

Spiritual Tourism and Frontier Esotericism at Mount Shasta, California

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ABSTRACT

Mount Shasta City, California (pop. 3300) is the gateway to this region's major attraction, a 14,179 foot volcano that is a sacred site for tourists seeking spiritual ascension, a mystical practice rooted in the Theosophical Society and the Saint Germain Foundation and the post-1950s associational offshoots of these traditions. Analysing 150 years of pilgrim narratives in the Mount Shasta Collection of the College of Siskiyous library, this study charts spiritual tourism and the central role pilgrims play in the foundation and promotion of key esoteric associational groups and concepts in the United States. Pilgrim accounts of encounter and ascent at Mount Shasta effectively create and reaffirm its sacred status. Spiritual tourists transmit and ascribe new metaphysical meanings to the mountain using an ever-expanding repertoire of cosmic attributes and esoteric signifiers.

Keywords

Pilgrimage, Spiritual Tourism, Mount Shasta, esoteric, spirituality,
New Religious Movements

Mt. Shasta City, California (pop. 3300) is the gateway to this region's major attraction, a 14,179-foot volcano that provides a striking scenic backdrop to the town's main boulevard. Tourism is the largest contributor to Mt. Shasta City's local economy. Over 25,000 tourists visit each year (Mt. Shasta Business 2013, 4). Thousands of tourists obtain U.S. Forest Service permits to ascend the mountain's summit, but less than half of them succeed. Another 35% of the tourists come for astral or spiritual ascension, a mystical practice rooted in the Theosophical Society and the Saint Germain Foundation and the post-

1950s associational offshoots of these traditions (Flood 2013). While other lofty volcanic peaks in the U.S. Cascade rim of fire (Baker, Rainier, Hood, St. Helens) are also popular tourist and mountaineering attractions, none can compete with the sacred geography or spiritual traffic of Mount Shasta (Calderazzo 2004; Huntsinger and Fernandez-Gimenez 2000). It has been classified as a U.S. “Cosmological District” from the 8,000 foot timberline and higher and is eligible to apply for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (Wolf and Orlove 2008, 62). Even without the district’s inclusion on the register, Mount Shasta’s spiritual visitors fit the classic definition of a spiritual pilgrim: one who journeys to a sacred place (Smith 2010, 141; Swatos 2006; Norman 2011, 200). For 150 years, pilgrims have composed narratives of encounter and ascent at Mount Shasta. Although these stories are regional testimonials of personal transformation, they are important to the study of American religion and spiritual tourism beyond the local context. These narratives serve to create and maintain a variety of esoteric and New Religious Movements, invite spiritual pilgrims from many regions to visit the mountain for its spiritual treasures, and promote and validate claims of Mount Shasta’s sacred status by continually ascribing new metaphysical meanings to the mountain.

Defintions and esoteric spiritual communities

Although it is located near an exit on the I-5 freeway, Mt. Shasta remains sufficiently distant from major California population centers to retain its aura of mystery and pristine remoteness. This insularity means that spiritual activities of both residents and tourists tend to conform to local norms of spiritual identity and sense of place. The definition of “spiritual” used in this article is derived from a 2013 survey administered to fifty adults participating in alternative spiritual associational groups located within a 75-mile radius of Mount Shasta. These participants were asked to define spirituality by checking definitions they preferred from a list of phrases. The definition of spirituality used in this study is the composite wording of three phrases chosen by 50% or more of the survey participants. This local meaning of spiritual is:

a natural human connection with the wonder and energy of nature, cosmos, and all existence, and an attempt to understand its meaning; an emotional response to self, divine, others and the world that inspires unity, awe, joy, acceptance, peace and consolation; an experience that brings one into contact with and connection to the divine or sacred. (Duntley 2013)

The word “esoteric” traces its etymology to a Greek term that refers to inner or interior concerns (as opposed to exoteric or outer, worldly matters). It is

used to describe a spiritual approach focusing on exclusive, secret, hidden knowledge available to the initiated, or to those deemed worthy to receive such wisdom. Although in New Age circles esoteric can imply a more subjective, individualized interest in interiority, this study employs “esoteric” much like Theosophists who use it to describe groups who seek to discover and utilize “special or occult traditions of secret knowledge” (Flood 2013; Hanegraaff 1998; Godwin 1994). Using “metaphysical” as a noun, or to refer to a person’s “metaphysical worldview” denotes those who attach great personal and social value to the ongoing quest to understand the fundamental and essential nature of being (Bender 2010). Metaphysicals who visit Mount Shasta share similar vocabularies, concepts, and practices with the Theosophical Society and the Saint Germain Foundation (also known as the I AM Activity). The esoteric/metaphysical writings included in this study also utilize abstract ideas regarding multiple “dimensions” of space/time/reality that venture beyond the possibility of a Fourth Dimension first expressed by mathematicians, physicists and artists in the early twentieth century (Henderson 2013; Hinton [1904] 1921; Rucker 1984).

Many of Mt. Shasta’s spiritual tourists are classified as being on the spiritual frontiers of American religion, even though esotericism has a long history of practice in California and in this town. Mt. Shasta’s spiritual tourist trade seems inconsequential when compared with other so-called cosmically-attuned places, such as Sedona, Arizona’s estimated 560,000 spiritual tourists each year (Coats 2011, 119; Ogilbee and Riess 2006, 131). Yet, while Mt. Shasta’s spiritual clientele is small, it maintains and alters America’s esoteric landscape in significant ways. Today many such tourists claim to be pulled to the mountain by some unnamed providential power, but others are drawn here by the foundational stories of their group’s advent (Casterline and English 2003). The story of Guy Ballard meeting the Ascended Master Saint Germain on Mount Shasta in 1930, provides the impetus for the annual gathering of the I AM worldwide diaspora, where over 2,000 pilgrims visit Mt. Shasta City for the I AM COME! outdoor pageant held each August. Like Ballard, many other one-time pilgrims also experienced intense spiritual encounters on the mountain and formed new twentieth century spiritual communities: groups not limited to, but including Astara, the Eureka Society, the Radiant School of Seekers and Servers, and the Association of Sananda and Sanat Kumara (Frank 2010; Avenell 1999; Chaney 2009). In this small town, esoteric communities and their pilgrims share a larger social network that includes channelers, mystics, and healers who are part of Mt. Shasta city’s business community. “Alternative spirituality” businesses

now comprise about one-third of the current Chamber of Commerce membership (Mt. Shasta Business 2013, 18).

