

Gary Snyder's Green Dharma

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Abstract

Twentieth-century environmentalist discourse often laid the blame for environmental degradation on Western civilization, and presented the religious traditions of the East as offering an ecocentric antidote to Western dualism and anthropocentrism. Gary Snyder has looked to Chinese and Japanese Buddhism to inform his environmentalist poetry and prose. While Snyder often writes in terms of a dualism of East and West, he synthesizes traditional forms of Buddhism with various Western traditions, and his green Buddhism ultimately undermines more simplistic oppositions of East and West.

The first chapter reads Snyder's writing of the mid-1950s alongside several of his West Coast contemporaries—Kenneth Rexroth, Allen Ginsberg, Michael McClure, Philip Whalen and Jack Kerouac—showing that these writers evoked the natural world together with Buddhist themes before the advent of the modern environmental movement in order to mount a critique of Cold War American culture. Snyder's early interest in Buddhism was motivated largely by translations of Chinese poetry and Chapter Two examines his own translations of the Tang Dynasty poet Hanshan. In Snyder's translations and contemporaneous original poetry, Buddhist poetics mingle with American conceptions of wilderness. Chapter Three shows how Snyder's Buddhism was influenced by Anglophone writers such as D.T. Suzuki and Alan Watts, and argues that from the late 1960s Snyder aimed to Americanize Buddhism as ideas of localism became more central to his environmentalism. Chapter Four examines Snyder's synthesis of Hua-yen Buddhism and Western scientific ecology in the 1970s and 1980s. Chapter Five examines 'The Hokkaido Book,' an unfinished prose work on environmental attitudes in the Far East in which Snyder considers the relationship between the civilized and the primitive. Chapter Six examines the influence of Chinese landscape painting and Japanese Nō drama, two forms steeped in Buddhist ideas, on the poems of *Mountains and Rivers Without End*.

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Introduction

In 1967 the medieval historian Lynn White Jr. published a paper entitled ‘The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis’ in the journal *Science*. White’s paper would become one of the most influential pieces of twentieth-century environmental polemic. It has been reproduced in publications as diverse as *The Boy Scout Handbook*, *The Sierra Club Bulletin*, *Horizon Magazine* and the San Francisco countercultural newsletter *The Oracle*; and in 1970 *Time Magazine* and *The New York Times* both published responses to White’s article.¹ The paper’s inclusion as the first piece in Glotfelty and Fromm’s anthology *The Ecocriticism Reader* and references to it in Greg Garrard’s critical survey of ecocriticism mean that it is still widely read within green studies today.² In the article White argues that environmental degradation is the result of ‘the Baconian creed that scientific knowledge means technological power over nature’.³ He finds the roots of this Baconian creed within the Judeo-Christian tradition, specifically in the Book of Genesis where God grants humanity dominion over nature. Because in the Judeo-Christian tradition man ‘shares, in great measure, God’s transcendence of nature’, Christianity establishes ‘a dualism of man and nature’ and is ‘the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen.’⁴ Following a Weberian logic, White claims that such dualistic and anthropocentric attitudes are ‘almost universally held’ within Western culture, even by those who consider themselves ‘post-Christian’.⁵ Because Western ‘science and technology have grown out of Christian attitudes toward man’s relationship to nature’, White doubts ‘that disastrous ecologic backlash can be avoided simply by applying to our problems more science

¹ This account of the publication history of White’s article is taken from Elspeth Whitney, ‘Lynn White, Ecotheology, and History’, *Environmental Ethics* xv, 2 (Summer 1993), 141-69, pp.157-8. Whitney gives specific reference to each reprinting or response.

² Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, eds., *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (Athens, GA, 1995), pp.3-14. Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2012), pp.42, 96.

³ Lynn White Jr., ‘The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis’, *Science* clv, 3767 (10 March 1967), 1203-07, pp.1203.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1205.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.1206. White acknowledged the influence of Weber in a follow-up piece, ‘Continuing the Conversation’, *Western Man and Environmental Ethics: Attitudes Toward Nature and Technology*, ed. Ian G. Barbour (Reading MA, 1973), 55-64, p.55. Lewis W. Moncrief criticized the Weberian terms of White’s argument: ‘The Cultural Basis for Our Environmental Crisis’, *Science* clxx, 3957 (30 October 1970), 508-12, pp.509, 511-12.

and more technology.’ Rather, since ‘the roots of our troubles are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not.’ White does suggest that such religious remedies may be found within the Christian tradition, and proposes St Francis of Assisi ‘as a patron saint for ecologists.’⁶ Of more importance to the argument of this thesis, however, is White’s suggestion that religious remedies to the ecological crisis may be found outside the Western tradition. He looks both backwards to pre-Christian animism, and laterally to ‘Asia’s religions’ which, with the exception of Zoroastrianism, stand ‘in absolute contrast’ to the dualistic attitude of Christianity.⁷

The outline of White’s argument, with some variations, would be repeated by proponents of deep ecology, an environmental philosophy that asserts the intrinsic value of non-human nature.⁸ Deep ecologists are more likely to find the root of the Western dualism of man and nature in the Cartesian split of mind and body, implying as it does the superiority of human mental faculties over material nature. Devall and Sessions, in what has been described as ‘the first major book on the deep ecology movement’ by American writers, quoted a passage of Descartes’ *Discourse on Method* in which he states his aim to establish a philosophy which would allow humanity to ‘make ourselves masters and possessors of nature.’⁹ Like White, who they refer to on more than one occasion, Devall and Sessions look to ‘primal peoples’ and to Eastern spiritual traditions, particularly Daoism and Buddhism, for religious alternatives to Western dualism.¹⁰

In a little commented on section of his article, White praises ‘beatniks’ who ‘show sound instinct in their affinity for Zen Buddhism, which conceives of the man-nature relationship as very nearly the mirror image of the Christian view.’¹¹ Perhaps the quintessential Zen beatnik was Gary Snyder, himself a major figure in twentieth-century environmental

⁶ White, ‘Historical Roots’, pp.1206-7.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.1205.

⁸ See Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, pp.23-6.

⁹ Alan Drengson and Yuichi Inoue, Introduction, *The Deep Ecology Movement: An Introductory Anthology*, eds. Drengson and Inoue (Berkeley, 1995), xvii-xxviii, p.xviii. Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered* (Salt Lake City, 1985), p.41.

¹⁰ Devall and Sessions, *Deep Ecology*, pp.45, 90, 96, 100.

¹¹ White, ‘Historical Roots’, p.1206.

thought. The environmental aspects of Snyder's work have been discussed at length in pioneering works of literary ecocriticism such as John Elder's *Imagining the Earth* (1985), Leonard Scigaj's *Sustainable Poetry: Four America Eco-poets* (1999), and in less detail in Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) and Jonathan Bate's *The Song of the Earth* (2000). Neil Astley's important anthology *Earth Shattering: Eco-poems* includes a sizable selection of Snyder's poetry.

A response to White's article written by the theologian Gabriel Fackre confirms Snyder as one of the Zen 'beatniks' who White speaks of. In an essay which attempts to define an ecocentric Christian position, Fackre rather condescendingly refers to countercultural 'ecological activists' who 'recommend a nature-affirming reverence for all life, who look to the religions of the East' as well as to 'native Indian' cultures to 'sustain it.'¹² As an illustration, Fackre quotes a 1969 essay by Snyder, although he attributes it to the Berkeley Ecological Revolutionary Organization, who reprinted the article in 1970, rather than to Snyder individually:

It seems evident that there are throughout the world certain social and religious forces which have worked through history toward an ecologically and culturally enlightened state of affairs. Let these be encouraged: Gnostics, hip Marxists, Teilhard de Chardin Catholics, Druids, Taoists, Biologists, Witches, Yogins, Bhikkus, Quakers, Sufis, Tibetans, Zens, Shamans, Bushmen, American Indians, Polynesians, Anarchists, Alchemists... the list is long. All primitive cultures, all communal and ashram movements.¹³

Fackre comments:

There are no Jews or Protestants in that list. The Christians mentioned are a select group. The rest of us are culprits.¹⁴

While Snyder's list of 'ecologically and culturally enlightened' groups does include some Western ones, they are on the periphery of Western culture, part of what Snyder had called the

¹² Gabriel Fackre, 'Ecology and Theology', *Western Man and Environmental Ethics*, ed. Barbour, 116-30, p.117.

¹³ Gary Snyder, 'Four Changes', *The Lancaster Independent Press* (14 February 1970). Quoted in Fackre, 'Ecology and Theology', p.117. Snyder's ellipsis. An amended version of the whole essay is printed in Snyder, *Turtle Island* (New York, 1974), 91-105.

¹⁴ Fackre 'Ecology and Theology', p.117.

‘Great Subculture’.¹⁵ Like White, and like Devall and Sessions, Snyder points to ‘primal peoples’ and to Eastern religious traditions as examples of ecocentric worldviews ‘in absolute contrast’ to the ecologically destructive tendencies of the dominant Western culture. This thesis is primarily concerned with Snyder’s engagement with Eastern religious traditions, particularly Zen Buddhism, but an engagement with primal cultures runs parallel to this engagement in Snyder’s writing, and the relationship between the two is explored in Chapters Three and Five.

Throughout his career Snyder would make Whitean pronouncements. In a 1977 interview he speaks of an early realization that ‘Western culture [...] was off the track’.¹⁶ He later spoke in particularly Whitean terms when discussing China:

I even thought for a time that simply because China had not been Christian, and had been spared an ideology which separated humankind from all other living beings (with the two categories of redeemable and unredeemable) that it naturally had an organic, process-oriented view of the world.¹⁷

Snyder’s statement here suggests that he later modified this dichotomous view of East and West, and such modifications will be described in this thesis. Snyder had read White’s paper by 1969, when he referred to it in an essay,¹⁸ but he had contrasted Eastern and Western attitudes toward nature in his work since the 1950s, as will be seen in Chapter One. White’s paper is evoked in this introduction not to overstate its influence on Snyder, but to show that an examination of the Eastern influence on Snyder’s environmental thought has relevance to the broader history of twentieth-century environmental thought.

The Whitean contrast of East and West lays itself open to certain criticisms. One early response by Moncrief argued that White overstated the importance of religion: ‘to argue that it is the primary conditioner of human behaviour toward the environment is much more than the data that he [White] cites to support his proposition will bear.’¹⁹ Moncrief blames

¹⁵ Snyder, *Earth House Hold: Technical Notes & Queries to Fellow Dharma Revolutionaries* (New York, 1969), p.115.

¹⁶ Snyder, *The Real Work: Interviews & Talks 1964-1979* (New York, 1980), p.94.

¹⁷ Quoted in Dan McLeod, ‘Asia and the Poetic Discovery of America from Emerson to Snyder’, *Discovering the Other: Humanities East and West*, ed. Robert S. Ellwood (Malibu, 1984), 159-80, p.117.

¹⁸ Snyder, *Earth House Hold*, p.122.

¹⁹ Moncrief, ‘Cultural Basis’, p.509.

environmental degradation on the drive to increase individual wealth, promoted particularly by Western capitalism but ‘not restricted to any one culture.’²⁰ Other early responses attempted to defend Christianity from White’s critique, arguing that the Book of Genesis can be read as promoting ecological stewardship.²¹ A later response to White’s article, written in 1969 by the ecologically-minded poet Wendell Berry, argued that while the ideal of stewardship may be implicit in Genesis, Christianity ‘as usually presented by its organizations, is not earthy enough’, and in order to realize the ecocentrism implicit in the Christian creation narrative, Christianity must become more like Buddhism: ‘I want to see if there is not at least implicit in the Judeo-Christian heritage a doctrine such as that the Buddhists call “right livelihood” or “right occupation.”’ Berry was corresponding with Snyder by the time he wrote this.²²

Other criticisms can be levelled against the Whitean contrast of East and West. The association of a cultural other with nature can be problematic. Clearly White’s and Snyder’s portrayals of Eastern cultures do not follow Said’s model of orientalism by asserting the West’s ‘intellectual *authority* over the Orient’, yet they do hint at a Saidian ‘basic distinction between East and West’.²³ By pitting an ideal Eastern environmental attitude against a destructive Western one, Snyder and White establish an ecological permutation of what Cynthia Stamy has described as a tradition of ‘subversive orientalism’. In her study of the Chinese influence on Marianne Moore’s poetry, Stamy places twentieth-century American orientalism within a lineage of satirical orientalist writing which dates back to sixteenth-century England and Europe in which Far Eastern characters or subject matters are used to critique ‘resident institutions, prominent persons or the contemporary state of affairs’ in Europe.²⁴ In a 1970 response to White, the geographer Yi-fu Tuan pointed out some of the problems with

²⁰ Ibid., p. 511.

²¹ Fackre, ‘Ecology and Theology’, p.46; René Dubos, ‘A Theology of the Earth’, *Western Man and Environmental Ethics*, ed. Barbour, 43-54, p.46.

²² Wendell Berry, *The Gift of Good Land: Further Essays Cultural and Agricultural* (San Francisco, 1981), p.267. For Berry’s correspondence with Snyder, see Chad Wriglesworth, ed. *Distant Neighbours: The Selected Letters of Wendell Berry and Gary Snyder* (Berkeley, 2014).

²³ Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (1978; repr. London, 1991), pp.19, 2. Said’s italics.

²⁴ Cynthia Stamy, *Marianne Moore and China: Orientalism and a Writing of America* (Oxford, 1999), p.16.

subversive orientalism in its ecological guise. He finds a spirit of Rousseauian primitivism to permeate the attitudes of '[s]ensitive Westerners' who 'are wont to contrast their own aggressive, exploitative attitude to nature with the harmonious relationships of other times and other places.' While this 'view should be commended for generosity,' it 'lacks realism'.²⁵ Firstly, it simplifies the religious traditions it holds up as foils to Western religious traditions. While Tuan accepts that there is 'some truth' in the 'generalization' that Chinese culture sees humanity as 'part of nature', there is a "'male" principle of dominance' toward the natural world within China's traditional religious worldview.²⁶ What is more, in an argument similar to Moncrief's, Tuan claims that 'religious ideas rarely have a major role' in determining a culture's 'practices pertaining to [the] environment'.²⁷ Tuan describes China's deforestation from the tenth century as the result of 'metallic industries' and 'the manufacture of salt alum, bricks, tiles, and liquor.' An 'enormous amount of timber' was also used 'for construction in the old Chinese cities, probably more than was required in European cities of comparable size', and Tuan gives details from the thirteenth century. Deforestation in the Far East was often exacerbated by the very religions held up by White for their ecocentrism. From the tenth to the fourteenth centuries, the Buddhist practice of cremation 'was common enough in southeastern coastal provinces [of China] to create a timber shortage'. In seventeenth-century Japan, deforestation was blamed on the construction of huge Buddhist halls and temples.²⁸

More recent ecocritical work has stressed the ways in which issues of race and environment are interconnected, although they do not deal specifically with presentations of East Asians. Race may not be an exact synonym for culture, or for religious tradition, but these terms often act as interchangeable criteria according to which one group registers its difference from another, so the relevance of ecocritical discussions about race to the present discussion should be self-evident. Shepard Krech has discussed the trope of the 'ecological Indian' in

²⁵ Yi-fu Tuan, 'Our Treatment of the Environment in Ideal and Actuality', *American Scientist* lviii, 3 (May/June 1970), 244-9, p.244.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.244, 247.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.244.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.247.

twentieth-century American environmental discourse, showing that the idealization of Native American attitudes toward the natural world is rooted in the romantic primitivism of Montaigne and Rousseau, and fails to acknowledge that ‘indigenous people’ are ‘dynamic forces’ within their environments ‘whose impact, subtle or not, cannot be assumed.’²⁹ Paul Outka has described the association of African Americans with nature in American literature, arguing that whites have made ‘people of color signify the natural, as a prelude to exploiting both.’ ‘Racism’, he continues, ‘whether directed against African Americans, Native Americans, Chinese laborers, or Irish immigrants—almost always asserts the supposedly subhuman or “animal” qualities of its object in contradistinction to white/human supremacy’.³⁰ Huggan and Tiffin, in a book which focuses primarily on connections between postcolonial theory and animal studies, point out that ‘environmental racism,’ the connection of race and environment, ‘has both positive and negative components, accruing just as easily to those considered romantically to be in harmony with nature, e.g. the familiar trope of the “ecological Indian”’.³¹ While ostensibly celebratory of cultural or racial others, the Whitean contrast of East and West may uphold the spurious logic by which racism justifies itself.

White’s contrast of East and West presents another ecocritical problem. White and deep ecologists want to undo the dualisms that govern Western attitudes to nature: the dualism of man and nature, and that between a transcendent realm of divinity and the material earth. Philosopher Kate Soper has argued that, in one sense at least, the very word ‘nature’ implies dualism: ““nature” is the concept through which humanity thinks its difference and specificity.”³² A string of binary oppositions are associated with this basic human/nature opposition: culture and nature, civilization and nature, art and nature, city and country or city and wilderness. The Christian distinction between heaven and earth follows this binary structure, as does the Cartesian split between mind and body, the latter being seen as part of

²⁹ Shepard Krech III, *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (New York, 1999), pp.18, 23.

³⁰ Paul Outka, *Race and Nature: From Transcendentalism to the Harlem Renaissance* (New York, 2008), pp.3, 6-7.

³¹ Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (Oxford, 2010), p.4.

³² Kate Soper, *What is Nature? Culture, Politics and the Non-Human* (Oxford, 1995), p.155.

material nature. By associating a cultural other with nature, whether as romantic idealization or as justification for oppression, binary oppositions of civilized and primitive, white and black, West and East become aligned with the basic human/nature opposition. In presenting non-Western cultures as exemplars of ecocentric monism, White ultimately upholds the dualistic logic he seeks to undo.

Ecocriticism has looked to challenge some of the binary oppositions around which our ideas of nature are structured. Lawrence Buell's second ecocritical book, in putting "green" and "brown" landscapes, the landscapes of exurbia and industrialization, in conversation with each other', asserts 'the impossibility of cordoning off country from city, or vice versa.'³³ Timothy Morton has argued that, rather than considering nature as 'always "over yonder,"' we must achieve a 'thinking of interconnectedness.'³⁴ It is the argument of this thesis that Snyder ultimately achieves a 'thinking of interconnectedness'; not only the interconnectedness of East and West, but of man and wilderness, civilized and primitive, the city and wild nature, and of art and nature. While I use the term 'nature' throughout primarily in the sense that Soper uses it, as signifying the non-human, the meaning of 'nature' will shift to include the human realm as the development of Snyder's non-dualistic vision is elucidated. I focus on Snyder's yoking of Zen Buddhism to environmental concerns. While the basic gesture of looking to an Eastern religion for an ecocentric philosophy of nature can be characterized as Whitean, or proto-Whitean, and Snyder would make pronouncements which on the surface appear to uphold White's 'absolute contrast' between East and West, such pronouncements are rarely unqualified. As will be seen in the first chapter, from the beginning of his career Snyder drew attention to early deforestation in China in order to problematize this 'absolute contrast' much as Tuan would do a decade and a half later. By 1977, Snyder would say in interview that he did not think in terms of East and West.³⁵ The non-dualistic attitude to nature that Snyder has

³³ Lawrence Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond* (Cambridge MA, 2001), pp.7, 264.

³⁴ Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge MA, 2010), pp.5,7.

³⁵ James McKenzie, 'Moving the World a Millionth of an Inch: an Interview with Gary Snyder', *The Beat Diary*, eds. Arthur and Kit Knight ([s.n.], 1977), 140-57, p.157.

developed throughout his career is heavily influenced by Zen Buddhism, but, as will be seen especially in Chapters Three and Four, Snyder's 'green Dharma' was modified by numerous Western discourses, and should be regarded as a hybrid of Eastern and Western traditions.

This Thesis in Relation to Previous Snyder Criticism

In my opening chapter I contextualize Snyder's early writing by reading his work of the 1950s against other Beat writers living in the San Francisco Bay area at this time, specifically those who read or were present at the 1955 Six Gallery reading: Allen Ginsberg, Michael McClure, Philip Whalen, Jack Kerouac and Kenneth Rexroth.³⁶ References to the work of these writers, particularly Rexroth and McClure, continues to be made throughout the thesis. My placement of Snyder's writing in this context in some respects follows Rod Phillips. In his 2000 book *"Forest Beatniks" and "Urban Thoreaus"* Phillips challenges the prevailing critical view of Beat writing, with the exception of Snyder's work, as 'an urban phenomenon' and argues 'that nature and ecological concerns have long been a part of Beat literature'.³⁷ The relationship between Eastern religious ideas and ecological concerns, while noted by Phillips, is not his primary concern. Phillips devotes a chapter each to Snyder, Kerouac, Lew Welch and McClure. Welch is not included in my discussion partly because he is a relatively minor figure, and partly because he did not attend the Six Gallery reading, the pivotal moment in the history of Beat literature on which my opening chapter focuses.³⁸ I expand upon Phillips' study by discussing Rexroth and Ginsberg, who receive only passing mentions in Phillips' book. A generation older than the other writers discussed, Rexroth was a keen hiker and avid orientalist, and the relation of Buddhist themes and natural landscapes in his work constitutes an important precedent for Snyder's work. In this opening chapter I argue that Buddhist themes and images

³⁶ In 1977 Snyder claimed that he 'never did know exactly what was meant by the term "The Beats,"' but went on to define the term as signifying 'the original meeting, association, comradeship' of a group of writers including those I list (Ibid., p.141).

³⁷ Rod Phillips, *"Forest Beatniks" and "Urban Thoreaus": Gay Snyder, Jack Kerouac, Lew Welch, and Michael McClure* (New York, 2000), p.2.

³⁸ Phillips does show that Welch had a strong interest in Buddhism, and readers interested in him are directed to Phillips' chapter on him (Ibid., pp.71-102).

took on particular subversive connotations in the Cold War context, and the writing of these poets in the mid-1950s are examples of ‘subversive orientalism.’ This chapter also owes a debt to John Suiter’s *Poets on the Peaks* (2002), an excellent historical treatment of Snyder’s, Whalen’s and Kerouac’s time spent as mountain lookouts in the 1950s, which provides useful biographical background.

In my second chapter I examine *Cold Mountain Poems*, Snyder’s translations of Hanshan, a Tang Dynasty Buddhist wilderness poet whom Snyder read in Buddhist terms. The Buddhist ideas in Snyder’s Hanshan translations have been explored in a Book-length study by Tan (2009), which claims to be ‘the first work that attempts to draw the three threads’ of Hanshanian poetics, Chan Buddhism and ecology in Snyder’s work ‘together into one system of ideas.’³⁹ Tan uses Buddhist poetics to read Snyder’s translations and his original poetry. She does little to contextualize Snyder’s interest in Far Eastern cultures, however; nor does she show how Snyder syncretizes Eastern religious ideas with Western ideas of wilderness and modernist poetics, as I do in this chapter.

Like Tan, Jonathan Stalling in one chapter of his 2010 book *Poetics of Emptiness* reads Snyder in Buddhist terms, arguing that Snyder creates ‘a poetics of emptiness that leaves language itself behind.’⁴⁰ Stalling is not primarily concerned with the interplay of Buddhism and ecology as I am. He briefly acknowledges that ‘Snyder’s particular application of Zen is in line with his period (and is similar to the positions held by D.T. Suzuki—as well as by innumerable Zen teachers who easily accommodated existing Western values)’ and acknowledges the ‘dynamic, heterocultural nature of Snyder’s transpacific poetics’.⁴¹ Stalling finds the ‘heterocultural nature’ of Snyder’s Buddhism to be ‘[p]roblematic’ if not entirely ‘illegitimate’. He specifically takes issue with Snyder’s Buddhism for being ‘too closely fitted to existing Romantic values (monism)’.⁴² Rather than measuring Snyder’s Buddhism against

³⁹ Joan Qionglin Tan, *Han Shan, Chan Buddhism and Gay Snyder’s Ecopoetic Way* (Eastbourne, 2009), p.6.

⁴⁰ Jonathan Stalling, *Poetics of Emptiness: Transformations of Asian Thought in American Poetry* (New York, 2010), p.98.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp.117, 120.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.120.

some notional standard of authenticity as Stalling does, I follow historian of religion David McMahan who views Western Buddhism, what he calls ‘Buddhist modernism,’ as a legitimate ‘new form of Buddhism that is the result of a process of modernization, westernization, reinterpretation, image-making, revitalization, and reform’.⁴³ In my third chapter I read Snyder against the writing of other Anglophone Buddhist modernizers—D.T. Suzuki, Alan Watts and Robert Aitken amongst others—and show that Snyder self-consciously Americanized Buddhism, a task which became increasingly urgent in the 1970s as ideas of localism and bioregionalism became central to his environmental thought.

The following chapter describes a particularly pertinent example of Snyder’s syncretic approach to Buddhism—his yoking of Buddhist ideas to Western ecological science. John Elder read Snyder’s work in terms of scientific ecology as early as 1985,⁴⁴ but my chapter is the first to combine close-readings of Snyder’s poetry and prose with close readings of the specific scientific texts Snyder read, and to examine Snyder’s responses to those texts in his unpublished journals. Snyder synthesized concepts from scientific ecology with Hua-yen Buddhist concepts of interdependence and this synthesis constitutes Snyder’s most significant contribution to Buddhist modernism.

The fifth chapter describes ‘The Hokkaido Book,’ an unfinished prose work on environmental attitudes in the Far East which Snyder worked on from the 1970s. A religious perennialist, Snyder distinguished between Buddhism, as a specific religious tradition, and the Dharma, as the religious truth expressed in many religions. In ‘The Hokkaido Book’ Snyder finds ecocentric religious ideas, what I call the ‘green Dharma,’ to be expressed in the traditions of the Ainu, Hokkaido’s indigenous inhabitants. Through his work on ‘The Hokkaido Book’ Snyder modified his ideas concerning the relation of East and West, and developed his attitudes toward another binary opposition, that between the primitive and the civilized. This

⁴³ David L. McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (Oxford, 2008), p.5.

⁴⁴ John Elder, *Imagining the Earth: Poetry and the Vision of Nature* (Urbana, 1985), p.191.

chapter is the first critical study of ‘The Hokkaido Book,’ and examines both published and unpublished material relating to it.

The final chapter examines Snyder’s response to Far Eastern aesthetics in the poems of *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, his magnum opus. Specifically, I explore his response to Chinese landscape painting and Japanese Nō drama, both of which are permeated with Buddhist ideas. Anthony Hunt’s *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning in Gary Snyder’s Mountains and Rivers Without End* (2004) is by far the best, and only full-length, study of *Mountains and Rivers Without End*. Hunt does discuss Chinese landscape painting and Nō drama, and while I am indebted to his study, my chapter supplements Hunt’s account by drawing on archival material that Hunt does not. The chapter’s central argument—that in *Mountains and Rivers Without End* Snyder develops a theory of art, informed by Buddhist and older Daoist traditions, that treads a middle path between a naïve faith in mimesis and post-modern scepticism—is entirely my own. This chapter also contextualizes Snyder’s engagement with Chinese art by examining earlier examples of orientalist ekphrasis by Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore and Ezra Pound. This discussion is indebted to Zhaming Qian’s discussion of these three poets in his *The Modernist Response to Chinese Art: Pound, Moore, Stevens* (2003).

Three other full-length studies that have been of value are Patrick Murphy’s *A Place for Wayfaring* (2000), Timothy Gray’s *Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim* (2006) and Page Tovey’s *The Transatlantic Eco-Romanticism of Gary Snyder* (2013). Murphy’s book is essentially a reader’s guide to Snyder’s poetry and prose from the beginning of his career up to *Mountains and Rivers Without End* (1997). Readings of a large number of Snyder’s poems are supplemented with biographical details, and I make some references to Murphy’s readings of individual poems. Gray usefully reads Snyder’s work of the 1950s and 1960s (with an epilogue on *Turtle Island* and Snyder’s work of the 1970s) as unifying East and West, depicting the Pacific region, including East Asia and the Western United States, as ‘a unified geometric

construct: a rim.’⁴⁵ Gray’s ‘project of cultural geography’⁴⁶ is not primarily concerned with ecology or Eastern religious traditions, although he touches on both and useful sections of Gray’s book are referred to throughout this thesis. Tovey’s book, the most recent monograph on Snyder, focuses on transatlantic rather than transpacific connections in Snyder’s work. Tovey sees Snyder as an inheritor of English Romanticism, via the intermediaries of Transcendentalism and Anglo-American modernism. Her discussion of Eastern religious traditions is necessarily limited, but I concur with her argument that Snyder’s Buddhism is influenced by Transcendentalist individualism.⁴⁷ I expand upon the links Tovey draws between Snyder’s Buddhism and Transcendentalism in my third chapter.

Scope and Contexts

This study examines Snyder’s poetry and prose from his first published work in the 1950s up to *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, published in 1997. I regard *Mountains and Rivers Without End* as the culmination of Snyder’s ecological-Buddhist poetic vision and for this reason the thesis ends with a discussion of it. The more staid poems of *Danger on Peaks* (2004) and the essays of *Back on the Fire* (2007) are only briefly discussed in Chapter Four. Snyder’s 1970 collection *Regarding Wave* is not discussed. While relevant themes are present in some of the poems in this volume, its overarching theme is the celebration of Snyder’s marriage to Masa Uehara in 1967 and examples more relevant to the argument of this thesis can be drawn from elsewhere. In addition to Snyder’s published writing, throughout the thesis I examine unpublished personal journals, letters and manuscripts held at Snyder’s archive at the University of California, Davis. The theoretical framework is ecocritical, drawing on recent ecocritical theory.

As already indicated, the primary American literary context I place Snyder in is that of his contemporaries on the West Coast. Some readers may expect Pound to be discussed more

⁴⁵ Timothy Gray, *Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim: Creating Countercultural Community* (Iowa City, 2006), p.xii.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.32.

⁴⁷ Paige Tovey, *The Transatlantic Eco-Romanticism of Gary Snyder* (New York, 2013), p.10.

than he is. Pound's translations of Chinese poetry were an important early influence on Snyder and are discussed in Chapter Two, and Pound's 'Seven Lakes Canto' is discussed in Chapter Six as an example of orientalist ekphrasis. Pound was dismissive of Buddhism, and his interest in China centred on Confucianism and a desire to incorporate Confucianism into a totalitarian political vision.⁴⁸ Pound does make pronouncements that could be considered as anticipating the Whitean contrast of East and West. In a 1938 essay he characterizes Greek philosophy, and by extension modern European philosophy, as 'almost an attack upon nature', while the ethics of Confucius and Mencius 'at no point [...] splinter and split away from organic nature'.⁴⁹ Pound's Confucian translations affirm that a good ruler will have 'coordinated the people / And brought them into harmony with nature', but the idea of 'harmony with nature' appears largely as a means of justifying a particular political system which is ultimately anthropocentric: 'Government is rooted in men, it is based on man.'⁵⁰

Ernest Fenollosa's 'The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry,' edited by Pound and published in 1918 after Fenollosa's death, comes closer to Snyder's yoking of Buddhism and environmental concerns. Fenollosa argued that the pictographic Chinese writing system allows a more direct representation of nature than Western phonetic writing systems, which are abstracted from nature and therefore both cause and symptom of Western alienation. 'In reading Chinese' he wrote, 'we do not seem to be juggling mental counters, but to be watching *things* work out their own fate.' According to Fenollosa, Chinese characters were all originally verbal, 'shorthand pictures of actions or processes.' This brings the Chinese writing system closer to nature because a 'true noun, an isolated thing, does not exist in nature.'⁵¹ Fenollosa converted to Tendai Buddhism in Japan, and Stalling finds his conviction that 'nothing is essentially autonomous' to derive from the second-century Indian Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna. The Buddhist philosophical underpinning of 'The Chinese Written

⁴⁸ See Mary Patterson Cheadle, *Ezra Pound's Confucian Translations* (Ann Arbor, 1997), pp.2, 197.

⁴⁹ Ezra Pound, *Selected Prose 1909-1965*, ed. William Cookson (London, 1973), pp.100-101.

⁵⁰ Ezra Pound, trans., *The Unwobbling Pivot & The Great Digest* (Norfolk CT, 1947).

⁵¹ Ernest Fenollosa, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, ed. Ezra Pound (1918; repr. San Francisco, 1968), pp.9-10. Fenollosa's italics.

Character,’ however, remains largely ‘submerged beneath his editor Ezra Pound’s “anti-Buddhist” interpretation’.⁵² While Fenollosa’s ideas concerning the interconnectedness of objects in nature does in some sense anticipate Snyder’s presentation of the interconnectedness of ecological systems in Buddhist terms in his poetry of the 1970s (see Chapter Four), Snyder does not seem to have been directly influenced by Fenollosa’s essay. Snyder did make reference to Fenollosa’s *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, and this will be discussed in Chapter Six.

Transcendentalism provides an earlier American precedent for the association of Asian religion with a felicitous relationship with the natural world. Stephen Prothero proposes ‘a lineage of sorts in the transmission of Buddhism to America—from Thoreau, who in 1844 in the Transcendentalist periodical *The Dial* published Elizabeth Palmer Peabody’s translation from the French of the *Lotus Sutra* (the first time a Buddhist sutra appeared in English) [...] to Jack Kerouac, the Beats, and the writers of the San Francisco Literary Renaissance’.⁵³ Emerson and Thoreau referred to Hindu and Confucian ideas more often than they referred to Buddhist ones.⁵⁴ Kerouac’s interest in Buddhism was initially sparked by references to Hindu scriptures in *Walden*; he ‘apparently had some difficulty discriminating between the Hindu and Buddhist traditions.’⁵⁵ *Walden* is briefly discussed in Chapter Two in relation to Snyder’s ideas of wilderness, and Transcendentalist ideas of universal religion are evoked in Chapter Three in relation to D.T. Suzuki, Snyder and other Buddhist modernists. A full account of the connections between Snyder’s Buddhism and Transcendentalism lies outside the scope of this project.

⁵² Stalling, *Poetics of Emptiness*, pp.14, 16.

⁵³ Stephen Prothero, Introduction, *Big Sky Mind: Buddhism and the Beat Generation*, by Carole Tonkinson (London, 1996), 1-20, p.3.

⁵⁴ See Arthur Versluis, *American Transcendentalism and Asian Religions* (New York, 1993), pp.51-99.

⁵⁵ Prothero, Introduction, p.1.

Ecocentric Buddhism

Whether ecocentric religious ideas can really cause a culture to act with environmental responsibility or not, it should be asked whether Buddhism really escapes the dualism that White finds to characterize Christianity. At the risk of answering an oversimplification with more oversimplifications, I want to end this introduction by addressing this question through some brief notes on the development of Buddhism and an examination of some of Snyder's early responses to Buddhism in his unpublished journals. This will also facilitate the introduction of some Buddhist terms that will concern us later.

In early forms of Buddhism, nirvana was defined as the release from suffering or samsara, which equates to the 'unending and compulsive cycle of birth and death.'⁵⁶ The Theravada tradition—one of the two main strands of modern Buddhism, often referred to pejoratively as the 'small' or 'lesser vehicle'—retained the radical distinction between samsara and nirvana,⁵⁷ and so aimed toward the transcendence of the phenomenal, natural world, governed as it was by the compulsive cycles of samsara. The great innovation of the Mahayana tradition (or 'great vehicle') was to reject the more transcendent aspects of Theravada:

For the Mahayana, samsara and nirvana are not distinct realms [...] Awakening is not a release from the world but rather realizing that this very world is already a Buddha-realm in which all things are doing the work of enlightenment.⁵⁸

It was from the Mahayana tradition that Chinese Chan Buddhism developed in the sixth century. Chan is known as Zen in Japan, and throughout this thesis 'Chan' is used when discussing this form of Buddhism in China, and 'Zen' when discussing it in Japan and America, although the two words should be regarded as near synonyms. Chan assimilated some of China's native Daoist beliefs and Snyder would say in interview in 1977 that it was this 'precise cultural meeting' that he found most 'fascinating' in the history of Buddhism.⁵⁹ One of

⁵⁶ Peter D. Hershock, *Chan Buddhism* (Honolulu, 2005), p.22.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.26.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Snyder, *The Real Work*, pp.94-5.

Chinese Buddhism's 'most distinctive features' is the concept of Buddha-nature, the belief that all beings share the essence of the Buddha.⁶⁰

Common to all such accounts [...] is recognizing that the concept of buddha-nature served to characterize positively the meaning of emptiness, to link the interdependence of all things with their interpenetrating or mutual nonobstruction [...] The point here is that the limitless positive and liberating qualities of Buddha do not transcend our familiar world but are always and everywhere present within it.⁶¹

It should be clear from this account that, while Mahayana and particularly Chan Buddhism express a non-dualistic attitude towards the natural world, Theravada, with its radical distinction between samsara and nirvana, does not. White's monolithic view of Eastern religions as ecocentric does not stand up to scrutiny. It would also be a mistake to view Mahayana, or Chan/Zen as monolithic in themselves; there are as many versions of Zen as there are practitioners and interpreters.

In January 1950, at the age of 19, Snyder stated an intellectual aim that would concern him throughout his career:

I am beset with the dualism of this age. It is my aim to reach a concept of unity between mankind and the natural world.⁶²

Over a year later he would write, in terms that anticipate White, of the environmental degradation that he saw as resulting from this dualism: 'A view separating man from nature has resulted in an unparalleled mistreatment of nature, & the depletion of nachural [sic] resources.'⁶³ Snyder's early engagement with Buddhism was largely motivated by his project of defining 'a concept of unity between mankind and the natural world.' But rather than finding an 'ease of fit' between an environmentalist agenda and 'Eastern religious or philosophical systems' that Tan finds to be evident in Snyder's work, a large amount of intellectual wrangling was involved in Snyder's yoking of Mahayana Buddhism to the non-dualistic stance

⁶⁰ Hershock, *Chan Buddhism*, p.49.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.58.

⁶² Snyder's Journal, 1947-52, Gary Snyder Papers, Department of Special Collections, Shields Library, University of California Davis, accession number D-050 (from here abbreviated to GSP), I 89:1, 1 January 1950.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 31 May 1951.

toward nature that he wished to develop. In June 1952 Snyder complained that ‘mahayana [sic] & Taoism are generally called extreme idealism!’⁶⁴ In August that year he wrote that Mahayana ‘idealism’ at least surpassed the anthropocentrism of ‘Western idealism’ which ‘reaches its limit when it declares, only I am real, the rest is illusion.’ Mahayana ‘goes the next step/ all is illusion, and so am I.’⁶⁵ But by October this argument did not suffice:

As for the damned Mahayana idealism, I probably am obtuse, but I simply will not, cannot, accept any idea of the material & phenomenal world that does not recognize its total & self-contained reality (recognizing) that matter is in a continuum that has, at one end, life & consciousness, but as properties of matter (in flux) & sometimes (but not always) the Mahayana philosophy seems to deny the phenomenal existence of things.⁶⁶

Mahayana writing does include certain pronouncements that may be regarded as idealist. The ninth-century Chan master Huangbo Xiyun’s (Huang Po His-yun) ‘doctrine of Universal mind,’ which Snyder described as ‘a thorny one’ in a journal entry on 23 July 1953,⁶⁷ states that

All Buddhas and all sentient beings are nothing but the One Mind, beside which nothing exists. [...] The One Mind alone is the Buddha, and there is no distinction between the Buddha and sentient things[.]⁶⁸

The Yogacara or ‘Consciousness Only School’ of Mahayana holds that only ‘the mind (which perceives things) is ultimately “real” or “self-existent”’ and that ‘everything arises as just an aspect of this monistic mind/consciousness/sea’. Consequently, ‘all phenomenal existence (including one’s sense of “self”) is not truly autonomous (real), but its “true self” is its nature as an aspect of ontological Oneness/Mind.’⁶⁹ What Snyder describes as Mahayana idealism, then, is ultimately monistic, in contrast to Cartesian idealism, even if its privileging of the term ‘Mind’ might make it resemble Cartesianism on the surface. Ideas of the relational nature of

⁶⁴ Ibid., 7 June 1952.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 20 August 1952.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 27 October 1952. Snyder’s underlining.

⁶⁷ This journal entry is published in *Earth House Hold*, p.17.

⁶⁸ John Blofeld, *The Zen Teachings of Huang Po: On the Transmission of Mind* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p.29.

⁶⁹ Stalling, *Poetics of Emptiness*, pp.16-17.

phenomena, as expressed by another Mahayana school, Avatamsaka or Hua Yen, would later influence Snyder's ecological poetics (see Chapter Four).

In the October 1952 journal entry, Snyder conceded that his understanding of such concepts was incomplete: '[D.T.] Suzuki sez that prajnaparamita type philosophy [another Mahayana school of thought] is not denying the commonsense [sic] existence of things, but is somehow negating forth & back to make them all both real & not real'. Despite his doubts, Snyder continued,

[...] my quarrels with Zen and bonzeism, seem to drive me further into it. I simply must understand & cannot, any more, reject.⁷⁰

By November 1955 Snyder felt able to reconcile Buddhism with his love of nature through the defining premise of Mahayan, the identity of samsara and nirvana:

what do poets love?—THIS WORLD. But love, not attachment! [...] whatever whoever words things or gestures you want to make of it, everything it's, samsara=HA [...] THIS WORLD viewed with love & detachment, is nirvana[.]⁷¹

⁷⁰ Snyder's Journal 1947-52, GSP I 89:1, 27 October 1952.

⁷¹ Snyder's Journal 1953-55, GSP I 84:2, 13 November 1955. Snyder's underlining.

1. Un-American Nature, Un-American Buddhism: The Six Gallery Poets

In the introduction it was argued that ideas of nature are often couched in a dualistic logic. The natural is defined against the human and the civilized. The dualism of East and West becomes embroiled in the nature/civilization dualism, with ‘the East’ becoming aligned with the natural and ‘the West’ becoming aligned with the civilized. Snyder began his career as a poet in an era when American cultural life was dominated by another dualism; that between the ‘Free World’ and communism. The terms ‘the West’ and ‘civilization’ took on new connotations in the context of Cold War America. When J. Edgar Hoover writes of ‘Western civilization’ in the 1950s, it is in opposition to the Communist East, which in his view threatens the West’s ‘very existence’.¹ (While the Communist East included Mao’s China, it is obviously not synonymous with the Orient.) Anxiety about communist infiltration of American institutions meant that this us-and-them mentality not only applied to foreign nations, but to American citizens. The anti-communist crusaders, epitomized by Senator Joseph McCarthy and Hoover himself, did not only target communists. As historian Ellen Schrecker writes, the ‘vision of the Communist menace extended far beyond the Communist party to almost any group that challenged the established social, economic, or racial order’. Schrecker describes this as a ‘dualistic view of the world’.²

Over the course of this chapter it is argued that Snyder and his contemporaries in San Francisco in the mid-1950s employed tropes of ‘nature’ and ‘the East’ as part of their critiques of the narrow, conservative ideal of ‘the American way of life’ propagated by Hoover. I limit my discussion to the writers who read or were present at the Six Gallery reading on 13 October 1955, the defining moment of Beat oppositionalism. These were Michael McClure, Philip Whalen, Allen Ginsberg, and Snyder himself, who read; Kenneth Rexroth who acted as master

¹ J. Edgar Hoover, *Masters of Deceit: The Story of Communism in America and How to Fight It* (New York, 1958), p.vi.

² Ellen Schrecker, *The Age of McCarthyism: A Brief History with Documents*, 2nd ed. (Boston, 2002), p.14.

of ceremonies; and Jack Kerouac who was present in the audience.³ In my discussion of ‘nature,’ I not only refer to descriptions of exurban landscapes and animals, but also to a preoccupation with the material nature of the human body. Particularly through images of sex and reproduction, these writers emphasize human beings’ biological nature. For anti-communist crusaders like Hoover, ‘[o]bscenity and subversion were indissolubly linked’,⁴ and Beat images of sex (particularly in Ginsberg’s writing) are deliberately provocative. In my discussion of ‘the East’ I primarily discuss references to East Asian Buddhism rather than the Communist East, although the two were to some extent linked. Following Mao’s victory in the Chinese Civil War, believed by many to have been engineered by communist infiltrators in the US State Department, and the subsequent Korean War, any association with Far Eastern cultures was viewed as suspect. In this context, evocations of East Asian Buddhism should be seen as a form of ‘subversive orientalism’ (see introduction). In examining these poets’ negotiations of the mesh of dualisms outlined above, it should be asked to what extent they reproduce, and to what extent they deconstruct those dualisms.

At the time of the Six Gallery reading McCarthy’s personal crusade, which had begun in 1950, had come to an end with his censure by the Senate in 1954, but the drive against communism spanned a much longer period, ‘beginning as early as 1946 (or even 1939) and extending into the 1960s.’⁵ During this period many writers were viewed with suspicion by government agencies. Ginsberg believed that the CIA prevented Kerouac’s work from being published in the early 1950s. While there is no evidence for Ginsberg’s assertion,⁶ the FBI certainly kept files on many writers, and prevented them from obtaining work or travelling abroad. A file was opened on Ginsberg in 1957 following the *Howl* obscenity trial, and during

³ Philip Lamantia also read at the Six Gallery, performing the poems of his recently deceased friend John Hoffman. It is unclear whether Snyder knew Hoffman, and Snyder’s acquaintance with Lamantia was slight; no correspondence between them is held in either poet’s archive. Lamantia’s and Hoffman’s poems of this period lack the political force of the other poets who read at the Six Gallery. Besides a passing reference to Zen in one of Hoffman’s poems (*Tau by Philip Lamantia and Journey to the End by John Hoffman*, ed. Garrett Caples [San Francisco, 2008], p.123), neither poet make reference to Buddhism in their poetry of this period. For these reasons they are not discussed in this chapter.

⁴ Natalie Robins, *Alien Ink: The FBI’s War on Freedom of Expression* (New York, 1992), p.336.

⁵ Schrecker, *The Age of McCarthyism*, p.1.

⁶ Jonah Raskin, *American Scream: Allen Ginsberg’s Howl and the Making of the Beat Generation* (Berkeley, 2004), pp.xii-xiii.

the 1960s his mail was opened, his writing and lecturing disrupted and his passport queried.⁷ While in October 1955 Ginsberg's persecution by the FBI lay in the future, Snyder's had already begun, although it does not seem to have been directly linked to his writing activities. On 10 February 1954 the Forest Service had written to Snyder refusing him summer work as a fire lookout in the North Cascades: 'Because of instructions from Washington D.C.', they wrote, 'we are unable to offer you employment in any capacity'.⁸ Then in December 1954 Snyder applied for a passport in preparation for travelling to Japan. In February 1955 his application was rejected because, as the letter from the State Department stated, it had been alleged that he was a communist.⁹ Snyder had been watched by the FBI since 1948.¹⁰ That summer he had worked on a passenger freighter, and had acquired his seaman's papers through the Marine Cooks and Stewards, a union with links to the Communist Party.¹¹ Because of his association with the union, his application to renew his seaman's papers in 1952 had been denied.¹² His association with the Marine Cooks and Stewards, as well as his association with members or supporters of the Communist Party at Reed College, seems to have been behind the refusals of lookout work and of a passport in the mid-1950s.

Despite the State Department's allegations against Snyder, none of the Six Gallery writers were actually communists, although they were mostly political radicals. McClure would later define Ginsberg's political position at the time as 'socialism', Snyder's as 'Buddhist anarchism', and his own as a 'biological and anti-political anarchist stance.' McClure described Whalen's less overt politicism as a 'gentleness of consciousness and conscience.'¹³ Rexroth was an anarchist throughout his life. Kerouac, despite his bohemian lifestyle, was much more conservative politically. While the Six Gallery poets had heterogenous political views, all refused the strict dichotomy between communism and the Free World. Ginsberg's mother had

⁷ Robins, *Alien Ink*, p.336.

⁸ Quoted in John Suiter, *Poets on the Peaks: Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen & Jack Kerouac in the North Cascades* (New York, 2002), p.85.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.124.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.90.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.87-8.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.90.

¹³ Interview with McClure by Jonah Raskin, 10 August 2003, quoted in Raskin, *American Scream*, p.8.

been a communist,¹⁴ as he had as a high school student, but by the mid-1940s he had moved beyond the simple opposition of left and right.¹⁵ In a 1951 poem he would write ‘America is like Russia’,¹⁶ and in an early draft of Part II of *Howl*, he wrote, ‘Moloch whose name is America / Moloch whose name is Russia’, targeting his critique at capitalist and communist nations alike.¹⁷ Neither was Snyder a communist, although he understood why, in the dualistic mindset of the McCarthy era, he might have been regarded as one. Following the refusal of lookout work he wrote to his friend Dell Hymes, ‘I’m disloyal & they figured it out.’ He continued, ‘Of course, they will never take into account the fact that I feel nastily disloyal to ALL governments, that Russian dungheap or the foul British stew, or whatever’. He claimed, with certain misgivings, to be ‘coming round to an Anarchist position.’¹⁸

While Ginsberg and Snyder were critical of both communist and capitalist regimes, at the Six Gallery reading American society was the primary target of critique. McClure wrote of the poets’ shared dissatisfaction with the political climate of America at the time:

We were locked in the Cold War [...] We hated the war and the inhumanity and coldness. The country had the feeling of martial law. An undeclared military state had leapt out of Daddy Warbucks’ tanks and sprawled over the landscape. [...] There were certain of us (whether we were fearful or brave) who could not help speaking out—we had to speak. We knew we were poets and we had to speak out as poets.¹⁹

Objection to militarism and to the materialistic aspirations of middle-class Americans, symbolized here by the fictional self-made millionaire Daddy Warbucks, are recurring themes in the poems read at the Six Gallery. As Raskin notes, ‘World War II, and the war economy generated by the Cold War and Korean War, created a new class of American millionaires’,²⁰ and McClure here hints at the links between militarism and economics. McClure saw the Six Gallery reading as an act of defiance. After Ginsberg’s reading of the first part of *Howl* in

¹⁴ Raskin, *American Scream*, p.28.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.55.

¹⁶ Allen Ginsberg, *Collected Poems 1947-1997* (New York, 2006), p.72.

¹⁷ Quoted in Raskin, *American Scream*, p.95.

¹⁸ Quoted in Suiter, *Poets on the Peaks*, p.86.

¹⁹ Michael McClure, *Scratching the Beat Surface: Essays on New Vision from Blake to Kerouac* (New York, 1982), pp.12-13.

²⁰ Raskin, *American Scream*, p.5.

particular, McClure felt ‘at the deepest level that a barrier had been broken down, that a human voice and body had been hurled against the harsh wall of America and its supporting armies and navies and academies and institutions and ownership systems and power-support bases.’²¹

Subversive Nature

In the same essay as he described the Six Gallery reading as an act of defiance, McClure asserts a relationship between the Beat Generation’s interest in nature and its politics: ‘Much of what the Beat Generation is about is nature—the landscape of nature in the case of Gary Snyder, the mind as nature in the case of Allen Ginsberg’, and the Beat interest in nature, for McClure, is ‘held together with their radical political or antipolitical stance.’²² It is telling that McClure described Ginsberg’s reading of *Howl* as a ‘human voice and body’ being ‘hurled against the harsh wall of America,’ as McClure’s ideas of nature centre on the body.

Of the poems McClure read at the Six Gallery, all were nature poems of one sort or another. The first, ‘Point Lobos: Animism,’ describes a ‘place of incredible beauty on the coast of Northern California.’²³

Of Animism:
 I have been in a spot so full of spirits
 That even the most joyful animist
 Brooded
 When all in sight was less to be cared about
 Than death
 And there was no noise in the ears
 That mattered.
 (I knelt in the shade
 By a cold salt pool
 And felt the entrance of hate
 On many legs,
 The soul like a clambering
 Water vascular system.[])²⁴

²¹ McClure, *Scratching the Beat Surface*, p.15.

²² McClure, *Scratching the Beat Surface*, p.11.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.26.

²⁴ Michael McClure, *Hymns to St. Geryon and Other Poems* (San Francisco, 1959), p.4.

While the tone of this passage seems unremittingly bleak, McClure later commented that he intended to ‘state the sharpness of a demonic joy’ that he found in the place:

I wanted to say how I was overwhelmed by the sense of animism—and how everything (breath, spot, rock, ripple in the tidepool, cloud, and stone) was alive and spirited. It was a frightening and joyous awareness of my undersoul. I say undersoul because I did not want to join Nature by my mind but my viscera—my belly. The German language has two words, *Geist* for the soul of man and *Odem* for the spirit of beasts. *Odem* is the undersoul. I was becoming sharply aware of it.²⁵

In privileging the bodily over the mental, McClure’s poetics enacts what Mikhail Bakhtin, in his discussion of the carnivalesque, has called ‘degradation.’ Bakhtin defines degradation as ‘the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity.’²⁶ In ‘Point Lobos: Animism,’ McClure follows this logic by comparing the soul to a water vascular system, the hydraulic system which enables echinoderms to move their limbs and to transport food and waste. Bakhtin argued that such celebrations of the ‘material level’ in European literature derive from medieval folk traditions of carnival. In its subversion of the usual hierarchy of the mental and spiritual over the material in Western culture, degradation follows the carnivalesque’s ‘peculiar logic of the “inside out” (*a l’envers*), or the “turnabout,” or a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear’.²⁷

McClure follows a carnivalesque logic of ‘inside out’ in describing his apparently dark and brooding poem as an expression of joy. McClure’s description of the ‘undersoul’ approaching nature via the body—the ‘belly’—conforms to a particular aspect of degradation. Bakhtin wrote that ‘[t]o degrade also means to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life of the *belly* and the reproductive organs; it therefore relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth.’²⁸ Such acts will be seen depicted in the poems of the other poets who read at the Six Gallery reading, and over the course of this

²⁵ McClure, *Scratching the Beat Surface*, p.26.

²⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, 1984), pp.19-20.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.11.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.21. My italics.

chapter it will be shown that Snyder and Ginsberg can both be read productively through Bakhtin's definition of the carnivalesque. The carnivalesque is a useful theoretical concept to bring to bear on these poets because it shows how their privileging of the material body and material earth over mental and spiritual realms—anticipating as it does the anti-Cartesian and anti-Christian arguments of deep ecology described in my introduction—implies a politically radical, countercultural spirit. Indeed, Bakhtin sees the primary 'function' of literary expressions of the carnivalesque as being 'to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world'.²⁹

McClure's final poem of the evening, 'For the Death of 100 Whales,' links a sense of carnivalesque degradation to a politically subversive spirit. The poem responds to an incident McClure had read about in an April 1954 issue of *Time Magazine*. After a large pod of killer whales had destroyed thousands of dollars' worth of fishing equipment off the coast of Iceland, the Icelandic government had appealed to US soldiers stationed nearby for help. Seventy-nine American G.I.s killed the killer whales with rifles and machine guns. McClure's poem describes this slaughter, comparing it to a scene from Goya's *Horrors of War*. The poem anticipates the concern for the welfare of marine mammals that will be a prominent cause for the environmental movement in the coming decades, as exemplified by Snyder's 1973 poem 'Mother Earth: Her Whales,' which protests against Japanese whale hunting.³⁰ In this sense it can be seen as a proto-ecopoem. McClure's description of the killer whales privileges the material and bodily over the mental and spiritual. He points out that they have 'Brains the size of a teacup' but have 'Mouths the size of a door'.³¹

McClure alludes to D.H. Lawrence's poem 'Whales Weep Not!' in which Lawrence describes whales copulating.³² Yet, following the logic of degradation, McClure's poem brings the more transcendent images of Lawrence's poem down to earth (or down below the waves). Lawrence had described the whales' copulation as the passing of 'archangels' and

²⁹ Ibid., p.34.

³⁰ Snyder, *Turtle Island*, pp.47-9.

³¹ McClure, *Hymns to St. Geryon*, p.7.

³² McClure explicitly acknowledges the reference in *Scratching the Beat Surface*, p.33.

‘Cherubim’ from one whale to another and concludes his description of the act by describing the whales’ environment as a ‘great heaven of whales in the waters’. The bull-whales, protecting the calves and females, are described as ‘Seraphim’ and the final image of the poem, ‘dark rainbow bliss in the sea’, presents the marine environment through an aerial image.³³ There is a degree of irony to the transcendent Christian language used by Lawrence; such language is used to express an animistic, erotic religious vision (the presiding deities of the poem are Aphrodite and Venus). But despite this irony, McClure refuses to use such transcendent images. He does draw on Christian images, describing the dying whales as ‘Cursed Christ of mammals’, but Lawrence’s angelic imagery is negated:

Oh Lawrence
 No angels dance those bridges
 OH GUN! OH BOW!
 There are no churches in the waves,
 No holiness,
 No passages or crossings
 From the beasts’ wet shore.³⁴

The insistent physicality of McClure’s description of the killer whales is contrasted to the cold rationalism of the American G.I.s. In the poem’s prose epigraph, constructed of fragments of the *Time Magazine* article, McClure describes the clinical, methodical slaughter: ‘*First the killers were rounded up into tight formation with concentrated machine gun fire, then moved out again one by one, for the final blast which would kill them*’.³⁵ The G.I.’s cold rationalism is degraded as the killer whales’ physicality is celebrated. Through a Bakhtinian logic, McClure mounts his critique of American militarism.

McClure would later make clear the subversive implications of degradation in his 1961 essay ‘Revolt.’ Here he defines ‘revolt’ as the struggling of the physical body, the ‘meat’, against the dominance of the head, the locus of the sensory and intellectual faculties, which

³³ D.H. Lawrence, *The Complete Poems of D.H. Lawrence*, eds. Vivian de Sola Pinto and Warren Roberts (Harmondsworth, 1977), pp.694-5.

³⁴ McClure, *Hymns to Geryon*, p.8.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.7.

‘fills with preconception and becomes locked in a vision of the outer world and of itself’, denying the meat its natural spontaneity and pleasure.³⁶ At the beginning of the essay McClure evokes the brilliant image of the asexual reproduction of flatworms (Platyhelminthes) to argue that revolt is a biological process. The tail end of the flatworm ‘tightens itself upon an object in the water and vigorously shakes from itself the head end...disavowing itself of the domination of the old head-end that has made all decisions with its brain and eyes.’³⁷ More complex animals obviously cannot detach their heads from their bodies, but all animals, McClure argues, are naturally impelled ‘to search for basic naturalness and freshness of physical processes’, to ‘keep alive the natural physical urges of the meat.’ These ‘natural processes’ include ‘sex, desire for awareness and desire for pleasure.’³⁸ Revolt against the ‘exterior bindings of Society’ is one manifestation of the universal, biological process of revolt.³⁹

Philip Whalen was next to read at the Six Gallery. Rather than critiquing American militarism as McClure had, Whalen’s satire was directed against the materialistic values and social mores of middle-class Americans; those who would ask Whalen, as the title of one poem he read that evening puts it, ‘If You’re So Smart, Why Ain’t You Rich.’⁴⁰ In ‘Plus Ça Change...’ Whalen presents a dialogue between a married couple who, like McClure’s G.I.s, are ‘coldly calculating.’⁴¹ Overly rational, they find each other’s bodies repulsive. Sex, belonging to Bakhtin’s ‘lower stratum of the body,’ is performed with great reluctance. ‘Let’s for God’s sake not look at each other’, says one of the speakers, ‘Keep our eyes shut and the lights turned off— / We won’t mind touching if we don’t have to see.’⁴² As the poem progresses, the couple metamorphose into parakeets, as if their instinctual, animal natures are

³⁶ Michael McClure, ‘Revolt’, *Journal for the Protection of All Beings* no. 1 (1961), pp.38-52, p.39.

³⁷ Ibid. McClure’s ellipsis.

³⁸ Ibid., pp.42-3.

³⁹ Ibid., p.44.

⁴⁰ Philip Whalen, *The Collected Poems of Philip Whalen*, ed. Michael Rothenberg (Middletown, 2007), p.37.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.34.

⁴² Ibid., p.35.

returning from the repressed. The shocked, prissy voice of American suburbia ends the poem, comically asking, ‘Just what *shall* we tell the children?’⁴³

After Whalen read, Ginsberg performed the first part of ‘Howl’ (the second and third parts had not yet been completed). *Howl* is the defining poetic statement of Beat opposition to Cold War culture, and McClure would later describe how ‘*Howl* spoke for so many of us in a time of McCarthyism and grim, stark, cold war silence’.⁴⁴ In *Howl*, Ginsberg turns the tables on those who had imposed that silence on so many writers, picturing underground poets ‘on the West Coast investigating the FBI’.⁴⁵ Like McClure’s poetry, Ginsberg saw *Howl* as a protest against American militarism and the economic system founded upon it, describing the poem as an ‘emotional time bomb that would continue exploding [...the] military-industrial-nationalistic complex.’⁴⁶ *Howl* not only critiques the Orwellian state of ‘eternal / war’, but also the ‘demonic industries’ of the war economy.⁴⁷ In the second part of *Howl*, American Cold War culture was personified as ‘Moloch whose blood is running / money! Moloch whose fingers are ten armies!’⁴⁸

More relevant to an ecocritical reading of the poem is Ginsberg’s association of Moloch with urban, suburban and industrial landscapes; with ‘skyscrapers’, ‘factories’, ‘smokestacks and antennae’ that ‘crown the cities’, and ‘invisible suburbs’.⁴⁹ Phillips argues that ‘a pronounced distaste for cities’ is characteristic of Beat literature.⁵⁰ In a 1946 essay Ginsberg presented cities as places where ‘megalopolitan mayors are continually trying to crusade against natural instincts’ and characterized suburbia as a place of ‘fetishistic accumulation of mechanical knick-knacks’.⁵¹ Unlike Snyder, Whalen and Rexroth, however, Ginsberg was not a poet of wilderness. While Ginsberg saw the centre of Moloch’s power being located in cities,

⁴³ Ibid., p.36.

⁴⁴ Interview with Michael McClure by Jonah Raskin, 10 August 2003, quoted in Raskin, *American Scream*, p.7.

⁴⁵ Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, p.135.

⁴⁶ Allen Ginsberg, *Howl: Original Draft Facsimile, Transcript & Variant Versions, Fully Annotated by Author, with Contemporaneous Correspondence, Account of First Public Reading, Legal Skirmishes, Precursor Texts & Bibliography*, ed. Barry Miles (New York, 1995), p.xii.

⁴⁷ Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, p. 141, 140.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.139.

⁴⁹ Ibid. See Phillips, “*Forest Beatniks*”, p.5.

⁵⁰ Phillips, “*Forest Beatniks*,” p.5.

⁵¹ Quoted in Raskin, *American Scream*, pp.67-8.

and manifested in the suburbs, ‘the corrupt, fallen world of men’⁵² was his primary poetic subject. His poetry looks to reassert ‘natural instincts’ within urban landscapes.

The ‘natural instincts’ Ginsberg depicts in *Howl* are primarily sexual, and it was his depiction of sex that proved to be the poem’s most controversial aspect, leading to the obscenity trial of 1957. Ginsberg not only employs profanities, but also describes acts of promiscuity outside the institution of marriage. The ‘best minds’ of Part I are described going ‘out whoring’, ‘scattering their semen freely to whoever come who may’ and ‘sweeten[ing] the snatches of a million girls’.⁵³ Sex is as casual and as natural as eating soup.⁵⁴ What is more, Ginsberg describes homosexual sex acts. This was a particularly provocative move in 1950s America, when homosexuals ‘were commonly expelled from universities or fired from jobs’, and homosexuality was officially considered a mental illness.⁵⁵ Ginsberg’s description of some of the ‘best minds’ being ‘fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists’ follows the logic of degradation.⁵⁶ In describing the motorcyclists as ‘saintly’, Ginsberg describes the sex act, belonging as it does to the ‘lower stratum of the body,’ in terms of ‘that which is high, spiritual, ideal’. ‘Footnote to Howl’ follows a similar logic, celebrating the body and material world in the same breath in which it celebrates the soul. Ginsberg’s Whitmanian celebration of the body is here expressed in Blakean exclamations: ‘The world is holy! The soul is holy! The skin is holy! The nose is holy! The tongue and cock and hand and asshole holy!’⁵⁷ In contrast to the sexually liberated ‘best minds,’ Moloch is identified, like McClure’s G.I.s and Whalen’s married couple, with the mental faculties alienated from the body: ‘Mental Moloch! [...] Moloch whose name is the Mind! [...] Moloch in whom I am a consciousness without a body!’⁵⁸

⁵² Ibid., p.124.

⁵³ Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, p.136.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.135.

⁵⁵ Beth Baily, ‘Sexuality and the Movements for Sexual Liberation’, *A Companion to Post-1945 America*, eds. Jean-Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig (Malden, MA, 2006), 260-76, p.260.

⁵⁶ Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, p.136.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.142.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.139.

