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Gary Snyder's Path

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Gary Snyder's Path

(TITLE)

BY

Jason Dockter

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Abstract

Early in Gary Snyder's life, he lived a rootless existence in pursuance of gaining spiritual satisfaction through a more harmonious relationship with nature. This rootlessness that dominated this period of Snyder's life originated in Snyder's European ancestors lifestyle, which valued exploiting the natural world for a profit. Through exposure to Chinese landscape paintings, Snyder found Buddhism and began to practice it as a means to reconcile his own humanity with the natural world, which his cultural heritage has alienated himself from. Through Buddhism, Snyder realizes the importance of reuniting humanity with the natural world.

Upon gaining this knowledge, Snyder assumes the role of shaman and attempts to help humanity reconnect with the natural world. Snyder withdrew from the human realm and immersed himself in the natural in shamanistic ritual in order to focus his thoughts on how to reunite humanity to the old ways. The goal is to reestablish a relationship between earlier cultures and modern American culture that would ultimately harmonize the natural world with the human world, and through his poems, Snyder establishes a path that shows the way to do so.

In order to fully reconnect humanity with the natural world, Snyder urges a deep ecology stance; he urges all humans to settle down and root themselves in one place. Rooting oneself in one place will help to create a community, which will include the natural world, and an equal relationship will grow between the human inhabitants and the natural. Without a relationship with the land one lives on, one is unable to fully understand him/herself and will be unable to live life to the degree that one is who roots him/herself and fully understands what occurs in that one area on a daily basis.

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by

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Gary Snyder's Path

At some point everyone has to go on their own. Does my body of poetry ensnare or liberate?
I'll have to keep doing poetry until I'm pretty sure that it has gone past being a snare and is
truly a guide to a path (Gary Snyder in Sherman Paul's *In Search of the Primitive* 300)

Gary Snyder made the above statement fourteen years ago, at the age of 66, well into a very established career as a poet and essayist. At that point, he had published over ten books of poetry and two books of essays; through these poems and essays, it is apparent that Gary Snyder has taken upon himself the task of liberating humanity from the self-destructive path that it is currently on by introducing an alternative path for them to follow. By living according to the traditions established for the destructive path, humans have lost touch with their ancestry, culture and customs. In essence, Snyder has created a viable alternative path that, if followed correctly, could reunite humans to the "primitive" ways of life, with which they have fallen out of contact. The path that Snyder has created in his poetry clearly reflects the path that he has devised to follow in his own life: "the poet's earliest exploration of the literal land . . . [aided] his attempt to establish a sense of place, and--ultimately--to find answers for the question of 'how to be'" (Yamazato 243). Just as Snyder himself has matured, so has the path that he has created through his poetry. Snyder began as a dharma bum, wandering in search of meaning or fulfillment in the late 1940s and early 1950s during which he was associated with the Beat Generation writers. This wandering eventually led him to formally studying Zen Buddhism as a monk in Japan. Twelve years later, he returned to the U.S. and turned to the study of shamanism and, ultimately, to deep ecology.

In the spring of 1951, Snyder graduated from Reed College and began a period of rootlessness that predominantly ruled his way of living. Even years later, this rootlessness continually tempted him to flee his rooted life and return to unattached ways. During this period, Snyder worked various jobs from logger to fire lookout on Crater Mountain. During these five years, he lived with friends or at various jobsites and tirelessly traveled the Pacific Northwest. At the time, Snyder did not understand, as he does in “Dusty Braces” from *Turtle Island*, that he is paradoxically rooted in rootlessness:

O you ancestors
 lumber schooners
 . . .
 you bastards
 my fathers
 . . .
 punchers, miners, dirt farmers, railroad-men
 . . . Your itch
 in my boots too,
 --your sea roving
 tree hearted son. (1-19)

His ancestors were rootless explorers, who searched the earth for untaken land to claim for their kings and countries. Just as his ancestors searched the world, Snyder searches the world as well, although his quest takes him in an opposite direction from his ancestors. At this point, Snyder is an unwitting and unwilling heir to modernist deracination; however, he attempts to solve this problem and remove himself from an

isolated lifestyle. As his ancestors' quests were driven according to their Protestantism and capitalism, Snyder's is spiritual and involves a communion with nature instead of the exploitation of it. By recognizing that his rootlessness is ancestral, Snyder realizes where his wandering comes from, but he is able to reconcile his nature by immersing himself in nature and fully living the rooted life Simone Weil argues for in *The Need for Roots*:

To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul. It is one of the hardest to define. A human being has roots by virtue of his real, active and natural participation in the life of a community which preserves certain particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations for the future. (41)

He creates a path that will connect himself and, in turn, connect human beings with the natural world.

In order to better understand a connection between humans and nature, Snyder decided to leave the U.S. and study Zen Buddhism as a monk because he saw numerous similarities between Zen, which he was originally exposed to through his study of Sanskrit, Chinese, and Japanese languages, and nature. Buddhism also offered Snyder a non-dualist alternative to the anthropocentrism that plagues much of humanity. In the Lannan video interview, Snyder explains that he was attracted to Zen through his study of Chinese landscape paintings and Chinese poetry, and that he saw “something in the works of the poets and the painters that seemed to come from a really authentic participation in nature.” By formally practicing ecologically and politically “engaged”

Buddhism and the teachings of scriptures such as the *Avatamsaka sutra*, Snyder was able to develop the ecological/symbiotic ethic, or what Thich Nhat Hanh calls “inter-being,” that he wished to develop in order to participate fully in the natural world. In *Riprap*, Snyder wrote “Piute Creek,” which clearly expresses the relationship between Zen and nature:

In thin stone fractures
 A huge moon on it all, is too much.
 The mind wanders . . .
 All the junk that goes with being human
 Drops away . . .
 Words and books
 Like a small creek off a high ledge
 Gone in the dry air. (7-18)

While sitting and focusing on a natural scene, “the mind wanders” (9), and the speaker loses concentration on the scene and concentrates to return to the scenery. Once the speaker refocuses his attention, nothing but the present matters; all that the human mind normally focuses on disappears, and the speaker is able to become a part of the scene or actually is able to unite with the natural world. According to Michael Castro, “Snyder envisioned an interpenetration of primitive and civilized states of mind that will return modern man, at least periodically, to the experience spoken of by the Buddhists as “original mind” (147). Once Snyder is able to remove all the intrusions of the human world from his mind, he is more able to relate to the natural world and more capable of understanding the relationship between the two worlds. By practicing Zen, Snyder

understands the value of attaining a perspective that joins primitive and civilized states, which allows him to experience fully a life connected to the natural world. At this point in his life, Snyder now realizes and understands this interconnectedness and returns to the U.S., but he is posed with a much larger problem: how to realize his insight in [the context of] a commercialized and “unenlightened” American culture.

