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THE LEGACY OF EXCEPTIONALISM

This essay is the first chapter of a forthcoming volume by Alan Weltzien entitled Exceptional Mountains: A Cultural History of the Pacific Northwest Volcanoes *(The University of Nebraska Press, 2016). We wish to thank here both the Author and the Publisher for the permission to pre-print it.*

> In various travels and expeditions in the territory, I had viewed the snow-peaks of this range from all points of the compass, and since that time . . .I assert that Washington Territory contains mountain scenery in quantity and quality sufficient to make half a dozen Switzerlands, while there is on the continent none more grand and imposing than is presented in the Cascade Range north of the Columbia River.
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> Lieutenant A. V. Kautz, *Overland Monthly* (May 1876)

The towering position of the volcanoes in the Northwest ethos is foregrounded in regional literature and historical writing. Exceptionalism – the notion that we're something special, given our landscapes — provides the preferred rhetoric, a chauvinistic master trope, in the fond story many Northwesterners tell of themselves. To understand that story, we must define that sensibility then trace its evolution. The Northwest's special endowment depends in part on what I will call the sociology of the snowpeaks. At the top of the region's remarkable topographies float the volcanoes, as virtually every contemporary Northwest literary history or general history claims, and above them all floats Mt. Rainier – Tacoma, or Tahoma in the Yakama language – undisputed crown of the lower forty-eight states' upper left corner. Like Pacific salmon, Rainier, in its myriad views, poses as the quintessential Northwest icon. As such it has served as a commonplace market brand and television backdrop, even appearing on commemorative postage stamps. Its image endorses a range of products and, since 1987, it has graced Washington State license plates. Rainier is ubiquitous.

Rainier figures centrally in Washingtonians' mental map. The Evergreen State's topographies write its "psychological landscape," and at its imaginative center rises Mt. Rainier, the state's biggest mountain and epitome of the acute lure of the West coast's volcanoes. Only four peaks outside Alaska and Hawaii – California's Mt. Whitney and three in Colorado – edge slightly higher, but Rainier's mass and isolation dwarf them. Rainier looms almost three miles above Puget Sound, Washington's inland sea, only forty-five miles or so east of it. Certainly since white settlers began crowding the old Oregon territory north of the Columbia River, some have been trying to take its measure (Barcott) and absorb it in sundry ways. Coming to grips with Rainier pinpoints but one story of regional identity formation as its potential meanings inform Northwestern self-representations.

The challenge of language and self-referentiality was captured by novelist Thomas Wolfe on 2 July 1938, at the tail end of his whirlwind tour, *The Great Parks Trip*, when this North Carolinian writer confronted Rainier in Saturday morning sunlight: "we stood trying to get its scale, and this impossible because there was nothing but Mountain – a universe of mountain, a continent of mountain – and nothing else but mountain itself to compare mountain to" (Wolfe 68). The challenge of Rainier or the other volcanoes consists in part of articulating exactly what they mean, given their unique stature and size. The difficulty – or for Wolfe,

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impossibility – of understanding in no way lessens the chronic effort to do so: a rich history of affinity and interpretation, particularly as these compose one idealized self-portrait.

Defining the volcanoes means defining ourselves. In *On Mount Hood: A Biography of Oregon's Perilous Peak,* a recent book, journalist Jon Bell comments that the first sight of Hood "brands your perception, marks your memory, nearly sends you careening off the road" (Bell x). These volcanoes make hearts if not cars careen, and many – whether natives or newcomers – struggle to understand their own stature in relation to these tallest of all mirrors. They try to absorb their endless astonishment into quotidian lives, which proves an endless frustration and pleasure. Journalists, climbers, and legions of residents and visitors assign widely variable interpretations to the Northwest volcanoes.

The volcanoes' meanings spread far beyond the scientific and factual and across the gamut of subjective human experience. When people gaze upon the volcanoes, they unwittingly study one palimpsest upon which Northwest psychology has written itself. One strain runs through the palimpsest: some conclude that these peaks are special and we must not be far off the mark, ourselves. Along the way such settlers old and new have come to regard themselves as unique, like the Northwest volcanoes themselves, the latter constituting the outer sign of election and inner grace. This theme of good fortune threads through contemporary regional history, journalism, and literature. That story of self-regard seemed firmly established well before the 20th-century's end, the volcanoes proving a signal instance of what two scholars have recently called "ecotopian exceptionalism" (Proctor and Berry).

Rainier and the others dominate the literature just as they dominate the skyline. The special claim of regional literature derives from the population's obsession with our remarkable landscapes (O'Connell). In Northwest literature, landscape has always been foregrounded as its storytellers and writers, like good Emersonian Transcendentalists, have probed a spiritual connection between self and physical environments. In the regional psyche, the Cascades divide westslope green from the brown beyond the mountains' east slopes, and the volcanoes crown the range, lending it superior beauty and shape and excitement.

Late Northwest composer Alan Hovhaness voiced an ancient and abiding view when he defined mountains as "symbolic meeting places between the mundane and spiritual world" (Notes to *Mysterious Mountain,* 1955). Volcanoes with their visible-invisible connections to earth's interior pose a special case, and when Northwest writing turns to the volcanoes, it strains to capture spiritual experience. Westslope urbanites, especially after a Northwest winter, typically recharge their batteries when freshly spying a nearby volcano. When those long seasonal carpets of stratus clouds lift and the jagged line of Cascades, highlighted by the line of volcanoes, becomes visible again, a large segment of the population feels newly grounded and privileged.

Writers repeatedly describe the Big One as "almost godlike," "the physical presence of God," and such deification seems unavoidable. In *Greater Portland,* historian Carl Abbott states, "Mount Hood hovers over Portland like a watchful god" (Abbott 17). The presumption of deity is common among the snowpeaks. If Rainier and Hood are god-like, at least when visible, what does that make those who lived or live within their sight? How does their fond gaze circle back and enlarge themselves? Rainier inspires the development of a robust if not inflated regional ego. The reverential language of the past 150 years rebounds onto its users, and manifestations of this tendency can be plotted as increasing legions of admirers have come to the volcanoes.