After Ginsberg read *Howl* at the Six Gallery, Snyder read selected sections of what would become *Myths & Texts* and finished the evening by reciting his most famous early poem ‘A Berry Feast.’ As Suiter notes, ‘A Berry Feast’ shared Ginsberg’s spirit of protest against Cold War American culture, although the West Coast setting was different from the Eastern cities depicted in *Howl*: ‘Snyder conjured Ginsberg’s Moloch in his Pacific Rim manifestation: the one whose yellow-snouted Caterpillars had levelled the groves of Cybele to build the suburbs’.⁵⁹ Like McClure and Ginsberg, Snyder employs degradation to mount his critique of American society. It will be remembered that Bakhtin listed ‘defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy and birth’ as relating to degradation, and Snyder’s poem depicts all of these. Snyder’s second stanza examines ‘bearshit’ in a ‘Neat pile on the fragrant trail,’ revealing the bear’s diet of berries.⁶⁰ These lines would provide the name for what would later be called ‘The Bearshit-on-the-Trail School of Poetry.’⁶¹ The examination of the bear’s faeces hints at the berries’ role in the foodchain, and in the second section of the poem Snyder apostrophizes to the berries, showing that they are eaten by other animals within the environment:

“you shall be owl
 “you shall be sparrow
 “you will grow thick and green, people
 “will eat you, you berries!⁶²

Even in this early poem, Snyder has a more systemic view of nature than his contemporaries.

Images of reproduction recur throughout the poem. The opening of the third section describes a woman giving birth:

Belly stretched taut in a bulge
 [...]
 A mess of afterbirth,
 A smell of hot earth, a warm mist
 Steams from the crotch⁶³

⁵⁹ Suiter, *Poets on the Peaks*, p.155.

⁶⁰ Snyder, *The Back Country* (London, 1967), p.3.

⁶¹ Suiter, *Poets on the Peaks*, p.15. Suiter’s note on p.276 states that Snyder, in an interview of 6 December 2000, attributed the term to Lawrence Ferlinghetti.

⁶² Snyder, *The Back Country*, p.4. Snyder does not close the quotation marks.

This description is unsentimental, focusing on the messy physicality of the birth process. By setting this scene outside amidst the ‘smell of hot earth,’ Snyder insists on the naturalness of birth.

The process of sexual reproduction links humanity to the rest of the animal kingdom, and two descriptions of copulation and reproduction elsewhere in the poem are between humans and other species. In the first section, Snyder refers to the Native American folk story of a woman who married a bear, describing her ‘nursing the half-human cubs,’ and later in the same section he describes the Native American trickster figure Coyote as ‘[m]ating with / humankind’.⁶⁴ More will be said of what Snyder terms ‘trans-species erotics’ in Chapter Five, but for now it suffices to say that Snyder imagines a bond between the human and non-human world in sexual terms. While Snyder presents images of sex and reproduction in a natural environment, the inhabitants of the American suburbs are presented as being alienated from their bodies, with ‘rigid thighs’ and ‘limp erections’.⁶⁵

The inhabitants of suburbia, metonymic for mainstream American culture, have removed themselves from nature, and the suburban home is described as ‘a box to catch the biped in.’ Yet Snyder’s poem suggests that, however much Americans may view themselves as separate from—or above—nature, they never really are. Humans to Snyder are just bipedal animals. Human language is described as ‘gibbering’ a word usually used to describe the sounds made by apes.⁶⁶ What is more, the man-made orthogonal forms of suburban housing are shown to be constructed from natural materials, and the non-orthogonal structures of those materials threaten to undermine the integrity of human-made structures:

The Chainsaw falls for boards of pine,
Suburban bedrooms, block on block
Will waver with this grain and knot⁶⁷

⁶³ Ibid., p.5.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.3.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.6.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.3.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.4.

The implication that nature will undermine built environments is made again in the final apocalyptic image of the poem, a ‘Dead city in dry summer, / Where berries grow.’⁶⁸ Given the Cold War context, the image surely plays on fears of nuclear apocalypse—the Bomb is a lingering presence in Ginsberg’s poetry of this period. Whether the city is dead because of some kind of revenge of nature, or because of an atomic blast, nature is shown to endure the destruction of urban civilization.

Un-American Buddhism

If the various ideas of nature outlined above were used to mount a critique of American Cold War society, so was Buddhism. Snyder, Ginsberg and Kerouac all considered themselves Buddhists at the time of the Six Gallery reading. Whalen had a keen interest in Buddhism, and referred to Buddhist themes in his poetry. Rexroth, although ambivalent about Buddhism,⁶⁹ was an avid orientalist and made references to Buddhism in his poetry. While the poems read at the Six Gallery make few explicit references to Buddhism, the postcard distributed to advertise the event offered ‘Wine, music, dancing girls, serious poetry’ along with ‘free satori,’ ‘satori’ being the Japanese word for Buddhist enlightenment.⁷⁰ These writers’ enthusiasm for Buddhism would have been viewed as subversive by the establishment. The dualistic view of the anti-communist crusaders was often expressed in nationalistic terms; Hoover often employed the phrase ‘the American way of life’⁷¹ in contrast to communists and subversives, and the congressional committee that conducted investigations into suspected communists during the period was called, tellingly, the House Un-American Activities Committee. By identifying with a Far Eastern religion, Snyder and his contemporaries deliberately refused to adhere to any narrow conception of Americanness.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.428.

⁶⁹ Carole Tonkinson, *Big Sky Mind: Buddhism and the Beat Generation* (London, 1996), p322.

⁷⁰ Phillips, “*Forest Beatniks*”, p. 11.

⁷¹ Hoover, *Masters of Deceit*, pp.vi, vii, 319.

There were also more concrete reasons why evocation of Far Eastern cultures would have had subversive resonances in this period. Timothy Gray notes that when ‘Snyder was embarking on his career as a writer, Americans who dared to promote partnership with Asian peoples often became the targets of anti-Communist crusaders.’⁷² Gray has the 1945 *Amerasia* incident in mind.⁷³ *Amerasia* was a small magazine dealing with East Asian affairs, and in 1945 it was noticed that an article in the magazine appeared to be based on classified material. *Amerasia*’s offices were subsequently searched and hundreds of classified documents discovered. Six people, including the editor Philip Jaffe and the State Department official John Stewart Service, were arrested in June, but the case never went to trial.⁷⁴ McCarthy, however, was to resurrect the case in the early 1950s following Mao’s victory in the Chinese Civil War and the onset of the Korean War. At that time a group of politicians, business people and journalists known as the ‘China Lobby’ asserted that Mao’s victory had been engineered by communist infiltrators in the US State Department. McCarthy attacked the State Department’s China experts as well as members of the Institute of Pacific Relations, a think tank that informed America’s China policy and which had links to *Amerasia*. Charges were eventually dropped, but McCarthy and the China Lobby succeeded in promoting the narrative of the ‘loss of China’ being caused by communists in the US.⁷⁵

If the ‘loss of China’ scenario seems a far cry from Snyder’s enthusiasm for Buddhism and Far Eastern culture, a 1957 letter from Whalen to Snyder, who was by then living in Japan, should demonstrate the connection. Whalen’s letter warned Snyder that ‘[r]umor has it that US Gov’t is more & more inclined to consider all bonze [i.e. Buddhist] activities as subversive, sympathetic to Peking &c.’⁷⁶ This is something of a non sequitur. Mao’s Marxist government in Peking was hardly sympathetic to Buddhism. Mao had banned Buddhism in China following the rise of the Peoples’ Republic in 1949, and in 1955 he had famously told the Dalai Lama in a

⁷² Gray, *Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim*, p.xii.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.10.

⁷⁴ Schrecker, *Age of McCarthyism*, pp.31-2.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp76-8.

⁷⁶ Philip Whalen to Gary Snyder, 21 February 1957, GSP II 200:59.

meeting in Beijing that ‘religion is poison’. Following the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1950, the Dalai Lama had considered accepting elements of Mao’s Marxist philosophy, seeing them as consonant with Buddhist teaching,⁷⁷ but while the Dalai Lama might have considered them compatible, Mao did not, and subsequent events in Tibet pitted Buddhists against Marxists. A rebellion against the Chinese occupation in 1956 was led in part by the monasteries. In fact, the rebellion was supported by the CIA. It may be surprising then that the US Government would associate Buddhism with Mao’s Peking government when recent events in Tibet, which America was involved in, contradicted such an association. The cases against *Amerasia* and the IPC, however, had lent an air of political subversion to any interest in the Far East in the minds of the anti-Communist crusaders. In the dualistic mindset of the anti-Communists, an ‘un-American’ enthusiasm for Buddhism could be associated with the ‘loss of China’ scenario, despite the obvious flaws in logic in making such an association.

In *Myths & Texts* Snyder deliberately plays on the subversive connotations of Buddhism by linking it to the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), an international revolutionary labour organization known colloquially as the Wobblies. Formed in 1805 by socialists, anarchists and radical trade unionists, the IWW had traditionally had a strong following in West Coast America. Snyder’s parents had been associated with the IWW, as had Kenneth Rexroth. In the McCarthy era, association with such an organization would have been viewed no less harshly than association with the Marine Cooks and Stewards’ union. In ‘Logging 7’ Snyder records the names of five Wobblies shot dead during the Everett Massacre on 5 November 1916 in Everett, Washington, during which vigilante groups, supported by local business interests and law enforcement, opened fire at a steamer of Wobblies who were expressing their support for a strike by local shingles workers. The following contemporary anecdote about sixty-five year old logger Ed McCullough, ‘Reduced by the advent of chainsaws / To chopping off knots at the landing’ implies the continuing need for organizations

⁷⁷ Patricia Cronin Marcello, *The Dalai Lama: a Biography* (Westport, 2003), p.76.

like the IWW to campaign for workers' rights.⁷⁸ In 'Burning 9' Snyder again makes reference to the IWW, quoting the 'motto in the Wobbly Hall' in Seattle: 'Forming the New Society / Within the shell of the Old'.⁷⁹ He goes on to hint at an analogy between the IWW's revolutionary aims and certain historical Buddhist figures, juxtaposing them with Lenin:

Bodhidharma sailing the Yangtze on a reed
 Lenin in a sealed train through Germany
 Hsüan Tsang, crossing the Pamirs⁸⁰

Bodhidharma, the fifth/sixth-century Buddhist monk credited with transmitting Chan to China is shown travelling away from his native land; Lenin is described returning from exile to Russia in 1917; the seventh-century Chinese Buddhist Monk Xuanzang (Hsüan Tsang) is shown en route to India. Through these juxtaposed journeys, Snyder hints at a revolutionary spirit in Buddhism.

Snyder's journals of this time show that he linked Buddhism with radical left-wing politics. A journal entry of 1 May 1956 imagines a 'Buddhist-Anarchist revolution' which would cause 'the overthrow of all governments by peace & quiet.' He continues:

The subtle revolution of non-consumption: one day everybody will quit buying foolish things— governments depend, for their existence, on fostering and exploiting ignorance and clinging; making a people think their happiness and security depend on some abstract power structure— all of which is untrue—we start with ourselves.⁸¹

While Snyder's critique of the buying of 'foolish things' seems to specifically target the consumerism of 1950s America, the rest of the passage, in the spirit of anarchism, is aimed at all governments, communist ones included.

At the end of this passage, Snyder writes that the ideas transcribed here were initially 'expounded to Jack [Kerouac] on the troop 80 Trail' in the California mountains, implying an interest in the possible consonances between Buddhism and anarchism among Snyder's

⁷⁸ Snyder, *Myths & Texts* (1960; repr. New York, 1978), p.9.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.44.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.45.

⁸¹ Snyder's Journal, 1956-58, GSP I 84:3, 1 May 1956. A handwritten amendment to this typed journal entry inserts the words 'but not frivolous or beautiful' between 'foolish' and 'things'.

contemporaries then in the San Francisco area. Indeed, a letter written to Will Petersen later that year shows that Snyder viewed many key figures of the Beat generation as part of his Buddhist-anarchist revolution. He described the forthcoming journal *Ark II Moby*, which would include poems from ‘Phil [Whalen], Allen [Ginsberg], Jack [Kerouac], me, Rexroth, Patchen, etc.’ as ‘a big manifesto of anarchist-buddhist-west-coast young poets.’⁸²

Rexroth is the only one of these writers to anticipate Snyder’s yoking of Buddhism and anarchism. Snyder had first met Rexroth in late 1953, when he called on Rexroth in San Francisco and asked to be invited to one of Rexroth’s Friday night literary evenings. Snyder had read a ‘sizeable portion’ of Rexroth’s work by this time, and for the next three years the two men saw each other nearly every weekend.⁸³ Their friendship was to be longstanding, and Snyder was to dedicate his 1967 poetry volume *The Back Country* to Rexroth, and Rexroth dedicated his 1967 poem ‘A Song and the Winepress’ and his 1971 collection *Sky, Seas, Birds, Earth, House, Beasts, Flowers* to Snyder. Rexroth linked Buddhism and anarchism in the introduction to his poetry collection *The Signature of All Things*, which Snyder had read as a graduate Student at Indiana University.⁸⁴ There he described the ‘point of view’ expressed in all his works as ‘a religious anarchism’ which drew on the writing of anarchist theorist Piotr Kropotkin, D.T. Suzuki’s writing on Zen, and ‘the Gospels and the sayings of Buddha’, as well as the Daoist philosophers Laozi (Lao Tze) and Zhuang Zhou (Chuang Tze).⁸⁵ Following his first meeting with Rexroth in 1953, Snyder wrote to Whalen describing the common ground he felt he shared with Rexroth:

[...] the Frontier-type Wobbly-Thoreau anarchism is in my blood, i.e., that’s my own tradition, I was raised up in it. So put it with the Oriental historical depth, & I got a fulcrum to tip the whole damn civilization over with.⁸⁶

⁸² Gary Snyder to Will Petersen, 12 June 1956. A copy of the letter is included in Snyder’s 1956-1958 Journal as part of an appendix following the 1958 journal entries (GSP I 84:3).

⁸³ Linda Hamalian, *A Life of Kenneth Rexroth* (New York, 1991), p.234.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Kenneth Rexroth, *The Signature of All Things: Poems, Songs, Elegies, Translations and Epigrams* (New York, 1949), pp.9-10. Rexroth also lists Martin Buber, Albert Schweitzer, D.H. Lawrence, and Jakob Boehme as influencing his ‘religious anarchism.’

⁸⁶ Quoted in Suiter, *Poets on the Peaks*, p.82.

Clearly Snyder's idea of Rexroth's combination of IWW-inspired anarchism and Orientalist interests as a revolutionary fulcrum anticipates his later formulation of a 'subtle revolution of non-consumption'. Snyder would later say in interview that 'anarchism as a credible and viable position was one of Rexroth's greatest contributions' to the Beat Generation.⁸⁷

Both Ginsberg and Kerouac, the East Coast Beats staying in the West in the mid-1950s, link Buddhism with a revolutionary spirit in their writing of this period, although this seems to be due to the direct influence of Snyder. In his 1956 poem 'Afternoon Seattle,' Ginsberg describes a visit to Wobbly Hall with Snyder and calls one of the IWW's posters 'the Great Mandala of Labor.'⁸⁸ Likewise, in *The Dharma Bums* Kerouac has Japhy Ryder (the fictional name for Snyder in the novel) prophesy a 'rucksack revolution' of

Dharma bums refusing to subscribe to the general demand that they consume production and therefore have to work for the privilege of consuming, all that crap they didn't really want anyway such as refrigerators, TV sets, cars, at least new fancy cars, certain hair oils and deodorants and general junk you finally always see a week later in the garbage anyway, all of them imprisoned in a system of work, produce, consume, work, produce, consume[.]⁸⁹

However, in the following chapter Ray Smith (Kerouac's alias) disassociates himself from Japhy's 'ideas about society', writing, 'I figured it would be better just to avoid it [society] altogether'.⁹⁰

Snyder does not clearly state his association of Buddhism with radical left-wing politics in published prose until his 1961 essay 'Buddhist Anarchism.' The five-year delay between imagining a 'Buddhist-Anarchist revolution' in conversation with Kerouac and an articulation of such ideas in published prose is significant. In interview in 1977 Snyder recalled that, in the 1950s, he had articulated 'in several conversations with Allen and Jack and possibly with Phil [...] a critique of the national state as an unworkable entity, for one thing, and a critique of industrial civilization as being self-destructive because of its lack of understanding of the

⁸⁷ McKenzie, 'Moving the World a Millionth of an Inch', p.141.

⁸⁸ Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, p.158.

⁸⁹ Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums* (1958, repr. London, 2007), p.83.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.90.

nature of biological systems.’⁹¹ Yet while such critiques were worked out in private conversations, like the one with Kerouac recorded in his journal or the one fictionalized in *The Dharma Bums*, he describes ‘Beat thought’ of the 1950s as essentially ‘apolitical’. By this he means that Beat writers had little confidence in their ability to contribute to social change. The only possibility of resistance, it was felt then, was ‘detachment from the existing society’: ‘Our point of view at that time was you can’t do anything about it, but you don’t have to participate in it—sort of Thoreauvian, really.’ This attitude changed, Snyder recalls, after ‘Castro taking over Cuba’ in 1959, and thereafter ‘many people began to look to politics again as having possibilities.’⁹² Kerouac’s position in the mid-1950s, expressed by Smith in *The Dharma Bums*, is closer to the apolitical ‘Thoreauvian’ position described by Snyder in the 1977 interview. Snyder’s own language in his journal, and as approximated by Kerouac in his novel, does imagine widespread societal change, but this change occurs as the aggregate result of individual acts of disengagement.

The change in tone between the 1950s and ‘60s is shown by a comparison of ‘Buddhist Anarchism’ (published in the same journal issue as McClure’s ‘Revolt’) and the 1956 journal entry. The political critique remains similar. As he had attacked American consumerism in 1956, in the 1961 essay Snyder describes America as having ‘become economically dependent on a fantastic system of stimulation of greed’. Snyder adds an element of environmental critique, writing that the ‘soil, and forests, and all animal life are being wrecked to feed these cancerous mechanisms.’⁹³ While the 1956 journal entry does not articulate these environmental concerns, Snyder’s comments in the 1977 interview show that these ideas had been formulated in the 1950s. While the revolution imagined in 1956 was to be achieved by ‘peace & quiet,’ the language of ‘Buddhist Anarchism’ is much more strident. It argues for ‘the need for radical social change and personal commitment to some form of essentially non-violent revolutionary

⁹¹ McKenzie, ‘Moving the World a Millionth of an Inch’, pp.144, 146.

⁹² Ibid., p.146.

⁹³ Snyder, ‘Buddhist Anarchism’, *Journal for the Protection of All Beings* i (1961), 10-12, p.11.

action’,⁹⁴ and in fact condones moderate violence ‘if it comes to a matter of clobbering some rampaging redneck or shoving a scab off the pier.’⁹⁵

In ‘Buddhist Anarchism’ Snyder sets himself up in opposition to McCarthy, Hoover and the anti-Communist crusaders, deliberately aligning himself with their negative stereotypes of subversives. In arguing for a politics based on Buddhist renunciation of the self, Snyder opposes Hoover’s assertion that American democracy is, and must be, based on ‘the dignity and worth of the individual’. Likewise, in rooting his politics in Buddhism, Snyder opposes Hoover’s belief that American democracy must be based on the ‘deep religious roots’ of ‘Western civilization’,⁹⁶ as well as opening himself to more general charges of being ‘un-American.’ ‘Buddhist Anarchism’ should be seen as a response to the dualistic thinking of the McCarthy era, but while in some senses Snyder’s essay conforms to the McCarthyist dualism, in other senses it deconstructs it. From an anarchist position, all governments are oppressive by definition, and the Cold War dichotomy between capitalist and communist is meaningless: ‘The conditions of the cold war’, he writes, ‘have turned *all* modern societies, Soviet included, into hopeless brain-strainers’.⁹⁷

Snyder’s essay evokes another, older cultural dichotomy—that of East and West (in the sense of Europe/America and Asia, rather than communist East and capitalist West)—only to undo it. Snyder imagines his Buddhist-Anarchist revolution as a cultural meeting of West and East, combining ‘the mercy of the west’ which ‘has been rebellion’ (a later version of the essay substituted ‘social revolution’ for ‘rebellion’)⁹⁸ and the ‘mercy of the east’ which ‘has been insight into the basic self.’⁹⁹ While Snyder criticizes traditional Buddhism in Asia for being acquiescent to ‘the inequalities and tyrannies of whatever political system it found itself under’,¹⁰⁰ he finds a revolutionary imperative to be implicit in the third of the traditional three

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p.12.

⁹⁶ Hoover, *Masters of Deceit*, p.320.

⁹⁷ Snyder, ‘Buddhist Anarchism’, p.11. My italics.

⁹⁸ Snyder, *Earth House Hold*, p.92.

⁹⁹ Snyder, ‘Buddhist Anarchism’, p.12.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.10.

aspects of Buddhist practice, morality (sila). ‘This last aspect means,’ he writes, ‘supporting any cultural or economic revolution that moves clearly toward a free, international, classless society’.¹⁰¹

An Eastern View of Nature

Up to now it has been shown that Snyder and his contemporaries employed tropes of nature and the East as part of their critique of American Cold War culture. I now want to complete the triangulation of these three themes—nature, the East, Cold War culture—by showing that Snyder and his contemporaries saw Eastern religious traditions as exhibiting a less alienated attitude toward the natural and material worlds than that found in the West. In the ‘Logging’ section of *Myths & Texts*, Snyder contrasts East and West along these lines. While he had employed the tropes of degradation in ‘A Berry Feast’ to critique contemporary suburban America, in certain sections of *Myths & Texts* such tropes are used to criticize a much broader idea of Western civilization, bringing Snyder’s views more in line with those that would be expressed by deep ecologists in the following decades. In ‘Logging 5’ he writes:

Again the ancient, meaningless
 Abstractions of the educated mind.
 wet feet and the campfire out.
 Drop a mouthful of useless words.
 —The book’s in the crapper
 They’re up to the part on Ethics now¹⁰²

Abstract reason, having its source in ancient Greek philosophy exemplified here by Aristotle’s *Ethics*, is criticized as being ‘meaningless.’ The book is degraded, placed next to the ‘crapper,’ here a metonym for the ‘lower stratum of the body.’

Later, in ‘Logging 14,’ Snyder describes the clearing of pine trees as a clash between the values of Western civilization, and those of the East and of Native American cultures. The

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.12.

¹⁰² Snyder, *Myths & Texts*, p.7.

‘Pine of Seami,’ a Japanese author of Nō plays, and the ‘cedar of Haida’, a group of Native Americans indigenous to British Columbia, are described being

Cut down by the prophets of Israel
 The fairies of Athens
 The thugs of Rome
 both ancient and modern;
 Cut down to make room for the suburbs¹⁰³

The cultural forces which led to deforestation and the construction of the American suburbs, it is suggested, derive from the founding traditions of Western civilization; the classical civilizations of Greece and Rome and Judeo-Christian religion.

The following poem, ‘Logging 15,’ presents a contrasting vision of rebirth that draws on Eastern religious traditions. The poem begins with the image of the cone of the Lodgepole Pine, the ‘wonderful reproductive / power’ of which had been described in ‘Logging 3.’ There Snyder described how the Lodgepole Pine cones are able to withstand forest fires and after such fires ‘the cones open and shed their seeds / on the bared ground and a new growth springs up.’¹⁰⁴ In ‘Logging 15’ Snyder equates the burnt patch of forest on which the cone falls with the Buddhist ‘void’. Although burnt, the ground associated with the void is fertile and gives rise to new life; as Murphy notes, ‘the lodgepole pine stands as a symbol of earth’s regenerative cycles, including fiery destruction.’¹⁰⁵ Later in the poem, the apocalyptic undertones of this image are reinforced by evoking of the idea of the ‘kalpa,’ an aeon in Buddhist and Hindu eschatology:

Shiva at the end of the kalpa:
 Rock-fat, hill flesh, gone in a whiff.
 Men who hire men to cut groves
 Kill snakes, build cities, pave fields,
 Believe in god, but can’t
 Believe their own senses
 Let alone Gautama. Let them lie.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p.15.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p.4.

¹⁰⁵ Patrick D. Murphy, *A Place for Wayfaring: The Poetry and Prose of Gary Snyder* (Corvallis, 2000), p.29.

Pine sleeps, cedar splits straight
Flowers crack the pavement.¹⁰⁶

Shiva, lord of destruction, watches over the destruction of Western civilization, yet the image of flowers cracking the pavement, like the image of berries growing in the dead city at the end of 'A Berry Feast,' provides the promise of rebirth from the destruction of the old civilization, alienated as it was from its own source in nature. It is an image of natural rebirth which perhaps implicitly promises a societal rebirth, based on Eastern rather than Western spiritual values.

In 'Logging' then, Snyder degrades Western civilization, characterized as being over-reliant on the mental faculties, on 'meaningless / Abstractions,' and contrasts it with Eastern spiritual traditions which offer a less alienated relationship with nature. The East/West binarism I am suggesting here is by no means absolute in Snyder's poetry of the 1950s. In 'A Berry Feast,' after describing the pregnant woman's 'Belly stretched taut in a bulge / Breasts swelling as you guzzle beer', Snyder asks 'who wants Nirvana?' as if aspirations toward nirvana equate to the shunning of the natural processes of procreation.¹⁰⁷ My discussion of samasara and nirvana in my introduction should show that Snyder soon came to realize that, from a Mahayana Buddhist perspective, nirvana need not be regarded as transcending the material world but might be identified with it. In 'Logging 2,' he describes 'The ancient forests of China logged,' showing that environmental degradation, associated as it is elsewhere with Western cultural traditions, has occurred in the East as well as the West.¹⁰⁸

A letter Snyder wrote to Ginsberg in 1956 shows explicitly that he came to regard Eastern spiritual traditions, Mahayana Buddhism in particular, as providing an antidote to Western culture's over-emphasis on the mental and spiritual realms. Ginsberg had previously written to Snyder expressing enthusiasm for St. Francis. Snyder wrote back:

Well, now about your St. Francis, I don't quite understand why, but you seem to have a weakness for the Manichaeian heresy, i.e. that spirit is pure good and matter is pure evil and the

¹⁰⁶ Snyder, *Myths & Texts*, p.16.

¹⁰⁷ Snyder, *The Back Country*, p.5.

¹⁰⁸ Snyder, *Myths & Texts*, p.3.

spiritual eye is acquired by subduing the physical eye (ear nose tongue body mind etc.). Because that's where St. Francis and all those people are.¹⁰⁹

Snyder sees Christianity as sharing Manichaeism's dualistic distinction between the good, spiritual realm of light and the evil, material world of darkness. The 'problems that Xtians [Christians] attribute to "matter"', he writes, are rooted in what Mahayana Buddhism recognizes as 'blind ignorant fearful craving, which darkens the mind' and 'fixes itself in the intellect as ARBITRARY CONCEPTIONS, among which such ideas as spiritual, good, evil, the body, the mind, awakening, ignorance, craving, peanut butter, Rexroth, sunshine may be counted.' Snyder implies that America's war culture is the result of such 'blind ignorant craving,' which 'throws images all through the intellect and imagination and starts huge trains of psychological economics and warfare and intermental governments and counterrevolutions'. While Snyder is here using political terms as metaphors for psychological processes, he is suggesting that such psychological processes become manifest as literal 'warfare'. Mahayana Buddhism, according to Snyder, denies the distinction between spiritual/mental and material phenomena, undoing these 'ARBITRARY CONCEPTIONS': 'Diamond Sutra great acid dissolving such, Prajnaparamita sutra a mental bomb' writes Snyder.¹¹⁰ Given the Cold War context, the image of a 'mental bomb' is a highly charged one, and Kerouac uses a similar image when he describes Buddhism as a 'big bomb on the head' in *Mexico City Blues*.¹¹¹ If the dualistic thinking of Western religious traditions has led ultimately to the creation of the atomic bomb, Snyder and Kerouac imply, a metaphorical explosion of equivalent intensity is needed to overturn that tradition of dualistic thinking.

Rather than aligning itself with the material side of the Manichean dualism, as I have been suggesting Snyder and his contemporaries do in their poetry of this period, Mahayana Buddhism denies the validity of that dualism altogether. Nevertheless, Mahayana's non-dualism allows the acceptance of the material world and the 'lower stratum of the body,' what

¹⁰⁹ Gary Snyder to Allen Ginsberg, [c. 20 August 1956], Bill Morgan, ed., *The Selected Letters of Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder* (Berkeley, 2009), pp.8-9.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.9.

¹¹¹ Jack Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, ed. Marilène Phipps-Kettlewell (New York, 2012), p.132.

Snyder describes in the letter to Ginsberg as ‘the flesh, sensuality, pleasure, sensation, etc.,’ which from the point of view of ‘Buddhist philosophy’ are ‘all as pure and devoid of good or evil attributes as a chunk of granite’. Snyder goes on to write that, because it escapes the dualism of Manichaeism and Christianity, Zen Buddhism—a subset of Mahayana—makes no prescriptions concerning sexual morality: ‘it is totally silent on the matter of sex philosophically’.¹¹²

Like Snyder, McClure and Ginsberg both associate Eastern religions with a felicitous relationship with the natural, material world in their critiques of American modernity. In ‘Sunflower Sutra,’ a 1955 poem written while he was living in Berkeley, Ginsberg again presents a negative view of built environments. From the vantage point of the San Francisco docks, he describes the environmental degradation caused by industry around San Francisco:

The oily water on the river mirrored the red sky, sun sank on top of final
Frisco peaks, no fish in that stream, no hermit in those mounts

He sees a sunflower growing, covered in dust, which becomes a metaphor for American modernity: ‘artificial worse-than-dirt—industrial—modern—all that civilization spotting your crazy golden crown’.¹¹³ The sunflower represents the persistence of nature within man-made environments, as well as symbolizing the persistence of a natural state of humanity beneath the ‘grime’ of modernity: ‘we’re all golden sunflowers inside’.¹¹⁴ By calling the poem a ‘Sutra,’ Ginsberg implicitly links this view of nature, as a point of resistance against American modernity, to Buddhism.

McClure, in his commentary on ‘Point Lobos: Animism,’ described that poem as illustrating ‘the oneness, the monism, of nature.’ He cites the nineteenth-century German biologist Ernst Haeckel and the process philosopher Alfred North Whitehead as providing precedents for the monist attitude of the poem. He writes that these men ‘believe that the universe is a single organism—that the whole thing is alive and that its existence is its

¹¹² Morgan, ed., *Selected Letters of Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder*, p.9.

¹¹³ Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, p.146.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.147.

sacredness and its breathing.’ He compares this scientific monism to monist ideas in Chinese religion, to ‘the Uncarved Block of the Taoists.’¹¹⁵ While Far Eastern religions should by no means be regarded as a monolith, elements of Daoism were assimilated by Chinese Buddhism.¹¹⁶ In presenting a view of nature that combines Western science and Chinese religion, McClure’s poem anticipates Snyder’s yoking of scientific ecology and Hua-yen Buddhism in the 1970s (see Chapter Four).

Finally, I want to show how the association of nature and Far Eastern religion outlined above led to the creation of a recurring trope in the works of the poets present at the Six Gallery: the orientalizing of the wilderness landscapes of the American West Coast. Rexroth was perhaps the first writer to employ this trope. The clearest example in Rexroth’s writing is in ‘Hojoki,’ a sequence of six mountain-scene vignettes titled according to season, which were included in Rexroth’s 1949 collection *The Signature of All Things*. The title translates from Japanese as ‘An Account of my Hut,’ and is the title of a thirteenth-century essay by the Buddhist recluse Kamo no Chōmei. Chōmei describes himself turning his back on the world and taking up residence in a ‘hut ten feet square’ in the mountains, where he contemplates ‘[t]he essence of Buddha’s teaching to man’.¹¹⁷ In Rexroth’s poem the speaker, like Chōmei, sits by his ‘ten foot square hut’ in an isolated landscape,¹¹⁸ but we know from Rexroth’s autobiography that this is Rexroth’s cabin in Marin County, California where he would meditate, ‘sitting in the lotus posture, doing controlled breathing, and emptying [his] mind of detritus.’¹¹⁹

In the penultimate section, Rexroth describes the West Coast landscape through the aesthetics of Song Dynasty China:

The alders overhead blend their bare twigs
And catkins with the moonlit clouds

¹¹⁵ McClure, *Scratching the Beat Surface*, p.27.

¹¹⁶ See Snyder, *The Real Work*, p.94.

¹¹⁷ Kamo no Chōmei, ‘An Account of My Hut’, trans. Donald Keene, *Anthology of Japanese Literature from the Earliest Era to the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, ed. Keene (New York, 1955), 197-212, pp.206, 211.

¹¹⁸ Rexroth, *The Signature of All Things*, p.31.

¹¹⁹ Rexroth, *An Autobiographical Novel*, ed. Linda Hamalian, 2nd ed. (New York, 1991), p.506.

Into one indistinct, netted haze.
 The hills, covered with wet young grass,
 Are intangible as billows of fog.
 [...]

 The thin bladed laurel leaves
 Look like Su Tung Po's bamboos.¹²⁰

Rexroth wrote of Su Shi (Su Tung Po) in his essay 'Sung Culture' that he was 'the greatest of the poets of Sung and the greatest poet of sentiment China ever produced', as well as being 'a painter of bamboo leaves in misty moonlight, so famous that half the bamboo scrawls in Hong Kong art shops are attributed to him to this day.'¹²¹ Rexroth attributes to Song art in general 'an aesthetic of the formless', a tendency to blur forms in order to express 'the essence of the Ch'an, Neo-Confucian or Taoist metaphysics of ultimate reality.'¹²² Rexroth's 'netted haze' of catkins and clouds, and his 'intangible' hills suggests just such a blurring of forms.

By rendering the landscape in a style that imitates Chinese Buddhist aesthetics and giving his poem a Japanese name, the reader might imagine that the poem depicts a Chinese or Japanese landscape. Identifying the poem's location from its contents is in fact impossible. All flora and fauna identified in the poem are referred to by taxonomic ranks above their species: a horned owl, maple, laurel, cherries, a heron, mice, alders, grass, deer, oak and bees are all mentioned, and examples of each of these can be found both in West Coast America and in East Asia. The tribe bamboo, native only to Asia, is mentioned, but only as a comparison to the laurel leaves; there is no bamboo in the poem's immediate environment. The resultant indefinability of location seems to have been a deliberate effect here.

Snyder's journals show that he, like Rexroth, imagined the wilderness landscapes of the West Coast to be oriental landscapes. Snyder spent the summer of 1952 as a fire lookout in Skagit County, Washington State. During this time he was reading deeply in Buddhist literature and Chinese poetry.¹²³ His oriental reading matter seems to have led him to imagine the American wilderness landscape as a Chinese one. Several times in his journals he refers to

¹²⁰ Rexroth, *The Signature of All Things*, p.33.

¹²¹ Rexroth, *Assays* (Norfolk CT, 1961), p.5.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p.10.

¹²³ Snyder's Journal, 1947-52, GSP I 84:1, 1 July 1952.

Crater Mountain as ‘Crater Shan,’ ‘Shan’ being the Chinese word for mountain.¹²⁴ From 1954, when studying oriental languages at Berkeley, Snyder refers to his tiny cottage near campus, as well as the country dwellings of several of his friends, as ‘Hojoki’ in imitation of Rexroth.¹²⁵ Snyder’s orientalization of Western American landscapes is reflected in Kerouac’s fictionalized account of climbing Matterhorn Peak in the Sierra Nevada with Snyder in *The Dharma Bums*. Ray Smith, Kerouac’s fictional alias, exclaims, ‘Oh this is like an early morning in China’, and Japhy Ryder, Snyder’s alias, says the mountain landscape ‘put [him] in the mind of a haiku’.¹²⁶ Later, Smith describes Ryder as looking like ‘an old Zen Master of China out in the wilderness.’¹²⁷

In ‘Sourdough Mountain Lookout,’ a 1956 poem set in the North Cascades in Washington State where Whalen had been a fire lookout during the summers of 1954 and 1955, Whalen introduces oriental motifs into his description of a West Coast wilderness landscape. The poem is, significantly, dedicated to Rexroth. The poem is introduced by an epigraph from the third/fourth-century Chinese painter Tsung Ping:

“Now I am old and infirm, I fear I shall no more be able to roam among the beautiful mountains. Clarifying my mind, I meditate on the mountain trails and wander about only in dreams.”

Whalen draws parallels between himself and Tsung Ping, beginning the poem proper by stating that he, like Tsung Ping, ‘always say[s] I won’t go back to the mountains’ as he is ‘too old and fat’. The poem that follows is Whalen’s own meditation on mountain trails.¹²⁸ Towards the end of the poem, Whalen imagines the mountain range as a circle of Buddhist prayer beads, with one bead becoming Gautama Buddha:

I’m surrounded by mountains here
A circle of 108 beads, originally seeds
of *ficus religiosa*

¹²⁴ Ibid., 11 July 1952, 23 July 1952.

¹²⁵ Snyder’s Journal 1953-55, GSP I 84:2, 27 November 1952, 9 February 1955, 25 October 1955.

¹²⁶ Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*, p.52.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p.65.

¹²⁸ Whalen, *Collected Poems*, p.40.

Bo-tree

A circle, continuous, one odd bead
 Larger than the rest and bearing
 A tassle (hair tuft) (the man who sat
 under the tree)
 In the center of the circle,
 A void, an empty figure containing
 All that's multiplied;
 Each bead a repetition, a world
 Of ignorance and sleep.¹²⁹

The mountain landscape becomes the setting for an experience of insight into the essential emptiness of all things. Whalen is here perhaps less celebratory of the natural world than Snyder or Rexroth might be—the world is a realm of ‘ignorance’—but it is the natural setting of the mountains that has provided this religious vision.

More will be said of the ecocritical implications of this mingling of East and West in relation to Snyder's *Cold Mountain Poems* in the following chapter. In terms of the argument of this chapter, it should be said that these poems of wilderness represent a disengagement from Cold War American society, identified as it was with the city and the suburbs. The mingling of tropes of the East and nature, both of which were evoked elsewhere as part of a critique of Cold War American culture, here offers a refuge from that culture. In this sense they are very much products of the ‘apolitical’, ‘Thoreauvian’ attitude of the 1950s that Snyder had described in the 1977 interview quoted above. While it has been argued that these writers’ orientalism would have been regarded as ‘Un-American’ in the 1950s, their ‘Thoreauvian’ evocation of wilderness places them in a particularly American tradition.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p.44.

2. Chinese Poems, American Wilderness: *Cold Mountain Poems* and the Influence of Classical Chinese Poetry

At the end of the preceding chapter it was seen how Snyder and his contemporaries depicted the wilderness areas of the West Coast in orientalized terms. In Rexroth's 'Hojoki' in particular, an indeterminate landscape is created that seems to be at once American and East Asian. This chapter will show that from the mid-1950s, through his engagement with Classical Chinese poetry, Snyder created similarly indeterminate landscapes that blur categories of East and West. The chapter centres on *Cold Mountain Poems* (1958), Snyder's translations of twenty-four poems by the Tang Dynasty poet Hanshan. Through anapopism, Snyder makes the Tiantai Mountains that Hanshan describes resemble the American landscapes in which he had hiked and worked as a fire lookout. The chapter also considers examples of Snyder's original poetry in which West Coast landscapes are orientalized by viewing them through the lens of Classical Chinese poetic conventions. These poems can be seen as negotiating the binary categories of local and global, terms with which much environmental discourse, including Snyder's later prose writing, concerns itself; the poems are localist inasmuch as they limit their viewpoints to specific, ostensibly American West Coast, locales, while they are cosmopolitan inasmuch as they gaze across the Pacific to borrow stylistic conventions with which to apprehend those landscapes.

As wilderness poems, both *Cold Mountain Poems* and the original poems examined here engage with another binary opposition: that between human civilization and virgin nature. The idea of wilderness presented in these translations and poems is itself a product of the meeting of East and West, of global and local; it should be placed in the contexts of John Muir's West Coast wilderness writing and Thoreau's experiment at Walden Pond on the other side of the country, as well as the Chinese hermit poetry tradition represented by Hanshan. By comparing Snyder's translations to other translators of Hanshan, I show that *Cold Mountain*

Poems emphasizes the binary opposition between civilization and nature. Because the ‘ideal wilderness space is wholly pure by virtue of its independence from humans,’¹ to quote Garrard, the poet’s persona occupies a paradoxical position in the landscape. Snyder addresses this paradox through Chan Buddhist ideas of the self he found to be expressed in Hanshan’s poetry, partially erasing the subjective ‘I’ from the landscapes he depicts. Finally, through a reading of Snyder’s 1981 poem ‘The Canyon Wren,’ which alludes to *Cold Mountain Poems* as well as to the Song Dynasty poet Su Shi, I suggest that, later in his career, Snyder’s poetry deconstructs the binary opposition of humanity and nature which his earlier work had implied.

Translations of Chinese Poetry into English: Snyder’s Predecessors

Snyder began work on his translations of Hanshan in 1955 under the supervision of Professor Chen Shih-Hsiang while studying Asian languages at Berkeley, and refined them with the help of a Japanese specialist in Chinese poetry while he was living in Kyoto. *Cold Mountain Poems* was published in *Evergreen Review* in 1958, and then in book form together with Snyder’s 1959 collection of original poetry *Riprap* in 1965. *Cold Mountain Poems* comprises translations of twenty-four of over 300 extant poems attributed to Hanshan, and depict the Chinese poet isolated from human civilization in the Tiantai Mountains.

By 1955 Chinese poetry had come to occupy a special place in Anglo-American modernism, due largely to the translations of Ezra Pound. In his statement for a symposium on ‘Chinese Poetry and the American Imagination’ held in 1977, Snyder stated that he had read Pound’s translations as well as those of English orientalist Arthur Waley while an undergraduate at Reed College. A ‘little later’ he read the translations of American poet Witter Bynner.² Prior to the publication of these translations, the best known English translations had been those in Herbert Giles’ 1901 *History of Chinese Literature*, the first such history in English. Giles had rendered his examples of Chinese poetry into distinctly English verse forms,

¹ Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, p.78.

² Snyder, ‘Chinese Poetry and the American Imagination: Statement from a Symposium, April 1977’, *The New Directions Anthology of Classical Chinese Poetry*, ed. Eliot Weinberger (New York, 2003), 211-12, p.211.

usually iambic pentameter or tetrameter, with trite *abab* rhyme schemes. Pound's first Chinese 'translations' appeared in the 1914 *Des Imagistes* anthology, and constitute four of the six poems that he contributed. Pound had no knowledge of the Chinese language at this point, and in fact adapted the poems from Giles' translations. The difference between Pound's and Giles' versions, however, could not be more marked. Pound's unrhymed, economical free verse exemplifies the Imagist ideal of composing 'in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of a metronome', and the impersonal, direct language exemplifies the Imagist aim of '[d]irect treatment of the "thing"'.³ In 1915 Pound published *Cathay*, a selection of Chinese translations, mostly of the Tang Dynasty poet Li Bai (Li Po; Pound gives the Japanese version of the poet's name, Rihaku), based on the notes of the late Ernest Fenollosa whose manuscripts Pound had acquired from Fenollosa's widow in November 1913. *Cathay* advanced Pound's poetic agenda, and has been described as 'the first great book in English of the new, plain-speaking, laconic, image-driven free verse' that was to dominate English-language translations of Chinese poetry throughout the rest of the twentieth century.⁴ Pound returned to translating Chinese poetry later in his career; in 1954 he published his translation of *The Classic Anthology Defined by Confucius*, the oldest collection of Chinese poetry, comprising 305 poems composed between eleventh and seventh centuries BC, said to have been compiled by Confucius. *The Classic Anthology* is stylistically very different to Pound's earlier translations; he abandons their cool, plain, modern style to imitate a vast array of historical English styles, including Anglo Saxon verse, Elizabethan verse, the King James Bible and the poetry of Robert Browning; some poems also imitate Classical Greek and Roman poetry, as well as employing the vocabulary of popular American speech.⁵

Waley's first collection of translations, *One Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems*, was published in 1918. Like Pound's earlier translations, Waley moved away from the English verse forms employed by Giles, attempting 'to produce rhythmic effects similar to those of the

³ Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T.S. Eliot (London, 1954), p.3.

⁴ Eliot Weinberger, Introduction, *New Directions Anthology*, ed. Weinberg, xvii-xxvii, p.xix.

⁵ See Cheadle, *Ezra Pound's Confucian Translations*, p.154.

original' by representing 'each character in the Chinese' by 'a stress in the English'.⁶ His diction is considerably plainer than Giles' fussy, archaic English, although his departure from the English rhythms of Giles is not as radical as Pound's. In 1929 Bynner published *The Jade Mountain*, a translation of a Chinese anthology of 300 Tang Dynasty poems that Bynner had completed in collaboration with the Chinese academic Kiang Kang-Hu. The lines of Bynner's free-verse translations are often more expansive than those of Pound and Waley, but they do exhibit a Poundian plainness of diction.

Discussing Pound's translations, Snyder acknowledged that he 'valued [Pound] highly as a teacher in poetic technology,'⁷ and previous criticism has documented Snyder's stylistic debt to Pound. Robert Kern writes that 'despite the fact that Snyder is a trained orientalist [...] capable of reading classical Chinese, he seems quite deliberately to have adopted Pound's invention of Chinese in English as one of his chief models', both in his translations and in his own verse.⁸ While Snyder's translations do owe a stylistic debt to Pound—and I will be drawing attention to some aspects of that debt—what interested him thematically about Chinese poetry was quite different to what interested Pound. Snyder writes that he 'first responded, in 1949, living in Oregon,' to 'Chinese poetry on the level of nature'. Snyder was 'struck in some of the translations by [...] a fine, specialized and precise attention and observation of natural detail'. He 'looked initially only to the hermit poet/nature poet for inspiration and for a while took that to be what Chinese poetry really was'.⁹ Secondly, Snyder looked to Classical Chinese poetry for its Buddhist ideas. He explained in 1987 that, early on, he recognized that 'Chinese poetry and the aesthetics of Chinese poetry are very much involved with Ch'an, or Zen.' His initial 'discovery of Zen was interwoven with Chinese poetry' and both of these for Snyder 'have a remote connection to mountaineering.'¹⁰ In fact, it was Snyder's interest in Buddhism that had let him to Hanshan. He had asked Professor Chen Shih-

⁶ Arthur Waley, trans., *One Hundred & Seventy Chinese Poems* (London, 1918), p.19.

⁷ Snyder, 'Chinese Poetry and the American Imagination', p.212.

⁸ Robert Kern, *Orientalism, Modernism, and the American Poem* (Cambridge, 1996), p.223.

⁹ Snyder, 'Chinese Poetry and the American Imagination', pp.211-12.

¹⁰ Snyder, [Saturday Morning Talk, 11 April 1987], *Jimmy & Lucy's House of "K"* 9 (January 1989), 53-7, p.54.

Hsiang to direct him towards a Buddhist poet who he might translate, and Hanshan was the tutor's suggestion.¹¹

The Chinese poems Pound translated are far more concerned with human affairs than with non-human nature. The translations in *Des Imagistes* are largely set in courtly surroundings, and the sylvan setting of 'After Ch'u Yuan' is a mere backdrop for the 'procession of maidens' on which the poem focuses. Likewise, *Cathay* has many poems in courtly settings, as well as poems about war and exile, but there is none of the hermit poetry that Snyder was attracted to. While Pound's *Classic Anthology* does illustrate the Confucian ideal of existing in 'harmony with the seasons of earth and heaven',¹² the poems' 'predominant subject', according to Cheadle, 'is individual experience and, explicitly or implicitly, how the integrity or corruptness of individual experience relates to the vitality of the state and culture.'¹³ Pound did not share Snyder's enthusiasm for Buddhism either: he submerged the Buddhist elements of Fenollosa's 'The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry';¹⁴ omitted or downplayed Buddhist references in his versions of Japanese Nō plays;¹⁵ and in the 'China Cantos' he presents Chinese history as a struggle between rational, orderly Confucianism and the superstitious mysticism of Buddhists and Daoists.¹⁶ Snyder recognized that Pound 'found in Chinese poetry something else entirely' from the Buddhist-inflected descriptions of the natural world that attracted him: 'Pound was delighted with the possibility of poets having political power in a strong bureaucracy' he wrote in 1977. He and Pound represented 'the two extremes [...] in their reactions to the role possibilities implied in Chinese poetry.'¹⁷

Like Pound's, Waley's translations in general do not foreground the 'hermit poet/nature poet' that fascinated Snyder. In the introduction to his first collection of Chinese translations,

¹¹ See Lee Bartlett, 'Gary Snyder's Han-Shan', *Sagetrieb* ii, 1 (Spring 1983), 105-10, p.106. Bartlett quotes an unpublished interview with Snyder from 1974.

¹² Pound, trans., *The Unwobbling Pivot & The Great Digest*, p.29.

¹³ Cheadle, *Ezra Pound's Confucian Translations*, p.3.

¹⁴ Stalling, *Poetics of Emptiness*, p.16.

¹⁵ Cheadle, *Ezra Pound's Confucian Translations*, p.13.

¹⁶ See especially Canto LVI, Ezra Pound, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (London, 1975), pp.301-310.

¹⁷ Snyder, 'Chinese Poetry and the American Imagination', p.212.

Waley insists that Chinese poetry was ‘essentially a metropolitan product’¹⁸ and, like Pound, the poems he translates in that volume tend to deal with war, exile, and political matters. A few poems do conform to Snyder’s idea of the hermit poet/nature poet. For instance, in ‘Returning to the Fields,’ the Daoist poet Tao Qian (T’ao Ch’ien) describes himself retiring from society, likened to ‘the bars of a cage,’ to a small, remote cottage where he turns ‘to Nature and Freedom.’¹⁹ But Waley’s comments on Tao Qian and Daoist poetry in general in his introduction have an air of derision to them. He portrays the Daoist ideal of ‘harmony with Nature’ as an excuse for shirking the ‘duty of public service’ inculcated by Confucianism.²⁰ In 1954, however, Waley did publish a selection of translations of Hanshan’s poems, which will be compared to Snyder’s later in this chapter.

Bynner does stress the observations of natural detail in Chinese poems that had attracted Snyder. In his introduction to *The Jade Mountain* Bynner writes that the Chinese poet ‘is constantly aware of the kinship between the beauty of the world and the beauty of imaginative phrase.’²¹ If this description of Chinese poetry as a mediation between the poetic imagination and natural world brings Romanticism to mind, it will be no surprise that Bynner goes on to identify Wordsworth as the English-language poet who ‘comes closest to the Chinese; but their poetry cleaves even nearer to nature than his.’²² Bynner’s introduction is couched in the terms of subversive orientalism. ‘Centuries ago’, he writes, the ‘Chinese gentleman’ knew ‘a profoundly rich civilization, a more poised and particularized sophistication than we westerners have yet attained.’²³ For Bynner, Chinese poetry exhibits Chinese culture’s balance between the values of high civilization and a naïve kinship with the natural world: the Chinese poet has the ‘head of a man and the heart of a child’.²⁴ Bynner’s collection demonstrates this balance through the inclusion of poets like Cen Can (Ts’ên Ts’an),

¹⁸ Waley, *One Hundred & Seventy Chinese Poems*, p.78.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.78.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.14.

²¹ Witter Bynner and Kiang Kang-Hu, trans., *The Jade Mountain: A Chinese Anthology Being Three Hundred Poems of the T’ang Dynasty 618-906* (New York, 1929), p.xiv.

²² *Ibid.*, p.xvii.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp.xiii-xiv.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.xviii.

who Kiang describes as a ‘magistrate poet’²⁵ and who writes of ‘officials’ climbing ‘vermillion steps’ among ‘purple walls’;²⁶ alongside poets like Wang Wei, a ‘hermit poet’²⁷ who writes of ‘empty mountain[s]’.²⁸

Another translator of Chinese poetry who provides a precedent for Snyder’s thematic emphases is Kenneth Rexroth. Rexroth’s 1949 collection *The Signature of All Things* which, as was noted in the previous chapter, Snyder had read as a graduate student at Indiana, contains a selection of translations of Chinese poems, all but one dating from the Tang and Song Dynasties, and more than half by the Tang Dynasty poet Du Fu (Tu Fu). These were later included in Rexroth’s *One Hundred Poems from the Chinese* (1956). Rexroth’s Du Fu translations are spoken by lone figures in wilderness settings (he uses the word ‘wilderness’ in the fourth poem),²⁹ and present the kind of ‘precise attention and observation of natural detail’ that had initially attracted Snyder to Chinese poetry.³⁰ While Rexroth’s attitudes towards Buddhism were ambivalent for most of his life, as was noted in the previous chapter, his introduction to *The Signature of All Things* acknowledged ‘the sayings of Buddha,’ as well as D.T. Suzuki’s writings on Zen (see my Chapter Three) as sources for the spirit of ‘religious anarchism’ that pervades all of his own work. As a keen mountaineer, Rexroth depicted the mountainous landscapes of the West Coast in the original poems included in *The Signature of All Things* along with the Chinese translations. Snyder’s perception that ‘Zen was interwoven with Chinese poetry’ and that both of them ‘have a remote connection to mountaineering’ would have been compounded by Rexroth’s translations.

Cold Mountain Poems: a Dual Sense of Place

In *Cold Mountain Poems* Snyder creates a dual sense of place that is simultaneously Chinese and American. It should be apparent from the previous chapter that Rexroth’s ‘Hojoki’ is a

²⁵ Ibid., p.xxiv.

²⁶ Ibid., p.136.

²⁷ Ibid., p.xxiv.

²⁸ Ibid., pp.189, 192.

²⁹ Rexroth, *The Signature of all Things*, p.71.

³⁰ See, for example, the third Du Fu poem, Ibid.

precedent for the creation of such indeterminate places, and that Snyder's contemporaries on the West Coast depicted such indeterminate places in their writing. In the following pages I want to also show that Snyder's creation of such an indeterminate place in *Cold Mountain Poems* is enabled by Poundian poetics. Once this is established, we may ask certain ecocritical questions of Snyder's translations.

In the preface to *Cold Mountain Poems* Snyder invites readers to imagine Hanshan in a contemporary American setting. He describes Hanshan and his 'sidekick' Shide (Shih-te) as 'immortals' who 'you sometimes run on to [...] today in the skidrows, orchards, hobo jungles, and logging camps of America.'³¹ These 'immortals' not only transcend the limits of time, but also of place. They are like Kerouac's Dharma bums, 'marginalized figures, members of a sub- or counter-culture and representatives of an oppositional politics.'³² The sense of Hanshan as a representative of American counterculture is compounded in Snyder's translations of the poems themselves. In the twelfth poem of the sequence, in which Hanshan remembers his 'first thirty years of life' from his mountain dwelling, he recalls how he 'Tried drugs, but couldn't make Immortal'.³³ Snyder's translation worksheets show that he considered translating 'drugs' as 'herbs'.³⁴ Red Pine, in his 2000 translation, translates the line as 'I've made elixirs and tried to become immortal'.³⁵ Snyder likely used the word 'drugs' because of its subversive, countercultural associations. The sense of Hanshan as an American Beat is compounded again by the use of distinctly American colloquialisms throughout the sequence (e.g. 'I don't talk their language' in the final poem).³⁶ In a 1967 letter Snyder justified such colloquialisms 'by the fact that Han-shan is writing in the colloquial of his own period, with a rough and slangy tone in spots.'³⁷ This slangy tone certainly serves to distance Snyder's translations from the

³¹ Snyder, *Riprap & Cold Mountain Poems* (San Francisco, 1965), p.39.

³² Kern, *Orientalism*, p.236.

³³ Snyder, *Riprap*, p.46.

³⁴ Snyder, *Cold Mountain Poems*, Worksheets on the Chinese poet Han Shan which became the basis of translations, Fall 1955, October 1994, GSP I 5:26, n. pag.

³⁵ Red Pine, trans., *The Collected Songs of Cold Mountain* (Port Townsend, 2000), p.125.

³⁶ Snyder, *Riprap*, p.24.

³⁷ Quoted in Jacob Leed, 'Gary Snyder: An Unpublished Preface', *Journal of Modern Literature* xiii, 1 (March 1986), 177-80, p.177.

stuffy English archaisms of translators like Giles, and it was that sort of stuffy Englishness that Whalen would have had in mind when he wrote to Snyder in 1953 urging him to avoid the style of ‘Celestial pedagogue[s] in China poultry [sic] [who] have been brought up (at great expense of money & ingenuity) in the very best English tradition, i.e. the U. of California idea (per AD 1901) of the Harvard idea (per 1839-40) of proper English (English of the Educated Upper Classes in London).’³⁸ Pound had employed American colloquialisms in some of his translations in *The Classic Anthology* (‘Ode 58’ includes the phrases ‘hill-billy,’ ‘it’s O.K. with me,’ ‘me and my gear,’ and ‘If I’m in trouble, well I made the mess’),³⁹ but as these Americanisms are juxtaposed with the gamut of other styles he imitates (including archaic English ones), the effect is quite different.

But anachronism and anachronism are not confined to Snyder’s diction. In Poem Two Snyder’s translation reads: ‘Go tell families with silverware and cars / “What’s the use of all that noise and money?”’⁴⁰ These lines perhaps demonstrate the influence of Rexroth’s Chinese translations. Rexroth’s translation of Du Fu’s ‘Winter Dawn’ describes men listening to ‘the sound of cars starting outside.’⁴¹ Snyder described the words ‘silverware and cars’ in the letter quoted above as ‘substitutions [...] for equivalent but culture-bound symbols of affluence in the T’ang dynasty.’ Red Pine gives a more literal translation: ‘all you owners of tripods and bells / what good are empty names’. He points out in a note to the poem that ‘[t]ripods and bells were cast at great expense for use at sacrificial ceremonies, and the names of ancestors or the men who commissioned them were often carved on their surfaces.’⁴² While Snyder keeps the sense of the essential meaninglessness of displays of wealth, his translation turns Hanshan’s lines into an attack on American consumerism in the 1950s. The substitution of ‘equivalent but culture-bound symbols of affluence’ enables Snyder to reinforce his co-option of Hanshan as a representative of his own countercultural stance.

³⁸ Philip Whalen to Gary Snyder, 5 November 1953, GSP II 200:8.

³⁹ Ezra Pound, trans., *The Classic Anthology Defined by Confucius* (London, 1955), pp.28-9.

⁴⁰ Snyder, *Riprap*, p.42.

⁴¹ Rexroth, *The Signature of All Things*, p.70.

⁴² Red Pine, *Collected Songs of Cold Mountain*, p.37.

Snyder not only Americanizes Hanshan's voice, but also the landscape described in the poem, which comes to resemble the mountain landscapes of the American West Coast at least as much as it resembles Hanshan's Tiantai Mountains. Timothy Gray astutely points out that some of the geological features described in *Cold Mountain Poems* are not present in the Tiantai Mountains. In the eighth poem, Snyder describes the trail to Hanshan's mountain dwelling as a 'long gorge choked with scree and boulders'.⁴³ Such gorges are common in the Sierras, but 'such traces of glacial activity are not found in the T'ien-t'ai range where Han-shan resided.'⁴⁴

Any reader attempting to identify Hanshan's location from the flora and fauna named in Snyder's translations would find it an impossible task. Like Rexroth in 'Hojoki,' Snyder usually names animals and plants at taxonomic ranks above their species. The one exception is the mention of horses (technically a subspecies) in the first and fourth poem (although in the former case Snyder is actually registering the absence of horses). Horses are of course found in both China and the America. In the rest of the sequence he lists birds (Poems Two, Nine and Thirteen), grass (Poems Three, Eight and Fourteen), pine (Poems Five and Eight), moss (poem Eight), cherry (Poem Thirteen), willow (Poem Thirteen), plum (Poem Fourteen) and mountain plants and berries (Poem Seventeen). Of the kingdoms, phyla, classes, genera and subgenera Snyder lists, examples can be found in both China and America. Snyder is not being any more vague than these particular poems are in the original; Waley's and Red Pine's translations of these words are almost identical to Snyder's.⁴⁵ Hanshan's entire oeuvre, however, contains many examples of organisms named at species level which would at least identify the poems' location as East Asian: the white crane and mandarin duck,⁴⁶ for example, are native to East Asia but not to America. In selecting poems with no such location-specific natural details,

⁴³ Snyder, *Riprap*, p.44.

⁴⁴ Gray, *Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim*, p.147.

⁴⁵ Arthur Waley, trans., '27 Poems by Han-shan', *Encounter* iii, 3 (September 1954), 3-8. Poems 6, 8, 9, 10, 17 and 24 in Snyder's selection are respectively nos. 6, 8, 7 (p.4), 24 (p.9), 17 and 16 (p.6) in Waley's. Snyder's poems 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 13, 14 and 17 are respectively nos. 1 (p.37), 6, 4, (p.39), 32 (p.57), 35 (p.59), 133 (p.127), 157 (p.143) and 169 (p.17) in Red Pine's translation.

⁴⁶ Red Pine, *Collected Songs of Cold Mountain*, pp.65, 111.

Snyder enables the reader to imagine Hanshan's mountain dwelling as either American or Asian.

Environmental theorists have differentiated between place and space. While places are 'centers of felt value'⁴⁷ that are 'inseparable from the concrete region in which [they are] found',⁴⁸ 'defined by physical markers as well as social consensus'; space 'connotes geometrical or topographical abstraction'.⁴⁹ Poem Twenty-three of *Cold Mountain Poems* moves away from the earlier poems' sense of place, however ambiguous it may have been, toward the geometrical abstractions of space. The poem's syntactically ambiguous second stanza describes the religious concept of Buddha-nature (see Introduction) as a 'fountain of light' flowing 'through the galaxies' before solidifying into a 'boundless perfect sphere.' The gaze of the poem leaves the earth, but the space it describes is as much a mental inner-space as it is the outer-space of 'galaxies'. The poem begins with Hanshan asserting, 'My home was at Cold Mountain from the start'.⁵⁰ 'Hanshan' literally translates as 'cold mountain,' and Snyder's introduction informs us that '[w]hen he talks about *Cold Mountain* he means himself, his home, his state of mind.'⁵¹ Poem Twenty-three's opening line makes little sense if it is talking about Cold Mountain as a literal place; it could not have been Hanshan's home before he moved there. Rather, 'Cold Mountain' here is a state of mind, the state of 'Original Mind' achieved through Zen meditation.⁵² As place disappears, we enter mental space.

It should by now have been shown that the landscape of *Cold Mountain Poems* is a curious mixture of East and West. While colloquial diction and anapopism introduce American elements into the ostensibly Chinese setting of the poems, botanical and zoological vagueness allows the poems to refuse any fixed location. Snyder's translations in some ways evoke a dual

⁴⁷ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis, 1977), p.4.

⁴⁸ Edward Casey, 'How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena', *Senses of Place*, eds. Steven Field and Keith Basso (Santa Fe, 1996) 13-52, p. 31.

⁴⁹ Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Oxford, 2005), p.63. The preceding quotations are also taken from Buell's discussion.

⁵⁰ Snyder, *Riprap*, p.49.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.39. Snyder's italics.

⁵² See Henricks' gloss on this poem, Robert G. Henricks, trans., *The Poetry of Han-Shan: A Complete, Annotated Translation of Cold Mountain* (Albany, 1990), p.285.

sense of place, and in others refuse any sense of place whatsoever. The 1967 letter quoted earlier reveals that this indeterminate sense of place arises largely as a result of an approach to translation that can, in its emphasis on the visual, be characterized as Poundian. Snyder writes:

My sense for the scene was indeed enhanced by the fact that I am a mountaineer and regular mountain-dweller [...] With this kind of background the visualization of the poems is made much easier for the translator. My method of translation is—first, to understand the poem thoroughly on a linguistic level. Second, by an effort of concentration to project the “picture” of the poem inside my mind, like a movie—to *see* what’s happening. Third, to write down, in my own language what I see happening. Fourth, to check that back against the original language and be sure they line up.⁵³

Snyder’s description of his translation process as primarily one of visualization agrees with Pound’s assertion that of the ‘three kinds of poetry’—phanopoeia, melopoeia and logopoeia—only phanopœia can be successfully translated from one language to another. Pound defines phanopœia as ‘a casting of images upon the visual imagination’ and asserts that ‘it is practically impossible for the translator to destroy it save by very crass bungling’. Conversely, melopœia, the ‘musical property’ of words, ‘is practically impossible to transfer or translate [...] from one language to another’; and logopœia, the ‘special way of habits of usage, of the context we *expect* to find with the word [...] does not translate’.⁵⁴ The primacy that Pound attributes to the visual imagination in his account of translation is of course linked to the Imagist poetics of his early career. In privileging the visual imagination (phanopœia) over the contextual content of words (logopœia), Pound justifies a poetics that ‘would strip words of all “association”’.⁵⁵ Robert Kern comments that Pound is ‘asking for a language removed from history’,⁵⁶ but he is also asking for a language removed from place. The image, for Pound, facilitates ‘freedom from time limits *and* space limits’.⁵⁷

Snyder saw his own process of translation-as-visualization as allowing him this kind of freedom from time and space limits: it allowed him, as he explained in an unpublished preface

⁵³ Quoted in Leed, ‘Unpublished Preface’, p.178.

⁵⁴ Pound, *Literary Essays*, p.25. Pound’s italics.

⁵⁵ Pound, ‘Status Rerum’, *Poetry* i, 4 (January 1913), 123-7, p.125.

⁵⁶ Kern, *Orientalism*, p.7.

⁵⁷ Pound, *Literary Essays*, p.4. My italics.

to *Cold Mountain Poems*, to ‘make an intellectual and imaginative jump into the mind and world of his poet.’⁵⁸ Such a jump is possible, Snyder claims, because ‘the range of sensibility shown in the poems dealt with here is not so various and so related to cultural and historical phenomena as it is for example, in poets like Po Chü I, Tu Fu, Tu Mu.’⁵⁹ The poems’ lack of context—of logopœia—for Snyder, is a virtue. The Poundian plain diction in which he renders them minimizes the attachment of foreign logopœia to the poems, except in the instances of anachronism and anatopism I have mentioned.