Upon returning to the U.S., Snyder homesteaded in the Sierra Nevada foothills and continued his quest to heal humanity of the emptiness that was consuming it. To Snyder, the lack of positive interaction with the natural world left a void in human life, one that no “consumable”/consumer culture could ever hope to fill; in fact, consumerism was itself the problem. At this point in his life, Snyder understood that the natural world offered the only source of authentic experience that would assist humans in filling the void they had created. Snyder evolves from purely being a student of Zen to the role of healer, or a modern shaman, a healer who understands how to heal humanity of the emptiness that derives from the alienation from its own nature: “as shaman, the poet restores the cultural and the natural to a holistic relationship of interdependence” (Dean 112). The function of the healer also allowed Snyder to offer humans a means to escape from the dualist perspective that fueled the ethnocentric bias that plagues American society. In “1,” from the “Hunting” section of *Myths and Texts*, Snyder establishes his “first shaman song” and begins to understand how to help humanity fill the void created within itself:

Two days without food, trucks roll past
in dust and light, rivers
are rising.

Thaw in the high meadows. Move west in July. (10-13)

In an exemplary way, like Henry David Thoreau and John Muir, Snyder withdrew from addiction-ridden consumerist culture and immersed himself deep within the natural world. The trucks roll past, and even though he has gone two days without food, he has not fully cleansed himself of the ills of that world, so he will not attempt to catch a ride back to it: His asceticism is not yet complete. Instead, he

sit[s] without thoughts by the log-road

Hatching a new myth

watching the waterdogs

the last truck gone. (16-19)

By removing himself to the natural world, Snyder is able to focus his thoughts on how to offer assistance to the humans who have lost touch with the old ways. Tim Dean offers “that those cultural forms which are able to harmonise [sic] the social with the natural are preferable over those cultural forms which instigate the social at the cost of the natural” (99). A relationship with nature would hopefully revive those cultural forms that would be more likely to harmonize the natural and the human worlds. In order to gain access to the natural world, the speaker must clear his mind of all thoughts, or all of the “junk that goes with being human.” By doing so, he is able to create a way to heal humanity, and for Snyder, that path lies within the natural world that this speaker has surrounded himself with.

Simply surrounding oneself with the natural world is not enough to heal the damage done to both humans and to the natural world. In order to recuperate fully, Snyder urges all humans to settle down in one place or to develop a rootedness to that

place, and in *The Real Work*, he explains that “. . . by being in place, we get the largest sense of community. We learn that community is of spiritual benefit and of health for everyone” (141). Thomas J. Lyon suggests, “it continues to be true that Snyder’s attempt to incorporate principles of evolutionary ecology gives his work weight and scope that separates it . . . from the ‘inturnedness’ marking Western, anthropocentric culture” (45). As a deep ecologist, Snyder advocates becoming rooted in one place, cultivating a community, and reaching out to establish a relationship to the land; he realizes that it is not easy, as his poem “True Night” in *Axe Handles* shows: “Sheath of sleep in the black of the bed:/ From outside this dream womb/ Comes a clatter” (1-3). Inside his home, Snyder has found protection from the ills of humanity and comfort in the nurturing environment he has created. But just as Snyder becomes comfortable with his living situation, a “clatter” is heard from outside that awakens his rootless impulses and lures him to “dash in the dark” (13). The clatter lures him away from the comfort and safety that he has created and pulls him back out into the dark, or the uncertain experience of being a wanderer. Snyder understands that he is “alive to the night./ . . . / Stick in the hand, forever” (30-32) and that he will eternally be tempted to return to the ways of his ancestors. Just as all humans have the desire to pick up and leave, Snyder wrestles with “. . . feel[ing] like a dandelion head/ Gone to seed/ About to be blown all away” (45-47). Inside of himself there is a dichotomy between living a rooted life and returning to a nomadic lifestyle, but, ultimately, the ecologist who understands the value of knowing the land and living a life connected to nature decides to return back to his home because “One cannot stay too long awake/ In this dark” (57-58). Without fully understanding the land that one lives on, one is unable to understand himself and will be unable to live to

the degree that one is, who roots himself in one area and fully comes to understand what occurs there on a daily basis will be able to understand.

In my study, I explore the connection between the maturation and evolution of Gary Snyder and his poetry through poems from *Riprap*, *Myths and Texts*, *Turtle Island*, and *Axe Handles*. I approach these works in terms of cultural anthropology and Snyder's understanding of cultural anthropology and show how Snyder lives and communicates what he has discovered along his path (Introduction). Through close readings of the poems, I trace Snyder's path from searching for meaning through wandering the earth to rooting himself firmly in the Sierra Nevada region of California. I dedicate one chapter to each phase of Snyder's life: Zen wanderer and monk, which in the Buddhist tradition literally means "left home person" and aptly applies to this phase of Snyder's life (Chapter 1), shaman (Chapter 2), and deep ecologist (Chapter 3).

Chapter One

After graduating from Reed College in 1951, Gary Snyder sought to establish a more spiritually gratifying life. At this time, he entered a period of rootlessness, during which he lived as a religious wanderer, roaming back and forth across the country, working various jobs and even signing on with “sea merchants” to pursue his quest overseas. Yao-fu Lin claims Snyder is prone to wandering, and living a rootless lifestyle as he lives “the life of a ‘dharma Bum,’ a seeker after truth and freedom, that combines meditation, morality, and wisdom in one” (Lin 360). In *Riprap*, Snyder captures this rootlessness in “Thin Ice.” Snyder sees himself as rootless in the immediate moment and simply wandering, in search of something, along an old, logging road: “Walking in February/ A warm day after a long freeze/ On an old logging road” (1-3). This road, however, is that of his ancestors and of a culture that exploited natural resources for profit. The old logging path serves the logging industry and separates more than it connects the human world to the natural world. Not only is Snyder on a road used to pillage the land of its resources, but he also does so, and while traveling on it he “Cut a walking stick from alder” (5).

As Snyder walks along the road, from his vantage point, he “looked down through clouds/ On wet fields of the Nooksack” (6-7), which clearly shows that he has distanced himself from the human world and, in a liminal sense, now peers down from above to understand his place between that familiar, human world and the natural world. Suddenly, as he walks along, he “slipped on the hard slick/ -- like thin ice – the sudden/ Feel of an old phrase made real” (15-17). This instantaneous realization of “an old

phrase made real” explains that even though the wild is slightly unfamiliar to Snyder, as he lives his life at this point, the act of immersing himself in nature rekindles feelings that exist inside of him and feel familiar. These feelings of familiarity exist in Snyder, just as the feelings of rootlessness do, but the familiarity with the natural world has been repressed due to the more recent experiences of his more immediate ancestors, who lived by taking from the earth. By directly experiencing the natural, his familiarity with nature is emerging from within himself, and the old phrases, or old ways, are beginning to be made a reality to Snyder. He is better able to understand the need to live harmoniously with nature. Snyder knows that the communion with the natural world is essential to spiritual nourishment, but he is just uncertain as to how to attain this union.