The volcanoes exert a magnetic attraction over nearby urbanites, one Northwest poet, for example, proclaiming Rainier as "recreational Mecca and spiritual retreat" (McNulty12). "Recreational Mecca" and "spiritual retreat" tug against one another as they recommend different behaviors. For example, how active or passive should our bodies be near this place? Yet both beckon people closer, as pilgrims enacting a spiritual discipline. The summons leads to both a healthy – or unhealthy – self-esteem and to a range of unintended effects. The influence of mountains upon identity formation, a commonplace in the literature of mountaineering, gains fresh force in the history of Euro-American testimony about Rainier, particularly from those who most literally close the gap between selfhood and divinity: climbers.

I am treating Mt. Rainier as the epitome of the Northwest's volcanoes, as its height, size, and reputation both old and new proclaim its dominance over the regional imagination. Of course, some portions of the population ignore the volcanoes just as many depend upon them in sundry ways.

Shifting landscape priorities and styles of tourism meet in the Pacific Northwest. This "national drama of self-affirmation" (Rothman 15), one could claim, manifests itself with particular vigor in the 'new' Northwest: a

region that has been variously interpreted, like California, as "West of the West." The "myth" and its accompanying "drama of self-affirmation," gain particular potency in the Northwest, for in its "sacred ground" casual tourists or natives alike raise their glances and confront a mountainscape unique in the lower forty-eight states, one from which they continually draw sustenance in negotiating and confirming their identities. In the national imaginary the region shines as an ultimate American West, a last best place, culmination of our westering yearnings. From the 19th century through the early and mid-20th century, styles of tourism shifted from a primarily spectator mode to increasingly participatory roles as more tourists actively used their bodies within their chosen landscapes. In the Northwest the stage was thus set for hikers and climbers and skiers to turn to the volcanoes for their status.

This deepening cultural embrace of the volcanoes tells an important regional story, and a key strand of Northwest identity can be plotted through writing devoted to them. To trace the evolution of that strand means to analyze and critique the sense of special regional endowment. Reviewing that literature shows regional identity transiting from hinterlands to hot spot, from being a shy, gawky kid in the back of the class to a preening, self-impressed star. Nineteenth-century accounts of The Mountain, particularly Theodore Winthrop's (1863) and those pioneering climber-writers collected by Paul Schullery (1987), reflect the growth of exceptionalism. A series of 20th-century texts, culminating in the representative figure, in the early 21st century, of poet and mountaineer, Gary Snyder, document its legacy and durability.

The evidence addresses two fundamental issues: how do visitors or artists voice a volcano, give it language? and how do they speak of themselves after encounters both distant and close up? To write a volcano is to bring it into human reference and impose some human scale: to bring it down to the size of words even as those words insistently point above and beyond themselves. To write Rainier assumes as well that such endeavor uniquely fits and belongs to this giant volcano, not the lower volcanoes let alone any old jagged peak. The survey yields a story of dramatically changing regional self-definition, one which tilts from periphery to center. Along the way, a spiritual and emotional reliance upon this huge icon has grown exponentially. Increasingly, many mark themselves as distinct and privileged according to their relationships with it.

Of course, the region's white history poses only the most recent episode in the ancient drama of human contact with volcanoes. A short span of historical time, one defined by white migration and settlement, has resulted in a dramatic paradigm shift. For Native peoples such as the Nisqually and the Yakama, the values attached to what whites call Mt. Rainier accrue from untold centuries of living nearby. For Native peoples, veneration proscribes visitation: 'Tahoma' stayed off-limits because of its sharply divided meanings. "Ta-co-bet," meaning "nourishing breasts" or "the place where waters begin," is both home of "Sagale Tyee, the Creator, the Great One," as well as angry "spirits of the mountain" (Svinth Carpenter 21, 24, 25). The story of Nisqually origins and migration explains their anxiety and caution about the latter. Sluiskin and Indian Henry, Kickitat and Yakama guides, respectively, of the first (1870) and a subsequent (1884) Mt. Rainier ascents, did not step onto snowfields or glaciers due to longstanding tribal taboos. Most native guides remained below snowline though some individuals climbed, perhaps on vision quests.

If local tribes almost entirely worshipped the volcanoes from a distance, believing them the domain of demonic spirits expressed in occasional eruptions (e.g. the nearly annual eruptions of Mt. St. Helens, from 1831 to 1857, known to the Cowlitz tribe and stray white traders or settlers), white visitors enacted contrary impulses. Modern attitudes toward the sacred volcanoes precisely reverse native attitudes: many are discontent with distant "holy land," and want them close up and personal, in the foreground.

Nineteenth-century writing about Rainier illustrates the origins of that tribal-white reversal. Initially the volcano stayed in the background. On May 7, 1792 the George Vancouver expedition, at anchor in what they named Discovery Bay, first sighted the mountain Vancouver named for an officer friend. An expedition artist made a sketch of the view and Vancouver interpreted the volcano as a promising sign for British settlement of the region. The sketch, or at least a London artist's engraving of it, as the original no longer exists, bears little resemblance to Rainier's sprawling dome; rather, it suggests an auspicious symbol, but nothing spectacular in its own right. For Vancouver and his practical British colleagues, agents of Empire, Rainier formed a scenic backdrop for agricultural settlement, a new colony; the volcano *per se* held less interest except, perhaps, as a source of rivers. What mattered were the forested and watered landscapes below it, and their potential uses. Forty-one years later an adventurous Scots physician, William Fraser Tolmie, trekked from Fort Nisqually into what is now Mount Rainier National Park (MRNP), botanizing for herbal

plants. Tolmie, after whom a peak is named in MRNP's northwest quadrant, is the first recorded Euro-American to directly approach the volcano.

The following generations of American visitors, disciples of philosopher Edmund Burke's gospel of the sublime and the picturesque, seized upon the volcano itself. Like the initial generations of European mountaineers, they pursued and described sublimity in Romantic terms, and the volcanoes drew them like flames. They had absorbed the crucial paradigm shift from "mountain gloom" to "mountain glory"[1]: instead of ugly excrescences best avoided, mountainscapes became, by the 19th century, a key topography of the human psyche. The Theodore Winthrops had been nurtured on William Wordsworth and the other Romantic poets, for whom mountaintops presaged states of eternity to which the imagination continually strives.

