

DEFENDING THE GROVES: GARY SNYDER'S POETRY OF THE EARTH

*Introduction: Anthropology, from the Other Side of the Fence**

In an essay of 1968, Stanley Diamond expressed his concern that the search for the primitive should regain its central role in anthropology. Abstraction, he wrote, inevitably narrows the scope of anthropology and turns it into a «symptom of our civiliza-

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- (BC) *The Back Country*, by GARY SNYDER. New York: New Directions, 1968.
- (DA) D. ALLEN, ed., *On Bread & Poetry*. A Panel Discussion with Gary Snyder, Lew Welch & Philip Whalen. Bolinas: Grey Fox Press, 1977.
- (FF) F. FAAS, ed., «Gary Snyder». Interviews, pp. 105-142 in *Towards a New American Poetics: Essays & Interviews*. Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1978.
- (EH) *Earth House Hold*, by GARY SNYDER. New York: New Directions, 1959 (Fifth printing).
- (FE) FAAS, HERBERT, «Gary Snyder». Essay, in *Towards a New American Poetics: Essays & Interviews*. Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1978 (pp. 91-103).
- (ET) *The Yudo Trilogy*, by GARY SNYDER. Berkeley: Shaman Drum, 1973.
- (HM) *Lie Who Hunted Birds in His Father's Village. The Dimensions of a Haida Myth*, by GARY SNYDER. Bolinas: Grey Fox Press, 1979.
- (MT) *Myths and Texts*, by GARY SNYDER. New York: Totem Press in association with Corinth Books, 1960.
- (ND) «Now, India», by GARY SNYDER (pp. 1-99), in *Caterpillar*, no. 19, October 1972 (Copyright Clayton Fisheman).
- (NT) N. TARN, «From Anthropologist to Informant: A Field Record of Gary Snyder». *Achéaranga*, 4 (Autumn 1972), pp. 104-113.
- (O) Diary excerpts dated 1958, 1959, in *Origin*, no. 2, 2nd Series (Copyright 1963, Cid Cozman, printed by the Genêchido Press).
- (OW) *The Old Ways. Six Essays*, by GARY SNYDER. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1977.
- (PS) PAUL, SHERMAN, «From Lookout to Ashram: The Way of GARY SNYDER». *The Iowa Review*, Summer 1970, pp. 76-89; *The Iowa Review*, Fall 1970, pp. 70-85. (Published under same title, with addition of an Author's Note, in PAUL, S., *Repossessing and Renewing. Essays in the Green American Tradition*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976).
- (RW) *Regarding Wave*, by GARY SNYDER. New York: New Directions, 1970.
- (R) *Riprap, & Cold Mountain Poems*, by GARY SNYDER. Writing 7. San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1969.
- (S) *Six Sections from Mountains and Rivers without End Plus One*, by GARY SNYDER. Writing 9. San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1970.
- (T) *Turtle Island*, by GARY SNYDER. New York: New Directions, 1974.

tion, congruent with, rather than antithetical to it». What is needed, instead, is a «sense of the totality and immediacy of human experience». It is by bringing man to the fountain of his being and by embracing, rather than rejecting, what is primary in human nature, that civilization can be healed. Finally, witness «every thinker of consequence from the beginning of the industrial revolution», Diamond stresses the cathartic value of history¹.

The search for the primitive, as Diamond espoused it, has nothing to share with the irrationalism of the «new barbarians». In emphasizing the historical dimension of consciousness, he draws a careful distinction between rationalizations which only serve to reinforce the pathology of the age, and the need for a vision to be gained within, not outside, the pale of history, i.e. reason. Thus, he avoids the ultimate identification of the uses of reason with reason itself which underlies the antiscientific bias and the gospel of self-fulfillment propagated by the tritest and most promissory side of the counter-culture. The vision advocated by Diamond can be attained only through a serious questioning of the human predicament in different cultures, which will yield an insight into the «nature of human nature». It requires direct experience, intellectual pursuit, and moral discipline.

This attitude is central to the life and work of the author who has occasioned this paper: Gary Snyder himself has described it as a willingness to «open up, explore and grow».

«Primitive» is a central concern for Snyder as well as for the group of poets and translators who are making increasingly available a wealth of oral/tribal literature within the framework of very clearly stated directives, the most comprehensive of which is the intention to combat cultural genocide.