The realization of “an old phrase made real” also helps Snyder to understand that language itself is a resource and that language can be used to relate directly to life, so, once Snyder learns how to unite with the natural world, he can relate his experience to others and offer a guide to help them find the way to do so too. The uncertainty of this path is made apparent to Snyder as he progresses along the logging path and walks across a patch of ice: “Like walking on thin ice—/ I yelled back to a friend,/ It broke and I dropped/ Eight inches in” (20-23). To travel as a wanderer proves to be more complicated than it appears, and, by setting himself up to fail while searching, Snyder introduces a humorous aspect to the poem. His falling shows that Snyder does not take himself too seriously, and this action allows the reader to relate to Snyder and to Snyder’s position more easily. By allowing himself to fall, Snyder shows that if he can follow the path, even after falling, anyone can, even if the way is a difficult one.

Along the way, one encounters numerous obstacles and challenges, which ultimately stop the traveler dead in his tracks. Snyder encounters another fall, similar to the one in “Thin Ice,” which explains that he is attempting to rise above the ways of American culture and leave his logging past behind him and develop a healthier relationship with nature. This fall occurs as Snyder has traveled:

All America south and east,
 Twenty-five years in it brought to a trip-stop
 Mid-point, where I turn
 Caught more on this land – rock tree and man,
 Awake, than ever before . . . (“Nooksack Valley, *RR* 14-18)

Snyder’s occasional falls comment on the myth of American Adam and display the difficulty he has in blending his rootless lifestyle with a more rooted one. At this point, however, Snyder is ready to accept the challenge, as he is more awake to the problem than he has ever been before. The inherent problems with living in contrast to the natural world are becoming quite apparent to Snyder, as his primitive instincts are beginning to surface and blend with his childhood enjoyment of the wilderness in Oregon. Snyder’s failure to root himself continues, as he cannot develop the means to integrate his beliefs in the value of nature into his life as a human, which stems from a long history of exploiting the natural world.

This exploitation of the natural world and the difficulties that such a relationship presents to humanity become even clearer to Snyder, which he expresses in “The Late Snow and Lumber Strike of the Summer of Fifty-Four.” During this strike, entire towns were forced to shut down, so Snyder takes off again, “hitching the Coast road” (2). The

strike drives Snyder in search of other work to keep himself busy. Since there is a scarcity of jobs, those without work feel lost and discontent because they have no work. The need to work in order to feel self-worth drives those who live in a culture that is obsessed with property and possessions. These people have become servants of the work, or the need to work in order to attain wealth. Accordingly, they have lost touch with everything that is important in life and live to satisfy their desires. In *The Essential Chuang Tzu*, “Hsu Yu replied, . . . If I assumed power, what would I be taking but a title? Aren’t titles and names merely the servants . . . of the real? And why would I want to become a servant of myself?” (Hamill 4). Members of this culture have all become slaves to what Hsu Yu described as being a “servant of myself.” By falling prey to this lifestyle, Americans are driven by the need to gain possessions, when they really should be driven to experience life, and the riches that living provides. That is not the case, so, with no work, Snyder believes there is no reason for him to remain there, so he “Hitched north all of Washington/ Crossing and re-crossing the passes/ Blown like dust, no place to work” (8-10). Instead of being rooted in one place, Snyder and all other humans who allow a job or other impermanent aspects of life to dictate how they live will be “blown like dust” with no capability to situate themselves in a permanent location or way of living.

Because Snyder is trying to find his bearings in the natural world, he has no qualms about moving on and trying to find work elsewhere. He allows himself to believe that work will provide a meaningful existence to rule the way he lives, because Snyder has no real vision as yet for his own life and has no concept of how to focus his life spiritually. The “work ethic” is so ingrained in him that it propels him through life, which

separates him further from “mindfulness.” Snyder has yet to discover that, as Suzuki says, “When your mind becomes demanding, when you long for something, you will end up violating your own precepts” (22). The Protestant “work ethic” directly conflicts with the Buddhist notion of “right livelihood;” the “work ethic” is extremely end-oriented while “right livelihood” advocates establishing a harmony and focusing on the present, creating a realization in the now. By allowing his work ethic to govern his lifestyle, Snyder has violated his own beliefs in the importance of the natural, and he has fallen victim to his demands. Snyder longs to find work, and this demand controls his thoughts; in order to regain control of his thoughts, Snyder isolates himself from human beings, and sits:

On Mt. Baker, alone

...

Thinking of work, but here,

Burning in sun-glare

Below a wet cliff, above a frozen lake. (16-21)

Throughout the ordeal of the strike, Snyder never once focuses on the present, but always focuses on his traveling or on the movement of others. Failure to live in the present and fully experience the moment does not allow humans to “live in, nor do they enjoy, what they do at the moment. So they are unhappy and discontented with the present moment.” (Rahula 71). Here, Snyder is able to set aside that world of work and focus on being “here” while trying to understand his place between the natural world and the world of American culture and logging. By focusing on the present, Snyder can fully give himself to the experience and understand his relationship to nature.

Snyder cannot yet reconcile the conflicting demands of these worlds, but he acknowledges the dilemma he faces when he “must turn and go back:/ caught on a snowpeak/ between heaven and earth” (25-27). At this point, human economy and the natural world seem mutually exclusive, and he can only continue “Looking for work” (29). The key word here, though, is “*looking*,” for it suggests that new kinds of work may lie ahead. Snyder is looking to harmonize work and life in the interest of spiritual fulfillment and to escape from the notion of productive work. This work is future-oriented, with one working for wages that only appear at the end, which makes work in this sense always oriented toward the future, and is conducive to dislocating.

Exposure to Chinese landscape paintings at an early age and study of Chinese and Japanese poets led Snyder to Buddhism. The separation of the wild and the civilized are reunited through Buddhist practice since “The Buddhists teach respect for all life, and for wild systems. Man’s life is totally dependent on an interpenetrating network of wild systems” (*TI* 104). Eventually, Snyder reconciles humanity and the natural world for himself by practicing Buddhism, which grows quite naturally out of his former wanderings. Chuang Tzu advocates wandering, but qualifies this recommendation by urging humans to “try wandering together in the palace of not possessing anything. We can talk about sameness and coming together no end . . . We’ll be calm and quiet, empty as a desert, clear as water, in tune – and *free*” (Hamill 127). Humans will cease to worry about material items and will abandon the job-driven lifestyle that Snyder experienced in “The Late Snow and Lumber Strike . . .” if they reject the belief that having material possessions is synonymous with personal well-being.