Let us pause at this point to consider what ecocritical conclusions might be drawn from the preceding discussion of the indeterminate sense of place in *Cold Mountain Poems*. Environmentalism since the 1960s and 1970s has tended to champion a sense of the local—of place-boundedness—as offering a ‘politics of resistance’ against the ecologically destructive and alienating forces of globalization.⁶⁰ Snyder’s own later prose writing would espouse localism: ‘Our relation to the natural world takes place in a *place*’, he would write, criticizing the ‘tens of millions of people in North America who were physically born here but who are not actually living here intellectually, imaginatively, or morally’.⁶¹ But *Cold Mountain Poems* seems to deliberately avoid what Lawrence Buell calls ‘the quotidian idiosyncratic intimacies that go with “place.”’⁶² Rather, Hanshan’s mountain dwelling, in its indeterminateness, comes to resemble the ‘non-places’ described by anthropological theorist Marc Augé: the interchangeable offices, malls and transport hubs of globalized (post)modernity.⁶³ But modern environmentalism since the 1960s and 1970s has talked in terms of global citizenship at the same time as espousing the virtues of localism.⁶⁴ Snyder’s own localism is never total;

⁵⁸ Leed, ‘Unpublished Preface’, p.179.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, p.65.

⁶¹ Snyder, *Practice of the Wild: Essays* (Washington DC, 1990), pp.42-3. Snyder’s italics. See also Snyder, ‘Re-inhabitation’, *The Old Ways: Six Essays*, by Snyder (San Francisco, 1977), 57-66.

⁶² Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, p.63.

⁶³ Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London, 1995), pp.78-9. See also Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, p.69ff.

⁶⁴ Ursula K. Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (New York, 2008), p.8.

‘Inhabitation does not mean “not travelling.”’⁶⁵ Recent ecocriticism has in fact questioned the wisdom of localism, arguing for the necessity of a more globally focused environmentalism. Lawrence Buell points out that a global perspective is necessary in order to comprehend environmental problems, such as global warming, whose effects are of a global scale.⁶⁶ Ursula Heise argues that, for reasons of national character, American environmentalism in particular has been characterized by ‘an excessive investment in the local’,⁶⁷ and that environmental thinking must ‘shift the core of its cultural imagination from a sense of place to a less territorial and more systemic sense of planet.’⁶⁸ Timothy Morton similarly argues that, while localist perspectives ‘have been good for environmentalist social policy’, environmental discourse must escape localism’s ‘language of smallness and restriction’ in order to address global environmental problems.⁶⁹

Morton sketches a way of thinking—what he calls ‘the ecological thought’—that would take the global scale of environmental problems into account, and which can usefully be applied to the poetics of Snyder’s translations. The ecological thought involves ‘the thinking of interconnectedness’,⁷⁰ and one way of achieving a sense of interconnectedness is by ‘dissolving the barrier between “over here” and “over there”’.⁷¹ Drawing on Freud’s definition of the uncanny, Morton continues:

Here is shot through with *there*. Our sense of place includes a sense of difference. When we think of the qualities (or lack thereof) of uncanny place, we arrive at a strangely familiar location—*anywhere*. [...] The ecological thought must extend our sense of location to include “anywhere.”⁷²

Through anapopism, *Cold Mountain Poems* mingles the ‘over here’ and the ‘over there.’ Through their botanical and zoological vagueness, and through employing a Poundian poetics that resists specific geographical context, they describe a kind of ‘anywhere.’

⁶⁵ Snyder, *The Old Ways*, p.60.

⁶⁶ Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, p.69.

⁶⁷ Heise, *Sense of Place*, p.10.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.56.

⁶⁹ Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge MA, 2010), p.14.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.39.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp.52, 55. Morton’s italics.

Snyder's volumes of original poetry of the 1950s and 1960s, the period during which he was moving between America and Japan, also mingle 'over here' and 'over there.' *Riprap* juxtaposes poems of Western American wilderness, which constitute the majority of poems in the volume, with poems set in Kyoto ('Tōji' and 'Kyoto: March'). The poems of the first three sections of *The Back Country* are arranged roughly geographically, with the 'Far West' section comprising poems of Western America, 'Far East' including poems set around Kyoto, and 'Kāli' detailing Snyder's 1961-2 trip to India. But the geographical compartmentalization is not total. 'Far West' contains poems which imitate Far Eastern poetic forms such as 'Hitch Haiku' and 'August on Sourdough, a Visit from Dick Brewer' (discussed below). 'Far East' contains poems in which Snyder reminisces about events that occurred in America ('Four Poems for Robin'), and 'Kāli' contains poems with American ('Alysoun') and Japanese ('This Tokyo,' 'Kyoto Footnote') settings. In these volumes, 'here' is shot through with 'there.'

The Wilderness Aesthetic of *Cold Mountain Poems*

The indeterminacy of *Cold Mountain Poems*' sense of place is made possible in part by the fact that the terrain they depict is devoid of human settlement. Our sense of place is determined at least as much by cultural factors as by features of physical geography or ecology, and a landscape without human presence is a landscape without culture. Thoreau recognized this—and I mention Thoreau because the version of Hanshan that Snyder presents is a Thoreauvian figure—in the 'Solitude' chapter of *Walden*. While living a mere mile from his nearest neighbour, the solitude Thoreau enjoys in the woods around Walden Pond, and the lack of visible signs of civilization, allow him to see his environment as being 'as much Asia or Africa as New England.'⁷³ Solitude allows Thoreau to relinquish place entirely and talk in the abstract, geometric terms of space: 'The whole earth which we inhabit is but a point in space.'⁷⁴

⁷³ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (1854; repr. Oxford, 2008), p.119. Visible signs of civilization are downplayed by Thoreau rather than being entirely absent.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.121.

When we talk about a place, or a space, which stands in contrast to the world of human civilization, we approach the concept of wilderness. While Walden Pond may not have been as remote from human civilization as to be considered a place of wilderness according to usual definitions, it does conform to environmental historian William Cronon's definition of wilderness. Cronon defines a particularly American idea of wilderness, derived in part from a cultural nostalgia for the 'primitive simplicity of the frontier':

Wilderness is the natural, unfallen antithesis of an unnatural civilization that has lost its soul. It is a place of freedom in which we can recover the true selves we have lost to the corrupting influences of our artificial lives. Most of all, it is the ultimate landscape of authenticity [...] it is the place where we can see the world as it really is, and so know ourselves as we really are—or ought to be.⁷⁵

No one embodied this American ideal of wilderness more than John Muir (1838-1914), the founder of America's national conservation movement and 'the first person to publically campaign for the preservation and protection of wilderness and wildlife on a national scale.'⁷⁶ In his mountain writings, which Snyder had read as a boy at Seattle public library,⁷⁷ Muir contrasted the unfallen purity of Western America's wilderness areas with the 'money-madness' of American consumerist society.⁷⁸ As has been seen, Snyder makes a similar contrast when he uses the figure of Hanshan to criticize mainstream American society's obsession with silverware, cars and money. In 1889 Muir began to campaign for Yosemite, California, 'to be rescued from the exploitative care of the State of California' and as a result an act of Congress in 1890 established Yosemite as a national park, legally enshrining its separateness from civilization.⁷⁹ Snyder had worked as a member of a trail crew in Yosemite, maintaining the cobblestone mountain trails, in the summer of 1955 prior to beginning work on his Hanshan translations. It has been noted that Snyder visualized Hanshan's mountain environment as the American wilderness areas he was familiar with. As his most recent

⁷⁵ William Cronon, 'The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature', *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. Cronon (New York, 1996), 69-90, p.80.

⁷⁶ Graham White, Introduction, *Journeys in the Wilderness: A John Muir Reader* by John Muir (Edinburgh, 2009), 1-19, p.3

⁷⁷ Gray, *Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim*, pp.47-8.

⁷⁸ Muir, *Journeys in the Wilderness*, p.353

⁷⁹ White, Introduction, p.4.

wilderness experience had been in an area synonymous with Muir, it is little wonder that *Cold Mountain Poems* shares aspects of Muir's ideal of wilderness.

A consideration of Snyder's selection of poems, and of certain word choices, shows that his translations emphasize the antithesis between Hanshan's remote mountain dwelling as a 'landscape of authenticity' and 'unnatural civilization' in a way that other translators do not. Arthur Waley had published a selection of twenty-seven translations of Hanshan's poems in 1954. We know that Snyder consulted Waley's translations while undertaking his own, as a typescript of them is included with his translation worksheets,⁸⁰ and of over 300 extant poems by Hanshan, Snyder's selection of twenty-four poems includes six also translated by Waley. Kern points out that Snyder presents 'a somewhat partial view of Han-shan' which foregrounds 'his indifference toward and sometimes scorn for the ordinary world'. Conversely, Waley's translations show Hanshan as 'an ordinary human being with a wife and children and family problems, and as a poor, wandering scholar in search of patronage.'⁸¹

Indeed, the first three poems of Waley's translations give details of Hanshan's life before he became a hermit in the mountains, and poems Four and Five recount his departure from civilization into the mountain wilderness. Poems Eleven, Twenty-one, Twenty-two, Twenty-three and Twenty-five depict Hanshan reminiscing about his pre-Cold Mountain life in his mountain dwelling. While the poems in the middle of the sequence are set in Hanshan's mountain dwelling, by bookending the sequence with poems that recount Hanshan's pre-Cold Mountain life (with the exception of the last two poems which form a coda), Waley's sequence is shaped around Hanshan's biography.

Waley's Poem Three, which gives details of Hanshan's life before he became a mountain hermit, suggests that his departure from human society was due to circumstances beyond his control:

⁸⁰ See Jacob Leed, 'Gary Snyder, Han Shan, and Jack Kerouac', *Journal of Modern Literature* xx, 1 (March 1984), 185-93, p.186.

⁸¹ Kern, *Orientalism*, pp.234-5.

When I was young I weeded book in hand,
 Sharing at first a home with my elder brothers.
 Something happened, and they put the blame on me;
 Even my own wife turned against me.
 So I left the red dust of the world and wandered
 Hither and thither[...]⁸²

While the details of the ‘something’ that happened are not given, Waley’s Hanshan is an exile, and so his relationship with his wilderness dwelling is necessarily one of discord.⁸³ This is compounded by the other poems in the sequence in which Hanshan reminisces about his previous life.

Unlike Waley’s, Snyder’s selection begins with Hanshan already dwelling in his mountain environment. The vast majority of the poems are set in that mountain landscape and the landscape is as much the focus of the sequence as Hanshan himself. Snyder makes Hanshan a hermit by his own volition:

In a tangle of cliffs *I chose* a place⁸⁴
 (Poem Two)

I wanted a good place to settle:
 Cold Mountain would be safe.
 [...]
 For ten years I haven’t gone back home
 I’ve even forgotten the way by which I came.⁸⁵
 (Poem Five)

Red Pine points out that the verb *pu-chu*, which Snyder translates as ‘chose’ in the first of these examples, ‘implies to choose by divination’,⁸⁶ and Henricks translates the verb as ‘divined’.⁸⁷ Snyder’s translation eliminates the sense of accident implied by these translations. The draft of Snyder’s translation shows that he originally used the word ‘sought’;⁸⁸ ‘chose’ in the published

⁸² Waley, ‘27 Poems’, p.3.

⁸³ In the Preface to his translations, Red Pine suggests that Hanshan may have been forced into exile for political reasons in the aftermath of the An Lushan Rebellion, *Collected Songs of Cold Mountain*, 3-28, p.14.

⁸⁴ Snyder, *Riprap*, p.42. My italics.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.43. My italics.

⁸⁶ Red Pine, *Collected Songs of Cold Mountain*, note on p.38.

⁸⁷ Henricks, *The Poetry of Han-Shan*, p.32.

⁸⁸ Snyder, *Cold Mountain Poems*, Worksheets, GSP I 5:26, n. pag.

version emphasizes Hanshan's agency. In the second example the subject of the first two lines is ambiguous in Hanshan's original. Henricks translates these lines as 'If you wish to find a place where you can rest, / Han-shan for long can keep you secure'. Red Pine translates the lines as 'Looking for a refuge / Cold Mountain will keep you safe.' Only Snyder's translation, using the verb 'wanted', suggests Hanshan's volition in choosing to settle in the mountains. Likewise, while Snyder's translation of the last two lines of the poem simply states that Hanshan has not gone home for ten years, both Red Pine's and Henricks translations make clear that Han-shan has been 'unable' to return home.⁸⁹

Because Snyder's Hanshan has chosen to depart from civilization, each time a place of human settlement is mentioned it is treated with derision. In the preface to the poems by Lu Jiuyin (Lu Ch'iu-yin), Governor of Tai Prefecture, which Snyder translates, one of Hanshan's and Shide's occasional visits to Guoqing (Kuo-ch'ing) Temple is recounted. The governor, recognizing Hanshan and Shide as 'men of Tao',⁹⁰ orders a house for them to be built within the temple grounds. Hanshan shuns the offer of a dwelling place within human society, even the cloistered society of the temple. Places of human settlement are treated with similar disdain in the poems themselves: the 'wrecked town' Hanshan visits in Poem Four 'sinks [his] spirits';⁹¹ the rural settlement described in Poem Sixteen is described as a 'prison';⁹² and in Poem Twelve, the 'cities of boiling red dust' Hanshan had roamed through in his 'first thirty years of life' are contrasted to the mountain landscape, where he can 'purify [his] ears.'⁹³ This act of purification confirms the landscape of *Cold Mountain Poems* as the 'antithesis of an unnatural civilization', to return to Cronon's definition of wilderness.

Two poems included in *The Back Country*, consciously modelled on Tang poetry, uphold this antithesis between wilderness and civilization. 'Siwashing it out once in Siuslaw Forest,' the first of the 'Four Poems for Robin' sequence, imitates a form employed by Wang

⁸⁹ Henricks, *The Poetry of Han-Shan*, p.56. Red Pine, *Collected Songs of Cold Mountain*, p.39.

⁹⁰ Red Pine, *Collected Songs of Cold Mountain*, p.39.

⁹¹ Snyder, *Riprap*, p.43.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p.47.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.46.

Wei which uses five-character lines with a ‘heavy, heavy, light, light, light’ stress pattern.⁹⁴ An early draft of the poem shows that it was originally written in prose before being adapted into the imitation-Chinese meter of the published version.⁹⁵ The poem also imitates Chinese verse on a thematic level. Snyder remembers Robin, his first girlfriend, and imagines her now teaching at a ‘school back east.’ Snyder’s own wilderness locale is contrasted with human civilization, where Robin teaches and their old ‘friends are married’.⁹⁶ This is Snyder’s version of Hanshan’s contrast of his wilderness home with the ‘dusty world’⁹⁷ of Chinese society. Like Hanshan, Snyder prefers this wilderness setting to the human world, although there is a more pronounced note of nostalgia for that human world than is present in Snyder’s Hanshan translations. The other poem in *The Back Country* that Snyder identified as an imitation of Chinese poetic form is ‘August on Sourdough, a Visit from Dick Brewer.’ This poem uses another kind of Chinese line as a model, one with ‘seven beats: 1-2/1-2/1-2-3’, and also employs a ‘classical Chinese theme [...] the visit of a friend from a long distance to a poet in a hermitage.’⁹⁸ Snyder’s strict approach to the form of this poem is indicated by the scansion marks on an undated draft.⁹⁹ Like ‘Siwashing,’ the poem contrasts the dusty world of New York, to which Brewer returns at the end of the poem, to the pristine wilderness environment where Snyder remains.

In *Cold Mountain Poems* Snyder compounds the antithesis between human and natural realms by emphasizing the inaccessibility of Hanshan’s mountain dwelling to other people, to the extent that the landscape seems to repel human intrusion.

Bird-paths, but no trails for men.¹⁰⁰
(Poem Two)

⁹⁴ Snyder, Question and Answer Session, 3 April 1971, University of Michigan, Gary Snyder’s Writer-in-Residence Appearances, Talks transcribed by Russell Gregory, GSP I 22:9, pp.4-5.

⁹⁵ ‘Siwashing it out once in Siuslaw State Park’, Poem, 1963, n.d., MS GSP I 20:7.

⁹⁶ Snyder, *The Back Country*, p.47.

⁹⁷ Snyder, *Riprap*, p.46.

⁹⁸ Snyder, Question and Answer Session, GSP I 22:9, p.5.

⁹⁹ Snyder, ‘August on Sourdough, a Visit from Dick Brewer’, Poem, n.d., 1963., MS GSP I 3:60.

¹⁰⁰ Snyder, *Riprap*, p.42.

Men ask the way to Cold Mountain
 Cold Mountain: there's no through trail.
 (Poem Six)

Men don't get this far into the mountains¹⁰¹
 (Poem Seven)

Rough and dark—the Cold Mountain trail,
 Sharp cobbles—the icy creek blank.
 [...]

 Bleak, alone, not even a lone hiker.¹⁰²
 (Poem Nine)

While the preface had mentioned Hanshan's 'sidekick' Shide, in the poems themselves Hanshan is alone in this inaccessible environment. He writes his poems 'on the rock cliff'¹⁰³ as if, in the absence of a human audience, the poems are addressed to the landscape itself.

The antithesis between wilderness and civilization, between human and natural realms, that I have been describing is problematic in terms of environmental ethics. Cronon writes:

To the extent that we celebrate wilderness as the measure with which we judge civilization, we reproduce the dualism that sets humanity and nature at opposite poles. We thereby leave ourselves little hope of discovering what an ethical, sustainable, honourable human place in nature might actually look like. [...] we seem unlikely to make much progress in solving these problems if we hold up to ourselves as the mirror of nature a wilderness we ourselves cannot inhabit.¹⁰⁴

While *Cold Mountain Poems*, and those poems in *The Back Country* Snyder identified as imitations of Classical Chinese poetic forms, do seem to uphold this idea of wilderness, it would be inaccurate to describe Snyder's work of this period as uniformly expressing an ideal of wilderness as a space which 'we ourselves cannot inhabit.' Poems like 'The Late Snow & Lumber Strike of the Summer of Fifty-four' and 'Hay for Horses' in *Riprap*, the 'Logging' sequence in *Myths & Texts*, and 'The Spring' and 'The Walk' in *The Back Country* all present the 'wilderness' areas of the Western United States as places where humans live and work. The honest depiction of human activity within 'natural' environments is one of the great eco-poetical

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.44.

¹⁰² Ibid., p.45.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p.49.

¹⁰⁴ Cronon, 'The Trouble with Wilderness', pp.81, 83.

strengths of Snyder's earlier work. It does seem, however, that Snyder associated Classical Chinese poetry—and remember he concentrated on the hermit poet tradition—with an ideal of wilderness that resembles that described by Cronon. At the end of this chapter it will be seen that, later in his career, Snyder engaged with Classical Chinese poetry in order to deconstruct the dualistic wilderness thinking I have been describing.

For now I want to pick up on a contradiction within the idea of wilderness as Cronon describes it. Cronon writes that we cannot inhabit wilderness, but as Greg Garrard points out in response to Cronon, 'the ideal wilderness narrative posits a human subject whose most authentic existence is located precisely there.' The subjective 'I' who speaks from within an area of wilderness occupies a privileged but paradoxical position, inhabiting a landscape which is otherwise, to use Garrard's phrase, 'pure by virtue of its independence from humans.'¹⁰⁵ As if to resolve the paradox, the subjective 'I' of *Cold Mountain Poems* comes close to disappearing at certain moments within the sequence, giving way to an objective poetic mode.

The absence of the first-person pronoun is a commonplace of Classical Chinese poetry. It is also characteristic of Pound's earliest Chinese 'translations,' even before he had any direct knowledge of the Chinese language. 'Liu Ch'e,' included in the *Des Imagistes* anthology, removes 'the speaker from an all but implicit involvement in the scene':¹⁰⁶

The rustling of the silk is discontinued,
Dust drifts over the courtyard,
There is no sound of footfall, and the leaves
Scurry into heaps and lie still,
And she the rejoyce of the heart is beneath them:
A wet leaf that clings to the threshold.¹⁰⁷

In its omission of any subjective 'I,' Pound's translation upholds the Imagist aim of presenting images directly, unmediated by authorial comment.

¹⁰⁵ Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, p.78.

¹⁰⁶ Kern, *Orientalism*, p.188.

¹⁰⁷ Ezra Pound, ed., *Des Imagistes: An Anthology* (London, 1914), p.44.

Some commentators,¹⁰⁸ perhaps overly influenced by Pound's co-option of Chinese poetry to his own poetics, have overstated the effect of Classical Chinese poetry's omission of the first-person pronoun. Although it 'does not ordinarily use a character for the personal pronoun', in practice, 'context and syntax should reveal the intended speaker, even if that speaker is an impersonal general speaker.'¹⁰⁹ Hanshan is atypical in his frequent use of the pronoun 我 and, correspondingly, Snyder's translations frequently employ the English 'I.' Nevertheless, *Cold Mountain Poems* does grasp towards a renunciation of subjectivity that should be seen in the light of Classical Chinese poetic convention, and of the Imagist poetics of Pound's Chinese translations.

Initially, Snyder uses the first-person pronoun to register a sense of Hanshan's discord with his mountain environment. In the first poem it is first used when Hanshan has 'lost the shortcut home'.¹¹⁰ Poem Three is composed entirely of objective description of the landscape until the last two lines, where the appearance of 'I' registers a loss of vision: 'And here am I, high on the mountains, / Peering and peering, but I can't even see the sky.'¹¹¹ As the sequence progresses, the 'I' becomes more settled in its environment, and in Poem Seven, Hanshan is able to view the object world from which he had been alienated earlier in the sequence:

I settled at Cold Mountain long ago,
Already it seems like years and years.
Freely drifting, I prowls the woods and streams
And linger watching things themselves.¹¹²

The phrase 'things themselves' echoes Pound's 'direct treatment of the thing' as well as Williams' 'no ideas but in things.' But while Pound's idea of a 'thing' could be either

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, Wai-lim Yip, 'Classical Chinese and Modern Anglo-American Poetry: Convergence of Languages and Poetry', *Comparative Literature Studies* xi, 1 (March 1974), pp.21-47.

¹⁰⁹ Tony Barnstone, Willis Barnstone and Xu Haixin, 'The Ecstasy of Stillness', Introduction, *Laughter Lost in the Mountains: Poems of Wang Wei*, trans. Barnstone, Barnstone and Xu (Hanover, 1991), xv-lxii, fn. p.158.

¹¹⁰ Snyder, *Riprap*, p.42.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.43.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p.44.

‘subjective or objective’,¹¹³ Snyder’s ‘things’ are entirely objective; in ‘Riprap’ he imagines a poetics based on the ‘Solidity of bark, leaf, or wall / riprap of things’.¹¹⁴

Several passages in the sequence exemplify this poetics of ‘things.’ Poems Eight, Nine, and Fourteen, for example, present natural details as images, sometimes paratactically, unmediated by authorial comment:

Clambering up the Cold Mountain path,
The Cold Mountain trail goes on and on:
The long gorge choked with scree and boulders,
The wide creek, the mist blurred grass.
The moss is slippery, though there’s been no rain
The pine sings, but there’s no wind.¹¹⁵
(Poem Eight)

Rough and dark—the Cold Mountain trail,
Sharp cobbles—the icy creek bank.
Yammering, chirping—always birds.¹¹⁶
(Poem Nine)

When the moon shines, water sparkles clear
When wind blows, grass swishes and rattles.
On the bare plum, flowers of snow
On the dead stump, leaves of mist.¹¹⁷
(Poem Fourteen)

But rarely does the subjective ‘I’ disappear entirely. In the first line of Poem Eight—‘Clambering up the Cold Mountain path’—a subject is implied even if not explicitly stated; and in the poem’s final lines Hanshan’s subjective voice returns, asking ‘Who can leap the world’s ties / And sit with me among the white clouds?’¹¹⁸ In Poem Nine a subject is implied in the line ‘Bleak, alone, not even a lone hiker’, before the first person returns, describing snow piling on his back and concluding, ‘Morning after morning I don’t see the sun / Year after year, not a sign of spring.’¹¹⁹ While these final lines imply a subjective, emotional state, that state is never

¹¹³ Pound, *Literary Essays*, p.3.

¹¹⁴ Snyder, *Riprap*, p.36.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.44.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.45.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.46.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.44.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.45.

described directly. No first-person pronoun appears in Poem Fourteen, although we hear Hanshan's personal experience in the final line—'At the wrong season you can't ford the creeks'—even if the pronoun is second-person.¹²⁰ The subjective 'I' is not entirely absent from these poems then, but its presence is a faint one.

Only three of the *Cold Mountain Poems* omit the first-person pronoun entirely. In the brief twenty-second poem, Hanshan's voice is heard as he instructs the reader to 'Honor' the 'priceless natural treasure' of the moonlit landscape. In the other two, Poems Eleven and Fifteen, rather than being edited out of the landscape entirely, Hanshan is present as an object rather than a subject. This is possible because, as was noted earlier, 'Cold Mountain' can be used to refer to both Hanshan himself and his mountain dwelling. In Poem Eleven, 'Cold Mountain' refers to both at the same time; Hanshan has become indistinguishable from his environment:

Spring-water in the green creek is clear
Moonlight on Cold Mountain is white
Silent knowledge—the spirit is enlightened of itself
Contemplate the void: this world exceeds stillness.¹²¹

The silent knowledge, enlightenment, and contemplation are Hanshan's, but his subjective states are rendered objectively. Similarly, in poem Fifteen Hanshan describes himself as a 'naked bug' with 'a white body and a black head.'¹²² In that poem he describes himself carrying 'the sword of wisdom.' This wisdom coincides with the renunciation of subjectivity just as the 'Silent knowledge' of Poem Eleven did.

In 'Piute Creek,' a wilderness poem first published in 1956 when Snyder was working on his Hanshan translations, Snyder enacts a Hanshanian shift from subject to object. The poem begins in an objective mode—'One granite ridge / A tree'—but a subjective voice, struggling to apprehend the landscape, quickly appears. The ridge and tree, we are told, would 'be

¹²⁰ Ibid., p.46.

¹²¹ Ibid., p.45.

¹²² Ibid., p.47.

enough' objective information for Snyder to process, but faced with the totality of the object world before him, it all becomes 'too much.' Unable to fully apprehend these phenomena, a dissolution of his human subjectivity occurs: 'All the junk that goes with being human / Drops away'. The second and final stanza, however, moves beyond this dissolution of self:

A clear, attentive mind
Has no meaning but that
Which sees is truly seen.

The human speaker does not disappear, but becomes subject and object at the same time:

Back there unseen
Cold proud eyes
Of Cougar or Coyote
Watch me rise and go.¹²³

Snyder admits his inability to see the animals in the environment, relinquishing epistemological mastery over them. He relinquishes his privileged role as subject and becomes the object of the animal-other's vision. As Hanshan had done by referring to himself in the third person, Snyder takes his place in the object world as one object (and one subject) among many. In an essay written in 1994, Snyder claimed that Classical Chinese poetry offers human beings 'a window into the nonhuman'; it can 'lend us eyes and ears that are other than human, pointing toward other biologies, other realms.'¹²⁴ By imagining himself being viewed by a cougar or coyote, Snyder here looks through some of those nonhuman eyes.

Buddhist Impersonality

It was noted earlier in this chapter that Snyder's interest in Buddhism had led him to Hanshan, and that he saw 'Chinese poetry and the aesthetics of Chinese poetry' as being 'very much involved with Ch'an, or Zen.' The diminution of the subjective 'I' that I have been discussing would have been understood by Snyder in Zen terms. This is made clear in the entry of

¹²³ Ibid., p.12.

¹²⁴ Snyder, *A Place in Space: Ethics, Aesthetics, and Watersheds* (Berkeley, 1995), p.92.

Snyder's journal for 15 August 1952, where he describes his own not-quite-successful attempt to reach a state of non-identity:

Almost had it last night: *no identity*. One thinks, "I emerged from some general, nondifferentiated thing, I return to it." One has in reality never left it.

This is Buddhist ontology, as is made clear later in the entry through the use of explicitly Buddhist language to reiterate the point: 'If a Bodhisattva [enlightened being] retains the thought of an ego, a person, a being, or a soul, he is no more a Bodhisattva'.¹²⁵ In her book-length comparative study of Snyder and Hanshan, Tan shows how the dissolution of the subjective 'I' within classical Chinese poetry relates to Chan notions of enlightenment. Classical Chinese poetry, she explains, 'takes Chan Master Qingyuan Weixin's explanation of the process of Chan Buddhist enlightenment as a model.' According to Qingyuan Weixin, enlightenment consists of three stages, the final and most profound of which is the realization of 'a state of existence in which the persona is completely immersed within reality and becomes a unity with the physical world.'¹²⁶ Consequently, the 'crucial step' in a Chan poem 'is the artistic dissolution of the self [...] in other words, how to make the persona become the Phenomenon in nature, or how to identify oneself with the cosmos.'¹²⁷ The preceding discussion should demonstrate that Snyder shows the persona becoming a phenomenon in his Hanshan translations and his original poetry.

Likewise, the objective, concrete mode that is so prevalent in *Cold Mountain Poems*, facilitated as it is by the diminution of the subjective voice, would also have been seen by Snyder in Zen terms. This is demonstrated by Snyder's unpublished journals of the early 1950s. Writing in December 1951, Snyder equates his 'sudden acceptance of the Zen Buddhist doctrine & the idea of satori' as 'another step in [his] continual re-definition of experience; the end of any experience, the epiphany.' He goes on to define epiphany and, by extension, satori as 'a moment of enlightened, unselfconscious transparency, of immense and immediate insight'

¹²⁵ Snyder, *Earth House Hold*, p.10.

¹²⁶ Tan, *Han Shan, Chan Buddhism, and Gary Snyder's Ecopoetic Way*, p.13.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p100.

during which ‘one has direct experience with objects in the real world.’¹²⁸ The word ‘transparency’ brings to mind Emerson’s description of the dissolution of self leading to direct experience of God in *Nature*, where he describes himself as ‘a transparent eye-ball’ with ‘the currents of the Universal Being’ circulating through him.¹²⁹ (The tendency of Snyder and other Anglophone writers to view Zen through a Transcendentalist lens will be discussed further in Chapter Three.)

Snyder’s journals of this period show him constantly thinking through the relationship of ‘symbolic’ and ‘concrete’ modes of expression and experience, and in the same journal entry he goes on to define satori as the ultimate experience of the concrete:

Satori is, I see, the ultimate & apotheosis of epiphany, a final and all-embracing trauma, but is, essentially NON-SYMBOLIC and the real thing is achieved, not by holding up the symbolic frame, by inventing mythologies, by ransacking books[,] philosophies, and traditions, but by destroying these, as blocks, and reaching directly out to the concrete world. Anything may thus be experienced, in satori all experience becomes epiphany; but it is a view which sees the world as real in itself, not symbolic, not mere counters to be negotiated and interpreted by man to any conceivable end [sic].¹³⁰

A little over two weeks after writing this, Snyder imagined writing poetry which would approximate the state of satori: ‘I would like to become successful at poetry’, he writes, ‘through the framework of my religion, which puts the value of poetry [...] in terms of insight & enlightenment into certain objects, relationships, & experiences of man; insofar as they can be communicated in the near-satori state.’¹³¹ Poetry became for Snyder, as he would write in March 1952, ‘a sort of linguistic zazen [meditation]’.¹³²

As has already been seen, the experience of ‘reaching out to the concrete world,’ and seeing ‘the world as real in itself’ is depicted in Poem Seven, in which Hanshan prowls the woods and streams, ‘watching things themselves.’ Snyder’s ‘watching things themselves’ is a translation of *kuan-tzu-tzai*, which Red Pine translates as ‘gaze in freedom.’¹³³ He notes the

¹²⁸ Snyder’s Journal, 1947-52, GSP I 84:1, 30 December 1951.

¹²⁹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (Boston, 1836), p.13.

¹³⁰ Snyder’s Journal, 1947-52, GSP I 84:1, 30 December 1951. Snyder’s underlining.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 16 January 1952.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 5 March 1952.

¹³³ Red Pine, *Collected Songs of Cold Mountain*, p.53.

Buddhist connotations of the term, it also being ‘the name of Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva whose unhindered view is the point of departure of the *Heart Sutra*.’¹³⁴ It is unclear whether Snyder recognized this particular Mahayana resonance, but he was certainly aware of the Buddhist resonance of the preceding line. A note on the draft of this poem glosses *jen yun*, which Snyder translates as ‘Freely drifting,’ as a ‘Buddhist term’ meaning ‘following fate’.¹³⁵ By using the phrase ‘things themselves’ in this Buddhist-inflected passage, Snyder suggests the Buddhist basis for his poetics of concrete ‘things.’

While Snyder associated a concrete, objective poetics with Zen enlightenment, the only use of explicitly Buddhist terminology in the whole sequence of *Cold Mountain Poems* appears in Poem Twenty-three, which abandons the concrete mode in favour of an abstract description of ‘the pearl of the Buddha nature.’ The penultimate poem in the sequence, Poem Twenty-three is *Cold Mountain Poems*’ ontological climax:

My home was at Cold Mountain from the start,
Rambling among the hills, far from trouble.

Gone, and a million things leave no trace
Loosed, and it flows through the galaxies
A fountain of light, into the very mind —
Not a thing, and yet it appears before me:
Now I know the pearl of the Buddha nature
Know its use: a boundless perfect sphere.¹³⁶

Although Buddha-nature is shown to unite subjective experience with the object world by flowing ‘through the galaxies’ and ‘into the very mind,’ Buddha-nature itself is presented as separate from the object world – it is ‘Not a thing.’

Snyder quite deliberately draws attention to the Buddhist implications of the pearl image. In Hanshan’s original poem, the Buddhist implications are not explicit. Red Pine translates it as ‘magic pearl,’ glossing it as ‘a gem that grants those who possess it whatever

¹³⁴ Note on *Ibid.*, p.52.

¹³⁵ Snyder, *Cold Mountain Poems*, Worksheets, GSP I 5:26, n.pag.

¹³⁶ Snyder, *Rirrap*, p.49.

they desire.’¹³⁷ Henrick’s translation reads ‘the *mani*—that one single pearl’,¹³⁸ and he glosses the *mani* (originally a Sanskrit word) as a jewel, usually a pearl, being ‘symbolic of the Buddha and his teaching’ and in this context specifically equated with Buddha-nature.¹³⁹ By including the term ‘Buddha nature’ in his translation, Snyder makes the symbolism of the image explicit.

The concept of Buddha-nature, as noted in my introduction, is ‘one of Chinese Buddhism’s most distinctive features’,¹⁴⁰ and Snyder would later write an account of its development. Buddha-nature, he writes, is the ‘inherent capacity to achieve enlightenment.’ Around the third-century A.D., certain ‘Indian Buddhist texts were brought to China and taught that salvation was accessible not only to all human beings but to all *sentient* beings, vindicating Chinese thinkers.’ This was interpreted as meaning that ‘animals and even plants are part of the Mahayana drama’. By the eighth century, the Chinese monk Chan-jan made ‘the final step’, arguing that ‘nonsentient beings also have the Buddha-nature, allowing Chinese Buddhists to view rivers and mountains as ‘Nirvana in the here and now.’¹⁴¹ While Poem Twenty-three departs from the objective depiction of the natural world that characterizes much of *Cold Mountain Poems*, the doctrine of Buddha-nature it expresses is as non-anthropocentric as the attitude of humility implied by Snyder’s concrete poetics. It was noted earlier that this poem abandons a sense of place for the abstractions of space. As it is concerned with the universal principle of Buddha-nature, it is fitting that it does so.

While Snyder associates satori with the concrete, he does not dismiss the symbolic realm. Indeed, later in his 1952 journal he came to see the role of the artist as a harmonization of the two: ‘his symbols are concrete; his understanding of the concrete is symbolic’, and he suggests that this reconciliation may be ‘part of the Buddhist “middle path”’.¹⁴² One mode or the other is likely to dominate in the poetry of a specific cultural moment in opposition to dominant modes of thought outside of art: ‘today, one orients toward symbols, since people

¹³⁷ Red Pine, *Collected Songs of Cold Mountain*, pp.176-77.

¹³⁸ Henricks, *The Poetry of Han-Shan*, p.285.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.280.

¹⁴⁰ Hershock, *Chan Buddhism*, p.49.

¹⁴¹ Snyder, ‘“Wild” in China,’ *CoEvolution Quarterly* 19 (Fall 1978), 39-46, p.41. Snyder’s italics.

¹⁴² Snyder’s Journal, 1947-52, GSP I 89:1, 7 June 1952.

think they are being concrete; in T'ang China the Zenshus oriented toward the concrete, since a wealth of idealist systems' dominated the intellectual culture of the time.¹⁴³ In fact, *Myths & Texts* might be regarded as being governed by a process of synthesizing the symbolic (myths) and the concrete (texts, which as Murphy explains, 'consist of sensory experiences'),¹⁴⁴ and many of the poems of *Mountains and Rivers Without End* are structured around mythical/symbolic material.

Re-writing Hanshan

Snyder's reconciliation of concrete and symbolic modes hints at the reconciliation of nature, which is rendered objectively, and human subjectivity, which produces symbols. Snyder later came to view Classical Chinese poetry as offering a vision of the reconciliation of humanity and nature. He wrote in 1978: 'I first came onto Chinese poems in translation at nineteen, when my ideal of nature was a 45 degree ice slope on a volcano, or an absolutely virgin forest.' This early formulation of 'nature' corresponds to the idea of wilderness as repelling human presence expressed in *Cold Mountain Poems*. But Snyder continues:

They [Classical Chinese poems] helped me to "see" fields, farms, tangles of brush, the azaleas in the back of an old brick apartment. They freed me from excessive attachment to wild mountains, with their way of suggesting that even the wildest hills are places where people, also, live.

To illustrate the point, he quotes his own translation of Wang Wei's poem 'Deer Camp,' which records 'human sounds' in what initially appears to be a wilderness landscape of 'Empty mountains'.¹⁴⁵

In the 1981 poem 'The Canyon Wren' Snyder deconstructs the human/nature dualism implicit in *Cold Mountain Poems*. This poem exhibits the dual sense of place seen there, viewing a Western American landscape through the lens of Classical Chinese poetry. Describing a rafting trip down the Stanislaus River in the Sierra Nevada, Northern California,

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Murphy, *A Place for Wayfaring*, p.22.

¹⁴⁵ Snyder, "'Wild" in China,' p.46.

Snyder quotes the Buddhist Song Dynasty poet Su Shi, and ends with the words ‘purify our ears’,¹⁴⁶ recalling the end of Poem Twelve in *Cold Mountain Poems* where Han Shan says, ‘I’ll sleep by the creek and purify my ears.’¹⁴⁷ The change from singular to plural first-person pronoun is significant. While Hanshan’s purification had involved isolating himself from human society, the rafting trip Snyder describes in ‘The Canyon Wren’ was undertaken with his friends James and Carol Katz, to whom the poem is dedicated. While Hanshan had ‘scribble[d] [his] poems on the rock cliff,’ as if non-human nature was the only audience for his poetry, Snyder’s dedication gives a social context to the poem. ‘The Canyon Wren’ is a poem in which the human and natural worlds mingle.

The natural details of the landscape which Snyder describes echo those described in Su Shi’s poem ‘Hundred Pace Rapids,’ which Snyder quotes in the middle of the poem. Like the rapids in Xu Zhou in southern China that Su Shi navigates, ‘Enjoying an hour of delight’, the stretch of the Stanislaus that Snyder rafts down is flanked by cliffs. In the third line of Su’s poem, ‘Waterbirds fly up at the boatman’s cry’,¹⁴⁸ and in Snyder’s poem the sight of a ‘single female mallard’ flying upstream brings Su’s poem to mind:

Shooting the Hundred-Pace Rapids
 Su Shih saw, for a moment,
 it all stand still
 “I stare at the water:
 it moves with unspeakable slowness”¹⁴⁹

This moment, when the poem’s gaze detaches itself from its immediate temporal and spatial setting to imagine Su Shi in eleventh-century China, echoes an equivalent moment in Su’s poem where the quoted line first appears:

I give in to the change that advances day and night;
 Sit, and in a moment of thought fly beyond Silla.
 Men in drunken dreams wrangle and steal,

¹⁴⁶ Snyder, *Axe Handles* (San Francisco, 1983), p.111.

¹⁴⁷ Ling Chung also notes this allusion to *Cold Mountain Poems*, ‘Allusions in Gary Snyder’s “The Canyon Wren”’, *Connotations* xii, 1 (2002/2003), 83-92, p.87.

¹⁴⁸ Burton Watson, trans., *Selected Poems of Su Tung-p’o* (Port Townsend, 1994), p.75.

¹⁴⁹ Snyder, *Axe Handles*, p.111.

Never believing that thorns will bury the bronze camels.
 In this reverie I lose a thousand kalpas;
 I stare at the water: it moves with unspeakable slowness.¹⁵⁰

As Ling Chung explains, Su's 'imagination travelled from Xu Zhou in southern China to a northern foreign country, Korea, and then returned seven hundred years to the fourth century to visit the bronze camels that had guarded the Lo Yang palace in central China.' Chung clarifies the image of thorns, stating that it is taken from the writings of the fourth-century official So Jing, who had predicted a rebellion after which 'thorns would bury the bronze camels at the palace.' Oddly, Chung claims that by comparison, 'Space and time in Snyder's poem do not expand as much as those in Su Shi's [...] for the space covers only a short stretch of the Stanislaus River in the Sierra Nevada and the time returns a little over one hundred years to the period of the Gold Rush.'¹⁵¹ In evoking Su Shi, even briefly, Snyder's poem has a larger temporal and spatial sweep than Su's (excluding Su's reference to the vast temporal scale of 'a thousand kalpas,' which Chung does not refer to).

Su's poem contrasts the corruption of human civilization, where men 'wrangle and steal', what Hanshan calls the 'dusty world', with non-human nature as a place of recreation and spiritual insight. The contrast of civilization and nature is compounded by the image of thorns burying the bronze camels of Yo Lang palace, illustrating the impermanence of the products of civilization against the persistence of non-human nature. The image functions rather like that of the 'Dead city in dry summer, / Where berries grow' that concludes Snyder's 'A Berry Feast.'¹⁵² But while Su's poem suggests the permanence of non-human nature, Snyder's poem suggests the opposite. The note at the end of 'A Canyon Wren' informs the reader that Snyder and his friends undertook their rafting trip to see the stretch of the Stanislaus 'before it goes under the rising waters of the New Mellones Dam.'¹⁵³ According to Chung, the dam's embankment was completed in 1978, the filling of the reservoir commenced in 1983 and

¹⁵⁰ Watson, *Selected Poems of Su Tung-p'o*, pp.75-6.

¹⁵¹ Chung, 'Gary Snyder's "The Canyon Wren"', pp.84-5.

¹⁵² Snyder, *The Back Country*, p.7.

¹⁵³ Snyder, *Axe Handles*, p.112.

the stretch of river Snyder and his companions rafted though would have been under water soon after that date.¹⁵⁴ Snyder had recorded his objection to the ecological impacts of dam building in California in his 1971 poem ‘The California Water Plan,’ which concludes with the unambiguously adversarial line ‘death to all dams.’¹⁵⁵ While Su’s poem contrasts enduring non-human nature with impermanent civilization, Snyder’s poem is a record of a natural landscape profoundly altered by human civilization.

Snyder would draw on a similar reversal of the tropes of Classical Chinese poetry in ‘Survival and Sacrament,’ included in his 1990 essay collection *The Practice of the Wild*. There he quotes the following line from Du Fu’s ‘Spring View,’ ‘one of the most famous of Chinese poems’ which recorded the destruction of Chang’an during the An Lushan rebellion,¹⁵⁶ which Snyder himself translated in 1993:¹⁵⁷ ‘The State is destroyed, but the mountains and rivers survive.’ Snyder then quotes a reworking of these lines by his friend, the Japanese poet Nanao Sakaki: ‘The mountains and rivers are destroyed, / but the State survives.’¹⁵⁸

In ‘The Canyon Wren,’ following the quotation from Su Shi, Snyder quotes the thirteenth-century Japanese Zen Buddhist Master Dōgen Zenji:

Dōgen, writing at midnight,
 “mountains flow
 “water is the palace of the dragon
 “it does not flow away.[?]”¹⁵⁹

These lines are from Dōgen’s *Mountains and Rivers Sutra*, for which Snyder would later write a commentary. There he gives more context to these lines: ‘All beings do not see mountains and waters in the same way [...] Dragons see water as a palace or a pavilion’. In juxtaposing Dōgen with Su Shi’s line, Snyder suggests that Su’s vision of water moving with ‘unspeakable slowness’ represents an extra-human mode of perception; Su looks through ‘a window into the

¹⁵⁴ Chung, ‘Gary Snyder’s “The Canyon Wren”’, p.91.

¹⁵⁵ Snyder, *The Fudo Trilogy* (Berkeley, 1973), n. pag.

¹⁵⁶ Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*, p.187.

¹⁵⁷ Snyder, *The Gary Snyder Reader: Prose, Poetry, and Translations* (Berkeley, 1999), p.542.

¹⁵⁸ Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*, p.187.

¹⁵⁹ Snyder, *Axe Handles*, p.111.

nonhuman' which, it will be remembered, Snyder saw as a characteristic of Classical Chinese poetry.¹⁶⁰

While Su's poem contrasts the natural and human worlds, the landscape he describes is not unmarked by human activity. 'See, there, on the face of the green rock bank', he writes, 'Holes like hornets' nests where ancient boatmen braced their poles!'¹⁶¹ The marks of the boatmen are naturalized into the landscape by the simile of hornets' nests. An equivalent moment occurs in Snyder's poem when he describes his party beaching at China Camp 'Between piles of stone / Stacked there by black-haired miners'.¹⁶² China Camp was a mining town established during the California Gold Rush, and as such represents a more severe human incursion on the landscape than the boatmen's holes described by Su. China camp was named after the Chinese workers who had settled in California in the mid-nineteenth century, Snyder's 'black-haired miners.' Their inclusion in the poem constitutes a more pedestrian but more tangible meeting of East and West in the California landscape than Snyder's appropriation of Classical Chinese poetics. They do not represent an idealized Eastern attitude towards nature, but partake in the human alteration of the landscape.

At the conclusion of the poem, Snyder and his friends listen to

These songs that are here and gone,
Here and gone,
To purify our ears.¹⁶³

These songs not only include the song of the Canyon Wren and other birds listed in the poem, but the songs of the miners. The final act of purification takes into account the human as well as the non-human. In a poem which memorializes a landscape about to be drastically altered by human hands, it would be irresponsible to imagine that landscape as being devoid of human presence.

¹⁶⁰ Snyder, *A Place in Space*, p.92.

¹⁶¹ Watson, *Selected Poems of Su Tung-p'o*, p.76.

¹⁶² Snyder, *Axe Handles*, p.111.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

3. 'The Path of Chan on Turtle Island': The Americanization of Zen

While the previous chapters have been charting the nexus of associations between nature and Buddhism in the early writing of Snyder and his contemporaries, from the late 1960s Snyder would be among a group of Americans who pioneered the 'synthesis of Buddhism and ecology', creating what historian of religion Richard Hughes Seager has described as 'a distinctly American form of Buddhism-based social action, sometimes referred to as the "eco-centric sangha" or the "green dharma."'”¹ 'Ecology' has two meanings in this context, which should be distinguished from the senses in which I have been using the word 'nature' up to this point. These two meanings will be explored sequentially. Firstly, 'ecology' refers to political ecology, or the modern environmental movement, and it is primarily in this sense that Seager is using the word, and it is with this sense of 'ecology' that I am concerned in the present chapter. Beginning in the 1960s, modern environmentalism moved beyond the conservationist concerns of figures like John Muir to consider diverse environmental issues such as population, chemical pollution, energy consumption (including fossil fuels and nuclear energy), and biodiversity, campaigning on these issues with the spirit of protest of 1960s counterculture. Snyder would make reference to all these issues in the poems and essays of his 1974 volume *Turtle Island*.

The shift from conservationism to modern environmentalism in America is perhaps best illustrated by the career of David Brower, a figure whose work with Snyder is described in Chapter Five. In 1969 Brower left his position as executive director of the Sierra Club, the conservationist organization set up by Muir in San Francisco in 1892, to co-found Friends of the Earth, an organization which campaigned on all the diverse issues of modern environmentalism.² Snyder's writing follows a parallel trajectory, from an emphasis on wilderness in the 1950s to the concerns of the modern environmental movement from the late 1960s. The modern environmental movement is often said to begin with the publication of

¹ Richard Hughes Seager, *Buddhism in America* (New York, 1999), pp.209-11.

² Joachim Radkau, *The Age of Ecology: A Global History*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Cambridge, 2014), pp.96, 255.

biologist Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), a scientific exposé of the ecological destruction caused by the pesticide DDT.³ From its beginning the modern environmental movement has been strongly tied to scientific ecology, and Snyder's engagement with this second sense of the word 'ecology' will be explored in the next chapter.

Returning to the quotation from Seager above, it is important to note that he identifies Snyder's synthesis of Buddhism and political ecology as 'distinctly American'. The central argument of this chapter is that Snyder's greening of the Dharma is intrinsically linked to various ways in which Zen was Americanized in the twentieth century, not only by Snyder himself but by other anglophone writers on Zen, and by Zen institutions in America. This chapter is divided into two parts. The first examines the two major anglophone Buddhist influences on Snyder during the 1950s, when he first became seriously interested in Buddhism. These are the First Zen Institute of America, which sponsored Snyder's first trip to Japan in 1956; and the writing of D.T. Suzuki which, along with the writing of San Francisco resident Alan Watts, was responsible for the 'Zen boom' in 1950s America.⁴ Through its emphasis on traditional institutional structures and ritual, the First Zen institute tended to tie Zen to Japan while Suzuki and Watts Americanized Zen by viewing it through certain Western intellectual lenses. I chart Snyder's negotiation of these poles and argue that he moved away from the First Zen Institute's traditionalism over the 1950s and 1960s. The second part of this chapter centres on Snyder's synthesis of Zen and political ecology from the time of his return to America in 1968. Snyder's earlier move away from the traditionalism of the First Zen Institute now allowed him to ally Buddhism with the activist spirit of the period. Snyder, as well as groups of 'Engaged Buddhists' in America at this time, felt that traditional Zen in Japan had been too quietist and needed to be injected with a Western spirit of protest and social engagement. The subversive connotations of Buddhism in 1950s America, described in Chapter One, now took on new resonances, including ecological ones; but it was not enough for Snyder to ally Zen

³ Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1994), p.23.

⁴ Seager, *Buddhism in America*, p.40.

with a Western sense of social engagement. At this time Snyder's environmental thought was becoming centred on ideas of localism, reinhabitation and bioregionalism. Before Americans could meaningfully engage with environmental problems, Snyder felt, they needed to reconnect with their immediate environment, and for Zen to play a part in American environmentalism it needed to become naturalized in that environment. By presenting Zen in Americanized terms, drawing particularly on Native American motifs, Snyder's writing of the late 1960s and 1970s aims to do just that.

'Practicing' and 'Reasonable' Zen

Writing in the October 1958 issue of the newsletter of the First Zen Institute of America, a Rinzai Zen institute for laypeople founded in New York in 1930, member Mary Farkas distinguished between two 'diverging directions' of Zen Buddhism in America. She identifies these as the way of Practice and the way of Reason.⁵ Practice is the way of the First Zen Institute itself, with its emphasis on ritual and meditation, while the way of Reason is epitomized by the writing of D.T. Suzuki. "'Practicing" Zennists', Farkas writes, 'tend to be critical of the "Reasonable" approach to Zen' for being overly 'intellectual', and the intellectualism of Suzuki's writing stems from his misguided desire to translate Zen into Western terms: Suzuki's writing represents the 'result of thirty years of effort to impart the inmost understanding of the East in the language and milieu of the Western intelligentsia.' For Farkas such an act of cultural translation is impossible, and Suzuki's writing is 'paradoxical' because, 'as Dr. Suzuki has tirelessly reminded his readers, Zen experience, which is the very heart of Zen study, cannot be had by intellectual methods.' For this reason, 'Practicing' Zennists tend to view 'Reasonable' Zen as 'the very opposite' of their own approach.⁶

Despite the opposition between Practicing and Reasonable Zen that Farkas sets up (she later admits that this opposition may be superficial: 'they may also be regarded as ways to the

⁵ Mary Farkas, 'Zen in New York', *Zen Notes* x, 10 (October 1958), 1-4, p.1. Available online: <http://www.firstzen.org/ZenNotes/1958/1958-10_Vol_05_No_10_October_1958.pdf> (last accessed 31 December 2014).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.2.

same end'),⁷ she shows that both strands emerged from the same movement in Japan to transmit Zen to the West, initiated by the Zen Master Imakita Kōsen.⁸ Kōsen was the Superior Overseer of Religious Teaching in the Educational Bureau of the Japanese government under Emperor Meiji in the second half of the nineteenth century. He inspired his student Soyen Shaku to study Western culture at Keio Gijiku University, and in 1893, the year after Kōsen's death, Soyen was invited to speak at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago,⁹ which is often seen as the starting point of the history of Zen in America.¹⁰ D.T Suzuki, who had been introduced to Zen study in Japan in 1891, was a lay student of Soyen, and translated Soyen's speech into English.¹¹ From 1910 Suzuki had lectured at universities in Tokyo and Kyoto where, in 1921, he and his wife began publishing *The Eastern Buddhist*, an English-language journal aimed at Westerners. Suzuki's *Essays in Zen Buddhism* were published in three volumes between 1927 and 1934, and Suzuki eventually moved to the United States, where he taught seminars on Zen at Columbia University for six years from 1951. Sokei-an Sasaki, the Rōshi who founded the First Zen Institute, was also in the lineage of Kōsen and Soyen. Sokei-an had been taught by Sokatsu Shaku, whose teacher had been Soyen. Sokei-an first travelled to San Francisco with Sokatsu in 1906 and moved to New York in 1916. Sokei-an returned to Japan in 1920 to complete his Zen training with both Soyen and Sokatsu. In 1930, he founded the Buddhist Society of America in order to instruct American laypeople in Zen. The Society was renamed the First Zen Institute of America following Sokei-an's death in 1945. Suzuki and Sokei-an not only shared a Zen lineage back to Kōsen and Soyen, but were personally known to each other in America. Suzuki had associated with Sokei-an's circle in New York in the early decades of the twentieth century. What is more, Sokei-an met his future wife Ruth Fuller

⁷ Ibid., p.4.

⁸ Ibid., p.1.

⁹ First Zen Institute of America, 'A Capsule History of Zen in America', *Zen Notes* iv, 11 (November 1957), 2-4, p.2. Available online: <http://www.firstzen.org/ZenNotes/1957/1957-11_Vol_04_No_11_November_1957.pdf> (last accessed 28/04/14).

¹⁰ Seager, *Buddhism in America*, p.91.

¹¹ Farkas, 'Zen in New York', p.2. Seager, *Buddhism in America*, p.40.

in 1938, at which time Fuller's daughter from her first marriage was married to Alan Watts, who was to become the second most prominent exponent of 'Reasonable Zen' after Suzuki.

While Suzuki presented Zen 'in the language and milieu of the Western intelligentsia', the First Zen Institute, because it insisted on the importance of formal transmission of Zen teachings from Roshi to student, tied Zen to Japan. 'As there has been no person in New York qualified to transmit Zen by the method of sanzen [koan study] since the death of Sokei-an in 1945,' writes Farkas, 'the only resources for persons wishing to undertake Zen study has been to go to Japan.'¹² This is exactly what Ruth Fuller Sasaki did following her husband's death, and she was eventually ordained as a Zen Priest in Kyoto in 1958. Before then, the newsletter of the First Zen Institute shows that its members considered themselves 'Zen orphans' without a formally trained Japanese Roshi to guide them,¹³ and much excitement surrounded the visits of several Japanese Roshis to the Institute in New York: Sogen Ashina of Engaku-ji visited the institute in 1954, and Miura Isshu of Koon-ji visited in 1955 and 1956.¹⁴ The First Zen Institute did look forward to a time when Zen would become firmly established in America. Their newsletter presents the transmission of Zen to America as a continuation of Mahayana Buddhism's eastward journey from India to China and Japan,¹⁵ and draws parallels between Sokei-an's coming to America and the arrival in China of Bodhidharma, the founder of Chan.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the newsletters express concern over the possibility of Zen being distorted by American practitioners who have not received formal Dharma transmission from Japanese Roshis.

In October 1952 Snyder joined the First Zen Institute of America. He had practised zazen on Crater Mountain that summer, but felt he needed a teacher and wanted to travel to

¹² Farkas, 'Zen in New York', p.2.

¹³ First Zen Institute, 'A Portrait of Daio Kokushi', *Zen Notes* ii, 8 (August 1955), p.2. Available online: <http://www.firstzen.org/ZenNotes/1955/1955-08_Vol_02_No_08_August_1955.pdf> (last accessed 31 December 2014).

¹⁴ First Zen Institute of America, 'A Capsule History', p.2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.3.

¹⁶ First Zen Institute of America, 'Zen History is Made in New York', *Zen Notes* i, 7 (July 1954), 5-6, p.5. Available online: <http://www.firstzen.org/ZenNotes/1954/1954-07_Vol_01_No_07_July_1954.pdf> (last accessed 31 December 2014).

Japan to receive formal training.¹⁷ In the Spring of 1953 Ruth Fuller Sasaki began corresponding with Snyder about the possibility of this happening¹⁸ and Snyder eventually left the US in May 1956 to receive formal Zen training in Kyoto under the First Zen Institute's sponsorship. Snyder's decision to travel to Japan certainly implies that he shared the First Zen Institute's belief that such a journey was necessary for serious Zen study. Almost as soon as he arrived in Japan, however, he seems to have reconsidered his position. Snyder's journal shows him to have been disappointed by the lack of interest most Japanese people showed towards Zen: 'well they don't seem to make much of it here.' Japanese Zen appeared to him to be fossilized, when for him 'it has to be alive & being made now'.¹⁹ America might have been a more appropriate place to pursue Zen:

The center of Zen in this world—perhaps all Buddhism—is quietly moving to San Francisco where it [sic] most alive—these Japanese folks will be left behind & they won't (in the words of Kanzan [Hanshan]) recognize it when they see it.²⁰

Two weeks later he evoked Hanshan again as a representative of a more countercultural strand of Zen (what Alan Watts would later define as 'beat Zen'), in contrast to the strict structures of institutional Zen endorsed by the First Zen Institute:

I hope I have sense to remember later that all this orthodox transmission stuff is really bullshit and men are quietly finding their freedom everywhere, like Han Shan right under the nose of the authorities. —when we see it we don't recognize it—but that happy wildness is everybody's [sic] & to stick at the traditional is to lack faith in the Buddha & his nature.²¹

Snyder's writing of this time does reflect the Practicing Zen he experienced in Japan. In his 1958 prose piece 'Spring Sesshin at Shokoku-Ji' Snyder describes a *sesshin*, a special week

¹⁷ Suiter, *Poets on the Peaks*, p.56.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.58.

¹⁹ Snyder's Journal, 1956-58, GSP I 84:3, 22 May 1956.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 23 May 1956. This passage is reproduced with alterations in 'Japan First Time Around', a selection of journal entries from 1956 and 1957 printed in *Earth House Hold*, 31-44, p.33. In this version Snyder writes 'The center in this world' rather than 'The center of Zen in this world'. That Snyder is talking about Zen here is implied by the preceding sentences, but I quote from Snyder's original journal for the sake of clarity. In the published version, Snyder attributes the words 'recognize it when they see it' to Fêng Kuan rather than Hanshan. In the original journal this correction is made in pencil above the original typed text.

²¹ Snyder Journal 1956-58, GSP I 84:3, 7 June 1956.

during the year in which the life of a temple is ‘given over almost entirely to zazen’.²² The reportage-style of the piece gives no clear statement of Snyder’s attitude towards the *sesshin*, but he does suggest that spiritual freedom and institutional Zen, opposed in the journal quotation above, need not be mutually exclusive. He describes the *Jikijitsu* (a monk who directs zazen sessions) hitting those sitting with a stick in order to correct bad posture, and concludes that ‘Zen aims at freedom but its practice is disciplined.’²³ At the end of the piece Snyder recounts meeting a college professor the morning after the zazen session. The college professor discusses koans, proclaiming, ‘When you understand Zen, you know that the tree is really *there*.’ Snyder tells us that this was the ‘only time anyone said anything of Zen philosophy or experience the whole week.’ Even this gnomic statement is out of place in the Temple, where ‘Zenbos never discuss koans or sanzen experience with each other.’²⁴ This brief anecdote highlights the non-intellectual character of Practicing Zen.

‘Spring Sesshin at Shokoku-Ji’ was originally published in the Summer 1958 special issue of *Chicago Review* devoted to Zen. The issue included translations of Chinese Zen texts by both D.T. Suzuki and Ruth Fuller Sasaki, so it represents proponents of both Reasonable and Practicing Zen. It also included excerpts from Kerouac’s *The Dharma Bums* and Whalen’s ‘Sourdough Mountain Lookout.’ These pieces represent another strand of American Zen that Alan Watts, in the first article in the *Chicago Review* issue, defines as ‘beat Zen.’ Watts defined beat Zen as being allied with ‘a very self-defensive Bohemianism’²⁵ and ‘a younger generation’s nonparticipation in “the American Way of Life”’.²⁶ It is, for Watts, ‘always a shade too self-conscious, too subjective, and too strident to have the flavour of Zen.’²⁷ Watts contrasts beat Zen with ‘square Zen,’ a term roughly equivalent to Farkas’ ‘Practicing Zen’ but with negative connotations. Square Zen deviates from the original spirit of Chinese Zen in a different fashion to beat Zen:

²² Snyder, *Earth House Hold*, p.45.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp.50-51.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.52.

²⁵ Alan Watts, ‘Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen’, *Chicago Review* xii, 2 (Summer 1958), 3-11, p.5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.7.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.8.

For square Zen is the Zen of established tradition in Japan with its clearly defined hierarchy, its rigid discipline, and its specific tests of *satori*. More particularly, it is the kind of Zen adopted by Westerners studying in Japan, who will before long be bringing it back home. [...] But it is [...] square because it is a quest for the right spiritual experience, for a *satori* which will receive the stamp (*inka*) of approved and established authority. There will even be certificates to hang on the wall.²⁸

Interestingly, while Watts presents Snyder as a proponent of beat Zen, an editorial footnote suggests that, based on the evidence of ‘Spring Sesshin,’ ‘Mr. Snyder seems to have gone square.’²⁹ It should be noted that *Cold Mountain Poems*, which the previous Chapter showed to exemplify the rebellious spirit of beat Zen, was published in the same year as ‘Spring Sesshin at Shokoko-ji.’ Rather than moving from beat to square, as the editorial footnote suggests, Snyder’s writing of this period represents both poles of Watts’ dichotomy.

Three sections of Snyder’s poetic sequence ‘Six Years,’ originally published piecemeal between 1963 and 1967 and printed as a complete sequence in *The Back Country*, describe life in Japanese Zen institutions: ‘April’ describes a ritual feast for the Five Hundred Year Festival at Dragon Cloud Temple; ‘November’ describes Snyder growing radishes in temple grounds; and ‘December’ gives an account of a *sesshin* in 1960.³⁰ The formal aspects of Zen practice are described in ‘April,’ where Snyder notes the ‘PA loudspeaker’ playing ‘songs’ and ‘chants / of the priests in the hall’;³¹ and in the account of the 1960 *sesshin* in ‘December’ the monks are described ‘chanting sutras’, performing ‘sanzen’ and ‘more sanzen’, and practising *zazen*.³²

In ‘Six Years,’ however, Snyder is more interested in showing the meditative value of physical work than in presenting these more formal aspects of Zen practice. In ‘April,’ after initially describing the fireworks and cataloguing the food of the feast, Snyder devotes much of his attention to the physical work involved in the festival:

used trays come back
wash in heated water:

²⁸ Ibid., pp.8-9.

²⁹ Ibid., p.8.

³⁰ See Murphy, *A Place for Wayfaring*, p.81.

³¹ Snyder, *The Back Country*, p.58.

³² Ibid., pp.67-8.

a wood tub three feet wide
 drain in a five-foot basket
 on bamboo grating,
 dry lacquer-ware twice and stow it in boxes
 carry them up to the
 right front corner of the white-plastered
 store house³³

In a 1965 interview, in reference to the ‘February’ section of ‘Six Years,’ Snyder described how such seemingly menial tasks could function as meditative exercises in themselves:

[...] there is a body-mind dualism if I am sweeping the floor and thinking about Hegel. But if I am sweeping the floor and thinking about sweeping the floor, I am all one.

