]' and offerings 'were thrown into the crater to appease the wrath of the goddess and avert a threatened overflow'.<sup>10</sup> However, it would appear to have only been with the Europeans' arrival that attempts were made to reach the island's highest volcanic summits, Mauna Loa (4,169 metres) and Mauna Kea (4,205 metres). Around the globe, as on Hawai'i, the climbing of many of the highest peaks was

initiated by individuals or groups non-native to the mountains' regions. However, these ascents generally required the support, knowledge and expertise of the areas' Indigenous populations, often highlighting the contrasting significance of mountains for different peoples and instigating contests over the peaks' meanings.

This essay will examine several accounts of the Romantic-period climbing of Hawai'i's volcanoes as a focus for examining whether 'standing on the verge of another world' forced the western writers to question their aesthetic, philosophic, religious and political beliefs, or whether the reaching of a summit afforded an opportunity for the reassertion of their values. The perceived challenges and opportunities of the 'other worlds' encountered when ascending peaks around the world were not just those of terrain but also those of the various symbolic meanings associated with mountains and the climbing of them that differed across cultures. Such differing responses to ascent are clearly if crudely registered by Lieutenant Charles Wilkes, the commander of the United States Exploring Expedition, which made an ascent of Mauna Loa in 1840-1. Wilkes writes of the Native Hawaiians' reluctance to ascend the volcano on a particular day as follows:

the natives refused to accompany [Lieutenant Budd] on account of its being Sunday, as they said. I am, however, inclined to believe that fear had something to do with it, for they never knew of any one having gone up this mountain before, and thought me mad for taking so much trouble to ascend it. They said that I must be in pursuit of gold and silver, or something to sell for money, as I never would take so much trouble, and spend so much money, unless it were to acquire great riches.<sup>11</sup>

Wilkes's reference to the Native Hawaiians' refusal to participate in climbing preparations on a Sunday indicates the extent to which their religious beliefs were being transformed by the considerable missionary work undertaken in Hawai'i, work in which volcano climbing would

play a considerable part, as we shall see. More generally, though, Wilkes's comment seeks to establish a contrast between the attitudes to ascent of himself and his own party and that of the Hawaiians. This contrast not only presents the Islanders' behaviour as motivated by 'fear', as opposed to the implied courage of the American explorers, but also establishes a hierarchy between the different understandings of the value of ascent. The Hawaiians held a complex belief system about the island's volcanoes and the validity of climbing them, as will be explored later, but by speculating on only their comments on the economic motivation for ascent, Wilkes implies a limitation to the Islanders' understanding of the ascent that doesn't grasp what he suggests is its greater value: 'they ... thought me mad for taking so much trouble to ascend it'. However, there is a powerful irony to Wilkes's implicit claim for his superior understanding of ascent; the Hawaiians' response to the climb does suggest their identification of economic gain as underpinning the ideology of scientific exploration that the United States Exploring Expedition exemplified.

Wilkes's reporting of Native Hawaiians' views on the planned Mauna Loa climb raises the crucial issue of Indigenous peoples' responses to high mountains ascents undertaken in their lands. These responses are as important and deserving of analysis as the western climbers' narratives although they can be challenging to reconstruct, given the relative lack of surviving contemporary ascent accounts from Indigenous perspectives and the issues of collecting and translating sources when they do exist. This challenge is especially the case in oral cultures such as Hawai'i. As the bibliographers Krickett Muabayashi and Thomas S. Dye observe, 'Hawaiians preserved history via an oral tradition, while the influence of foreigners began to call for a written record of traditional Hawaiian history'.<sup>12</sup> The relationship between oral and written histories is particularly significant in thinking about the climbing of Hawai'i's volcanoes, given the peaks and craters were a crucial part of native oral beliefs and traditions, sacred for the Native Hawaiians and associated with the

figure of Pele (values and associations that continue to this day).<sup>13</sup> Critics and historians have debated the merits and ideologies of attempts to collect, translate and publish Hawai‘i’s oral history, especially as many of these attempts have been seen as part of a colonising process that has served the priorities of the coloniser.<sup>14</sup> In his book *Displacing Natives: The Rhetorical Production of Hawai‘i*, Houston Wood has examined the challenges posed by gathering, translating and reproducing Hawai‘i’s oral traditions in written form, especially for those from outside the islands:

For many Hawaiians, Pele is associated primarily with an oral and not a textual or visual arts tradition. Some Euroamericans have managed to collect and transcribe fragments of the Native oral tradition, but these texts have tended to mistranslate and misidentify Hawaiian beliefs, often by relying on previous Euroamerican texts. A compounding of errors has thus made it likely that Euroamerican experts are becoming with each succeeding generation less and less knowledgeable about Hawaiian beliefs.<sup>15</sup>

Much of the most valuable recent scholarship on Hawaiian oral traditions, including those associated with the volcanoes, has been produced by Native Hawaiians, such as ku‘ualoha ho‘omanawanui’s *Voices of Fire: Reweaving the Literary Lei of Pele and Hi‘iaka*, which ‘examines Pele and Hi‘iaka mo‘olelo published between 1860 and 1928 from an Indigenous perspective, with a focus on Kanaka Maoli [Native Hawaiian] agency rather than displacement’.<sup>16</sup> There has also been considerable discussion of the volcanoes’ sacredness in the context of recent infrastructural developments, such as the plans for the placing of a thirty metre telescope on Mauna Kea’s summit.<sup>17</sup>

This essay will focus primarily on the western climbers’ ascent narratives but it will seek to problematise and challenge these narratives by exploring their own tensions and

ambiguities, by juxtaposing them where possible with the Native Hawaiian perspectives that they sometimes ventriloquise through reported speech and paraphrase (as in the example from Wilkes above), and through references to the Indigenous scholarship on Hawaiian history and beliefs. It seeks, where possible, to use elements of Indigenous history to highlight the contests over the mountains' meanings and to draw out the contrasting cultural perspectives on ascent, while also paying particular attention to the presentation and framing of the Native Hawaiians' roles in, and attitudes towards, volcano climbing.

The island of Hawai'i could be seen to exemplify the idea of an 'other world' to western climbers, for whom it was characterized by its distance 2,400 miles from the United States mainland, by the height of its volcanoes, by the instability and unpredictability of its volcanic terrain, and by the different meanings attached to its highest locations. The large-scale ascent and exploration of Mauna Loa made in 1840-1 by the United States Exploring Expedition, led by Wilkes, marked the culmination of a period of climbing on Hawai'i by western explorers that began in 1779, as part of Captain Cook's third voyage. During this sixty year period, 1779-1841, which offers a striking correlation with what is broadly thought of as the Romantic period, there were several successful and unsuccessful attempts to reach the summits of the two highest Hawaiian volcanoes, Mouna Loa and Mauna Kea, summits that appear to have been unclimbed prior to arrival of Europeans and North Americans. There were also numerous expeditions to the lower volcanic craters, particularly Kilauea, a sacred site for the Native Hawaiians who had been ascending to it long before their arrival.<sup>18</sup> The European and North American ascents were made within a number of contexts, including the voyages of Cook in 1779 and Vancouver in 1794, the expeditions made by American missionaries in the 1820s and after, the journey made by Admiral George Anson Byron to return the bodies of King Kamehameha II and Queen Kamamalu in 1825, and the individual expeditions made by explorers and scientists. These climbs resulted in ascent narratives in

varied forms – primarily published descriptions, private journals, and letters – from at least fifteen different writers, including the American adventurer and sailor John Ledyard, the naval officer John Rickman, three Scottish botanists (Archibald Menzies, James Macrea and David Douglas), three missionaries (William Ellis, Joseph Goodrich and Charles Stewart), the naturalist Andrew Bloxham, the artist Robert Dampier, the commander of the United States Exploring Expedition Charles Wilkes, as well as works by professional authors and scientists such as Maria Graham who drew on these accounts without having participated themselves. This remarkable set of Romantic-period ascent narratives offers a fascinating and understudied resource through which to examine what was at stake when climbing in ‘other worlds’.