Winthrop, Rainier's single most important 19th-century advocate, left an ambivalent legacy in the cultural embrace of volcanoes. For Winthrop, Rainier comprises his north star, as he structures his travel narrative, *The Canoe and the Saddle,* around the mountain. Winthrop emphasizes Rainier's transformative potential and the "spiritual benefits of both the mountain and the region as a whole" (O'Connell 37). Those "spiritual benefits" became a watershed of regional self-regard. *The Canoe and the Saddle,* widely reprinted in the two decades following Winthrop's death in 1861 at only the age of 32, extravagantly promoted the farflung region and its premiere mountain. An outsider, Winthrop worshipped Rainier as eagerly as he ignored his native guides, their tribes, and signs of white subjugation increasingly evident around him.

The tendency toward adoration and private communion not only feeds self-esteem but can remove celebrants from responsible participation in history – in those processes, malign or otherwise, that characterize their own time. Carried far enough, the worshipful pose becomes solipsistic and blinds one to surrounding ground realities including the fundamental differences between self and the object of worship. More than anything else, climbing into an ostensibly metaphysical realm expands the inflatable boundaries of selfhood: that is the guarantee of "mountain glory" that spread rapidly by the late 19th century. But personal "mountain glory" often fostered gendered nationalist and imperialist agendas common in much mountaineering rhetoric of the 20th century – political fallout from the Romantic gospel of sublimity.

Winthrop's literary responses to Mt. Rainier set a pattern that continued through pioneering accounts of climbs and across the 20th century. It's an old story of seduction and addiction, of participating in the "aesthetics of the infinite;" or it's an old story of pilgrimage. In this pattern, imaginative or physical exposure to Rainier resembles a love affair, an enchantment transitory or sustained, in which the visitor loses herself in the beloved. Near or on this magic mountain, the pilgrim is temporarily transported out of clock time as she surrenders to it. Since indigenous peoples around the world construe particular mountains as animate beings, and many religions venerate particular summits as sites for revelation, climbing a volcano recapitulates an archetypal journey with an archetypal plot (approach, difficulties overcome, summit climax, descent denouement). Climbing a volcano – "alive" in a way other mountains are not – only adds *frisson* to the journey.

To "apply" Winthrop's sermon and ascend Rainier means to encounter a timeless ideal and to open oneself to epiphany – and the lingering effects of its enchantment, the possibility of permanent change, of personal transformation. This mountain fever, the promise of the "climber's high," teases crowds, in our time, onto snowfields and glaciers.

Mountain fever derives from a special kind of concentration, an almost trance state of heightened awareness dependent upon the rhythm of legs and lungs. Extreme focus and exertion prompt extreme perception and meditation in this restatement of the archetypal journey. This "zone" proves an addiction for masses.

Yet enchantment carries risks, particularly if the climber pays less attention to his physical environment and more to his self-esteem. Egos wax and wane in the mountains according to individual personalities and immediate experience. Mountain time variably balances pride and humility, self-aggrandizement and self-effacement. As much as anything, this mix marks criticisms of the Romantic sublime, the gospel of mountain glory. Contemplating or climbing a volcano transports us out of ourselves, removes us temporarily from our mortality and chronology. Yet that does not mean climbers shed any expressions of stewardship. On the contrary, a reverential mindset more typically leads to an assumption of responsibility, however slender its expression. Ideally, volcano experience results in increased care-taking, not carelessness, because it

[1] Marjorie Hope Nicolson's thesis in her pioneering study, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (1959).

forcibly reminds its participants of their tiny place on them and within other landscapes. The lesson in humility often inspires an ethic of stewardship.

In its structure *The Canoe and the Saddle* – ur-text among 19th-century Northwest travel narratives – imitates a volcano climb and attests to the symbiosis between remarkable mountains and remarkable selves. The narrative's shape – approach, proximity, withdrawal, like a bell curve, a climb – forges the archetypal model for volcano visits. With Winthrop we ride south-southeast down Puget Sound from Port Townsend, a guest in Winthrop's canoe and, like himself, leaving the paddling to his Klallam guides, as though approaching Rainier directly. Before it, Winthrop praises in inflated Romantic style as though a priest at the high altar. The central chapter of Winthrop's memoir, titled "Tacoma" (in deference to the native name), includes a long, interpolated tale, "Hamitchou's Legend," set on Rainier and told to Winthrop by "a frowzy ancient of the Squallyamish" at Fort Nisqually (92-108). The narrative chronicles his passage along Rainier's northern then eastern perimeters, The Mountain receding as he reaches The Dalles on the Columbia River, his journey's end. The whole design approaches then recedes from the Beloved: a slower, longer version of the plot followed by tens of thousands of visitors, whether climbers or not, ever since.

Years before John Muir sang the mountain gospel of California's Sierra Nevada, Winthrop defined 'volcano fever' in the Northwest, and the heightened terms of engagement have changed little since then. His charged language sets the mold. His first image of Rainier takes the form of a perfect reflection on the Sound's surface (29), and the reader graduates from inverse image to ideal Platonic form, the thing in itself. Winthrop glosses his sermon – "only mountains, and chiefest the giants of snow, can teach whatever lessons there may be in vaster distances" – before and after his slow north-south survey of the volcanoes. (30) Hard to grasp those "lessons" in "palpable ether," as though the prophet speaks in tongues. Nonetheless, for many a Rainier poses as tangible connection with infinity and as a result, affords endless homilies to the witness, however close or distant.

In his infatuation with Rainier, Winthrop endorses the Romantic view of mountains as symbols of divinity. Given this credo of affinity, it logically follows that increasing numbers would close the gap and literally interpret the metaphorical challenge of "mountain glory." This is the clarion call to the mountains, which eventually engenders mass mountaineering on Northwest volcanoes. Many, myself included, accept the call. That sensibility runs through the supposedly more secular present, as every cliché about mystical experience or spiritual epiphany or uplift alters but does not negate it. The New Englander poses as advocate and translator of mountains' "spiritual benefits," and his effusions helped shift the paradigm from background to foreground.