Snyder follows this advice and again removes himself from the human world, and sets himself on Sourdough Mountain in “Mid-August at Sourdough Mountain Lookout.” He states “I cannot remember things I once read/ A few friends, but they are in cities” (6-7) and he is situated among rocks and fir-cones, alone with himself. By distancing himself from the human realm, he is able to find a deeper connection with nature, and he no longer attempts to recall people and books he used to know, but, instead, he focuses on his present experience. The distance he has placed between himself and the human world allows Snyder to be comfortable when he is alone, and allows him to feel oneness, or interconnectedness, with nature.

The ability to understand this interconnectedness stems from practicing meditation: “The exorcising and cleansing of the mind is the chief function of meditation, the technique Zen developed in its pursuit of enlightenment” (Lin 360). By cleansing the mind of “All the junk that goes with being human” (*TI* “Piute Creek” 12), Zen Buddhists are able to better appreciate the emptiness that connects all living beings. By dismissing “all the junk,” “what remains is the quintessence of being one with the nonhuman wilderness” (Lin 362). Snyder expresses this interaction in “16” of the Cold Mountain poems:

Cold Mountain is a house
 Without beams or walls.
 The six doors left and right are open
 The hall is blue sky.
 The rooms all vacant and vague
 The east wall beats on the west wall

At the center nothing. (1-7)

Han Shan literally means Cold Mountain, and this act of taking the name of a place eliminates the separation of human from the natural and creates an immediate bond with the area. Han Shan becomes the natural world, and this world possesses no beams or walls. This emptiness makes the separation between the natural world and the human world extremely difficult to view, and that is because the separation does not exist outside of the human understanding that there is a distinction between the two worlds. Nature is both vacant and “vague,” and it spans the entire globe so that the east wall does beat on the west wall and paradoxically, it has indeterminate boundaries. This vastness surrounds and includes the human world, which has tried to separate itself from it. But, since the center of Cold Mountain and the natural world is nothing, then the center of the human world is nothing as well, and the two worlds are connected by emptiness.

Shunryu Suzuki states, “According to the traditional Buddhist understanding, our human nature is without ego. When we have no idea of ego, we have Buddha’s view of life. Our egoistic ideas are delusion, covering our Buddha nature” (100). Humanity has built a wall around itself, which is supported by egoistic ideas, and these ideas separate humanity from the natural world. Humans have allowed themselves to “forget who is doing the creating and the reason for the creation, we become attached to the material or exchange value” (Suzuki 67). Essentially, humans have placed themselves at the top of the food chain and have applied other beings to processes that will earn a profit or serve a purpose for what they perceive to be the betterment of humanity. Along the way, humans have forgotten how insignificant they are in the larger picture and have created a dualist perspective that advocates the separation of human and non-human. Snyder finally

discovers that, through Buddhism, humans are able to re-open the ties that unite humanity to the natural world. While practicing Buddhism in Japan, “Snyder . . . deeply realized that Buddhism and ecology shared a vision of the world in terms of the interrelatedness of all beings” (Yamazato 233). Only by losing the idea of self, realigning with a nondualist perspective, and realizing that all beings are interrelated could humans reopen a valuable relationship with the natural world. Just as “the land belongs to itself./ ‘no self in self; no self in things” (*TI* “What Happened Here Before” 52-53), humans also belong to the land, as there is no distinction between self and things, and, in order to bridge the gap between humanity and nature, humans must realize that there is no reason to separate the two and live a life that perpetuates the belief that both worlds should remain apart.

The apparent conflict between human and natural (or civilized and wild) stems from a false dichotomy based on circular thinking: self-centered “‘civilization’ requires [‘wildness’] to be ‘other’ in order to confirm its own pre-eminent ‘selfhood’” (Martin 4). The importance of reconnecting humans with the natural world that they have distanced themselves from is apparent to Snyder, and it is first of all a matter of right views, and by practicing Buddhism, he believes that humans can realize the two as one and thus live more complete and fulfilling lives. Snyder claims “that his position, although at present perceived to be marginal, is ‘in line with the big flow,’ and that civilization is . . . dangerously alienated from what is in fact its material ‘ground,’ namely wild nature” (Martin 4). Prior to forming civilizations and attempting to somehow tame the wild earth, humans were integrated with that wild earth and lived harmoniously with other beings in such a world. Practicing Buddhism allows people to free their minds from the hustle of civilization, and, by doing so, humans are able to reconnect with “the

experience spoken of by Buddhists as ‘original mind’” (Castro 147). “Original mind” allows those who realize selflessness or emptiness to experience the state of mind that allowed humans to live harmoniously with the natural world. In this context, “original mind” may be reminiscent of both Coleridge’s notion of primary imagination and Wordsworthian innocence, or Blakeian organized innocence. Shunryu Suzuki states “The mind of the beginner is empty, free of the habits of the expert, ready to accept, to doubt, and to open to all the possibilities” (13). In this state, there is no conception of “civilization,” or of a consumer culture that exploits the natural world for its own gain and the mind was empty, and humans were ready to experience all of the possibilities of life as a component of the wilderness.

Chapter Two

Snyder understands that to reverse the damage that Americans have done to themselves and to their way of life, they must reconnect with what he refers to as “the old ways.” In an attempt to heal the wound in American culture, Snyder, as David Carpenter argues, “decides to write – or attempts to write – as shaman” (117). By doing this, Snyder has been criticized by some readers for appropriating Amerindian culture, but Snyder explains his use of shamanism:

To step outside of that [social nexus] and make contact with a totally nonhuman other is where a certain kind of power, wisdom, and experience comes from. That is what I’m talking about when I talk about shamanism, which is a worldwide phenomenon and not limited in a proprietary sense to any one culture. (*RW* 154-55)

Snyder aims to reconnect humanity to the ways of its primitive ancestors, and Snyder also explains that “[shamanism] informs the fundamental lore of the planet, that is to say, all of the worldwide body of folktale that we all share” (*RW* 155). Americans have severed ties with the planet itself, and they have created a culture that allows them to attempt to dominate and control all that is wild and strange. They have exploited nature in order to separate themselves from it:

San Francisco 2 X 4s

were the woods around Seattle:

Someone killed and someone built, a house,

a forest, wrecked or raised

All America hung on a hook

& burned by men, in their own praise. (“Logging 2, *M&T* 5-10)

What once constituted the wild and untamed, natural world has been tamed by Americans, as they have created houses out of woods. John Steinbeck reflects on this phenomenon:

I have often wondered at the savagery and thoughtlessness with which our early settlers approached this rich continent. They came at it as though it were an enemy . . . They burned the forests and changed the rainfall; they swept the buffalo from the plains, blasted the streams, set fire to the grass, and ran a reckless scythe through the virgin and noble timber. Perhaps they felt that it was limitless . . . and that man could move on to new wonders endlessly . . . the early people pillaged the country as though they hated it. (Steinbeck 597)

Certainly, this practice is not limited to American culture, but what is specific to European-inspired American culture is the idea of devastating an environment that could be used to supply humans for generations upon end with the same resources, such as wood, if the location were properly logged, i.e., by replanting trees.