1. ‘A feeling of insecurity’:<sup>19</sup> the unstable aesthetics of volcano climbing

Charles Wilkes reached the top of Mauna Loa in January 1841, describing his feelings on doing so as follows:

The very idea of standing on the summit of one of the highest peaks in the midst of this vast ocean, in close proximity to a precipice of profound depth, overhanging an immense crater ‘outrageous as a sea,’ with molten rock, would have been exciting even to a strong man; but the sensation was overpowering to one already exhausted by breathing the rarefied air, and toiling over the lava which this huge cauldron must have vomited forth in quantities sufficient to form a dome sixty miles in diameter, and nearly three miles in height. (p. 160)

Wilkes’s position would indeed have seemed an extreme one to him, positioned on a Pacific island some 2,400 miles from the United States mainland and standing on a summit some

4,169 meters above sea level, only 638m lower than the much-prized peak of Mont Blanc, the highest mountain in Western Europe. The commander of the United States Exploring Expedition had placed himself at the limits not only of height and distance but also of sensation. His summit moment was not simply one of conquest or triumph but rather of instability, standing precariously between self-assertion – even a ‘strong man’ would have been ‘excited’ by his predicament – and self-annihilation, physically and mentally ‘overpowered’ by altitude, effort and ‘profound depth’. For this leader of a major scientific expedition, the experience of extreme elevation was offset by a fear of falling into an immense crater that required the poetry of Milton’s description of Chaos from *Paradise Lost* to capture it: ‘They viewed the vast immeasurable abyss / Outrageous as a sea, dark, wasteful, wild’.<sup>20</sup> The volcanic other world of Mauna Loa needed words other than Wilkes’s own to adequately describe it. Wilkes’s instability of self was matched by the instability of the landscape, the volcano’s molten fabric calling into question the very ground upon which he stood and raising the issue of the relationship between the explorer and the natural world that was the subject of his endeavour. While Wilkes registers the volcano’s astonishing creative power, ‘vomiting forth’ enough lava to form ‘a dome sixty miles in diameter, and nearly three miles in height’, his very act of giving measurements starts to contain this extraordinary natural phenomenon within a human and scientific frame of reference, one structured by the whole rationale of an unprecedented expedition of scientific exploration, measuring and mapping.

Wilkes’s summit description balances a sense of physical and existential instability caused by the experience of the volcanic ‘other world’ with a desire to comprehend, measure and categorise that ‘other world’. This desire to measure and categorise the Hawaiian volcanoes was part of the imperial and colonial agenda that underpinned many of the voyages of which the ascents were part, particularly those of Cook in 1779, Vancouver in 1794, and



the United States Exploring Expedition itself.<sup>21</sup> As Houston Wood writes of the first of these major voyages: ‘Cook was ordered to collect knowledge “as far as your time will allow,” but even this part-time occupation was to focus on the acquisition of information that might help establish new colonies and defeat England’s Euroamerican enemies’.<sup>22</sup> However, those attempting the earliest climbs of Mouna Loa and Mauna Kea presented their motivations for ascent in very much the same terms as those used to justify ascent in Britain and Europe in the same period: as driven by a vague sense of ‘curiosity’, as a search for botanical specimens, and as the desire for an elevated view.<sup>23</sup> The first known attempt to climb Mauna Loa was made in 1779 during Cook’s third voyage by the expedition’s botanist David Nelson, ‘four other gentlemen’ and a Hawaiian chief who acted as guide, according to John Rickman in his *Journal of Captain Cook’s last voyage to the Pacific Ocean*.<sup>24</sup> Rickman reports that after ‘two days travelling and two nights thro’ a savage country’, the party of sailors and Native Hawaiians were forced to return, ‘without being able to satisfy their curiosity’, adding that ‘the only advantage they accrued from their journey, was, a curious assortment of indigenous plants and some natural curiosities, collected by Mr. Nelson’.<sup>25</sup> The American explorer and sailor John Ledyard, who was a member of the unsuccessful ascent party, also presented the climb as motivated by ‘curiosity’, though he claimed the idea of the climb as his own:

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of January I sent a billet on board to Cook, desiring his permission to make an excursion into the interior parts of the country proposing if practicable to reach the famous peak that terminated the height of the island. My proposal was not only granted, but promoted by Cook, who very much wanted some information respecting that part of the island, particularly the peak, the tip of which is generally covered with snow, and had excited great curiosity.<sup>26</sup>

Here, the shared sense of ‘curiosity’ about the peak aligns with the ‘information’ gathering element of Cook’s mission, bringing together the climbing party’s amateurish quest for the new or the surprising with the broader colonial and imperial collecting of factual material. For Ledyard, as for Nelson, the failed expedition did have its rewards, though for him they were visual rather than botanical. Describing the ‘extensive prospect’ from one elevated spot, Ledyard writes as follows:

It was exquisitely entertaining. Nature had bestowed her graces with her usual negligent sublimity. The town of Kireekakooa and our ship in the bay created the contrast of art as well as the cultivated ground below, and as every object was partly a novelty it transported as well as convinced.<sup>27</sup>

Not having reached the volcanic crater, or indeed having ascended particularly close to the summit, Ledyard presents the visual rewards of climbing in the conventional terms of eighteenth-century landscape appreciation, with the view conforming to the rules of ‘art’ and a feminised ‘Nature’ offering exquisite entertainment for the male viewer.

Archibald Menzies, the Scottish botanist who led the first successful ascent of Mauna Loa in 1794 while part of George Vancouver’s expedition, similarly described the pleasures of his party’s ascent in conventional visual terms, regularly framing the landscape through the popular eighteenth-century concept of the ‘prospect’. In a section of his journal entitled ‘Extensive View from the Top’, Menzies writes as follows:

The day being clear and serene when we arrived upon the top of the mountain, the extensive prospect which rushed upon our sight on every side may be more easily conceived than described. The whole western side of Hawaii lay beneath us with its indented shore. Bays, villages, plantation and forests depicted as it were like a map upon the vast sheet of extended ocean before us, while fleecy clouds hovering at a

distance appeared like an immense extent of frozen country with towering mountains and deep valleys of softest shades, every moment varying their aerial shapes and situations, and presenting the most beautiful prospects of picturesque scenery over which the eye could wander without weariness, and continue imparting to the mind new felt pleasures.<sup>28</sup>

Here, as throughout his ascent narrative, Menzies draws heavily on the period's conventions of summit top descriptions, framing the Hawaiian landscape as a series of 'prospects' that conform to the category of the 'picturesque' (p. 165, p. 175). Menzies's viewing position is one of unlimited freedom, with the eye able to 'wander without weariness'. It is also one of control; the analogy drawn between the landscape and the map – 'as it were like a map' – places the viewer in a position of visual mastery, omnisciently able to look down on the world below.<sup>29</sup> Despite the landscape's initial animation – 'which rushed upon our sight' – and the gesture towards the failure of description characteristic of the sublime – 'may be more easily conceived than described' – the experience of elevation for Menzies is ultimately pleasurable rather than terrifying or horrifying.

Ledyard's and Menzies's descriptions of the elevated views gained from ascending Mauna Loa would seem to confirm many traditional understandings of mountain climbing, that it offers an assertion of human dominance over the natural world and of one type of subjectivity (that of the climber) over another (the non-climber). This power relation is gendered explicitly in Ledyard's account, with Nature 'bestowing her graces', and implicitly in Menzies, with the climber experiencing new pleasures as his eye wanders without weariness over 'the most beautiful prospects of picturesque scenery' (the 'beautiful' is, of course, strongly associated with the female in the period's aesthetic theory, an association usually traced back to Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas*

of the *Sublime and Beautiful* of 1757).<sup>30</sup> This assertion of masculine subjectivity through ascending and viewing can be linked to other forms of power that will be discussed later in this essay, most obviously the specific power relations between the Europeans and the Hawaiians and the issues of colonialism and science.