A watershed figure like Winthrop proposes volcanoes as the region's most "sacred ground," as they provide "spiritual benefits" otherwise unavailable. He never specifies what these are. His privileging of Rainier is as influential as his claims are ethereal, and both strains affect subsequent interpretations and behavior on the snowpeaks. For such a prophet, Northwest volcanoes provide a scaffolding for regional chauvinism since their "grand and stirring influences" will inspire a better breed of Americans (198) An Edenic setting nurtures a superior people. In Winthrop's triumphant vision, sustained contemplation somehow creates better lives. This booster's logic proves elusive, the grand prediction characteristically omitting the details: "these Oregon people, carrying to a new and grander New England of the West a fuller growth of the American Idea. . .will elaborate new systems of thought and life. It is unphilosophical to suppose that a strong race, developing under the best, largest, and calmest conditions of nature, will not achieve a destiny" (90-91). In Winthrop's roseate view, the "grander New England of the West" derives from the exceptional peaks.

For the Winthrops, the American Adam – to borrow an old cliché from American literary history defining New World American identity, usually white male – will newly re-emerge in the region and birth a "strong race." This visionary gospel forms, as always, wishful thinking.[2] Such a self-proclaimed promoter as Winthrop claims a consensus about our national essence that is both enduring and laughable. This proper noun ("American Idea") presumes a reductive common vision naively embraced and endlessly critiqued. Yet *The Canoe and the Saddle* predicted a regional ethos that manifested itself more than a century later, one in which the volcanoes serve as a primary symbol. That ethos enabled the late 19th-century and early 20th-

[2] Scholars James D. Proctor and Evan Berry remind us, "exceptionalism is always predicated on a utopian yearning" (150).

century settler Northwest to gradually shake off its inferiority complex. More recently, regional chauvinism has restored Winthrop's book to the status it enjoyed in the late 19th century.

Climbers' narratives printed between 1876 and 1902 (and collected in Paul Schullery's *Island in the Sky*) provided variations on Winthrop's theme and together, fostered the growth of regional exceptionalism. These accounts further link the volcanoes, especially Rainier, to regional identity: their testimony grounds Winthrop's Transcendental rhetoric.

If Rainier looms as symbol for a Winthrop, subsequent writers, having closed the distance, also treat Rainier as fact. They created one publicity stream whose momentum helped pressure the creation of MRNP in 1899. Published in both local presses and national magazines (e.g. *Overland Quarterly, Atlantic Monthly*), these samples of late 19th-century travel writing, of variable quality, generated national interest in the Northwest's dominant volcano analogous to John Muir's and Clarence King's literary accolades about California's Sierra Nevada range. Soon enough, for example, railroads (e.g. Northern Pacific) retained writers who contributed to this interest and thus boosted tourist revenues. In the first generation of transcontinental railroads, when Rocky Mountains and Pacific coast tourism became big business, owners quickly grabbed onto that and created profitable new markets. Particular railroads assumed variable advertising roles for particular monumental landscapes like Northwest volcanoes.

Early climber August V. Kautz's paean (cf. epigraph) not only extolled a particular American mountainscape over all others, but called readers to it. Kautz nearly summitted (10 July 1857) four summers after Winthrop threaded his way eastward across Natches Pass. Declining weather conditions and the late hour of the day forced Kautz to turn back just a few hundred feet below Rainier's highpoint, "Columbia Crest" (Molenaar 30-32). He waited nineteen years to write his account, which was published immediately before the nation's Centennial summer and thirteen years before Washington statehood. His hyperbolic invitation links the Cascades, and particularly the snowpeaks, to national identity. His centennial boast applied the Emersonian gospel to make the U.S. new, not some Old World makeover: in belittling Europe's Alps, Kautz used Washington's mountainscape to proclaim the American Adam, a fresh home-grown humanity defined apart from European precedents. His essay, a prideful act of ownership, placed Northwest mountains in the gallery of outstanding Western landscapes 19th-century America newly championed as part of its world-class heritage and identity. The volcanoes became objects to variably admire, contemplate, climb, and brag over many generations, as tourist paradigms shifted. Writers such as Kautz, led Americans to believe that nothing in Europe can match the American West, let alone the Northwest corner.

Pioneering climber-writers threw down the gauntlet, beckoning readers to reach Rainier and infuse the extraordinary – and extraordinarily difficult – into their mundane lives. Half a year after Kautz's account, Hazard Stevens, son of Territorial Governor Isaac Stevens, published a more polished story in the *Atlantic Monthly* of what Rainier historians agree was the first successful climb, completed by Stevens and Philemon B. van Trump on August 17-18, 1870. Stevens' brag (e.g. "this colossus among mountains") matches Kautz's, Another early climber, George Bayley, echoed Kautz's fervid celebration of the mountainous Northwest.[3] For such, Rainier summit's "field of vision" surveys the new Promised Land, a rhetoric that caught on slowly but flourished by the late 20th century.

From the beginning, travel journalism sustained and elaborated Winthrop's rhapsody, ultimately drawing crowds to the peak. Eventually they came. Early climbing accounts paint pictures similar to Winthrop's, as each climber-writer, through the approach-climb-return plot, endeavors to define Rainier's "fine lesson" and personal transformation, extolling volcano climbing as a desirable agent of change. Such testimony leads, ultimately, to industrial-scale tourism near and on volcanoes.

Some tried their hand at landscape composition: for example, a minister from Snohomish, WA, brushed a broad canvas, from sea level gradually upwards, his set description conjuring this "ideal mountain" and climaxing with its broad dome.[4] These verbal labors were more than matched by those oil painters, descendents of the Hudson Valley School (i.e. the Luminists), who captured Rainier or other snowpeaks on canvas. The most famous writer among these pioneering climbers, John Muir, bestowed his blessing, saluting Rainier as "noblest" among the West coast's "fire mountains." He trotted out the same metaphors

[3] In his "Ascent of Mount Tahoma," (*Overland Quarterly,* Sept. 1886), Bayley extols the Cascades as "the wildest and most inaccessible region within the boundaries of the United States" (Schullery 100, 80).
[4] J. Warner Fobes, "To The Summit of Tacoma" (*West Shore, 1885;* Schullery 265-69).

and championed the same summit panoramas, but reserved his greatest praise for the alpine parks on Rainier's south-central flank – "the richest subalpine garden I ever found, a perfect floral elysium" (Muir 1992, 471) – which quickly became known as Paradise: an irresistible brand that explains, as much as anything, the 20th-century story of MRNP and crowds.