Records of pilgrim encounter and ascent

Ascension narratives form the backbone of tourist memoirs of Mount Shasta. The earliest nineteenth-century California guidebooks, as well as the most recent “local attraction” newspaper circulars showcase visitors’ narratives of encounter with the mountain. Collectively, pilgrim accounts comprise a rich archival record spanning more than 150 years. Such grassroots annals of ascension and encounter enrich our understandings of the rhetorical pattern and metaphysical purpose of the modern spiritual tourist experience (Norman 2011; Wearing *et al.* 2010, 48). Such accounts are printed, marketed, distributed and memorialized in newspapers, magazines, books, circulars, flyers, coursework, visual art, museum displays, websites, blogs, local history projects, and in remembrances of annual and *ad hoc* festivals—all produced to engage and attract tourists with metaphysical worldviews. In terms of method, the plot sequence of a metaphysical ascension and encounter narrative is easily retrieved from existing textual sources by utilizing classic methods of narrative analysis (Reissman 1993) and the “critical event” inquiry approach to narrative (Webster and Mertova 2007). The chronology, context and provenance of these autobiographical accounts may be reconstructed by utilizing the resources of the nearby College of the Siskiyous (COS) library. It contains an impressive Mount Shasta Collection that includes an online and print bibliography, 2500 books, 600 pamphlet files, and hundreds of periodicals, maps, prints, images, audio, videos, biographical references and material culture relating to all aspects of the mountain and town. In order to avoid confusion between the city and the summit, this article will use the COS convention of referring to the town as “Mt. Shasta” or Mt. Shasta City, and the peak as “Mount Shasta.”

Mount Shasta as spiritual icon: Cosmic and Californian

Mt. Shasta City’s history began as a trading outpost named “Strawberry Valley.” Located on the Siskiyou footpath trail, it was a supply stop used by trappers and explorers as early as the 1820s. The United States Exploring Expedition, or “Wilkes Expedition” of 1838–1842 passed through this alpine settlement. It was a pioneering scientific expedition funded by Congress to survey and explore environs near the Pacific Ocean. In 1841, a member of that party, James Dwight Dana, described his encounter with the mountain in cosmic terms as “a vision of immensity such as pertains to the vast universe rather than to our own planet” (Dana 1849, 615). Because of its location at

the crossroads of Oregon Trail emigration routes, this striking snow-covered pinnacle later became a visual icon of California's new frontier. Oregon Trail pioneers remarked on Mount Shasta's massive scale, thinking it to be "18,000 feet...a monarch of mountains." Its size and grandeur evoked the desire "to kneel in worship" (Hutchings 1875, 204). For these emigrants who branched off to follow the Applegate or Lassen Trails, the mountain became the symbol of "journey's end" and the "start of the new life for which they had traveled so far and endured so much." For them, the mountain was firm proof of the truth of a frontier myth of bountiful possibility "that at last they knew was no myth at all" (O'Brien 1951, 221).

Mount Shasta as a symbol of pioneer hope and frontier abundance was instantly communicated to the public in visual shorthand by imprinting an image of Mount Shasta on the covers of many nineteenth century "Golden State" tourist and promotional pamphlets. Not only was Mount Shasta on the cover of California tour books, but it also figured prominently in Central Pacific Railroad marketing campaigns from the 1890s to the 1940s. Graphic artists' renditions of the mountain were showcased on railroad brochures, postcards, and travel posters. While it was beyond the means of many Californians in the nineteenth century to travel to see the mountain, these mass-produced images allowed much of the population to encounter the mountain indirectly—to "see" it and to invite "Shasta into their hearts." In addition to the popular commercial art featuring Mount Shasta, more than 200 prominent artists painted, sketched, or photographed the mountain (Miesse and Peterson 2008, 148, xxii, 162).

Mount Shasta was seen as an especial challenge, even to well-known landscape artists who had painted other Cascade peaks. It "was the biggest of the big visually, but solitary, mysterious, challenging" and caused the "spiritually minded" among them to yearn to see it, even if they had to "endure discomfort and privation to do so" (Miesse and Peterson 2008, 148). "Prospecting for Pictures" is how landscape artists such as Henry Joseph Breuer (1860–1932) described solitary camping expeditions into the wilderness to mine for visual treasures of Mount Shasta. Breuer recalled having to:

wear old serviceable clothes and heavy shoes...carry a sleeping bag, a food sack, a tin cup, a large pocket knife, a small sketch box. ...a railway ticket... I board[ed] a train to some station...near Mount Shasta, and thus into the woods. I made a one-man camp every night for two weeks. It was cold and sometimes miserable in the thick, wet, cold mist of the mountainside, but the days were grand before the high, white altar, Shasta. I shall feel for all my life that I was a *true pilgrim*." (Miesse and Peterson 2008, 133, emphasis mine)

Breuer was not alone. Many other famous landscape artists, Albert Bierstadt, Thomas Hill, William Keith and Thomas Moran, packed up provisions to make the tourist-artist's trek to the wilderness to paint Mount Shasta. Such artistic embarkations into the woods "took on a spiritual dimension." Artists reported a kind of "meditative, contemplative" experience in painting the mountain, and "through the finest of their paintings, the viewer may partake of the same sensations" (Miesse and Peterson 2008, 130).

One amateur watercolor artist of the 1880s lived within view of the mountain in the nearby county seat of Yreka, California, a town whose name is derived from a Native American word meaning "White Mountain." Like many other artists, Frederick Spencer Oliver had an abiding affection and reverence for the mountain. In 1884, after climbing a ridge to see the sunrise on the mountain, Oliver wrote:

Away in the south....where its peak holds aloft the sky, 'tis rosy, glowing pink.... It rises not like other mountain pile, from ranges rivaling its own height; no, all alone it stands forth from its high plateau, piercing heaven's blue, from base to summit.... Shasta, O, Mt. Shasta.