These early accounts of climbing Hawaiian volcanoes by Ledyard and Menzies show how the landscapes of this ‘other world’ could initially be assimilated into familiar aesthetic frameworks and dynamics of elevated viewing. However, once the climbing parties eventually reached the volcanoes’ summits, they were presented with a far more radical challenge to their understandings and sensibilities. Unlike the vast majority of European mountains, the highest points of these peaks did not only offer an elevated viewing station for looking outward on the landscape but also confronted the climber with the horror of looking into the volcanic crater itself.<sup>31</sup> The American missionary Charles Stewart, captured the sense of shock on first encountering the volcanic crater of Kilauea in his *Private Journal of a Voyage to the Pacific Ocean*:

There are scenes to which description, and even painting, can do no justice; and in conveying any adequate impression of which they must ever fail. Of such, an elegant traveller rightly says, ‘the height, the depth, the length, the breadth, the combined aspect, may all be correctly given, but the mind of the reader will remain untouched by the emotions of admiration and sublimity which the eye-witness experiences.’ That which here burst on our sight was emphatically of this kind; and to behold it without singular and deep emotion, would demand a familiarity with the more terrible phenomena of nature, which few have the opportunity of acquiring.—Standing at an elevation of one thousand five hundred feet, we looked into a black and horrid gulf, not less than eight miles in circumference, so directly beneath us, that, in appearance, we might, by a single leap, have plunged into its lowest depth. The hideous immensity

itself, independent of the many frightful images which it embraced, almost caused an involuntary closing of the eyes against it. But when to the sight is added the appalling effect of the various unnatural and fearful noises—the muttering and sighing—the groaning and blowing—the every agonised struggling of the mighty action within—as a whole, it is too horrible! And for the first moment I felt like one of my friends, who, on reaching the brink, recoiled and covered his face, exclaiming, ‘*call it weakness, or what you please, but I cannot look again*’.<sup>32</sup>

Stewart’s account enumerates the different methods through which the spectacle of the volcanic crater might be captured and contained: description, painting, measurement, and the aesthetic categories of the sublime. However, the crater’s combined visual and aural power defeats any such attempts to comprehend the natural phenomenon which goes beyond the sublime pleasurable experience of terror – ‘it is too horrible!’. This failure to ‘do justice’ to the volcano is enacted in the turn away from the volcano but is also linked to the possibility of the viewer’s extinction, of plunging into the lowest depths of the abyss.

For Stewart, the volcanic crater was the most extraordinary natural phenomenon he had witnessed and in its emotional powers surpassed the works of both art and the imagination: he commented that the crater presented ‘an exhibition of ever varying fireworks [...] surpassing in beauty and sublimity all that the ingenuity of art ever devised’ and that ‘its action was more horribly sublime than anything I ever imagined to exist, even in the ideal visions of unearthly things’.<sup>33</sup> The sublime was regularly invoked by those seeking to describe the volcanic craters, though this version of the sublime was one from which those who experienced it frequently sought relief, like Stewart’s friend. Wilkes similarly wrote of the crater of Mauna Loa that ‘I can never hope again to witness so sublime a scene, to gaze on which excited such feelings that I felt relieved when I turned from it to engage in the

duties that had called me to the spot' (p.160). The volcanic craters and the emotions they produced could not easily be contained within specific categories, as Stewart himself comments: 'It is difficult to say whether sensations of admiration or of terror predominated, on reaching the bottom of the tremendous spot', later commenting that 'It was at once the most splendidly beautiful and dreadfully fearful of spectacles'.<sup>34</sup> Many accounts similarly register how the volcanoes took the viewer beyond the conventional emotions of the sublime into a more unsettling experiences. Stewart's fellow missionary William Ellis described the 'spectacle' of the crater as 'sublime, and appalling', terms echoed by a third missionary mountaineer, Joseph Goodrich, who wrote that 'The scene was terrific and appalling' adding that 'I know not that it is possible to give any adequate conception of it, unless actually beheld by one's own eyes'.<sup>35</sup> For Ellis the experience of looking into the crater was petrifying; he writes that 'Astonishment and awe for some moments deprived us of speech, and, like statues, we stood fixed to the spot, with our eyes rivetted on the abyss below' (p. 130).

While it may be tempting to read these expressions of terror and horror as standard tropes of the sublime, it is worth remembering that these writers were aware that they were not standing on solid ground. Wilkes describes the perils of walking near Mauna Loa's summit crater as follows:

In traversing these fissures we were in great danger, and experienced much difficulty in walking on the recent stream that seemed to have flowed from them, for the snow which covered the lava concealed the new and weak places. The idea of being precipitated down a chasm of one hundred and fifty or two hundred feet deep, was by no means agreeable. Our blood was occasionally stirred by breaking through with one leg. (p. 158)

For Wilkes, while the emotions felt looking into the crater are comparable to those that would be experienced when viewing ‘the scene of some dreadful conflagration’, on the volcano ‘there is in addition a feeling of insecurity, arising from the fires that are raging around, and are known to exist underneath’. (p.176) When gazing into the volcano’s abyss, aesthetic instability is matched by, and is indeed a consequence of, physical instability.

Rather than finding their gazes directed outwards to the surrounding prospect or upwards to the sky, then, those on the summits of Hawaiian volcanoes found themselves staring into an ‘abyss’, to quote Wilkes, Ellis and even John Milton. Not only did the volcanic crater challenge conventional ways of experiencing and writing about ascent, it offered a further physical risk due to the additional ‘feeling of insecurity’ caused by the terrain. Moreover, this sense of insecurity was further exacerbated by the choice of many parties to descend into the crater itself. Wilkes describes a descent into the Kilauea crater he made with the naturalist Dr. Judd and ‘a party of natives, to endeavour to obtain some gases’ (p. 169). Wilkes comments that he himself ‘was somewhat uneasy and doubtful relative to his descent and prospect of obtaining the objects of his search, for I knew about the state of the crater’ and the ‘natives .... urged numerous objections’ (p. 169). These doubts and objections proved well founded ‘when one of my men suddenly sunk in up to his middle, which at once caused us to make a halt, and examine the ground’ (pp.169-70). Wilkes adds ‘Such was the terror that came over him, that he crawled with great rapidity to a place where he could find a point of safety or firmer ground, to rise upon’ (p.170).

The Hawaiian volcanoes’ challenge to the aesthetic ideas, physical safety and even sense of identity of western climbers is most strikingly seen in the writings and experiences of the Scottish botanist, David Douglas, with whom this essay opened. Douglas has a notable place in the history of the climbing of Hawai‘i’s volcanoes and in exploratory mountaineering more generally. Having already made pioneering climbs in North America,

he became the first known person to have reached the summits of both Mauna Loa and Mauna Kea, a feat he achieved in a three-week period in 1834. Douglas became obsessed with Hawai'i's volcanoes; one of his last pieces of writing includes the phrase 'I must return to the volcano, if it is only to look – to look and admire'.<sup>36</sup> The botanist wrote extensively and evocatively about the volcanoes, seeking to accumulate as much scientific data as possible while also experiencing the power of the natural phenomenon; indeed, he himself describes how the sight of the peak distracted him from his scientific pursuits, commenting on one occasion that 'the spectacle became so commanding that I lost a fine night for making astronomical observation by gazing on the volcano, the illumination of which was but little diminished by a thick haze that set in at midnight' (p. 40).

Douglas seems particularly to have felt his own inadequacy as a writer when seeking to describe the volcanoes. He commented in his journal of the crater of Mauna Kea that 'It were difficult, nay, almost impossible, to describe the beauty of the sky and the glorious scenes of the day', adding that 'The lava is terrible beyond description', and wrote to his mentor, the botanist William Jackson Hooker, of Mauna Loa's summit that 'It is difficult to attempt describing such an immense place' (p. 51, p. 63). For Douglas, the intellectual challenge of comprehending and describing the volcanoes was linked to his sense of the danger inherent in his endeavours. When he descended into Kilauea's crater, he observed that 'A most uncomfortable feeling is experienced when the traveller becomes aware that the lava is hollow and faithless beneath his tread' (p. 42), prompting him to make the following remarkable statement:

Of all the sensations in nature, that produced by earthquakes or volcanic agency is the most alarming: the strongest nerves are unstrung and the most courageous mind feels weakened and unhinged, when exposed to either. (p. 42)



Here, Douglas presents his volcanic experiences as comparable to earthquakes in their power to destroy a stable sense of subjectivity, unstring nerves, and weaken and unhinge even the ‘most courageous’ minds. In another letter, the botanist develops this idea of the volcanoes’ undoing of selfhood to show how his experience of this natural phenomenon had destabilized him physically, vocationally, and intellectually:

A sight of the volcano fills the mind with awe [...] The strongest man is unstrung; the most courageous heart is daunted in approaching this place. How insignificant are the works of man in their greatest magnitude and perfection, compared with such a place. I have exhausted both body and mind, examining, measuring, and performing various experiments and *now, I learn that I know nothing.* (p.59).

Douglas’s sense of the volcano as a threat not only to his physical being but also to conventional notions of selfhood recalls his statement used at the opening of this essay, that ‘Man feels himself as nothing, as if standing on the verge of another world’ (p. 32). For Douglas, the volcano baffles not only his sense of self but also space. It similarly undoes a sense of time; in one of his final letters he informs his correspondent that ‘One day there, madam, is worth one year of common existence’ (p. 60).