The predictable cheerleading increased its lure by posing a fundamental ambivalence about volcano climbing. Attraction and alienation provide an energizing tension in mountaineering, and Muir gave voice to it. While some predictably detailed physical exhaustion followed by endless summit views – the cliched ascent plot – he remarked the risks inherent in that personal transformation. Muir, an inveterate summiteer, proposed that " more pleasure is to be found at the foot of the mountains" – say, the Paradise alpine parks – than "on their frozen tops."[5] Winthrop's distant communion with Rainier proved less easy and assured when atop it. Physical exhaustion and alienation provide the complications in the archetypal journey. Such a psychic distancing as suggested by Muir underlines the twinned danger and lure commonplace in ascents, particularly on such a dominant volcano. Certainly it defines the challenge of Rainier[6]

The cautionary note represents not only a further teaser, but a theme sustained by many subsequent visitors. The tops of arctic islands prove a risky setting for transformation because they resist habitation: though increasing numbers would regard the mountains as "home," Muir defined Rainier's crater as far from home, and more generally volcanoes and especially summits remain *other* than a home. Mass mountaineering grew out of the contradiction that people belong (temporarily, at least) on summits, yet never belong in such precincts. To court the beloved or to complete the pilgrimage carries risks.

The creation of Paradise by Muir and other publicists enacts Winthrop's boosterism and explains, as much as anything, the story of tourist concentration in the volcano's vicinity. It's another developers' cliché: build Paradise from an alpine park and they will come. Ever the rhapsodist, Muir also labelled those parks, "lower gardens of Eden." By the time the well-known author and founder of the Sierra Club re-published his "Ascent of Mount Rainier"[7] three years after MRNP's founding, its lavish, superlative rhetoric – stock answer to how one writes a Rainier – sealed Paradise's reputation, an area the Nisqually and Yakama had called "Saghalie Illah, the Land of Peace" (Albright and Schenck 234). Roughly half a century later, the brand was sustained by an early caretaker who titled his account of wintering over (1919-20) with his bride, *A Year in Paradise* (1959). As Paradise Found, the precinct quickly become primary visitation site, and remains the launching point for the most popular climbing route (via Disappointment Cleaver), pioneered by most of the earliest summiteers including Muir. In this Paradise, visitors most have the chance to absorb the Mountain's "lessons," so the sentiment goes.

The accounts of these ardent supporters try to capture Rainier's size, dominance, and life-changing health values. They express a rhetoric of religious conversion which applies and specifies Winthrop's symbolic Rainier. They write Rainier and their new selves out of a tradition of special revelation, intimating the ineffable – and irresistible. Of Winthrop's prophetic party, they testified as religious witnesses, recommending this transformation that outlasts their temporary exhilaration. The first woman to climb Rainier (1890) spoke for not only the earliest climbers but future crowds: "All who have the opportunity, and who live in sight of this lofty pinnacle we almost reverence, who have never climbed the mountains, and want to begin life anew might profitably spend a few weeks next summer on its hillside, if they want to fall in love with the world again" (Schullery 140). This language of conversion epitomizes the salubrious, happy "contagion of mountain-climbing," in one pioneer climber's phrase.[8] Volcano fever fuels the addiction of accomplishment: that potential conversion promises a lot. If time on Rainier's glaciers and craters means renewal, even rebirth, climbers return as different people.

The biggest mountain yields potentially the biggest climb and change. The attraction of Rainier and accompanying testimonials illustrate a vigorous turn in Winthrop's "American Idea," as late 19th- and early 20th-century recreational tourists took to the mountains to test their mettle and set new contours of personal identity. In this milieu of masculine virility and nationalist aspiration, Theodore Roosevelt became the role model and Northwest volcanoes and other mountains, an ideal proving ground of selfhood. Philemon B. van

[5] Rpt. in Schullery 123.
[6] Longtime Rainier climber, guide, and artist Dee Molenaar titled his history *The Challenge of Rainier* (1971).
[7] See Muir 1902, 197-204.
[8] Philemon Beecher van Trump, in "Mount Tahoma" (1894).

Trump, the individual who climbed Rainier more than anyone else before 1900, published a spirited defense of "the contagion of mountain-climbing" in the first *Sierra Club Bulletin* (1894). A local Roosevelt, he emphasized the volcano's heroic challenge whereby the climber can transcend physical pain to accomplish the worthy goal of summiting. In this period that goal was heavily tinctured with gendered and imperialist agendas, which influenced local and national mountaineering for generations.

Yet the language of religious transformation proved exportable, removed in time and space from the volcanoes. The railroads targeted a broader audience through their promotional materials. For example, in 1895 a Northern Pacific copywriter published a florid Rainier account in its *Wonderland* travel guides. He let out all the stops in his thoroughly corny invocation and "homage," his effusions superficially echoing those of Winthrop. A canny pitchman, he wrote copy to increase traffic and profits. His lengthy narrative decried the challenge if not impossibility of translating Mt. Rainier, of chronicling the ineffable. Like many before and after him, he used a well-worn rhetorical strategy, protesting his failure yet summoning the mountain after the fact, from great distance.

The strategy of word painting (or something similar) underlines the vividness of the evocations and proves that language, like photographic images and other artistic responses, becomes indefinitely reproducible away from the thing itself. Rainier and all the others are both familiar and unfamiliar in their endless reproductions (e.g. coffee table photography books or online images). Language inherently falls short yet is subject to limitless imitation and copy. And facsimiles take on a long life of their own, in the marketplace and elsewhere. But no matter the brand familiarity, the de-mystification never completes itself: the volcano remains more than our language about it.

The *Sierra Club Bulletins* and those *Wonderland* guides served contrary audiences and agendas, which competed for a long time at Rainier and the other volcanoes. Though both promoted the volcano, the Sierra Club and its Northwest offshoots stressed preservation, not development, from the beginning. These diverse expressions of that lofty "American Idea" – volcanoes as sites for personal change or for tourist business – continue to compete for dominance through the present.

The latter 19th century, then, revealed a rhetoric of superlatives and quasi-religious conversion about the biggest volcano: a linguistic approximation of the region's gifted mountainscape. This rhetoric compensated for Washington Territory's, and young Washington State's, boondocks image, so far from the country's population and cultural centers. In more recent guises such rhetoric honors the biggest and expresses the ultimately inexpressible. The linguistic challenge of Rainier grows in direct relation to proximity: the closer one comes to or on Rainier, the greater its power and transformative potential.