His work is grounded in anthropology, mythology, folklore and linguistics: Snyder's interest in these areas dates back to his college career. To develop the study of oral literature, he later attended courses at Indiana University, where he worked with Charles

1. Cf. S. DIAMOND, «The Search for the Primitive», in A. MONTAGU, ed., *The Concept of the Primitive* (The Free Press, New York, 1968).

Voegelin and Thomas Sebeok among others, and started making his connections with the various 'anthros' -anthropologists, and 'anthrolinguists'.

However, almost since the inception of his postgraduate work, Snyder realized that his interest in anthropology was, so to speak, from the other side of the fence: or as he put it very nicely in an interview with Nathaniel Tarn, «I didn't want to be the anthropologist but the informant» (NT, 109).

The poet in him was growing impatient with objective data, and more so with anthropological curiosity: studying people, but not really participating in (= respecting) their lives. These feelings made him a precursor of the polemic that later developed into an attack against the 'anthropological vultures'². Snyder quietly chose to leave academia and the analytical mind. Thus, his journey from the Far West to the Far East, where he sought and apprehended new ways of the mind. The «bearded Berkeley cat (...) hung up on Indians» — Kerouac's Japhy Ryder, who loved mountainclimbing and spoke of «the East meeting West» — took years of (tough) Zen discipline in a Kyoto monastery³.

A Beat, a Zenist, a traveller to Japan and India, and all the while an American pragmatist and a poet of the back country of the West: but not like Coyote, the shapeshifter in the native Ame-

2. The resentment and distrust caused among American Indians by anthropologists, especially the students and amateurs swarming to the reservations during the summer, is best explained in VINCE DELORTA'S *Custer Died for Your Sin* (Macmillan, New York, 1969).

3. ALLEN GINSBERG, Sept. 9, 1955: «...a bearded Berkeley cat name of Snyder, I met him yesterday (via Rexroth suggestion) who is studying Oriental and leaving in a few months on some privately put up funds to go be a Zen monk (a real one). He's a head, peyotlist, laconist, but warmhearted, like looking with a little beard, thin, blond, rides a bicycle in Berkeley in red corduroy an levis and burgoy on indians ... Interesting persons of A. CHARTERS, compiler, *Scenes Along the Road*, Gotham Book Mart, NY, 1972, p. 30).

IN JACK KEROUAC'S novel, *The Dharma Bums* (Signet Books: N.Y., 1958), Japhy Ryder (= Gary Snyder) says: «Think what a great world revolution will take place when East meets West finally, and it'll be guys like us that start the things. And: «The closer you get to real matter, rock air fire and wind, bus, the more spiritual the world is. All these people thinking they're hardheaded materialistic practical types, they don't know shit about matter, their heads are full of crazy ideas and notions».

rican lore he knows so well⁴. From the actual experience of different cultural situations — a life which can be contained in the metaphor of the vision quest — he has drawn a firm grasp of the 'minimally human', a deep understanding of the man-nature continuum, and a sense of wholeness. This well-founded (and hard-won) identity flows into a poetry which attends to «the most archaic values on earth».

Snyder's work belongs with a non-ethnocentric American literature which is trying to write a continental history, and to establish a new contact with the land. But the land is Turtle Island: and to see it as its original inhabitants and owners saw it, means to look at history from a different angle than the Frencans, the Coopers, the Parkmans, the film-makers of the American tradition. It means a knowledge of native lore: hence ethnopoetics, expressing in the first place an awareness of the plurality of cultures that were lost and a concern to change the trend towards monoculture in contemporary civilization. Snyder's radicalism vies for a rediscovery of the most archaic values of «housekeeping on earth», a form of «sacramental» ecology.

At home with the subculture «which has been a powerful undercurrent in all higher civilizations», and indeed a heir to the Emersonian tradition⁵, Snyder is working out a mythopoesis native to the American continent but parent to all of humanity, for «the wild and the unconscious are the same». His advocacy of a life (not 'lifestyle') based on a primitive/primary relation to the biosphere comes close to Diamond's conception of the search for the

4. In Snyder's view, native mythology is a key to «the flavor of the land». The incorporation of native myths into his poetry has both cultural and political significance, for it runs counter to the ethnocentric bias of expansionist imperialism.