At points in his writings, Douglas finds some response to the threat of the volcano in what knowledge he does have and in his sense of divine power. He recovers from the nadir of his despairing ‘I know nothing’ with the phrase ‘this much I know’ and gives a statement of his understanding of how volcanoes work, though even this attempt at affirmation ends with the admissions that ‘Of all modes of material combination volcanoes are the most complicated’ (p. 59). Douglas places his sense of man’s nothingness within a religious framework, stating that the volcanic landscape

[...] impresses on [Man's] mind with double force the extreme helplessness of his condition, an object of pity and compassion, utterly unworthy to stand in the presence of a great and good, and wise and holy God, and to contemplate the diversified works of His hands! (pp. 32-3)

Though reaching the mountain's summit provides the gratification of 'witnessing the wonderful works of God', Douglas writes that it is with 'thankfulness' that he descends into 'a climate more congenial to our natures' (p. 58).

For David Douglas, then, the 'other world' of Hawaiian volcanoes with which he became obsessed was not an environment that enabled him to assert himself as a conqueror of nature or to enact a Romantic realisation of the self. Rather, it posed a profound threat that went beyond the physical, undermining his sense of time, space and identity, calling into question his status as a knowing being, and reducing him to 'nothing'. And this threat of annihilation was enacted in the strange end to Douglas's Hawaiian exploration and, indeed, to his life. While preparing for another ascent of Mauna Loa, Douglas disappeared and was later found dead in a pit dug to catch bulls, into which he had likely fallen by accident (though there has been some speculation that he may have been murdered for money). Of Mauna Loa's summit crater, Douglas had written that 'The spectator is lost in terror and admiration at beholding an enormous sunken pit' (p. 63), another indication of how the volcano disoriented him. There is a sad irony in the fact that Douglas's own sense of being 'lost' – in terror and admiration, in time, and in space – when confronted with the 'enormous sunken pit', would be realised in the far less spectacular pit in which he died.

2. 'No mistake as to who had been there':<sup>37</sup> writing and erasing summit presence

David Douglas's experiences of Hawai'i's volcanoes in 1834 forcefully show how climbing in 'other worlds' undermined many of the assumptions about ascent usually associated with mountains and mountaineering in Europe during the Romantic period. The island's challenge to ascent as a means of asserting what Marlon B. Ross has called 'self-quest and world conquest' might seem all the more powerful once the climbs of Hawai'i's volcanoes are understood not as individual triumphs of the self of the kind portrayed in representations such as Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Mists* but as collective endeavours that were entirely reliant upon the knowledge, skills and physical effort of the Native Hawaiians who participated in them.<sup>38</sup> However, while an examination of these ascents undermines the writers' claims for reaching the summit as an individual triumph, it also reveals that many representations of the climbs can be seen as part of a larger process of 'world conquest', asserting a binary hierarchy that claims summit achievements as entirely those of European and North American climbers. In their ascent narratives, these climbers present themselves as overcoming the challenges not only of the terrain but also those ostensibly posed by the Native Hawaiians themselves.

Though Wilkes's description of his summit moment on Mauna Loa in January 1841 quoted at the start of this essay focused on his own individual experience, his ascent was in fact part of a major collective mission: the first United States government-sponsored scientific expedition to the Pacific. During the winter of 1840-1, the expedition focused its efforts on Mauna Loa and other Hawaiian volcanoes, measuring, mapping, drawing, describing and descending into the extraordinary natural phenomena. The Mauna Loa climbing party, which at one point numbered around 400 (many of whom were drawn from the island's population), spent 28 days on the mountain, including 3 weeks' residence close to the summit, living in a 'walled village' they constructed next to the crater (p. 165). The

symbolism of this volcano-top enterprise becomes clear when Wilkes describes the actions of himself and another crew member upon leaving the encampment:

Previous to our departure, I had the words ‘Pendulum Peak, January 1841,’ cut in the lava within our village. J. G. Clarke, one of the seamen belonging to the Vincennes, who made these marks came to me and desired, on the part of the men, that I would allow them to add to it U. S. Ex. Ex., in order that there might be no mistake as to who had been there; to this I readily gave my consent. This was the same man who had been wounded at Malolo, and one of the best and most useful we had with us; in himself he united many employments, as a seamen, drummer, fifer, cook, and stone-cutter; knew a little of physic, sang a good sailor’s song, and was withal a poet! (p. 166)

The act of naming has long been linked to processes of colonialism and imperialism.<sup>39</sup> In this instance, the volcano is literally marked in the name of science; the nomenclature ‘Pendulum Peak’ refers to the equipment used at this part of encampment (one of several names Wilkes gave to different ‘stations’ on the volcano). Through physical inscription, cutting into the lava itself, Wilkes defines the volcano in terms of his own expedition both spatially and temporally. The Lieutenant’s claiming of the volcano is then reinforced by the figure of the seaman Clarke whose request makes explicit the colonial agenda inherent in this inscriptive act; the further addition of ‘U. S. Ex. Ex.’ to the carving means ‘there might be no mistake as to who had been there’.

Wilkes idealises Clarke as the spokesperson for the ‘U. S. Ex. Ex.’; not only is the seaman ‘one of the best and most useful’ among the crew, but he ‘united many employments’, bringing together a range of different roles, including medical and cultural ones (‘knew a little of physic ... withal a poet!’). Clarke’s many attributes – maritime,

medical, and cultural – lend further authority to the defining of Mauna Loa in the name of the United States Exploring Expedition. For Wilkes, Clarke’s representative value is further heightened by the fact that he ‘had been wounded at Malolo’, shedding his blood in the cause of American exploration. But this reference to Malolo also makes explicit the violence that occurred as part of this national scientific mission. When the expedition had visited this volcanic island earlier in 1840, disagreements with local Indigenous people during negotiations over food led to the death of two of Wilkes’s crew. Wilkes retaliated with an attack on the village, issuing the order to ‘destroy *every thing* save women and children’. His men subsequently killed 87 inhabitants, including women, and destroyed all the village’s crops.<sup>40</sup>

Clarke’s hope that the addition of ‘U. S. Ex. Ex.’ to the inscription ‘Pendulum Peak, January 1841’ would mean ‘there might be no mistake as to who had been there’ was itself mistaken, and deliberately misleading, in that it failed to acknowledge another group of people ‘who had been there’, the Native Hawaiians who were crucial to the ascent. As Wilkes himself describes, the ascent party included ‘two hundred bearers of burdens’ – a phrase that equates the load carrying Hawaiians with the livestock that was also taken onto the volcano – as well as ‘a large number of hangers-on, in the shape of mothers, wives, and children, equalling in number the bearers, all grumbling and complaining of their loads’ (p. 118). While the ‘mothers, wives, and children’ did not make it to the summit encampment, many of the ‘bearers’ did, despite suffering like the rest of the party as a result of the altitude and the cold temperature. Wilkes acknowledges the Hawaiian presence at the summit camp when he describes how on one occasion ‘we found the village filled with half-naked natives ... and it became necessary to accommodate some forty natives with lodging and comforts’ (p. 161). Moreover, Wilkes and his men were guided on the volcano by ‘two guides [... who were ...] perfectly familiar with the mountain’, with Wilkes commenting that ‘One of them was a

celebrated bird-catcher, called Keaweehu, who had been the guide of Lowenstern' (p. 134), a reference to an 1839 Mauna Loa ascent.

Acting as guides and carriers (and anticipating the roles played by Sherpas in Himalayan ascents from the early twentieth century onwards), Native Hawaiians were crucial to an expedition that Wilkes thought both highly successful and worth memorializing. Yet their role remained uncredited in his act of summit-based naming and memorialization. Moreover, Wilkes's naming and inscriptions imposed themselves onto already existing Hawaiian place names. He reports that on one occasion the guide Keaweehu 'gave us the name of the terminal crater, as Moku-a-weo-weo, and of that south of it as Pohakuohanalei' (p. 150). As a number of indigenous Hawaiian scholars including Abraham Pi'ianai'a and Mary Kawena Pukui have shown, such traditional place names were particularly important in Hawaiian culture, bringing together landscape, history and narrative. Houston Wood summarises as follows:

In Hawaiian geographic thought, place names speak the shifting relationships and the narratives that are spoken to create and maintain those relationships. These names participate in a complex and changing history much like Hawaiian places themselves are understood to do. As Abraham Pi'ianai'a explains, such traditional Hawaiian names thus display 'a knowledge of place, history, and personal relationships.'