He goes on to assert that this realization of the meditative value of physical work first occurred while he was working on a trail crew in Yosemite in the summer of 1955,³⁴ prior to his Zen study in Japan. This accounts for the large number of work poems in *Riprap* and in the ‘Far West’ section of *The Back Country*. In ‘April,’ Snyder ties this type of working meditation to images of Buddhist devotional objects and paraphernalia, writing ‘wipe the feet of the Buddha / wipe under bronze incense stands’,³⁵ but working meditation does not have to be tied to the monastery. In ‘February’ it is facilitated by domestic chores, and ‘Envoy to Six Years’ describes Snyder working aboard a ship as he leaves Japan. Snyder’s description of his work here—‘Rinse out the soogy rag in kerosene, / And wipe off sooty oil condenser line’³⁶—recalls the acts of wiping in the temple described in ‘April.’ While ‘Six Years’ expresses none of the hostility towards institutional Zen recorded in Snyder’s journal in 1956, the sequence does suggest that meditative practice need not be tied to institutions; wiping up oil in an engine room can be just as valuable a religious experience as wiping the feet of a statue of the Buddha. Furthermore, Snyder’s decision to end the sequence describing himself sailing for America implies that Zen need not be tied to Japan.

³³ Ibid., p.57.

³⁴ Snyder, *The Real Work*, pp.7-8.

³⁵ Snyder, *The Back Country*, p.58.

³⁶ Ibid., p.69. Soogy is a liquid or powder used for cleaning wood and paintwork.

Snyder returned to California in May 1964, teaching English classes at the University of California, Berkeley before returning to Japan in October 1965. Shortly before his return to Japan he performed a circumambulation ritual on Mount Tamalpais in Marin County with Whalen and Ginsberg. Circumambulation is a Hindu and Buddhist practice of ‘walking meditation’ during which ‘one stops at notable spots to sing a song, or to chant invocations and praises, such as mantras, songs, or little sūtras.’³⁷ Snyder had first learned of the practice in Japan not from Zen institutions, but from the Yamabushi,³⁸ a Buddhist group who Snyder would later describe as ‘back country Shaman-Buddhists with strong Shinto connections, who make walking and climbing in deep mountain ranges a large part of their practice.’³⁹ The 1965 circumambulation is recounted in Snyder’s prose poem ‘The Circumambulation of Mt. Tamalpais,’ as well as in Whalen’s ‘Opening the Mountain, Tamalpais: 22:X:66.’ In some senses, the ritual is square; the chanting of mantras and sutras and the use of paraphernalia—‘blowing the conch, shaking the staff rings’⁴⁰—root the 1965 circumambulation in Asian tradition. These elements adhere to the Yamabushi walk Snyder observed in 1961, when he noted in his journal ‘the tinkle of bells & blowing of conch’ and the ‘chanting’ of ‘the prajna paramita’.⁴¹ On the 1965 circumambulation, Snyder and his companions chanted from one of the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras, the Prajñāpāramitā-hridaya-sūtra or Heart Sūtra.⁴² But as Gray notes, Snyder and his companions ‘declined to choose the stations in advance’,⁴³ injecting an element of Beat spontaneity into proceedings.

‘The Circumambulation of Mt. Tamalpais’ combines Buddhist motifs with environmentalist concerns. At one point Snyder notes the ‘smog and sense of heat’ around the bay and writes, ‘May the whole planet not get like this.’⁴⁴ The religious texts he and his

³⁷ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End* (1996; repr. New York, 1997), p.161.

³⁸ Gray, *Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim*, pp.219-20.

³⁹ Snyder, *The Gary Snyder Reader*, p.372.

⁴⁰ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p.89.

⁴¹ Snyder’s Journal, 1959-61, GSP I 84:4, 3-4 June 1961.

⁴² Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p.85.

⁴³ Gray, *Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim*, p.221.

⁴⁴ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p.88.

companions chant, we are repeatedly told, are ‘for Removing Disasters,’⁴⁵ and these disasters are, we infer from the line about smog, ecological ones. It was noted in the introduction to this chapter that Snyder would come to feel that, in order to yoke Buddhism to environmentalism in an American setting, it would be necessary to naturalize Buddhism into that setting. Considerably more will be said of this later in this chapter. For now, it should be noted that in ‘The Circumambulation of Mt. Tamalpais’ there is a certain discordance between the American landscape, described with great physical precision in the main passages, and the Asian texts chanted. When those texts are identified, their Asian names are given and they are separated from the main body of text by indentations and line breaks, implying their non-integration into the local landscape.

Buddhist Modernism

If the Practicing Zen of the First Zen Institute tended to tie Zen to institutions in Japan, the Reasonable Zen of Suzuki tended to present Zen through certain Western intellectual filters, as Farkas noted. Snyder had first read Suzuki in September 1951, standing by the roadside while hitch-hiking in eastern Nevada after having purchased a copy of Suzuki’s *Essays in Zen Buddhism (First Series)* from a ‘metaphysical’ bookshop in San Francisco.⁴⁶ Although Snyder had by this time read about Zen in the books of R.H. Blyth, Suzuki was to have a more profound influence on his Buddhism: ‘D.T. Suzuki gave me the push of my life,’ he would write in 1983, ‘and I can never be too grateful.’⁴⁷ In the spring of 1952, back in the San Francisco Bay Area, Snyder discovered ‘a few others who had been touched by D.T., including Alan Watts’,⁴⁸ who, it was noted early, is regarded by Seager as the second-most important

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp.85, 86, 87, 88, 89.

⁴⁶ Snyder, ‘On the Road with D.T. Suzuki’, *A Zen Life: D.T. Suzuki Remembered*, ed. Mazao Abe (New York, 1986), 207-9, p.207.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp.208-9.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.207.

figure in the ‘Zen boom’ of the 1950s after Suzuki. Snyder was to maintain a personal acquaintance with Watts,⁴⁹ and consequently he is included in the following discussion.

By comparing Snyder to Suzuki and Watts, I want to show that his appropriation of Buddhism emerges from, and is a particular permutation of, what David McMahan has called ‘Buddhist modernism.’ McMahan argues that, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Buddhism was portrayed to the West in ways that engaged with certain ‘discourses of modernity’. As such, ‘an actual new form of Buddhism’ emerged ‘that is the result of a process of modernization, westernization, reinterpretation, image-making, revitalization, and reform that has been taking place not only in the West but also in Asian countries for over a century.’⁵⁰ While McMahan’s term ‘Buddhist modernism’ is in some senses equivalent to Farkas’ ‘Reasonable Zen,’ both terms referring to the Westernization of Buddhism by writers such as Suzuki, McMahan’s terms has none of the negative connotations of Farkas’ and covers a wider number of processes of modernization. While the opposition Farkas drew between Practicing Zen and Reasonable Zen was a useful one earlier in the argument, from now on I prefer to use McMahan’s term.

McMahan’s argument centres on three Western ‘discourses’ with which Buddhism was syncretised in the West. These are: Western monotheism; rationalism and scientific naturalism; and Romanticism and its successors, including, crucially, American Transcendentalism.⁵¹ While Kerouac combined Buddhism with Catholicism, and Ginsberg combined Buddhism with Judaism, Snyder remained either hostile or indifferent to Western monotheism throughout his career, and consequently the first of McMahan’s ‘discourses’ does not form part of my discussion. Snyder’s synthesis of Western science—specifically ecological science—is discussed in the following chapter. For now, I will concentrate on the syncretism of Buddhism and certain Transcendentalist themes in the writing of Suzuki, Watts and Snyder.

⁴⁹ In his journal, Snyder describes having ‘dinner at Alan Watts’ in 1956 (Snyder’s Journal, 1956-58, GSP I: 84:3, 8 April 1956) and Snyder’s archive holds correspondences between Snyder and Watts from between 1962 and 1971, two years before Watts’ death.

⁵⁰ McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, p.5.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.10.

The first of these themes to be discussed most clearly distinguishes Suzuki and Watts from the Practicing Zen of the First Zen Institute: the privileging of direct, personal religious experience over the formal transmission of religion through institutions and scripture. Suzuki defines satori as ‘an experience which no amount of explanation or argument can make communicable to others unless the latter themselves had it previously.’⁵² The ‘ultimate fact of experience must not be enslaved by any artificial or schematic laws of thought’⁵³ and for this reason, ‘anything that has the semblance of an external authority is rejected by Zen.’⁵⁴ Watts writes in similar terms. His distaste for the ‘clearly defined hierarchies’ and ‘rigid discipline’ of square Zen has already been seen. Elsewhere Watts presents Zen as ‘a vigorous attempt to come into direct contact with the truth itself’ which ‘has no patience with second-hand wisdom, with someone else’s description of a spiritual experience’.⁵⁵ As such, ‘Zen dispenses with all forms of theorization, doctrinal instruction and lifeless formality’.⁵⁶ And elsewhere he writes, ‘Zen refuses to be organized, or to be made the exclusive possession of any institution.’⁵⁷ Suzuki’s and Watts’ descriptions of Zen chime with Emerson’s argument in ‘The Divinity School Address,’ in which he argues that the insights of direct, intuitive religious experience undergo a process of ‘degradation’ if coopted by ‘the church, the state, art, letters’. Indeed, Emerson had used the same term as Watts—‘second hand’—to describe such mediation of religious experience.⁵⁸ It should be clear from the passages of Snyder’s 1956 journal quoted earlier that Snyder shared this Emersonian stance, believing that Zen had to ‘be alive and made new’ and that ‘orthodox transmission’ was ‘bullshit’.⁵⁹ While Snyder did spend time in Zen

⁵² D.T. Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (1934; repr. London, 1983), p.92.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.55.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.44.

⁵⁵ Alan Watts, *The Spirit of Zen*, 2nd ed. (1958; repr. London, 1991), p.16.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.16.

⁵⁷ Watts, *The Way of Zen* (1957; repr. London, 1990), p.14.

⁵⁸ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Divinity School Address* (1838; repr. London, 1903), p.38.

⁵⁹ Tovey identifies this Emersonian aspect of Snyder’s Buddhism in her introduction, writing that, ‘Ever the individualist, Snyder’s Buddhism follows an Emersonian fashion.’ Tovey, *The Transatlantic Eco-Romanticism of Gary Snyder*, p.10.

institutions in Japan, it is important to note that, after his return, he did not enter the hierarchies of Zen institutions in America as Whalen did.⁶⁰

The second point of contact between Suzuki's and Watts' presentation of Zen with Transcendentalism—and indeed with Romanticism more broadly—is the idea that Zen experience offers an antidote to man's alienation from nature. Suzuki writes that Zen points towards a state of being where

[...] timelessness has not negated itself so that we have a dichotomy of subject-object, Man-Nature, God-world [... in Zen] pure subjectivity is pure objectivity; the *en-soi* is the *pour-soi*; there is perfect identity between Man and Nature, of God and Nature[.]⁶¹

McMahan notes that there 'are no terms in Buddhist languages that precisely correspond to the word *nature* with all the connotations it has in the modern period'.⁶² By using the binary pairs man and nature, and subject and object, 'Suzuki takes Zen literature out of its social, ritual and ethical context and reframes it in terms of a language of metaphysics derived from German Romantic idealism, English Romanticism, and American Transcendentalism.'⁶³ In evoking these dualistic terms, and arguing that Zen can negate these dualisms, Suzuki anticipates the terms of Lynn White's argument with which the introduction to this thesis began. But if a proto-Whitean opposition of East and West is only implicit in Suzuki's writing, it is made forcefully by Watts. For Watts, Zen in America appeals primarily to 'the Westerner in search of the reintegration of man and nature'. It provides 'a view of the world imparting a profoundly refreshing sense of wholeness to a culture in which the spiritual and the material, the conscious and the unconscious, have been cataclysmically split.' Watts, like White, attributes these dualisms to the "anti-naturalness" of both Christianity, with its politically ordered cosmology,

⁶⁰ Whalen became involved with the San Francisco Zen Centre in 1972, where he was ordained a monk. He received Dharma transmission in 1987 from Richard Baker.

⁶¹ D.T. Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D.T. Suzuki*, ed. William Barrett (Garden City NY, 1956) pp.240-41.

⁶² McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, p.123.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.124.

and technology, with its imperialistic mechanization of a natural world from which man himself feels strangely alien.’⁶⁴

Watts wrote these lines in 1958 before the advent of the modern environmental movement, but Snyder would similarly evoke Zen in order to critique Western culture’s endemic alienation in his ecological polemics of the 1960s and 1970s. In the prose essays collected at the end of *Turtle Island*, first published individually between 1969 and 1971, he writes ‘I don’t like Western culture because I think it has much in it that is inherently wrong and that is at the root of the environmental crisis that is not recent’. Western culture ‘alienates itself from the very ground of its own being’.⁶⁵ In a passage already quoted in my introduction, Snyder contrasts alienated Western culture with ‘certain social and religious forces,’ including Zen, ‘which have worked through history toward an ecologically and culturally enlightened state of affairs’.⁶⁶ While the term ‘Western culture’ implies a monolithic contrast of East and West, Snyder ultimately refuses such a distinction, pointing to the deforestation of China by 1000 A.D., as he had in ‘Logging 2,’ to show that ‘The West is not the only culture that carries these destructive seeds.’⁶⁷

In one of the essays quoted above, where Snyder defines Zen as working towards ‘an ecologically and culturally enlightened state of affairs’, Zen is just one religion within a list including Gnostics, Teilhard de Chardin Catholics, Druids, Taoism, Witches, Yogins, Quakers, Sufis, Shamans, Bushmen and Alchemists.⁶⁸ Snyder here is exhibiting religious perennialism, which McMahan identifies as another point of contact between Buddhist modernism and Transcendentalism. He writes, the ‘view of Buddhism as one of a number of ways to a metaphysical absolute that transcended any and all tradition-specific religions was an initial and crucial move in the entrance of Buddhism into the discourses of modernity.’ Buddhism became ‘swallowed up in what the Transcendentalists call the “Universal Religion”’.

⁶⁴ Watts, ‘Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen’, pp.5-6.

⁶⁵ Gary Snyder, *Turtle Island*, p.106.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.100.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.106.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.100.

McMahan identifies Suzuki as the ‘most notable’ Buddhist modernist to employ themes of perennialism.⁶⁹ Indeed, Suzuki describes Zen as representing ‘the spirit of all religions and philosophies.’⁷⁰

Snyder developed his own version of perennialism during the late 1960s and early 1970s, and it is exemplified in his 1967 essay ‘Why Tribe.’ This essay describes how many Westerners, ‘in response to the increasing insanity of the modern nations’, were prompted to ‘study other major civilizations—India and China—to see what they could learn.’ ‘In the course of these studies’, he continues, ‘it became evident that the “truth” in Buddhism and Hinduism is not dependent in any sense on Indian or Chinese culture’.⁷¹ Rather than tying this religious ‘truth’ to any specific culture, Snyder describes it as one of the ‘outcroppings of the Great Subculture’ which runs through all societies. This Great Subculture runs ‘from Paleo-Siberian Shamanism and Magdalenian cave-painting; through megaliths and Mysteries, astronomers, ritualists, alchemists and Albigensians; gnostics and vagantes, right down to Golden Gate Park.’⁷²

In a 1967 letter, Snyder restated his perennialism in relation to this essay. Having been asked to send a short essay on the subject of Zen for inclusion in a series of publications, Snyder sent ‘Why Tribe.’ In the letter he insisted that a ‘new society’ of ‘forward-looking, spiritually-seeking young people’, among which he includes himself, was ‘not content with just the “Zen sect” or “oriental culture.”’ He continues:

Our concerns are not with Zen or Buddhism, but with the Dharma. Zen is simply a method; along with yoga, Tibetan meditation practices, Hindu devotionalism, Sufism, and many other types of religious and spiritual practices from many different traditions. Zen will be but one thread in the tapestry of the yet-unnamed religion of the future world, that we are now in the process of making.⁷³

⁶⁹ McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, pp.71-2.

⁷⁰ Suzuki, *Introduction to Zen*, p.44.

⁷¹ Snyder, *Earth House Hold*, pp.113-114.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.115

⁷³ Gary Snyder to Mr. Abé, 26 December 1967, GSP II 1:1.

Because Snyder's perennialist attitude towards Zen, anticipated by Suzuki, allows him to detach Zen from Asian traditions, it is an important step towards Snyder's Americanization of Zen. It is important to see this perennialism as part of the broader synthesis of Zen with Transcendentalist themes—encompassing anti-institutionalism and discourses of alienation—as that synthesis is itself a form of Americanization.

Engaged Buddhism

It was noted at the beginning of this chapter that Seager defines Snyder's 'green dharma' as a type of 'Buddhism-based social action'. During the 1960s and 1970s, certain groups began to ally Buddhism with a spirit of social protest, giving rise to what was to become known as 'Engaged Buddhism.' The term was coined by the Vietnamese Buddhist scholar and peace activist Thích Nhất Hạnh in his 1967 book *Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire*. Nhất Hạnh would influence many engaged Buddhists in America, including Robert Aitken, who in 1978 formed the Buddhist Peace Fellowship. The Buddhist Peace Fellowship is the best known engaged Buddhist organization in America, and it continues to campaign on issues surrounding race, class, gender and war, as well as ecology.⁷⁴ Snyder, who had corresponded with Aitken since the early 1950s, became a leading member of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship shortly after its creation.⁷⁵

At the beginning of the 'History' section of their website, the Buddhist Peace Fellowship quote Snyder's essay 'Buddhism and the Coming Revolution,' implying that that essay set the tone for the Fellowship's activism:

The mercy of the West has been social revolution; the mercy of the East has been individual insight into the basic self/void. We need both.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Seager, *Buddhism in America*, pp.202-208.

⁷⁵ Snyder, Foreword, *Taking the Path of Zen*, by Robert Aitken (San Francisco, 1982), xi-xiv, p.xii.

⁷⁶ Snyder, *Earth House Hold*, p.92. Quoted on <<http://www.buddhistpeacefellowship.org/about-bpf/history/>> (last accessed 31 December 2014).

As was seen in Chapter One, in the earlier 1961 version of this essay, entitled ‘Buddhist Anarchism’, Snyder had described the ‘mercy of the West’ as ‘rebellion.’⁷⁷ The phrase ‘social revolution’ is more in keeping with the activist spirit of the late 1960s, when the revised version of the essay was published. Indeed, in the later version, Snyder aligns himself with the anti-war movement by criticizing American involvement in Vietnam. He does so in the same paragraph in which he attacks the destruction of the ‘soil, the forests and all animal life’ and the fouling of ‘the air and water of the planet’.⁷⁸ Environmentalism in 1967 becomes aligned with the anti-war movement’s spirit of protest.

The contrast of East and West in the lines quoted by the Buddhist Peace Fellowship is crucial. Snyder portrays traditional Buddhism in Asia as politically quietist, and this becomes another reason for disassociating with the square, *Practicing Zen of Asia*:

Although Mahayana Buddhism has a grand vision of universal salvation, the *actual* achievement of Buddhism has been the development of practical systems of meditation toward the end of liberating a few dedicated individuals from psychological hangups and cultural conditionings. Institutional Buddhism has been conspicuously ready to accept or ignore the inequalities and tyrannies of whatever political system it found itself under.⁷⁹

Aitken would make a similar point, writing that ‘social action by traditional Buddhists seems confined to defensive statements designed to protect sectarian status.’⁸⁰ Both writers found an impetus towards social action to be implicit in the Bodhisattva ideal of Mahayana Buddhism, according to which Buddhist practitioners vow to work towards the liberation of all sentient beings. Snyder writes, ‘The Bodhisattva lives by the sufferer’s standard, and he must be effective in aiding those who suffer.’⁸¹ Likewise, Aitken sees the Bodhisattva ‘who sacrifices his or her own enlightenment for the sake of others’ as the prototype of the engaged Buddhist.⁸²

⁷⁷ Snyder, ‘Buddhist Anarchism’, p.12.

⁷⁸ Snyder, *Earth House Hold*, p.91.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p.90. Snyder’s italics.

⁸⁰ Aitken, *Taking the Path of Zen*, p.61.

⁸¹ Snyder, *Earth House Hold*, p.92.

⁸² Aitken, *Taking the Path of Zen*, p.60. Although this volume was published in 1982, the talks of which it is comprised were first drafted in 1972. They were, however, constantly revised up until publication, and Aitken acknowledges the input of Snyder amongst others (p.xvi). It is unclear whether the similarities between the arguments of the passages quoted and that of ‘Buddhism and the Coming Revolution’ is the direct result of Snyder’s influence, or whether Aitken’s critique of traditional Buddhism was formed relatively independently.

Nevertheless, for the impetus toward social action to be realized, Buddhism must become aligned with a Western spirit of ‘social revolution.’ This is true for Aitken as well as Snyder, the former writing that, in Asia ‘[w]e do not find Buddhist social movements developing until the late nineteenth century, under the influence of Christianity and Western ideas generally.’⁸³

The spirit of engaged Buddhism is most clearly evident in *Turtle Island*, where Snyder writes polemically on environmental issues. In ‘Four Changes,’ a 1969 essay reprinted there, he writes on issues including population, pollution and energy consumption. Snyder employs Buddhist language here, arguing that in order for meaningful action to be taken on these issues, it is necessary to realize the insight ‘that we are all interdependent energy-fields of great potential wisdom and compassion’. The specific Buddhist resonances of the term ‘interdependent’, and its juxtaposition with the scientific language of ‘energy-fields’ will be elucidated in the following chapter. For now it suffices to say that when Snyder talks later on the same page of ‘total transformation’, he means both a societal and a spiritual transformation, both of which are necessary to combat ecological destruction.⁸⁴ The spirit of engaged Buddhism is not confined to the prose essays at the back of the volume. Poems like ‘Mother Earth: Her Whales’ protest against Brazil’s destruction of the Amazon and Japan’s pollution of the sea with methyl mercury.⁸⁵

The polemicism of *Turtle Island* has been criticized. Writing in 1976, Altieri contrasted Snyder’s earlier poetry, which articulated ‘how the mind can compose itself in order to attend to numinous qualities of experience’ or engaged in ‘more abstract meditations on the role of the mind’, with *Turtle Island*’s project of enacting ‘social change.’⁸⁶ Altieri calls these stances the role of the ‘seer’ and the role of the ‘prophet’ respectively. For Altieri, ‘Snyder’s great achievement is as a seer’, and he criticizes the polemicism of *Turtle Island* for ‘leaving an impression of self-righteousness’, even if this self-righteousness is ‘completely absent from

⁸³ Robert Aitken, *The Mind of Clover: Essays in Zen Buddhism* (San Francisco, 1984), p.164.

⁸⁴ Snyder, *Turtle Island*, p.99.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.47

⁸⁶ Charles Altieri, ‘Gary Snyder’s *Turtle Island*: The Problem of Reconciling the Roles of Seer and Prophet’, *Boundary 2* iv, 3 (Spring 1976), 761-78, pp.763, 771.

Snyder as a person.’⁸⁷ Snyder has been defended against such charges by Gray, who argues that any sense of self-righteousness is offset by Snyder’s ‘humor’.⁸⁸ Snyder’s ‘didacticism’ has also been criticized by Bate, who focuses particularly on ‘Mother Earth: Her Whales.’ For Bate, despite its worthy sentiments, the poem fails as an ‘ecopoem’ because ‘it has been written as a set of opinions, not as an attempt to transform into language an experience of dwelling upon the earth.’⁸⁹

Re-inhabitation

The idea of ‘dwelling upon the earth’ is actually central to Snyder’s polemic. In ‘Four Changes,’ amid the practical programs outlined for controlling population, pollution and energy consumption (Altieri would contend that Snyder’s recommendation of cutting the world’s population in half is far from practical), Snyder argues that ecological amelioration is only possible if people renew their contact with their immediate environments:⁹⁰ ‘Stewardship means, for most of us, find your place on the planet, dig in, and take responsibility from there’.⁹¹ The alienation of humanity from nature, which Suzuki and Watts had presented as being symptomatic of Western culture, must be undone on an individual level. Snyder would continue to make this point throughout his career. In a 1977 interview he recapitulates: ‘One of the key problems in American society now, it seems to me, is people’s lack of commitment to any given place’.⁹² In 1990, in lines quoted in the previous chapter, Snyder again espouses place-centredness: ‘Our relation to the natural world takes place in a *place*,’ he writes, criticizing the ‘tens of millions of people in North America who were physically born here but who are not actually living here intellectually, imaginatively, or morally.’⁹³ The poems of *Turtle Island* describe such a place-centredness: ‘*stay together / learn the flowers / go light*’,

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp.763, 775.

⁸⁸ Gray, *Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim*, p.281.

⁸⁹ Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (London, 2000), pp.199-201.

⁹⁰ Snyder, *Turtle Island*, p.92. Altieri, ‘Gary Snyder’s *Turtle Island*’, p.774.

⁹¹ Snyder, *Turtle Island*, p.101.

⁹² Snyder, *The Real Work*, p.117.

⁹³ Snyder, *Practice of the Wild*, pp.42-3.

reads the conclusion of ‘For the Children.’⁹⁴ If we return to the terms of Bate’s criticism of Snyder, Snyder here presents an ideal mode of dwelling as an imperative rather than ‘transform[ing] into language an *experience* of dwelling upon the earth’ (my italics).

While Snyder insists that, to dwell ecologically, Americans must reconnect with the patch of earth on which they live, he avoids the nationalism that this might imply. In the introductory note to *Turtle Island* he argues that the patch of land we identify with should be defined by natural rather than political boundaries: ‘The “U.S.A” and its states and counties are arbitrary and inaccurate impositions on what is really here’, he writes, and ‘we may see ourselves more accurately on this continent of watersheds and life-communities—plant zones, physiographic provinces’. This is the language of bioregionalism, and it gives an ecological twist to Snyder’s earlier anarchist critique of the nation state. To reflect this, Snyder refuses to use the names ‘U.S.A’ or ‘North America,’ and renames his continent ‘Turtle Island—the old/new name for the continent, based on many creation myths of the people who have been living here for millenia [sic]’.⁹⁵

If Snyder’s ecological vision involves living intellectually and imaginatively on Turtle Island, his adoption of a Far Eastern religion becomes problematic. It has been shown that, by dissociating Zen from Asian institutions and presenting it within a perennialist framework, Suzuki, Watts and Snyder aimed to remove Zen from specific cultural ties. Nevertheless, as a letter written in 1980 shows, Snyder did become unsure of the compatibility of ‘Far Eastern baggage’ with his ‘secular and spiritual life here on Turtle Island.’⁹⁶ In ‘The Call of the Wild,’ a poem from *Turtle Island*, Snyder explores the problem of ‘Eastern baggage.’ The poem pictures American ‘ex acid-heads from the cities / Converted to Guru or Swami’ who have moved to the ‘forests of North America’ but imaginatively dwell elsewhere: ‘They dream of India.’⁹⁷ Because they are not mentally rooted in their immediate locale, they are alienated

⁹⁴ Snyder, *Turtle Island*, p.86.

⁹⁵ Snyder, Introductory Note, *Turtle Island*, no page number.

⁹⁶ Gary Snyder to Wendell Berry, 5 June 1980, GSP II 1:24, p.2.

⁹⁷ Snyder, *Turtle Island*, p.21.

from the wild environment, symbolized by Coyote, a mythologically-charged native animal who acts as a kind of *genius locus*:

And Coyote singing
is shut away
for they fear
the call
of the wild.⁹⁸

While Gurus and Swamis belong to Indian Hinduism rather than Chinese and Japanese Buddhism, the figure of the counter-cultural acid-head dreaming of Asia from the American wilderness surely stands as an alter ego of Snyder's younger self, who had imagined himself as a Chinese hermit in the Californian mountains in his journals of the 1950s and depicted his native landscapes in poems imitating Chinese verse forms in *The Back Country*. The criticism of the acid-heads steeped in Hinduism applies just as much to any religious exoticism, Snyder's Buddhism included, which prevents one from identifying with one's native soil. While Suzuki and the Buddhist modernists lauded Zen as an antidote to Western man's alienation from nature, Snyder came to see that it might exacerbate it.

The solution was to naturalize Zen into an America setting, 'to unfold a path of "Chan on Turtle Island"', as he wrote to Robert Aitken in 1986.⁹⁹ An early example of Snyder tying an Americanized Buddhism to environmental concerns is 'Smokey the Bear Sutra,' written for the Sierra Club Wilderness Conference in 1969, soon after Snyder's return from Japan. This light-hearted prose piece imagines 'the Great Sun Buddha' metamorphosed into Smokey the Bear, the mascot of the US Forest Service's poster campaigns to prevent forest fires. It will be remembered that Ginsberg had used the word 'Sutra' in the title of his 1955 poem 'Sunflower Sutra,' which described environmental degradation caused by industry around San Francisco (see Chapter One). But while explicit Buddhist references were confined to the title of Ginsberg's poem, Snyder's Sutra evokes Buddhist mythology through the evocation of the Sun

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.22.

⁹⁹ Gary Snyder to Robert Aitken, 16 March 1986, GSP II 1:8.

Buddha. In Buddhist modernism as defined by McMahan, Buddhism tended to be ‘purged of mythological elements and “superstitious” cultural accretions’,¹⁰⁰ and in this respect Snyder’s Sutra is atypical of Buddhist modernism.

The figure of the Sun Buddha does, however, contribute to a perennialist stance which has been shown to be characteristic of Buddhist modernism. The Sun Buddha is originally shown ‘in the Jurassic, about 150 million years ago’,¹⁰¹ suggesting that the religious truth he embodies is not tied to any specific culture, and indeed predates the evolution of humanity. As such, ‘Smokey the Bear Sutra’ expresses an extreme form of perennialism. The Sun Buddha’s transformation into Smokey the Bear also implies a perennialist stance. In his commentary on the Sutra, Snyder informs the reader that he had in mind the Circumpolar Bear Cult, previously referred to in ‘This Poem is for Bear’ in *Myths and Texts*, which he here defines as ‘the surviving religious complex [...] of what may be the oldest religion on earth.’ ‘In the light of meditation once’, he continues, ‘it came to me that the Old One [the bear god] was no other than the Auspicious being described in Buddhist texts as having taught in the unimaginably distant past, the one called “The Ancient Buddha.”’ Smokey the Bear, he writes playfully, ‘was the inevitable resurfacing of our ancient benefactor as guide and teacher in the twentieth century’.¹⁰² While this representative of the prehistoric, global Bear Cult is the manifestation of a universal archetype, he is also a figure of American popular culture. Snyder has evoked the Ancient Buddha of Asian mythology in order to place that figure within a universal, perennialist framework, and then naturalized the figure into a twentieth-century American setting. The effect is of deliberate bathos, and audio recordings of Snyder reciting the piece show he played it for laughs, upholding Gray’s assertion that Snyder’s environmental didacticism is offset by humour.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, p.4.

¹⁰¹ Snyder, *A Place in Space*, p.25.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.29.

¹⁰³ Snyder, ‘Wild Wisdom: Zen and Nature in North America’, Presented for the Hermes Project, rec. 10 May 1986, Sound Disc, GSP VIII 21:4, 17:12-23:33.



A US Forest Service poster from the 1960s featuring Smokey the Bear.

<[http://www.smokeybear.com/vault/#!/prettyPhoto\[1960sP\]/4/](http://www.smokeybear.com/vault/#!/prettyPhoto[1960sP]/4/)> (last accessed 1 January 2015).

Despite this bathos, the Sutra's spirit of environmental activism is serious. After the Great Sun Buddha's transformation into Smokey the Bear, Snyder describes Smokey's 'broad-brimmed hat of the west' as 'symbolic of the forces that guard the Wilderness, which is the Natural State of the Dharma'.¹⁰⁴ The Sutra prophesies that, under the guidance of Smokey the Bear, America will 'enter the age of harmony of man and nature.' Snyder's early distaste for suburban America is combined with the more militant language of the late 1960s when Snyder describes Smokey '[t]rampling underfoot wasteful freeways and needless suburbs, smashing the worms of capitalism and totalitarianism', and describes his 'followers, becoming free of cars, houses, canned foods, universities, and shoes [...] and [...] prun[ing] out the sick limbs of this country America'. By this rejection of mainstream American culture, we '[w]ill help save the planet Earth from total oil slick.'¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Snyder, *A Place in Space*, p.26.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.27.

Becoming Native

Believing that ecological dwelling necessitated imaginative and intellectual rootedness in a place, Snyder looked to Native American cultures in order to root his ecological vision in the soil of Turtle Island. The name ‘Turtle Island,’ metonymic for Snyder’s bioregionalism, was after all a name taken from the myths of those who have been ‘living here for millenia.’ Snyder explained that he had first heard the name ‘Turtle Island’ from a Navajo at a gathering of Native Americans in southern California in 1969. At the gathering, ‘conversations circled around the idea of a native-inspired cultural and ecological renaissance for all of North America.’¹⁰⁶ Snyder described the indigenous peoples at the gathering as embodying ‘a powerful spiritual teaching on the matter of human and natural relationships, and for some individuals a practice of self-realization that came with trying to see through nonhuman eyes.’¹⁰⁷ It will be remembered that Snyder regarded Chan-inflected Classical Chinese poetry as offering ‘a window into the nonhuman.’¹⁰⁸ Snyder’s repetition of the term ‘nonhuman’ suggests a consonance between Chinese Buddhism and certain Native American attitudes towards the natural world. A kind of ecological perennialism is suggested.

For Snyder, bioregionalism on Turtle Island involved a process of becoming native. He would write that

Native Americans to be sure have a prior claim to the term native. But as they love this land they will welcome the conversion of the millions of immigrant psyches into fellow “Native Americans.” For the non-Native American to become at home on this continent, he or she must be *born again* in this hemisphere, on this continent, properly called Turtle Island.¹⁰⁹

Not all Native Americans did welcome this process of ‘conversion’. The Laguna Pueblo writer Leslie Marmon Silko criticized *Turtle Island* for being complicit in ‘land theft by enthusiastically quoting the pre-Columbian notion that “the land belongs to itself”’ and for

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.241.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p.242.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p.92.

¹⁰⁹ Snyder, *Practice of the Wild*, p.43. Snyder’s italics.

ignoring Snyder's own Anglo-American 'roots and origins.'¹¹⁰ Geary Hobson, while exempting Snyder's 'sincere efforts [...] to incorporate an essential part of American Indian philosophy into his work', criticizes Snyder's imitators, his 'bastard children',¹¹¹ whose appropriation of Native American identities constituted 'a new version of cultural imperialism.'¹¹² As the primary focus of this thesis is on Snyder's engagement with Far Eastern cultures, a full exploration of his appropriation of Native American cultures is not possible here. Readers are directed to Gray's discussion of these issues, to which my brief discussion here is indebted.¹¹³

Snyder's belief that ecological dwelling necessitates a process of becoming native accounts for the relative scarcity of explicitly Buddhist references in *Turtle Island*. Some poems evoke recognizably Buddhist themes: 'No Matter, Never Mind' is a meditation on Void and Mind; while 'For Nothing' meditates on nothingness; Buddhist mythological figures like Achala and Tārā make occasional appearances;¹¹⁴ and Buddhist terms such as 'Deva Realm,' 'Dharma' and 'sangha' are at times employed.¹¹⁵ Such explicit Buddhist references, however, seem somewhat out of place in the predominantly North American terrain of the volume. The title of one poem, 'One Should Not Talk to a Skilled Hunter about What is Forbidden by the Buddha,' suggests that Buddhism, at its most moralistic and dogmatic, has nothing to teach the man truly at home in his environment. In the following chapter, it will be shown that Buddhist philosophy is central to the ecological vision of *Turtle Island*, but Snyder's Buddhism here has been largely shorn of 'Far Eastern baggage.'

In *Turtle Island* it is Native Americans who are shown to truly understand their environments. In 'Control Burn' Snyder shows that the Native Americans living in the woodland of an unspecified North American region 'used to burn out the brush every year' so

¹¹⁰ Leslie Marmon Silko, 'An Old-time Indian Attack Conducted in Two Parts', *The Remembered Earth: An Anthology of Contemporary Native American Literature*, ed. Geary Hobson (1979; repr. Albuquerque, 1980), 211-216, p.214.

¹¹¹ Geary Hobson, 'The Rise of the White Shaman as a New Version of Cultural Imperialism', *The Remembered Earth*, ed. Hobson, 100-108, p.105.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p.100.

¹¹³ Gray, *Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim*, p. 274ff.

¹¹⁴ Snyder, *Turtle Island*, pp. 17, 62.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.28, 61, 73.

as to prevent large-scale forest fires. Now they no longer inhabit the site, manzanita is allowed to crowd up under the trees, causing risk of forest fire that ‘can wipe out all.’¹¹⁶ ‘Anasazi’ depicts the eponymous Ancient Pueblo people so at home in their environment that they become part of it:

Anasazi.
 Anasazi,

 tucked up in clefts in the cliffs
 growing strict fields of corn and beans
 sinking deeper and deeper in earth
 up to your hips in Gods¹¹⁷

Like the corn and beans they plant, the Anasazi themselves are imagined to be rooted in the earth.

Snyder’s aim of unfolding ‘the path of Chan on Turtle Island’ implies an attempt to reconcile Zen with the ideal of becoming native. Following his return from Japan in 1968, Snyder looked to syncretize his Buddhism with Native American myths and practices. Borrowings from Far Eastern and Native American cultures mingled in his personal life. As he settled on land at Bald Mountain in the Sierra foothills that he had bought with Allen Ginsberg and Richard Barker, the future abbot of the San Francisco Zen Center, Snyder and his friends constructed a farmhouse ‘inspired by Japanese and Mandan Indian designs.’¹¹⁸ On beginning construction of the Zendo at Bald Mountain, a jinchin-sai or ‘earth calming ceremony’ was held ‘incorporating both Native American and Buddhist motifs.’¹¹⁹

While the links between Buddhism and Native American modes of dwelling are only implicit in *Turtle Island*, they are made more explicit in two poems included in *Mountains and Rivers Without End*: ‘The Blue Sky,’ first published in 1968, and ‘The Hump-backed Flute Player,’ first published in 1971. In an interview first published in 1970, Snyder spoke of the

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p.19.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p.3.

¹¹⁸ Gray, *Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim*, p.270.

¹¹⁹ Gary Snyder to Robert Aitken, 12 August 1982, GSP II 1:4.

‘arbitrary’ nature of many ‘Buddhist symbols’, and argued that ‘these symbols could just as well be translated into terms of the North American continent.’¹²⁰ In ‘The Blue Sky’ such an act of translation is dramatized as Snyder draws parallels between Buddhist and Native American lore concerned with healing. The opening of the poem is a version of the beginning of the *Bhaisajyaguru vaidūryaprabhārāja Sūtra*, the Sutra of Bhaisajyaguru, the celestial Buddha of healing known commonly as the Medicine Buddha. As Hunt points out, Snyder’s version is based on an English translation of Xuanzang’s (Hsüan-tang) Chinese translation of the original Sanskrit.¹²¹ It describes the ‘Master of Healing’ in the eastern celestial realm, or Pure Land, known as ‘Pure as Lapis Lazuli’, which he presides over. Bhaisajyaguru’s Pure Land is located

“Eastward from here,
beyond Buddha-worlds ten times as
numerous as the sands of the Ganges[?]”¹²²

As a hand-written note on a draft of the poem makes clear, Snyder associates the eastern Pure Land with America: ‘(America) is lapis-lazuli / Old Man Realm’.¹²³ Snyder associates the eastern paradise with America perhaps because America is east across the Pacific from Asia; thus he brings into question the usual categories of East and West. In the next stanza, Snyder reworks the passage from the Sutra in order to Americanize it. He describes the distance to the Pure Land in terms of the American institution of the road trip (popularized in large part by Kerouac): ‘It would take you twelve thousand summer vacations / driving a car due east all day every day’. Bhaisajyaguru is renamed ‘Medicine Old Man Buddha,’ an appellation which suggests the English term for a Native American healer, ‘medicine man’; and he is later called ‘Coyote Old Man,’¹²⁴ suggesting that the Native American trickster figure Coyote, who has

¹²⁰ Snyder, *The Real Work*, p.17.

¹²¹ Anthony Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning in Gary Snyder’s Mountains and Rivers Without End* (Reno, 2004), p.107.

¹²² Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p.40.

¹²³ ‘The Blue Sky’, Notes, n.d., GSP I 4:38, p.3.

¹²⁴ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p.40.

recurred in Snyder's poetry since 'The Berry Feast,' is an American counterpart to the Asian figure of Bhaishajyaguru.

Later in the poem, Snyder reproduces the mantra of Bhaishajyaguru and then translates it into English,¹²⁵ but his concern with translation in the poem goes deeper than this. At several points in the poem he presents clusters of words around terms symbolically associated with the Medicine Buddha. Such chains suggest etymological links between words from eastern and western cultures:

Sky.

[The dappled cloud zone—
Sanskrit *sku* "covered"
skewed (pied) skewbald (... "Stewball")
skybald / piebald]—¹²⁶

[...]

Azure Old French *azur*,
Persian *lazhward*, "lapis lazuli"¹²⁷

[...]

Medicine, measure, "Maya"—¹²⁸

While linguistic difference is the most salient sign of cultural difference between East and West, Snyder's exploration of etymology (and some of these etymological links may be fanciful) shows that, on occasion, language reveals shared cultural roots.

Snyder goes on to point to the shared associations of blue stones with healing in different cultures. As Bhaishajyaguru the Medicine Buddha is associated with lapis lazuli, turquoise is associated with healing in Navajo lore. Snyder quotes a Navajo song about a mythical 'turquoise horse' who is prayed to to 'make thee whole', and suggests an etymological link between the words 'whole' and 'heal'.¹²⁹ He later alludes to 'blue bead

¹²⁵ Ibid., p.41.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p.40. Snyder's square brackets and ellipsis.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p.42.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p.43.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p.41.

charms against the evil eye',¹³⁰ and a note in Snyder's archive shows that he is referring to such charms in Mediterranean cultures.¹³¹ In showing the existence of equivalent symbols for healing in diverse cultures, Snyder suggests that a symbolic framework already exists in Native American cultures which will ease the translation of Buddhism into American terms.

Snyder suggests that some of the mythical symbolism of healing is preserved in American popular culture, just as he would suggest that Smokey the Bear was an unconscious resurfacing of a mythic archetype. In the list of words etymologically linked to 'sky' quoted above, he refers to 'Stewball,' a racehorse celebrated in a popular American folk song, and implies a link to the turquoise Navajo horse that is described immediately afterwards.¹³² Later, he quotes Bob Wills' 1938 Western Swing song 'San Antonio Rose' (a note in his archive shows that Snyder was thinking of the Hank Williams version),¹³³ in which a lost love is associated with 'Enchantment as strange as / the Blue up above'. Snyder juxtaposes the quotation with the statement that 'Tibetans say that goddesses have lapis lazuli hair.'¹³⁴ White popular culture may also contribute to the symbolic framework of an American Buddhism.

While 'The Blue Sky' draws on the mythological aspects of Buddhism and so, like 'Smokey the Bear Sutra,' is atypical of Buddhist modernism, Snyder is careful to bring the more celestial symbolism of this material down to earth. In a 1977 interview Snyder was asked about the relationship between American Indian 'myths of the land' and 'Oriental teachings'. He replied, 'Oh, it's all one teaching', but qualified that universalist pronouncement by distinguishing between different 'expressions' of this teaching, some of which have 'a more earthly stress' and some 'a more spiritual stress.'¹³⁵ While in the quotation from the Medicine Buddha's Sutra that begins the poem, the precious blue stone is merely a simile used to describe the celestial Pure Land, Snyder later describes the other precious blue stone that features in the poem, turquoise, in terms of its chemical make-up:

¹³⁰ Ibid., p.42.

¹³¹ 'The Blue Sky', notes, n.d., GSP I 4:38, p.7.

¹³² See Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning*, p.109.

¹³³ 'The Blue Sky,' Notes, n.d., GSP I 4:38, p.8. See also Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning*, p.108.

¹³⁴ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p.42.

¹³⁵ Snyder, *The Real Work*, pp.67-8.

Turquoise: a hydrous phosphate of aluminum
 a little copper
 a little iron—¹³⁶

In a draft of the poem, he also gives a partial list of the constituent elements of lapis lazuli—‘Sodium, Aluminium, Calcium, Sulfur’—but presumably removed this from the final poem to avoid repetition.¹³⁷ In doing so, he insists on the material reality of these stones and moves away from the ‘more spiritual stress’ of the Medicine Buddha’s Sutra to the ‘more earthly stress’ more often found in American Indian lore.

Directly after the description of turquoise in terms of its chemical make-up, Snyder suggests that the healing powers that the blue stones symbolize should not be regarded as emanating from a celestial realm, but from the earth itself. He recounts an episode from the life of the Japanese poet Ono-no-Komachi (c.825-c.900). The seventeen-year old Komachi sets out to look for her father, who has become a Buddhist wanderer. Along the way Komachi takes ill and sees Bhaishajyaguru in a dream.

[...] He told her she would find a hot springs
 on the bank of the Azuma river in the Bandai mountains
 that would cure her; and she’d meet her father there.¹³⁸

Although Bhaishajyaguru may be associated with the transcendent Pure Land (which might after all only be a metaphor for ‘aspects of the awakened state of mind’),¹³⁹ the source of healing he directs Komachi to emanates from the earth.

At the end of the poem, Snyder asserts emphatically, with a crescendo and diminuendo of capitalization:

The blue sky
 the blue sky.
 The Blue Sky
 Is the land of

¹³⁶ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p.41.

¹³⁷ ‘The Blue Sky,’ Draft A, n.d., MS GSP I 4:39, p.2.

¹³⁸ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p.42

¹³⁹ Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning*, p.106.

OLD MAN MEDICINE BUDDHA
 where the eagle that flies out of sight
 flies.¹⁴⁰

The land of Old Man Medicine Buddha is not a transcendent, spiritual realm, but the literal sky. This final image, as Snyder's note on the poem makes clear, moves from Buddhist associations of the sky with *shunyata* or 'emptiness'—the Chinese character for *shunyata* also means sky—to a Native Californian image of healing as a trembling hand 'guided by an eagle so high up in the sky as to be out of sight.'¹⁴¹

'The Hump-backed Flute Player' begins by implying an analogy between Xuanzang (Hsüan Tsang), the seventh-century Chinese Buddhist monk who travelled to India and brought back the *Heart Sutra* to China, and Kokop'ele, a figure from Hopi mythology. Depictions of Kokop'ele in ancient rock art, as Snyder's note on the poem explains, show 'a walking flute-player, sometimes with a hump on his back'.¹⁴² In the poem Snyder asserts that 'his hump is a pack', and juxtaposes Kokop'ele with a description of Xuanzang returning from India 'with 657 sūtras, images, mandalas, / and fifty relics' in his 'curved frame pack'.

he carried
 "emptiness"
 he carried
 "mind only"
*vijnaptimātra*¹⁴³

The subject of this short stanza is not made clear. The reference to Vijnaptimātra, a school of Mahayana Buddhism that emphasises meditative and yogic practice, suggests Snyder is commenting on the contents of Xuanzang's pack, but the reference to Kokop'ele's pack immediately afterwards suggests that this Native American figure also embodies the religious truths of Buddhism. The suggestion is compounded in the following sections in which a prose

¹⁴⁰ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p.44.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.160.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.79.

description of cave paintings of Kokop'ele in Canyon de Chelly, Arizona is followed by a description of the ruins of Nalanda, an ancient centre of Buddhist learning in Bihar, India.¹⁴⁴

In his discussion of the poem, Hunt writes that, '[i]n Native American folklore' Kokop'ele's pack is said to contain 'the seeds and flowers with which to start a new world.' This is why Snyder's poem next gives a version of the vision of the Paiute prophet Wovoka, also known as Jack Wilson, 'whose shamanistic insights led to ritualistic Ghost Dances designed to regenerate the world and rid it of the White Man':¹⁴⁵

Ghost bison, ghost bears, ghost bighorns, ghost lynx, ghost pronghorns, ghost panthers,
ghost marmots, ghost owls: swirling and gathering, sweeping down,
Then the white man will be gone.¹⁴⁶

Snyder's note informs us that

"White man" here is not a racial designation, but a name for a certain set of mind. When we all become born-again natives of Turtle Island, then the "white man" will be gone.¹⁴⁷

Wovoka's Ghost Dance looks forward to a renewed contact with the American land, just as Smokey the Bear had prophesied 'the age of harmony of man and nature.' The vision of reinhabitation and environmental rejuvenation that follows employs Buddhist as well as Hindu imagery:

Then the white man will be gone.
butterflies on slopes of grass and aspen—
thunderheads the deep blue of Krishna
rise on rainbows
and falling shining rain
each drop—
tiny people gliding slanting down:
a little buddha seated in each pearl
and join the million waving grass-seed-buddhas
on the ground.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p.80.

¹⁴⁵ Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning*, p.157.

¹⁴⁶ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p.80.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p.161.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., pp.80-81.

An unfinished screenplay entitled ‘Darma’s Bodhi,’ on which Snyder collaborated with David Padwa between 1969 and 1970, also shows a conscious desire to combine Buddhist and Native American material in his writing, and suggests that the syncretism of such material may create a religious framework conducive to reinhabitation and environmental rejuvenation. In a letter to Snyder, Padwa described the ‘basic idea’ for the screenplay:

(1) to ring the bell of the teaching on non-self by (2) retelling the story of Daruma and Eka (3) as taking place among the new world Indians (4) at the time of old world in-migration, (5) within a modest production budget[.]¹⁴⁹

The story referred to is an episode from the life of Bodhidharma (Daruma in Japanese). Bodhidharma meditated for nine years in a cave near Shaolin Temple in China. Dazu Huike (Eka in Japanese) wished to become Bodhidharma’s student and waited outside the cave for a week trying to attract Bodhidharma’s attention. After receiving no recognition, Huike is said to have cut off his arm and presented it to Bodhidharma as a sign of his dedication. Huike eventually became Bodhidharma’s successor and the second Patriarch of Chan. Snyder and Padwa planned to transplant this Chinese legend to a North American landscape.

Snyder was to write three scenes of the screenplay: ‘Dharma [sic] and Emperor Wu, The Shamans, The meeting of Sanchez and Eka’.¹⁵⁰ Of the notes and drafts held at Snyder’s archive, most seem to refer to ‘The Shamans’ scene, in which several Native American medicine men and healers discuss Darma, a shaman who, like Bodhidharma, sits in a cave in a mountain canyon. Darma’s religious practices are described both in Buddhist and Native American terms: a hand-written note describes him sitting at ‘zazen’, while another note describes him as being ‘on a super vision-quest’ and ‘communing w/ spirits.’ Black Bear, one of the shamans, describes him making ‘medicine [...] out of nothing’, ‘medicine’ suggesting Native American religious practices and ‘nothing’ suggesting Buddhist ideas of void. Black Bear goes on to describe Darma as ‘the great Trickster, Coyote [...] in the shape of a man.’ Significantly, Darma’s ethnicity is made hard to pinpoint. Another hand-written note describes

¹⁴⁹ David Padwa to Gary Snyder, 1 October [1969], GSP II 141:67.

¹⁵⁰ David Padwa to Gary Snyder, 29 December 1969, GSP II 141:69.

Darma as ‘a Yaqui or Tarahumaran’ but he is also ‘maybe half-white.’ He has ‘no specific tribal mark’, Snyder writes, making it clear that his religious insight should not be tied to any individual tribe, ethnicity or culture. His religion is shown to be a new form of syncretism. The character Sanchez notes that the Yaqui ‘have kept their old religion, and taken our Christian Teaching, and made of it something new,’ but Darma ‘has gone beyond both.’¹⁵¹

Darma’s religious insights have an environmental dimension. The shaman Earth Tongue has a dream prophesying the ecological destruction caused by white settlers:

This land will be swept like a dust storm by white men riding in wagons. The game will be dead and the bones of dead animals stink to the sky
the sky will be foul and the water turn bitter.

It is with this vision in mind that Black Bear says of Darma, ‘Such a one could cure the ground itself, if it took sick and shook.’¹⁵² The idea that a religious vision that syncretized Buddhist and Native American elements might provide an antidote to the environmental destruction caused by ‘white men’ anticipates ‘The Hump-backed Flute Player.’ Snyder clearly had such hopes for his syncretic vision in this period.

¹⁵¹ Gary Snyder and David Padwa, ‘Darma’s Bodhi’, Screenplay and Notes, ca. 1970, MS GSP I 6:17, n. pag.

¹⁵² Ibid.

4. The Cross-fertilization of Hua-yen and Scientific Ecology

In April 1974 Snyder sent the manuscript of *Turtle Island* to his publishers New Directions. In the covering letter he described the collection as a ‘tentative cross-fertilization of Buddhist ideas of interpenetration (the Avatamsaka philosophy) and the elegant ecological thinking of the Odum brothers, Howard and Eugene’.¹ The Avatamsaka (or Hua-yen) school of Mahayana Buddhism was established in China during the Tang Dynasty, and is based on the teachings of the Avatamsaka Sutra. Eugene Odum (1913-2002) and his brother Howard T. Odum (1924-2002) were probably the two most important ecosystem ecologists of the second half of the twentieth century. This chapter will explore the cross-fertilization of Hua-yen Buddhism and scientific ecology in Snyder’s work of the 1970s and 1980s. In addition to the writing of the Odum brothers, I examine the scientific writing of Ramón Margalef (1919-2004) and James Lovelock (b.1919), both of whom Snyder refers to in his published work. A letter of 1975 shows that Snyder associated Margalef’s work with that of H.T. Odum, attributing ‘a curious poetry’ to ‘the work of both men’. In the letter, Snyder mistakenly identifies Margalef as ‘Odum’s teacher’,² while in fact Margalef acknowledged he had been ‘strongly influenced’ by both Odum brothers.³ Lovelock’s work, like that of Margalef and H.T. Odum, applies elements of cybernetics to ecology, and Snyder discusses Lovelock, Margalef and Eugene Odum together in his 1975 paper ‘The Politics of Ethnopoetics.’ The importance of Lovelock’s Gaia Hypothesis to Snyder is attested to by the title of his 1979 poetic sequence *Little Songs for Gaia*.

While Snyder’s yoking of Buddhism and scientific ecology is innovative, the association of Buddhism with modern science more generally had been a salient feature of Buddhist modernism since its beginnings (McMahan devotes a whole chapter to it). Soyen

¹ Gary Snyder to New Directions, 6 April 1974, GSP II 2:54.

² Gary Snyder to Jerry Brown, 22 January 1975, GSP II 1:32.

³ Ramón Margalef, *Perspectives in Ecological Theory* (Chicago, 1968), p.vi. Margalef here identifies the Odum brothers as ‘former students’ of G. Evelyn Hutchinson, whose influence Margalef also acknowledges. It is possible that Snyder misread this as Margalef identifying the Odum brothers as his own students.

Shaku—who, it will be remembered from the previous chapter, had taught D.T Suzuki and Shokatsu Shaku, Sokei-an Sasaki’s teacher—argued that ‘Buddha’s teachings are in exact agreement with the doctrines of modern science’.⁴ Sokei-an Sasaki expressed similar sentiments when he wrote that ‘Buddhism can be illustrated by modern science’.⁵ The most influential Western figure in the association of Buddhism with science was the German-American author Paul Carus, whose most well-known work was *The Gospel of Buddha* (1894), a selection of excerpts from Buddhist scriptures arranged to resemble the chapter-and-verse structure of the Bible. Carus added six chapters of his own which stressed Buddhism’s consonance with science, and he wrote elsewhere that ‘Buddhism is a religion which recognizes no other revelation except the truth that can be proved by science’.⁶ Carus’ own Christianity had been undermined by its apparent incompatibility with modern science, and the tendency in Buddhist modernism to assert Buddhism’s consonance with science can be seen as an attempt to exempt Buddhism from the scientific critiques against which Christianity was having to defend itself.⁷ Snyder was familiar with the work of both Soyen Shaku and Carus in the 1950s, and a journal entry shows that he believed their work to have influenced D.T. Suzuki.⁸

In *The Gospel of Buddha*, according to McMahan, Carus aimed to ‘further the development of a universal, cosmic religion’ which would draw on Buddhism, modern science, and certain aspects of Christianity.⁹ As such, his project resembles Suzuki’s and Watts’ presentation of Zen in Transcendentalist terms of universal religion. There is, however, a tension between Carus’ scientific Buddhism and the more Romantic inflections of Suzuki’s and Watts’ Buddhist modernism. McMahan writes that more Romantically inclined Buddhist modernists incorporated ‘the dharma into [...] narratives of suspicion toward the mechanized

⁴ Soyen Shaku, *Zen for Americans: Including the Sutra of Forty-two Chapters* (1913; repr. New York, 1993), p.122.

⁵ Sokei-an Sasaki, ‘Sokei-an Says’, *Zen Notes* i, 2 (February 1954), 1-2, pp.1-2.

⁶ Paul Carus, *Buddhism and its Christian Critics* (Chicago, 1897), p.114.

⁷ For a fuller discussion of Carus, see McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, pp.101-107. My account here is indebted to McMahan’s.

⁸ Snyder’s Journal, 1956-8, GSP I 84:3, 10 June 1956.

⁹ McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, p.106.

worldview of scientific rationalism'.¹⁰ It was seen in the previous chapter that Watts presented Zen as an antidote to the Western 'imperialistic mechanization of the natural world',¹¹ and Suzuki repeatedly characterizes Zen as anti-rationalist, as 'decidedly not a system founded upon logic and analysis.'¹² McMahan sees this 'constitutive tension' as central to Buddhist modernism,¹³ and this tension will be seen in Snyder's work.

Hua-yen Buddhism

The period during which the Hua-yen school was established in China spanned roughly the seventh century, the same period when Chan was firmly established in China.¹⁴ The two schools should not be regarded as mutually exclusive; Hua-yen philosophy exerted an important influence on all the five major schools of Chan.¹⁵ Put simply, Hua-yen presents a vision of 'the entire cosmos as one single nexus of conditions in which everything simultaneously depends on, and is dependent on, everything else.'¹⁶ According to Thomas Cleary, 'The dialect of Hua-yen philosophy is consummated in the doctrine of the four realms of reality, comprehending both conventional and absolute reality.' These four realms are 'the realm of phenomena, the realm of noumenon (which means the principle of emptiness), the realm of non-interference between noumenon and phenomena, and the realm of non-interference among phenomena.'¹⁷ He continues, 'the non-interference of noumenon and phenomena simply means that the relative or conditional existence of things is not opposed to their absolute emptiness'.¹⁸ Implicit in the doctrine of the non-interference of noumenon and phenomena is the doctrine of non-interference among phenomena. The Hua-yen scholar Yanshou (904-975) describes this realm as follows:

¹⁰ Ibid., p.77.

¹¹ Watts, 'Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen', p.5.

¹² Suzuki, *Introduction to Zen*, p.38.

¹³ McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, p.11.

¹⁴ Thomas Cleary, *Entry Into the Inconceivable: An Introduction to Hua-yen Buddhism* (Honolulu, 1983), pp.10-11.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.17.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.2.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.24.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.25.

Since phenomena are merged by means of noumenon, causing them to be without division, in accord with the universal permeation of noumenon, one enters all, and in accord with the inclusiveness of noumenon, all enter one.¹⁹

‘In terms of their phenomenal or apparent aspect,’ Cleary writes, ‘things retain individuality, while at the same time in terms of their noumenal or empty aspect things pervade and contain the universe.’²⁰ Barnhill neatly summarizes this ‘nondualistic view of the individual and the whole’ as countering ‘the extremes of atomism and monism.’²¹

If all this seems rather obtuse, it will be useful to describe the Hua-yen vision in terms of its most commonly evoked metaphor, the net of Indra:

The net of Indra is a net of jewels: not only does each jewel reflect all the other jewels but the reflections of all the jewels in each jewel also contain the reflections of all the other jewels, ad infinitum. This “infinity of infinities” represents the interidentification and interpenetration of all things[.]²²

Snyder would evoke Indra’s net as an image of the interconnections within ecosystems.

The Avatamsaka Sutra provides alternative images of mutual interpenetration. Just as each individual jewel within Indra’s net reflects and therefore contains all the others while retaining its individual identity, a single atom is said to contain all objects in the universe.²³ This image would have reminded Snyder of Blake’s ‘World in a Grain of Sand.’ Snyder’s Hua-yen-inflected poetry would explore the relation of microcosm and macrocosm symbolized by this image, as would Rexroth’s poetry, which will be discussed in relation to Snyder’s at the end of this chapter.

Hua-yen and Ecology in Snyder’s Published Prose

In a journal entry from June 1956, published in *Earth House Hold*, Snyder meditates on the ‘connecting truths hidden in Zen, Avatamsaka and Tantra’, which are all ‘closely historically

¹⁹ Quoted in *Ibid.*, p.30.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.31.

²¹ David L. Barnhill, ‘Gary Snyder’s Ecosocial Buddhism’, *How Much is Enough? Buddhism, Consumerism, and the Human Environment*, ed. Richard K. Payne (Somerville, 2010), 83-120, p.93.

²² Cleary, *Entry Into the Inconceivable*, p.37.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.4.

related'. He refers particularly to Avatamsaka's influence on Zen which was mentioned above, writing that Zen was 'founded on Avatamsaka, and the net-network of things'. In this brief, rather opaque entry, Snyder argues that all three schools of Buddhism promote an attitude of selflessness which he calls a 'love relationship'.²⁴ Snyder elaborated on the ethical implications of Avatamsaka in 'Buddhist Anarchism'. Here he repeats his assertion of the link between Zen and Avatamsaka, describing the latter as 'the intellectual statement of Zen'. Avatamsaka philosophy, he writes, 'sees the universe as a vast, inter-related network in which all objects and creatures are necessary and holy.' Snyder is more concerned here with the non-interference among phenomena than with the relation of phenomena to noumenon or emptiness. This ontological vision for Snyder implies the ethical stance of the Bodhisattva ideal, the resolve of the enlightened being to remain in the realm of samsara, living 'by the sufferer's standard' and 'aiding those who suffer.' As was noted previously, 'Buddhist Anarchism' is primarily concerned with co-opting Buddhism into a programme of 'radical social change'. There is, however, an implicit ecological dimension to Snyder's argument. He describes the moral action of the Bodhisattva as working 'ultimately toward the true community (sangha) of "all beings."' ²⁵ In extending the idea of sangha, which usually refers to a Buddhist monastic community, to include all beings, not just humans, Snyder anticipates the idea of a community which includes animals and plants that he will develop more fully in his 1970 essay 'The Wilderness.'²⁶

In his 1969 essay 'Poetry and the Primitive,' Snyder makes the link between Hua-yen interdependence and the natural world more explicit. Towards the end of the essay he asserts, 'It is clear that the empirically observable interconnectedness of nature is but a corner of the vast "jewelled net" which moves from without to within.'²⁷ Indra's net, the principal image of Hua-yen Buddhism, is identified with the systems of the natural world. What is more, the words 'empirically observable' suggest that a modern scientific outlook is consonant with the

²⁴ Snyder, *Earth House Hold*, pp.34-5.

²⁵ Snyder, 'Buddhist Anarchism', pp.11-12.

²⁶ Barnhill discusses Snyder's extension of the concept of sangha, 'Gary Snyder's Ecosocial Buddhism', p.103.

²⁷ Snyder, *Earth House Hold*, p.129.

metaphysical and ontological stance of Hua-yen, although specific links between Hua-yen and scientific ecology are not made.

In ‘Four Changes,’ discussed briefly in the previous chapter, Snyder links Hua-yen Buddhism to a spirit of environmental activism. He argues that, in order to combat the environmental problems of pollution, population and excessive energy consumption, we must not only adopt his inclusive notion of sangha and become ‘good member[s] of the great community of living creatures’,²⁸ but view ourselves as part of the interdependent net of Hua-yen Buddhism:

To live lightly on the earth, to be aware and alive, to be free of egotism, to be in contact with plants and animals, starts with simple concrete acts. The inner principle is the insight that we are interdependent energy-fields of great potential wisdom and compassion—expressed in each person as a superb mind, a handsome and complex body, and the almost magical capacity for language.²⁹

The association of interdependence in the natural world with energy has several resonances. It suggests the Daoist concept of qi or life force, as well as various esoteric and New Age concepts of energy. It may also suggest the idea of an ecosystem as a network of energy flow, as described by the Odum brothers, although Snyder had not yet begun to refer specifically to their work. The wide semantic range of the word ‘energy’ explains in part why Snyder was later able to approach ecological ideas of energy flow in religious terms.

In the 1970 essay ‘The Wilderness’ Snyder does refer specifically to Eugene Odum, and begins to link scientific ecology to his Buddhist ethics. He cites Odum’s definition of ‘biomass’ as ‘stored information in the cells and in the genes.’³⁰ The idea of natural systems transmitting information will become important later, as Snyder comes to view poetry as part of the wider pattern of information transmission in natural systems. In the present context, Snyder uses the idea to argue for a stance of ecocentric humility. According to Odum, Snyder writes, ‘there is more information of a higher order of sophistication and complexity stored in a few square

²⁸ Snyder, *Turtle Island*, p.97.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.99.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.107.

yards of forest than there is in all the libraries of mankind’ and in ‘this total information context, man may not be necessarily the highest or most interesting product.’ Next, Snyder cites scientific ecology as agreeing with his inclusive notion of sangha:

Ecologists talk about the ecology of oak communities, or pine communities. They *are* communities.³¹

He goes on to argue that these communities must be represented by human political institutions.