(Miesse and Peterson 2008, 168)

Oliver unites his love of the mountain with his interest in the occult. Oliver is fascinated with Tibet and the mythical continent of Atlantis as sources of ancient wisdom, religion, and invention. In 1905 his book, *A Dweller on Two Planets* was published, selling many copies and instantly becoming an occult classic (Eichorn 1971, 60). This book contains Oliver's 1886 watercolor of Mount Shasta, and is illustrated with a number of his other "visionary" paintings which include several styles of "aerial-submarine" spaceships and other technological inventions. What sets "visionary art" apart from other genres, is that unlike art that is created as an imaginative process over time, a "vision" is instantly received intact in the context of a dream, trance, astral journey, or channeling, and is then rendered without alteration by the painter to the canvas (von Finck 1989).

A Dweller on Two Planets was marketed as a work of "automatic writing"—a written form of channeling. Oliver was the amanuensis of a Tibetan named "Phylos." Phylos referred to himself as a "Theochristian student and Occult Adept...one of a class of men who know and can explain...mysteries." Resembling the teachings of the Theosophical Society, Phylos's wisdom included insights from both Eastern religions and Christianity (Phylos, xv). The esoteric communities in Mt. Shasta recognize three main types of spirit guides: Adepts, Masters, and Ascended Masters. Adepts have learned all past-life lessons and must choose between "further evolution in the spirit realm

His work also supported the theosophical postulation that an aspect of one's personal identity remained intact through a pattern of successive lives. Therefore, one's aggregate journey of multiple soul-embodiments greatly influences the status of a person's current spiritual condition. With the help of spiritual Adepts, one could travel astrally through time and space to see replayed the key events of one's past lives, and this knowledge was invaluable in achieving "spiritual ascent" or progress in the present (Powell 1982).

The discovery of gold in 1851 in Oliver's childhood home in Yreka attracted thousands of prospectors and pioneers to the region. While gold was never found in Mount Shasta, the hope of finding treasure was never abandoned, and would become the particular obsession of early twentieth century Rosicrucians. Oliver's "Seven Shasta Scenes Interlude" in *A Dweller on Two Planets*, issues an invitation to his readers that proves the miner's hope of discovering gold and gems in Mount Shasta was not in vain. But it was a treasure intended not for gold miners, but for *spiritual prospectors*:

What secrets perchance are about us?...that tall basalt cliff conceals a doorway. We do not suspect this, nor that a long tunnel stretches away, far into the interior of majestic Shasta. Wholly unthought is it that there lie at the tunnel's far end vast apartments, the home of a mystic brotherhood, whose occult arts hollowed that tunnel and mysterious dwelling.... Are you incredulous as to these things? Go there, or suffer yourself to be taken there as I was, once! See, as I saw...the walls, polished as by jewelers, though excavated as by giants...and in their wonderful polish exhibiting veinings of gold, of silver, of green copper ores, and... precious stones. Verily, a mystic temple...a refuge... Does it truly exist? Seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you. Shasta is a true guardian and silently towers, giving no sign of that within his breast. But there is a key. The one who first conquers self, Shasta will not deny." (Phylos 248)

Oliver's claim that Mount Shasta was a North American metaphysical frontier outpost became adopted by California booster literature that gushingly referred to California as "Holy County" worthy of being called "the New Jerusalem." In this grand state, it was claimed, "certain localities...have been especially chosen of the Spirit" such as "majestic Mt. Shasta, mystic abode of the illumined" (Huggins 1937, 11, 16). The existence of a Lodge of the Masters, or Tibetan Adepts resident in hidden precincts of Mount Shasta was also highly significant, in that it pointed to an ancient *American* mystery tradition located

here in California going directly back to Atlantean times and probably earlier.... This also indicates that points of contact with the Inner Planes have long been established....and the sincere occult student doesn't have to traipse off to Europe, the Near East or the Orient for initiation. (Wilson 1961, 17)

This consecration of Mount Shasta as a keeper of occult secrets was further augmented by twentieth century Rosicrucian speculative publications and expeditions that fixed Mount Shasta's physical location as a geographical vestige of the ancient continent of "Lemuria." The branch of Rosicrucians who figure in this study is AMORC (Ancient and Mystical Order of the Rosae Crucis) founded in 1915 by H. Spencer Lewis. The legend of the Lemuria continent dates to a scientific publication, *The Mammals of Madagascar* (1864). In this work, Philip Lutley Sclater argued that lemurs exist in various parts of the globe on land separated by vast oceans, therefore "some land-connection must have existed in former ages" (Strickland 2005, 136). Sclater called this continent Lemuria, in honor of the marsupials. This scientific theory of a lost continent was affirmed and adopted by American occultists, who re-oriented the location of Lemuria first from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, and then from the Pacific Islands to the Coast of California (Strickland 137). The thread of the Lemuria legend that is most significant to Mount Shasta contains several facets. First, that Lemuria was millions of years old, and was more ancient than Atlantis. Second, as Lemuria sank, Mount Shasta became the only land mass from the original Lemuria to survive the deluge. Third, many of the surviving Lemurians took refuge within the hollow interior of the mountain and built a city there using their great skills and knowledge (Eichorn 1971, 64, 65; Walton 1985; Strickland 2005, 140).

At first, these legends fueled a literal form of "spiritual prospecting." People travelled to the mountain to explore subterranean caves looking for evidence of these lost civilizations and their treasures, or claimed to have encounters with actual Lemurians on the mountain. Although Abraham Mansfield waited almost 30 years to publish *The Golden Goddess of the Lemurians* (1970) his adventures on Mount Shasta were widely known by the 1930s in occult circles. Mansfield claimed that Lemurians showed him their "treasure-vaults" full of miraculous inventions, sophisticated underground agricultural methods, and the golden Plates of Time which preserved "knowledge of atomic power so that a new generation could use it wisely" (Frank 2010, 28, 29). Fellow treasure-seeker J. C. Brown organized an expedition of 80 residents of Stockton, California in June of 1934 to travel to the mountain and explore the treasure caverns Brown had reputedly discovered in 1904. Although Brown accompanied the party in their journey from Stockton, he disappeared on the appointed day of the trek. After a lengthy search, the expedition was forced to return home empty-handed (Frank 2010, 41, 42). These and other tales further cemented Mount Shasta's reputation as an occult landmark. Interest in this lost continent also inspired a new esoteric mystery spiritual group called

The Lemurian Fellowship, founded in 1936, which later published a sequel to Frederick Spencer Oliver's channeled work, entitled *An Earth Dweller's Return* (1940).