American consumer culture depletes region upon region of natural resources without any of the regret or humility, which would be characteristic of native, indigenous cultures. When members of these cultures killed animals in order to survive, they did so with a reverence for the animal and offered thanks to the animal for sacrificing itself.

The earliest European explorers of North America also killed animals to ensure their own survival, but they did so with no remorse, just as Snyder does in “Hunting 8.” While walking through the forest, he “Scared out a cottontail/ Whipped out the winchester/ Shot off its head” (5-7). If this kill were necessary, Snyder would have taken the time to find out where the rabbit’s body ended up in order to utilize the carcass; however, Snyder shoots the rabbit, and then “run[s] down the hill to the car” (10) and leaves the body wherever it lay dead. This act exemplifies the remorseless killing that many European colonizers did simply for fun, to kill for the sake of killing.

Additionally, European colonizers appropriated the land and claimed it according to their ethnocentric biblical and imperial mandates. These forests were and continue to be “Cut down by the prophets of Israel/ the fairies of Athens/ the thugs of Rome/ . . . / Cut down to make room for the suburbs” (“Logging 14, *M&T* 8-12). The myth that many Americans follow is one that privileges Americans. Unfortunately, this belief in American superiority has not diminished as Americans burn forests “in their own praise,” which signifies the belief many Americans have of their own importance and the lack of respect for nature and earlier cultures who did respect nature’s ways. Instead, they continue to live according to the belief that humans are superior to everything, living or not, and perpetually attempt to conquer the wild.

In order to reconnect humanity to the old ways, Snyder assumes the role of healer, or a shaman, who understands “the kind of healing that makes whole, heals by making whole . . . demonstrating that . . . a little human enclave, does not stand by itself apart from the plants and the animals and the winds and rains . . . that surround it” (*The Real Work* 171). Snyder turns to “the old ways” as a means for humanity to reconnect with the

natural world. In order to be able to show humanity the way, Snyder first distances himself from humanity, just as Mircea Eliade explains: “The shaman begins his new, his true life by a ‘separation’” (13) and oftentimes as an initiation ritual, the candidate “withdraws to the forests, feeds on tree bark, flings himself into water” (16). In “Burning I,” in *Myths and Texts*, this isolation from humanity is precisely what Snyder achieves: He “Squat[s] in swamp shadows./ mosquitoes sting,” (1-2). While isolated in a swamp, Snyder is not bothered by mosquitoes that would annoy any human being who lived a life separate from nature. He establishes a nondualist perspective and views himself as a part of the swamp. As Snyder understands the necessary link between humans and the wild, he connects with the natural and becomes one with it, sitting calmly in an almost trance-like state. As he squats, his “Still hand moves out alone/ Flowering and leafing/ turning to quartz” (12-15). The division between himself and nature dissolves as his hand begins to blend with flowers and leaves, and eventually with quartz. Snyder loses sight of himself and feels more and more comfortable in the natural world: “the long body of the swamp [becomes]/ A mud-streaked thigh” (16-17), and the “oneness with nature, [and] the oneness of mind and body” (*The Real Work* 157) are complete. According to Lawrence Buell, “He has allowed his body to become permeable to the point that his bones rub against the roots, and inside and outside can no longer be distinguished. . . . The metamorphosis is total” (167). Snyder has learned that in order to help humanity to achieve this completeness, he must teach humanity of its own past that it has severed itself from and show how to reconnect to that past, and, ultimately, to reconnect with nature.

The necessity of showing humanity how to reconnect with its own past is made clear to Snyder while he watches a flock of birds fly, and as Black Swifts fly by, “—the swifts cry/ . . . See or go blind!” (“Logging 3” *M&T* 27-28). Snyder must explain the damage that has been done and show how humanity can cease to cause further damage to the ecology. The swifts explain the ultimatum; humans can either see “the way,” and continue to survive, or they will go blind and eventually become extinct. In the flight pattern of the birds, Snyder sees the “Form: dots in air changing line from line,/ the future defined” (3-4) and learns that from nature, humans can regain the perspective of elder cultures. The birds’ form changes from line to line, and Americans view time in a linear sense, with a clear beginning and a clear end. If Snyder can reconnect humanity to its past, he can show that time is circular and there is no distinctive beginning and ending. By explaining this infinite evolution, humans may realize that the damage they cause today will affect those who live in the future, just as the damage that early colonizers began continues to haunt Americans today.

In “What Happened Here Before,” from *Turtle Island*, Snyder introduces humanity to the culture that it has severed itself from and additionally shows the human evolution that resulted in humanity’s quest to control the wild. Prior to European colonization:

. . . human people came with basket hats and nets
 winter-houses underground
 . . .
 feasts and dances for the boys and girls
 songs and stories in the smoky dark. (29-33).

Humans were able to live harmoniously with the natural and, in fact, lived inside of the earth, in underground homes. This relationship shows that nature can provide and care for humanity, if humanity allows the relationship to survive. Instead, European colonizers came to North America and “tossed up trees and/ boulders with big hoses/ going after that gravel and the gold” (34-36). These colonizers, who are Snyder’s ancestors, generated the culture that governs the way that many Americans live today. Early European settlers began to deforest areas in order to produce more crops in an effort to support its civilization:

The spread of agriculture in the three millennia after 5000 BC saw the first clearing of natural forests . . . Forests originally covered about 95 per cent of western and central Europe. By the end of the great period of medieval colonisation [sic] this had been reduced to about 20 per cent.
(Ponting 121)

Instead of finding value in a relationship with nature, colonizers only found value in what they could take from nature and turn into a profit, and, accordingly, they went “after that gravel and the gold,” and also began to deforest areas in order to create larger fields to cultivate crops in. Carolyn Merchant explains that “European capitalism expanded through the establishment of colonies in the western and southern hemispheres that supplied both the natural resources and cheap labor that extracted them from the earth” (24). This consumerist culture exists today, and it is precisely what Snyder attempts to urge humanity to distance itself from by trying to reconnect humanity to a more primitive way of life, meaning, as Kenneth Burke says, “the fuller human nature, the first nature, to

which we all aspire” (Paul viii). What Snyder views as being necessary is a reconnection between the current and the old ways of life.