In the 1972 essay ‘Energy is Eternal Delight’ whose title, quoting Blake,³² suggests another resonance of the word ‘energy,’ Snyder implicitly links Odum to Hua-yen interdependence:

The Buddhists teach respect for all life, and for wild systems. Man’s life is totally dependent on an interpenetrating network of wild systems. Eugene Odum, in his useful paper “The Strategy of Ecosystem Development,” points out how the United States has the characteristics of a young ecosystem.³³

While the arguments of the first and third sentence here are attributed to Buddhists and to Odum (as a representative of scientific ecology) respectively, the second sentence is not explicitly attributed to either. The idea of interpenetration is used to bridge the Buddhist and ecological aspects of Snyder’s argument, implying the compatibility of both Buddhism’s and ecology’s formulations of interconnectedness.

³¹ Ibid., p.108.

³² Certain ironies surround the evocation of Blake in ecologically engaged writing. At his most Platonic, Blake is disdainful of the ‘Vegetable Universe’, which he sees as the ‘faint shadow’ of the ‘real & eternal world’ of the imagination (*The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman [1981; repr. Berkeley, 2008], p.231). *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, from which the phrase ‘Energy is Eternal Delight’ is taken, is more easily reconciled to Snyder’s ecocentric stance. Blake is at his most ecocentric at the end of this volume, where he proclaims that ‘every thing that lives is Holy’ (Ibid., pp.34, 45). His definition of energy as eternal delight is part of an argument against the dualism of ‘All Bibles or sacred codes’, and Blake asserts that ‘Man has no Body distinct from his Soul’. Not only does Blake’s spirit of religious dissent chime with Snyder’s antipathy towards Christianity, but his antidualism here has some similarities with Mahayana Buddhism’s denial of various dualisms, not to mention the anti-Cartesianism of much deep ecology. Blake’s disdain for the ‘dark Satanic Mills’ (Ibid., p.95) of the industrial revolution provides another point of contact with the environmental argument of Snyder’s essay, and Snyder explicitly evokes Blake at the end of the essay after having defined the immature ecosystem of the United States as ‘the cancer of exploitation-heavy-industry-perpetual growth’.

³³ Snyder, *Turtle Island*, p.104.

Snyder's 1975 paper 'The Politics of Ethnopoetics' is noteworthy because it mentions several scientific ecologists, including Eugene Odum, who were to influence Snyder's thinking, even if their work is not explicitly linked to Buddhism here. (As will be demonstrated with archival material later, Snyder read the work of most of these figures prior to 1975.) The paper was given at the Ethnopoetics Conference at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee in April 1975, and was first published in 1976 in the journal *Alcheringa*. Snyder here evokes scientific ecology in a formulation of an ecopoetics, a model of 'songs that will speak for plants, mountains, animals and children',³⁴ although the paper ranges into political matters. He goes on to define climax, the final stage in the succession of an ecosystem, 'following Ramon Margalef and others', as a state of 'maximum diversity and maximum stability in a natural system.' This vision of stability is used to mount an implicit attack on the concept of perpetual economic growth.³⁵ He then speaks in 'Dr. Eugene Odum's terms' in order to contrast the unnaturalness of civilization with primitive cultures, which resemble climax ecosystems:

[...] what we call civilization is an early succession phase; immature, monoculture system. What we call the primitive is a mature system with deep capacities for stability and protection built into it.³⁶

Later in the paper, he refers to the Gaia Hypothesis, formulated by James Lovelock and Sidney Epton in their paper 'The Quest for Gaia.' Lovelock and Epton argued that life on earth had evolved in tandem with the atmosphere, oceans and land surfaces to 'form part of a giant system which could be seen as a single organism.'³⁷ The terms Snyder uses to describe the Gaia Hypothesis, actually quoting another ecologist, perhaps suggest Hua-yen philosophy: 'This grand scale synergy of green plants in the atmosphere is the result of millions of years of evolution of life and of the atmosphere which are therefore closely *interdependent*.'³⁸ Following Lovelock and Epton, Snyder suggests that producing humanity may have been

³⁴ Snyder, 'The Politics of Ethnopoetics', *Alcheringa: Ethnopoetics* i, 2 (1976), 13-22, p.21.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.17.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ James Lovelock and Sidney Epton, 'The Quest for Gaia', *New Scientist* lxxv, 935 (6 February 1975), 304-6, p.304.

³⁸ Snyder, 'The Politics of Ethnopoetics', pp.20-21. My italics.

Gaia's 'one mistake.'³⁹ This introduces a key question posed by both Snyder's scientific source material and his own vision of the interpenetration of wild systems: is humanity part of, or apart from the interpenetrating networks of nature?

Finally, Snyder quotes Howard T. Odum, who describes information pathways in natural systems as 'tiny energies', and Snyder suggests that this idea can form the basis for a 'Poetics of the earth.'⁴⁰ Snyder describes language as '[c]oncentrations of communication-energy', viewing human language as part of the natural world's network of energy pathways. As such, Snyder here uses scientific ecology to challenge the dichotomy between human culture and nature that he had suggested a page earlier.

In his 1976 essay 'Re-inhabitation,' Snyder explicitly states his syncretism of scientific ecology and Hua-yen philosophy: 'The biological-ecological sciences have been laying out (implicitly) a spiritual dimension', Snyder writes, and we 'must find our way to seeing the mineral cycles, the water cycles, air cycles, nutrient cycles, as sacramental.' This spiritual dimension is realized in 'Avatamsaka ("Flower Wreath") jewelled-net-interpenetration-ecological-systems-emptiness-consciousness'. Treading Hua-yen's middle path between atomism and holism, Snyder explains that this 'consciousness' equates to the realization that

There is no "self" to be found [...] and yet oddly enough, there is. Part of you is out there waiting to come into you[.]

By realizing that part of oneself is always 'out there' in the world of nature's interpenetrating networks, the implicit spiritual dimension of the biological-ecological sciences is realized.⁴¹

Snyder's 1990 essay 'Nets of Beads, Webs of Cells: Ecosystems, Organisms, and the First Precept in Buddhism' attests to his enduring interest in the connections between Hua-yen and ecology. Here he writes that '[t]he web of relationships in an ecosystem makes one think of the Hua-yen Buddhist image of Indra's net'.⁴² But, importantly, at the end of this essay Snyder

³⁹ Ibid., p.20.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.21.

⁴¹ Snyder, *The Old Ways*, pp.63-4.

⁴² Snyder, *A Place in Space*, p.67.

argues that while Hua-yen philosophy and the injunction against hurting and taking life in Buddhism's First Precept might imply an ecocentric stance, Buddhist morality and metaphysics are not sufficient in themselves to promote ecologically sensitive action:

Even as the Buddhists were practicing vegetarianism and kindness to creatures, wild nature in China suffered significant species extinction and wholesale deforestation between the fifth and the fifteenth centuries A.D. India too was vastly deforested well before modern times. Now, with insights from the ecological sciences, we know that we must think on a scale of a whole watershed, a natural system, a habitat.⁴³

A green Buddhism must be informed by the scientific insights of ecology, while ecology may glean useful moral lessons from Buddhism.

Snyder's Scientific Sources

The following pages examine four ecological scientific texts that Snyder refers to in his published prose: Eugene Odum's 'The Strategy of Ecosystem Development' (1969), Howard T. Odum's *Environment, Power, and Society* (1971), Ramón Margalef's *Perspectives in Ecological Theory* (1968) and James Lovelock and Sidney Epton's 'The Quest for Gaia' (1975). Material from Snyder's archive is used, where available, to describe his responses to these texts as he read them, and they are examined in the order in which Snyder read them rather than the order in which they were published. As well as pointing out potential points of contact with Hua-yen philosophy in these texts, it will be shown that all four of them engage with the Romantic trope of humanity's alienation from, and potential for reintegration with, nature, albeit in the specific historical context of twentieth-century ecological crisis. It was seen in the previous chapter that both D.T. Suzuki and Alan Watts presented Zen as offering an antidote to Western man's alienation from nature. The fact that the writing of scientific ecologists of the 1960s and 1970s also engaged with this trope establishes a point of contact between ecology and Buddhism, and partly accounts for Snyder's syncretism of the two.

⁴³ Ibid., p.73.

Eugene Odum's 'The Strategy of Ecosystem Development'

It was seen earlier that Snyder refers to Eugene Odum as early as 1970, and specifically to his 1969 paper 'The Strategy of Ecosystem Development' in 1972. Eugene Odum was one of the most influential ecologists of the post-World War II period and, according to James H. Brown, 'the emergence of ecosystem science as a major subdiscipline of ecology in the second half of this [last] century can be attributed in large part to Odum's energetic leadership.' For Brown, the importance of Odum's paper is twofold. Firstly, it attempted to bridge the gap between two competing schools of American ecology that had developed at the time of writing: ecosystem and evolutionary ecology. Odum 'tried to develop relationships between, on the one hand, the processes of energy flow and nutrient cycling as they traditionally had been studied by ecosystem scientists, and, on the other hand, the phenomena of population growth, community organization, and adaptation as they had been studied by evolutionary ecologists.'⁴⁴ Snyder would combine accounts of energy flow and nutrient cycling with an evolutionary narrative in his poem 'Towards Climax,' an early draft of which was dedicated to Eugene Odum and his brother Howard, to be discussed below.

The second important innovation of Odum's paper identified by Brown is the application of concepts of successional process to human ecology. The process of succession, whereby an ecological system develops towards a state of stability and equilibrium known as climax, had been documented in animal and plant communities, but not in human communities. Successional process, it had earlier been argued, could best be observed in 'natural systems [...] defined as wild and as little influenced by human activities as possible.'⁴⁵ This view is exemplified by Frederic Clements' classic 1936 paper 'Nature and Structure of the Climax.' It is worth turning briefly to Clements' paper as Odum's paper expands on Clements' concept of the climax, and the idea of climax is referred to by Snyder several times. All the ecosystems Clements points to as examples of climax are untouched, or little touched, by humanity: 'oak-

⁴⁴ James H. Brown, 'Methodological Advances: New Approaches and Methods in Ecology', *Foundations of Ecology: Classic Papers with Commentaries*, ed. Leslie A. Real and James H. Brown (Chicago, 1991), 445-455, p.452.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.453.

hickory woodland [...] almost untouched by the ax', or the 'primeval' forests of the American Northwest.⁴⁶ 'Man alone', Clements writes, 'can destroy the stability of the climax'.⁴⁷ In defining the state of nature epitomized by climax as only occurring apart from the influence of humanity, Clements asserts the dualism of man and nature which in Chapter Two was shown to be at the heart of the ideal of wilderness. It is significant that Clements looks to the forests of the Northwest, the same region that John Muir had written of, to provide examples of climax. Odum's innovation was to argue 'for an ecology that would include humans and all their activities as integral parts of ecosystems.'⁴⁸

Odum does not entirely dispense with Clements' dualistic terms, but he does imagine that that dualism can be undone through an understanding of natural systems. The abstract of his paper reads: 'An understanding of ecological succession provides a basis for resolving man's conflict with nature.'⁴⁹ In the body of the paper that 'conflict' is specified as 'environmental crisis', but the more general language of the abstract implies the old Romantic trope of alienation from, and subsequent reintegration with, the natural world. Odum sees humanity at the present moment as standing in contrast to the maturity and stability of the climax community; while the latter is defined by 'the strategy of "maximum protection" (that is, trying to achieve maximum support of complex biomass structure)', the former tends to aim toward a 'goal of "maximum production" (trying to obtain the highest possible yield)'.⁵⁰ Humanity achieves high yield 'by developing and maintaining early successional types of ecosystem, usually monoculture.'⁵¹ Humanity must aim to model its society on the climax ecosystem; man must 'pass through the present rapid-growth stage, to which he is clearly well adapted, to the ultimate equilibrium-density stage, for which he as yet shows little

⁴⁶ Frederic E. Clements, 'Nature and Structure of the Climax', *Journal of Ecology*, i, 4 (February 1936), 252-84, p.253.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.256.

⁴⁸ Brown, 'Methodological Advances', p.453.

⁴⁹ Eugene Odum, 'The Strategy of Ecosystem Development', *Science New Series* clxiv, 3877 (18 April 1969), 262-70, p.262.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.262-3.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.266.

understanding and to which he now shows little tendency to adapt.’⁵² By associating production and rapid growth with immaturity, Odum undermines Enlightenment ideals of civilizational progress. It was seen earlier that Snyder paraphrases Odum’s argument in ‘Energy is Eternal Delight’ and ‘The Politics of Ethnopoetics,’ and in the latter uses it to support his own primitivism.

In order for humanity to reintegrate with nature, Odum advocates a kind of holistic thinking that for Snyder would resonate with Hua-yen ideas of interconnectedness. ‘The “one problem, one solution approach” is no longer adequate,’ writes Odum, ‘and must be replaced by some form of ecosystem analysis that considers man as a part of, not apart from, the environment.’ He continues, ‘Society needs, and must find as quickly as possible, a way to deal with the landscape as a whole, so that manipulative skills (that is, technology) will not run too far ahead of our understanding of the impact of change.’⁵³

H.T. Odum’s *Environment, Power, and Society*

Snyder’s journal shows that he read H.T. Odum’s *Environment, Power, and Society* between August and October 1972.⁵⁴ Odum’s book describes human systems in terms of the ‘basic laws of energy and matter’.⁵⁵ In 1957, Odum had presented ‘the first relatively complete documentation of energy flows in a natural system’ in his paper ‘Trophic Structure and Productivity of Silver Springs, Florida’ which presented ‘the ecosystem as a series of boxes connected by arrows, each defined as a transfer function.’⁵⁶ In *Environment, Power, and Society*, Odum applies the same methodology to human systems—economic, political and religious—describing them in terms of energy flow. Human systems are presented as subsets of natural systems:

⁵² Ibid., p.269.

⁵³ Ibid., p.267.

⁵⁴ Snyder’s Journal, 16 August 1972-29 August 1973 (Book 8), GSP I 87:3, 21 August 1972, 23 December 1972.

⁵⁵ Howard T. Odum, *Environment, Power, and Society* (New York, 1971), p.vii.

⁵⁶ Robert K. Peet, ‘Case Studies in Natural Systems: Lessons from Nature’, *Foundations of Ecology*, eds. Real and Brown, 605-15, pp.607-8.

In its structure and function, nature consists of animals, plants, microorganisms, and human societies. These living parts are in turn joined by invisible pathways over which pass chemical materials that cycle round and round being used and reused [...] and over which flow potential energies that cannot be reused [...]. The network of these pathways forms an organized system from the parts. In addition, the more complex systems for self-control have specialized communication circuits such as the behavioural cues passing between animals. In the parts of the system involving human interchange, there are special kinds of information exchange, such as human language, and special units of economic exchange such as dollars. [...] The small ecological systems, the large panoramas that include civilized man, and the whole biosphere of the planet earth—all receive only certain amounts of energy. Hence we approach man and nature by studying the limited energy of environmental systems.⁵⁷

The idea of the self-organizing system is borrowed from cybernetics, and by identifying such systems within the natural and human worlds, Odum implicitly asserts the essential unity of man and nature. However, Odum describes the current state of human civilization as being in a state of disharmony with nature. He talks in terms of ecological crisis. We live, he writes, in a ‘world of disturbed nature’ and his book ‘consider[s] the pressing problem of survival in our time’.⁵⁸ The primary cause of this imbalance is industrial society’s over-reliance on fossil fuels: ‘Nothing about man’s present system is balanced, for his inputs come from geological storage or from the energies that used to go to balanced systems.’⁵⁹

While making grandiose claims about the purely societal benefits of his methodology—he claims his analysis can settle the ‘age-old argument about which society is best, the highly centralized one or the decentralized one’⁶⁰—the main thrust of Odum’s argument is that an analysis of the power flows between human systems and the natural world can facilitate the reestablishment of balance between man and nature. He promises to provide the model for ‘a reasonable system coupling nature with [...] culture’.⁶¹ Odum’s book then, like his brother’s 1969 paper, evokes the old Romantic theme of alienation from, and promised reintegration with, nature. His suggestions of how to achieve this reintegration vacillate between a quasi-

⁵⁷ H.T., Odum, *Environment, Power, and Society*, p.1.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.281, vii.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.288.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.213.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.274.

primitivist advocacy of a return to a more agrarian system with smaller cities,⁶² and a more instrumental view of nature:

[...] the exciting possibilities for great future progress lie in manipulating natural systems into entirely new designs for the good of man and nature. The inventory of the species of the earth is really an immense bin of parts available to the ecological engineer.⁶³

Such language would upset many a deep ecologist.

Snyder's enthusiasm for Odum's book is expressed in a letter of October 1972 in which he recommends the book to Allen Ginsberg 'for incredible theoretical comprehension—adamantine vocabulary—insights and facts.'⁶⁴ In January 1975 Snyder again extolled the virtues of Odum's book, this time to the newly elected Governor of California, Jerry Brown. Snyder's letter suggests that his understanding of the science behind Odum's book was limited—'I don't know much about systems theory'—but he was impressed by its 'underlying set of value/conclusions', which he defines as follows:

In essence, applying energy-flow analysis to contemporary industrialism, he concludes that there is nothing to be gained from pursuing high energy-consumption modes of living [...] Strip-mining, oil-shale extraction, would be net energy losses. Nuclear power might not only be a net energy loss but a fearful danger in the long run because of the difficulty of storing radioactive waste. Thus, the annual income of solar energy to the planet must be our basic long-range resource. A stable and fulfilling society can be built on this base, he believes, by a combination of sophisticated technologies and gradually lowered populations. More people would live by agriculture and farms would become smaller and more diversified. The fossil-fuel era would come to be seen in retrospect as an unhealthy, over-speeded anomaly.

Snyder's implicit endorsement of Odum's advocacy of 'sophisticated technologies' suggests he was not overly put off by Odum's instrumental language. In writing to Brown, he demonstrates hope that Odum's ideas of how to construct a more ecologically sound society might be seriously considered by elected officials, although Snyder's statement later in the letter to Governor Brown that a 'suggestion [...] hovers, that religious and aesthetic modes of human

⁶² Ibid., p.308.

⁶³ Ibid., p.279.

⁶⁴ Gary Snyder to Allen Ginsberg, 22 October 1972, Morgan ed., *The Selected Letters of Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder*, p.144.

self-realization would somewhat supplant the dreams and pleasures now built around accumulating and consuming in our society' is more Snyder's conclusion than Odum's.⁶⁵

Odum's political stance would by no means have been wholly endorsed by Snyder. The application of energetics to human politics at times leads Odum to some unnervingly conformist conclusions. He writes that 'basic energetics require some loss of freedom of control over one's power budget', but that through this 'loss of freedom the individual gains something vastly more important to him—the opportunity to specialize'. He argues that 'subcultures' arise through a lack of understanding of this concept, and the desire for 'the state of high freedom from organization [...] carries them diametrically away from what they really want.'⁶⁶ Such an attitude could hardly be further from Snyder's anarchism and endorsement of the 'Great Subculture.'

Odum's calls later in the book for reform of the legal system in order to represent the interests of the natural world, however, do chime with Snyder. Odum argues that, 'Once the basic facts of planetary existence are understood', legal privilege will move away from land owners to protect 'individual rights and through this principle incorporate nature and man in the same system of right.'⁶⁷ The idea of a legal system that recognizes the rights of nature is similar to the idea Snyder had already developed in 'The Wilderness,' where he argues that 'we must find a way to [...] incorporate the other people—what the Sioux Indians called the creeping people, and the standing people, and the flying people, and the swimming people—into the councils of government.'⁶⁸

Two further points of contact between Howard Odum and Snyder are shown in Snyder's notes on Odum in his journal. Firstly, as mentioned briefly in the account of 'The Politics of Ethnopoetics' given above, Odum's belief that the 'information exchange' facilitated by human language can be described in terms of energy pathways suggested to Snyder a theoretical foundation for an ecopoetics. On 14 October 1972 Snyder writes,

⁶⁵ Gary Snyder to Jerry Brown, 22 January 1975, GSP II 1:32.

⁶⁶ H.T Odum, *Environment, Power, and Society*, pp.217-8.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.299-300.

⁶⁸ Snyder, *Turtle Island*, p.108.

‘Information has energy’, and below copies part of a sentence from Odum into his journal.⁶⁹ In the book, Odum had been discussing ‘information pathways’ in ecological systems:

The transmission of information is an important part of any complex system. A plant manager makes his company respond on the basis of a stock market report. A cell makes its biochemical machinery respond on the basis of codes received from its genes. An ecosystem makes its power flows respond on the basis of its memory storage, some of which are biological and some of which may be physical or in libraries, in records, in rocks, or in wood structure.⁷⁰

While information itself has tiny amounts of potential energy, its effect in a system is significant. Here is the quotation Snyder copied into his journal:

[...] the quality of this information (tiny energies in the right form) is so high that in the right control circuit it may obtain huge amplifications and control vast power flows.⁷¹

Snyder underlines the phrase ‘tiny energies in the right form.’ Underneath the quotation, Snyder writes:

A poem is alternative fuel for creative probes on the part of the society-network.

A poem is a net- -
a matrix- -

The following day a note in his journal reads, ‘Language as an energy system > poesy’.⁷² Odum’s book allows Snyder to view poetry as functioning as part of the energy flows of natural systems. The quotation from Odum was to be important to Snyder. He quotes it in ‘The Politics of Ethnopoetics’,⁷³ and entitled a section of his 1986 poetry collection *Left Out in the Rain* ‘Tiny Energies,’ using the Odum quotation as an epigraph.⁷⁴ Some of these poems will be analysed later in this chapter.

The final point of contact between H.T. Odum and Snyder is the linking of ecological and religious ideas. The idea of poetry as a ‘net’ suggests both the ecological networks of

⁶⁹ Snyder’s Journal, 1972-3, GSP I 87:3, 14 Oct 1972.

⁷⁰ H.T. Odum, *Environment, Power, and Society*, p.172.

⁷¹ Ibid. Quoted in Snyder’s Journal 1972-3, GSP I 87:3, 14 Oct 1972.

⁷² Snyder’s Journal, 1972-3, GSP I 87:3, 15 Oct 1972.

⁷³ Snyder, ‘The Politics of Ethnopoetics’, p.21.

⁷⁴ Snyder, *Left Out in the Rain: New Poems 1947-1985* (San Francisco, 1986), p.153.

energy transfer described by Odum, and the Hua-yen image of Indra's net. Snyder's journal suggests that he began to see Odum's ideas in Buddhist terms while he was reading the book. Underneath the note on the poem as a net or matrix, Snyder writes, 'but [...] the kōan in the context of the tradition fits best.' A kōan is a paradoxical anecdote or riddle contemplated by Zen practitioners. Snyder here suggests that Zen has found a form of language which best exemplifies the kind of concentration of energy that Odum describes.

Later that month, Snyder refers to Odum's description of inevitable energy loss in any system:

What gets lost in the heat drain?
Where does it go?
[...]
That the energy flow in the universe, entropy, goes "Nowhere"—
proof enough of the void—⁷⁵

The scientific theory of entropy is identified with Buddhist notions of 'Void.' Then on the same day Snyder writes, 'Just finishing H.T. Odum, Environment, Power, and Society. A vajra-book',⁷⁶ a vajra being a Buddhist ritual tool.

Odum himself links his ecological ideas to religious ideas, although not specifically Buddhist ones. Odum argues that the moral precepts of organized religion act as 'the master control systems' of the networks of energy flow within societies,⁷⁷ but networks of energy flow are also the subject matter of 'primitive' religion:

When man was a tiny part of the stable complex forest, his faith was in an umbrella-like energy system with God identified as the intelligence within the mechanisms of forest control, the system. Primitive forest peoples such as the early Druids of Europe had religious faith in the forest as a network of gods operating with intelligence. A stable forest actually is a system of compartments with networks, flows, and logic circuits that do constitute a form of intelligence beyond that of its individual humans. [...] If God is defined as the source of revealed truth and if such truth is defined by the complex network of man and nature in terms of its own survival [...] God becomes identifiable with the networks of which individuals are mere parts.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Snyder's Journal, 1972-3, GSP I 87:3, 23 Oct 1972. Snyder's underlining.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ H.T. Odum, *Environment, Power, and Society*, pp.239-40.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp.245, 247.

While Odum's theistic terms are not strictly consonant with Buddhism, it is not a huge leap of imagination to see a consonance between the idea of religion being concerned with the networks of man and nature's interrelatedness and the doctrine of interpenetration found in Hua-yen philosophy. The view of individuals as being 'mere parts' in the network of God brings to mind the relation of individual and whole expressed in the image of Indra's net.

Odum seems to waver between advocating a return to this primitive, ecocentric religion and advocating a new form of religion that would reflect humanity's changed relationship to energy networks. Citing Aldo Leopold's 'Land Ethic' and Lynn White Jr.'s article 'The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis,' Odum writes that

[...] the error of our recent religious faith [lies] in excluding the life of nature and its systems from our religious ethic. Whereas many of the earlier religions kept man in mutual allegiance with his life support, our fast development of urban culture on fossil fuels has moved further away from duty to nature as to oneself.⁷⁹

He imagines that 'some of God's older forms may have to be stored away until the simpler networks return, if they ever do.'⁸⁰ His tone suggests that he hopes they do. Yet elsewhere Odum imagines that 'a stabilization of [societal] change may allow the codification of yet unfound faiths that characterize the now new networks.' He imagines that 'new prophets will emerge for fresh religious adaptations to the complex modern systems' and ends the book asking, 'Prophet where art thou?'⁸¹ Attitudes of primitivism and progressivism jostle side by side in Odum's religious vision just as they do in Snyder's.

Ramón Margalef's *Perspectives in Ecological Theory*

It has been seen that Snyder referred to Ramón Margalef in 'The Politics of Ethnopoetics.' Snyder also refers to Margalef in the letter to Jerry Brown in which he discusses Howard Odum. He writes there that 'a striking number of non-scientific thinkers, especially on the west coast,' have discovered Margalef's 1968 book *Perspectives in Ecological Theory*, as well as

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.249.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.247.

⁸¹ Ibid., pp.308, 310.

Howard Odum's work.⁸² Snyder was in fact reading Margalef by March 1974, when he wrote in his journal, 'Thoughts begin to creep in from Margalef' and copied out several quotations from *Perspectives in Ecological Theory*.⁸³ Margalef's book is based on a series of four lectures delivered at the University of Chicago in 1966 which apply principles from cybernetics to ecosystems ecology.

Snyder copied out the following sentence into his journal, in which Margalef links the evolution of individual species to the succession of the ecosystems of which they are part:

By the natural process of succession, which is inherent in every ecosystem, the evolution of species is pushed—or sucked—in the direction taken by succession, in what has been called increasing maturity.⁸⁴

As Eugene Odum would, Margalef associates humanity with immature ecosystems, contrasting humanity's trajectory with the natural process of succession: 'The evolution of man has not been in the direction of passive adjustment to more mature ecosystems but is actively sustained through a regression of the rest of the biosphere.'⁸⁵ For Margalef, humanity is a disruptive influence on the natural teleology of evolution and succession: 'The evolutionary play was going on in the evolutionary theatre when as a part of the plot men entered, romping and stamping on the stage and bringing it almost to the point of collapse.'⁸⁶ Yet while humanity is disruptive, analogues for this disruption, such as fires and large grazers, exist in nature.⁸⁷

In 'The Politics of Ethnopoetics,' Snyder cites 'Ramon Margalef and others' in his argument against perpetual economic growth. Snyder links economic growth to 'single species rapid growth' in contrast to the 'maximum diversity and maximum stability' that characterizes a climax ecosystem.⁸⁸ (Margalef actually refrains from using the word 'climax,' but does

⁸² Gary Snyder to Jerry Brown, 22 January 1975, GSP II 1:32, p.2.

⁸³ Snyder's Journal, 3 September 1973-31 August 1974 (Book 9), GSP I 87:4, 25 March 1974.

⁸⁴ Margalef, *Perspectives in Ecological Theory*, p.81. Quoted in Snyder's Journal, 1973-4, GSP I 87:4, 25 March 1974.

⁸⁵ Margalef, *Perspectives in Ecological Theory*, p.97.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.96.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.47.

⁸⁸ Snyder, 'The Politics of Ethnopoetics', p.17.

define maturity in terms of diversity and stability.)⁸⁹ Snyder thus uses Margalef in a similar way to how he uses Eugene Odum: to implicitly challenge ideals of civilizational progress. His attack on economic growth would have had particular resonances in 1976, four years after the Club of Rome published *The Limits to Growth*, which used computer modelling to predict the collapse of the global civilization by the late twenty-first century.

Snyder found in Margalef's description of ecosystems as cycles of information part of the theoretical basis for an ecopoetics, just as he had found in Howard Odum. Margalef uses the word 'information' in the way it is used in cybernetics: it 'has to do with any posteriori restrictions of a priori probabilities.' Margalef continues:

Information contained in nature—why nature is as it is and not otherwise—allows a partial reconstruction of the past. [...] Organisms constitute a wonderful example, but this process of history-making and history-telling is by no means restricted to the organic world. The development of the meanders in a river, the increasing complexity of the earth's crust through successive epochs of orogenesis, are information-storing devices in the same manner genetic systems are.⁹⁰

Not only is information (in the specific cybernetic sense of the word) contained in the non-biotic elements of the natural world, but also in animal behaviour and in human cultural forms:

A third channel [of information] may be called 'ethological' (because ethology is the science of animal behaviour) or 'cultural'; it transmits what has been learned by individual activity or experience and is transmitted to future generation outside the genetic channel. This last channel had a negligible importance at the beginning of life but it is now increasing explosively. In it can be placed: formation of trails and burrows that are used by other individuals, accumulation of dead material, imprinting, imitative collective behavioural memory and formation of local traditions, and the legacy of tools and all cultural manifestation in man.⁹¹

Snyder would later link human methods of information transmission, namely language, with the marks left by animals on a landscape. In the essay 'Tawny Grammar,' he writes that 'language belongs to our biological nature and writing is just moose-tracks in the snow.'⁹²

In his journal, after writing 'Thoughts begin to creep in from Margalef', Snyder writes:

⁸⁹ Margalef, *Perspectives in Ecological Theory*, p.32.

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp.2-3.

⁹¹ Ibid., p.98.

⁹² Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*, p.69.

levels of organization
 miniaturization
 poetry, the top member of one sort of information chain⁹³

The idea of miniaturization as a feature of a poetics that imitates natural systems seems to have particularly appealed to Snyder. Later in the paragraph in which Margalef describes information contained in nature, he describes how information-storing mechanisms in nature tend towards miniaturization—‘The success of life springs from miniaturization’—and Snyder copies out this sentence later in the same journal entry.⁹⁴ The idea of miniaturization will be discussed later in relation to the ‘Tiny Energies’ section of poems in *Left Out in the Rain*.

One final aspect of Margalef’s account of succession deserves mention, as it will provide a useful tool for reading ‘Towards Climax’ and *Little Songs for Gaia* later in this chapter, as well as helping to link ecological ideas with Hua-yen. In his 1936 paper, Clements had described the climax as having ‘inherent unity’, and the word ‘unity’ recurs throughout the paper.⁹⁵ Margalef uses Clements’ own concept of the ‘ecotone,’ developed earlier in 1905,⁹⁶ to challenge this view of the inherent unity of an ecosystem:

[...] a word, ‘ecotone’, was introduced by Clements to designate the ambiguous boundary between patches. Happily enough, in the etymology of the word there is reference to tension—a suggestion of something dynamic that can give life to the patches on a map. Indeed, such boundaries must be considered places of tension where two organizations meet and exchange their respective components [...] In practice, however, ecotones often disappear when we look for them.⁹⁷

While some ecotones are clearly defined, such as those along shorelines, ‘more undulating boundaries are found in mature systems and less complicated frontiers in the less mature.’⁹⁸ In any case, the ambiguity of boundaries Margalef describes problematizes the definition of the ecosystem as a discrete unit. Any artificially defined boundary may prove to be arbitrary on closer inspection, although Margalef never categorically denies the unity of individual

⁹³ Snyder Journal, 1973-4, GSP I 87:4, 25 March 1974.

⁹⁴ Margalef, *Perspectives in Ecological Theory*, p.3. Quoted in Ibid.

⁹⁵ Clements, ‘Nature and Structure’, p.254.

⁹⁶ Clements, *Research Methods in Ecology* (Lincoln NE, 1905), p.181.

⁹⁷ Margalef, *Perspectives in Ecological Theory*, p.39.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.40.

ecosystems. As such, Margalef's account of the ecotone resonates with the middle path between atomism and holism trod by Hua-yen ontology.

There is no evidence that Snyder read Margalef specifically in these terms, although it will be seen that he does explore boundaries between ecosystems in his Buddhist-inflected poetry. Snyder's journal does show, however, that he made some attempt to translate Margalef's work into Buddhist terms while he was reading it. A note in his journal directly above the quotation on miniaturization reads, 'Information is like a kind of karma / merit'.⁹⁹

James Lovelock and Sidney Epton's 'The Quest for Gaia'

It was seen earlier that Snyder referred to Lovelock and Epton's paper 'The Quest for Gaia' in 'The Politics of Ethnopoetics'. By far the better known of these two scientists is Lovelock, who developed the controversial Gaia Hypothesis in the 1970s. The Gaia Hypothesis posited that the earth's atmosphere had evolved in tandem with life, forming a single, self-regulation system. Lovelock extended Clements' metaphor of the climax ecosystem as a 'complex organism'¹⁰⁰ to imagine the 'giant system' of the earth 'as a single organism'¹⁰¹ which he named Gaia, after the ancient Greek earth goddess. Like Clements' climax, Lovelock's Gaia served to maintain a 'steady state'.¹⁰² The Gaia Hypothesis was not widely accepted by the scientific community, who often criticized Lovelock's metaphorical language,¹⁰³ but it was enthusiastically taken up by many environmentalists. Snyder refers to Lovelock many times in his journals and correspondences from 1975. In July that year a brief note in his journal mentions 'Gaia' and 'James Lovelock'.¹⁰⁴ He wrote to Lovelock in the 1980s, giving him 'a proper account of [Gaia's] name', indicating a continuing interest in Lovelock's work.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ Snyder's Journal, 1973-4, GSP I 87:4, 25 March 1974.

¹⁰⁰ Clements, 'Nature and Structure', p.253.

¹⁰¹ Lovelock and Epton, 'The Quest for Gaia', p.304.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ See Stephen Jay Gould, 'Kropotkin Was No Crackpot', *Natural History* 107 (June 1997), 12-21.

¹⁰⁴ Snyder's Journal, 1 September 1974-2 December 1975, GSP I 87:5, 8 July 1975

¹⁰⁵ James Lovelock to Gary Snyder, 1 July [1986-1988?], GSP II 111:26.

The mythological metaphor of Gaia is significant. The name was suggested to Lovelock by William Golding, and Lovelock felt it to be suitable because ‘in the days of Ancient Greece the concept’ of the Gaia Hypothesis ‘was probably a familiar aspect of life, even if not formally expressed.’¹⁰⁶ Ancient Greek religion, according to Lovelock, had intuitively grasped the ways in which natural systems functioned. He goes on to argue that the ‘myth of Prometheus stealing fire from heaven’ and ‘the biblical story of Adam and Eve tasting the forbidden fruit’ may be mythological descriptions of the formation of life through ‘random encounters between individual molecular components’ which ‘may have eventually resulted in a chance association of parts which together could perform a life-like task, such as gathering sunlight and using its energy to contrive some further action which would otherwise have been impossible or forbidden by the laws of physics.’¹⁰⁷ By presenting the Gaia Hypothesis as a new formulation of old religious truths previously expressed mythologically by different cultures, Lovelock creates his own version of perennialism. Lovelock’s perennialism may not have drawn specifically on Buddhism, but subsequent writers, many of whom (including Snyder) are represented in Alan Hunt Badiner’s 1990 anthology *Dharma Gaia*, have drawn parallels between Buddhist ideas of interdependence and ‘dependent co-origination’, and Lovelock’s description of the ‘self-regulating, constantly changing atmosphere of the Earth.’¹⁰⁸

In the 1975 paper, Lovelock and Epton ask whether ‘man’s activities’ might be destabilizing the system of Gaia to the extent that ‘it is no longer able to exert sufficient control to stay viable’.¹⁰⁹ As the ever-growing human population requires more resources, the ‘[n]atural distribution of plants and animals’ becomes disturbed. Lovelock and Epton point to ‘the present puzzling climate’ as an indicator that such disturbances might be destabilizing the whole global system.¹¹⁰ While the presentation of humanity as a disruptive force might suggest a dualism between humanity and nature, Lovelock and Epton do point out that Gaia has

¹⁰⁶ James Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (1979; repr. Oxford, 2009), p.10.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.13.

¹⁰⁸ Allan Hunt Badiner, Introduction, *Dharma Gaia: A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology*, ed. Badiner (Berkeley, 1990), xiii-xviii, p.xvi.

¹⁰⁹ Lovelock and Epton, ‘The Quest for Gaia,’ p.304.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.306.

endured, and survived, disturbances of greater magnitude in the past: ‘Gaia has survived the most appalling of all atmospheric pollutants, namely oxygen, which was put into the atmosphere in substantial quantity about 2000 million years ago when the photosynthesisers had completed their task of oxidising the surface and the atmosphere’, a process which ‘completely changed’ the ‘appearance of the whole planetary surface and its chemistry’.¹¹¹ The ecological disruption caused by humanity, it is implied, is just as ‘natural’ as this earlier disruption. Nevertheless, while Gaia may survive the disruptions caused by humanity, humanity itself may not: we ‘disturb and eliminate at our peril’.¹¹²

While Lovelock and Epton implicitly reject the dichotomy of humanity and nature, they do argue that the *perception* of such a dichotomy lies at the root of the ecological disruption they describe. We are urged ‘to rid ourselves of 19th century technocratic thinking, to reject the idea that human existence is necessarily a battle against nature.’ As such, they share the anti-technocratic stance seen in Buddhist modernists like Watts, as well as in deep ecology. Furthermore, they imagine undoing humanity’s alienation from nature in terms that recall H.T. Odum’s quasi-primitivism as well as Snyder’s inclusive definition of sangha: we should ‘return to peaceful co-existence with our fellow creatures’ like ‘some of our ancestors did’ thirty thousand years ago.¹¹³

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It has been seen that the Romantic trope of alienation permeates the writing of the four ecologists examined. It is by means of this trope, borrowed from literature, that these writers criticize contemporary civilization’s ecologically destructive attitudes and behaviour, aligning scientific ecology with political ecology. Because we require objectivity from the sciences, we usually expect them to eschew the literary, but ecology has been particularly open to accusations of literariness. Dana Phillips has criticised ecology’s careless use of figurative language. ‘Any scientific hypothesis that conceals an analogy’, he writes, ‘tends to devolve into

¹¹¹ Ibid., p.305.

¹¹² Ibid., p.306.

¹¹³ Ibid.

a metaphor and to wind up as a myth, at which point it can be said to have come full circle: it has returned to science's point of departure.'¹¹⁴ Phillips attributes to 'early ecology' an 'overreliance on analogical reasoning,'¹¹⁵ pointing to Clements' organismal metaphor for the climax (which Lovelock extended), and the idea of a plant 'community' as 'only two examples of the charm that analogy held for the first few generations of ecologists'.¹¹⁶ Snyder's enthusiasm for the community analogy was seen earlier, and we might say that his idea of language being rooted in natural systems is based on analogy. The appeal of ecology to Snyder's poetic imagination may to a large extent be attributed to its predilection for analogy. The 'myths' which Phillips finds expressed in ecology are myths of balance and harmony, and of holism and interconnectedness. For Phillips these are, in reality, 'no better than platitudes',¹¹⁷ but they are exactly the ideas that Snyder found most compelling in ecology in the 1970s. The balance and harmony which characterize the mature climax community provide a standard by which to measure and critique human civilization, and ideas of holism and interconnectedness are suggestive of Hua-yen ontology.

Phillips' critique of Clements' and the Odums' generations of ecologists is based on the fact that subsequent ecologists have challenged their myths.¹¹⁸ Around the time Snyder was reading the scientific texts discussed above, their ecological paradigms were being challenged. In a 1973 study of New England's temperate forests, ecologists William Drury and Ian Nisbet argued that the process of succession never reached a point of balance, but continued indefinitely in no particular direction.¹¹⁹ Drury and Nisbet's 'challenge to the climax theory', according to environmental historian Donald Worster, 'became the core idea of what some scientists hailed as a new, revolutionary paradigm in ecology.'¹²⁰ Then in 1974, Robert May published a paper entitled 'Biological Populations with Nonoverlapping Generations: Stable

¹¹⁴ Dana Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology: Nature, Culture, and Literature in America* (Oxford, 2003), p.58.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.60.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.56.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.viii.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.79.

¹¹⁹ William H. Drury and Ian C.T. Nisbet, 'Succession', *Journal of the Arnold Arboretum* liv (1973), 33-68.

¹²⁰ Worster, *Nature's Economy*, p.392.

Points, Cycles, and Chaos,' which evoked chaos theory to undermine the idea of ordered, steady succession.¹²¹ Ecologists were beginning to assert, as Worster puts it, that 'nature is inherently unsettled.'¹²² Phillips sees these revisionary ideas as part of ecology's 'struggle to divest itself of analogical, metaphorical, and mythological thinking, and of literary means of suasion'.¹²³ Yet Worster, who Phillips criticizes for continuing 'to exaggerate the scientific credibility of an old-fashioned variety of ecology',¹²⁴ points out that the idea of chaos, used by the new generation of ecologists to challenge the old, has its roots in 'the lost pagan cosmology of ancient Greece' just like Lovelock's Gaia metaphor.¹²⁵

The biologist Daniel Botkin has stressed the importance of abandoning myths of stability in ecology, which he finds to be rooted in 'the writings of classical Greeks and Romans'.¹²⁶ For Botkin, such myths lead to wrong-headed strategies of environmental management: 'Change now appears to be intrinsic and natural at many scales [...] and in at least some cases these changes are necessary for the persistence of life, because life is adapted to them and depends on them.'¹²⁷ Despite the growing acceptance of ideas of perpetual change and disturbance in nature among ecologists, it was the older myths of stability and harmony that continued to be evoked by the environmental movement and the popular press,¹²⁸ and according to Botkin, 'our laws, policies, beliefs, and actions continue to be primarily based on nature as a still life.'¹²⁹ A 'transformation in attitude', he writes, 'must occur so that we can conserve, save from extinction, and make best use of natural resources.'¹³⁰

¹²¹ Ibid., p.408.

¹²² Ibid., p.389.

¹²³ Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology*, p.58.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p.47.

¹²⁵ Worster, *Nature's Economy*, p.406.

¹²⁶ Daniel B. Botkin, *The Moon in the Nautilus Shell: Discordant Harmonies Reconsidered: From Climate Change to Species Extinction, How Life Persists in an Ever-Changing World* (Oxford, 2012), p.11.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p.12.

¹²⁸ Worster, *Nature's Economy*, p.389.

¹²⁹ Botkin, *The Moon in the Nautilus Shell*, p.8.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p.213.

Turtle Island and The Fudo Trilogy

The poems of *Turtle Island* explore the flows of energy in natural systems and, as Yamazato has noted, ‘the Buddhist concept of interpenetration’ is ‘a key metaphor in *Turtle Island*’.¹³¹ Yamazato shows how Snyder’s idea of interpenetration draws on both Hua-yen Buddhism and ecology, and my discussion of *Turtle Island* is indebted to his, although I want to expand upon Yamazato’s work by looking more closely at the ecological ideas in *Turtle Island*. Snyder depicts the energy flows of natural systems by descriptions of organisms’ use of solar energy through photosynthesis and its subsequent transmission through food chains. In focusing on natural energy pathways, Snyder compares them to inefficient human energy usage in order to mount an ecological critique on contemporary civilization, just as the scientific ecologists he had read had.

The word ‘energy’ had a particular resonance when *Turtle Island* was published in 1974. In the short essay ‘On “As For Poets”’ at the back of the volume, Snyder refers to the ‘energy crisis’ of the ‘over-developed world’, which was experiencing ‘shortages of oil and electric power’.¹³² The USA had seen a dramatic increase in oil consumption following the Second World War as oil was increasingly used for transportation, energy production (including electricity) and in the growing petrochemical industry.¹³³ Prior to the War, the USA had been the world’s leading producer of petroleum, but after the discovery of oil in Latin America, the Middle East and North Africa, the USA became a net importer.¹³⁴ In October 1973 global oil prices soared. This was for two reasons. Firstly, the major oil exporters, represented by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, decided to take control of oil prices away from the major oil companies and thereafter to set production and price levels themselves.¹³⁵ In the same month, the Yom Kippur War broke out after Egypt and Syria

¹³¹ Katsunori Yamazato, ‘How to Be in This Crisis: Gary Snyder’s Cross-Cultural Vision in *Turtle Island*’, *Critical Essays on Gary Snyder*, ed. Patrick D. Murphy (Boston, 1991), 230-47, p.231.

¹³² Snyder, *Turtle Island*, p.113.

¹³³ Fiona Venn, *The Oil Crisis* (London, 2002), p.1.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.2.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.7.

attacked Israeli troops on the Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula.¹³⁶ The Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries subsequently imposed an oil boycott on countries which supported Israel, including the United States.¹³⁷ In America panic ensued as President Nixon warned that supplies might fall by seventeen per cent, leading to huge queues at petrol stations.¹³⁸

For Snyder, the energy crisis of 1973 was a symptom of the West's, and particularly America's, overuse of fossil fuels, which he described as an addiction.¹³⁹ Snyder had written against the overuse of fossil fuels prior to the 1973 crisis, describing its 'harmful effects on all the other members of the life-network' including species extinction.¹⁴⁰ Snyder saw the excessive use of fossil fuels as arising from Western Enlightenment ideals of 'progress' which have their roots in the 'Judeo-Christian worldview'.¹⁴¹ His criticism of fossil fuel consumption is part of a broader critique of the ecologically damaging effects of 'modern technology' and 'the great achievements of science'.¹⁴² As such, Snyder aligns himself with Suzuki's and Watts' critiques of scientific rationalism, even while he evokes a particular branch of science, namely ecology, to mount his own critique of scientific rationalism.

Snyder contrasts the developed world's over-reliance on fossil fuels with the more efficient, less harmful transmission of solar energy in natural systems. In 'Facts' he quotes H.T. Odum's endorsement of the human use of solar energy. Odum wrote that 'plants have already maximized the use of sunlight',¹⁴³ implicitly criticizing human use of fossil fuels which, as Snyder points out later in *Turtle Island*, contain 'the stored energy of the sun locked by ancient plant-life in cells.' Snyder and Odum advocate the more direct use of solar energy, and Snyder goes on to associate it with 'another kind of energy, in every living being, close to the sun source but in a different way.' Following the Blakean maxim that had given the name to

¹³⁶ Ibid., p.9.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p.13.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p.126.

¹³⁹ Snyder, *Turtle Island*, p.103.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p.97.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p.103.

¹⁴² Ibid., p.97.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p.31.

another essay in the volume, he names this other kind of energy ‘delight’: ‘The delight of being alive while knowing of impermanence and death’.¹⁴⁴

Within the poems of *Turtle Island*, Snyder frequently evokes a sense of delight by celebrating the use of sunlight by primary producers (i.e. photosynthesizing plants) and the transmission of solar energy through food chains. Read against the argument of the prose pieces included in the volume, this celebration should be read as an implicit indictment of the indirect and ecologically damaging ways in which the developed world utilizes energy ultimately derived from the sun.

Gratitude to the Sun: blinding pulsing light through
trunks of trees, through mists, warming caves where
bears and snakes sleep[...]
(‘Prayer for the Great Family’)¹⁴⁵

I take it into me and grow
Say the trees
Leaves above
Roots below
(‘The Uses of Light’)¹⁴⁶

The grasses are working in the sun. Turn it green
Turn it sweet. That we may eat.
(‘Mother Earth: Her Whales’)¹⁴⁷

Yamazato notes that sunlight ‘is one of the dominant images in *Turtle Island*’, and that it has a particular Hua-yen connotation. ‘The principal Buddha in the Avatamsaka sutra is Vairocana (the Sun Buddha), who is depicted in the sutra as the center of the universe.’¹⁴⁸ The Buddhist deity Achala (known as Fudo in Japan) appears in ‘Spel Against Demons’, and as Snyder noted in ‘The California Water Plan,’ Achala/Fudo ‘is considered a direct emanation of Vairocana, the Great Sun Buddha’.¹⁴⁹ In ‘Spel,’ a mantra of Achala is chanted to magically counteract the ‘Demonic Energies’ of the over-developed world.¹⁵⁰ The importance of

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p.113.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p.24.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p.39.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p.47.

¹⁴⁸ Yamazato, ‘How to Be in This Crisis’, p.239.

¹⁴⁹ Snyder, *The Fudo Trilogy*, n. pag.

¹⁵⁰ Snyder, *Turtle Island*, p.16.

Achala/Fudo/Vairocana to Snyder's mythological thought is suggested by his short 1973 volume *The Fudo Trilogy*, which collected 'Spel Against Demons' (also included in *Turtle Island*), 'The California Water Plan,' and 'Smokey the Bear Sutra' together. All three pieces are thematically linked by references to Fudo/Achala/Vairocana. It will be remembered from the previous chapter that in 'Smokey the Bear Sutra,' Smokey is a manifestation of 'the Great Sun Buddha.'

In 'The Uses of Light,' Snyder shows sunlight warming stones, being used by plants for photosynthesis, attracting moths (when reflected by the moon), and facilitating deer's sense of sight. For Yamazato, the poem shows that 'at a deeper level, "stones," "trees," "moth," "deer," and people in this world are all interrelated and constitute a harmonious whole while *illuminated* by the spiritual light that emanates from the Sun Buddha.'¹⁵¹ In Yamazato's reading, the sunlight becomes a metaphor for the 'spiritual light' associated with Vairocana, but Yamazato's word 'spiritual' implies a dualism between matter and spirit that is not present in Snyder's poem, or in Hua-yen philosophy. Francis Cook writes that Vairocana 'is the emptiness of things, for [...] since emptiness refers to the relational mode of entities, it cannot ever exist apart from the things which we say are empty'.¹⁵² According to Cook's reading at least, the sunlight imagery associated with Vairocana represents a monist philosophy. It perhaps seems pedantic to focus on Yamazato's use of the word 'spiritual,' but it is important, as its use obscures the Buddhist philosophical underpinning of Snyder's eco-poetics in *Turtle Island*.

If we turn for a moment to Snyder's descriptions of Achala/Fudo/Vairocana in *The Fudo Trilogy*, Snyder's non-dualism will become clear. In 'Spel Against Demons,' Snyder describes Achala as 'Lord of Heat'. Like Vairocana, of whom he is a manifestation, Achala's 'powers are of [...] the Sun', but he is also associated with geothermal heat and geological

¹⁵¹ Yamazato, 'How to Be in This Crisis', p.239. Yamazato's italics.

¹⁵² Francis Cook, *Hua-yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra* (University Park, 1977), p.105.

process; his powers are also ‘of lava, / of magma, of deep rock strata’.¹⁵³ The heat of which Achala is Lord is not a spiritual, transcendent quality, but a physical phenomenon. In ‘Smokey the Bear Sutra’ the ‘Great Sun Buddha’ (i.e. Vairocana) is described ‘in this corner of the Infinite Void [giving] a discourse to all the assembled elements and energies: to the standing beings, the walking beings, the flying beings and the sitting beings’.¹⁵⁴ In this description, phenomena, described in scientific language as ‘elements’ and ‘energies,’ are shown to exist within ‘Void,’ a term equivalent to ‘emptiness’ or ‘noumenon.’ As such, Snyder’s description of Vairocana agrees with Hua-yen ontology, as described earlier in this chapter, in asserting the ultimate identity of noumenon and phenomena. Finally, in ‘The California Water Plan,’ Snyder describes Japanese visual representations of Achala ‘at the center of the five-spot mandala, the Unconditioned Body-of-Dharma represented, amazingly, WITH form’.¹⁵⁵ Snyder here alludes to the famous key lines of the Heart Sutra, ‘Form is emptiness; emptiness is form’, which assert the ultimate identity of phenomena and emptiness. The dualism implied in Yamazato’s phrasing, then, is not consistent with Snyder’s Buddhist ontology. In his descriptions of Vairocana and Achala/Fudo, Snyder suggests the ultimate unity of phenomena and noumenon, and the images of sunlight and geothermal energy with which he associates these figures are physical and phenomenal. While the realm of phenomena, when viewed by the enlightened mind, is identical to the realm of emptiness, sunlight, rocks and magma remain themselves rather than functioning as metaphors for something spiritual and transcendent.

Returning now to ‘The Uses of Light,’ we need not view the sunlight as spiritual light, but as itself. By showing different organisms’ uses of sunlight, sunlight serves to illustrate ‘the relational mode of entities,’ to use Cook’s phrase, just as the figure of Vairocana does. But sunlight as depicted by Snyder is emphatically involved in ecological process. All the organisms described in the poem are unified by their use of sunlight, and we might say that this illustration of ecological interconnection illustrates the non-interference among phenomena.

¹⁵³ Snyder, *Turtle Island*, p.17.

¹⁵⁴ Snyder, *Place in Space*, p.25.

¹⁵⁵ Snyder, *The Fudo Trilogy*, n. pag.

‘The teaching of the realm of non-interference among phenomena, of everything containing the universe,’ writes Cleary, ‘is presented throughout the Hua-yen scripture, but virtually exclusively in symbolic form.’¹⁵⁶ Snyder’s innovation is to show it literally in ecological process.

For animals of course, the energy ultimately derived from the sun is consumed through eating both plants and other animals. *Turtle Island* is full of instances of eating, but Snyder also shows eating indirectly, through descriptions of the content of animal scat. In ‘On San Gabriel Ridge’ he describes ‘squirrel hairs’ and ‘squirrel bones crunched’ in the ‘scats of / fox.’¹⁵⁷ In ‘Tomorrow’s Song’ he describes ‘a ground squirrel tooth’ in ‘a dried coyote-scat’.¹⁵⁸ In so doing, Snyder demonstrates that the autonomous existence of individual organisms is impermanent. Only pieces of the prey—hair, bones, teeth—remain in the predator’s scat. The excreted waste matter shows that the predator itself is not an entirely discrete object—other organisms pass in and out of it—but a node in the network of ecological process.

Snyder also shows humans’ places within food webs by describing them hunting and eating animals. ‘One Should Not Talk to a Skilled Hunter About What is Forbidden by the Buddha’ (a poem whose title suggests a tension between the vegetarianism prescribed by many forms of traditional Buddhism and Snyder’s view of food webs as networks of interpenetration), describes Snyder and his son Kai skinning a female fox and lists the contents of the fox’s stomach:

[...] a whole ground squirrel well chewed
 plus one lizard foot
 and somewhere from inside the ground squirrel
 a bit of aluminium foil.¹⁵⁹

The contents of the fox’s stomach suggest the extended food web, of which Snyder’s consumption of the fox is a part (it is unclear from the poem whether Snyder and his son are

¹⁵⁶ Cleary, *Entry Into the Inconceivable*, p.30.

¹⁵⁷ Snyder, *Turtle Island*, p.40.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.77.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.66.

planning to eat the fox's meat or merely use its pelt). The presence of aluminium foil in the stomach also demonstrates how human-made waste can pollute the food chain.

Whilst skinning the fox, Kai reminds Snyder to chant the Heart Sutra, linking its Mahayana ontology to an act of consumption in a ritualistic way. The importance of a sense of ritual when hunting and eating animals is stressed in several other poems such as 'The Hudsonian Curlew'.¹⁶⁰ The poem 'Steak' suggests that this sense of ritual, based on a sacrificial reverence for the interpenetration of food chains, is sorely lacking from mainstream American culture. The poem describes diners in steak houses, wilfully ignorant of the non-ecologically sensitive farming methods practiced 'down the tracks' on 'the ripped-off land'. Ironically, among the diners are 'Japanese-American animal nutrition experts / from Kansas, / with Buddhist beads'.¹⁶¹

Snyder also links Hua-yen philosophy to another ecological process: reproduction. This is most clearly shown in 'The Bath,' which describes Snyder, his wife Masa and their son Kai sharing a bath. Their shared nakedness prompts a meditation on sexual reproduction which Snyder expresses in Hua-yen terms. Cupping his wife's 'vulva arch and hold[ing] it from behind,' Snyder writes,

The gates of Awe
That open back a turning double-mirror world of
wombs in wombs[...]¹⁶²

While the 'double-mirror' image is a common metaphor for infinity, in Snyder's Hua-yen inflected poetry it recalls the image of 'ten mirrors reflecting each other,' first devised by Fazang, the third patriarch of the Hua-yen school. This image, like Indra's net, symbolizes the idea that 'each and every phenomenon implies and reflects the existence of each and every other thing; the existence of all is inherent in the existence of one.'¹⁶³ Snyder had already used the image of the double mirror in his 1961 poem 'Bubbs Creek Haircut,' included in *Mountains*

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., pp.54-57.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p.10.

¹⁶² Ibid., p.13.

¹⁶³ Cleary, *Entry Into the Inconceivable*, p.33.

and Rivers Without End and discussed in Chapter Six in relation to that volume. Snyder acknowledged the image's source 'in *Avatamsaka* philosophy' in relation to that poem in interview.¹⁶⁴ In the context of 'The Bath,' it applies Hua-yen notions of interdependence to different generations of humans. Each individual is a constituent part of the chain of generation. This is reflected in the poem's refrain, '*this is our body*'.¹⁶⁵

Snyder viewed the poems of *Turtle Island* themselves as partaking in the energy flows of natural systems. In his introductory note he writes:

The poems speak of place, and the energy-pathways that sustain life. Each living being is a swirl in the flow, a formal turbulence, a "song."¹⁶⁶

He elaborated on this idea in a 1973 interview, where he explained that the Japanese term for 'song' also means 'knot', meaning 'an intensification of the flow at a certain point that creates a turbulence of its own which [...] sends out an energy of its own, but then the flow continues again.' He sees parallels with 'the Plains Indian view' that 'trees, animals, mountains are in some sense individualized turbulence patterns, specific turbulence patterns of the energy flow that manifest themselves temporarily as discrete items'. He continues, 'I like to think of poetry as that'.¹⁶⁷ The clearest statement of this view of poems as partaking in the energy flow of natural systems is in 'By Frazier Creek Falls,' where Snyder writes:

This living flowing land
is all there is, forever

We are it
it sings through us—¹⁶⁸

The poems of *Turtle Island*, Snyder hopes, are the songs that the land sings through us. There are clear similarities between Snyder's ideas here and the view of language as partaking in, or

¹⁶⁴ Ekbert Faas, *Towards a New American Poetics: Essays and Interviews: Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, Gary Snyder, Robert Creeley, Robert Bly, Allen Ginsberg* (Santa Barbara, 1978), p.135.

¹⁶⁵ Snyder, *Turtle Island*, pp.13-14.

¹⁶⁶ Snyder, *Turtle Island*, n. pag.

¹⁶⁷ Snyder, *The Real Work*.

¹⁶⁸ Snyder, *Turtle Island*, p.41.

being analogous to, the energy flows in natural systems expressed by Margalef and H.T. Odum seen earlier.

‘Toward Climax’ links Buddhist and ecological ideas.¹⁶⁹ The poem draws more overtly on ecological science than the other poems so far discussed, and so deserves particular attention. Snyder first drafted this poem on New Year’s Eve 1973.¹⁷⁰ The title refers to Clements’ concept of climax that had been developed by Eugene Odum and Margalef, and a later, undated draft of the first section of the poem, entitled ‘Beyond “Survival”’, bears a handwritten dedication to both Eugene and Howard T. Odum.¹⁷¹ The opening lines of the poem evoke the Buddhist image of a mandala among descriptions of animals and their environments:

salt seas, mountains, deserts—
 cell mandala holding water
 nerve networks linking toes and eyes
 fins legs wings—
 teeth, all-purpose little early mammal molars.
 primate flat-foot
 front fore-mounted eyes—¹⁷²

If an ecosystem is defined as a system ‘in which biotic and abiotic factors interact dynamically as components of “one physical system,”’¹⁷³ Snyder’s opening lines evoke the concept of ecosystem by linking organic structures, ‘cell mandala,’ with non-biotic environments of seas, mountains and deserts. The sense of a network of interrelation suggested by ‘cell mandala’ is developed in the following lines where ‘nerve networks’ link components of animal bodies. By constantly shifting between focal lengths in this stanza—from the macro level of seas, mountains and deserts, to the minutia of cells, and to the intermediate focus of fins, legs and wings—Snyder refuses to reify any discrete object. What matters is the network of

¹⁶⁹ For an earlier discussion of scientific ecology in this poem, see Elder, *Imagining the Earth*, p.187ff. My reading of the poem expands on Elder’s by reading it against its specific scientific source material, and linking it to Hua-yen philosophy.

¹⁷⁰ Snyder’s Journal, 1973-4, GSP I 87:4, 31 December 1973.

¹⁷¹ Snyder, ‘Beyond Survival’ [‘Toward Climax’], Poem, n.d., MS GSP I 4:30.

¹⁷² Snyder, *Turtle Island*, p.82.

¹⁷³ Joel G. King and Robert T. Paine, ‘Theses, Antitheses, and Syntheses: Conversational Biology and Ecological Debate’, *Foundations of Ecology*, eds. Real and Brown, 310-317, p.310.

interrelation. This is felt most strongly in his refusal to name any specific animal, but only to list their component parts linked by ‘nerve networks.’

The second stanza continues to deconstruct the apparent unity of discrete units through presenting what Margalef and Clements would call an ecotone: ‘the forest-grassland (interface / richness) edge.’¹⁷⁴ Snyder does not seem to have read Margalef by the time he drafted ‘Toward Climax’ (these lines appear in the December 1973 draft), but it is possible that he had read about the concept of ecotone in Clements or elsewhere. In any case, the forest-grassland edge conforms to Margalef’s definition of ecotone as ‘the ambiguous boundary between patches’ which ‘often disappear when we look for them’,¹⁷⁵ and Snyder finds ‘richness’ in the energy exchanges that occur between two systems. The rest of the stanza describes various eating practices—‘scavenge, gather [...] hunting’—whereby energy is transferred within ecosystems and across the ecotone. The discrete unity of organisms is broken down as organisms are digested by each other. The sense of the transience of organisms’ apparent autonomous existence is compounded in the following single-line stanza which pictures ‘sharp points of split bone’.

As Eugene Odum’s 1969 paper had attempted to combine ecosystem and evolutionary ecology, Snyder moves on to construct a narrative of human evolution. He begins with biological evolution:

brain-size blossoming
on the balance of the neck,
tough skin—good eyes—sharp ears—¹⁷⁶

Snyder’s journal shows that this account of the evolution of the human brain is taken from Philip V. Tobias’ 1971 book *The Brain in Hominid Evolution* which Snyder took notes on in January 1973.¹⁷⁷ Like Tobias’, Snyder’s narrative moves from biological to cultural evolution. He shows the development of early human artifacts (‘sewn hide clothing, mammoth-rib-

¹⁷⁴ John Elder applies the ecological concept of the ecotone to this poem, *Imagining the Earth*, p.191ff.

¹⁷⁵ Margalef, *Perspectives in Ecological Theory*, p.39.

¹⁷⁶ Snyder, *Turtle Island*, p.82.

¹⁷⁷ Snyder’s Journal, 1972-3, GSP I 87:3, 26 January 1973.

framework tent'), primitive art ('pictures in caves'), and language.¹⁷⁸ By presenting cultural evolution as being on a continuum with biological evolution, Snyder follows Howard Odum's presentation of human systems as continuations of natural systems. Snyder presents language as a network analogous to the network of nerves with which the poem opened:

formal complex grammars transect
inner structures & the daily world—¹⁷⁹

Just as the nerve network had connected parts of the body, language connects subjective experience with the external world. This idea may have been suggested by Howard Odum, who had described 'special kinds of information exchange, such as human language' which serve an organizational function in the networks of 'invisible pathways over which pass chemical materials'.¹⁸⁰ Snyder's fragmentary syntax in 'Toward Climax' is analogous to his fragmentary presentation of organisms, compounding the link between human language and natural systems.

At this early stage in the evolution of human civilization, humanity is yet to suffer alienation from nature: we are still 'kin to grubs and trees and wolves'. When the fall does occur, it is because of the advent of agriculture and the large-scale manipulation of the environment it involves. As we 'start farming' we 'forget wild plants, their virtues'. Further large-scale manipulation of environment compounds our alienation:

lay towns out in streets in rows,
and build a wall.

drain swamp for wet-rice grasses, burn back woods¹⁸¹

While the rice grasses of this last line suggest that a fall from nature occurred in Asia as well as the West, Section Two of the poem, which follows a few lines later, describes the next stage of

¹⁷⁸ Snyder, *Turtle Island*, pp.82-3.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.83.

¹⁸⁰ H.T., Odum, *Environment, Power, and Society*, p.1.

¹⁸¹ Snyder, *Turtle Island*, p.83.

Snyder's fall narrative as the result of 'Reason,' a word metonymic for the European Enlightenment: 'Reason gets ferocious as it goes for / order throughout nature'.¹⁸²

While Snyder had criticized attitudes of scientific rationalism in 'Energy is Eternal Delight,' in the next section of 'Toward Climax' he writes:

science walks in beauty:

nets are many knots¹⁸³

Scientific ecology at least, because of what he would later call its implicit 'spiritual dimension', escapes the criticisms Snyder levels against rationalism. That spiritual dimension is suggested here by the word 'net,' which evokes the Hua-yen image of Indra's net.