The Lemurian legends connected to Mount Shasta were a source of fascination to both locals and pilgrims and have been continually embellished since the 1930s (DeCamp and Ley 1952; Clark 2010). Evidence of the role of the Mount Shasta Lemuria myth in creating new esoteric ideas and networks resides primarily in the popular *Telos* series produced by Mt. Shasta channeller, Aurelia Louise Jones. "Telos" is Greek for "purpose or goal" but it is also the name of a City in Lemuria located within Mount Shasta on the "fourth dimensional frequency." Jones channels a Lemurian named "Adama." This three-volume published series also confirms the connection of Lemurians to the Pleiadian star system, features Mansfield's "hydroponic gardens" and claims that ancient Lemurian esoteric wisdom is essential for modern humanity's spiritual transformation and ascension (Jones 2004).

The rumored existence of Lemurians also contributes to Mount Shasta's classification as a "sacred mountain" in the imagination of Western esotericists. The way Mount Shasta is constructed as a holy place in these esoteric writings and pilgrim accounts is not unlike the classical Tibetan concept of *gnas ri*, or "spirit-mountain." Such mountains in the orient contained a kind of cosmic ecosystem—they had vortex energy, fantastic spirit-creatures, and were home to spiritual Adepts. Like Mount Shasta, such mountains were "monumental and pillar-like, reaching into the heavens" with a remote, pristine "landscape inclusive of humans, animals, plants and the spirit world embedded in it...saturated with natural, supernatural and spiritual forces" (Yü 2012, 53, 43). These types of mountains were destination points for spiritual pilgrims from Europe, who saw the remote sacred mountains of Tibet and India as places of physical and spiritual challenge. Theosophy's Helena Blavatsy and Annie Besant both reportedly spent time sojourning with Buddhist lamas and Adepts in these mountains in India and Tibet (Norman 2013). A mountain could not claim spiritual status without a resident spiritual Master. By revealing the presence of the Great White Brotherhood in Mount Shasta, Frederick Spencer Oliver and Guy Ballard successfully bequeathed to California its own northwest corner of holy mountain real estate, readily accessible to American spiritual pilgrims who did not have the financial means or stamina to "traipse off to the Orient." Yet as Dan Smyer Yü notes, in Tibet, geography and Buddhist lamas alone cannot make a mountain truly sacred. "The topography of the mountains is coupled with the typography of...narratives concerning local pantheons and...protective

deities” (Yü 2012, 54; Neuhaus 2012). Thus each new pilgrim tale, exhibited painting, esoteric novel or channeled communication served to further validate Mount Shasta’s iconic status as a cosmic, Californian spirit-mountain (Lane 1998, 144; Norman 2013, 142).

The creation of the image of Mount Shasta as both cosmic and Californian is a fitting denouement of explorer James Dwight Dana’s 1841 praise that so grand a mountain must pertain “to the vast universe rather than to our own planet” (Dana 1849, 615). Today, this otherworldly image of the mountain is transmitted by modern artists who paint in the mode of Metaphysical Visionary Art. These artists, all of whom were one-time Mount Shasta spiritual pilgrims themselves, now are more permanent residents who paint or photograph the mountain as a visual form of spiritual ascent and encounter. These modern artists build on the occult novels and landscape paintings of a century ago by using the arts to continue to ascribe new metaphysical meanings to the mountain. *The New Visionaries from Mt. Shasta* (1989) is a volume that preserves the artistry as well as the testimonials of these artists’ experience of direct mystical encounter with the mountain. These visionary artists, because of their mystical gifts, consider themselves to be perennial pilgrims, traversing “between worlds, yet becoming residential to none.” They see Mount Shasta as a spiritual portal that helps them to “bring back from the subtler realms high ideals for the planet, by manifesting them on the physical plane (von Finck 1989, 6). Artist Cheryl Yambrach Rose-Hall tells of her artistic encounter with the mountain:

Mount Shasta is more in the angelic realms, the higher spiritual realms... in Mount Shasta the vibration is pretty pure, fresh and new, and it’s that energy which I try to bring back.... Mount Shasta is like a clearing ground, constantly bombarding you with challenges. Another door opens and you get through that one, then another one opens.... The mountain is about infusing spirit into matter, and that’s what my work is about. This is a place where these things can be brought forth easily. (English and Coyle 1995, 22)

Sylvia Clarise McChrist, like Frederick Spencer Oliver before her, is both an artist and channeler. She describes her work as “more than mere image on canvas, they are dimensional gateways that connect the physical world with higher sphere of Light.” She often incorporates a channeled prayer to produce these “rare meditative pieces” (McChrist 1993).

Other artists use photography to capture their encounters with the mountain. Addonatia Ariana creates “Interdimensional Photography.” Ariana’s pilgrim story is a self-described “healing journey” that brought her to Mount Shasta. There she discovered that the portal energy of the sacred mountain

interacted with the electronics in her digital camera to “capture the sixth dimensional light matrix codes and portals to other realms.” She claims that by meditating on these photographs, one may connect with this “Shambhala Portal” ever-present in Mount Shasta (Ariana 1995). Mount Shasta’s title as the “New Shambhala” is well established by local esotericists. One of the alternative spirituality businesses in Mt. Shasta is even named “Shambhala.” Like Atlantis and Lemuria, Shambhala is a mythical land, located somewhere in the remote mountains of Asia. It is a place where “highly evolved beings” partake of eternal youth and live in “peace and harmony for the benefit of humanity.” Peter Mt. Shasta, a former pilgrim who lived near the mountain for many years and even adopted its name as his own, wrote an account about how he learned that Mount Shasta was the “New Shambhala.” When Peter was a spiritual seeker in India, long before he had ever heard of the mountain, a guru took him on an astral journey into “the blue sky above Mount Shasta.[and] with a sweep of his arm said, ‘This is the New Shambhala.’” (Mt. Shasta 2000, 45). Another encounter in India confirmed this. A white-robed man appeared to Peter Mt. Shasta, and matter-of-factly revealed:

...one doesn’t need to go to India. Everything I have needed to know about connecting with the spirit I learned meditating on a rock on the side of Mount Shasta. It is a place where the veils between the ethers are thinner... and the Masters can communicate...more easily. (Mt Shasta 2000, 9)

These latter-day visionary artists express a goal also shared by nineteenth and twentieth century landscape artists: that representational art of Mount Shasta should provide a bridge or gateway to an experience of the sublime. For today’s visionary artists, Mt. Shasta City, due to its close proximity to the vibrational energy zone and ley lines of the mountain, is seen as an incubator of perfected spirit energy (Mt Shasta Sacred Guide n.d., 1). These artists feel that this location is the best place to explore representations of the fifth and sixth dimensions in their work. These new visionary artists also contribute to the transmission and propagation of esoteric concepts by representing in visual media a distinctive metaphysical style or aesthetic, especially in their renditions of the sacred mountain and Ascended Masters. They also promote spiritual tourism in the area by affirming in their published testimonials the immeasurable spiritual benefits of having direct visual and mystical encounters with the mountain.

Encounter and ascent in mountaineer tales

Although artists helped to ascribe a sacred identity to Mount Shasta through *visual* representations of their spiritual encounters with the mountain, the roots of the *narrative* form of the pilgrim tale of ascent and encounter trace

back to Mount Shasta's summiteer accounts of the 1850s and 1860s (Zanger 1992, 29). The town's very first business was a tavern and hotel built to serve this clientele. A party of eight climbers successfully ascended the summit in August of 1854. Within the next two years no fewer than forty persons, both residents and visitors, made the trip to the summit, including a party of five local women. On the summit, these mountaineers left behind material testaments to their accomplishment, many of which point to spiritual concerns. By the time the famed Whitney Geological Survey party arrived at the top of Mount Shasta in 1862, the lead climber, Professor Josiah Dwight Whitney, was surprised by the "California Conglomerate" relic pile at the summit, which included several religious magazines, pamphlets, a temperance flag, and a Methodist hymnbook (Eichorn 1971, 26, 31). Mountaineer tales were immediately collected and serialized in a variety of books, periodicals, and California travel guides, such as J.M. Hutchings popular *Scenes of Wonder and Curiosity in California: A Tourist's Guide* (1875). These mountaineer accounts establish a "critical events" rhetorical pattern, and thus recount a change of understanding precipitated by the event (Webster and Mertova 73). This same pattern is often found in the work of more recent pilgrims who write of their life-changing adventures (Reisinger 2013, 19). These critical event narratives are marked by six phases of direct encounter with the mountain: resplendence, travail, ascent, transformation, return, and invitation.

Ascension narratives begin with descriptions of "resplendence" in the context of the mountain's sensual abundance. These descriptions betray a devotional attachment to and uncanny familiarity with the natural environs of Mount Shasta. They remark upon the copious verdant flora of the meadows, in contrast to the barren volcanic rock of the summit. A midsummer mountain meadow is "one continuous bed of honey-bloom, so marvelously rich, that, in walking your foot would press a hundred flowers at every step." The air "when all the rose thickets are in blossom" is "delicious with their fragrance" (Sanders 1916, 16; Avery 1878, 153). One writer even describes the timbre of the wind rushing through each of the mountain's many species of pines as an auditory compass for all who would travel in darkness:

The trees have each their own voice—a degree of flexibility or length of needles upon which the wind harps to produce its characteristic note. The traveler in the dark of mountain nights knows his way among them as by the street cries of his own city. The creaking of the first, the sough [moan] of the long-leaved pines, the whispering whistle of the lodgepole pine, the delicate... redwoods in a wind, these come out for him in the darkness with the night scent of moth-haunted flowers. (Austin 1914, 153)

Mountaineers also devote much effort in describing the next phase of their experience: their “travail” in terms of the harrowing hazards and daunting obstacles they overcome in pursuit of the summit. They were particularly vulnerable to the vicissitudes of the weather. A mountaineer identified as “Mr. A. Roman” climbs the mountain in April of 1856, and “suffered dreadfully” from a cold snap on the summit. As he stops to check his thermometer, he is shocked to watch it plunge to 12 degrees below zero; then as his “stiffened fingers lost their grip” he was shocked again to watch the thermometer plunge and break on the crags below. By the time Roman returned to the valley, he is snowblind and frostbitten, and “so altered in appearance that his own brother did not know him” (Avery 1878, 185, 186). But even mountaineers like Roman who suffer much in the travail to the summit, feel transformed and light-hearted at the end. Upon returning to the valley, mountaineers could gaze lovingly at the mountain from a distance, “all its ruggedness gone...its vast front smoothed by distance...a sunny haze clothing it in tender beauty.” They often admit to visiting its summit once more “in dreams” and “longed on waking, for its restful solitude” (Avery 1878, 190).

Israel S. Diehl’s account of 9 October 1855 is typical of these phases of mountain encounter. Although he had planned to ascend the mountain with a climbing party, messages were waylaid, and he arrives with no “equipped and noted traveller... [in] my attendance” and thus sets out on his journey to the summit alone (Hutchings 1875, 204). Even as early as 1855, Diehl knew about this mountain’s perils: “fearful accounts and warnings...given of grizzlies, California lions, avalanches, falling rocks and stones.” His journey up the mountain is recounted as a series of heart-stopping hardships: “I slipped and fell several times, once coming near being dashed thousands of feet below” and had to wade through a quicksand of “loose and coarse lava, ashes, and other matter...a foot in depth.” After crossing one last field of snow and pausing for warmth at “the long-sought...sulphur springs” he finally reaches the summit. “I spent nearly an hour here...watching this wonderful view...upon that peak I planted the temperance banner...and with great reluctance, notwithstanding the wind, cold, loneliness, and coming night, I was compelled to beat a descent” (Hutchings 1875, 206–208). Two days later, he returns to his lodgings in town and attests to a complete transformation, being now “much better and happier for my ascent of Mount Shasta” (Hutchings 1875, 209). Another climber from the 1860s recounts no less than fifteen successive pages of the challenges faced in his climb, including the unnerving sound of an “ice stream constantly cracking” beneath the climber’s feet, followed at intervals by “heavy detonations” of unstable, frac-