The second fundamental issue, how we speak or write about ourselves after time with the volcanoes, also includes, in its answer, some expectation of recognition: a social confirmation of personal transformation. Those who stray well beyond Paradise's or Sunrise's meadows represent a species of secular pilgrims who all seek personal renewal. One MRNP historian describes a Tacoma street scene after an 1894 climb: "[Major Edward] Ingraham's party of thirteen men and women paraded down the street (…) attired in alpine clothing and with alpenstocks in hand, looking 'like a band of warriors,' chanting: 'We are here! / We are here! / Right from the top / Of Mount Rainier!'" (Catton 10) The long-ago scene suggests a ritual requirement of dramatic display and public acknowledgment asked by climbers, who presume some acknowledgment of that transformation that inflates and alters the self.

For many the social confirmation guarantees the personal transformation as though the latter entirely depends upon the former. The recognition expected by Rainier summiteers has not disappeared. One version of Northwest chauvinism consists of climbing the volcanoes and broadcasting that achievement. It is also reflected in late 20th-century mass mountaineering and regional histories of the sport, some (e.g. *REI: Fifty Years of Climbing Together,* 1988) even claiming the Northwest as the birthplace of American mountaineering in the decades framing World War II. Other communities – New England, Colorado, Yosemite – shrug off this claim.

One strand of Northwest sensibility, then, depends upon people's unfolding cultural uses of the volcanoes. In the preferred narrative we belong to them in some respects just as, in others, they belong to us. Many Northwesterners embrace this fiction of entitlement. For them, whether nearby or at a distance, Rainier signifies not only an emblem of divinity or the otherworldly, but a convex mirror reflecting back some portion of their gaze and faint intimations of its superlative status. They take pride in Rainier and the lower volcanoes as though maintaining a proprietary relation to them. They do not literally see themselves when

contemplating a Northwest volcano yet in another sense, they do. When such folks watch Rainier, they watch themselves in some physical and spiritual relationship to it, as though the tiny human figures in the right foreground of a sprawling Albert Bierstadt mountain canvas. The perceiver always figures in the perceived panorama. In somehow taking its measure, they inevitably take or include their own and in the process, come out looking good.

That visual connection enlarges them and confirms their happy choice in living, temporarily or permanently, within its sightlines. The gleaming images of the volcanoes confirm Northwesterners' healthy – or too healthy – self-regard. Many, though by no means all, bask in their glow. Contemporary evidence suggests Northwesterners have taken Winthrop's claim about the "fuller growth of the American Idea" as gospel. Certainly many published testimonies exist confirming the region as one special place, an ultimate West. The substantial in-migration of the past two generations demonstrates that many have sought out the Northwest. Longtime inhabitants and newer arrivals preen themselves in part because of the spectacular topographies, particularly the show-off snowpeaks. A range of 20th-century texts show the earlier rhetoric about Rainier subject to further specification and, in some cases, qualification. As the habits of imaginative appropriation increase in number and kind, dependency upon the volcanoes as one constituent of regional identity deepens.

As every Northwest history avers, if Northwest pioneer descendents or new arrivals felt peripheral to other U.S. regions in the welter of popular or promotional images more than a century ago, Rainier and the other volcanoes inspired a contrary view, one that took precedence by the mid-20th century. The Cascades as rich endowment compensated the region for its remoteness. Northwesterners are a long ways from New York or that other Washington but the volcanoes symbolize their inheritance, in the region's self-flattering story: a view that extended the Rainier rhetoric of superlatives to all the snowpeaks. For example, North Cascades conservationist Grant McConnell's mid-century essay, "The Cascade Range," singled out the volcanoes for tribute:

> In the neighborhood of any one of the volcanic peaks, that one dominates everything within sight. . .the personality of the nearby peak obliterates the sense that other mountains can exist. Thus each of the big volcanoes has its tributary region…
> There is nothing in the nation remotely resembling any one of them, let alone their long stately procession." (77-79)

Our metaphorical appropriations of volcanoes measures one pattern of human use of them. McConnell's "long stately procession" defines the height of the Northwest's geographical status and unifies the volcanoes above the surrounding Cascades. Anyone who has spent much time in the Cascades high country attests to the accuracy of McConnell's claim. Even in the extraordinary North Cascades, the Alps of the lower forty-eight states, Mt. Baker and Glacier Peak always dominate the west-northwest and southern vistas, respectively. Once high enough anywhere in the range or from a plane, under clear skies one discovers the volcanoes' rising in a loose, north-south line. Mountaineers and others grouped them just as ancient peoples clustered stars into constellations. Those familiar with Washington's five volcanoes accept, without qualification, the notion that each Northwest volcano bears a distinct personality – cf. composer Alan Hovhaness's symphonies to/about Mt. St. Helens and Glacier Peak – and each visually dominates neighboring, lower mountains. The same animist energy holds true among Oregon's far more numerous volcanoes.

With the snowpeaks, writers' and artists' habits of figuration seem inevitable, given Rainier's history of rhapsodic language. These habits mark human dependency and appropriation. Consider the subtitles in Stephen L Harris's *Fire and Ice: The Cascade Volcanoes* (1976), a "volcanic and glacial history": "Oregon's Volcanic Playground" (The Three Sisters), "Guardian of the Wilderness" (Mt. Jefferson), "The Forgotten Giant of Washington" (Mt. Adams), "The 'Fujiyama of America'" (Mt. St. Helens – before 1980), "White Goddess of the North Cascades" (Glacier Peak), and "The 'Great White Watcher'" (Mt. Baker). Harris's familiar epithets, like earlier Nisqually or Yakama or Lummi or other tribal epithets, tag particular volcanoes in relation to the others; they also bridge our understanding of their geology. McConnell's regal metaphor also animates and ennobles the region's most exceptional mountains, and his boastful credo underlines every writer's panoramic survey since Winthrop's symbolizing Rainier.