The poem ends with a vision of a 'virgin / Forest', described as 'Stable' and 'at / Climax'.¹⁸⁴ While 'Toward Climax' has shown human systems to be continuations of natural systems, the poem's final image of nature is an ecosystem, like those described by Clements, which is untouched by human interference. The history of civilization, Snyder's poem suggests, has been one of alienation from nature, but the poem's title suggests that, by learning from the examples provided by scientific ecology, we might hope to move *toward* the condition of maturity and stability exemplified by the virgin forest.

As was seen earlier however, the concepts of harmony and stability within natural systems, on which Snyder's vision is based, have been challenged by later scientific writers. 'Control Burn,' discussed briefly in the previous chapter, both implies a more disordered model of natural systems and suggests that responsible human manipulation of natural environments can be advantageous. There, it will be remembered, Snyder describes how Native Americans used to 'burn out the brush' in woodland, the unchecked build-up of which could cause large, spontaneous forest fires which could 'wipe out all.'¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Ibid., p.84.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p.85.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p.19.

Botkin has written on the beneficial effects of controlled burns. In 1964 the scientist Richard Hartesveldt ‘realized that giant sequoias might rely on fires to regenerate.’ Policies of fire suppression up to the 1960s, promoted by the Smokey the Bear poster campaign, had caused sequoia populations to decline. In 1968, in response to such discoveries, ‘the National Park Service established a new policy that allowed controlled burns in national parks.’¹⁸⁶ For Botkin, the discovery of the natural role of fire in forest ecosystems undermines the view of nature as ‘still life’ and proves that nature ‘requires change.’¹⁸⁷

Snyder would later write of the beneficial role of fire in several of the essays in *Back on the Fire*: ‘the Sierra Nevada is a fire-adapted ecosystem, and [...] a certain amount of wildfire has historically been necessary to its health’.¹⁸⁸ He realizes with hindsight that his work as a fire lookout in the 1950s, part of a policy of fire suppression, had been ‘wrong-headed’.¹⁸⁹ Snyder had abandoned the Clementsian vision of stability expressed at the end of ‘Toward Climax’ by this time. In 1992 he spoke of the ‘measured chaos that structures the natural world’, an oxymoronic phrase similar to Botkin’s ‘discordant harmonies.’¹⁹⁰ Snyder still finds a sense of ‘order’ in ‘wild nature’, but it is an order that includes disturbance.¹⁹¹ This sense of disturbance is illustrated in his most recent book of poems, *Danger on Peaks*, which describes the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens in Washington State and the subsequent recovery of the surrounding forest.¹⁹² Snyder still writes in terms of ‘succession’, but it is a model of succession which allows for change and disturbance.¹⁹³ From a Buddhist perspective, the vision of the stable climax had been at odds with one of the central tenets of Buddhism: that all phenomena are impermanent. The eruption of Mount St. Helens in part leads Snyder to the meditation on impermanence towards the end of *Danger on Peaks*.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁶ Botkin, *The Moon in the Nautilus Shell*, pp.212-14.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.217.

¹⁸⁸ Snyder, *Back on the Fire: Essays* (Berkeley, 2007), p.12.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.83.

¹⁹⁰ Snyder, *A Place in Space*, p.168.

¹⁹¹ Snyder, *Back on the Fire*, p.27.

¹⁹² Snyder, *Danger on Peaks: Poems* (Washington DC, 2004), pp.11, 14.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.14.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.101-2.

Little Songs for Gaia

Snyder also combines Buddhist and ecological ideas of interconnectedness in *Little Songs for Gaia*, a sequence of short poems first published in 1979, which forms the central section of his 1983 collection *Axe Handles*. The title of the sequence refers to Lovelock's Gaia Hypothesis. The aerial imagery of the opening lines of the first of the *Little Songs* suggests the atmospheric systems of global self-regulation that Lovelock's work describes:

across salt marshes north of
San Francisco Bay
cloud soft grays
blues little fuzzies
illusion structures—pale blue of the edge,
sky behind,¹⁹⁵

It will be remembered that in 'Toward Climax' Snyder had focused on the 'edge' between forest and grassland. Here the 'edge' between cloud and sky is identified as an 'illusion.' Once again, Snyder is drawing on Buddhist ontology to show that what appear to be discrete objects are in fact interrelated. Throughout the *Little Songs*, Snyder focuses on edges, boundaries and 'between' places to demonstrate interpenetration. For example, the tenth poem in the sequence describes deer fighting 'between the pond and the barn' and the fourteenth shows 'Hawks, eagles, and swallows / nesting in holes *between* / layers of rock'.¹⁹⁶ The second poem in the sequence is a play on edges and boundaries:

Look out over
This great world
Where you just might walk
As far as the farthest rim
There's a spring, there
By an oak, on a dry grass slope,
Drink. Suck deep.
And the world goes on¹⁹⁷

The addressee is described walking to 'the farthest rim', but this rim is only an edge in the subjective world of that person; 'the world goes on' beyond the boundaries of her personal

¹⁹⁵ Snyder, *Axe Handles*, p.49.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.53, 55. My italics.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.50.

geography. The act of drinking in the second stanza is an act of blurring boundaries; drinking brings the external world inside the body, and as such confuses dualistic categories of inside and outside.

The action of Poem Four also takes place in a liminal space:

trout-of-the-air, ouzel,
 bouncing, dipping, on a round rock
 round as the hump of snow-on-grass beside it
between the icy banks, the running stream:
 and into running stream
 right in!
 you fly¹⁹⁸

Not only does the poem take place *between* the banks and the stream, but the noun compound ‘snow-on-grass’ disrupts the distinction between what we usually perceive to be discrete entities, snow and grass.

The eleventh poem in the sequence ends with a description of ‘Twenty thousand mountain miles of manzanita’. After describing this vast plant community, Snyder focuses in on a single plant:

I saw a single, perfect, lovely,
 manzanita

Ha.¹⁹⁹

While Hua-yen emphasizes the interpenetration of phenomena, as was noted earlier, the Hua-yen vision paradoxically allows things to retain their individuality. Snyder’s realization of this relationship between one and many causes a reaction of laughter.

While the poems deconstruct boundaries between environments and objects on a thematic level, the *Little Songs* also blur boundaries on a structural level. It is not clear whether what I have been referring to as the constituent poems of *Little Songs* are discrete poems themselves, or individual sections of a long poem. The ‘poems’ are not individually named, but

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. My Italics.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.p.54.

simply separated from one another by a ‘⁰’ symbol. These sections, or poems, are thematically linked to one another, as the above discussion should demonstrate, and are also thematically linked to the rest of the volume. The poems preceding the *Little Songs* are collectively entitled ‘Loops,’ and those following are entitled ‘Nets’. The image in the first poem of *Little Songs* of the hawk ‘dipping and circling’ and ‘whirling and turning’ links that poem to the recurring motifs of loops and circular motions in the poems of ‘Loops.’ Likewise, the fifth poem describes

The stylishness of winds and waves—
nets over nets of light
reflected off the bottom²⁰⁰

This not only looks forward to the ‘Nets’ section, but also recalls the image of Indra’s net evoked earlier in ‘Toward Climax’ in *Turtle Island*. The individual poetic unit is simultaneously an individual entity and a node within the larger interdependent structures of the volume and Snyder’s oeuvre as a whole. When Snyder exclaims in the opening ‘poem’ of *Little Songs*, ‘ah, this slow-paced / system of systems’ he could be referring to the interdependent structures of his poetry or to the interdependent systems of Gaia.²⁰¹

‘Tiny Energies’

Snyder’s 1986 collection *Left Out in the Rain* includes a selection of previously uncollected poems written between 1970 and 1984, collectively entitled ‘Tiny Energies.’ It was seen earlier that this phrase is taken from Howard Odum, and that Snyder had copied it into his journal in 1972, and quoted it in ‘The Politics of Ethnopoetics.’ Snyder uses the passage from which the phrase is taken as an epigraph for the ‘Tiny Energies’ section of *Left Out in the Rain*, and I quote the epigraph here in full:

For such situations of a few combinations found in messages, the energy content as a fuel is far too negligible to measure or consider compared to the great flows of energy in the food chain.

²⁰⁰ Ibid. p.52.

²⁰¹ Ibid. p.49.

Yet the quality of this information (tiny energies in the right form) is so high that in the right control circuit it may obtain huge amplifications and control vast flows of power.²⁰²

The implication is that Snyder's miniature poems will perform a function of amplification analogous to those performed by messages in natural systems. It will be remembered that Snyder saw the idea of 'miniaturization' in natural systems as described by Margalef as the basis for an ecopoetics. The poems included in 'Tiny Energies' are haiku-like in being richly suggestive within compact forms, although they are by no means strict haikus. Snyder's poetics of miniaturization may also bring to mind the Hua-yen idea that an atom contains the whole universe.

The first poem of the section, 'Dragonfly,' is about the transmission of genetic information through reproduction:

Dragonfly
 Dead on the snow
 How did you come so high
 Did you leave your seed child
 In a mountain pool
 Before you died²⁰³

While the speaker of the poem does not know for certain whether the dragonfly succeeded in reproducing, the poem itself transmits information about the dragonfly. The image of the dead dragonfly on the white background of snow looks like a printed character on a page; the short poem itself is given a page to itself, leaving plenty of white space. Snyder suggests an analogy between the dragonfly as transmitter of genetic information and the poem as transmitter of linguistic information.

While 'Dragonfly' shows that human language can perform functions analogous to the transmission of genetic information, other poems in 'Tiny Energies' show analogues for human language in nature. 'The Songs at Custer's Battlefield' juxtaposes the sounds of 'Crickets and

²⁰² H.T Odum, *Environment, Power, and Society*, p.172. Quoted by Snyder, *Left Out in the Rain*, p.153. Snyder misquotes 'the quality of this information' as 'the quality of this energy'.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.155.

meadowlarks today’ with the war songs heard ‘that day’.²⁰⁴ On the surface, the poem seems to offer a sentimental juxtaposition between a violent human past and a peaceful natural present, but male crickets on occasion chirp out of aggression towards rival males, and birdsong is sometimes linked to defence of feeding territories. Crickets and birds have their own war songs.

As Howard Odum and Margalef argue that information is transmitted in natural systems, Snyder’s poem ‘Know’ suggests that trees apprehend information in a way analogous to how humans do:

The trees know
stars to be sources

Like the sun
of their life²⁰⁵

Several poems in *Tiny Energies* suggest a more general unity of the human and natural. ‘Through’ juxtaposes ‘The white spot of a Flicker / receding through cedar’, presumably a retreating bird or animal, with ‘Fluttering red surveyors tapes’ seen ‘through trees’;²⁰⁶ ‘Spring’ juxtaposes ‘bees humming’ with ‘tires spinning’;²⁰⁷ and ‘The Forest Fire at Ananda’ juxtaposes a skunk walking ‘out of a thicket / of burning blackberries’ with ‘hundreds of / yellow-clad firefighters’ coming down the hill.²⁰⁸ Through simple juxtaposition of human and natural images, these brief, imagistic poems suggests the identity of human and natural realms.

In ‘Gatha for All Threatened Beings,’ Snyder draws on Howard Odum’s idea of information having power to suggest that poetry can have the quasi-magical power to engender the healing of the natural world amid environmental degradation. The poem is a kind of prayer with Buddhist connotations:

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p.159.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p.174.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p.156.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p.157.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p.165.

Ah Power that swirls us together
 Grant us bliss
 Grant us the great release
 And to all beings
 Vanishing, wounded,
 In trouble on earth,
 We pass on this love
 May their numbers increase²⁰⁹

The poem is a rewriting of the Bodhisattva vow to work towards the liberation of all beings. The mention of ‘Vanishing’ species and ‘trouble on earth’ suggests that the Bodhisattva vow takes on particular import in the context of ecological crisis. While the Bodhisattva vow is traditionally spoken in the first person, Snyder’s poem is a supplication to the ‘Power that swirls us together’, a phrase suggestive of both Hua-yen notions of interpenetration and of the flows of energy in natural systems.

The final poem in the sequence, ‘How Zen Masters Are Like Mature Herring,’ again links Buddhism and ecology. The word ‘mature,’ as has been seen, was earlier used by Snyder to describe both climax ecosystems and desirable human social structures which he calls primitive, in contrast to the immaturity of Western civilization. By calling Zen Masters ‘mature,’ even if many Zen practitioners never reach maturity, Snyder suggests a consonance between Zen and the ‘deep capacities for stability and protection’ built into primitive social structures. Here is the poem:

So few become full grown
 And how necessary all the others;
 gifts to the food chain,
 feeding another universe.

These big ones feed sharks.²¹⁰

The idea that every Zen practitioner and every individual herring is ‘necessary’ is suggestive of the relationship of the individual to the whole expressed in the image of Indra’s net, where each jewel is a necessary part of the totality.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p.175.

²¹⁰ Ibid., p.178.

Some West Coast Contexts

The ecological ideas explored in Snyder's writing of the 1970s and 1980s find parallels in the contemporary writing of other West Coast writers. In 1972 the anthropologist Gregory Bateson published a volume of collected essays entitled *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. These essays, like H.T. Odum's book published the previous year, view human and natural systems through the theoretical lens of cybernetics. Bateson views the 'processes of civilization' and 'human behaviour', as well as 'any biological system', as 'self-correcting systems'.²¹¹ Bateson also points out similarities between human language and biological structures, noting 'an analogy between the formal relations between stems, leaves and buds, and the formal relations that obtain between different sorts of words in a sentence'; 'both grammar and biological structure are products of communicational and organizational process.'²¹² Such observations would have resonated with H.T. Odum's work, and with Snyder's ideas of ecopoetics.

Bateson argues that, due to 'Occidental errors of epistemology', Western civilization has lost the innate recognition of his place within the cybernetic systems of nature, leading ultimately to ecological crisis. He proposes a monist theory of mind, which views mind as the 'interaction between organism and environment'.²¹³ In order to combat ecological crisis, we must realize this conception of mind: 'The most important task today is, perhaps, to learn to think in a new way.'²¹⁴ While Bateson makes only passing references to Buddhism in the volume, he does suggest that the Orient may never have made the same 'errors of epistemology' as the West had done:

[...] there are patches of sanity still surviving in the world. Much of Oriental philosophy is more sane than anything the West has produced[.]²¹⁵

McMahan claims that Bateson's beliefs that 'minds should not be seen as either separate from their physiological substrata or as isolated from other minds', and that the 'basic unit [...] is not

²¹¹ Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (1972; repr. London, 1973), p.405.

²¹² *Ibid.*, pp.126-7.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p.463.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.437.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.463.

the individual entity but the system of which entities are a part' influenced Buddhist modernist notions of interdependence.²¹⁶

In July 1967 Ginsberg had written to Snyder of Bateson's concerns about the effect of rising carbon dioxide levels on global temperatures,²¹⁷ but Snyder does not seem to have read Bateson's work until 1979. In July that year he wrote to Wendell and Tanya Berry that he was reading Bateson in preparation for a conference entitled 'Size and Shape in Mental Health' which was being organized by Bateson for that September. He described Bateson's work as 'interesting and a trial at the same time.'²¹⁸ Prior to that date, Snyder and Bateson had been part of the same intellectual and political milieu; both had published articles in the environmentalist publication *CoEvolution Quarterly*, and Bateson had been appointed to the Board of Regents of the University of California by Governor Jerry Brown in 1976, the year after Brown had appointed Snyder to the California Arts Council. While Bateson does not seem to have had a direct influence on Snyder, it is significant that both men developed such similar ideas within their respective fields in the milieu of the West Coast in the 1970s.

More definite connections between Hua-yen Buddhism and ecology were made by two of Snyder's contemporary poets: Kenneth Rexroth and Michael McClure. In his autobiography, Rexroth wrote that early experiences of hiking and camping in California's wilderness areas led to his creation of 'poetry and [a] philosophy of life' which 'it's now fashionable to call ecological.' While Rexroth attributes his ecological vision to direct experience of wilderness areas, prior to any knowledge of scientific or political ecology, his view of himself 'as a microcosm in a macrocosm, related to chipmunks and bears and pine trees and stars and nebulae and rocks and fossils, as part of an infinitely interrelated complex of being' has clear similarities with Snyder's scientifically informed ecological vision expressed in *Turtle Island*

²¹⁶ McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, p.169.

²¹⁷ Allen Ginsberg to Gary Snyder, [26 July 1967], Morgan, ed., *Selected Letters of Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder*, p. 93.

²¹⁸ Gary Snyder to Wendell and Tanya Berry, 29 June 1979, Wriglesworth, ed., *Distant Neighbours: The Selected Letters of Wendell Berry and Gary Snyder*, p.42.

and subsequent volumes.²¹⁹ What is more, the phrases ‘microcosm in a macrocosm’ and ‘infinitely interrelated complex of being’ are suggestive of Hua-yen ontology. In a 1980 interview, Rexroth explicitly acknowledged the influence of Hua-yen on his poetry, where he described the Avatamsaka Sutra as the expression a ‘vision of infinity, an infinitude of buddha worlds, each reflecting the other’. He sees the Avatamsaka Sutra as promoting ‘a community of love’ based on the realization that ‘perspectives are infinite because the contemplators are infinite.’ Rexroth’s ‘community of love’ recalls Snyder’s definition of sangha, and this aspect of Hua-yen teaching, Rexroth states, ‘occurs over and over in my poems.’²²⁰

Rexroth’s 1976 poetic sequence *On Flower Wreath Hill* takes its name from the Avatamsaka Sutra, often referred to in English as the Flower Wreath Sutra. The sequence is set in the hills on the eastern edge of Kyoto, where Rexroth lived in 1974 and 1975. The range is the site of the tumulus of a princess, and the title of the poem, Rexroth tells us in the notes, ‘is also a Chinese and Japanese euphemism for a cemetery.’ As well as having a Japanese setting, the style of the sequence is imitative of Japanese verse (Rexroth published *One Hundred More Poems from the Japanese* in the same year) and the ‘second and third verses of Part 2 are a conflation of well-known Classic Japanese poems and Part 5 is entirely so.’ The book features calligraphies by Yasuyo Morita and Rexroth himself, and of the initial edition of 2,000, ‘200 copies [were] bound in the Japanese manner.’²²¹ *On Flower Wreath Hill* is a piece of *japonisme*, in contrast to the Americanized Buddhism of *Turtle Island*, with its American settings and Michael Corr’s woodcut drawing on American Indian motifs.

Near the beginning of Part Eight of the sequence, Rexroth uses scientific language to describe a moment of insight into his kinship with the natural world. Rexroth becomes ‘Immersed in living protoplasm’ and feels that ‘Each / Cell’ of his ‘body is / Penetrated by a / Strange electric life.’ The Hua-yen doctrine of interpenetration—Rexroth uses the word ‘Penetrated’—is rendered in the language of organic matter—protoplasm and cells. Yet later in

²¹⁹ Rexroth, *An Autobiographical Novel*, pp.376-7.

²²⁰ Quoted in Tonkinson, *Big Sky Mind*, p. 342.

²²¹ Rexroth, Notes, *On Flower Wreath Hill* (Burnaby, 1976), n.pag.

the section interpenetration within the natural world is presented as a mere analogue for a more profound ontology of ‘Void.’ The phenomenal world—‘The moon, the mist, the world, man’—are ‘only fleeting compounds / Varying in power,’ and this power ‘is only insight / Into the void’.²²² Rexroth’s repeated use of the word ‘only’ serves to devalue the phenomenal world. Because phenomena are impermanent, interpenetration in the phenomenal world can only stand as an imperfect analogue for the more profound interpenetration on the level of Void.

In the final section of the sequence, Rexroth describes the web of an orb spider as Indra’s net, evoking the central image of Hua-yen more explicitly than Snyder ever does in his poetry. While in the previous section the interpenetration of phenomenal nature had been an analogue for a more profound interpenetration, here Rexroth states that these two types of interpenetration are in fact identical. The spider’s web

Is itself the Net of Indra,
The compound infinities of infinities,
The Flower Wreath,
Each universe reflecting
Every other, reflecting
Itself from every other

While a natural object is used to express Hua-yen ideas of interconnectedness, Rexroth’s poetic vision differs markedly from the vision of ecological interpenetration expressed in Snyder’s poetry. In Snyder’s poetry, the energy pathways of ecological systems are shown through the constant activity of organisms: photosynthesis, feeding, procreation, as well as decay. In Section Eight, Rexroth briefly shows ecological process through spring flowers opening ‘to probing bees’ and ‘seeds ripening / In the fruit’, but on the whole, *On Flower Wreath Hill* is pervaded by a sense of silence and stasis: in Part Four ‘No leaf stirs’ and the insects are silent, and throughout the sequence stasis and silence increase through to the final section, where the ‘wind’ is ‘still’, the ‘Spider’s net of jewels has ceased / To tremble’ and the ‘night grows more still.’ The only sound that is heard does not belong to the natural scene at all, but to the mystic vision of Krishna’s flute accompanying a ‘Circle of dancing gopis’

²²² Rexroth, *On Flower Wreath Hill*, n. pag.

(cow-herding girls).²²³ Rexroth's notes inform us that Krishna's music 'connects true reality and the gopis, who dance and become Real',²²⁴ but while this vision of true reality arises from a natural scene, it seems to be ultimately separate from it, despite the identification of the natural phenomenon of the spider's web as Indra's net. While Rexroth's final vision of Indra's net through the spider's web implies the ecological interconnectedness of nature, it does not show it. The spider's web is described as a 'sculpture,' an 'architecture of pearls / And silver wire.'²²⁵ Rather than showing the web functioning ecologically, catching insects for the spider to eat, as Snyder likely would have done, Rexroth metaphorically transforms it into the traditional Huahan image of a jewelled net, a static, decorative object with no obvious ecological function.

Michael McClure's poetics, like Snyder's, attempts to find a 'biological basis for poetry'.²²⁶ McClure was influenced by Olson's assertion in 'Projective Verse' that poetry had its source in the physical body, as well as by H.T Odum's *Environment, Power, and Society* and Margalef's *Perspectives in Ecological Theory*, which he read in the early 1970s.²²⁷ In his writing on poetics, McClure employs two ecological metaphors: the poem as a self-organizing system of energy transfer, and the poem as organism.

McClure sees the poetry he most admires, including Snyder's,²²⁸ as a flowing of poetic energy through an intellectual structure, the poetic energy rearranging that structure as it flows through it. He describes Olson's verse as 'the flowing or pouring of energy through the system [...] of Olson's concepts.'²²⁹ Likewise, Shelley's 'Mont Blanc' is as an 'energy structure' in which Shelley's 'intellect' becomes 'a system through which energy passes to organize the system.'²³⁰ In his description of Kerouac's *Mexico City Blues*, McClure suggests the consonance of Buddhist ideas with this cybernetic/ecological view of poetry as an energy

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Rexroth, Notes, Ibid., n. pag.

²²⁵ Rexroth, *On Flower Wreath Hill*, n. pag.

²²⁶ McClure, *Scratching the Beat Surface*, p.43.

²²⁷ Ibid., p.95.

²²⁸ Ibid., p.96.

²²⁹ Ibid., p.57.

²³⁰ Ibid., p.66.

structure. Kerouac's poem is 'a great self-organizing act of verse-energy' which 'flows on and on, becoming more diverse, stronger in its self-supporting complexity—like the systems described by H.T. Odum in his remarkable *Environment, Power and Society*'; and it is also the expression of the 'Hua-yen vision of the interdependency of the phantasmic illusion of Maya'.²³¹

McClure also imagines that 'a poem could [...] become a living bio-alchemical organism',²³² and he views the organism in systemic, relational terms:

[...] the organism is, in itself, a tissue or veil between itself and the environment. And, it is not only the tissue between itself and the environment—it is also simultaneously the environment itself. [...] The organism is a swirl of environment in what the Taoists call the Un-carved Block of time and space (a universe in which time and space are not separated into intersecting facets by measured incidents). [...] The organism is a constellation (like a constellation of stars or molecules) of resonances between itself and the outer environment.²³³

While here McClure employs a Daoist metaphor rather than evoking Buddhist ideas, the idea of the individual organism existing relationally is suggestive of Hua-yen ideas of interdependence.

In 'Hwa Yen Totalism,' a poem included in his 1975 collection *Jaguar Skies*, McClure describes a moment of religious enlightenment or 'LIBERATION' through images of organisms and ecological communities, linking ecological interdependence to the Hua-yen philosophy referenced in the poem's title:

MY SWEET LIBERATION
comes out of the conflagration
like a nation
of tiny bees
and gnats
that swarm in trees
and make a living constellation
real as a transparent whale
or narwhal²³⁴

²³¹ Ibid., p.80.

²³² Ibid., p.89.

²³³ Ibid., p.44.

²³⁴ McClure, *Jaguar Skies* (New York, 1975), p.37.

The word ‘constellation,’ which McClure used in the essay quoted above to define the individual organism, is here used to describe an ecological community including bees, gnats and trees, as well as to describe, indirectly, individual organisms: the whale and the narwhal.

While McClure views individual organisms, including himself, as having existence only in relation to their environments, which contain other organisms, his poetic expressions of ecological interpenetration are often presided over by a strident subjective voice. In ‘Hwa Yen Totalism,’ bees, gnats, trees, whales and narwhals are evoked to describe McClure’s personal moment of ‘LIBERATION.’ Likewise, in ‘Models of Complexity’ McClure describes interpenetration within natural systems, only to have the components of those systems coalesce in his own ‘being’:

The histories of beings
whirl
around each other
in successions
of cybernetic
feedback
making models of complexity
much simpler:
giant
black toads
of gentle love,
trumpeter birds
with iridescent necks
that peck about
in mud-floored huts,
a
sleepy, square-faced
jaguar
chewing on a possum,
and a margay kitten
with nocturnal eyes.
These are fragments
of my being
and songlike cries
of the bulk of what I am²³⁵

The first person ‘I’ is never so strident in Snyder’s poetic descriptions of ecological interdependence, as a comparison of another poem from *Jaguar Skies*, ‘Elf,’ with ‘Toward Climax’ will make clear. In ‘Elf,’ McClure writes:

²³⁵ Ibid., pp.75-6.

shattered
 parts
 of
 many
 beings
 draw whole
 in me again
 with skin and fin
 and shell and fur and hearts.²³⁶

As he had with the whirling beings described in ‘Models of Complexity,’ McClure imagines these fragments coalescing in himself. While it is certainly far from his intention, McClure’s vision of natural systems amalgamating in the porous human subject implies the human subject’s mastery over the other components of those systems. Nature seems to exist to facilitate McClure’s ‘LIBERATION,’ or as the building blocks from which to construct his identity. The ‘shattered / parts’ of animals that McClure describes—the skin, fin, shell, fur and hearts—recall Snyder’s catalogue of animal components at the beginning of ‘Toward Climax,’ which included skin and fins, as well as toes, eyes, legs, wings and teeth. In stark contrast to McClure’s poems, the subjective ‘I’ is entirely absent from ‘Toward Climax,’ where verbs are frequently not attached to a subject. Snyder only employs one personal pronoun in the whole of his poem when, pondering the extinction of ‘big herds,’ he asks ‘did we kill them?’²³⁷ Significantly, it is a plural, not a singular first-person pronoun. Snyder’s poetic vision of ecological interdependence is not organized around a central subjective ‘I’ as McClure’s is; Snyder’s subjectivity occupies no more central a position than any other node in Indra’s net.

²³⁶ Ibid., p.34.

²³⁷ Snyder, *Turtle Island*, p.82.

5. Ideas of the Primitive in 'The Hokkaido Book'

In the preceding chapter it was shown that Snyder drew out ecological implications from Hua-yen Buddhist philosophy. A religious perennialist, Snyder did not see Buddhism as having a monopoly on the ecological/religious vision he himself tried to express in his writing. In a letter quoted in Chapter Three, Snyder distinguished between 'Buddhism' as a particular religious tradition, and 'the Dharma' as the religious insights expressed by many religious traditions.¹ As has been seen in Snyder's references to Native American cultures (Chapter Three) and in my discussion of his essay 'The Politics of Ethnopoetics' (Chapter Four), Snyder often found the 'green Dharma' to have been realized by 'primitive' cultures. The word 'primitive' for Snyder (and he uses the word frequently) is devoid of 'all negative associations': 'it means *primus* or "first," like "original mind," original human society, original way of being.'² 'Original mind' is a Buddhist term for the state of enlightenment,³ and employing the term here, Snyder suggests a link between Buddhist and primitive religious insights. In 'Nets of Beads, Webs of Cells' Snyder argues that the 'perception of a "sacramentalized ecosystem"', suggested by 'the Hua-yen Buddhist image of Indra's net,' lies 'behind the ceremonies of compassion and gratitude in foraging cultures'.⁴ It is 'the earliest subsistence cultures of the world' who 'most beautifully expressed their gratitude to the earth and its creatures' and as 'Buddhists we have something yet to learn on that score.'⁵

McMahan argues that the themes of alienation from nature, and critiques of rationalism which pervade Buddhist modernism are rooted in Romantic traditions of primitivism:

Such literature draws on a primitivism that has always been the shadow of rationalism, emerging full-blown in the Romantic period, where we see a longing to slough off the complexities of modern society, a valorization of the "noble savage," a modern mythical being innocent of modernity's fall into differentiation, artificiality, and nihilism—someone in

¹ Gary Snyder to Mr. Abé, 26 December 1967, GSP II 1:1.

² Snyder, *The Real Work*, p.115.

³ *Ibid.*, p.99.

⁴ Snyder, *A Place in Space*, p.67.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.70.

harmony with his environment, without the acquisitiveness, the drive to power, of the spiritual vacuity of modern humanity.⁶

Snyder acknowledged an intellectual debt to '[o]ne of the most remarkable intuitions in Western thought [...] Rousseau's Noble Savage: the idea that perhaps civilization has something to learn from the primitive.'⁷ The relationship between primitivism and Buddhism for Snyder, however, is not as straightforward as McMahan's account suggests. The primitive forms one half of a binary opposition in Snyder's writing, with the opposing term being civilization.⁸ Buddhism can be aligned with either term. Within the essays of *Earth House Hold*, Buddhism may at one moment be aligned with the primitive because it carries 'much of the Stone Age religion along with' it,⁹ at another it becomes aligned with civilization because Buddhist as well as Hindu 'institutions [in Asia] had long been accomplices of the State in burdening and binding people'.¹⁰

Examining both published and unpublished material, this chapter will examine ideas of the primitive in 'The Hokkaido Book,' a study of environmental attitudes in the Far East that Snyder worked on throughout the 1970s but never completed. Up until now, this thesis has focused on another binary opposition that Snyder's writing negotiates: that between East and West. It has been seen that Snyder often presents Eastern cultures as ecocentric and Western culture as ecologically destructive, although he has complicated this binary opposition ever since 'The Berry Feast.' Snyder's negotiation of the primitive/civilized binary in the published and unpublished fragments of 'The Hokkaido Book' coincides with a reformulation of his ideas concerning the relationship between East and West. While the earlier fragments of 'The Hokkaido Book' complicate further the binary opposition of East and West, the later fragments go on to deconstruct the binary opposition of civilized and primitive.

⁶ McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, p.12.

⁷ Snyder, *Earth House Hold*, p.120.

⁸ See for example *Earth House Hold*, pp. 115, 126.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.132.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.114.

Composition and Publication History

In the summer of 1972 Snyder travelled to Hokkaido, Japan's second largest island in the north of the country, to research a book on the island's wilderness which was to be published by Friends of the Earth. In the following years the project ballooned into a study of wilderness and environmental attitudes in China as well as Japan. The project was never completed, although material relating to it was published piecemeal. In 1974, a pamphlet by Snyder entitled *North Sea Road* (a literal translation of 'Hokkaido') was included as part of a periodically issued 'bundle' of art and information called PLANET/DRUM, published in San Francisco with a print run of 2,800. The first four pages largely consist of anecdotes taken from the journal Snyder kept on his visit to Hokkaido, but touch on the geography, ecology and history of the island. The latter four pages are dedicated to an essay on the 'Phytogeography of the Islands of the North Pacific' by Misao Tatewaki, a Japanese botanist who Snyder met while in Hokkaido. Next, in 1977 Snyder published a short essay 'A Note on the Interface' on the history of the Ainu, Hokkaido's indigenous people, in *Alcheringa*, a journal of ethnopoetics. Then in 1978, a selection of mini-essays under the collective heading "'Wild" in China' were published in *CoEvolution Quarterly*. Although these pieces deal with the cultural and environmental history of China, a subheading identifies them as being 'from the Hokkaido Book in progress'.¹¹ Finally, "'Wild" in China' was reprinted together with two more essays, 'Walls Within Walls' (originally published in 1983)¹² and 'The Brush,' in *The Gary Snyder Reader* in 1999, collectively being identified as 'from *The Great Clod Project*',¹³ by which the Hokkaido project had come to be called. While the project was never completed, these published fragments, together with correspondences and the journal Snyder kept in Hokkaido—now held at Snyder's archive at UC Davis—reveal much of Snyder's intentions for the project. Furthermore, themes

¹¹ Snyder, "'Wild" in China', p.39.

¹² Snyder, 'Walls Within Walls', *CoEvolution Quarterly* 37 (Spring, 1983), 90-71.

¹³ Snyder, *The Gary Snyder Reader*, p.285.

arising from Snyder's Hokkaido research—in particular, the image of the Ainu bear god/goddess—can be seen in several poems of the 1970s.

Snyder's interest in the Ainu dates back to at least as early as 1967. In July that year he wrote to his ex-wife Joanne Kyger thanking her for directing him to 'the Ainu material in the Waley book', referring to the translations of Ainu poetry and an Ainu folk story in Arthur Waley's collection *The Secret History of the Mongols* (1963). Snyder wrote to Kyger that he had seen a copy of the volume in Ruth Sasaki's library in Kyoto, 'but never looked at it, not being especially concerned with the Mongols.' He was, however, 'curious to know more about the Ainu; them being so much like the N.W. coast Indians.'¹⁴ Parallels between the Ainu and Native Americans would become important as the project progressed.

A contract dated 12 March 1970 shows that Snyder and the photographer Ferenc Berko agreed to produce a book entitled 'Hokkaido: Perspective on Wilderness,' to be published by The John Muir Institute, Friends of the Earth, and the McCalls Publishing Company by 30 June 1971.¹⁵ The book was intended to have been part of a series called 'The Earth's Wild Places.' In a 1971 letter, Snyder states that he had looked at two other titles in that series: Robert Wenkam's *Maui: The Last Hawaiian Place* and Max Knight's *Return to the Alps*.¹⁶ These are both large coffee-table books describing specific wilderness landscapes through prose and colour photography. The forewords to each book, written by founder of Friends of the Earth David Brower, make clear the series' conservationist agenda: 'Some kinds of beauty have to be put in a please-do-not-handle category, with humanity settling for a chance merely to pass by and look', writes Brower of Maui, the second-largest Hawaiian island.¹⁷ Both books employ primitivist tropes within their conservationist arguments. The introduction to *Maui* presents the

¹⁴ Gary Snyder to Joanne Kyger, 4 July 1967, GSP II 2:9.

¹⁵ [The Great Clod] Project, or *Hokkaido: Perspective on Wilderness*, agreement with The John Muir Institute, 12 March 1970, GSP I 27:12.

¹⁶ Gary Snyder to Friends of the Earth, 10 May 1971, GSP II 1:79. The contract for Snyder and Berko's book mentions 'a series of books' but does not name it. The books Snyder mentions in the letter of 10 May 1971 were part of 'The Earth's Wild Places' series. In a 1974 interview Snyder misremembers the name of the series as 'Wild Places of the Earth' (McKenzie, 'Moving the World a Millionth of an Inch', p.152).

¹⁷ David Brower, Foreword, *Maui: The Last Hawaiian Place*, by Robert Wenkam (San Francisco, 1970), 20-22, p.21. Cf. Brower, Foreword, *Return to the Alps*, by Max Knight (San Francisco, 1970), 18-20, pp.18-19.

‘[p]rimitive ways’ of Maui’s indigenous inhabitants as being in harmony with the island’s wilderness landscapes, while the ‘civilized ways’ of European, American and Asian immigrants are likely to ‘destroy [the] unprotected wilderness and wild life with appalling ruthlessness’.¹⁸ A quotation from Italian nature writer Guido Rey included in *Return to the Alps* imagines the Alps as a landscape where ‘modern, civilized man, sated with artificialities and luxury’ can ‘unite with’ the spectre of ‘his prehistoric brother, alive and unchanged, a simple child of Nature’.¹⁹

In the same letter in which Snyder mentioned reading these two books, he also informed Brower that he was resigning from the project and returning his advance, giving reasons of lack of time and lack of first-hand experience of Hokkaido’s wilderness: ‘I can’t imagine doing a book on a wilderness without weeks and months of backpacking through it.’²⁰ Joan MacIntyre responded on Brower’s behalf in June, urging Snyder to reconsider and granting him and Berko expenses to travel to Hokkaido and an extra year to finish the book. MacIntyre’s letter suggests that ‘The Hokkaido Book’ need not conform to the formula of previous books in the series, and that Snyder would be free to write it as he chose:

David really wants you to do this book. He sees it as our way of moving into a new kind of verbal or conceptual place, sees you as irreplaceable – as a real writer writing about an essential reality, that could bring a dimension into his work that he very much needs.²¹

Snyder responded in August agreeing to continue with the project, apparently taking the intellectual freedom granted by MacIntyre’s letter as a prompt to reformulate the shape of the project, ‘with the idea of possibly invoking the “wilderness that was” to a small extent in the book; as well as showing the wilderness that is.’²² Environmental history would become a more prominent part of the project, both in relation to Hokkaido and to the Chinese material that was included later.

¹⁸ Charles A. Lindbergh, Introduction, *Maui*, by Robert Wenkam, 23-5, p.25.

¹⁹ Quoted in Knight, *Return to the Alps*, p.46.

²⁰ Gary Snyder to Friends of the Earth, 10 May 1971, GSP II 1:79.

²¹ Friends of the Earth to Gary Snyder, 9 June 1971, GSP II 58:63.

²² Gary Snyder to Friends of the Earth, 19 August [1971], GSP II 1:80.

Snyder and Berko travelled to Hokkaido in the summer of 1972 to conduct research and take photographs. More doubt over the future of the project seems to have been cast after their return, however. A letter from Snyder to Brower dated September 1972 complains of lack of communication from Brower, and expresses concern over rumours that the publisher McCalls had withdrawn backing for the project.²³ The correspondence directly following this letter is not extant, but by December 1974 Snyder was back at work on the book, even though he had run over the extra year given to complete it. A letter to Anne Chamberlain of Friends of the Earth shows that by that date, the scope of the book had increased significantly:

The book as planned now will probably be structured around a journal kept in Hokkaido during the summer of 1972 and departing in and out from the journal to fill in such areas of information as:

- Geological and biological background of Hokkaido
- The Ainu people; circum-polar Bear cult American Indian contacts? Ainu subsistence on Hokkaido
- Far Eastern attitudes toward nature. Pre-feudal Chinese thought. Tao as "Great Mother". Japan and male-oriented Confucianism.
- Destruction of nature in pre-modern China and Japan
- Japanese colonialism and Ainu.
- post-Meiji Hokkaido history.
- similarity of treatment of Ainu with treatment of American Indians in the west.
- American "experts" in 19th C. Hokkaido
- Modern Japanese industrial culture
- Primitive world view in the light of ecological crisis
- Alternatives for Japan's future. Red China. Sacramental Food-chain.
- Brief critique of capitalism

²³ Gary Snyder to Friends of the Earth, 20 September 1972, GSP II 1:81.

--The interior wilderness of Hokkaido

--How to see

--Labor-intensive life

--Zen and primitive.²⁴

It is worth quoting this outline at length firstly because it lists many of the themes that will be explored in the published fragments of the Hokkaido book, and shows that Snyder's aims for his book were much more intellectually ambitious than the other books in the series. It also gives an idea of why the project was never completed. Snyder's free-ranging prose style may lend itself to such open-ended topics as a 'Brief critique of capitalism' or 'How to see'; even so, arranging such diverse material into a coherent book would be no easy task. In February 1976, still working on the book, Snyder wrote to Nanao Sakaki of his difficulties with the project: 'it takes long and it is slowly pulling together many thoughts.'²⁵

In August 1978 Snyder wrote to Berko that he had completed 70 pages of the book, which he 'hesitate[d] to refer to as the "Hokkaido" book any longer, since it really is a study of attitudes towards nature in the far east with Hokkaido as just one kind of pivot point.' The work was 'excruciatingly slow,' but Snyder felt he would be able to complete the book within 'a couple of more years', and suggested arranging a new contract to reflect the altered timescale.²⁶ In January 1979 Snyder wrote to Brower that he still had 'under a hundred pages of finished manuscript [...] entirely about ecological problems and environmental attitudes in Chinese history.' Sections of this material had by now been published in *CoEvolution Quarterly*, and their publication gave Snyder 'clarification of what [he was] doing.' He resolved to 'wrap up the China material as a separate small book—probably a textbook—that will be of use to undergraduates and graduate students in the field.' With regard to the Japan and Hokkaido material, on which Snyder had done 'virtually nothing', he felt unable to undertake the same

²⁴ Gary Snyder to Friends of the Earth, 17 December 1974, copy included in folder with Friends of the Earth to Gary Snyder, 5 December 1974, GSP II 58:68.

²⁵ Gary Snyder to Nanao Sakaki, 28 June 1976, GSP II 2:70.

²⁶ Gary Snyder to Ferenc Berko, 24 August 1978, GSP II 1:23.

amount of historical research that he had devoted to China, but could possibly write something on contemporary Hokkaido, in line with what Brower ‘wanted it to be in the beginning’, although Snyder was making ‘no promises.’ Snyder suggested that he would need to undertake a second trip to Hokkaido, although this never happened, and nothing further was published of the Hokkaido material.²⁷ In September 1979, Snyder sent 80 pages of the China book manuscript, now called ‘The Great Clod,’ to Friends of the Earth.²⁸ This has never been published in its entirety.

Edward H. Schafer: a Stylistic Predecessor

Snyder felt that no generic precedent existed for a work of factual prose that dealt with the human and environmental history of a Far Eastern region in the way he envisioned ‘The Hokkaido Book’ doing. The work of Edward H. Schafer, however, came somewhere close. Schafer had taught Snyder at the Oriental Languages Department at Berkeley, and Snyder wrote to Brower in January 1979 (by which time the work’s focus had shifted to China) that much of his research ‘would not have been possible’ without Schafer, ‘whose marvellous books amount to the closest thing to “Chinese environmental history” so far done: the Golden Peaches of Samarkand, The Vermillion [sic] Bird, Shore of Pearls, and The Divine Woman.²⁹ While *The Divine Woman* (1973) would have a thematic influence on Snyder, to be discussed below, *Shore of Pearls* (1970) provides the closest structural or generic precedent for what Snyder seems to have envisioned at first. In fact, *North Sea Road* can be regarded as a kind of imitation-in-miniature of Schafer’s book. Like *North Sea Road*, *Shore of Pearls* takes an island—Hainan Island off the south coast of China—as its subject, examining Chinese accounts of it up to Tang and Song times, and combines human and environmental history; the first chapter being entitled ‘History’ and the second ‘Nature.’ *Shore of Pearls* is full of

²⁷ Gary Snyder to David Brower, 18 January 1979, GSP II 1:31.

²⁸ Friends of the Earth to Gary Snyder, 17 September 1979, GSP II 59:3.

²⁹ Gary Snyder to David Brower, 18 January 1979, GSP II 1:31.

quotations from contemporary accounts of Hainan, both prose and poetry, the latter adding a further element of cultural history to the work. Snyder imitates Schafer's style of quotation in *North Sea Road*, including a seventeenth-century Japanese account of the Ainu, who are said to possess 'immense natural power' and have 'hair [that] grows upward' and eyes 'like the golden morning sun', on the second page of the pamphlet.³⁰

Schafer's initial chapter on history details a series of attempts by the Chinese, or Hua people, to colonize Hainan and to subdue the native Li people, who the Hua regarded as 'uncivilized.'³¹ Schafer suggests that Hua oppression of the native Li is intrinsically linked to exploitation of the environment (although he does not make the point as forcefully as Snyder will in relation to the Ainu): 'The exactions of the new administrators, greedy for the natural wealth of the island, provoked repeated uprisings.'³² Furthermore, Schafer suggests parallels between the treatment of the Li by the Hua on Hainan with the treatment of Native Americans by European settlers, just as Snyder planned to describe the 'similarity of treatment of Ainu with treatment of American Indians in the west.' Schafer's third chapter is entitled 'Aborigines,' and attempts 'to reconstruct the Chinese image of the native peoples of Shore of Pearls [ie Hainan]'.³³ The epigraph of the chapter is a quotation from American statesman William Maxwell Evarts, describing the Mayflower pilgrims' first encounter with Native Americans:

The pious ones of Plymouth, who,
reaching the Rock, first fell upon
their own knees and then upon the
aborigines.³⁴

³⁰ Snyder, *North Sea Road* (San Francisco, 1974), n. pag.

³¹ Edward H. Schafer, *Shore of Pearls* (Berkeley, 1970), p.2.

³² *Ibid.*, p.12.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.56.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.55.

Japan's Modernization

North Sea Road begins by emphasizing Japan's, and Hokkaido's, modernization. 'Today [Hokkaido] is the Alaska/California of the world's third largest industrial-economic power.'³⁵

On the following page, Snyder describes a mural in Sapporo, the prefectural capital, which depicts a narrative of Hokkaido's modernization, hinting at both the environmental cost and the suppression of the indigenous Ainu that modernization entails:

On the main lobby floor of the Prefectural Office-Building is a mural, wrapping around a right angle, maybe 80 feet long in all. Low relief on stone. "Hokkaido's hundred years" ... starting, as such murals do, with the woods, deer, and the natives ... and then pioneers wielding axes, hovering over stumps. Soon there are girls harvesting wheat; haystacks and cows; and finally the bridges, steamships, and airplanes in the sky. One hundred years.³⁶

The mural Snyder describes here celebrates the 1968 centennial of the incorporation of Hokkaido into the Japanese state. Celebrations had included public ceremonies at Maruyama Stadium in Sapporo, attended by the Emperor, and the construction of the first stages of a memorial park and the Museum of Development. The historical narrative that surrounded these celebrations generally excluded the Japanese suppression of the Ainu, and the Ainu were largely excluded from the celebrations themselves.³⁷ In Snyder's description of the mural, the 'natives' disappear after the arrival of the 'pioneers', who are pictured 'hovering over stumps', suggesting their role in Hokkaido's deforestation. Although the timescale may be different, this narrative fits American history as well as it does the history of Hokkaido. The description of the Japanese as 'pioneers' deliberately establishes this parallel with American history, just as the earlier description of Hokkaido as 'the Alaska/California' of Japan suggested a trans-Pacific analogy. As Schafer had compared the Li people to Native Americans, Snyder's trans-Pacific parallelism here implies an analogy between the treatment of the Ainu with the treatment of Native Americans.

³⁵ Snyder, *North Sea Road*, n.pag.

³⁶ Ibid. Snyder's ellipses.

³⁷ Richard Siddle, *Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan* (London, 1996), pp.161, 163.

1968 was also the centenary of the Meiji Restoration, a period in which Japan became less isolationist, opening herself to trade with the West and importing Western technology. In Snyder's poems about Japan written while he was living there, Japan's modernization and corresponding alienation from nature are associated with Western influence. 'Out West' describes a farm in which traditional Japanese farming methods—manual 'hoes', and 'poles and straw ropes'—have been replaced by 'a new gas cultivator'. Snyder notes the 'fumes' it gives off, and registers his distaste for the machine through his description of its 'cough cough' sounds and 'wheezes'. Snyder suggests that the modernization of farming methods is part of the broader Westernization of Japanese culture: the boy operating the gas cultivator wears a 'straw hat shaped like a stetson' and 'tight blue jeans.'³⁸ 'Vapor Trails' describes US pilots, who remained in Japan following the San Francisco treaty of 1951, disrupting the natural beauty and rustic simplicity of Japanese life: the 'air world' is 'torn and staggered for these / Specks of brushy land and ant-hill towns'.³⁹ In these poems, Snyder is employing the 'machine in the garden' trope identified by Leo Marx, in which a machine, symbol of technological modernity, is depicted 'invading the peace' of a scene of idyllic tranquillity.⁴⁰ In Snyder's poems, Japan is the idyll while the disruptive influence of the machine comes from the West.

From the mid-1950s, Japan had enjoyed a period of unprecedented economic growth, often referred to as the Japanese Miracle. While Japan had seen some industrialization in the first half of the twentieth century, she was still essentially an agrarian nation when the occupying Allied forces left in 1952.⁴¹ The era of the Japanese Miracle saw heavy industrialization and the shift from a predominantly agricultural to a predominantly urban economy.⁴² During these decades, as historian Conrad Totman notes, 'in tandem with the industrial boom, several forms of socially objectionable pollution – noise, vibrations, ground

³⁸ Snyder, *The Back Country*, p.39.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.37.

⁴⁰ Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (1964; repr. London, 1967), p.29.

⁴¹ See Gary D. Allinson, *The Columbia Guide to Modern Japanese History* (New York, 1999), p.85.

⁴² Conrad Totman, *A History of Japan* (Malden MA, 2000), p.455.

subsidence, foul odors, and construction that blocked out sunlight, as well as air and water pollution – became causes of complaint, especially in urbanized areas.⁴³ A number of cases of industrial poisoning came to public attention, the most prominent of which was the Chisso Corporation’s poisoning of Minamata Bay in Kyushu. The mercury poisoning of the area had begun in 1908, but became more intense in the 1950s and was brought to national public attention in the early 1970s. Likewise, integrated coastal industrial sites known as *kombinato* ‘concentrated diverse polluting activities at fixed spots’, polluting the air with sulphur oxides. In 1969, the Japanese government recognized 73,000 people as victims of industrial poisoning. Such incidents led to public outcry, and public pressure led to the establishment of the Japanese Environment agency in 1971.⁴⁴

In the journal he kept during the Hokkaido trip, Snyder shows his concerns with these issues. On 23 June 1972 he ponders the ‘Japanese national drive for growth’⁴⁵ and on 29 June, he writes that ‘Japan has the worst pollution in the world’.⁴⁶ He would make reference to mercury poisoning in his 1973 poem ‘Mother Earth: Her Whales,’ where he describes Japan as ‘A once-great Buddhist nation’ which now ‘dribbles methyl mercury / like gonorrhoea’ into the sea.⁴⁷ Early on in the Hokkaido trip, Snyder equates Japan’s rise as a modern, polluting nation with the influence of the West. He sketches a kind of historical fall narrative in which the Japanese “‘sacred’ view of nature’ gives way to ‘greed & vanity’ which are equated with ‘industrialization’ and ‘westernization’.⁴⁸ But this narrative of Westernization is revised later in the journal. On 1 August Snyder writes:

Reading, the Financial Times book on Japan “Miracle 70” – Eco/nomics systems—indeed of interest; I wonder how I came so long able to ignore it—& depressing; the power of all that,

⁴³ Ibid., p.494.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp.494-5.

⁴⁵ Snyder’s Journal, 5 June -15 August 1972 (Book 7), GSP I 87:2, 22 June 1972.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 29 June.

⁴⁷ Snyder, *Turtle Island*, p.47.

⁴⁸ Snyder’s Journal 5 June –15 August 1972 (Book 7), GSP I 87:2, 23 June 1972.

economies of states; the Question remains must every society go through this process, and what will be left.⁴⁹

The book Snyder is referring to is a business guide published by the *Financial Times* to coincide with the Expo '70 World Fair held in Osaka. Rather than presenting Japan's modernization as a passive process of Westernization, the *Financial Times* book argues that Japan's development had been on her own terms. While in 'the early stages of her advancement from a backward country, Japan was greatly helped by what she learned from the Western nations', subsequent development does not conform to any Western economic model: 'People in those [Western] Countries could obviously profit greatly now by learning from Japan's more recent experiences.'⁵⁰ Rexroth would make a similar point in the early 1970s. 'Ever since Perry's gunboats forced open the sea gates of Japan in 1854,' he writes, 'people, both Japanese and Western, have been talking about the Westernization of the country', but 'the country has not been Westernized at all, it was simply modernized.'⁵¹ In the August quotation from Snyder's journal, there is no longer any mention of Westernization; modernization and industrialization seem to be inevitable processes that 'every society' must go through.

Prior to the Hokkaido trip, Snyder frequently argued that the roots of the ecological crisis were to be found in the Western cultural tradition, thus establishing, whether implicitly or explicitly a binary of ecocentric East and ecologically destructive West. Several examples of this line of argument have been identified earlier in this thesis. What is important to note here is that, when making such arguments in the early 1970s, Snyder often associates Japan with western industrialized nations. In his 1970 Earth Day speech, Snyder claims that the 'industrial statism' which has led to the current environmental crisis was 'the logical and historical outcome of a 5000-year long historical process that we call western civilization', the 'first expression' of which 'is in the Old Testament where we are explicitly enjoined to go out and

⁴⁹ Ibid, 1 August 1972.

⁵⁰ The *Financial Times*, *Japan Miracle '70: A Business Guide to the World's Third Economic Power Prepared by the Financial Times* (London, 1970), p.ix.

⁵¹ Rexroth, *The Elastic Retort: Essays in Literature and Ideas* (New York, 1973), p.132.

win our dominion over nature.’⁵² In contrast to Western culture, ‘primitive and Oriental cultures’ lack this spirit of domination and practice ‘disciplines of communication with nature directly’.⁵³ But anomalously, Snyder includes Japan in his list of Western industrial nations.⁵⁴ Likewise in his 1971 essay ‘Energy is Eternal Delight’ Snyder identifies the root of the developed world’s addiction to fossil fuels in the ‘priapic drive for material accumulation’ of ‘Western civilization’, but he lists Japan among the Western nations addicted to fossil fuels.⁵⁵ As long as Japan’s modernization is viewed as the product of Westernization, the East/West dichotomy still holds, but while in Hokkaido Snyder came to see that Japanese modernization could not entirely be attributed to Western influence.

The Ainu as ‘Primitive’

In the published material relating to ‘The Hokkaido Book,’ the East/West binary is replaced by another binary pair: the primitive and civilized. In his 1967 essay ‘Poetry and the Primitive,’ Snyder had argued that members of ‘primitive’ societies avoid the alienation from their own material being, and from their environment, that characterizes civilization:

“Primitive” as those societies which have remained non-literate and non-political while necessarily exploring and developing in directions that civilized societies have tended to ignore. Having fewer tools, no concern with history, a living oral tradition rather than an accumulated library, no overriding social goals, and considerable freedom of sexual and inner life, such people live vastly in the present. Their daily reality is a fabric of friends and family, the field of feeling and energy that one’s own body is, the earth they stand on and the wind that wraps around it; and various areas of consciousness.⁵⁶

Whereas the East/West and civilized/primitive binary pairs had functioned side by side in Snyder’s writing prior to the Hokkaido trip, the latter now comes to supplant the former.

⁵² Snyder, ‘Earth Day Speech (The Poet Speaks Out)’, Colorado State College, Greeley CO, 22 April 1970, GSP I 7:2, p.5.

⁵³ Ibid., p.13.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.8.

⁵⁵ Snyder, *Turtle Island*, p.103.

⁵⁶ Snyder, *Earth House Hold*, p.117.

In *North Sea Road*, the Ainu are contrasted with the civilized Japanese: ‘they are different from [the] Japanese.’ Not only do the Ainu have ‘darker skin, thick brow, up-turned nose’; they also have a ‘looser, easier walk and gaze’, suggesting that they conform to Snyder’s definition of primitive peoples as being unified with ‘the field of feeling and energy that one’s body is’. Snyder goes on to link the Ainu to other marginalized ethnic groups around the world: ‘They are Tibetans, American Indians, Polynesians, “Real People.”’⁵⁷ The contrast between the ‘primitive’ Ainu and the ‘civilized’ Japanese is repeated in the short essay ‘A Note on the Interface’, where Snyder gives an historical narrative of the suppression of the Ainu by the Yamato, the dominant ethnic group in Japan. ‘The people now called Ainu’, Snyder tells us, ‘at one time possibly occupied all the Japanese islands’. By the late ninth century, the Yamato ‘had nominal political control over the lowlands of all Honshu’ and the Ainu were marginalized to mountain areas and the island of Hokkaido. Ainu culture is presented as having an animistic and sacrificial reverence for the land; their world was one in which

[...] the River [was] a kind of artery between the Spirit-land of the deep interior mountains and the Spirit-land of the deep sea. Beings came as visitors from both ends, to be entertained (killed and eaten) and sent back with gifts.

In contrast, the agricultural Yamato people are presented as over-civilized, ‘fascinated by the image of great central government and power presented by the court of T’ang China.’⁵⁸

The portion of the narrative that follows could not fail to suggest analogies with the treatment of Native Americans by European settlers. As Japanese power increased, they traded with the Ainu, giving them alcohol, ‘half-poisoned *sake* made only for the Ainu’, and ‘the Ainu were at a disadvantage and always deceived.’⁵⁹ Later, in the 1880s, ‘the Ainu tribal structures were broken up, the land declared “all Japanese” and tiny parcels of worthless land issued to the Ainu in return.’⁶⁰ Rather than setting up a binary opposition between ecocentric East and

⁵⁷ Snyder, *North Sea Road*, n. pag.

⁵⁸ Snyder, ‘A Note on the Interface’, *Alcheringa: Ethnopoetics* iii, 1 (1977), 2-3, p.2.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.3.

alienated West, Snyder suggests that the conflict between ecocentric primitivism and alienated civilization is one that has occurred throughout history in both the East and the West.

In *North Sea Road* Snyder associates the Ainu with the native flora of Hokkaido. Directly after the paragraph describing the Ainu as ‘Real People’, Snyder describes himself walking through the meadows, unable to identify the names of flowers from his Japanese books. He spends hours on his hands and knees examining the patterns of plants without knowing their names, concluding: ‘Nameless, self complete [sic], independent, fragile, eternal, free. This is the real world.’ The repetition of the word ‘real’, the penultimate word of both paragraphs, attributes the same authenticity to the Ainu and the natural environment.⁶¹ This identification of the Ainu with their environment is reiterated in a preface Snyder wrote to Donald Philippi’s 1979 collection of translations of Ainu oral poetry, *Songs of Gods, Songs of Humans* (one of Philippi’s translations had directly followed ‘A Note on the Interface’ in the 1977 issue of *Alcheringa*).⁶² As Snyder had defined ecocentric primitive societies as ‘non-literate’ in ‘Poetry and the Primitive,’ in the preface to Philippi’s book he links the ecocentrism of the Ainu worldview expressed in Ainu poetry to its orality. ‘[C]ivilized educations’ are removed from the ‘primacy of together-hearing’, Snyder writes, and the ‘urban cosmopolitanism’ that is gained brings with it ‘the loss of a keen sense of human/natural systems integration.’ In contrast, through the communal recital of Ainu poetry of the natural world, ‘the several worlds of sense-experience and imagination are knit together.’ ‘The life of mountains and rivers flowed from their group experience,’ he writes, and a ‘people and a place become one.’⁶³ The Ainu and their environment become indistinguishable.

Snyder describes the Ainu’s unity with their environment through the language of scientific ecology, and the Ainu’s knowledge of their environment is shown to anticipate the insights of twentieth-century ecology: they ‘knew their specific watershed ecosystems and

⁶¹ Snyder, *North Sea Road*, n.pag.

⁶² Donald L. Philippi, ‘Kimun Kamui Isoitak, Song of Bear’, *Alcheringa: Ethnopoetics* iii, 1 (1977), 4-20.

⁶³ Snyder, Preface, *Songs of Gods, Songs of Humans: The Epic Tradition of the Ainu*, trans. Donald L. Philippi (Tokyo, 1979), vii-ix, pp.vii, ix.

mastered those details with beautiful and empirical precision.’ Snyder here views scientific ecology as the rediscovery of primitive wisdom ‘after a lapse of many millennia’. The Ainu worldview is described as ‘the sacramental food-chain mutual sharing consciousness’, and the Ainu term *iworu* (‘field of force’) is shown to be equivalent to the scientific term ‘biome.’ Yet for Snyder, the Ainu’s worldview surpasses scientific ecology because it includes a religious dimension; the term *iworu* ‘has spirit-world implications as well.’ Only with the addition of this spiritual dimension do ecological ideas of holism and interconnectedness become a worldview. While the ecological implications of Hua-yen Buddhism were only implicit and had to be teased out by Snyder himself, Snyder finds an ecological/religious vision already realized in Ainu culture. The ecological/religious worldview of the Ainu, Snyder claims, has particular relevance ‘in the last years of the twentieth century,’ after ‘Millennia of rapacious states spilling out of their boundaries to plunder the resources and people within reach’⁶⁴ has led to the current ecological crisis. This ‘spilling out’ is contrasted with primitive peoples’ place-centeredness, which involves intimate knowledge of their immediate environments, ‘of their specific watershed ecosystems’.⁶⁵ Snyder is hinting at a connection between primitive worldviews and bioregionalism here, ‘watershed’ being ‘the most popular defining gestalt in contemporary bioregionalism’⁶⁶.

Yet at the same time as being rooted in a specific place, the Ainu were ‘at the center of an archaic internationalism’:

Their big island was a meeting place of circum-polar hunting culture pathways with Pacific seacoast cultures. In the practices they live by are some of the purest teachings according to those old ways that survive: the sacramental food-chain mutual sharing consciousness that was likely the basic religious view of the whole northern hemisphere paleolithic. This view clearly has relevance, after a lapse of many millennia, to us again: the planet Earth:: [sic] Gaia must now be seen as *one system*.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.ix.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.viii.

⁶⁶ Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, p.246.

⁶⁷ Snyder, Preface, *Songs of Gods*, by Philippi, p.viii.

The Ainu's internationalism is compatible with the planetary scale of thinking on which contemporary ecological problems must be grasped. The reference to Lovelock's Gaia Hypothesis is fitting here as Lovelock's evocation of the Earth Goddess Gaia hints at the compatibility of archaic ecocentric religion with twentieth-century ecology's insights into the interconnectedness of global ecological systems (see Chapter Four). Crucially, the Ainu's internationalism need not imply the drive to political and environmental domination exemplified by the 'rapacious states.' In a 1977 interview Snyder had distinguished between 'planetary' and 'global' outlooks:

"Planetary mind" is old-ways internationalism which recognizes the possibility of one earth with all of its diversity; "global consciousness" ultimately would impose a not-so-benevolent technocracy on everything via a centralized system.⁶⁸

Ainu culture conforms to Snyder's definition of 'planetary mind.'

As Snyder asserts the inseparability of the Ainu from their natural environment, he also shows that the destruction of natural environments is intrinsically linked to the oppression of indigenous peoples. This was implied in Snyder's description of the Sapporo mural, and is shown more clearly in an unpublished prose draft entitled 'Revolutionary Thought & Ecological Insights,' held at Snyder's archive at U.C. Davis. While the manuscript is undated, it covers (and expands upon) much of the material in *North Sea Road*, and is certainly related to the Hokkaido book. The piece argues that the forces of industry and progress which have negative impacts on Hokkaido's environment also have negative impacts on the Ainu. The piece begins by showing that, despite most Japanese people's impressions of Hokkaido as an island of virgin forest,

Hokkaido, for all its natural appearance, has been pretty well exploited. Logged at least once and now entering the second or third time around. The great lowland swamps and bogs have been drained and converted to pasture or agriculture. And now, on the southern coast, giant industrial combines are making plans for new instant cities. The decentralization of Japanese industry will mean that the quiet shores of Hokkaido will suffer the same pollution that afflicts Honshu. The island as a whole is under attack; the demand for timber increases, and forestry

⁶⁸ Snyder, *The Real Work*, p.126.

scientists reluctantly revise their estimates of what “sustained yield” really means to satisfy the greed of government and industry. At the same time an aggressive commercial tourism pushes roads and inns deeper and deeper into the mountains, disrupting the last homes and pathways of wild animals, to say nothing of destroying the intangible essence called wilderness, which evaporates when too many people come to look at it.⁶⁹

A few pages later, Snyder shows that the ‘century of development’, while raising the standard of living for most Japanese on Hokkaido, has left the Ainu ‘worse off’ and threatens to destroy their culture entirely.⁷⁰

Snyder goes on to draw an analogy between the treatment of the Ainu and Brazil’s ‘genocide’ of the Amazon tribes ‘in the name of developing the hinterland of the Amazon’. Not only do the destruction of the tribes and the destruction of their environment go hand in hand; ‘as the Amazon Indians are destroyed, with them dies their subtle and ancient system of plant-knowledge.’⁷¹ On the next page, Snyder concludes that

[...] what we call civilization leads away from variety and diversity to monoculture; away from rich genetic information storage to a poverty of life-information [...] in a word, civilization is not in harmony with the process of biological evolution but runs counter to it.⁷²

The term ‘monoculture’ applies equally to the land as it does to human culture. The destruction of the Ainu reduces ethnic diversity while Japanese forests logged over the course of the twentieth century were often replanted as monoculture forests.⁷³ By applying the same terms—diversity, genetic information—to primitive cultures and their environment, Snyder again makes the one indistinguishable from the other.