tured ice (Avery 1878, 180). Yet after all this deprivation and challenge, once a climber is on the summit all hardship is forgotten. Here, transformed by his ascent, one climber audaciously issues this bold invitation to his readers: “Considering how *easily* Shasta can be reached...except on the larger ice-fields, it is remarkable that it is not more *sought by tourists*” (Avery 1878, 183, emphasis mine). Even fifty years later, this distinctive style of critical event narrative pattern is rarely altered in mountaineer’s tales. In 1905, summiteer Liberty Hyde Bailey recalls the worshipful poignancy of the transformation phase of his entire climbing party’s encounter with the mountain—a sense of reverence that even affects the animals in the party:

we found ourselves on the crest of a great ridge: and sheer before us stood the great cone of Shasta, cold and gray and silent, floating on a sea of darkness.... Scarcely had we spoken in the miles of our ascent, and now words would be sacrilege. Almost automatically we dismounted, letting the reins fall over the horses’ necks, and removed our hats. The horses stood, and dropped their heads.... It was the morning of creation.

(Miesse and Peterson 2008,132)

These mountaineer tales were extremely successful in fixing the ideal experiential pattern of encounter and ascent in the public mind. At first glance, these rhetorical phases seem to simply mimic John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* allegory, with their chronicles of beauties, dangers, obstacles—all leading to eventual triumph. Yet in Bunyan’s allegory, entrance into the celestial city is the crowning summit of the journey (Keeble 1984, 132). Yet ascent is not the ending for the Mount Shasta mountaineers, nor is it for many of the “mystic mountaineers” or the founders of new religious communities who follow them on this narrative trail of ascent and encounter. While the summit ascent is transformational, it is only part of the journey. The mountaineers add two new endings to Bunyan’s template: the return to the valley, and the invitation to all new pilgrims to pursue ascent.

One of the first mystical ascent journeys to use the mountaineer’s ascent template in her astral journey is M. Evalyn Davis. She is an occult tourist who visited Mt. Shasta in 1905, and she lodged at the Shasta Springs Resort. The town was by no means an idyllic spiritual haven in 1905. At this time it had about 600 residents and was dominated by two industries: timber and tourism. It had four hotels, dozens of bars and boarding houses, three churches, and two schools (Cox 2014, 67). The establishment of the Shasta Mineral Springs company in 1889 began a new tourist trade focused on spiritual retreat and healing mineral waters. Shasta Springs resort was built on the hill above the railroad tracks, and its station was a stop on the Central Pacific

“Wonderland Route.” A tram took visitors up the hill to a dining room and cabins; later an impressive two-story hotel was built, complete with veranda, guest cottages, swimming pools, and clubhouse (Weston 1992, 2). At the station on the track below, even visitors passing through on the trains could disembark and purchase a souvenir tin cup for a taste of Shasta’s healing mineral waters. A tourist visiting in 1913 recalls the scene:

Ten minutes is allowed, and everyone, including the train officials, hurry out to the famous spring. The crystal-clear waters, conveyed from some mysterious source below, bubble up into a large raised basin like a church font. Round this some two or three hundred people are all doing their level best to make the most of their ten minutes.” (Johnson 1913, 327)

In her devotional book, *Revelations of the Life Beautiful* (1908) M. Evalyn Davis recalls a spiritualist encounter with her deceased brother in 1905 while staying at the Shasta Springs Resort. Her brother speaks to her of the resplendent beauty and holiness of Mount Shasta. “This is a beautiful spot favorable to the children of God; yet how many look out on its rare beauties and fail to understand...Beautiful! Glorious! Inexpressible!” (Davis 1908, 60, 61). His spirit reminds her “the higher your soul ascends, the more Christ-like messages you receive.” In the pages following, she marks the travail of her ascension journey in anguished prayers and poems about the mistakes of life, and her quest for purity. Then her ascent takes the form of an astral journey to a sensual place, which she calls the “wonderland of the infinite.” She sees “landscape that earth-language cannot picture...rare in coloring, iridescent the foliage, entrancing the bloom.” Blossoms reach out to caress her face and butterflies touch her lips as she floats by “light as air.” Suddenly the valley below turns to a winter scene: “All was white...soft and downy, glittering and sparkling, bejeweled flakes of frost and myriad tinted, like diamonds” and she sees a lone mountain, rising from its base of gold “transcendent in splendor” and from its “fleecy cloud, came all the colors in their most mellow tints.” As she cries out in ecstasy at the vision a voice tells her that the mountain is “the sacred Mount Olivet” which is the location of Jesus’ ascension in the Gospel of John. When she returns from the bliss of this vision, she invites her readers to “seek such beautiful places” and to drink “from the Fountain-head of life” (Davis 1908, 35, 36, 39).

Founders’ tales

The story of how Guy Ballard met Ascended Master Saint Germain on the mountain is perhaps the most famous Mount Shasta encounter and ascension story. Ballard published his experiences in 1934 as *Unveiled Mysteries*, under the pen name, Godfré Ray King. Saint Germain’s historical identity

is difficult to trace, but he has a rich biographical record in occult literature (Braden 1967, 297). Saint Germain's enigmatic nature is maintained partly through his uncertain nationality (he is thought to be either Italian, Spanish, Polish, or Jewish, but in Theosophical circles he is often Transylvanian). His name is a French version of the Latin Sanctus Germanus, or Holy Brother. Most occult sources agree that he was an alchemist, that he developed an "elixir of life" potion, that he was a diplomat and perhaps an 18th century spy. Some accounts say he was Francis Bacon in a former embodiment; others claim he was the founder of Freemasonry or Rosicrucianism (Cohen 1971, 41, 45). Saint Germain's popularity is evident in the shops in downtown Mt. Shasta where his distinctive auburn-haired, purple-clad, blue-eyed image is displayed on books, pamphlets, posters, and cards. Saint Germain is arguably second only to Jesus as the most recognizable Ascended Master in the city's esoteric visual canon. His dictations fill twenty volumes, and are commonly called the "green books" by students of the I AM Activity.