Euroamerican settlers disrupted this Native system of naming, replacing it with a system that arrests fluidity and ignores Native history in order to create static symbols suitable for deeds and maps.<sup>41</sup>

Wilkes's renaming of the summit as 'Pendulum Peak' and his and Clarke's act of inscribing it with 'U. S. Ex. Ex' so 'there might be no mistake as to who had been there' not only writes the Hawaiians central to the ascent of the mountain out of that history but overwrites and

obliterates their own names for the craters. Wilkes and Clarke impose other words on this other world, redefining the volcano as a symbol of American exploratory and scientific triumph.

The climbing of Hawai‘i’s highest volcanoes was never a purely European and North American initiative but involved the permission, support and expertise of the local rulers. Hawaiian royalty were central to the successful and unsuccessful attempts on Mauna Loa and Mauna Kea from the outset. As noted by Rickman, who participated in the first known attempt on Mauna Loa, the ascent party ‘requested the king’s permission, and a guide to attend them, which was readily granted’, adding that ‘no less than twenty Indian chiefs contended which should accompany them’.<sup>42</sup> The knowledge and authority of King Kamehameha were major factors in Menzies’s ultimate success in reaching Mauna Loa’s summit. Of his first attempt, Menzies describes how Kamehameha not only ‘readily consented’ to his ‘journey up the mountains’, but ‘as an encouragement to the undertaking, he promised that he would send particular people along with me to conduct and protect me, and to supply me during the journey with everything the country afforded’ (p. 73). Indeed, the King’s knowledge as well as his willingness to provide provisions, local guides and carriers was crucial to Menzies’s ultimate success in climbing the volcano. The botanist describes how prior to beginning this ascent, he ‘consulted with Kamehameha, not only on the means, but likewise on the best route for accomplishing such an object, when he assured me that the most likely way of succeeding was to ascend it from the south side of the island, to which I must go by water in one of his canoes’ (p. 175). Hawaiian rulers continued to play an important role in ascents of the island’s volcanoes throughout the period. The botanist James Macrae describes how for his party’s 1825 ascent of Mauna Kea he ‘got Lord Byron to gain Queen Kaumanna’s consent for me to have 7 or 8 natives to accompany me to Mouna Kaah’, while Maria Graham adds that for the climb to Kilauea made by members of the same

crew, 'The queen, Kahumanu, in order to facilitate the expedition, sent several of her vassals beforehand to construct resthouses on the way, and provided a sufficient number of carriers for provisions, cots, and whatever else might be necessary' .<sup>43</sup>

While the gaining of royal approval was essential for the climbs of Hawai'i's volcanoes, in practical terms the ascents were only made possible by the guiding and particularly the carrying undertaken by members of the island's population. The Westerners involved in the climbs occasionally give credit to the guides in their accounts; Menzies, for example, writes that 'had we not good guides with us, we should have met with insurmountable difficulties' (p. 189). However, it is rare to find such acknowledgments of the value of the increasingly large support parties of Native Hawaiians (Lord Byron's and Charles Wilkes's parties included 100 and 200 'bearers' respectively, with Wilkes estimating that the number in his party was doubled by 'hangers on'). Rather the narratives tend to focus on the Indigenous members of the ascent parties at the times when they resist or oppose the ascents, often on practical grounds. Menzies recounts an incident when, upon 'looking up the side of Mauna Loa',

the lower edge of the snow did not appear to be far from us, and as the ascent seemed smooth and easy, we proposed to make an attempt to reach it, but the chief and all the rest of the natives were very much against it, declaring that if we should chance to succeed in overcoming the difficulties, the cold on the mountain was so intense as to kill us. (p. 164)

While the different attitudes of the western and native climbers to ascent became a feature of some accounts, the Native Hawaiians were far less effectively clothed and shod to cope with the demands of high altitude volcano climbing, with its challenges of extreme cold and heat



and rough terrain. Menzies describes how when walking on ‘fields of loose and peaked lava, the most dreary and rugged I ever beheld’,

Our shoes were torn and cut to pieces by the lava that we could scarcely drag them after us, and the natives were crippled, notwithstanding they had matted for themselves a kind of sandals to defend their feet. (p. 189)

While many of the ascent accounts comment on the complexities of organising climbing parties, Charles Wilkes makes the ‘management’ of the Native Hawaiians a major feature of his narrative, creating a very obvious binary between the western and native members of the party that seeks to establish the superiority of the former over the latter. In his account, the success of the expedition is as much about organising the Islanders as it is about overcoming the challenging terrain. The need to ‘manage the natives’ is a recurrent idea in the opening of his account, during which he describes his friend Dr Judd’s role as that of the party’s ‘physician, interpreter, adviser, and manager of the natives’ (p. 112) and his recruited interpreters as ‘several graduates of the high-school at Lahaina, whom I thought necessary in the management of the natives we were about to employ’ (p. 112). The attitude of Wilkes and Judd towards the Hawaiians is revealed when the latter designs a system whereby ‘each of the natives employed by us should be designated by a tin disk, in order to keep them in some sort of order or discipline’ (p. 115). Wilkes remarks that ‘I well knew that no confidence was to be placed in the natives’ (p. 125) and his imposition of ‘order and discipline’ is seen in a number of actions during the expedition. These include staging the ‘trial of a deserter’, suppressing ‘a rebellion’ by firing a mortar, and ‘mak[ing] an example’ of a Native Hawaiian who had suggested striking for higher wages by turning him off the expedition and sending him away (p. 132, p. 125).

Wilkes represents the Hawaiians as an unruly collective, commenting that on one occasion ‘there was an uproar resembling that of Bedlam’, repeatedly describing the party as ‘a sort of mob’ and ‘mob-like’, and remarking that ‘No person who has not seen a large collection of South Sea natives, can imagine the noise and confusion that prevailed’ (pp. 116, 119, 120, 130, 116). The racism informing Wilkes’s depiction becomes even clearer when he writes that ‘Selfishness is a predominant trait in the character of the Hawaiians, and when they are thus associated together, it shows itself more strongly than at other times’ (p.133). Wilkes’s racism is also seen when he uses what Houston Wood has termed ‘a rhetoric of revulsion’, a set of representations that Wood argues was first used by the American missionaries to Hawai‘i in the 1820s.<sup>44</sup> When Wilkes describes ‘the distribution of food to the multitude’, he comments that ‘during which time much confusion and noise existed’ and adds that ‘The natives put me in mind of wild beasts in this respect; they seldom make any noise unless their appetite and ease are in some way concerned’ (p. 119). During one extended description of ‘our company’ in which he again equates the Hawaiians with animals and describes their terror at a wild hog as a ‘a source of much amusement to us’, Wilkes gives a revealing confession of his own ignorance, his lack of concern, and his refusal to take responsibility for the wellbeing of the Native Hawaiians, remarking that ‘I felt happy in not understanding the language, and of course was deaf to their complaints’, adding ‘they had reason to complain, not of us, but of each other’ (pp. 118-9).

Wilkes’s erasure of the Native Hawaiians from his summit memorial was part of a wider colonial vision that saw the Islanders not as fellows in ascent but as a rebellious mob who needed to be ‘managed’ through ‘order and discipline’ and as bearers of burden akin to the expedition’s animals. For Wilkes, who wrote of his ascent that ‘every part of the objects of my ascent of Mauna Loa had been fully accomplished’ (p. 162), the achievement of his climb was not only gaining scientific data but also asserting superiority over the Native

Hawaiians. Wilkes sought to transform the volcano's summit crater into an exclusively American location, one that symbolised the success of the 'U. S. Ex. Ex.' and ensured that 'there might be no mistake as to who had been there'.