What Snyder is describing here has been termed ‘environmental racism,’ defined by the American environmental philosopher Deane Curtin as ‘the connection, in theory and practice, of race and environment so that the oppression of one is connected to, and supported by, the

⁶⁹ Snyder, ‘Revolutionary Thought & Ecological Insights’, n.d., GSP I 19:35, p.1.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.5.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., p.6.

⁷³ Totman, *A History of Japan*, p.499.

oppression of the other'.⁷⁴ As noted in my introduction, Huggan and Tiffin point out that '[e]nvironmental racism has both positive and negative components, accruing just as easily to those considered romantically to be in harmony with nature, e.g. the familiar trope of the "ecological Indian"'.⁷⁵ Snyder's identification of the Ainu with their natural environment lays him open to charges of positive environmental racism. It should first be said that Snyder never presents his argument in terms of racial essence, but rather in terms of primitive and civilized stages of culture. Nevertheless, the association of a cultural other with nature, as environmental philosopher Val Plumwood has argued, may serve obliquely to uphold the logic of Western colonialism, which justifies itself as the imposition of rational, Enlightenment values onto the linked spheres of 'rational deficit' which include 'backward' cultures as well as the natural world.⁷⁶

In Japan before the 1970s, the association of the Ainu with nature tended to carry negative connotations,⁷⁷ but from the 1970s, when Snyder was writing about the Ainu, Ainu groups were beginning to present their own culture as being in harmony with nature, in much the way Snyder presents them. A few Ainu writers had been making such associations since the 1920s. The preface to the young Ainu writer Chiri Yukie's *Ainu Shinyōshū* (*Collected Songs of the Ainu Gods*), published in 1923, 'evoked a nostalgic vision of a happy Ainu past in harmony with nature'.⁷⁸ Another Ainu writer of this period, Iboshi Hokuto, published an essay entitled 'Ainu no Sugata' ('The Condition of the Ainu') in an Ainu magazine in 1927. Iboshi argued that the Ainu had been 'fettered under the euphemism of protection, robbed of their land of freedom and forced to become loyal slaves' to the Japanese state. He urged other Ainu to assert

⁷⁴ Deane Curtin, *Environmental Ethics for a Postcolonial World* (Lanham, 2005), p.145. Quoted in Huggan and Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*, p.4.

⁷⁵ Huggan and Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*, p.4.

⁷⁶ Val Plumwood, 'Decolonizing Relationships with Nature', *Decolonizing Nature: Strategies for Conservation in a Post-colonial Era*, eds. William M. Adams and Martin Mulligan (London, 2003), 51-78, p.52.

⁷⁷ Takashi Kinase, 'Difference, Representation, Positionality: An Examination of the Politics of Contemporary Ainu Images', *Senri Ethnographical Studies*, 60 (October 1998), 171-81, p.172.

⁷⁸ Siddle, *Race, Resistance and the Ainu*, p.127.

their ethnic identity, and to recall the ‘pride of an indigenous race’ (senjū minzoku).⁷⁹ In doing so, he challenged the assimilationism which underlay both the official Japanese policy towards the Ainu, and the rhetoric of most Ainu groups at the time. The 1970s and 1980s saw a strong resurgence in the assertion of ethnic identity among the Ainu, and it was not until this period that the kind of images of the Ainu presented by Chiri and Iboshi were promoted by the Ainu on a large scale as Ainu groups, especially those composed of the young, moved away from assimilationism.⁸⁰

In ‘A Note on the Interface,’ Snyder describes this ‘Ainu political consciousness’, which he sees as beginning in the 1930s and culminating in Ōta Ryū’s *Ainu Kakumei Ron* (‘Discourse on Ainu Revolution’), published in 1973. Snyder summarises Ōta’s main points:

1. To circulate Japanese translations of Ainu *yukar* [epic poems]—thus putting the problem on a new level
2. Get in touch with American Indians.
3. Do away with “Ainu anthropology”—such scholars are only working for our acculturation.
4. Revive Ainu art.
5. Refuse assimilation. Learn our own history.
6. Revive the Ainu language.⁸¹

Ōta was actually Yamato, not Ainu as Snyder claims. A Trotskyist, Ōta believed that mass revolution would begin with the Ainu, and he influenced the predominantly Yamato group Ainu Kaiho Undo (Ainu Liberation Movement) to indulge in bomb terrorism in the Ainu’s name.⁸² Ōta represents the most extremist permutation of pro-Ainu activism of this period, but the cultural revivalism propounded in the points that Snyder draws from Ōta was widely endorsed by less extreme Ainu groups. Ōta’s suggestion that the Ainu ‘Get in touch with American Indians’ was likewise taken up by many Ainu groups of this period, who identified with indigenous movements in other countries.⁸³ Snyder’s comparison of the Ainu with

⁷⁹ Translated in *Ibid.*, p.130.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.147, 162.

⁸¹ Snyder, ‘A Note on the Interface,’ p.3.

⁸² Kinase, ‘Difference, Representation, Positionality’, p.176-7. Siddle, *Race, Resistance and the Ainu*, p.172.

⁸³ Siddle, *Race, Resistance and the Ainu*, pp.171, 178.

indigenous Brazilians in ‘Revolutionary Thought & Ecological Insights,’ and his implicit connection of the treatment of the Ainu with the treatment of Native Americans in *North Sea Road* thus replicate comparisons which Ainu groups were making themselves in this period. Indeed, Ainu contact with Native American groups often led to an association of the Ainu with nature. Siddle points to the symbol of *Ainu Moshiri*, the homeland, ‘usually translated as “the quiet earth where humans live,”’ which stood for ‘a golden age in which Ainu lived independent and happy communal lives in harmony with nature until they were destroyed by subsequent invasion and colonization.’⁸⁴ Drawing on the earlier vision of Chiri Yukie, Yūki Shōji, in 1980, described *Ainu Moshiri* thus:

Ainu Moshiri was the Mother Earth that formed Ainu culture, and this remains unchanged to this day. The Gods in whom the people believe have not left Ainu Moshiri for ever. The present situation where magnificent ethnic ceremonies are carried out every year in various regions, and prayers are offered respectfully to the Gods of Nature, is confirming Mother Earth, Ainu Moshiri, as the territory, albeit spiritually, of our people.⁸⁵

As Siddle shows, the concept of ‘Mother Earth’ (*haha naru daich*) is an ‘adaptation of Native American indigenous belief.’⁸⁶

The Bear

At the beginning of *North Sea Road*, Snyder contrasts contemporary Hokkaido, with its clear-cut forests and fast-breeder reactor, to pre-industrial times when ‘the main article of trade was once hawk-feathers, and the God of it all, the Bear.’⁸⁷ The Ainu’s worship of the bear is emblematic of their animistic reverence for nature. In ‘Revolutionary Thought & Ecological Insights,’ Snyder contrasts the Ainu’s attitude to bears with those of the Yamato Japanese. Here, Snyder recounts an anecdote originally recorded in his Hokkaido journal. Walking in the Daisetsu Mountains of Hokkaido one morning, Snyder meets three young meteorology students

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.176.

⁸⁵ Translated in Siddle, *Race, Resistance and the Ainu*, p.176.

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp.176, 178.

⁸⁷ Snyder, *North Sea Road*, n. pag.

from Hokkaido University. They tell him that they ‘feared bears.’ Such fear is widespread, due in part to an attack several years previously in which ‘two (or was it three?) students [...] were killed by a bear in the Hidaka mountains’. Snyder questions the basis of the students’ fear, as he has seen no evidence of bears being in the immediate vicinity, and the statistical chances of such an attack are slight. One of the students staunchly insists, ‘I am afraid of bears’. Snyder concludes,

I felt it wasn’t bears, but the idea of bears, that he feared, the unseen, dark, forces that lurk in the forest—and lurk deep in our minds. To be too concerned with bears while hiking in Hokkaido means you cannot become one with the mountains; nature appears to harbor evils; perhaps we should shoot all bears? And the next thought is, perhaps we should cut down the forests. This line of fear, and thought, brings us back to the environmental crisis.⁸⁸

Unlike the modern Japanese, the Ainu, we are told, saw the bear as ‘the God of the mountain, his energy, vigor, liveliness [...] a pure expression of the power of the wild forest.’ While an encounter with a bear for the Ainu would be ‘an occasion of fear,’ it would also be one of ‘delight and awe.’⁸⁹ Cultural attitudes to bears become a barometer of alienation. The Ainu revere the natural environment, while the Yamato Japanese fear of bears is a symptom of antipathy to wildness, which is a quality of mind as much as one of external nature for Snyder. The Yamato’s alienation from wild environments is the root of their environmentally destructive behaviour.

The Ainu’s reverence for the bear, expressed through ritual dance,⁹⁰ suggests to Snyder a model of democracy that would ‘include the votes and voices of trees, rivers, and animals, as well as human beings.’ By mimicking the bear in ritual dance, the Ainu dancer ‘becomes a

⁸⁸ Snyder, ‘Revolutionary Thought’, p.3.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p.4.

⁹⁰ In fact, the Ainu’s animistic reverence for the bear had traditionally been expressed through a ceremony known as the *Iomande*, in which a bear was ritually sacrificed. It is likely that Snyder read of the *Iomande* in M. Inez Hilger’s anthropological study *Together with the Ainu: A Vanishing People* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), as Kenneth Rexroth had recommended the book to Snyder (Kenneth Rexroth to Gary Snyder, GSP II 154:27). The U.C. Davis archive catalogue dates this letter 24 January 1955, but as this predates the publication of the book it cannot be correct. Hilger notes that the Ainu believed that ‘dispatching [i.e. killing] the bear was kindness, since his spirit went to the world of bear spirits, a place of happiness for him’ (p.87). In leaving out the *Iomande* from his discussion, Snyder avoids confronting its thorny ethical implications.

bear' and 'for a brief while can speak for the bear.'⁹¹ This is an idea that Snyder had earlier developed in the 1970 essay 'The Wilderness & the Non-Verbal,' reprinted as 'The Wilderness' in *Turtle Island* and already referred to briefly in Chapter Four. In that essay, Snyder imagined a government, which he calls a 'council of elders,' who would 'open themselves to representation from other life-forms.' Snyder suggests a precedent for this in 'the dances of Pueblo Indians and other peoples' in which 'certain individuals became seized as it were, by the spirit of the deer, and danced as a deer would dance, or danced the dance of the corn maidens'. Consequently, the dancers 'were no longer speaking for humanity, they were taking it on themselves to interpret, through their humanity, what these other life-forms were.' What is more, the shamanic power of the dancer to channel the spirit of animal or plant is also applicable to primitive visual art in which '[t]he animals were speaking through the people and making their point.'⁹² An ecological model of art is linked to the ecological model of democracy. The terms in which Snyder imagines environmental art, and ecocentric democratic structures, here provide a riposte to a common objection to deep ecological representations of non-human beings. Wishing 'to provide a voice for the world,' the argument goes, deep ecology simply '*cloak[s]* the human role as *representer*' and the deep ecologist, or radical environmental artist, takes on 'the position of ventriloquist.'⁹³ For Snyder, representation of the animal other need not amount to ventriloquism if the kind of shamanic channelling described above occurs. One suspects Snyder does not literally believe in spirit possession, but rather uses it as a metaphorical way of describing a state of ecocentric empathy.

Snyder refers to the Ainu and to bears in his poem 'The Way West, Underground.' The poem was originally published in 1971, showing that Snyder's interest in Ainu bear worship predates the 1972 Hokkaido trip. The poem not only references the Ainu's reverence for the bear, but describes 'the Bear Cult, which is an international mystery religion, running from

⁹¹ Snyder, 'Revolutionary Thought', p.7.

⁹² Snyder, *Turtle Island*, p.109.

⁹³ Peter C. van Wyck, *Primitives in the Wilderness: Deep Ecology and the Missing Human Subject* (Albany, 1997), p.80. Van Wyck's italics.

Utah, to the Pacific Northwest, to Siberia to Finland’, linking Ainu bear worship to the international paleolithic religion he would describe in the preface to Philippi’s book. As was seen in Chapter Three, Snyder made reference to the Bear Cult in his commentary on ‘Smokey the Bear Sutra’ as well as ‘This Poem is For Bear,’ included in *Myths & Texts*, and Snyder describes ‘The Way West’ as ‘a kind of sequel’ to that poem.⁹⁴

‘The Way West’ begins by describing a black bear in Western America, first in Oregon and then heading ‘uphill / in Plumas county’, California. The bear is described as the ‘Bear Wife’,⁹⁵ referring to the Native American story of a human woman who married a bear which fascinated Snyder throughout his career. As was seen in Chapter One, Snyder refers to this story in ‘A Berry Feast,’ and he would later tell the story in prose, as well as providing a commentary, in ‘The Woman Who Married a Bear.’⁹⁶ What Snyder describes as the ‘trans-species erotics’⁹⁷ of the Bear Wife story implies a porousness between animal and human realms of experience. The Ainu’s shamanic channelling of the bear spirit suggests a similar porousness, and reinforces the symbolic associations surrounding the image of the bear in Snyder’s work.

Because Snyder believed the Bear Cult to be international, ‘The Way West’ has an international gaze. It next pans ‘around the curves of islands / foggy volcanoes / on, to North Japan’ and describes the ‘bears / & fish-spears of the Ainu’, suggesting a connection between Native American folklore surrounding the bear and Ainu reverence for the bear. The following lines link the mythical and religious associations of the bear in these two cultures to a shamanic worldview:

Mushroom-vision healer,
Single flat drum,

⁹⁴ Snyder, Question and Answer Session, 2pm, 3 April 1971, p.9, University of Michigan, Gary Snyder’s Writer-in-Residence Appearances, transcribed Russell Gregory, GSP I 22: 9. See also Murphy, *A Place for Wayfaring*, p.105.

⁹⁵ Snyder, *Turtle Island*, p.4.

⁹⁶ Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*, pp.166-86.

⁹⁷ Snyder, *A Place in Space*, p.206.

From long before China.

Women with drums who fly over Tibet.⁹⁸

Snyder is showing that the American Indians, Ainu and Tibetans, who would all be included in his catalogue of 'Real People' in *North Sea Road*, all share in a shamanic world view. Snyder is drawing parallels between the worldviews of different indigenous peoples just, as was seen earlier, certain Ainu groups did in the 1970s.

The gaze of the poem next shifts to Europe. Snyder tells us that in Europe 'the bears are gone / except Brunhilde'.⁹⁹ By suggesting that the bear lives on in Europe only through this mythical female warrior whose name has an etymological link to 'bear,' Snyder implies another association of the bear image. In German epics, Brunhilde defied Odin and was consequently imprisoned in a ring of fire as punishment. Her story is one of female oppression. In the next line the bear is not just a mythical warrior, but a 'goddess.' In a foreword he wrote for Edward Schafer's *The Divine Woman*, Snyder describes some of the implications that the word 'goddess' took on in the twentieth century due to works of comparative mythology such as Robert Graves' *The White Goddess*. Such books taught of the 'archaic matrifocal roots' of cultures across the world, represented by goddess figures, which have been suppressed in 'both East and West, that have been dominated by men for several thousand years.'¹⁰⁰ Snyder sees Schafer's study of the earth goddess archetype in Tang Dynasty China as following the tradition of Graves' book. The goddess archetype has traditionally been repressed and suppressed by patriarchal culture, and for this reason it is linked to the Ainu Bear Cult, suppressed by the Japanese, and the 'Real People' who are oppressed by dominant cultures in

⁹⁸ Snyder, *Turtle Island*, p.4.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.5.

¹⁰⁰ Snyder, *A Place in Space*, pp.85-6.

general. All are part of what Snyder calls elsewhere the ‘Great Subculture’,¹⁰¹ and what the final one-word line of Snyder’s poem calls simply ‘Underground.’¹⁰²

In ‘The Bear Mother,’ a short poem from *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, Snyder links the bear goddess to that other oppressed party, the natural environment. Here, the bear is imagined as an earth- or mountain-goddess, who can be found in many guises in the poems of this volume.¹⁰³ (It will be remembered that the Ainu believed bears to be mountain gods.) As in the Bear Wife story, the bear in this poem is eroticized, but the ‘trans-species erotics’ of this poem permeates the whole environment. The bear ‘teases’ Snyder and ‘kisses [him] through the mountain’.¹⁰⁴

“Wild” in China’

In the collection of short essays collectively entitled “‘Wild” in China,’ identified as being ‘from the Hokkaido Book in progress’ in the Fall 1978 edition of *CoEvolution Quarterly*, Snyder’s categories of primitive and civilized are set into play, but Snyder here is less categorical in his rejection of the civilized. In his account of a kind of pastoral nostalgia in Chinese poetry, and in Chinese culture more generally, Snyder moves towards the incorporation of the civilized, urban world into his ecological vision which, in the following chapter, will be seen to characterize many of the poems of *Mountains and Rivers Without End*.

The first of these mini-essays, ‘Hsieh’s Shoes,’ begins in a Schaferesque mode. Just as Schafer made the interactions of the Hua people (the dominant ethnic group in China) and the Li people (the ‘non Chinese [i.e. “uncivilized”]’ natives of Hainan) central to the narrative of *Shore of Pearls*,¹⁰⁵ Snyder begins by describing the ethnic differentiations within Chinese culture:

¹⁰¹ Snyder, *Earth House Hold*, p.115.

¹⁰² Snyder, *Turtle Island*, p.5.

¹⁰³ See Anthony Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning*, pp.49-56.

¹⁰⁴ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p.113.

¹⁰⁵ Schafer, *Shore of Pearls*, p.2.

The people of mainstream China call themselves “*Han*” people [a term largely synonymous with ‘Hua’], even today. The term is contrasted with any and all “ethnic” groupings—such as the people of the south known as the *Yüeh* (modern *Viet* of Vietnam), who “cut their hair short and tattooed themselves.”¹⁰⁶

The use of the word ‘mainstream’ to describe the Han suggests that the non-Han are to be regarded as representatives of the global ‘Great Subculture’ defined in ‘Poetry and the Primitive.’ Like the Ainu, the non-Han have been marginalized by the dominant ethnic group throughout Chinese history, although such marginalization had met with resistance in recent years; Snyder describes how contemporary ‘cadres organizing and educating in Tibet who are too grossly contemptuous of local customs might be sent back labelled “Han chauvinists.”’¹⁰⁷ Like the Ainu, the ‘tribal people’, as well as some ‘backwoods Han people’, inhabit more wild areas than the dominant Han: the ‘forests and agriculturally marginal areas’. But it is the Han people’s attitudes toward nature that Snyder is primarily concerned with here. He describes a ‘flourishing back-to nature movement from within the ruling gentry class’ which began during the Six Dynasties period, and which lies at the root of the Tang and Song artistic representations of nature that ‘we now take to be the Chinese sense of nature as reflected in art.’¹⁰⁸ This ‘Chinese sense of nature’ arose, Snyder’s essay implies, precisely because of the civilized Chinese’s *remove* from nature. Whereas earlier Chinese poetry had described natural environments with a short focal length, and often presented wild landscapes as ‘horrible and scary’, from the Six Dynasties period, the appreciation of wild landscapes was expressed through a ‘view [that had] moved back and become more panoramic.’¹⁰⁹ This was an aesthetic of distance.

Snyder presents the poet Xie Lingyun (Hsieh Ling-yün) as an example of the Six Dynasties aesthetic of nature. Xie was a civilized man with a taste for the wild. Born of an aristocratic family who had moved south, Xie ‘grew up in a biome that would have been

¹⁰⁶ Snyder, ““Wild” in China’, p.39.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., pp.39-40.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p.39.

considered exotic and barbarous by Confucius.’¹¹⁰ Like Snyder, Xie developed an early appreciation of wild, mountainous landscapes, but went on to undertake a political career. Like so many Chinese poets, Xie was banished ‘to a minor position in a remote south coast town’ and ‘soon resigned totally from the administration and moved to a run-down family estate in the hills southeast of present-day Hangchow’ where he composed poetry. In Xie’s poetry, Snyder’s account suggests, the civilized and wild mingle. His *fu* (prose poem) *Living in the Mountains* combines the short focal length of earlier Chinese poetry with the panoramic gaze of the Six Dynasties. This mingling leads to a ‘faint contradiction’ in Xie’s writing: while he is able to declare that he ‘awoke to the complete propriety of loving what lives’, elsewhere in the *fu* he describes his own workers felling trees and cutting bamboo. In Xie’s writing, ‘individual animals are carefully spared, while the habitat that sustains them is heedlessly destroyed.’ While such contradictions in Xie’s writing stem from his civilized, aristocratic background, his depictions of nature are valuable in so much as they transcend these cultural specifics. The specifics of Xie’s birth, Snyder argues, are an unlucky accident: he ‘was probably already out of place in China—he should have joined the Rocky Mountain Fur Company and gone out to be a trapper.’ His poetry is successful in as much as it taps into a universal spirit: ‘he opened up the landscape—“mountains and waters”—to the poetic consciousness for all time’.¹¹¹

The final paragraph of ‘Hsieh’s Shoes’ suggests that the ‘Chinese sense of nature’ has roots further back than the Six Dynasties back-to-nature movement epitomised by Xie. Snyder writes, ‘Mountains were always foci of spirit power in China, beginning perhaps as habitat for the *hsien*, a shaman who gained “power” in the hills.’ Those same mountains ‘became a place of retreat for the Taoist practitioners of “harmonizing with the Way” and again as sites for Buddhist monasteries.’ It was into this same landscape the Hsieh ‘plunged’.¹¹² While he does not say so explicitly, there is a suggestion that something of the spirit of this prehistoric,

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p.40.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

shamanic reverence for wilderness survived in later Chinese culture, albeit it in a transformed state.

The kind of perennialism that Snyder implies here has a precedent in Schafer's writing. It will be remembered that Snyder wrote a foreword to Schafer's *The Divine Woman*. Although Snyder's foreword was written in 1980, after 'Hsieh's Shoes,' the book itself was published in 1973 and so predates Snyder's essay. In his foreword, Snyder describes Schafer's book as demonstrating that behind the 'calm male lyric strain' of Tang and Song poetry, 'a wilder thread that goes back to prehistoric times' can be detected. Tang Dynasty poetry exhibits the continuing but suppressed 'presence of semi-human Goddesses of mountains and streams.' The goddess of the Wu mountains, Schafer's titular 'Divine Woman,' is linked to the ancient shamanic practices that Snyder refers to in 'Hsieh's Shoes': 'The mountain's name, Wu, means "female shaman."' ¹¹³

If 'Hsieh's Shoes' presents a perennialist narrative in suggesting the (albeit suppressed) continuation of an archaic spirit of reverence for wilderness, the third of the mini-essays published in *CoEvolution Quarterly* follows a more straightforward narrative of decline. 'The Chase in the Park' describes the fossilization of archaic hunting practices into empty ritual:

In Shang-dynasty times hunting had already become an upper-class sport. The old hunters' gratitude for the food received, or concern for the spirits of the dead game, had evaporated. This hunting was actually "the chase"—an expensive group activity requiring beaters who drove the game toward the waiting aristocrats who then pursued and shot with bows from chariots or horseback. ¹¹⁴

The hunting parks maintained for wealthy governors and emperors from the Han Dynasty, Snyder argues, citing information from Schafer's article 'Hunting Parks and Animal Enclosures in Ancient China,' 'evolved from Bronze Age preserves established originally to continue supplying certain wild species for the periodic state sacrifices'. While sacrifices continued to be offered to the Earth throughout Chinese history, the original sacrificial reverence for nature

¹¹³ Snyder, *A Place in Space*, p.88.

¹¹⁴ Snyder, "'Wild' in China," p.42.

held in the Bronze Age became obscured. Hunting parks became man-made landscapes; by the Zhou Dynasty such parks would include ‘artificial lakes and ponds, stables, hunting lodges, and pleasure pavilions’ and their differentiation from the natural ecosystem was marked by the introduction of ‘exotic species’.¹¹⁵ Chinese civilization became ‘alienated’ from the natural environment.¹¹⁶

In Snyder’s earlier writing, alienation from nature was felt to be a peculiarly Western condition and the cultural products of Chinese civilization—notably its religions and poetry—were held up as antidotes to this condition. By showing Chinese civilization suffering from the same condition, “‘Wild” in China’ moves beyond the more simplistic dichotomy of East and West. The final mini-essay printed in the 1978 issue of *CoEvolution Quarterly*, however, shows that this does not mean Chinese cultural products should be rejected. ‘Empty Mountain’ argues that Chinese, as well as Japanese, poetry is valuable precisely because it shares some of the sense of alienation that Westerners are all too familiar with:

The Chinese and Japanese traditions carry within them the most sensitive, mind-deepening poetry of the natural world ever written by civilized people. Because these poets were men and women who dealt with budgets, taxes, penal systems, and the overthrow of governments, they had a heart-wrenching grasp of the contradictions that confront those who love the natural world and are yet tied to the civilized. This must be one reason why Chinese poetry is so widely appreciated by contemporary Occidentals.¹¹⁷

It will be remembered that Snyder also used the word ‘contradiction’ to describe the mingling of civilized and wild in Xie’s poetry, where such contradictions were attacked as the roots of Hsieh’s less ecocentric attitudes. In ‘Empty Mountain,’ such contradictions are seen as being what give Chinese and Japanese nature poetry its power, and allow it to speak to contemporary Westerners. Arising from an over-civilized culture, Chinese poetry of the Tang and Song Dynasties exhibits a ‘strain of nostalgia for the self-contained hard-working but satisfying life of the farmer’, and harks ‘back to the Neolithic village’, but Snyder does not dismiss it as naïve

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p.43.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. p.42.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p.44.

pastoral. The strain of nostalgia that runs through Classical Chinese poetry for Snyder equates to an undercurrent of Neolithic ecocentrism that, like Schafer's divine woman, endures below the civilized surface of Chinese culture.

6. 'All Art and Song is Sacred to the Real': Chinese Landscape Painting, the

Nō Play and Mountains and Rivers Without End

“Mountains and waters” is a way to refer to the totality of the process of nature. As such it goes well beyond the dichotomies of purity and pollution, natural and artificial. The whole, with its rivers and valleys, obviously includes farms, fields, villages, cities, and the (once comparatively small) dusty world of human affairs.¹

This thesis has been concerned with various binary oppositions by which the concept of ‘nature’ is defined. Of central importance to ecopoetics is the opposition between art and nature. Adorno sums up this opposition: ‘Wholly man-made, the work of art is radically opposed to nature, which appears not to be so made.’² It is the task of ecocriticism to attempt somehow to reconcile art and nature. Dana Phillips has argued that first-generation ecocriticism oversimplified the relationship between artwork or text, and external nature. Singling out Lawrence Buell’s *The Environmental Imagination* for particular criticism, Phillips claims that earlier ecocritics displayed a naïve faith in mimesis and literal representations,³ spurning postmodern theory’s more problematic and sceptical accounts of the relationship between nature and artwork.⁴ This chapter argues that in *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, Snyder treads a middle path between faith in mimesis and postmodern scepticism.

Composed between 1956 and 1996, the poems collected in *Mountains and Rivers Without End* span most of Snyder’s career as a poet, and the volume should be considered his magnum opus. The volume bears an epigraph from ‘Painting of a Rice Cake,’ an essay by Dōgen, founder of the Soto sect of Zen

An ancient Buddha said “A painted rice cake does not satisfy hunger.” Dōgen comments:
[...]

“If you say the painting is not real, then the material phenomenal world is not real, the Dharma is not real.

¹ Snyder, *Practice of the Wild*, p.109.

² Theodore W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. C. Lenhardt (London, 1984), p.91. Cf. Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, p.119ff.

³ Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology*, pp.6-7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.ix.

“Unsurpassed enlightenment is a painting. The entire phenomenal universe and the empty sky are nothing but a painting.[”]⁵

Just as the apparent dualism of subject and object is, from a Zen point of view, illusory, so is the dualism between an artwork and that which it represents. Both are part of the same ultimate reality or emptiness.

Using the epigraph from Dōgen as a starting point for his discussion of *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, Leonard Scigaj has argued that the philosophy of art put forward in the volume is opposed to postmodernism’s view of the ‘text as a hermetically sealed ground’.⁶ But if *Mountains and Rivers Without End* refuses an extreme postmodern view of text and artwork, it does not promote a naïve faith in realism or mimesis either. In these poems, Snyder accepts that art approaches nature obliquely, filtering and distorting that which it represents, yet at the same time art is shown to belong to the same non-dualistic world as its subject. Snyder develops this philosophy of art through exploring two Far Eastern genres, both of which are permeated with Far Eastern religious ideas.

In China, ‘mountains and rivers’ is a term which signifies both landscape and landscape painting. Hunt has argued that Chinese hand scrolls, depicting mountainous landscapes, serve as a structural model for Snyder’s volume,⁷ and the first poem in the volume gives an ekphrastic description of a Song Dynasty hand scroll. In Chinese painting, Snyder found a non-mimetic aesthetic which is ‘somehow true to organic life and the energy cycles of the biosphere.’⁸ Often produced and displayed in urban environments, Chinese landscape painting also prompts meditation on another, related, binary opposition: that between nature and the city, the locus of human culture and artifice. The main part of this chapter explores Snyder’s response to Chinese landscape painting. The final section describes his response to Japanese Nō drama, an art form which Hunt identifies as providing another ‘structural model’ for

⁵ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, n. pag.

⁶ Leonard M. Scigaj, ‘Dōgen’s Boat, Fan and Rice Cake: Realization and Artifice in Snyder’s *Mountains and Rivers Without End*’, *Studies in Humanities* xxvi, 1&2 (June and December 1999), 124-36, p.126.

⁷ Anthony Hunt, ‘Singing the Dyads: The Chinese Landscape Scroll and Gary Snyder’s *Mountains and Rivers Without End*’, *Journal of Modern Literature* xxiii, 1 (Summer 1999), 7-34, p.17.

⁸ Snyder, *The Gary Snyder Reader*, p.316.

*Mountains and Rivers Without End.*⁹ Like Chinese landscape painting, Nō is a metropolitan form which depicts mountain landscapes. In ‘The Mountain Spirit,’ the antepenultimate poem of the sequence, Snyder borrows from the Nō play *Yamamba* to produce his definitive poetic statement of the reconciliation of nature and human artifice.

Chinese Art and American Modernism

While Snyder’s use of the Chinese hand scroll as a structural model for a volume-length poetic sequence is singular, American poets of the previous generation had been inspired by Far Eastern paintings. Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore and Ezra Pound all wrote poems which engage with Chinese visual art and which, in different ways, meditate on humanity’s relationship with nature. Critics Zhaoming Qian and Rupert Arrowsmith have shown that such poetic engagements followed the influx of Chinese artworks into Europe and America at the *fin de siècle* and in the first decades of the twentieth century. In England during this period, ‘London’s museums and other exhibition spaces were inundated with newly acquired prints, paintings, sculptures, ceramics, and textiles’ from China,¹⁰ and Pound and Moore both saw Chinese paintings at the British Museum. In America, the Boston Museum of Fine Art appointed Ernest Fenollosa as its first curator of Oriental Art in 1890,¹¹ and while the collection that Fenollosa oversaw mostly consisted of Japanese pieces, Okakura Kakuzō, who succeeded Fenollosa in 1910, made the acquisition of Chinese art a priority.¹² Of equal importance to the Boston collection was that of entrepreneur Charles Lang Freer.¹³ Freer donated his personal collection to the US government in 1908, and it was subsequently housed at the Freer Gallery in Washington, D.C. from 1923 after Freer’s death.

Both Qian and Arrowsmith note that the influx of Chinese art into Europe and America at this time was the result of political instability in China, which culminated in the collapse of

⁹ Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning*, pp.38-49.

¹⁰ Rupert Richard Arrowsmith, *Modernism and the Museum: Asian, African, and Pacific Art and the London Avant-Garde* (Oxford, 2010), p.106.

¹¹ Zhaoming Qian, *The Modernist Response to Chinese Art: Pound, Moore, Stevens* (Charlottesville, 2003), p.82.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.22.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp.22-3.

the Qing Dynasty in 1911. As China's last dynasty was collapsing, 'tons of art treasures were slipping through the hands of its power elite'¹⁴ and these art treasures often found their way to the West 'via fairly dubious channels.'¹⁵ The situation in China was largely the result of European interference and aggression. After the Opium War with Britain from 1839-42, the Treaty of Nanking had given Britain the island of Hong Kong as a colony, and China was forced to open a series of 'treaty ports' on her coast to trade with European countries on terms advantageous to them.¹⁶ China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 resulted in greater power being granted to European countries, and 'by the close of the century', according to historian Michael Schaller, 'China's independence had been so compromised that it was more a semicolony than an independent nation.'¹⁷ The gradual weakening of the Qing Dynasty led to the emperor's abdication and the establishment of a republic in February 1912. While Western art historians and poets alike would celebrate Chinese culture, particularly its relation to nature, this celebration should be seen against the background of Western colonialism. It was argued in the previous chapter that the very association of a culture with nature may serve to uphold the logic of Western colonialism.

Qian has shown that Stevens attended an exhibition of Chinese paintings at the Century Club in New York in March 1909,¹⁸ and conjectures that he may have visited the Oriental art collection at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston that September while on honeymoon in the city, although at that time the collection in Boston still consisted mostly of Japanese artworks. Stevens' letters show that he also saw Chinese paintings at a commercial auction in New York on New Year's Day 1911, and his interest in Chinese art endured throughout his life.¹⁹

Stevens' journals show that he was also reading books about Far Eastern art prior to World War I. In May 1909 he copied out passages from Okakura's *The Ideals of the East* (1903), a history of Chinese and Japanese art, and Laurence Binyon's *Painting in the Far East*

¹⁴ Ibid., p.22.

¹⁵ Arrowsmith, *Modernism and the Museum*, p.109.

¹⁶ Michael Schaller, *The United States and China in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1990), p.13.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.14.

¹⁸ Qian, *The Modernist Response to Chinese Art*, pp.23-4.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.28.

(1908).²⁰ Okakura's book contrasts the rustic simplicity of Far Eastern culture with western modernity, and this opposition between East and West would find its way into the two poems of Stevens that most clearly illustrate his interest in Chinese art: 'Six Significant Landscapes' and 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird.' 'The simple life of Asia', Okakura writes—and for him 'Asia is one'²¹—'need fear no shaming from the sharp contrast with Europe in which steam and electricity have placed it to-day.'²² But Asian culture is under threat from 'the scorching drought of modern vulgarity' being imported from the West.²³ For Okakura, East Asian art encapsulates the spirit of the East, and in celebrating it, his book is a work of resistance against Western cultural hegemony.

Earlier, in 1906, Stevens had read 'Letters from John Chinaman,' an essay by the British classicist, political scientist and philosopher Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson.²⁴ Dickinson's essay is written from the point of view of a fictional Chinese man living in England, and uses Chinese culture as a foil by which to highlight the ills of Western society. As such, it is an example of what Cynthia Stamy calls 'subversive orientalism.' Like Okakura, Dickinson makes a 'sharp contrast' between Eastern and Western culture, but presents this contrast in terms of alienation from nature. Dickinson's Chinaman claims that Chinese culture instils 'both the instinct and the opportunity to appreciate the gifts of Nature, to cultivate manners, and to enter into humane and disinterested relations with his fellows', while Christianity's emphasis on the transcendent realm of heaven led to westerners being 'divorced from Nature'.²⁵ Dickinson anticipates the East/West dualism expressed by White in 'The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis.'

²⁰ Ibid., p.26.

²¹ Okakura Kakuzō, *The Ideals of the East: with Special Reference to the Art of Japan* (1904; repr. Berkeley, 2007), p.9.

²² Ibid., p.141.

²³ Ibid., p.145.

²⁴ Stevens first refers to this essay in his journal entry of 5 April 1906, Wallace Stevens, *Souvenirs and Prophecies: The Young Wallace Stevens*, ed. Holly Stevens (New York, 1977), p.163.

²⁵ G. Lowes Dickinson, *Letters from John Chinaman* (1902; repr. London, 1906), p.8.

Stevens' 1916 poem 'Six Significant Landscapes' is an imitation of Chinese landscape painting, and it reproduces the East/West dichotomy of Dickinson and Okakura. The poem begins:

An old man sits
 In the shadow of a pine tree
 In China.
 He sees larkspur,
 Blue and white,
 At the edge of the shadow,
 Move in the wind.
 His beard moves in the wind.
 Thus water flows
 Over weeds.²⁶

Qian has convincingly argued that this poem was directly influenced by the Song Dynasty Ma Xia School of landscape painting. A typical subject matter would be a 'single man' sitting in meditation 'in the midst of rippling pine trees, weeds, and water', and Stevens would have been able to see examples in many major art galleries prior to the poem's completion in 1916.²⁷ In the ekphrastic opening of Stevens' poem, the parallelism of larkspur, pine tree and the old man's beard all moving in the wind suggests an identity between the Chinese man and the objects of nature.

The final section of the poem contrasts strongly to this opening vision of unity:

Rationalists, wearing square hats,
 Think, in square rooms,
 Looking at the floor,
 Looking at the ceiling.
 They confine themselves
 To right-angled triangles.²⁸

Stevens is contrasting the old Chinese man's state of unity with his environment with that of these rationalists, who 'confine themselves' away from nature through both the literally orthogonal forms of their architecture, and through the figuratively orthogonal forms of rational thought, metonymic of European Enlightenment. As such, he reproduces the East/West

²⁶ Wallace Stevens, *Collected Poems* (1954; repr. London, 2006), p.64.

²⁷ Qian, *The Modernist Response to Chinese Art*, pp.100-101.

²⁸ Stevens, *Collected Poems*, p.66.

dichotomy of Okakura and Dickinson. Dickinson actually provides a specific precedent for the terms in which Stevens draws this dichotomy. Listing the shortcomings of Western civilization, Dickinson writes: ‘Look at your streets! Row upon row of little boxes, one like another, lacking in all that is essential, loaded with all that is superfluous’. He goes on to attack briefly the shortcomings of Western literature and visual art before, in the same paragraph, concluding that ‘[r]atiocination has taken the place of perception; and your whole life is an infinite syllogism from premises you have not examined to conclusions you have not anticipated or willed.’²⁹ Dickinson’s and Stevens’ images of orthogonal Western architecture as a metonym for western alienation from nature anticipate Snyder’s description of the American suburban house as ‘a box to catch the biped in’ in ‘A Berry Feast,’ discussed in Chapter One.

In ‘Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird’ (1917), Stevens also draws on Far Eastern visual art in order to set up a dichotomy between Eastern and Western attitudes to natural environments. Like ‘Six Significant Landscapes,’ the poem is structured as a series of short vignettes, in each of which the image of a blackbird is treated differently. Litz sees the influence of ‘those Japanese prints in which a single setting is rendered from different viewpoints’, such as Hiroshige’s *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*.³⁰ Qian argues that Stevens’ presentation of a subject from multiple points of view also owes a debt to the ‘Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers’, a ‘traditional series of subjects’ in Chinese landscape painting ‘passed down from the Song period’, which Stevens had read about in Binyon’s *Paintings of the Far East*.³¹

Through the constant shifting of the relationship between the subjective ‘I,’ the blackbird and the surrounding landscape, ‘Thirteen ways’ dramatizes the integration of subject and object. In Section Four the speaker’s subjective ‘I’ disappears as humanity’s unity with the blackbird is asserted: ‘A man and a woman and a blackbird / Are one.’³² While the haiku-like

²⁹ Dickinson, *Letters from John Chinaman*, p.25.

³⁰ Arthur Walton Litz, *Introspective Voyager: The Poetic Development of Wallace Stevens* (New York, 1972), p.66.

³¹ Qian, *The Modernist Response to Chinese Art*, pp.27, 87.

³² Stevens, *Collected Poems*, p.80.

style of ‘Thirteen Ways’ is decidedly orientalist, the only places specifically mentioned are American, and each time an American place is mentioned a sense of alienation is registered. The ‘thin men of Haddam’ (a town in Connecticut) in Section Seven imagine golden birds, unable to see the real blackbird that ‘Walks around the feet / Of the women about’ them,³³ let alone experience the unity of man, woman and blackbird. The unnamed ‘He’ of Section Eleven, riding in a glass coach over Connecticut, is afraid of blackbirds.³⁴ Stevens’ poem contrasts Western artifice and alienation with an Eastern empathy with the natural world.

While the golden birds imagined by the thin men of Haddam signify their alienation from nature, Stevens does not radically oppose art and nature. Stevens would later define ‘the nature of poetry’ as ‘an interdependence of the imagination and reality as equals.’³⁵ In the context of the essay in which this pronouncement occurs, ‘reality’ primarily signifies social reality, but it does also, at times, equate to physical reality or nature. From the perspective of contemporary physics, physical reality, unmediated by human perception, is a world of ‘blank space, [...] without color’, where objects ‘have no shadows’.³⁶ In order to live in this reality, it must be worked upon by the imagination. Only then can any state of harmony between humanity and physical nature be achieved. The two poems discussed above do not attempt to render nature objectively, but rather show the imagination acting upon reality, rendering it in language full of colour and metaphor. Stevens evokes Far Eastern visual art in order to remind his reader that his own poems are imaginative mediations of reality.

Moore first saw Chinese artworks in museums at around the same time as Stevens. In March 1909 she visited the University of Pennsylvania Museum as part of a course on Oriental history she was taking at Bryn Mawr College. Although the course focused on the ‘classical orient’ of the Near East, Moore would have seen Chinese artworks at the museum.³⁷ In the summer of 1911 she visited the British Museum Exhibition of Chinese and Japanese Paintings

³³ Ibid., p.81.

³⁴ Ibid., p.82.

³⁵ Stevens, *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (New York, 1951), p.27.

³⁶ Ibid., p.31.

³⁷ Qian, *The Modernist Response to Chinese Art*, pp.30-31.

with her mother,³⁸ and in 1923 visited an exhibition of Chinese art at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art.³⁹ Moore appears to have been more interested in depictions of animals, both real and mythical, than in landscape painting. She would have seen depictions of dragons both at the British Museum and in New York,⁴⁰ and her 1932 poem 'The Plumet Basilisk' describes the eponymous lizard as a 'dragon', 'As painted by a Chinese brush'.⁴¹ She would also have seen depictions of kyilins (Chinese unicorns) at the British Museum,⁴² and her 1934 poem 'Nine Nectarines and Other Porcelain' describes a 'nectarine-loving kylin / of pony appearance'.⁴³

In the final stanza of 'Nine Nectarines' in which the kylin is described, Moore alludes to the association of Chinese culture with a harmonious relationship with nature that had been exemplified by Stevens and Dickinson. The stanza begins, 'A Chinese "understands / the spirit of wilderness"'.⁴⁴ While no specific source is cited for this quotation, the equation of Chinese culture with nature can be traced to books on oriental art which Moore read. We know she read Laurence Binyon's 1911 study of Chinese and Japanese art *The Flight of the Dragon*.⁴⁵ There Binyon opposes Eastern and Western art, and by extension Eastern and Western culture in general, in terms that recall Dickinson's Chinaman. As Dickinson's Chinaman had claimed that the overly-rational Westerner's 'outer sense [...] is dead', Binyon writes that 'we [Westerners] guard ourselves against impressions, we entrench our minds in habit, we refuse to see with our eyes, to trust our senses'.⁴⁶ Western man's self-imposed alienation from his physical environment, for Binyon, leads to a Baconian conception of art as 'essentially a conquest of matter by spirit'.⁴⁷ In contrast, Far Eastern aesthetics is based on the belief that 'man is not an isolated being; it is by his relation to others and to the world around him that he is known and

³⁸ Ibid., p.34.

³⁹ Ibid., p.71.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp.37, 71.

⁴¹ Marianne Moore, *Complete Poems* (London, 1968), pp. 24, 22.

⁴² Qian, *The Modernist Response to Chinese Art*, p.36.

⁴³ Moore, *Complete Poems*, p.30.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Stamy, *Marianne Moore and China*, p.58.

⁴⁶ Laurence Binyon, *The Flight of the Dragon: An Essay on the Theory and Practice of Art in China and Japan, Based on Original Sources* (London, 1911), p.9.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.11.

his nature made manifest.’⁴⁸ It is in ‘the painting of China and Japan’ that this conception of ‘the relation of man to nature [...] has found its most characteristic success.’⁴⁹

Another book on Far Eastern art that seems to have inspired ‘Nine Nectarines’ more directly is Louise Hackney’s *Guide-posts to Chinese Painting* (1927), which Moore had given a lukewarm review in *The Dial* in 1928.⁵⁰ Hackney introduces her study with universalist rhetoric that recalls that of Fenollosa in *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* (1912), which shall be discussed later. ‘All great art’, she writes, ‘is universal and appeals to that something deep within us which transcends race and time’.⁵¹ Nevertheless, like Dickinson and Binyon she contrasts Eastern and Western attitudes toward nature. ‘Opposition between man and Nature has been long ingrained in our Western thought’, she writes, and Western art expresses a ‘sense of ownership’ of the natural world. ‘The Chinese artist, on the contrary’, she continues, ‘has, for centuries, regarded himself only as one of the many manifestations of Nature.’⁵² The Western ‘sense of ownership’ is expressed in Western art through ‘preoccupation with details of form and the scientific knowledge of material things’,⁵³ while the ‘Chinese artist made no attempt to produce such a literal likeness’,⁵⁴ being concerned not ‘with the *aspect* of things’, but ‘with their *vitality*.’⁵⁵ Chinese art’s penchant for non-mimetic, mythological and emblematic modes, therefore, escapes the Western spirit of domination of nature.

‘Nine Nectarines’ initially seems to follow Hackney in contrasting a Western scientific gaze with a more symbolic and mythological approach. The opening stanza describes nine nectarines depicted on a porcelain plate, stating that ‘they look like / a derivative’. This concern with the biological origins of the fruit gives way in the next stanza to a discussion of the Chinese mythical associations of the nectarine’s near relative, the peach, with immortality:

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.22.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.23.

⁵⁰ Marianne Moore, *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, ed. Patricia C. Willis (New York, 1987), p.255.

⁵¹ Louise W. Hackney, *Guide-posts to Chinese Painting* (Boston, 1927), p.1.

⁵² Ibid., pp.161-2.

⁵³ Ibid., p.19.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.7.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.19.

[...] the peach *Yu*, the red-
cheeked peach which cannot aid the dead,
but eaten in time prevents death⁵⁶

The poem's footnote cites Alphonse de Candolle's *Origin of Cultivated Plants* (1886) as the source for this information on the miraculous life-giving power of the fruit. But as Schulze notes, in his scientific enquiry de Candolle relegates this mythical material to a footnote. Moore resurrects it and has the mythical material supplant the scientific.⁵⁷ To emphasize the rejection of scientifically objective description, the poem's final stanza is devoted to a description of the kylin, an imaginary composite beast.

Hackney, quoting a Chinese essay on animal painting of about 1120 A.D., had claimed that the Chinese preferred to paint wild animals, 'creatures that cannot be inured for the will of man'. She goes on to contrast such typical Chinese subject matter with the 'sportsman's interest in Nature which has inspired so much of European art'.⁵⁸ Moore may have had this passage in mind when she contrasts her Chinese plate with the 'Hunts and domestic scenes [which] occur / in France on dinner-plates' in the longer, original version of the poem.⁵⁹ Yet Moore interrogates Hackney's association of China and wildness. In the first stanza, the nectarine 'looks like / a derivative' but in the third stanza it is described as a 'wild spontaneous fruit [...] found in China first.' Seeking clarification, the poem asks, 'But was it wild?' but her scientific source 'Prudent de Candolle would not say'.⁶⁰ Whether the nectarine was originally wild or cultivated is left unresolved. Hackney's association of Chinese art with wildness is brought into question. What appears wild and spontaneous may in fact be cultivated, the product of artifice.

While the plate may or may not express Chinese culture's inherent empathy with wildness and wilderness, it is itself a decorative art object, a work of artifice, and Moore is at

⁵⁶ Moore, *Complete Poems*, p.29.

⁵⁷ Robin G. Schulze, 'Marianne Moore's "Imperious Ox, Imperial Dish" and the Poetry of the Natural World', *Twentieth Century Literature* xlv, 1 (Spring 1998), 1-33, p.21.

⁵⁸ Hackney, *Guide-posts to Chinese Painting*, p.154.

⁵⁹ Marianne Moore, 'Nine Nectarines and Other Porcelain', *Poetry* xlv, 2 (November 1934), 64-7, p.66.

⁶⁰ Moore, *Complete Poems*, p.29.

pains to draw attention to this. The first word of the poem tells us that the nectarines the plate depicts are ‘Arranged’.⁶¹ According to Bazin, the plate in the poem is based on a Chinese plate Moore’s mother had seen in the display case for the Pierce Arrow motor car,⁶² and the poem’s second stanza suggests that we are looking at a poorly reproduced image of the plate in an American magazine advertisement:

[...] the four
pairs’ half-moon leaf-mosaic turns
out to the sun the sprinkled blush
of puce-American-Beauty pink
applied to the bees-wax gray by the
uninquiring brush
of mercantile bookbinding.

The fruits, which may be cultivated or wild, are rendered through Chinese artistic convention—‘in the Chinese style’⁶³—and then reproduced by Western print media. Nature is approached obliquely through layers of artifice. What is more, the ‘spirit of wilderness’ attributed to Chinese culture, the poem suggests, by placing that phrase in quotation marks, may be a Western invention.

Pound also saw examples of Far Eastern art prior to World War I. According to Arrowsmith, the ‘venue both for Pound’s earliest and his most significant encounters with Asian artworks’ was the British Museum’s Prints and Drawings Students’ Room, which Pound first visited in 1909.⁶⁴ Laurence Binyon, who Pound had met that year, was Assistant Keeper of Prints and Drawings, and Arrowsmith argues that Pound must have originally visited the Print Room as Binyon’s guest.⁶⁵ Binyon was also in charge of the British Museum’s Far Eastern acquisitions, and in 1909 many of these would have been on display in the Print Room.⁶⁶ Pound attended Binyon’s lectures on Asian art in 1909 and probably attended the same

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Victoria Bazin, *Marianne Moore and the Cultures of Modernity* (Farnham, 2010), p.190.

⁶³ Moore, *Complete Poems*, p.29.

⁶⁴ Arrowsmith, *Modernism and the Museum*, pp.106-7.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.108.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 109, 111.

exhibition of Chinese and Japanese paintings that Moore and her mother saw, which Binyon curated.⁶⁷

Arrowsmith argues that the Japanese prints Pound saw at the British Museum influenced his early imagist work, just as Japanese prints had influenced Pound's fellow Imagists Richard Aldington, John Gould Fletcher and Amy Lowell.⁶⁸ The clearest example of orientalist ekphrasis in Pound's work, however, is Canto XLIX, known as 'The Seven Lakes Canto,' composed between 1936 and 1937 when Pound had resumed correspondence with Binyon.⁶⁹ The first thirty-two lines of this Canto are based on a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century Japanese screen book Pound had received from his parents in 1928. While the screen book was Japanese, it was based on the traditional Chinese subject 'Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers' which Pound would have learned about from Binyon.⁷⁰ For this reason I include it (as does Qian) in my discussion of American modernist responses to Chinese art. For each of the Eight Views, Pound's screen book includes an ink painting, a poem in Chinese and a poem in Japanese.

Canto XLIX is a distinctly Poundian work of subversive orientalism. In spare, paratactic verse that recalls his early Chinese translations, Pound constructs from the scenes depicted in the screen book an idyll enjoyed by 'a people of leisure.'⁷¹ Pound would later describe it as 'a glimpse of paradise.'⁷² This idyll is evoked as part of the middle Cantos' critique of Western culture, evoked later in Canto XLIX: 'State by creating riches shd. Thereby get into debt? / This is infamy; this is Geryon.'⁷³ For Pound, Western capitalism is based on abstractions that alienate Western man from nature: 'Money is not a product of nature but a product of man,' Pound wrote in 1942.⁷⁴ Modern, industrial working practices, based on the hours of the clock, are not in tune with the natural rhythms of days and seasons. To these,

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 113, 105.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 126, 130, 141, 145, 148.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.201.

⁷⁰ Qian, *The Modernist Response to Chinese Art*, p.126.

⁷¹ Pound, *The Cantos*, p.244.

⁷² William Cookson, *A Guide to the Cantos of Ezra Pound* (1985; repr. London, 2001), p.69.

⁷³ Pound, *The Cantos*, p.245.

⁷⁴ Pound, *Selected Prose, 1909-1965*, p.316.

Pound contrasts the working practices of Confucian culture, in which work is allied to the time of day,⁷⁵ and this is why towards the end of Canto XLIX he writes, ‘Sun up; work / sundown; to rest’.⁷⁶ As Bell writes, ‘a notion of work within “natural” time and within an economic system that contests usury through a reliance upon nature’s productivity, is the source of *The Cantos*’ mystical vision’.⁷⁷

But while Pound presents Chinese—particularly Confucian—culture as close to nature, the extent to which Canto XLIX’s vision of nature is mediated by artifice is remarkable. While Pound’s spare language in the opening section of the canto gives the impression of direct mimesis, it is based on the depictions of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers in Pound’s screen book which are themselves based on previous artistic depictions of a traditional subject matter rather than the actual landscape around the Xiao and Xiang. The poems and paintings in the screen book point to each other rather than any original in nature; the first poem in Chinese begins, ‘High across they dot the sky with thin black ink’.⁷⁸ As Qian writes, the ‘poems and paintings of Pound’s source book are versions of each other doubly or triply representing a traditional Chinese theme’.⁷⁹ As in Moore’s orientalist ekphrastic poem, nature is only approached through layers of artifice.

Before turning to Snyder, it should be noted that two of his West Coast contemporaries wrote poems inspired by Chinese painting and that, unlike Stevens, Moore and Pound,⁸⁰ they emphasized Buddhist themes in Chinese art. It will be remembered from Chapter One that in ‘Hojoki’ Rexroth compared the laurels of the West Coast to Su Shi’s bamboos and viewed the American wilderness through the Chan ‘aesthetic of the formless’ of Su Shih and other Song Dynasty painters.⁸¹ Ginsberg’s interest in Buddhism had first been aroused by a book of

⁷⁵ Ian F.A. Bell, ‘Middle Cantos XLII-LXX’, *The Cambridge Companion to Ezra Pound*, ed. Ira B. Nadel, (Cambridge, 1999), 92-108, p.96.

⁷⁶ Pound, *The Cantos*, p.245.

⁷⁷ Bell, ‘Middle Cantos’, p.95.

⁷⁸ Translation given in Daniel D. Pearlman, *The Barb of Time: On the Unity of Ezra Pound’s Cantos* (New York, 1969), p.306.

⁷⁹ Qian, *The Modernist Response to Chinese Art*, p.124.

⁸⁰ Qian finds ‘Chan-like notions’ in Stevens’ poems and attributes them to his interest in Chan art (Ibid., p.81), but it is not clear that Stevens would have seen Chinese artworks or his own poems in Buddhist terms.

⁸¹ Rexroth, *Assays*, p.10.

reproductions of Chinese paintings at the New York Public Library.⁸² In ‘Sakyamuni Coming Out from the Mountain,’ a poem written in 1953 before Ginsberg moved to San Francisco, he describes a painting of Gautama Buddha by the Song Dynasty painter Liang Kai. In Ginsberg’s poem the Buddha becomes an American beatnik; his ‘humility is beatness’. In the painting as Ginsberg describes it, the objects of nature appear ‘inanimate’, unlike the flowing forms Stevens describes in the first section of ‘Six Significant Landscapes.’ Only the Buddha’s ‘intelligence’ has vitality, and while his enlightenment occurs in a mountain setting, the ‘land of blessedness’ is not external nature but ‘in the imagination’.⁸³

Snyder and Chinese Art

Like Stevens, Moore and Pound, Snyder first came into contact with Chinese art in Western museums. In a 1977 interview he described his reaction on first seeing Chinese landscape paintings at the age of eleven or twelve in the Chinese room at the Seattle Art Museum:

[...] they blew my mind. My shock of recognition was very simple: “It looks just like the Cascades.” The waterfalls, the pines, the clouds, the mist looked a lot like the northwest United States. The Chinese had an eye for the world that I saw as real. In the next room were the English and European landscapes, and they meant nothing. It was no great lesson except for an instantaneous, deep respect for something in Chinese culture that always stuck in my mind and that I would come back to again years later.⁸⁴

Snyder’s mental conflation of American and Asian landscapes anticipates *Cold Mountain Poems*’ dual sense of place. Like Stevens and many of the art historians already discussed, Snyder attributes to Chinese artists an acute sensitivity to nature, their ‘eye for the world’, which is lacking in European landscape painting. It is worth noting that the opposition between Eastern and Western art that Snyder draws here would become less categorical. During a visit to London’s Tate Gallery in 1982, Snyder wrote in his journal of the English painter Samuel Palmer’s *The Waterfalls, Pistil Mawddach, North Wales* (1835-36) that ‘the Chinese could

⁸² Tonkinson, *Big Sky Mind*, p.90.

⁸³ Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, p.98.

⁸⁴ Snyder, *The Real Work*, p.94.

appreciate it', and described this and other of Palmers' paintings as 'meditative comments on Gaia and humanity in it'.⁸⁵

While at Reed College, Snyder read Ernest Fenollosa's *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* (published posthumously in 1912). Rather than presenting Far Eastern art through an East/West binary as other art historians had, Fenollosa argued for a 'universal scheme or logic of art' that would 'as easily subsume all forms of Asiatic and of savage art and the efforts of children as it does accepted European schools.'⁸⁶ As such he challenges Eurocentric prejudices by stressing similarities rather than differences between the artistic traditions of East and West. In his chapters on Song landscape painting—which would be Snyder's main interest—Fenollosa stressed its Chan philosophical underpinning. It is the 'gentle Zen doctrine, which holds man and nature to be two parallel sets of characteristic forms between which perfect sympathy prevails', that is expressed in Song landscape painting: 'When Sung went to nature with Zen, it practically declared for landscape painting'.⁸⁷ Such pronouncements may well have increased Snyder's enthusiasm for Song landscapes. Snyder continued to read about Far Eastern art while studying Oriental languages at Berkeley, where he took sumi brush painting classes with the Japanese-American artist Chiura Obata, whose *Evening Glow at Yosemite Waterfall* is reproduced on the cover of *Mountains and Rivers Without End*. In one book Snyder 'came upon a reference to a hand scroll (*shou-chuan*) called *Mountains and Rivers Without End*' and the 'name stuck in [his] mind.'⁸⁸

While living in Kyoto, Snyder saw Japanese and Chinese scrolls hanging in Buddhist temples, and during the 1970s and 1980s, after his return to America, he visited 'most of the major collections of Chinese paintings in the United States', including those at the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Freer Gallery in Washington, D.C., the Nelson Gallery in Kansas City, the Honolulu Academy of Arts, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Asian Art Museum of

⁸⁵ Snyder's Journal, 15 May 1982-8 November 1982 (Book 20), GSP I 89:4, 28 December 1982.

⁸⁶ Ernest Fenollosa, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art: an Outline History of East Asiatic Design*, 2 vols. (1912; repr. New York, 1963), vol.i, xxiv.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. ii, 4, 6.

⁸⁸ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p.153.

San Francisco. During this period he also saw Chinese landscape paintings at the British Museum, the Stockholm National Museum, the Palace Museum in Beijing and the Palace Museum in Taipei.⁸⁹ Snyder's journals record details of some of these visits, and attest to his interest in landscapes over other subject matters. On 4 November 1973 Snyder visited the Chinese Painting Room at the Nelson Gallery, Kansas City.⁹⁰ His responses to six scroll paintings recorded in his journal were later typed up as a sequence of poems entitled 'Six Scrolls to be Seen in Kansas City.' The sequence was not published, but the undated typescript is held at Snyder's archive. Each poem in the sequence describes one of the scroll paintings Snyder saw at the Nelson Gallery. These are, as Snyder names them: *Landscape in the Style of Li T'ang* (end of twelfth century); *Carts on a Winding Mountain Road* by Yuan Chiang (1694); *Landscape in the Manner of Tung Yuan* by Kung Hsien (mid-late seventeenth century); *River Landscape* by Li Chung-Lueh (1206); *Travelling in the Chill of the Mountains*, Li/Kuo style (fourteenth century); and Chu Ta's *Mynahs* (seventeenth to early eighteenth century).⁹¹

In his poems on the landscape paintings, Snyder emphasizes the human elements in the landscapes, the presentation of 'Man in nature' as a phrase from the first poem has it. In this first poem Snyder notes a 'pole bridge over the creek', a man 'carrying a pole on his shoulder', 'Villages and Temples', 'Men fishing' and 'animals with loads.' In his poem on *Landscape in the Manner of Tung Yuan*, Snyder struggles to make out 'One bit of token unoccupied path' and a 'tiny bit of hilltop farm' in a landscape that initially appears devoid of human presence.⁹² He shows particular enthusiasm for the placing of a temple on the edge of a lake: 'The building just there where it is, is / masterful.' In the poem on Li Chung-Lueh's *River Landscape* Snyder again struggles to make out human elements in the landscape:

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp.156-7.

⁹⁰ Snyder's Journal, 3 September 1973-31 August 1974 (Book 9), GSP I 87: 4, 4 November 1973.

⁹¹ These details of the paintings are as Snyder lists them. The first and fourth of these have not been identified. Details of the other paintings as listed by the Nelson-Atkins Gallery in Kansas City, with modern transliterations of names, are as follows: Yuan Jiang, *Carts on a Winding Mountain Road* (1694), hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk; Gong Xian, *Landscape in the Manner of Dong Yuan* (Qing Dynasty), handscroll, ink on paper; Anon., *Waiting for the Ferry in the Chill of Winter* (*Hang Chiang tai tu*) (early 14th century), album leaf, ink on silk; Bada Shanren, *Mynah Birds, Old Tree Branch, and Rocks* (Qing Dynasty), hanging scroll, ink on silk.

⁹² Snyder, 'Six Scrolls to be Seen in Kansas City', Poem, n.d., GSP I 20:15, p.1.

A boat? A pier? Juts in the
water. Only the straight lines
make it human.⁹³

On 3 December 1982 Snyder was granted a private viewing of Lu Yuan's Qing Dynasty scroll *Mountains and Rivers Without End* at the Freer Gallery,⁹⁴ 'most likely the very one that first came to [his] attention' in his earlier reading.⁹⁵ A sticky note on which is written 'Mountains and Rivers Scrolls' marks the account of the visit in Snyder's journal. Snyder took nine pages of notes on the scroll, describing the landscape and, as he had done in 'Six Scrolls to be Seen in Kansas City,' emphasizing the human figures and structures within it, moving through the scroll from right to left as it would traditionally have been viewed. Snyder's notes on the Freer scroll anticipate 'Endless Streams and Mountains,' the opening poem of his magnum opus which describes a Song Dynasty hand scroll he viewed at Cleveland Museum of Art, in several important respects. Firstly Snyder takes note not just of the images, but also of the signature, seals, colophons and poems at either end of the scroll. Secondly, he attempts to trace a traversable route through the landscape depicted in the painting, identifying places where paths disappear and reappear. Thirdly, he notes one point where 'the stream widens out and flows into the viewer.'⁹⁶ Snyder would similarly imagine the word of a painting extending beyond the painting's borders in 'Endless Streams and Mountains,' where he writes that a 'watching boat has floated off the page.'⁹⁷

'Endless Streams and Mountains'

While the Freer Scroll had initially inspired Snyder's poetic sequence *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, he began to refer to another scroll with a similar name held at the Cleveland Museum of Art, the anonymous Song Dynasty *Streams and Mountains Without End*. It is this

⁹³ Ibid., p.2.

⁹⁴ In his journal Snyder notes that the scroll had previously been attributed to Hsu Pen and refers to it by the alternative title 'Interminable Mountains and Rivers' (Snyder's Journal, 12 November 1982-1 June 1983 [Book 21], GSP I 89:5, 3 December 1982).

⁹⁵ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, pp. 156-7.

⁹⁶ Snyder's Journal, 12 November 1982-1 June 1983 (Book 21), GSP I 89:5, 3 December 1982.

⁹⁷ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p.6.

scroll that is described in his opening poem. Hunt gives several reasons for this shift in focus. He claims that the disputed attribution of the Freer scroll made it ‘problematic.’ Furthermore, as Snyder explained to Hunt in November 1996, he found the sixteen-foot long Freer scroll ‘too rich.’ The Cleveland scroll ‘had accumulated a full-length monograph, several scholarly articles, photographs, and slides for study’, and its more manageable size made it ‘easier to take in at a single glance.’⁹⁸

The landscape that Snyder describes in ‘Endless Streams and Mountains’ undergoes a kind of triple mediation which Snyder, like Moore in ‘Nine Nectarines,’ seems at pains to draw attention to. Firstly, the mountains and rivers of nature are filtered through the Chinese conventions of painterly representation; then they are filtered through the lens of the institutions of another culture. In his poem, Snyder points out that the scroll is now ‘at the Cleveland Art Museum, / which sits on a rise that looks toward the waters of Lake Erie.’⁹⁹ The represented landscape faces a real one, thousands of miles from its place of origin. Snyder’s ekphrastic poem adds another layer of mediation – it is a verbal description of a painterly representation of a landscape. The poem begins:

Clearing the mind and sliding in
 to that created space,
 a web of waters streaming over rocks,
 air misty but not raining,
 seeing this land from the boat on a lake
 or a broad slow river,
 coasting by.¹⁰⁰

In the very first line Snyder draws attention to the fact that he is describing an artistic representation of a landscape, a ‘created space’. But through a meditation-like act of ‘Clearing the mind’, Snyder imagines himself into that created space, ‘sliding’ into it and viewing the landscape from within the world of the painting, from the perspective of the boat shown in Figure 4.