Guy Ballard's pilgrim tale follows the mountaineer pattern with his opening praise for the beauty and resplendence of the mountain: "Mount Shasta stood out boldly against the western sky...like a jewel of diamond-shining whiteness held in a filigree setting of green. Its snow-covered peaks glistened and changed color from moment to moment" (King 1939, 1). He claims to be in Mt. Shasta on business but also admits to a sideline interest in investigating the existence of the Great White Brotherhood that was associated with this mountain. Ballard takes a long, hot, strenuous climb, and while pausing to fetch water from a spring he meets a young man who offers him a cup. Ballard is told that the drink comes from the "Universal Supply, pure and vivifying as Life Itself" (King 1939, 3). The beverage acts as a kind of elixir and it revives his mind and body. After several pages of instruction, Ballard is told to follow three steps: the first is "control of yourself...both mind and body;" the second to feel your body enveloped in a "Dazzling White Light" and third to accept the fullness of the Mighty God Presence" (King 1939, 11). Suddenly, Ballard's young visitor reveals himself in his true guise as Saint Germain. Saint Germain then takes Ballard to the Lodge of the Brotherhood, and Ballard is given an invitation to meet him again the next day.

The second day Ballard again climbs to the meeting-place, but he experiences the daunting obstacle of a wild Panther, who tests both his trust and fear. Ballard passes the test by taming the panther. He senses the Mighty Presence of God within, and sends love to the animal in a mystic "Ray of Light" (King 1939, 30). When Ballard is given personal instruction from Saint Germain, he is also given four cakes that transform his health, quicken his entire

body, and give him “clearness of mind.” He is then taught the law of re-embodiment, and is transported to places like the Sahara, the Grand Tetons, Yellowstone, Mexico, and Brazil. The last scene is the “Supreme Vision,” an event that includes The Seven Kumaras, who are Lords of the Flame from the planet Venus. There they perform a cosmic musical concert and invite Ballard, his wife Lotus (Edna) and son Donald to perform. Ballard is told that in this time of great need, there would be a great outpouring of “cosmic love” from the Masters and a “tremendous lifting process” where humankind might reach “the Greater Heights.” He is then invited to receive instruction for future work to be performed (King 1939, 252, 253, 258).

This pilgrim encounter and ascent story marks the beginning of the I AM Activity, which later becomes the Saint Germain Foundation. At its height, it claimed to have millions of followers around the globe (Braden 1967). Although the Saint Germain Foundation is headquartered in Schaumburg, Illinois, Mt. Shasta City is the site of its Western Preserve and the center of its Youth Conclave. In 1948, Guy Ballard’s widow, Edna Ballard purchased the Shasta Springs Resort to provide a summer camp for the movement’s youth. Youth groups from the international network of I AM sanctuaries were assigned specific scenes from Jesus’ life to bring to the stage. An amphitheater was constructed, and the three-hour Jesus drama known as the I AM COME! pageant was first performed in 1952 and has been continuously staged in Mt. Shasta City ever since. The drama attracts over 2,000 tourists from this religious community each year. The pageant depicts the life of Jesus, except for the Passion, choosing instead the Ascension on Mt. Olivet for the play’s climax. The theatre has a 34-foot ascension tower—a kind of elevator-loft that dramatically lifts the actor up to the trees into a hidden, tree-house enclosure (I AM COME 2002, 2). Edna Ballard credited Master Jesus himself with the inspiration for this Youth Conclave and the Ascension play, for Jesus revealed to her that the “Record of the Ascension is a Living, Breathing, Etheric Record which is a Magnet to draw, even the human mind, up into...perfection” (I AM COME 2002, 18).

Other emblematic founder-pilgrim encounters on the mountain include Earlyne Chaney’s account from 1952 of an initiation experienced on the mountain with her husband, Robert. It was first published as a “report” soon after their journey, but she withdrew the publication after too many readers traveled to Mount Shasta and attempted to find the secret cave in the narrative (Chaney 2009, ix). The book was reissued in 1980, when Earlyne received a communication from the “Spiritual Hierarchy” that readers and seekers were now better able to “understand and receive the prophecies.” In

1952 she is told by “Master Teacher Rama” to plan a trip to Mount Shasta for an initiation. They were excited by the prospect of going to the mountain, as they had “long heard of Mt. Shasta and the place it occupied in mystical lore” (Chaney 2009, 1). They were told to camp and hike, and to fast for two days. Hungry from their fast, they hiked up to the government camp at Panther Meadows. There, they experienced the resplendence and ordeal sequences that one finds in previous mountain climber tales:

the world beneath us faded into forgetfulness as our eyes beheld the vast expanse... It is difficult to paint a word picture...the dawn was an immense splash of vivid colors, as though Mother/Father God had taken a divine paintbrush and made great sweeps across the universe...over and above it all, Mount Shasta rose like a Lord overshadowing his kingdom. (Chaney 2009, 4, 5)

The hike up the mountain was a trial.

It did not take us long to realize that the climb itself was another test on the Path toward God-realization. We knew that there were those watching to ascertain whether or not we had the courage to face the hardships of the climb in order to obtain the goal ahead (Chaney 2009, 10).

The couple persevered. At last they meet a guide named Idosa, wearing white slacks and a silver zodiac belt. He gives them a cup of special tea to “banish weariness” and it renews their strength. He announces that they are to undergo a “Fire Initiation.” Next they are taken into a dark grotto or cave in the mountain. They find the walls cut from a glowing emerald-colored rock. The tunnel leads to the Cave of the Inner Circle (Chaney 2009, 18, 34). The next forty pages are spent detailing a complex initiation ceremony, which is culminated by a vision of beloved Master Jesus, who told them that the current Light Workers must not flee but instead send White Light of healing love to earth, in order to bring about positive transformation and erase negative karma (Chaney 2009, 70). As the couple returns to the valley Chaney writes:

God hides the glories of other realms...so that humans might endure life on the physical plane... The glories of the higher life are shown only to those who can view them, and who can turn again and take up earthly life without the vain dreamings of the life-to-be. And so we came down from the mountain top a great deal changed from when we went up...to do the Great Work...we were sent to fulfill before we ever put on these forms of flesh.