3. 'This worship is now no more':<sup>45</sup> conversion at the crater

By renaming the Moku-a-weo-weo crater 'Pendulum Peak', Wilkes participated in the wider colonial claiming of landscape and reconstruction of its meaning. His inscription of Mauna Loa's summit in the name of American science and exploration also ignored another crucial aspects of the volcanoes' meaning for the island's indigenous population: their sacredness and their role in defining national history. For the Hawaiians, to climb the volcanoes was to walk on ground sacred to the goddess Pele, as outlined by the nineteenth century Hawaiian historian David Kalākaua:

In the pantheon of ancient Hawaiian worship—or, rather, of the worship of the group from the twelfth century to the nineteenth—the deity most feared and respected, especially on the island of Hawaii, was the goddess Pele. She was the queen of fire and goddess of volcanoes, and her favorite residence was the vast and ever-seething crater of Kilauea, beneath whose molten flood, in halls of burning adamant and grottoes of fire, she consumed the offerings of her worshippers and devised destruction to those who long neglected her or failed to respect her prerogatives.<sup>46</sup>

These traditional Native Hawaiian beliefs were very much in evidence during the volcano climbs. As Wilkes's party ascended Mauna Loa, he noted that an Okea tree they passed was 'known as the boundary of the territory of Pele, or the goddess of the volcano', adding that 'In bygone days no native dared venture beyond it without an offering to Pele, under penalty

of her vengeance' (p. 121). In contrast to the inscriptive, writing culture of Wilkes and his party – demonstrated in both the volcano-top inscription and Wilkes's five-volume *Narrative* in which it is described – Pele was a figure of oral history.<sup>47</sup> Wilkes comments that 'Many strange traditions are told' of Pele and describes how he and Dr. Judd,

while at the volcano, listened to one of these long traditions from a young man named Kiwe, a descendant of one of the "tradition bearers," who were employed specially to hand down the traditions in their family, and were thus the depositaries of the oral archives of the nation. (p. 121)

The oral traditions of Pele, the goddess of the volcano, were a key part of the island's national history and for the Native Hawaiians it was essential they remained unwritten, a point Kiwe emphasised. Wilkes describes how the 'tradition bearer' was subjected to 'many interrogatories' but 'refused to answer':

he told us he had discovered our intention, and that he knew we were going to put what he said in a book, that every body might read it, and therefore he would give us no further information. This I hope will be received as a sufficient apology for my not giving the histories and details of these marvellous personages; for, according to Kiwe, by relating them he would lose his occupation as soon as they were printed. (p. 121)

Implicitly privileging writing over orality, Wilkes displaces responsibility for 'not giving the histories and details of these marvellous personages' onto Kiwe, whose refusal to enter into written history he presents as purely a matter of self-interest. By contrast, Wilkes himself uses writing to inscribe the volcano with the American, scientific and exploratory values of the 'U. S. Ex. Ex.', his summit carving and five-volume *Narrative* imprinting these values

not only on the top of Mauna Loa but also over the Hawaiians' own 'oral archives of the nation'.<sup>48</sup>

The symbolic value of Hawai'i's volcanoes as sites that could be redefined by colonialism – a process in which other words could be used to remake other worlds – was powerfully demonstrated by the climbing and writing of several American missionaries who made ascents of the island's highest mountains in the 1820s. The contrast between these missionaries' attitudes to Native Hawaiian beliefs about the peaks and those of the first European climbers of the 1780s and 1790s is striking. Early visitors to the mountains such as Menzies were aware of the volcanoes' significance for the Native Hawaiians and of the rituals associated with them but sought to make their ascents in line with those beliefs and rituals. Menzies remarks of his 1794 ascent of Mauna Loa that on the sides of the path there were 'little maraes [sites consecrated to their deity], pointed out by taboo sticks stuck in the ground round a bush or under a tree', observing that 'In passing these places the natives always muttered a prayer or hymn, and made some offering, as they said, to their akua, by leaving a little piece of fruit, vegetable or something or other at these consecrated spots' (pp. 156-7). On being requested not to remove 'these taboo sticks', Menzies's party 'very strictly obeyed their injunction', with the botanist arguing that 'religious forms whatever they are, ought to be equally inviolable everywhere' (p. 157). Similarly, on learning that 'the natives regarded volcanoes as the habitations of evil spirits who, when anywise engaged, vomit up fire and hot stones, and to appease their wrath they conceive it necessary to make some offerings to these demons', Menzies party left 'beads, nails and pieces of tape' for 'these demons' (pp. 160-1). Menzies comments that this behaviour 'highly pleased [the natives], and they seemed to think that such offerings would be highly acceptable' (p. 161).

While Menzies and his party operated within the belief systems of the Native Hawaiians as a means of realising their desire to climb Mauna Loa, three decades later

American missionaries used volcano climbing to assert their own understandings and beliefs and to change those of the Islanders. Their approach is well summed up by Benjamin Silliman, the editor of *American Journal of Science*, which published much of the missionaries' research. In a note on an 1826 article on Hawaiian volcanoes supplied by the Yale-trained mineralogist, geologist, missionary and mountaineer Joseph Goodrich, Silliman writes as follows:

The missionaries did not forget to avail themselves of their superior knowledge, to enlighten, as far as possible, the dark intelligence of the Hawaiians, as to the origin of volcanoes from physical causes, operating according to the laws impressed on matter by the omnipotent and all-wise Creator, and they strove by every means in their power, to subvert their superstitious belief in the agency of demons of fire and earthquakes, whom it was necessary to propitiate by penance, sacrifices and privations, mingled with habitual slavish fear.<sup>49</sup>

The evangelistic use of ascent to 'enlighten' the Islanders about the volcanoes' scientific and religious meanings is well illustrated by the British missionary William Ellis's account of an 1823 Kilauea climb, made with three American missionaries and a party of Native Hawaiians. Ellis describes how he informed his Native Hawaiian guide Makoa of 'our intention to visit the volcano', and received the following response:

He objected strongly to our going thither, as we should most likely be mischievous, and offend Pele, or Nahoarii, gods of the volcano, by plucking the *ohelo*, (sacred berries,) digging up the sand, or throwing stones into the crater, and then they would either rise out of the crater in flames of smoke, send up large stones to fall upon us and kill us, or cause darkness and rain to overtake us, so that we should never find our way back.<sup>50</sup>

Ellis responded with a flat denial of these beliefs: ‘We told him we did not apprehend any danger from the gods, that we knew there were none, and should certainly visit the volcano’ (pp. 108-9). Throughout his ascent narrative, Ellis repeatedly describes how the missionary party ‘disregard[ed the] entreaties’ of the Native Hawaiians and ‘advised them to dismiss their fears’ (pp. 129), chiding them that ‘we were sorry to see them offering to an imaginary deity the bounties of our common Parent, but hoped they would soon know better, and acknowledge Jehovah alone in all the benefits they received.’ (p. 130) When Ellis and his fellow missionaries reached the crater, the experience provided further evidence to support their own beliefs:

we continued for about half an hour, contemplating a scene which it is impossible to describe, filled with wonder and admiration at the almost overwhelming manifestation of the power of that dread Being, who created the world, and who has declared that by fire he will one day destroy it. (p. 131)

Ellis and his party exploited the volcano’s symbolic power when they used its summit as a location for their attempted conversion of the Native Hawaiians to Christianity. The missionary describes how on the mountain top:

we told them, that when we considered their ignorance of the true God, and of the causes by which the action of volcanoes was sustained, we were not surprised at their supposing them to be the habitations of their gods, and their operations those of supernatural beings. We also endeavoured to explain, as far as they were capable of understanding, and their language would allow, some of the causes and principal phenomena of volcanic fire, the sources whence it was nourished, and the nature of its amazing power, illustrating the latter characteristic by the great force of gunpowder,

with the effects of which they were familiar; and assuring them that the expansive force of steam is much greater than that of gunpowder. (pp. 141-2)

In his expanded version of this account given in his *Narrative of a Tour*, published the year after his *Tour*, Ellis added the following sentence, reinforcing the sense of his party's determination to use the volcano as an aid to conversion:

Our principal solicitude, however, was to lead their minds to God, who created the world, and whose almighty power controls the elements of nature in all their diversified operations; but of whom, though they beheld the wondrous works of his hand, they were lamentably ignorant..<sup>51</sup>

Ellis's and his fellows' approach exemplifies what the *American Journal of Science* described as 'the importance of uniting scientific and religious qualifications in the character of the missionary, and in our view, every important mission – especially in a *terra incognita*'..<sup>52</sup> These missions to other worlds such as Hawai'i, it argued, were 'worth making to elevate this interesting people to the condition of civilized and christian men'..<sup>53</sup> Volcano climbing provided a perfect enactment of this process, offering both literal and metaphorical elevation. The missionaries used physical elevation to the crater to try to generate local people's political and spiritual elevation, their ascents seeking to convert the Hawaiians into 'civilised and christian men'.