Because of diverse Rainier meanings – Rainier as tourist business and as site for potential transformation – both regional inhabitants and visitors increasingly have wanted the Cascades, above all the crowning volcanoes, close at hand. Given the publicity streams, the draw is unavoidable. Like gleaming white magnets, volcanoes pull crowds onto their slopes who seek connection. Many seek this locus of the sacred under their boots and crampons. The "challenge of Rainier" distills and climaxes the national brag about the Washington Cascades voiced in 1876 (cf. epigraph). The grip of Rainier or others on the regional psyche and self-portrait adheres, if anything, more strongly now than in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Part of its power derives from the peculiar lure of volcanoes, which become a palpable connection between one's body and the earth's molten interior, between pulsing microcosm and macrocosm, and an emblem of human transience. However long their dormancy, people speak about volcanoes being "alive" as other mountains are not. Volcanoes remind us of a felt connection, however slight, between our transitory selves and the changing face of the planet. That sense of impermanence affords, for some, a measure of consolation. With some vulcanology under our belt, and knowledge of particular volcanoes' particular threats, we employ volcanoes as a frame of reference for our own potential or actual disturbances, and our mortality. That sensibility, antithetical to the neo-Platonism of Winthrop and his successors, is shared by contemporary visitors or residents, many of whom know, particularly since Mt. St. Helens's 1980 explosion, something about risks from volcanoes.

Volcanoes pose as symbols of permanence or impermanence, depending upon generation and temperament, and thus solicit a wide range of artistic and scholarly response from the early 20th-century through the present. Those habits of figuration measure varying degrees of imagined or desired connection. The responses rewrite more than they dispute the earlier style of rhapsodic rhetoric. In the case of Rainier, two poets unsurprisingly engender a different volcano from vastly different perspectives. Marianne Moore's big poem, "An Octopus" (1924) ranges all over the place, likening Mt. Rainier to a giant "Octopus / of ice," labeling it "Big Snow Mountain" and "Mount Tacoma," and quoting from then-current government pamphlets on our national parks. This poem's roving, restless eye suggests the peak as a series of ecosystems and portrays the whole as nothing if not dynamic – and scary in the popular imagination (cf. title metaphor). In her triptych, "Three Ways of Looking at a Mountain" (1992), Denise Levertov proposed a distant, anti-Romantic view that ironically recalls Winthrop's symbol of eternity. She concludes her first poem, "Settling," asserting Rainier's huge presence even when invisible. If The Mountain is not "there" it's there, and settling in means accustoming oneself to a presence that is often absent.

With the volcanoes, imagined connection does not always depend upon physical proximity. The sociology of the snowpeaks encompasses populations at lesser and greater remove, but typically within their sightlines. Most Seattle residents like Levertov (in her final years) prefer Rainier at a distance which, given infrastructural limits, is a good thing. She proposes, in her second poem, "Against Intrusion," distance superior to closeness in this homily: "How clearly it speaks! *Respect, perspective,* / *privacy,* it teaches. *Indulgence* / *of curiosity increases* / *ignorance of the essential*. (italics hers) In voicing Rainier, Levertov interprets its meaning both differently yet similarly to Winthrop's extended definition. For most, Levertov articulates a minority opinion, as "privacy" has become rare for most tourists or climbers. In this paradoxical view, knowledge decreases with intimacy. The lesson of detached "*perspective"* affords a holistic, composed understanding reminiscent of that held by the Yakama and Nisqually, one unavailable close up. Awe demands distance and mass visitation, even if it occasions personal transformation, precludes full knowledge. Detachment enables understanding, and Levertov's poems privilege the vantage of urbanites or those who remain at the far end of their precious vistas.

"Ways of Looking" imply ways of knowing, and in the late 20th century most residents or visitors favor 'intrusion' (vs. Levertov's second poem) in one mode or other, as access grounds familiarity. Many have rejected her*"essential"* meaning of Rainier (an "Open Secret," Levertov's third poem) since they increasingly demand an array of contacts. They want it more than remote: "This mountain's power / lies in the open secret of its remote / apparition, silvery low-relief / coming and going moonlike at the horizon, / always loftier, lonelier, than I ever remember." The rhetoric of superlatives remains, as does the tradition of neo-Platonic image, the "moonlike" "apparition" (cf. Winthrop's initial Puget Sound reflection). But if Rainier is "lonelier, than I ever remember" ("Open Secret"), the personification downplays if not denies the thickening pattern of human connection of the past 150 years. The loneliness Levertov ascribes to it suggests its lack of referentiality for those who live within sight of it. She defines The Big One through two paradoxes: the "open

secret" of its abiding remote image, and its "loftier" yet "lonelier" reality. The volcano's otherworldiness has no bearing on human affairs, it's no altar; or, more commonly, it feeds regional self-esteem, its height somehow improving citizens' own bearing. Many want to be there.

That yearning remains secure in the 21st century, Levertov's dissenting voice notwithstanding. According to this chronic desire, one source of our greatness remains clear. As many commentators have noted, the region has long outstripped its original white stigma as hinterlands and backwater. Patterns of self-representation, the favored local/regional story, always make participants look good, particularly to the extent Northwest self-representations are infused with "invocations of nature spirituality" (Proctor and Berry 161).

The preferred Northwest narrative concerns this "sacred landscape," the tendency to spiritualize our topographies since these constitute, in historian William G. Robbins's words, "the centerpiece of our regional iconography" (177-78). If our iconography constitutes our essence, the outer sign of our collective inner grace, then the volcanoes form a center. Robbins's scholarly anthology, *The Great Northwest: The Search for a Regional Identity* (2001), works between potential tensions in its title's two halves: between myriad signs of ongoing identity "search" and a consensus of "greatness." Arguably, the search has slowed in the early 21st century because most inhabitants, if questioned, construe it as over. Great mountains, particularly the snowpeaks, form part of the core of "great Northwest" on anyone's list. The consensus is inevitably self-congratulating and insufficiently self-critical.

"Nature's Northwest" climaxes other Northwests that together constitute the region. Instead of being defined by outsiders, many Northwesterners pro-actively gild their region, taking their cue from coastlines, salt water, rivers, mountains, and literally above all, volcanoes. The case is perfectly made by the cover chosen for Robbins's anthology, a "Detail from *Mt. Hood,*" a big oil painting by William Samuel Parrott (in the Portland Art Museum). A late 19th-century painting, product of the American Romantic landscape school, reasserts the volcanoes' dominance in the contemporary regional imaginary.