⁹⁸ Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning*, pp.30-31.

⁹⁹ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p.8.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.5.



Fig. 1. Right-hand section of *Streams and Mountains Without End*. Late Northern Song or Jin Dynasty. Handscroll, ink and slight colour on silk. Cleveland Museum of Art. Sherman E. Lee and Wen Fong, *Streams and Mountains Without End: A Northern Sung Handscroll and its Significance in the History of Early Chinese Painting* (Ascona, 1955), plate 1.

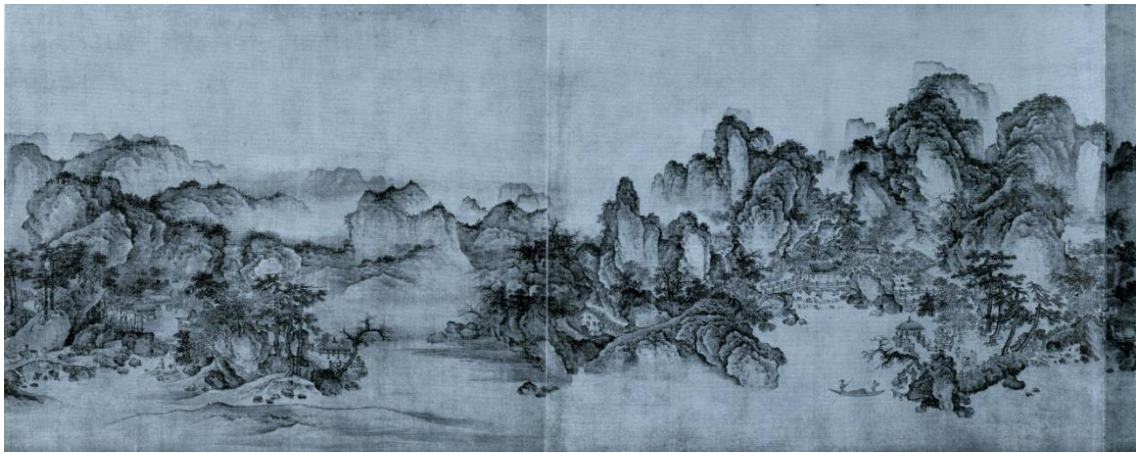


Fig. 2. Central section of *Streams and Mountains Without End*. Ibid.



Fig. 3. Left-hand section of *Streams and Mountains Without End*. Ibid.



Fig. 4. Detail of Fig.2.

In the first section of the poem, Snyder continues to imagine himself into the landscape, moving through it by means of its paths and trails. He describes a ‘path [that] comes down along a lowland stream’ and then ‘slips behind boulders and leafy hardwoods’ and ‘reappears in a pine grove’; then ‘a trail of climbing stairsteps forks upstream’, and the trail continues ‘far inland, / somewhere back around a bay,’ to be ‘lost’ from view ‘in distant foothill slopes’ before it appears again ‘at a village on the beach’; a ‘trail goes up along [a] cascading streambed’ and even though there is ‘no bridge in sight’, the trail ‘comes back through chinquapin or / liquidambar’. By focusing on these routes through the landscape, Snyder immerses us in the picture, focusing in on details on a human scale. Furthermore, in repeatedly noting those places where trails disappear from view only to reappear, Snyder gives the landscape an illusion of depth. In fact, the only suggestion that the poem is describing a painting rather than a real landscape between the opening and closing lines of its opening section is a punning description of some cliffs as ‘brushy’.¹⁰¹

In focusing on these routes through the landscape, Snyder shows that the Cleveland scroll adheres to one of the artistic ideals of Song landscape painting. The Song Dynasty painter and critic Guo Xi argued that painters should depict landscapes which appear hospitable to human dwelling, and are easily navigable: painted landscapes should exhibit ‘qualities as are

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp.5-6.

suitable to walk in, suitable or pleasant to look at, suitable to ramble in, and suitable to live in.¹⁰² Not only do the trails and paths Snyder describe make this landscape suitable for walking in, but the ‘cottages and shelters’ and ‘village on the beach’¹⁰³ which he notes show that this is a landscape that is lived in. As Snyder had said of the landscapes depicted by Chinese poets in “‘Wild’ in China,” the Cleveland scroll shows that ‘even the wildest hills are places where people, also, live.’¹⁰⁴ Perhaps with Guo Xi in mind, Lee and Fong, in a monograph on the Cleveland scroll that Snyder refers to in his notes on the poem, write that ‘we should constantly remember the admonitions of the earlier writers [...] that a painted landscape should be livable and capable of being traversed in an intelligent and understandable manner.’¹⁰⁵ They expand upon the latter point:

[...] in the eyes of both the Sung painters and the later critics, there must be a consistent, natural and understandable way through the endless mountains and over or around the endless streams. The way is a traveller’s way: a path, a resting place, a ferry, etc.¹⁰⁶

They conclude that this particular scroll does exhibit such a route: ‘The journey is made with no difficulty.’¹⁰⁷ Snyder’s poem traces such a journey.

With the final line of the first section, the illusion that a real landscape is being directly described dissolves: ‘The watching boat has floated off the page.’¹⁰⁸ The line reminds us that we are looking at an art object, not a real landscape, and the word ‘page’ could refer to the poem as well as to the hand scroll. The line suggests a permeability between the ‘created space’ of the painting, the immediate environment of its viewer, and the immediate environment of the reader of the poem. Snyder differs here from Lee and Fong, who view the representational ‘units’ of the painting as ‘totally enclosed in the space suggested by empty silk.’¹⁰⁹

¹⁰² Quoted in Fenollosa, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, vol.ii, 14.

¹⁰³ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, pp.5, 6.

¹⁰⁴ Snyder, “‘Wild’ in China”, p.46.

¹⁰⁵ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p.159. Sherman E. Lee and Wen Fong, *Streams and Mountains Without End: A Northern Sung Handscroll and its Significance in the History of Early Chinese Painting* (Ascona, 1955), p.5.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.6.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.7.

¹⁰⁸ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p.6.

¹⁰⁹ Lee and Fong, *Streams and Mountains Without End*, p.8.

The second section of the poem is composed of quotations from the colophons written on the scroll, drawing attention to its status as an art object with a history of provenance independent from the scene it portrays. While Snyder's poem negotiates between the terms of one dualism—that between art and nature—many of the scroll's colophons are concerned with another dualism—that between urban and exurban locales—although Snyder curiously edits this out from his selection of quotations from the colophons. Lee and Fong give full translations of all nine colophons, and a comparison of these full translations with the quotations given by Snyder shows that Snyder deliberately omitted one recurring topos from his translations. The first colophon Snyder translates from was written by one Wang Wen-wei in the house of the mayor of Ho-tung town in 1205. The lines Snyder quotes are from the beginning of the colophon, and imagine the anonymous painter of the scroll and the process of its composition. Lee and Fong's translation of the complete colophon shows that its central portion describes the scenes depicted in the painting in a fairly simple manner. Seeing that Snyder had given his own description of the painting in the first section of his poem, it is understandable that he did not quote from this central portion of the colophon. But Snyder's decision not to quote from the end portion of the colophon is more significant. Lee and Fong's translation ends:

I wonder where in this dust-filled world
Scenery like this can be found!
Gather your pension money:
When old this is a good place to go.¹¹⁰

The trope of the 'dust-filled world' or 'dusty world' may be remembered from Snyder's *Cold Mountain Poem*. The 'dusty world' is the corrupt urban world, which stands in contrast to the purity of nature. In his 'Essay on Landscape,' perhaps the best-known Chinese treatise on landscape painting and according to Fenollosa 'one of the greatest essays of the world',¹¹¹ Guo

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p.51.

¹¹¹ Fenollosa, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, vol ii, 11. A reference to Guo Xi's essay in 'The Brush' shows that Snyder was familiar with it (*The Gary Snyder Reader*, p.315).

Xi argues that the contrast between the dust-filled world and nature is fundamental to the appeal of landscape painting:

The noisiness of the dusty world, and the locked-in-ness of human habitations are what human nature, at its highest, perpetually hates; while, on the contrary, haze, mist and the Sennin sages (meaning, poetically, the old spirits that are supposed to haunt mountains) are what human nature seeks, and yet can but rarely see. But if there be great peace and flourishing days in which the minds, both of the ruler and subject, are high and joyous, and in which it is possible for one to regulate his conduct with purity, righteousness and honesty during his whole career; then what need or motive would there be for the benevolent man to hold aloof, shun the world, and fly from the common place? But since this is not the case what a delightful thing it is for lovers of forests and fountains and the friends of mist and haze, to have, at hand a landscape painted by a skilful artist! To have therein the opportunity of seeing water and peaks, of hearing the cry of monkeys, and the song of birds, without going from the room! In this way a thing, though done by another's will, completely satisfies one's own mind. This is the fundamental idea of the world-wide respect for sansui (landscape) painting[.]¹¹²

Natural landscape is not so much valued for itself as for its function as an antidote to the corruption of the dusty world; should citizens of the dusty world act with 'purity, righteousness and honesty', natural landscapes would have no appeal. Artistic representations of nature become a pastoral fantasy of escape for those who, being 'locked in' to the dusty world, may spend no time in the actual landscapes which those artistic representations depict.

The nature/dusty world dichotomy is repeated in two more of the Cleveland scroll's colophons. The shorter seventh colophon written by Chih Yuan in 1336, which Snyder does not quote from, reads:

Clouds sweep over the bushes where hermits leisurely pass their time.
 Into a mountain stream worldly goods are discarded.
 Someday I wish I could also build a thatched hut there.
 The ambition in the Unicorn Hall will not weigh on my heart.

Lee and Fong gloss the Unicorn Hall as 'a commemorative hall built by the Han emperor Hsüan Ti' which became 'the symbol of worldly fame and success in China.'¹¹³ Again, the landscape depicted in the hand scroll is imagined as a realm of escape from the metropolitan, civilized world.

¹¹² Fenollosa's translation, *Ibid.*, p.14.

¹¹³ Lee and Fong, *Streams and Mountains Without End*, p.56.

The second colophon, which Snyder does quote from, also employs the ‘dusty world’ topos, but with a variation. Li Hui, writing in 1205, does not characterize the dusty world as corrupt, but still longs to escape it. Here are the relevant lines as Lee and Fong translate them:

Other people living with the noise of chickens and dogs
Are happily at peace with a good government.
Why then is my love so foolish
That I crave the company of rocks and streams?¹¹⁴

These are the same four lines that Snyder translates, and although he renders them in a more colloquial tone, the sense is similar until the last of these lines:

‘...Most people can get along with the noise of dogs
and chickens;
Everybody cheerful in these peaceful times.
But I—why are my tastes so odd?
I love the company of streams and boulders.’¹¹⁵

Snyder’s verb ‘love’ implies that Li Hui is either speaking from an environment that contains streams and boulders, or has easy access to such an environment. Lee and Fong’s verb ‘crave’ suggests the opposite. The lines which follow, which Snyder does not translate, show that Lee and Fong’s translation is closer to the original sense:

Once I became an official I fell into the net of worldly affairs,
My books are buried and I am exhausted by the race of life.
The thousand precipices and ten thousand valleys have since become only a
dream,
[...]
While opening the scroll I seem to wash my dust-filled eyes,
With hands on chest, I sigh three times, in vain.¹¹⁶

Snyder was well aware that Song landscape painting satisfied a yearning for nature from within the dusty world. In ‘The Brush,’ an essay from *The Great Clod* published in *The Gary Snyder Reader*, he wrote that, for the ‘elites of premodern China’s high civilization [...] [n]ature and its landscapes were seen as realms of purity and selfless beauty and order, in vivid

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p.52.

¹¹⁵ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p.7. Snyder’s quotation marks and ellipsis.

¹¹⁶ Lee and Fong, *Streams and Mountains Without End*, p.52.

contrast to the corrupt and often brutal entanglements of politics that no active Chinese official could avoid.’¹¹⁷ In the notes to ‘Endless Streams and Mountains’ he writes that the ‘large vistas’ of Song art only appeared ‘after two and a half millennia of self-aware civilization in the basins of the Ho and Chiang.’¹¹⁸ Song landscape paintings were the products of civilized alienation. What is more, they were often painted by men who ‘didn’t always walk the hills they portrayed’, and could be composed of ‘an established vocabulary of forms’.¹¹⁹ A Song landscape painting may be a simulacrum, with no original in nature. But Snyder does not dismiss Song landscape painting as pastoral escapism, and perhaps the reason he omitted the ‘dusty world’ topos from his quotations from the colophons in ‘Endless Streams and Mountains’ is because they would make the scroll appear to be just that. In ‘The Brush’ he writes that, as China became more urban, ‘[p]ainting helped keep a love of wild nature alive’ even though paintings were increasingly ‘done by people who had never much walked the hills, for clients who would never get a chance to see such places.’¹²⁰ Snyder would agree with Bate that while a return to a state of nature might not be realized, ‘our survival as a species may be dependent on our capacity to dream it in the work of our imagination.’¹²¹

Hua-yen and Qi in *Mountains and Rivers Without End*

In other poems in *Mountains and Rivers Without End* Snyder attempts to reconcile wild nature with the dusty world of cities, and nature with art, through Eastern religious ideas, both Buddhist and Daoist. In ‘Bubbs Creek Haircut’ Snyder evokes Hua-yen philosophy (see Chapter Four) to do just this. The poem begins in a barber-shop in San Francisco, where Snyder is having his hair cut in preparation for a walking trip in the California wilderness, and the opening lines give some details of the barber-shop: ‘High ceilinged and the double mirrors,

¹¹⁷ Snyder, *The Gary Snyder Reader*, p.313.

¹¹⁸ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p.159.

¹¹⁹ Snyder, *The Gary Snyder Reader*, p.316.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.318.

¹²¹ Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, pp.37-8.

the / calendar a splendid alpine scene'.¹²² In interview, Snyder explained the Buddhist symbolism of the double mirrors image:

“Double mirror waver” is a structure point. Mutually reflected mirrors. Like, you see yourself many times reflected in a barber’s shop. [...] It’s a key image in *Avatamsaka* [Hua-yen] philosophy, Buddhist interdependence philosophy. Multiple reflections in multiple mirrors, that’s what the universe is like.¹²³

By paratactically juxtaposing the double mirrors with the calendar showing an alpine scene, Snyder suggests an analogy between the two. A visual representation of a mountain scene displayed in an urban setting, the calendar is a kitsch double of the Chinese hands scroll in the first poem. Rather than (or as well as) functioning as a piece of pastoral escapism, the calendar’s alpine scene is a reflection of wild nature from within the city. Through visual representation, Snyder is suggesting, urban and exurban environments interpenetrate. Later in the poem Snyder himself will link city and wilderness by moving between the two. Hunt has argued that in several of the poems of *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, ‘the city becomes interconnected with the wild’, but distinguishes between the poems written from the mid-1980s, in which ‘Snyder seems to have come to terms with the city landscape’, and those written earlier, which incline ‘toward rejection’ of the city.¹²⁴ ‘Bubbs Creek Haircut’ was originally published in 1961, and if my reading of the poem’s opening lines is accepted, it shows that Snyder began to ‘come to terms with the city’ much earlier.

The poem which precedes ‘Bubbs Creek Haircut’ in *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, ‘The Elwha River,’ presents the eponymous river through a series of layers which bring to mind the *Avatamsaka* image of mutually reflecting mirrors. Hunt shows that the poem is based on a dream that Snyder recorded in his journal on 21 December 1958.¹²⁵ Snyder dreams that he is a pregnant girl, waiting for her boyfriend at the roadside by the Elwha River. When her

¹²² Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p.33.

¹²³ Faas, *Towards a New American Poetics*, p.135. See Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning*, p.92, and Woon-Ping Chin Holaday, ‘Formlessness and Form in Gary Snyder’s *Mountains and Rivers Without End*’, *Sagetrieb* 5 (1986), 41-51, p.45. Both Hunt and Holaday note the Hua-yen connotations of this image.

¹²⁴ Hunt, ‘Singing the Dyad’, p.19.

¹²⁵ Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning*, pp.84-5.

boyfriend does not come, the girl goes to school and completes an essay assignment entitled ‘What I Just Did.’ She describes waiting by the river, but ‘the real river’ is ‘different from the / river [she] described [...] the Elwha doesn’t fork at that point.’ Next, Snyder writes in his own voice:

[...] I must remind myself that there is
another Elwha, the actual Olympic peninsula river, which is
not the river I took pains to recollect as real in the dream.¹²⁶

The river as described in the poem goes through a number of distortions as it is reflected by the consciousness of the girl, herself a product of Snyder’s subconscious. The ‘actual’ river is not described at all. Yet from the point of view of Snyder’s Hua-yen philosophy, these reflections of a natural object, depicted through the artifice of Snyder’s poetry, like Dōgen’s painting of a rice cake, belong to the same ultimate reality as the river itself.

If art approaches nature indirectly through ‘an established vocabulary of forms’ or through the layered distortions of the artist’s consciousness and craft, then a non-mimetic aesthetics is called for. Snyder finds such an aesthetics in the first principle of painting as defined by the fifth-century painter and critic Xie He (Hsieh Ho): *qiyun shendong*. Art historian Osvald Sirén, who Snyder references in his footnotes to ‘The Brush,’ translates this phrase as ‘resonance or vibration of the vitalizing spirit and movement of life.’¹²⁷ Sirén emphasizes the importance of the first character in this formula, *qi*, a concept rooted in pre-Buddhist Chinese traditions which is ‘akin to Tao as well as to the Confucian “Spirit of Heaven and Earth.”’ Sirén glosses *qi* as a ‘cosmic principle’ which ‘signifies the life-breath of everything, be it man, beast, mountain or tree.’¹²⁸ Snyder refers to Xie He’s first principle in ‘The Brush,’ where he translates it as “‘spirit resonance and living moment’—meaning, a good painting is one in which the very rocks come alive’. He defines *qi* (ch’i), following Joseph Needham’s third

¹²⁶ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p.32.

¹²⁷ Osvald Sirén, trans. and ed., *The Chinese on the Art of Painting: Texts by the Painter-Critics, from the Han through the Ch’ing Dynasties* (1936; repr. Mineola, NY, 2005), p.22.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.21.

volume of *Science and Civilization in China* (1959), as a ‘proto-scientific term’ meaning ‘matter energy’.¹²⁹

Snyder argues that the ‘abstract and geometrical’ patterns of ‘[a]rchaic art’ represent the flow of qi energy.¹³⁰ Drawing on a 1953 paper by art historian Michael Sullivan, he claims that Chinese landscape painting evolved out of volute motifs in early Chinese decorative arts which traced ‘the lines of energy flow as observed in the clouds, running water, mist and rising smoke, plant growth—tendrils, rock formations, and various effects of light, in their patterns.’ For later artists, these ‘lines finally twisted themselves into ranges of mountains.’¹³¹ The idea of Chinese landscape painting having roots in archaic abstract designs adds another nuance to Snyder’s defence of Chinese painters who, from the Song Dynasty onwards, ‘didn’t always walk the hills they portrayed.’ Rooted in archaic representations of qi flow, ‘these invented landscapes were somehow true to organic life and the energy cycles of the biosphere.’¹³²

In ‘The Brush,’ Snyder expands upon Needham’s definition of qi as a proto-scientific concept by equating it to ecological process:

The paintings show us the earth surface as part of a living being, on which water, cloud, rock, and plant growth all stream through each other [...] The swirls and spirals of micro- and macroclimate (“the tropical heat engine” for example) are all creations of living organisms; the whole atmosphere is a breath of plants, writhing over the planet in elegant feedback coils instructed by thermodynamics and whatever it is that guides complexity. “Nature by self-entanglement,” said Otto Rössler, “produces beauty.”¹³³

In describing the earth’s surface as ‘part of a living being,’ Snyder evokes Lovelock’s Gaia Hypothesis. Gaia’s atmosphere follows the patterns of ‘swirls and spirals’ which had been depicted in the volute designs from which Chinese landscape painting evolved. The description of the atmosphere as ‘a breath of plants’ evokes the definition of qi as ‘the life-breath of everything.’ This breath is described, in the language of cybernetics employed by Lovelock, Margalef and H.T. Odum, as ‘elegant feedback coils.’

¹²⁹ Snyder, *The Gary Snyder Reader*, p.314.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid. Cf. Michael Sullivan, ‘On the Origin of Landscape Representation in Chinese Art’, *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America* vii (1953), 54-65, pp.60, 63.

¹³² Snyder, *The Gary Snyder Reader*, p.316.

¹³³ Ibid.

Snyder had perhaps earlier linked the concept of qi in Chinese painting to H.T. Odum's theories in 'Six Scrolls to See in Kansas City.' In the final poem in that sequence, he describes Chu Ta's *Mynahs* as 'little energies,'¹³⁴ evoking Odum's phrase 'tiny energies', discussed at length in Chapter Four. While the ecologists Snyder read in the early 1970s tended to promote a view of nature as teleological and ordered, Snyder's reference to Chaos Theorist Otto Rössler, and his use of the word 'complexity', show that by the time he wrote 'The Brush' (it was first published in *The Gary Snyder Reader* in 1999), he had assimilated the more disordered views of nature presented by later scientists.

Snyder's vision of the qi-like flow in nature draws on Buddhism as well as pre-Buddhist Chinese religious ideas. In the passage quoted above, rocks as well as water, cloud and plant-growth all partake in the flow of qi. In *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, Snyder is particularly concerned with the dyad of rocks and water, mountains and rivers. In his commentary on Dōgen's 'Mountains and Rivers Sutra' in *The Practice of the Wild*, Snyder explains the dyadic symbolism of mountains and waters in pre-Buddhist Chinese culture and in Folk Buddhism. In the former tradition, mountains 'are exemplars of the "yang": dry, hard, male, and bright.' Conversely, waters 'are feminine: wet, soft, dark "yin"'. In Folk Buddhist (Vajrayana) iconography, the mythical figure of Fudō Myō-ō, ascetic and 'ferocious-looking', is associated with mountains while the Bodhisattva Kannon Bosatsu, associated with water, is 'a figure of compassion.' Just as a landscape combines the yang energies of mountains with the yin energies of water, Fudō Myō-ō and Kannon Bosatsu are 'seen as buddha-work partners: ascetic discipline and relentless spirituality balanced by compassionate tolerance and detached forgiveness.' For Snyder, 'Mountains and Waters are a dyad that together make wholeness possible'.¹³⁵

Mountains and Rivers Without End is full of poems which present the wholeness of mountains and waters by showing them united in the flow of qi. 'The Flowing,' a poem first

¹³⁴ Snyder, 'Six Scrolls to be Seen in Kansas City', GSP I 20:15, p.3.

¹³⁵ Snyder, *Practice of the Wild*, p.108.

published in 1974, begins with a description of Fudō at a cliff spring at the headwaters of the Kamo River in Kyoto. Fudō is said to make ‘Rocks of water, / Water out of rocks’,¹³⁶ and the rest of the poem describes the flowing of rivers and the ‘water cycle’, as well as the tectonic movement of the earth’s crust: ‘fault block uplift / thrust of westward slipping crust’.¹³⁷ ‘Finding the Space in the Heart’ is likewise concerned with the flow of geological process, with ‘lava flow’.¹³⁸ In ‘The Flowing,’ the qi-like ‘soft breath, world-wide, of day and night’ flows through the yin and yang of nature alike. While evoking Fudō and, implicitly, his partner in buddha-work Kannon, this poem is more concerned with natural process than with the balance between asceticism and compassion.

Snyder’s ekphrastic poems present rocks and mountains as flowing, dynamic forms. In the second poem of the ‘Six Scrolls to be Seen in Kansas City’ sequence, Snyder describes the mountains in Yuan Jiang’s (Yuan Chiang) painting as

rising, twisting up like smoke—
Which is precisions [sic]. Fantasies
& logic in the scape.¹³⁹

Snyder suggests that while these mountains might be ‘fantasies’, with no original in nature and not depicted through a strictly mimetic, realist aesthetic, they do demonstrate the ‘logic’ of qi.

In ‘Endless Streams and Mountains,’ Snyder compares the ‘ravines and cliffs’ of the Song Dynasty hand scroll to ‘waves of blowing leaves’. Rocks and waters are shown to interpenetrate:

the creek comes in, ah!
strained through boulders,
mountains walking on the water,
water ripples every hill.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p. 68.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.70.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.149.

¹³⁹ Snyder, ‘Six Scrolls to be Seen in Kansas City’, GSP I 20:15, p.1.

¹⁴⁰ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p.8.

The poem ends with lines from Dōgen's 'Mountains and Rivers Sutra,' suggesting the constant flow of both mountains and rivers: '*Streams and mountains never stay the same.*'¹⁴¹

If 'Six Scrolls' and 'Endless Streams' show the flow of qi in Chinese artistic representations of landscape, 'Arctic Midnight Twilight' presents the flow of qi in an actual mountain landscape in Alaska that Snyder visited in July 1985.¹⁴² The poem abstracts the natural forms into patterns which recall those in archaic art from which, according to Sullivan and Snyder, Chinese landscape painting evolved. The poem begins:

Green mountain walls in blowing cloud
white dots on far slopes, constellations,
slowly changing not stars not rocks
"by the midnight breezes strewn"
cloud tatters, lavender arctic light
on sedate wild sheep grazing¹⁴³

The stanza seems to shift without warning between describing sheep and describing clouds, which have certain visual resemblances. Snyder's parataxis means it is sometimes unclear which is being described. The 'White dots on far slopes' may be sheep, as clouds are usually above slopes rather than on them, but the first line has told us that these clouds are low, enveloping the mountain. The word 'constellations' usually refers to stars, so the aerial metaphor is perhaps more suitable to clouds, and the line in quotation marks is taken from Shelley's 'The Cloud.' 'Cloud tatters' in the next line may refer literally to clouds, or may be used metaphorically to refer to the 'sheep grazing.' Through this blurring, Snyder suggests that the movement of the flock, described as a 'slow / rotation',¹⁴⁴ partakes in the same universal flow that governs the movements of the clouds. Both are part of the 'sky-sea-earth cycles'. Snyder discerns the same 'swirls', recalling the volutes in early Chinese decorative art, in the shifting 'air mass' and in the 'curls / of Dall sheep horns.'¹⁴⁵ The traditional Koyukon riddle

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p.9.

¹⁴² Snyder's notes in his journal for 30-31 July 1985 would form the basis of the poem (Snyder's Journal, June 23 1985-31 December 1985 [Book 26], GSP I 90:4).

¹⁴³ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p.92.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p.94.

which ends the poem suggests (playfully) that the swirls of the sheep's horns may have been formed by the swirling of the weather:

“It really snowed hard
in opposite directions
on my head

who am I?”

—*dibée*

a mountain sheep.¹⁴⁶

In two poems in *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, Snyder uses qi-like patterns to suggest that cities, too, partake in this universal flow. In ‘Night Song of the Los Angeles Basin,’ Snyder juxtaposes ‘Vole paths’ and ‘Mouse trails’ with the Los Angeles freeway, described as a ‘calligraphy of cars’, a phrase that is repeated with variations throughout the poem.¹⁴⁷ Sullivan had argued that qi was not only depicted in Chinese painting, but also in calligraphy: the ‘high degree of symbolic abstraction’ in Chinese pictorial art ‘gives it more than a technical affinity with the written character.’ Through the ‘abstracted forms of writing and painting’ alike, the Chinese artist expresses ‘his intuitive awareness of the ch’i’.¹⁴⁸ Snyder’s image of a ‘calligraphy of cars’ suggests that qi flows through human structures just as it flows through the trails of animals.

‘Walking the New York Bedrock Alive in the Sea of Information’ expands upon the theme of qi flow in cities. This poem was composed shortly after ‘Arctic Midnight Twilight,’ and is the second poem after that poem in the sequence of *Mountains and Rivers Without End*. Making reference to a 1988 interview with Snyder, Murphy shows that, visiting New York shortly after the Alaska trip which provided the subject matter of ‘Arctic Midnight Twilight,’ Snyder felt able to view the city with ‘the same perspective as he had in the mountains.’¹⁴⁹ In the New York poem, Snyder describes the ‘migrating flow’ of the city. The buildings of New

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p.95.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p.62.

¹⁴⁸ Sullivan, ‘Origin of Landscape Painting’, pp.62-3.

¹⁴⁹ Murphy, *A Place for Wayfaring*, p.202.

York flow with ‘prana-subtle-power’, ‘prana’ being a Sanskrit word for life-force or energy, roughly synonymous with qi.¹⁵⁰ On the streets, ‘streams of people / Curve round the sweep of street corners’,¹⁵¹ suggesting that the flowing, volute-like patterns of qi can still flow through the orthogonal forms of urban architecture.

Snyder demonstrates the unity of cities and wild nature in this poem by more literal means. Descriptions of ‘spiderwebs, fungus, [and] lichen’ in the tunnels below the city, and ‘Peregrines nest[ing] at the thirty-fifth floor’ of high-rise buildings shows the persistence of wild nature in urban environments.¹⁵² Snyder also suggests the unity of cities and wild nature metaphorically. New York is a ‘sea anemone’ in ‘the Sea of Economy’,¹⁵³ the ‘Sea of Information’.¹⁵⁴ Just as Snyder had shown the dyad of rocks and water to be, at heart, a unity by showing rocks and mountains flowing like water, he here transforms the city into a submarine environment, moving not with the incessant flow of rivers, but with the back and forth of the tides. It will be remembered from Chapter Four that Margalef described ecosystems in cybernetic terms as systems in which information is transmitted. By describing New York as a ‘Sea of Information,’ Snyder suggests that the city functions in a way analogous to an ecosystem.

Hinting at the connection between cities, as products of human artifice, and creative artworks, Snyder describes the art collections assembled by New York’s elite, ‘The Guggenheims, the Rockefellers, and the Fricks’. He describes Monet’s *Water Lilies*, on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art behind ‘plate glass’, viewed by people who, like ‘fish or planets, [...] / Move, pause, move through the rooms’ of the gallery. Because this account of New York’s art galleries directly follows an indictment of New York’s false ‘gods’ of

¹⁵⁰ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p.97.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.98.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p.100-101.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.97.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.98.

capitalism, ‘Equitable god, Celanese god, [...] / Old Union Carbide god,’¹⁵⁵ Hunt finds Snyder’s account of New York’s art galleries to be negative:

Snyder is not much kinder to the art barons, targeting the way they have bought and packaged the world’s art for easier viewing. More a reminder that this assembled art is someone else’s idea of what is tasteful, and that culture is based on commerce, Snyder’s diatribe does not appear to be against art museums as such. Still, the unnaturalness of “water lilies,” Monet’s or anyone’s, being seen under glass, signals a broadening of the imagery. Culture, it seems, has become a matter of drifting through room after room, passively observing rather than partaking or performing, as guards watch all our movements.¹⁵⁶

It should be clear by now that the poems of *Mountains and River Without End* do not view artistic representations of natural objects, situated in cities, as ‘unnatural.’ Like the calendar in ‘Bubbs Creek Haircut,’ Monet’s painting allows nature and the city to interpenetrate. Like Chinese landscape paintings, the *Water Lilies* may serve to keep a love of nature alive from within the city. Snyder may well have viewed Impressionist paintings as sharing some of the non-mimetic aesthetic ideals of Chinese landscape painting. Fenollosa had identified Whistler, a post-Impressionist painter, as the ‘common nodule’ between Eastern and Western art,¹⁵⁷ and Snyder himself described Song Dynasty landscape paintings as creating ‘an effect that can be called impressionistic.’¹⁵⁸ The plate glass in the Metropolitan Museum does not, as Hunt suggests, hermetically seal the painting from external nature. Rather, it ‘lets light in on “the water lilies”’ in a simulation of photosynthesis. What is more, the drifting of the gallery visitors, which Hunt reads as an indication of their passivity, may in fact be in tune with the tide-like movement of the city’s qi: ‘Like fish’ they ‘Move, pause, move’.¹⁵⁹

Nō Drama and ‘The Mountain Spirit’

Snyder returns to considering art’s relationship to nature in ‘The Mountain Spirit,’ the antepenultimate poem of *Mountains and Rivers* and in many ways its climax. The poem, set in

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p.99.

¹⁵⁶ Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning*, pp.185-6.

¹⁵⁷ Fenollosa, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, vol.i, xxv.

¹⁵⁸ Snyder, *The Gary Snyder Reader*, p.316.

¹⁵⁹ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p.99.

the California mountains, is structured around the plot of the Japanese Nō play *Yamamba*. *Yamamba* was almost certainly written by Zeami Motokiyo (1363-1443), Japan's most celebrated writer of Nō¹⁶⁰ and of all Nō plays, *Yamamba* 'especially fascinated' Snyder.¹⁶¹ It is through dialogue with this play that Snyder meditates on the relation between urban art and the reality of wilderness in Buddhist terms.

Nō is a highly stylized and codified dramatic form. The main actors are masked and wear elaborate, decorative costumes. A chorus of eight to ten performers sits to the right of the stage and a flute player and three drummers sit to the left. The main actors move with 'measured steps and deliberate gesture', and performances involve elements of mime and dance.¹⁶² In incorporating elements of such a stylized form into his poem, Snyder clearly does not share the 'mistaken faith in realism' of which Phillips accuses many ecocritics.¹⁶³

Snyder would have been familiar with Nō drama before he went to Japan in the 1950s. Pound had published *Certain Noble Plays of Japan*, a selection of Nō translations from Fenollosa's manuscripts which Pound had completed himself, in 1916; and Arthur Waley published nineteen Nō translations in *The Nō Plays of Japan* (1921).¹⁶⁴ *Yamamba* is not translated in Pound's book, and Waley's includes only a summary (he transliterates the title as 'Yamauba'). D.T. Suzuki gives an outline of *Yamamba* (again, transliterated as 'Yamauba') as an appendix to *Zen Buddhism and its Influence on Japanese Culture* (1938), refraining from giving a full translation only because 'Noh-plays are difficult, perhaps impossible to translate'.¹⁶⁵ *Yamamba* is the only Nō play Suzuki discusses and this, together with Suzuki's comments that the play is 'thoroughly saturated' with Zen thought and 'was probably written

¹⁶⁰ For a point-by-point comparison of the play with Snyder's poem, see Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning*, pp.247-249. Hunt's account is a summary of a more detailed comparison in David Jinsoo Lee's unpublished honours thesis, 'American Nō: Gary Snyder's *Mountains and Rivers Without End*', University of California, Berkeley, 1997.

¹⁶¹ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p.155.

¹⁶² Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning*, p.43.

¹⁶³ Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology*, p.xii.

¹⁶⁴ See Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning*, p.38.

¹⁶⁵ D.T. Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism and its Influence on Japanese Culture* (Kyoto, 1938), p.188.

by a Buddhist priest to propagate the teaching of Zen,' could partly explain why Snyder singles the play out.¹⁶⁶

In June 1956, about a month after his arrival in Japan, Snyder wrote to Will Peterson that he was about to attend his first Nō play, and he purchased season tickets for the plays in Kyoto throughout the time he lived there.¹⁶⁷ In 1960 or 1961, Peterson suggested that Snyder attend performances of *Yamamba* and *Eguchi* as those plays 'seem to lend themselves to what you seem to be up to' poetically,¹⁶⁸ although it is quite possible that Snyder had already seen both plays by this time. On 11 November 1965, having recently returned to Kyoto from California, Snyder wrote to Ginsberg: 'I went to the Noh play *Yama-uba* this afternoon—"old woman of the Mts"—the one I described to you and Martine when we hiked up the first day.' Snyder is referring to a recent hiking trip to the Pacific Northwest he went on with Ginsberg and Martine Algiers, a girlfriend of his at the time.¹⁶⁹ The letter gives no more details of the discussion they had on the trip, but the discussion of the play in the mountains of Western America prefigures Snyder's importation of the themes of *Yamamba* into the landscape of the Great Basin in 'The Mountain Spirit,' published more than thirty years later. By that time Snyder described himself as 'an aficionado of Nō history and aesthetics'.¹⁷⁰

The plays of W.B. Yeats provide a precedent for Snyder's transplantation of Nō into a Western setting. In plays such as *At the Hawk's Well* (1916) and *The Only Jealousy of Emer* (1922), Yeats had combined stylistic elements of Nō with stories drawn from Irish mythology. Yeats had been introduced to Nō by Pound, and wrote an introduction to Pound and Fenollosa's *Certain Noble Plays of Japan*. There Yeats opposes the 'aristocratic form' of Nō to realism, which was 'created for the common people'.¹⁷¹ For Yeats, Nō is also opposed to

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p.186. Zeami had become a lay monk in 1422.

¹⁶⁷ Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning*, p.38.

¹⁶⁸ Will Petersen to Gary Snyder, January [1960/61?], quoted in Ibid., p.40.

¹⁶⁹ Morgan, ed., *The Selected Letters of Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder*, p.79.

¹⁷⁰ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p.155.

¹⁷¹ W.B. Yeats, Introduction, *Certain Noble Plays of Japan from the Manuscripts of Ernest Fenollosa* (Dundrum: Cuala Press, 1916), i-xix, pp.ii, viii.

nature: no “naturalistic” effect is sought [...] At the climax instead of the disordered passion of nature there is a dance’.¹⁷²

While Yeats opposes the aristocratic, stylized form of Nō to nature and the common people, Snyder saw it as a form which unites opposed terms. In ‘The Making of *Mountains and Rivers Without End*,’ where Snyder singles out *Yamamba* as holding particular interest for him, he describes Nō as ‘a gritty but totally refined high-culture art that is in the lineage of shamanistic performance’.¹⁷³ As such, Snyder presents Nō as a form in which the primitive and the civilized—so often an opposing dyad in Snyder’s earlier writing—are reconciled. Indeed, in ‘Poetry and the Primitive,’ Snyder’s most sustained prose meditation on this dyad, he quotes the anthropologist Stanley Diamond to define the ‘sickness of civilization’ as ‘its failure to incorporate (and only then) to move beyond the limits of the primitive.’¹⁷⁴ Snyder sees Nō as a form that does manage to incorporate the primitive within the civilized. Because Snyder almost always presents primitive, shamanic worldviews as ecocentric, for him Nō is also a form which can reconcile nature and (high) culture.

If Nō, in Snyder’s understanding, represents a movement from the primitive to the civilized, its history involves a corresponding shift from rural to urban locales. From its provincial beginnings in the fourteenth century, Nō became a metropolitan art form, and is now seldom performed outside of Japan’s major cities.¹⁷⁵ The tastes and values expressed in the plays are therefore metropolitan in character. As Tyler explains, the idea of the capital is often idealized within Nō plays:

The capital, often called Miyako, is the seat of the ideal sovereign. [...] It was acknowledged to be the centre of civilization, and, as several plays suggest, people from Miyako were assumed to be more cultivated than those from the provinces. The plays [...] are an art of the capital.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷² Ibid., p.xii.

¹⁷³ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p.155.

¹⁷⁴ Snyder, *Earth House Hold*, p.126.

¹⁷⁵ Royall Tyler, trans. and ed., *Japanese Nō Dramas* (London, 1992), p.2.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p.17.

This is not to say that provincial areas escape representation in the Nō canon. *Yamamba* is set largely in a mountain village, and its plot reverses the Nō genre's journey from provinces to city. Hyakuma Yamamba, a famous dancer from the capital and 'elegant lady',¹⁷⁷ is travelling through a mountain village on her way to Zenkō-ji, a Buddhist pilgrimage centre in what is now Nagano City. The dancer has achieved fame by composing and performing a *kusemai* song-and-dance piece about Yamamba the Mountain Crone, a mythical figure who is 'the embodiment of the mountain-spirit',¹⁷⁸ part good fairy and part 'ogress',¹⁷⁹ and it is the Mountain Crone that the dancer has become named after. In the mountains, the dancer meets an old woman who is revealed to be the Mountain Crone herself. The Mountain Crone asks the dancer to perform her *kusemai* 'as a sort of musical service for her spiritual benefit, so that she may escape further transmigration and attain Buddhahood.'¹⁸⁰ At the end of the play, the dancer and Mountain Crone perform the *kusemai* together. The relationship between the rural/wilderness landscape of the Mountain Crone and the dancer's metropolitan origin is linked to issues of artistic representation. The dancer's *Kusemai* is a metropolitan representation of the mountain landscape as personified by Yamamba, and by becoming named after the Mountain Crone, the dancer herself becomes a kind of representation of the Crone – her urban doppelganger.

In Snyder's poem, the validity of urban representations of mountain landscapes is interrogated. Like Zeami's dancer, the speaker of Snyder's poem has travelled from an urban environment, 'Driving all night south from Reno,' and just as the dancer's attendant stops to ask directions from a mountain villager at the start of *Yamamba*,¹⁸¹ the speaker of Snyder's poem stops to ask 'the way / to the White Mountains, / & the bristlecone pines' at a Ranger

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p.316.

¹⁷⁸ Nippon Gakujutsu Shinkōkai, trans. and ed., *The Noh Drama: Ten Plays from the Japanese* (Tokyo, 1959), vol.ii, 159.

¹⁷⁹ Tyler, *Japanese Nō Dramas*, p.318.

¹⁸⁰ Nippon Gakujutsu Shinkōkai, *The Noh Drama*, vol.II, p.159.

¹⁸¹ Tyler, *Japanese Nō Drama*, p.316.

Station in Bishop, Owens Valley in eastern California.¹⁸² Once in the mountains, the speaker hears a disembodied voice saying:

“You had a bit of fame once in the city
for poems of mountains,
here it’s real.

[...]

But what do you know of minerals and stone.
For a creature to speak of all that scale of time—what for?

Still, I’d like to hear that poem.”¹⁸³

This section of Snyder’s poem is based on Yamamba’s request that the dancer perform her *kusemai*. In the play, Yambaba says that she resents the dancer’s *kusemei* about her, but this resentment comes more from jealousy of the dancer’s ‘worldly glory’ than from doubt of the dancer’s knowledge of her subject matter.¹⁸⁴

In program notes from a reading of *Mountains and Rivers Without End* given at Stanford in 1997, Snyder draws further attention to the potentially problematic relationship between urban art and natural landscapes.

Some years back, in San Francisco, there was a poet who made his reputation largely on the basis of a poem he had written about the Mountain Spirit, even though he had not actually visited the mountains very much himself.¹⁸⁵

Like a Chinese landscape painter, this fictionalized urban poet depicts mountain landscapes with which he is not familiar.

In the poem, Snyder’s persona performs his poem-within-a-poem to the mountain spirit, describing the geological formation of the mountain landscape. Once the recitation is finished, the mountain spirit comments approvingly:

¹⁸² Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, 140.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.141.

¹⁸⁴ Tyler, *Japanese Nō Drama*, p.319.

¹⁸⁵ Quoted in Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning*, p.253.

“All art and song
is sacred to the real.
As such.”¹⁸⁶

What has absolved the speaker of the Mountain Spirit’s initial charge of ignorance of his subject matter? These lines, in asserting a sacred relationship between art and ‘the real,’ which in one sense equates to phenomenal reality, bring to mind the epigram from Dōgen at the beginning of *Mountains and Rivers Without End*. From a Zen point of view, the dualism of art and nature is an illusion. Another formulation of this relationship is to be found in Snyder’s poem-within-a-poem. Snyder paraphrases a line from the Heart Sutra, which is also quoted by the chorus towards the end of *Yamamba*:¹⁸⁷ ‘nothingness is shapeliness’.¹⁸⁸ In the Heart Sutra, probably the most well-known Mahayana text, Avalokita, the bodhisattva of compassion, discourses on the doctrine of emptiness. Near the beginning of the Sutra, he states that, on the level of compassionate transcendental wisdom, ‘form is emptiness, and the very emptiness is form; emptiness does not differ from form, form does not differ from emptiness’.¹⁸⁹ While in its original context, form or shapeliness equates to phenomenal reality, in the context of Snyder’s poem, it applies equally to the art object. ‘Form’ is after all a term used to describe the arrangement of elements within a work of art. ‘All art’, even if it represents its subject matter imperfectly, partakes in the ultimate emptiness of reality.

Throughout ‘The Mountain Spirit’ Snyder describes the mountain landscape through geological language, giving his poem a quality of scientific objectivity. In this sense, he seems to make his art approach the real (nature) in as direct a way as language will allow. He notes with precision the different types of rocks and their formations in the landscape: ‘*red sandstone and white dolomite*’, ‘granite’, ‘red sandstone strata outcrop’, ‘talus slopes’, ‘pluton’, ‘shales and silts’, ‘calcite ridges’.¹⁹⁰ Snyder describes the formation of the landscape over a timespan

¹⁸⁶ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p.146.

¹⁸⁷ Tyler, *Japanese Nō Drama*, p.326.

¹⁸⁸ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p.145.

¹⁸⁹ Edward Conze, trans., *Buddhist Wisdom Books, Containing The Diamond Sutra and The Heart Sutra* (London, 1958), p.81.

¹⁹⁰ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, pp. 140, 141, 144, 145. Snyder’s italics.

of ‘three hundred million years’,¹⁹¹ noting evidence of geological processes of ‘*Erosion*’, the flow of ‘magma’¹⁹² and tectonic movement:

ten million years ago an ocean floor
glides like snake beneath the continent crunching up
old seabed till it’s high as alps.¹⁹³

Dana Philips has asserted that, despite early ecocriticism’s ‘fundamentalist fixation on literal representation’, “‘the environmental imagination’ should not be understood as a faithful copyist of natural relationships.’¹⁹⁴ To do so is not only naïve in its assumption of a direct, unproblematic relationship between text and world, signifier and signified; it also ‘seems hostile to the very possibility of imagination’, and the task of the ecocritic ought to be to ‘assert the imaginary status of things we find depicted in literature’.¹⁹⁵ While Snyder’s scientific, objective language here might suggest that his role as poet is merely that of a faithful copyist, his description of the mountain landscape is of course shaped by his poetic craft. The snake simile above should show that Snyder’s language is not entirely literal.

Snyder’s language is always carefully crafted, as the following example makes clear:

passing a tidy scat-arrangement on a ledge,
stand on a dark red sandstone strata outcrop at the edge.
Plane after plane of desert ridges
darkening eastward into blue-black haze.¹⁹⁶

While metrically free, the rhythm occasionally falls into trochaic feet (‘dark red sandstone strata outcrop’). These lines include a rare example of rhyme (‘ledge’ and ‘edge’), and the restrained use of alliteration (‘sandstone strata’, ‘blue-black’) and repetition (‘Plane after plane’) demonstrate Snyder’s careful attention to the arrangement of sounds. These patterns are created by Snyder’s craft, and do not correspond to any patterns in the natural scene he portrays.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p.145.

¹⁹² Ibid., pp, 143-4. Snyder’s italics.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p.145.

¹⁹⁴ Dana Philips, *The Truth of Ecology*, pp.7, 14.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., pp.9, 7.

¹⁹⁶ Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, p.141.

Snyder draws attention to the ‘imaginary status’ of the scene he depicts. A large portion of ‘The Mountain Spirit’ is a poem within a poem, the poem that the speaker recites to the Mountain Spirit. As already indicated, the Mountain Spirit initially doubts the urban poet’s ability to write a poem which corresponds to the reality of the mountain environment. The program notes quoted above also indicate that the poet’s knowledge of mountain landscapes is limited. With this in mind, the objective, geological language quoted above—much of which is quoted from the poem-within-a-poem—no longer seems to approach the reality of nature directly. It might be taken from a geology textbook.

On the third page of the poem the speaker falls asleep, and the poem-within-a-poem is recited in a dream. It seems likely that it is misremembered. Whatever relation the poem-within-a-poem may have originally had to the mountain landscape, the relationship becomes less direct as the poem is (mis)remembered by the subconscious mind of the fictional poet. Nature is approached indirectly, through the double mediation of the poem-within-a-poem, and through the subconscious of the fictional poet. By drawing attention to such mediations, Snyder suggests that the descriptions of the mountains in the surrounding frame narrative may also approach nature obliquely, through the filter of Snyder’s imagination.

As Moore had juxtaposed scientific language with the mythological associations of the peach and nectarine, Snyder supplements his geological language with mythological and religious references. The ‘peaks [are] like Buddhas’.¹⁹⁷ The Mountain Spirit herself is a mythological figure, a composite of Yamamba and mountain spirits from North American tales.¹⁹⁸ She is the personification of the geological processes Snyder has been describing: her eternal ‘wandering’ equates to the constant flow of geological process, what Snyder describes in his poem-within-a-poem, in lines echoing the first poem in the volume, as ‘*walking on walking*’.¹⁹⁹ She is a figurative, imaginative way of depicting the same natural phenomena that are also rendered literally, through geological language. As seen in Chapter Two, as early as

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p.145.

¹⁹⁸ Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning*, p.253.

¹⁹⁹ Snyder, *Mountains and Rives Without End*, pp.145, 144. Snyder’s italics.

1952, Snyder saw the work of the poet as a negotiation between the ‘concrete’ and the ‘symbolic’.²⁰⁰ By using geological language and the mythological figure of the Mountain Spirit to describe the same natural phenomena in the same poem, Snyder combines symbolic and concrete modes and as such dramatizes the interplay between mind and world, imagination and reality (to use Stevens’ terms).

Near the end of the poem, Snyder pictures a tree dancing.²⁰¹ There is a structural parallel between Snyder’s dancing pine and the *kusemei* performed by the dancer and the Mountain Crone at the end of *Yamamba*. Just as Snyder sees language as having analogues in nature, dance, too, is something that the non-human world partakes in. While Yeats had seen the dance at the end of the Nō play as serving to distance the stylized, non-mimetic performance from nature, Snyder suggests that dance connects humanity with nature.

*

Mountains and Rivers Without End is the ultimate statement of Snyder’s non-dualistic vision. In viewing American landscapes through the lenses of Chinese landscape painting and Japanese Nō drama, he unites East and West with a gaze that is at once global and local. The Mountain Spirit and other composite mythological figures seen in Chapter Three imply the compatibility of religious traditions and mythologies from either side of the Pacific (although Western monotheism is never reconciled with Snyder’s religious vision). In his descriptions of the flow of qi energy through exurban and urban landscapes alike, and in his presentation of an urban poet in the mountain landscape of ‘The Mountain Spirit,’ the dualism between city and wild nature is undermined. Most crucially, through his use of indirect and non-mimetic modes of representation, art and nature become reconciled, as do humanity and nature by implication. Snyder’s deconstruction of these dualisms is rooted in his personal interpretation of Mahayana Buddhism. That interpretation is itself the result of the syncretism of Eastern and Western traditions.

²⁰⁰ Snyder’s *Journal*, 1947-52, GSP I 89:1, 7 June 1952.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.147.

Conclusion

This thesis is innovative in its focus on the oppositional aspect of Snyder's engagement with Eastern religion—his 'subversive orientalism.' It refutes the argument of one recent critic who sees Snyder's 'boundary-crossing, transnational, and translational project' as being one that 'irons out the dilemma of bicultural friction.'¹ Snyder's antipathy to Western culture has been shown to be a motivating factor in his engagement with Eastern cultures. 'Bicultural friction' is central to his writing.

In the introduction it was argued, drawing on Tuan, that too rigid a contrast between Eastern and Western attitudes toward nature may simplify and distort those Eastern cultures which are ostensibly being celebrated. What is more, such a contrast may obscure the fact that Eastern religious reverence towards the natural world has not always led to ecologically responsible action. This is clearly evident at the time of writing when China, despite its Daoist and Mahayana Buddhist traditions, emits more carbon dioxide than any other country in the world.² While Snyder does contrast East and West along ecological lines throughout his oeuvre, it has been pointed out that, from the beginning of his career, such a contrast is rarely made without qualification. He described the logging of China's ancient forests in *Myths & Texts*, and in Hokkaido he came to see that Japanese modernization and the environmental problems resulting from it could not be solely attributed to Western influence. It was shown that in the essays on China associated with 'The Hokkaido Book,' Snyder's contrast between East and West softened as he identified elements of alienation from nature in Classical Chinese Culture. Despite this softening, the contrast remains in Snyder's later work, a full consideration of which lies outside the scope of this thesis. In a talk given in 2003 Snyder stated that 'East Asian civilizations have never made the sharp separation between the human and the rest of

¹ Robin Chen-Hsing Tsai, 'Gary Snyder: Translator and Cultural Mediator Between China and the World', *Comparative Literature Studies* xlix, 4 (2012), 596-609, p.599.

² Alison Kanski, 'The World's Greenhouse Gas Emissions in One Graphic' (3 July 2015), <<http://www.climatecentral.org/news/greenhouse-gas-emissions-by-country-19167>> (last accessed 10 July 2015).

biological nature that is formalized in the “the [sic] religions of Abraham” and even those in the West ‘who profess to be secularists are still often in thrall to such dualism.’³

While a dichotomy between East and West permeates Snyder’s work, it has been shown throughout this thesis that Snyder incorporates many Western traditions and discourses into his Buddhist ecological vision: American conceptions of wilderness; Transcendentalist themes of direct religious experience, alienation and universal religion; and scientific ecology. In fact, in order to yoke Buddhism to an environmentalist agenda, Snyder felt it necessary to inject it with a Western spirit of protest and social engagement. Further Westernization was necessary in order to reconcile Buddhism with Snyder’s ideas of bioregionalism and localism. Snyder’s green Buddhism should be seen as a synthesis of Eastern and Western traditions.

In the introduction to this thesis it was argued that the opposition of East and West in twentieth-century environmental writing partakes in a broader dualistic logic surrounding the term ‘nature,’ even as Eastern spiritual traditions are held up as offering an antidote to dualism. Snyder’s writing has been shown to engage with many of the binary pairs associated with the term ‘nature’: humanity and nature; primitive and civilized; city and wilderness; art and nature. The non-dualistic outlook of Mahayana Buddhism leads Snyder to undo—or at least to complicate—these dualisms.

Individual Chapter Summaries and Their Specific Contributions to Knowledge

Chapter One showed that Snyder’s early formulation of subversive orientalism was shaped by the historical context of 1950s Cold War America. His writing was placed in the literary context of the West Coast Beat scene through comparisons with works by Ginsberg, McClure, Whalen, Kerouac and Rexroth. These writers employed natural imagery—primarily of wilderness landscapes, animals and the human body—to mount their critiques of American militarism and consumerism. Bakhtin’s concept of degradation was used to elucidate how

³ Snyder, *Back on the Fire*, p.27.

McClure, Whalen, Ginsberg and Snyder employed images of ‘the lower stratum of the body’⁴ to mount their critiques. It was shown that, following Mao’s victory in the Chinese Civil War and the subsequent Korean War, any association with Far Eastern cultures tended to be viewed as subversive in 1950s America. Snyder, Ginsberg and Kerouac all played on the subversive connotations of Far Eastern cultures by linking Buddhist themes to revolutionary politics, as Rexroth had before them. An unpublished journal entry shows that Snyder imagined a revolution inspired by Buddhism in the mid-1950s, before he explicitly linked Buddhism with a revolutionary spirit in published prose in 1961. It was then shown that Snyder, Ginsberg and McClure all associated Eastern religious traditions with a less alienated attitude toward the natural world than that found in the West. In *Myths and Texts*, Snyder critiques the environmentally destructive habits of Western civilization with a vision of ecological rebirth which draws on Hindu and Buddhist imagery. Finally, it was shown that the subversive associations of nature and Buddhism, which had been described earlier in the chapter, came together in a recurring trope in the works of these writers: the orientalizing of Western American wilderness landscapes. Rexroth, Kerouac, Whalen and Snyder imagined these American landscapes to be Eastern ones, and these landscapes functioned as places of disengagement from mainstream American society.

Following on from the description of the blurring of Eastern and Western locales at the end of Chapter One, Chapter Two showed that Snyder’s translations of the Tang Dynasty poet Hanshan in *Cold Mountain Poems* blur categories of East and West. Through anachronism and anachronism, and through zoological and botanical vagueness, Snyder depicts landscapes that seem to be Chinese and American at the same time. Drawing on theorist Timothy Morton, it was argued that the dual sense of place exhibited in *Cold Mountain Poems* achieves an ecological ‘thinking of interconnectedness’ by ‘dissolving the barrier between “over here” and “over there”’.⁵ Through comparisons with other translations, it was shown that Snyder

⁴ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p.21.

⁵ Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, pp.7, 39.

exaggerates the dichotomy between wilderness and the civilized, urban world in his translations. As such, Snyder is shown to reproduce American conceptions of wilderness exemplified by Thoreau and Muir and theorized by Cronon. Two of Snyder's original poems, which archival material shows to have been consciously modelled on Chinese verse forms, uphold this dichotomy. Garrard has argued that the subject who speaks from within an area of wilderness occupies a paradoxical position when wilderness is valued for its independence from humans. Snyder was shown to partially resolve this paradox by dramatizing the dissolution of the subjective 'I' in his translations and employing an objective, 'concrete' mode of description. Snyder's dissolution of the subjective 'I' was shown to have precedents in Classical Chinese and Imagist poetics. His personal journals were used to show that he also viewed poetic impersonality in Buddhist terms and associated 'concrete' poetics with satori. The chapter concluded with an examination of Snyder's 1981 poem 'The Canyon Wren,' which alludes to Hanshan and to a poem by the Song Dynasty poet Su Shi. The human/nature dichotomy implicit in *Cold Mountain Poems* became softened in 'The Canyon Wren.'

Just as the Buddhist-inflected poetics of *Cold Mountain Poems* was shown to come from a hybrid of Eastern and Western traditions, Chapter Three showed that Snyder's yoking of Buddhism to environmental concerns from the late 1960s was shaped by its American context. The chapter showed how Snyder moved away from the 'Practicing Zen' of the First Zen Institute which, as examinations of its newsletters reveal, tended to tie Zen to institutions in Japan, toward a more Americanized version of Zen. Snyder's writing was read against Buddhist modernizers D.T. Suzuki and Alan Watts, and it was shown how, like these writers, Snyder's Buddhism was inflected with American Transcendentalist themes of direct religious experience, religious perennialism, and alienation and potential reintegration with nature. Snyder's Buddhism became more self-consciously Western as he looked to ally Buddhism with a Western spirit of political activism. As ideas of bioregionalism became more central to

Snyder's environmental thinking, he looked to shear Zen of 'Far Eastern baggage'⁶ and to synthesize Zen with American, particularly Native American, themes and images. This synthesis was illustrated through readings of 'The Blue Sky,' 'The Hump-backed Flute Player' and fragments of an unfinished screenplay, 'Darma's Bodhi,' held at Snyder's archive.

Chapter Four focused on another synthesis of Eastern and Western discourses: Hua-yen Buddhist notions of interpenetration and Western scientific ecology. While this synthesis has been noted by previous critics, my chapter is the first to combine close readings of the scientific texts Snyder read with examinations of his poetry and prose. The chapter examines scientific texts by Eugene Odum, H.T. Odum, Ramón Margalef and James Lovelock, all of which Snyder refers to in his published writing of the 1970s. All these writers explored humanity's relationship with nature in terms which recalled Romantic tropes of alienation, and H.T. Odum and Lovelock both explored connections between religious ideas and ecology. Snyder's unpublished journals provide evidence of when Snyder read some of these texts: he read H.T. Odum's *Environment, Power, and Society* in 1972; Margalef's *Perspectives in Ecological Theory* by 1974; and was familiar with Lovelock's work by 1975. Snyder's journals show he translated the writings of H.T. Odum and Margalef into Buddhist terms. These two writers' views of language as an ecological system were shown to have influenced Snyder's eco-poetics. An unpublished letter to his publisher shows that Snyder saw the poems of *Turtle Island* as a synthesis of Hua-yen ideas of interpenetration and ecological theory, and this synthesis was illustrated through examinations of poems in that volume. 'Toward Climax,' an early draft of which was dedicated to the Odum brothers, was shown to employ Buddhist imagery, to engage in a Hua-yen-inflected negotiation of part and whole, and to evoke the ecological concept of the ecotone. Like 'Toward Climax,' *Little Songs for Gaia*, whose title evokes Lovelock's Gaia Hypothesis, was shown to illustrate the interpenetration of phenomena though its exploration of ambiguous edges and boundaries in nature. The poetic sequence was shown to imitate the interpenetration of natural systems by blurring the boundaries between

⁶ Gary Snyder to Wendell Berry, 5 June 1980, GSP II 1:24, p.2.

discrete poetic units. The poetic sequence ‘Tiny Energies,’ which takes its title from a quotation from H.T. Odum, was then analyzed. It was argued that this sequence draws on H.T. Odum’s and Margalef’s conceptions of language as a natural system, and presents a more general unity of human culture and non-human nature. Finally, it was shown that Rexroth in *On Flower Wreath Hill* and McClure in several poems from *Jaguar Skies* both followed Snyder in linking Hua-yen ontology and ecology. The sense of stasis that permeates Rexroth’s poetic sequence differs markedly from Snyder’s dynamic presentation of ecological process, however, and the strident subjective voice of McClure’s poems contrasts strongly to Snyder’s poetry.

Chapter Five is the first critical study of ‘The Hokkaido Book,’ an unfinished prose project Snyder worked on from the early 1970s. The chapter examined published and unpublished fragments of the project. Through examining unpublished letters and a contract held at Snyder’s archive, it was shown that the project evolved from a study of Hokkaido’s wilderness into a much broader work on environmental attitudes in the Far East. One letter to his publisher shows that Snyder’s combination of environmental and human history was influenced by the writings of Edward H. Schafer and parallels between Snyder’s and Schafer’s writings were elucidated. Through an examination of the unpublished journal Snyder kept while visiting Hokkaido in 1972, it was shown that Snyder came to abandon the view that Japan’s modernization and the increased pollution that went with it could primarily be attributed to Western influence. In Snyder’s writing on Hokkaido, he moves away from the contrast of East and West and engages with another binary opposition, that between the ‘primitive’ and the civilized, a dynamic shown to function in both East and West. Snyder contrasts the ‘primitive’ ecocentrism of the Ainu with the alienation of the Yamato Japanese. In Snyder’s view, the Ainu religious worldview should be regarded as a manifestation of the ‘green Dharma,’ which as a religious perennialist he believed was not tied to any specific religious tradition. While Snyder’s association of the Ainu with the natural world lays him open to charges of positive environmental racism, it was shown that such associations were employed by Ainu groups in the 1970s who promoted a resurgence of Ainu ethnic identity. The

parallels Snyder draws between the Ainu and other indigenous peoples were also employed by these Ainu groups. Finally, the chapter examined the later fragments of ‘The Hokkaido Book’ concerned with Chinese culture, and showed that Snyder came to soften the binary opposition he had established between the primitive and civilized, presenting Classical Chinese culture as maintaining an undercurrent of prehistoric, shamanic ecocentrism within its civilized cultural forms.

After showing how Snyder’s ecological vision came to (at least partially) reconcile the primitive with the civilized, the final chapter focused on two other binary pairs in the poems of *Mountains and Rivers Without End*: art and nature, and the city and nature. Snyder models poems in this volume on Chinese landscape painting and on Japanese Nō drama. His early engagement with Chinese art was placed within an American modernist tradition of orientalist ekphrasis. Poems by Pound, Stevens and Moore, and the works of oriental art history that these poets read, were shown to anticipate the subversive orientalist terms in which Snyder first viewed Chinese landscape painting. A series of unpublished poems, ‘Six Scrolls to be Seen in Kansas City,’ based on Chinese scrolls Snyder saw at the Nelson Gallery in 1973, show that his poetic engagement with Chinese visual art predated his published ekphrastic poem ‘Endless Streams and Mountains.’ The notes in Snyder’s 1982 journal on a Qing Dynasty landscape scroll by Lu Yuan were shown to anticipate the focus on human routes through landscape, and the examination of colophons in ‘Endless Streams.’ In *Mountains and Rivers Without End* Snyder develops a view of the relation between art and nature which treads a middle path between naïve faith in mimesis and postmodern scepticism. Nature is approached obliquely through the conventions of Chinese painting and through the filter of Snyder’s literary art. Snyder saw Chinese landscape painting as having evolved from the abstract and geometrical patterns of archaic Chinese art which represented the flow of qi in nature, and it was argued that Chinese landscape painting provided Snyder with a non-mimetic model of art. Japanese Nō drama, a highly stylized form which nevertheless depicts natural landscapes, provides another model for a non-mimetic approach to nature. Snyder’s epigraph from Dōgen and his

interpretation of the Heart Sutra in 'The Mountain Spirit' imply that, from a Mahayana Buddhist viewpoint, art and nature need not be regarded as radically separate, but partake in the same ultimate, non-dual reality. The Poems of *Mountains and Rivers Without End* were also shown to reconcile the city with wild nature. Through the Hua-yen image of double mirrors, depictions of patterns of qi-like flow in cities, and in his presentation of an urban poet in the mountain landscape of 'The Mountain Spirit,' Snyder illustrates the interpenetration of cities and wild nature.

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Visual Works

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- Gong Xian, *Landscape in the Manner of Dong Yuan*. Qing Dynasty. Handscroll, ink on paper. Nelson-Atkins Gallery, Kansas City.
- Liang Kai, *Sakyamuni Descending the Mountain after Asceticism*. Song Dynasty. Hanging scroll, ink and light colour on paper. Tokyo National Museum
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