One Kilauea ascent in particular exemplifies the value invested in Hawaiian volcano climbing as part of a mission of civilisation and Christianisation, offering proof of conversion and repudiating traditional Native beliefs. This climb, which the nineteenth-century Hawaiian historian Samuel Manaiakalani Kamakau dates to 1823,<sup>54</sup> is described by Maria Graham in her *Voyage of H.M.S Blonde to the Sandwich Islands, in the Years 1824-1825*, a work



commissioned by the publisher John Murray and based on the writings of the expedition's commander, Lord Byron, and naturalist, Richard Rowland Bloxham. As proof that 'This worship [of Pele] is now no more', Graham tells the story of 'one of the greatest acts of moral courage, which has perhaps ever been performed', adding that 'the actor was a woman, and, as we are pleased to call her, a savage.'<sup>55</sup> Graham then describes how

Kapiolani, the wife of Nahi, female chief of the highest rank, had recently embraced Christianity; and desirous of propagating it, and of undeceiving the natives as to their false gods, she resolved to climb the mountain, descend into the crater, and, by thus braving the volcanic deities in their very homes, convince the inhabitants of the Island that God is God alone, and that the false subordinate deities existed only in the fancies of their weak adorers. (pp. 186-7)

Graham's detailed account culminates in Kapi'olani's descent into the crater, at the bottom of which 'she pushed a stick into the liquid lava, and stirred the ashes of the burning lake' (p. 188). Graham presents this action as defining a new epoch, dramatically remarking that 'The charm of superstition was at that moment broken' (p. 188) and commenting of Kapi'olani's followers that 'They acknowledged the greatness of the God of Kapiolani; and from that time few indeed have been the offerings, and little the reverence offered to the fires of Peli' (p. 188). In Graham's account, ascent of a volcano and descent into its crater becomes a means of redefining not only the meaning of the mountain but the religious beliefs of a whole society and the spirit of an entire age.

This essay began by showing how volcano climbing in the 'other world' of Hawai'i during the Romantic period posed a challenge not only to western ideas about ascent but more powerfully to western identity itself. This challenge was felt profoundly by the Scottish botanist David Douglas, who presented himself as 'lost in terror and admiration' when

confronted with the crater of Mauna Loa, his sense of time, space, language and self all undone by the natural phenomenon of the volcano. However, for the collective endeavours of the American missionaries and the United States Exploratory Expedition, climbing Hawai'i's volcanoes provided a powerful means of asserting the values of their respective missions. The Westerners' ascent narratives eliminated the Native Hawaiians' contributions to the expeditions, erased the Islanders' presence from the summit and reinterpreted the mountains' religious significance. Replacing the 'oral archive of the nation' with summit inscription and written accounts, in their narratives the missionaries and Wilkes transformed the 'other world' of Hawaiian volcanoes into symbols of the values of their own quests, undertaken in the names of Christian religion and American scientific exploration respectively.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Extract from David Douglas's Journal of a Second Expedition to the Sandwich Islands in 1833-4, which Journal was sent to his Brother John Douglas', in *David Douglas, Botanist at Hawaii*, compiled by W. F. Wilson (Honolulu, 1919), p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979), pp. 458-64; Lord Byron, *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980-93), II, 92. On mountaineering and 'the poet's charge of self quest and world conquest', see Marlon B. Ross, 'Romantic Quest and Conquest: Troping Masculine Power in the Crisis of Poetic Identity', in *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. Anne K. Mellor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> See Simon Bainbridge, *Mountaineering and British Romanticism: The Literary Cultures of Climbing, 1770-1836* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Peter H. Hansen, *The*

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*Summits of Modern Man: Mountaineering after the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Sir Joseph Banks, 'The Iceland Journal, Part I and II', in *Sir Joseph Banks, Iceland and the North Atlantic 1772-1820: Journals, Letters, and Documents*, ed. Anna Agnarsdóttir (London: Hakluyt Society, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> '1773 Ascent of Mt Sparrman, Fiordland', *New Zealand Alpine Journal*, 49, 2 (1997), pp. 102-3; John Ledyard, *A Journal of Captain Cook's Last Voyage to the Pacific Ocean, and in Quest of a North-West Passage ... in the Years 1776, 1777, 1778, and 1779* (Nathanial Patten, 1783), pp. 117-123.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander von Humboldt, 'About an Attempt to Climb to the Top of Chimborazo', translated by Vera M. Kutzinski, *Atlantic Studies* 7, no. 2 (2010), pp. 191-211. On Humboldt as mountaineer, see Caroline Schaumann, *Peak Pursuits: The Emergence of Mountaineering in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, CT; Yale University Press, 2020).

<sup>7</sup> David Douglas, *Journal kept by David Douglas During his Travels in North America 1823-1827* (London: William Wesley and Son, 1914), p.72.

<sup>8</sup> Maurice Isserman and Stuart Weaver, *Fallen Giants: A History of Himalayan Mountaineering for the Age of Empire to the Age of Extremes* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), pp.15-16.

<sup>9</sup> See Davianna Pōmaika'i McGregor and Noa Emmett Aluli, 'Wao Kele O Puna and the Pele Defense Fund' in *A Nation Rising: Hawaiian Movements for Life, Land, and Sovereignty* ed. Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, Ikaika Hussey and Erin Kahunawaika'ala Wright, (Duke University Press, 2014), pp. 180-98: 'The principal place to honor Pelehonuamea is at her home at Kīlauea... most people in Hawai'i, Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian alike, widely acknowledge and respect her as the premier Hawaiian deity of the volcano' (p. 183).

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<sup>10</sup> David Kalākaua, *The Legends and Myths of Hawaii: The fables and folk-lore of a strange people*, NY: Charles L. Webster and Co, 1888, p. 139.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition. During the Years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842*, 5 vols. (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1845--), 4. 135-6. Further references to Wilkes's *Narrative* are to this volume and given in parenthesis in the text.

<sup>12</sup> Krickett Muabayashi and Thomas S. Dye, *Historians of Traditional Hawai'i: An Annotated Bibliography* (published by T.S. Dye and Colleagues, Archaeologists Inc., Honolulu, 2010)

<sup>13</sup> Nathaniel Bright Emerson, *Pele and Hiiaka: A Myth From Hawaii* (Honolulu Star-Bulletin Limited, 1915). For a recent portrait or 'short mo'olelo' of Mauna Kea as a sacred space, see Leon No'eau Peralto, 'Portrait. Mauna a Wākea: Hanau Ka Mauna, the Piko of our Ea', in *A Nation Rising*, ed. Goodyear-Ka'ōpua et al, pp. 232-244. See also: Greg Johnson, 'Engaged Indigeneity: Articulating, anticipating, and enacting tradition on Mauna Kea', in Siv Ellen Kraft et. al., *Indigenous Religion(s): Local Grounds, Global Networks*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 154-181.

<sup>14</sup> See Muabayashi and Dye, *Historians of Traditional Hawai'i*, passim; on the cultural and colonial politics of the translation and production of written versions of Hawaiian mo'olelo (stories) from the nineteenth century onwards, see: Cristina Bacchilega, *Legendary Hawai'i and the Politics of Place: Tradition, Translation, and Tourism*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). For more general studies of Hawaiian identity, representation and history, see M. Battiste (ed), *Reclaiming indigenous voice and vision*, (Vancouver, Canada: University of British Columbia Press, 2000). R. T. Halualani, *In the name of Hawaiians: Native identities and cultural politics*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

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<sup>15</sup> Houston Wood, *Displacing Natives: The Rhetorical Production of Hawai‘i* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999), p. 83.

<sup>16</sup> ku‘ualoha ho‘omanawanui, *Voices of Fire: Reweaving the Literary Lei of Pele and Hi‘iaka* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), p. 26.

<sup>17</sup> See Alexandra Witze, ‘How the fight over a Hawaii mega-telescope could change astronomy, *Nature*, vol. 577, no. 7791 (23 Jan. 2020), pp. 457-8.

<sup>18</sup> For an extensive bibliography, see Thomas L. Wright and Taeko Jane Takahashi, *Observations and Interpretations of Hawaiian Volcanism and Seismicity 1779-1955* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989). For a full list of voyages in the period to Hawai‘i, see *Voyages to Hawai‘i Before 1860: A Record*, ed. Bernice Judd and Helen Yonge Lind (Honolulu: University Press of Hawai‘i, 1974).

<sup>19</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative*, 4. 176.

<sup>20</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 401.