This "Detail" confirms the volcanoes' contiguity. No miniscule figures in the left or right foreground relieve the focus upon Parrott's Mt. Hood; only a couple of drift logs balanced on some lakeshore boulders momentarily pull our eye from the far shore of the still lake (presumably Lost Lake), and that distant line, along with the foothills behind, insistently draw our eyes upward to the top third of the cover. The painter has foreshortened the mountain as though with a powerful telephoto lens, and his oils have simplified its lines and rendered it snowier than usual. The viewer gazes upon an idealized Mt. Hood on whose western façade two enormous ribs, or spurs, separate several glaciers. Parrott's *Mt. Hood* towers over the lake to an extent that it does not over Portland, but the imaginative claim feels contemporary, not only 19th-century. Parrott's romanticized *Mt. Hood* underlines its domination over the Oregonian imagination and sustains the regional tradition of superlative rhetoric. Like his *The Three Sisters from Clear Lake,* and Sanford Gifford's and Albert Bierstadt's paintings of Mt. Rainier from southeast Vashon Island – *Mt. Hood* visually captures that tradition of magnificent awe, of language straining at its own borders to signify the grandeur of volcanoes initiated by Winthrop and imitated ever since.

Other contemporary evidence including scholarly histories and poetry links the volcanoes' dominance with the issue of regional identity in ways that show the latter sustained, in part, by the former. There is no getting around the volcanoes or the increasing human play on or below them. The cover of *The Pacific Northwest: Growth of a Regional Identity* (2010), for example, follows suit from the Robbins's anthology cover, again featuring Mt. Hood from Lost Lake – likely the most popular perspective except Portland's. Over and over, Mt Hood and the others provide a regional brand and striking visual and psychic benchmark.

The Rainier rhetoric of superlatives and testimony, a capstone feature of "nature's Northwest," continues unabated through the present, sometimes turning in countercultural directions. Such turns only increase the volcanoes' cultural value for new population segments. That reconfirmed cultural value sanctions increasing uses close up – contrary to the recommended detachment of Marianne Moore or the distance of Denise Levertov. The value grants renewed license to mountaineers as pilgrims. Immortalized as hip mountaineer, Japhy Ryder, in Jack Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* (1958), poet Gary Snyder, native Northwesterner, brings a new-old spiritual cachet to the Northwest volcanoes. In the 1940s Snyder climbed all of them, and he shows himself a descendent of the Winthrop tradition who lends the volcanoes a Zen Buddhist aura in his "Mt. St. Helens" sequence (*Danger on Peaks*, 2004). Through Snyder, an Eastern esthetic with ever-widening appeal is imposed on the volcanoes such that they become, for reasons similar but different from the first generation of Rainier climber-writers, a highly sought mode of self-realization.

Once again the volcanoes loom as both fact *and* symbol, as emblems of permanence *and* impermanence. Snyder spiritualizes "the snowpeaks" with new nuance, mountain climbing serving as a form of prayer, an extension of the Buddhist tradition of walking meditation. In "The Climb," Snyder's invocation recognizes and endorses the contemporary paradigm of the volcanoes as site for personal growth, itself only the newest version of the old theme: "the big snowpeaks pierce the realm of clouds and cranes, rest in the zone of five-colored banners and writhing crackling dragons in veils of ragged mist and frost-crystals, into a pure transparency of blue." His Himalayan credo sounds an essential clarion call for Baby Boomers who read Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* in the 1960s and 1970s. The credo became one of the primary attractions to Northwest climbing, at least standard route ascents, by the 20th-century's end. It is cool to climb, like practicing a zazen, and the Eastern flavor lends further mystique and status to the aspirant. In this recent variation on the theme of volcanoes affording self-transcendance, too often the subsequent boast eclipses the transcendance.

Ultimately, those two issues – giving voice to a volcano (apart from geology) and voicing one's relation to it – overlap more than not, as my survey has proven. People can't really speak about them apart from their experience, imaginative or otherwise, of them. The two issues presume an essentialist view of language and that which it defines. For example, Snyder's definition of the volcanoes, like the Rainier rhetoric since the late 19th century, seemingly derives from the mountains themselves. That is the governing illusion – Snyder borrows images from Tibetan Buddhism, after all. Ditto the illusory notion that the definition is not exportable to other volcanoes and regions. Rather, the language about the snowpeaks presumes their uniqueness. Those who write Rainier or any of its sisters do so in the conviction that their words, however imperfect, belong only to it. The assumption is that a singular relation exists between it and the language it attracts. Writers' incomplete or approximate language, however frequently imitated or copied, about them exists only in relation to them, not any other mountainscape. Northwesterners posit an essentialist view of their relationship to this highest landscape.

The volcanoes provide a rich and diverse legacy, a prominent inheritance, and our language, whatever scholarly or journalistic or artistic mode, marks our dependency.

Within the past century a paradigm shift has occurred involving the outcomes of recreational tourism. The volcanoes have acquired new forms of prestige on a massive scale as people seem, in many guises, to rely on them more. This shifting sociology derives from the rise of status tourism, which can be defined as packaged experiences of faux-authenticity dependent upon commodification and perceived status.[9] It's all about buying your way into cool places, perhaps at some personal effort. When mountaineering trips serve as a vehicle to increase social status, the results have been dramatic on the volcanoes. Recreation and self-fulfillment have been core values there for a long time. Only in the past few generations have they grown indistinguishable from status, as though bragging rights exceed the older value of personal transformation on Rainier and its sisters.

Northwest volcanoes not only represent primary sites that enhance status. They make people feel better, and better about themselves. Their linguistic legacy feeds local identity wherein well-being easily and inevitably becomes privilege. After all, as many have remarked, more than a few Puget Sound residents claim a special affinity with their five volcanoes just as Willamette Valley residents do with their more numerous ones, deriving from their views both a personal relationship and a subsequent sense of entitlement. Those sightlines, from all compass points, account for the aura of smugness that has grown steadily recently, along with the population. Whether on I-5 or I-90, or flying in or out of SeaTac: to write Rainier is to write themselves, so regional thinking goes, and its legacy of superlative rhetoric spills over into self-definition. Taking the measure of The Mountain means taking their own in some regards. In the process, more than a slight residue of complacency has accreted in local imagery and publications, promotional and otherwise. This complacency in turn beckons more masses to Rainier.

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[9] The term comes from Hal K. Rothman, Jr.'s *Devil's Bargains* (1998), and represents Rothman's contemporary mode of tourism.

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