In order to help humanity reconnect to the old ways, Snyder must offer a path, which will reestablish this connection and will also reconnect humanity with the natural. This path will assist humans in suppressing the individualism that is inherent in the consumerist culture and will enable humans to reunite with the communal ways of their indigenous ancestors. Joseph Campbell states

The highest concern of all . . . social organizations . . . has been that of suppressing the manifestations of individualism; and this has been generally achieved by compelling or persuading people to identify themselves not with their own interests . . . but with the archetypes of behavior and systems of sentiment developed and maintained in the public domain.
(*The Masks of God* 240)

Therefore, “The poetic function for Snyder is . . . analogous to the shamanistic function . . . [which] ‘heals’ by making whole; as shaman, the poet restores the cultural and the natural to a holistic relationship of interdependence” (Dean 112). Snyder’s task is to establish the importance of abandoning self-centered, narcissistic ways and gaining a greater understanding of the whole interrelated world, of which humanity is a part. Snyder must first show us how to take the path, so he takes it upon himself to “Lay down these words/ Before your mind like rocks./ placed solid, by hands” (“Riprap” *Riprap* 1-3). Poems will form a path, or a guide, which will lead to a more harmonious lifestyle. He chooses the words he will use and purposefully sets them in place to demonstrate that

words are connected to the real. These words and poems can become a path to follow and can show the relationship between all elements of life, which can live harmoniously and interconnectedly. The “riprap of things” (8) establishes the idea that everything in life is connected, and that just as Snyder the poet specifically places words in his poems and poems in collections, every creature and living thing holds a specific function in life and when the world is connected, all of the world can live a more healthy life.

One of the first steps in distancing Americans from the culture they have perpetuated is to urge them to follow the path that he is creating, as he has been “picking my holds/ With intense caution” (“Burning 8” *M&T* 2-3). Snyder must explain that this need to reconnect with the old ways is not just a fad, but is a path that he has been contemplating the best way to achieve for a long while. Humanity has come to “A dead stop”(5) and, in order to continue to progress, its members must let go of the contemporary culture and they “MUST fall” (9), in order to lose the belief in humanity’s superiority. Once this ethnocentrism has been displaced, “life [will blaze] . . . / Forth again with preternatural clearness” (16-17) and humanity will find itself “to become possessed/ Of a new sense” (17-18). Snyder “see[s] man as full of pride and his institutions as insignificant in the vastness of the universe” (Steuding 153). Excessive pride has only harmed humanity, and, by not allowing pride to rule the way humans live, humanity will be able to feel refreshed and truly experience life with “a new sense.” In reality, this new sense will actually be old, but will be experienced for the first time by people of this generation as indigenous people of previous generations experienced this sense of life everyday. Ultimately, by following Snyder’s path, humanity will “[move] with a positiveness and precision/With which I seemed to have/ Nothing at all to do” (22-

25). Humanity will have reunited itself with the natural, which allows all living things to experience a simpler way of life, which seems to take care of itself.

In addition to presenting the way to unite humanity with the way it formerly lived and with nature, Snyder also explains that the damage humanity causes to the environment -- and will continue to cause -- occurs while humans continue to live as if they were foreordained rulers of the earth. Snyder writes in "Front Lines" from *Turtle Island* that "The edge of the cancer/ Swells against the hill—we feel/ a foul breeze" (1-3). As a means of expressing the significance of changing humanity's way of life, Snyder shows that the cancer consumer culture has created momentarily rests beside a hill, waiting to devour everything in its path, while humanity views the problem as something slight. Instead of instantly changing its ways, humanity continues to "[bring] in/ Landseekers, lookers, they say/ To the land,/ Spread your legs" (10-13). If humanity does not mend its ways, the perpetuation of its pride and belief in its own superiority is inevitable. Land developers will continue to build upon what once was a wild and untamed section of nature, and the division between human and nonhuman will be even greater. The violation of nature will continue and will ultimately hurt the way of living that many humans have grown accustomed to. Snyder predicts the bleak future that humanity will be steadily approaching if it continues to devour the natural world and its resources at the rate that it presently is. He acknowledges the damage that has already been done, but that is where "we must draw/ Our line" (25-26). This current level of destruction is where this behavior must end, and Snyder insists that we stop. If we fail, future generations will lack a complete understanding of American history, culture and

certainly community, as it will have lost most of the natural world that supported, or was a part of, all of those components of American heritage.

Chapter 3

Early indigenous, tribal cultures in America viewed the land they inhabited “as a whole and living organism” (Halifax 22). In addition to believing and living as though the land were an equally alive organism, the land these tribes lived on was considered an extension of the people themselves. The term *community* encompassed not only the human members of their tribe, but also “[included] other species, plant and animal, as well as environmental features” (Halifax 25). This communal living with the natural world existed until European colonialists landed on North America and began to claim ownership of the land, and eventually forced members of indigenous cultures to relocate to undesirable areas of the continent. Inherent in the European colonists’ lifestyle “[was] a disregard for the native way of life and an overwhelming urge to exploit both the land and the people” (Ponting 130). Even though most indigenous cultures lived with the land, “the first human families had to clear the oak trees in order to plant another kind of tree: the genealogical tree” (Harrison 6). This anthropocentrism dominates American culture and leads to human attempts to control wild nature. Snyder grapples with the problem of reconciling the work he has done as a logger, or one who perpetuates anthropocentrism, with his love of nature and his knowledge that living harmoniously with the natural world is the best way to reverse the damage that has already been done.

For centuries, humans have attempted to dominate the surrounding land in hopes of turning the land into a financially profitable resource. According to Robert Poque Harrison, this practice dates back to at least 100 B.C., as land was “transformed from forests to pasture to cultivated fields, [and] the land around . . . became more productive,

to be sure, but the loss of the outlying forests eventually led to disaster. As the hills could no longer retain water, . . . the city was eventually forced to relocate itself” (57). This practice of deforestation for the sake of financial gain applies directly to Snyder, as he was employed as a logger who assisted in stripping the land of its resources so that his employer could reap the rewards. For some, the rewards are merely financial, but for others, fame, or the belief that their memory will live on, is what propels them to desecrate the earth. Harrison states that “We know from the written records that certain Sumerian individuals actually achieved considerable fame by . . . seizing huge quantities of timber” (17). The forest can be seen as perpetually alive, as its cycles allow it to regenerate year after year. Early humans may have viewed their own species as inferior to the wild, as humans have a distinct lifespan, and some may have gained notoriety for slaying the forests and surviving against the natural elements in order to return with wood that could be used to create buildings, or monuments, which would honor that individual.