<sup>21</sup> See Nigel Rigby, Peter van der Merwe and Glyn Williams, *Pacific Exploration: Voyages of Discovery from Captain Cook’s Endeavour to the Beagle* (London: Adlard Coles, 2018); John Gascoigne, *Science in the Service of Empire: Joseph Banks, The British State and the Uses of Science in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); John Gascoigne, *Encountering the Pacific: In the Age of the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); David Philip Miller and Peter Hanns Reill, eds. *Visions of Empire: Voyages, botany, and representations of nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Davod MacKay, *In the Wake of Cook: Exploration, Science & Empire* (London: Croom Helm, 1985); Tony Ballantyne, ed., *Science, Empire and the European Exploration of the Pacific* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific: A Study in the History of Art and Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford

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University Press, 1960); Bernard Smith, *Imagining the Pacific In the Wake of the Cook Voyages* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). For valuable examinations of these issues in a specifically Hawaiian context, see Wood, *Displacing Natives*, and Rona Tamiko Halualani, *In the Name of Hawaiians: Native Identities & Cultural Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

<sup>22</sup> Wood, *Displacing Natives*, p. 33.

<sup>23</sup> Bainbridge, *Mountaineering and Romanticism*, p. 16-71.

<sup>24</sup> John Rickman, *Journal of Captain Cook's last voyage to the Pacific Ocean, on Discovery; performed in the years 1776, 1777, 1778, 1779*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: E. Newberry, 1781), p. 316.

<sup>25</sup> Rickman, *Journal*, p. 316.

<sup>26</sup> John Ledyard, *A journal of Captain Cook's last voyage to the Pacific Ocean, and in quest of a north-west passage, between Asia & America; performed in the years 1776, 1777, 1778, and 1779* (Hartford: Nathaniel Patten, 1783), p. 117.

<sup>27</sup> Ledyard, *Journal*, p. 120.

<sup>28</sup> Archibald Menzies 'Journal of Archibald Menzies, kept during his three visits to the Sandwich or Hawaiian Islands in the Years 1792-1794', in Archibald Menzies and William Frederick Wilson, *Hawaii Nei 128 Years ago* (Honolulu, T. H., 1920), p. 160. Further references to Menzies's 'Journal' are to this edition and are included in parenthesis in the text.

<sup>29</sup> For a discussion of the use of eighteenth-century aesthetic categories in the colonial context, see Paul Carter's chapter, 'A More Pleasing Prospect', in *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), pp. 230-60. On the visual mastery of elevated viewing, see Bainbridge, *Mountaineering and British Romanticism*, pp. 98-128.

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<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Tom Furniss, *Edmund Burke's Aesthetic Ideology: Language, Gender and Political Economy in Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 34-40.

<sup>31</sup> There are some parallels with the experiences of travellers visiting European volcanoes. See Cian Duffy, 'A volcano heard afar': Vesuvius, Etna and the Poetics of Depth', in *The Landscapes of the Sublime, 1700-1830* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 68-101; David McCallam, *Volcanoes in eighteenth-century Europe: An essay in environmental humanities*, Oxford University Studies in the Enlightenment (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019); John Brewer, *Volcanic: Vesuvius in the Age of Revolutions* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2023).

<sup>32</sup> C. S. Stewart, *Private Journal of a Voyage to the Pacific Ocean, and Residence at the Sandwich Islands in the Years 1822, 1823, 1824, and 1825* (New York: John P. Haven, 1828), p. 373.

<sup>33</sup> Stewart, *Journal*, p.376, p.387.

<sup>34</sup> Stewart, *Journal*, p.380, p. 388.

<sup>35</sup> William Ellis, *A Journal of a Tour Around Hawaii, The Largest of the Sandwich Islands* (Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1825), p. 130; Joseph Goodrich, 'Notices of some of the volcanoes and volcanic phenomena of Hawaii, (Owyhee,) and other islands in that group', *American Journal of Science and Arts*, 25 (January 1834), p. 203.

<sup>36</sup> Douglas, *David Douglas: Botanist at Hawaii*, compiled by W. F. Wilson ((Honolulu, 1919), p. 60. Further references to Douglas's writing are to this volume and are given in parenthesis in the text.

<sup>37</sup> Wilkes, *Narrative*, p. 166.

<sup>38</sup> Ross, 'Romantic Quest', p. 44.

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<sup>39</sup> For a landmark discussion of naming and colonialism, see Carter, *Road to Botany Bay*, esp. Chapter 1, ‘An Outline of Names’, pp. 1- 33. For the Hawaiian context, see Wood, *Displacing Natives*, esp. ‘Naming as Imperialism’, pp. 10-15.

<sup>40</sup> William Stanton, *The Great United States Exploring Expedition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), pp. 208, 210.

<sup>41</sup> Wood, *Displacing Natives*, p. 11. See also Mary Kawena Pukui, Samuel H. Elbert, Esther T. Mookini, *Place Names of Hawaii*, revised and expanded edition, (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1974), pp. 235-80.

<sup>42</sup> Rickman, *Journal*, p. 316.

<sup>43</sup> James Macrae, *With Lord Byron at the Sandwich Islands in 1825* (Honolulu, 1922), p. 45; George Anson Byron [Maria Graham, Richard Bloxham], *Voyage of H.M.S Blonde to the Sandwich Islands, in the Years 1824-1825* (London: John Murray, 1826), p. 176.

<sup>44</sup> Wood, *Displacing Natives*, p. 37.

<sup>45</sup> Byron, *Voyage*, p.186.

<sup>46</sup> Kalākaua, *Legends and Myths of Hawaii*, p. 139. The scholarship on Pele is extensive. See particularly Emma Kaili Metcalf Beckley Nakuina, ‘Hiiaka. A Hawaiian Legend by a Hawaiian Native. A Legend of the Goddess Pele, Her Lover Lohiau and her Sister Hiiakaikapoliopole’, *Daily Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, August 25 – October 13, 1883; Kalākaua, *Legends and Myths of Hawaii*, pp. 137-54; Emma Kaili Metcalf Beckley Nakuina, *Hawaii, Its People, Their Legends* (Honolulu T. H., 1904), pp. 22-4; Emerson, *Pele and Hiiaka*; Martha Beckwith, *Hawaiian Mythology* (Honolulu; University of Hawai‘i Press, 1970 [1940]), pp. 167-200; H. Arlo Nimmo, *The Pele Literature: An Annotated Bibliography of the English Language Literature on Pele, Volcano Goddess of Hawai‘i* (Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 1992); John Charlot, ‘Pele and Hi‘iaka. The Hawaiian-Language Newspaper



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Series, *Anthropos* 93, pp. 55-75; Pukui et al, *Place Names of Hawaii*, p. 323;

Ho‘oulumāhiehie and M. Puakea Nogelmeier, *The Epic Tale of Hi‘iakaikapoliopele*

(Honolulu: Awaiaulu Press, 2006); H. Arlo Nimmo, *Pele, Volcano Goddess of Hawai‘i*

(Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company), 2011; ho‘omanawanui, *Voices of Fire*.

<sup>47</sup> See Emerson, *Pele and Hiiaka*, p. 5; Muabayashi and Dye, *Historians of Traditional Hawai‘i*; Bacchilega, *Legendary Hawai‘i*; Wood, *Displacing Natives*, p. 83; ho‘omanawanui, *Voices of Fire*.

<sup>48</sup> The debate over the cultural and national politics of collecting, translating and publishing Hawai‘i’s oral history is a continuing one. For example, Muabayshie and Dye wrote of the extensive work of Mary Kawena Pukui (1895–1986), whom Noelani Mahoe described as ‘the greatest living authority on Hawaiian culture and language’, that ‘She received criticism from some Hawaiians for publishing the things she did on Hawaiian culture and making it available to all, including non-Hawaiians—it shouldn’t be written down and it shouldn’t be available for just anyone to see’, adding that ‘Kamakau received the exact same criticism’. *Historians of Traditional Hawai‘i*. p. 20. See also Wood on ‘Unwritable Knowledge’, *Displacing Natives*, pp. 51-60.

<sup>49</sup> ‘Notice of the volcanic character of the Island of Hawaii, in a letter to the *American Journal of Science and Arts*, 11 (October, 1826), p. 36.

<sup>50</sup> William Ellis, *Journal*, p. 108.

<sup>51</sup> William Ellis, *Narrative of a Tour through Hawaii* (London: H. Fisher, 1826), p. 222.

<sup>52</sup> ‘Notice’, *American Journal*, p. 35.

<sup>53</sup> ‘Notice’, *American Journal*, p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> Samuel Manaiakalani Kamakau, *Ruling Chiefs of Hawaii (Revised Edition)*, (Honolulu: Kamehameha Schools, 1992), p. 382.

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<sup>55</sup> Byron [Graham], *Voyage of H.M.S Blonde*, pp. 186-7. Further references are given in parenthesis in the text.