his wife, on that roofing day in 1995, "heard a slither and a fall and found him on rocks at the edge of the loch. Not being in the habit of falling he was more concerned about this aberration than about his injuries."

There are brief passages in the latter part of the book when his narrative voice returns with full insightfulness. He wrote (obviously from old age): "The expeditions to Garwhal, Almora and Everest had convinced me that the richest Himalayan experience comes in exploratory travel and climbing, not in the siege of a big peak."

Taken as an incomplete and posthumously compiled autobiography, The Evidence of Things Not Seen may be without peer. Or at least least stitched together than Tom Patey's delightful One Man's Mountains. If a publisher in North America chooses to market this book (hopefully with a less garishly retrograde dust jacket than British publishers seem so fond of), more than a few readers will be drawn to Murray's out of print classics, deserving the anthology treatment given to that of Shipton and Tilman. Despite The Evidence's disjointedness, at the height of Murray's narrative powers, we see that climbing is not a thing apart, but a tapestry on which to weave a whole life.

JONATHAN WATERMAN, AAC


I will begin this review with a disclaimer. As far as I can remember, I never met Willi Unsoeld. Our paths might have crossed in 1967, when I went to Nepal as a correspondent for The New Yorker, and Unsoeld was finishing what appears to have been a not particularly successful interlude as the director of the Peace Corps there. I have also, as far as I know, never met any of the other principals in the book such as John Roskelly, Peter Lev, Lou Reichardt, and the rest. I feel obliged to say this, because this book has raised hackles among the True Believers—the Unsoelders. After reading it, I can understand why, but this may not make the portrait any less valid. Let a thousand blossoms bloom.

On the other hand, I can give my own views, including some that are purely literary. Let me start off with two. Mr. Roper belongs to the school of mountain writing that calls a turd a turd. In his account, no bowel movement goes unreported. There is no point in trying to contrast this with the writings of people like Eric Shipton or H.W. Tilman who, in 1934, were the first people to approach Nanda Devi—the mountain in the Indian Garhwal that is also a vivid character in the book. (In the name of full disclosure, I was able to study this remarkable peak from the Tibetan plateau. It is magnificent.) Reading Shipton and Tilman one would get the impression that neither of them had an intestinal tract. Shipton once told me that it was on this trip that he suggested that he and Tilman address each other by their first names—"Bill" and "Eric." Tilman agreed, adding, "But it sounds so silly!" That era is gone. There is, however, a middle ground between discretion and diarrhea.

My second literary criticism concerns Mr. Roper's dreadful habit of interrupting the narrative with pointless asides about people like Hemingway or Melville. The worst is a multi-page divagation on John Muir just at the place where he is about to describe the death of Unsoeld's daughter "Nanda Devi." It is tedious beyond belief. A firmer hand on the editorial tiller was called for.
These things aside, I think that this is a very good book. Once you start it, you will have difficulty putting it down.

As I was reading it, I kept asking myself if, had I met him, would I have liked Unsoeld and vice versa? I decided that the answer was "no." He seems to have been—this is from the book—a superannuated scoutmaster with a metaphysical carapace. Roper informs us that Unsoeld used to wake up his clients at the crack of dawn in the Tetons with a rousing rendition on the harmonica of the "Colonel Bogey March." I much preferred hearing Chamonix guides saying, under the same circumstances, "Levez vous, tas des cons!" On the metaphysics, Unsoeld was a lifelong admirer of the French obscurantist Henri Bergson on whom he wrote a thesis at the University of Washington. I have a particular animosity towards Bergson since, as an undergraduate, I had a summer job of deconstructing his views on Einstein's theory of relativity. I came to the conclusion that Bergson understood nothing, which did not stop him from writing interminably. That he won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1927, when both Proust and Joyce were overlooked, boggles the mind, as does Unsoeld's being able to extract meaning from any of this. Roper tries to explain, but it reads like a dying man grasping for breath.

Unsoeld emerges as a very intelligent, egocentric man with a considerable core of foolishness, and of course as a great climber. The book is basically an account of the 1976 expedition to climb Nanda Devi. This misbegotten adventure has been written to death and, of course, its climax was the death of Nanda Devi—a death that seems to me to have been preventable. She was clearly very ill and she should have been told in no uncertain terms to go down. Unsoeld's response when Roskelly told him that Devi had to descend—"What's a father to do?"—seems to me to have a straightforward response: Save the life of his child. We all know that this has to be done sometimes by brute force and that is what should have been applied. Both of them seem to have been caught up in some sort of spiritual nexus that is often the stuff of tragedy. Unsoeld's apparent reaction to this—to become a smiling public man for whom Devi's death became part of a lecture performance—seems to me to border on the inhuman. I think Roper disentangles this lucidly. Very likely the Unsoelders have a different take on this and I am sure they will tell us.

They may also have a different take on Unsoeld's last climb in March of 1979, on Mt. Rainier. The personnel on the Nanda Devi expedition were at least seasoned professionals—some of the best climbers in the world. The people on this ill-fated climb were in most cases beginners. The conditions were so bad that Yvon Chouinard was leaving the mountain because of his perception of the avalanche dangers. This did not stop Unsoeld. Nor did the potentially bad weather. The whole thing seems to me like sheer irresponsibility—almost suicidal. In France, where guides are sanctioned by the government, this sort of performance would have led to a trial and a probable jail sentence. As it was, it led to Unsoeld's death in avalanche along with that of a young woman whom he was guiding. That anyone survived was something of a miracle. Perhaps now you will see why I don't think I would have liked Unsoeld. He was a great mountain climber but a terribly flawed man.

Jeremy Bernstein, AAC