The initial section of *Myths and Texts* is entitled “Logging,” and the poems therein pertain to destroying nature for the sake of earning a financial profit. In “Logging 2,” Snyder “[wakes] from bitter dreams” (14) that were of humanity leveling forests in order to produce “San Francisco 2X4s” (5), and the dilemma is clear when Snyder calls such dreams bitter, but he then proceeds to take part in this destruction himself. Even though Snyder has a deep appreciation for the natural, he chooses to work in the logging industry and even measures the progress that is made: “250,000 board-feet a day/ If both Cats keep working/ & nobody gets hurt” (24-26). Hopefully, nobody does get hurt, but the Northwest ecology will require a long period of time to recuperate from the

devastation that the logging industry causes; ultimately, the environment gets hurt and this destruction, in turn, harms humanity as well.

The harm to humanity is slightly less direct and not easily noticed, but it does occur as Bill Devall and George Sessions explain in *Deep Ecology*: “Biocentric equality is intimately related to the all-inclusive Self-realization in the sense that if we harm the rest of Nature then we are harming ourselves” (68). Snyder shows how the damage occurs, and it is clear that because of the logging, “it’s hard to farm/Between the stumps:/ The cows get thin, the milk tastes funny” (“Logging 3” *M&T*, 20-22). Because of the increased logging in the forests, the food supply in the area starts to suffer. Humanity will be directly affected by this deterioration as it will be eating lesser-quality food and drinking milk that has lost nutrients due to the poor nutrition of the cows. If the farmers can’t produce sufficient pastures, then, naturally, the cows will not produce quality milk. Ultimately, the idea of reciprocity is addressed here, and Snyder makes evident the direct relationship between the natural world and the human world. The harm that humanity causes to the natural world will in turn cause harm to humanity. Just as earlier communities relocated due to the depletion of natural resources, many Americans continue to relocate in order to get what they consider to be a fresh start instead of rooting into an area and making certain that the resources will be around for generations. Instead, many “kids grow up and go to college/ They don’t come back./ the little fir-trees do” (23-25). While humanity causes irreversible damage to the environment, which leads to familial division and relocation, thus weakening the family bond, the trees will eventually return. In time, nature will reverse the damage done to the forests by the loggers, but the damage done to humanity will be irreversible.

Even though Snyder himself adds to the damage done to the environment and local ecologies, a love of nature is present in him. This love has always existed. Snyder explains, “When I was young, I had an immediate, intuitive, deep sympathy with the natural world which was not taught me by anyone” (*RW* 93). This immediate experience with the natural world inherently exists inside of him, and that “original mind” allows Snyder to experience euphoria while immersing himself in nature as he does in “Water:”

I leaped, laughing for little boulder-color coil

Pounded by heat raced down the slabs to the creek

Deep tumbling under arching walls and stuck

Whole head and shoulders in the water:

Stretched full on cobble – ears roaring

Eyes open aching from the cold and faced a trout (*RR* 5-11)

Not only is Snyder able to enjoy running down the mountainside, but he also is able to interact with the natural and, perhaps even more importantly, allow the reader to interact with nature as well. The rapid pace of the poem causes the reader to be unable to latch onto Snyder himself, as the focus of the poem is on the environment and Snyder’s movement through it. Interaction with the natural world allows humanity to escape the idea that humans should distance themselves from nature: “When we think of something as Other [as we do nature], we hold that there is a profound *split* between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Barnhill 187). Instead, interacting with nature emphasizes humanity’s connection to nature and the importance of living harmoniously with nature instead of destroying the wild.

Snyder further emphasizes the inner-conflict between living with nature and damaging it. Whenever one returns to the natural, certain experiences make the relationship between nature and humanity clear. Snyder loses all sense of time and self as other when he ventures out into the wild:

in the blue night
 frost haze, the sky glows
 . . .
 bend snow-blue, fade
 into sky, frost, starlight.
 the creak of boots.
 rabbit tracks, deer tracks,
 what do we know. ("Pine Tree Tops," *TI* 1-9)

Snyder is able to lose completely the idea of self as other as he is in awe of his surroundings' beauty. There is no sense of human individuality here, and Snyder is able to merge with the natural. The sound of "the creak of boots [on snow]" snaps Snyder's attention back to the present moment, and he witnesses "rabbit tracks, [and] deer tracks," which allow him to realize the error of humanity's ways. The animals have left tracks, or paths, to follow that explain to Snyder that humanity can return to living in communion with nature if humans would take the time to realize their place in the natural world and stop taking from it. As humanity lives separately from the natural, Snyder wonders, "what do we know." To Snyder, humans know relatively little and that a reunion with nature is necessary for humanity's survival.

In order to reverse the damage that humanity inflicts upon the natural world and, ultimately, inflicts upon itself, Snyder advocates regaining a direct link to primitive ways of life. Snyder states, “I think there is a wisdom in the worldview of primitive peoples that we have to refer ourselves to, and learn from” (*RW* 107). Primitive cultures were able to take what they needed from nature in order to survive and to hold a reverent respect for nature. American culture is unable to do so, as it is too concerned with making a profit from nature. By separating themselves from nature, humans have also separated themselves from their peers and have established a very individualistic way of life. Primitive cultures lived in tribes or communities that relied both on their tribal members and on the natural world in order to survive. Joan Halifax in “The Third Body,” explains: “Community for many native peoples is regarded as including other species, plant and animal . . . Community is lived in and experienced as a whole system of interrelated types and species. Most importantly, this community is alive” (25). Just as the key to survival for primitive people was including the wild in their community, Snyder believes that establishing a true, rooted community will allow humanity to solve the conflict between the exploitation of nature and love of the natural world.

The goal of this rooted lifestyle is “not some abstract or generalized oneness but a concrete unity with a particular place. It is not realized in some aloof mystical state but in the very physical practice of ‘reinhabitation’” (Barnhill 191). Developing this kind of dynamic with the natural world is not a simple task, just as nature’s task of survival in this anthropocentric world is not easy: “Every fall a lot of little seedlings sprout/ around it—/ Every summer during long dry drouth they die” (“Among,” *AH* 3-5). Just as many little seedlings begin to sprout, many humans attempt to establish a less-destructive

manner of life, but ultimately, many seedlings die and many humans fail and will “[sell] their virgin cedar trees,/ the tallest trees in miles,/ To a logger” (“The Call of the Wild,” *TI* 33-35). Even though the intent to live harmoniously with nature is there, the path is a long and toilsome one, to which many cannot remain faithful. For those seedlings or humans who do survive the first draught or hardships, however, the task will get easier: “Once every forty years or so/ A rain comes in July” (6-7). With the aid of rain, or help from other community members, the relationship between man and nature is able to grow. Once they have established their roots in an area, these people will be able create a healthy relationship with all members of their community.