(Chaney 2009, 73)

Significance of Mount Shasta spiritual tourism

Despite the richness of these pilgrim records, and the beauty and appeal of Mount Shasta as a pilgrimage site, very few academic studies of spiritual tour-

ism in this area exist, and all are limited to the mountain's regional significance. John Calderazzo (2004) includes a fine essay on the New Age tourist scene in Mt. Shasta City in his cultural study of the meaning and significance of volcanoes, and Lynn Huntsinger and Maria Fernandez-Giminez (2000) published a fascinating mixed-methods study of the land use opportunities and sacred site access debates among the U.S. Forest Service, business entrepreneurs, and spiritual pilgrims from many traditions. My study of spiritual tourism in Mount Shasta adds to these existing studies, and attempts to widen the scope of analysis. It represents only one part of a larger project on spirituality in this region that uses localized examples to expand our knowledge of occult and esoteric spiritual subcultures in American religion.

Sacred places are often valued as pilgrimage sites because they are “enduring symbols” with a permanency that transcends the more fluid contingencies of human experience (Bremer 2006). Yet Mount Shasta continues to be an enduring symbol even with the continual change and refinement of its iconic meanings. Mount Shasta pilgrims are not merely the passive receivers of holiness at a “power place” (Timothy and Conover 2006, 144), but they engage in a “reciprocal meaningfulness” that binds them to this place (Bremer, 2006, 33). Unlike nomadic pilgrims who feel the need to travel to many sites in their quest for spiritual wisdom, the spiritual pilgrims of Mount Shasta do not need to challenge that essential categorical binary of “dweller or wanderer” or choose between “fixity over mobility—of roots over routes” (D’Andrea 2006, 25). The cosmic, Californian sacred mountain the pilgrims have created is both root *and* route, a place to dwell and a place to journey. The mountain serves as a conduit to spirit worlds and remnants of ancient civilizations hidden in its depths, and as an access point to vibrational, planetary, and astral worlds accessible in the various dimensions and universes above its peaks. At Mount Shasta, the pilgrims do not merely react to the site: they are actively and creatively contributing to its consecration through their own accounts of ascension, encounter and esoteric discovery. Pilgrim accounts can be revelatory: this study shows how they impart new guidance, novel insight and wisdom and thus serve to create new spiritual communities and understandings. Like a Pacific Rim volcano, ever growing and ever-altering—esoteric wisdom is not seen as a fixed mark, or as an inalterable record, but as a living tradition, revealed gradually, by degrees, mediated and transmitted in part by communications from the spiritual adepts and pilgrim adventurers who reside near or sojourn at Mount Shasta.

Pilgrim tales and artists’ renditions of ascension and encounter allow us to reconstruct a 150-year process of sacralizing the mountain. Spiritual pilgrims

endow the mountain with an ever-expanding repertoire of cosmic symbolic attributes and sacred signifiers. The mountain plays a mediating role in the transmission of metaphysical ideas within communities, and spiritual tourism in this region directly contributes to the foundation and promotion of key esoteric and alternative associational groups and concepts in the United States.

Conclusion: The view from the overlook

The pilgrim experiences profiled here are primarily from people who belong to the frontiers and borderlands of the American alternative esoteric religious spectrum called “metaphysicals.” Courtney Bender notes that such groups are often misrepresented as a “perennial product of disconnected individuals.” Yet, as we have seen, they in fact reflect a set of “historically embedded, reproduced and changing ideas that have been regularly ignored” (Bender 2012, 182). As anyone living near the mountain knows, the views or aspects of Mount Shasta change radically depending upon the directional orientation of one’s viewpoint. Mount Shasta offers to the sightseer a strikingly different contour, shape and visual experience, depending upon whether one is gazing at the mountain from the north, south, east, or west. It is just another dimension of the mountain’s changeling nature that adds to its mystique. On those highways that take travellers through the natural wonders of the West, the road-builders wisely constructed scenic turnoffs at various elevation points on the route to allow for motorists to pause for a perfect, unobstructed view (Scott 1946, 225). Such a vantage point is fittingly and ironically called an “overlook.” Any study of spiritual tourism in Mount Shasta is an “overlook”—in choosing to focus on esoteric accounts, the stories of other spiritual pilgrims are neglected because they are beyond the range of this overlook.

Yet one of those stories beyond the range does provide a fitting ending for this study, because it is a “frontier” pilgrim story. It comes from the Shasta Abbey, founded in 1970 as a self-proclaimed “frontier outpost” for traditional Soto Zen Buddhism in the West. For Zen Buddhists, the mountain means three things. It is a classic Buddhist epithet to describe a novice learning the discipline of *zazen* or sitting meditation. It is a word that also refers to the teacher, a sage whose spiritual abode is the mountain in a literal and figurative sense. Finally, mountain also means simply the place of practice, the monastery, because all spiritual retreats were built upon a mountain. Shasta Abbey Buddhists, like the mountaineers of the nineteenth century before them, describe Mount Shasta as both unchanging and ever-changing (Dōgen 2001, 17). Amidst this paradox of life, there is only one view of the mountain that is truly transformational:

[Mount Shasta] held me suspended that day wherever I went...lives, like that of the wind flowing over the basin, were borne forward that day with the same selfless absorption with which the mountain called Shasta rose in fire ages ago and with which it now drinks the winter snows. ...The mountain comes and is passed on. It is in this way that we receive our lives and it is in this way that we relinquish them as well, not once only, but again and again... The mind of the mountain is none other than our own mind. There is nothing mystical in this, nothing at odds with the ordinary. We would all see that this is so, could we but see ourselves fully into view. (Jenson 1997, 77–79)

This Buddhist pilgrim's invitation to "see ourselves fully into view" circles back to the invitation issued in 1905 by Frederick Spencer Oliver's *A Dweller on Two Planets*: to conquer the self and come to the mountain. It quotes a familiar Christian scripture as a promise to all seekers: "Seek and ye shall find," he wrote, "Knock and it shall be opened unto you.... The one who first conquers self, Shasta will not deny" (Phylos 1940, 248). This invitation, this promise continues to inspire pilgrims to journey to the sacred place of Mount Shasta, to encounter it from a wide range of viewpoints and overlooks. This invitation is echoed also in the motto the Mt. Shasta Chamber of Commerce chose for the town: "Mt. Shasta—Where Heaven and Earth Meet." For pilgrims past and present, the sacred summit of Mount Shasta mirrors the time-honored mystical goal of spiritual ascent. To spiritual tourists this mountain offers its most renewable resource, a "universal supply" of wisdom that is oriented toward the future, but anchored to the past.

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