Through establishing a community, Snyder and others are able to blend the necessity of working and taking from the wild with a responsibility to the wild. Snyder believes that “A scaled-down, balanced technology is possible, if cut loose from the cancer of the exploitation-heavy-industry-perpetual growth” (*TI* 104). By establishing a community separate from the major hubs of the nation and by pledging to remain there for generations to come, Snyder and members of the Sierra-Nevada region of California are able to distance themselves from the consumerist, exploitative culture of America and nurture their own sense of communal experience. These communities do not completely dismiss the necessary machinery or technology needed to live, but they use such tools responsibly and purposefully to fulfill the needs of the community instead of fulfilling personal wants and desires: “[The work] is physical and mundane rather than industrial or technologically sophisticated” (Barnhill 210).

In “Working on the ’58 Willys Pickup,” Snyder explains the necessity of using a truck in order to:

. . . bring sawdust

Rotten and rich

. . .

So that clay in the garden

Can be broken and tempered

And growing plants mulched to save water –

And to also haul gravel

. . .

Putting pebbles aside to strew on the paths. (*AH 9-20*)

The community uses the pickup as a means to better root themselves and to live responsibly in this one area. Determining to live a harmonious lifestyle, or one rooted in primitive culture, allows humans to use that culture as a guide to using modern technology responsibly. The truck is necessary to bring sawdust to the community so that the people can create mulch in order to conserve water to grow their plants. Instead of creating concrete walkways, this community uses a gravel, clay and sand mixture to create walkways, and every year they take the trouble to redo these walkways so that the paths do not get as muddy in the winter. They do not use concrete, which would free up the time necessary to annually redo the walkways, but instead prefer to do the work so that they do not disrupt the land with artificial, cement structures that would be permanent fixtures in the community. Although the people plan to live in the area for generations, adding cement walkways would be a distinct disruption of their living with nature. Concrete sidewalks would serve much as concrete walls served earlier civilizations: “Walls protect, divide, distinguish . . . [and ultimately] divide culture from

nature” (Harrison 14). Concrete structures would directly oppose the goal of this community, and that goal is to unite nature and culture, so that nature is the foundation of their culture. This community has established a way of living that does involve creating structures of natural materials in order to better their community, but they use these tools in a responsible manner that does not involve making a financial profit or creating permanent divisions.

Snyder’s ideas of community dismiss the notion of the importance of the self and, instead, promote the importance of helping others and of including the natural in the community. Snyder and his neighbors have united to build a school for their children in “Painting the North San Juan School,” and, together, they have created a “building [that will be] good for ten years more” (*AH 16*). But even as this group unites together to create a school to help their children to gain an educational foundation to live in a way that is opposite of the way that other Americans live, they are reminded of the difficulty of living this lifestyle: “The shingled bell-cupola trembles/ at every log truck rolling by” (7-8). As many community members strive to raise their families in an environment where living according to needs is stressed over living according to desires or wants, the rumble of the logging trucks is never very distant and consistently reminds those community members of the proximity of those who needlessly take from nature. Hopefully, the education that the children receive will give them a solid foundation to continue to live as their parents have: as companions of the natural world.

Those who do view themselves as peers of nature and not as its superiors establish a relationship with the land. Snyder argues, in “Poetry, Community & Climax,” that “the process becomes educational, and even revolutionary, when one becomes aware of the

responsibility that goes with ‘rootedness’ and the way the cards are stacked against it; we live in a system that rewards those who leap for a quick profit” (*RW* 161). The real work involves those who are willing to homestead in one place and who allow a relationship to that place evolve so that humans feel responsibility to that place – ultimately respecting and caring for the land as they would other humans. If a small community of humans would create this kind of relationship with an ecological area, they would allow “the mountains and rivers,/ trees and animals,/ a vote” (“Tomorrow’s Songs,” *TI* 3-5). The human members of these communities would voice their concerns over unnecessary usage of machinery and technology to develop land, to strip mine, to drill, or to deforest the area, and the natural world would finally have an advocate who is directly a part of it.

Conclusion

In an attempt to answer the question of “how to be,” (“What Happened Here Before” *M&T* 81) Gary Snyder has created a path in his poetry that follows his own transformation, and he also offers one possible guide for humanity to follow in order to correct the damage that it has imposed upon itself and the natural world. Snyder’s own quest for living a fulfilling life began as a wanderer, and he crossed the earth, searching for something that would add purpose to his life. Eventually, he was led to Zen Buddhism, and through practicing Buddhism, Snyder began to understand humanity’s connection to the natural world. Unfortunately, this connection has been severed due to generations of pillaging resources from nature and attempting to conquer and to control it. In order to help humanity understand the importance of the connection between the natural and human, Snyder assumed the role of healer, and through his poetry, offered humans a non-dualist perspective and showed how this approach could heal the damage that has been done.

Snyder’s healing perspective shows humanity the importance of returning to a rooted culture that is based on the living in harmony with nature, and not in opposition to it. Rootedness itself allows humans to create a clear relationship to a place and to develop a sense of responsibility for what happens to that specific area. Earlier indigenous cultures relied on nature for their own survival, but also respected it as an equal, and this perspective has been lost due to European colonization of North America. Accordingly, humans now feel no need to respect the natural world, as we are too far

removed from it. Becoming rooted to a specific area will allow humanity to reenter into the natural community and resume its place as a member of the community of the world, not as the anthropocentric ruler of it.

By rooting themselves, and following Snyder's path, humans will be able to focus on smaller details of their lives and regain a notion of what is truly important in life and what is not. Hopefully, the attachment to material possessions and the consumerist culture will wane and what will develop is a nurturing, interconnected world. Humanity could return to living lifestyles that concentrate on family, community and spirituality and lead more fulfilling lives, which would ultimately allow humans to enjoy life more thoroughly than they do in the hectic, contemporary pace of competition for profit and status. More importantly, however, would be the fact that humanity would have a newfound sense of responsibility for the state of the natural world, which could lead to the establishment and possible use of renewable resources and knowledge of the importance of taking care of the wild. Taking care of the natural world will ultimately allow humanity to survive for many generations to come and to be able to enjoy the same quality of life that we enjoy today. Snyder explains in "Energy is Eternal Delight," taken from William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, that:

Here is a generation of white people finally ready to learn from
the Elders. How to live on the continent as though our children,
and on down, for many ages, will still be here (not on the moon).

Loving and protecting this soil, these trees, these wolves. (TI 105)

We have the unique situation of being able to bear witness to the destruction that the American lifestyle has caused and to study earlier indigenous cultures' ways of life and to

understand the benefits of blending the two together. By doing so, we may ensure that our children and their children's children will live here and be able to enjoy the natural world that we hold sacred.

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