5. Snyder's life in the backcountry — as a logger, a lookout, a mountain-climber — makes the comparison with Thoreau inevitable. His first journals, covering his summers as a lookout in 1952 and 1953, look 'inward' as much as 'outward', wander into 'vast and cosmogonical themes' and yet observe very closely the flora and fauna, the changing shapes of the clouds and the speech of the occasional visitors. One could say, using Emersonian language, that nature helped him to know 'the flag of his disposition': for it was at this time that Snyder came to terms with his vocation as a poet, and resolved to go to Japan and further pursue his Zen-training.

primitive. Like the anthropologist in Diamond's image, he is seeking the lay of the land — usable to all lands.

II

The Poetry: Defending the Groves

Snyder's major poetic mode is perhaps the 'confessional' lyric, located at the razor-edge where perception of the world outside meets the perception of the self -inner states and changes. It is in these poems, rather than in the more complex structures of *Myths and Texts* and *Six Sections*, that the consolidation of his approach to form can perhaps be more aptly shown.

«Piute Creek», one of the first poems in Snyder's earliest collection, contains many indications of the directions he is taking.

- 1 One granite ridge
 A tree, would be enough
 Or even a rock, a small creek,
 A bark shred in a pool.
- 5 Hill beyond hill, folded and twisted
 Tough trees crammed
 In thin stone fractures
 A huge moon on it all, is too much.
 The mind wanders. A million .
- 10 Summers, night air still and the rocks
 Warm. Sky over endless mountains.
 All the junk that goes with being human
 Drops away, hard rock wavers
 Even the heavy present seems to fail
- 15 This bubble of a heart.
 Words and books
 Like a small creek off a high ledge
 Gone in the dry air.
 A clear, attentive mind
- 20 Has no meaning but that
 Which sees is truly seen.
 No one loves rock, yet we are here.
 Night chills. A flick
 In the moonlight

- 25 Slips into Juniper shadow:
 Back there unseen
 Cold proud eyes
 Of Cougar or Coyote
 Watch me rise and go.

The accumulation of nominal syntagmas in lines 1-8, especially the symmetrical balance and repetition in line 5, build up a stereoscopic effect, the wandering of the eye which sets the stage for the wandering of the inner eye, in the second part. Here, the complex noun phrase in line 12 and the metaphor in 13 (the wavering rock, a *contradictio in adiecto*, perhaps a little overdone with the addition of the adjective, 'hard') set off the conceptual lines 19-22, which lead to the severe, aphoristic phrasing of line 23. This assertive statement resolves the dialectic contrast which is at the heart of the poem, between actuality and possibility, the need to accept what is here and the temptation to wander into the world of the possible. Once the contradiction is resolved, the involved syntax of 20-22 (negatives, adversatives, main clauses and dependent clauses) dissolves into short plain and 'flowing' sentences, while carefully patterned alliterations and the polysyndeton in the final lines («or», «and») bring the close. The speaker suddenly materializes in the last line, but in the objective case. The cataphora in line 15 («this») anticipates the «window scene» type of viewpoint, but the deixis in line 26 («back there unseen») reverts the perspective to a direct first-person speaker, and finally, in the last line, the speaker is foregrounded through the eyes of an unseen other. This play on perspectives is emphasized by the shift in register and modality between the colloquial («junk»), even sentimental («this bubble of a heart») and highly phatic («back there») language of the speaker expressing his own sensations and the more formal idiom of the generalized statement («...yet we are here»). In a sense, this poem is a study in perspectives, where sensations and thoughts are foregrounded and the subject is backgrounded, and eventually absorbed in the last semantic nucleus of the slipping away in the night. Both the syntax and the phonic structure form a semantic interface, and the reversal of expectations

produced by mentioning the subject in the accusative case gives thrust to the ending.

«Nooksack Valley», the central poem in *Riprap*, displays a far more articulate use of syntax, with a subtle play on symmetry and variation, subordination and coordination:

- 1 At the far end of a trip north
 In a berry pickers cabin
 At the edge of a wide muddy field
 Stretching to the woods and cloudy mountains,
- 2 Feeding the stove all afternoon with cedar,
 Watching the dark sky darken, a heron flap by,
 A huge setter pup nap on the dusty cot.
 High rotten stumps in the second-growth woods
 Flat scattered farms in the bends of the Nooksack
- 10 River. Steelhead run now
 a week and I go back
 Down 99, through towns, to San Francisco
 and Japan.
 All America south and east
 Twenty-five years in it brought to a trip-stop
- 15 Mind-point, where I turn
 Caught more on this land-rock tree and man,
 Awake, than ever before, yet ready to leave.
 dammed memories,
 Whole wasted theories, failures and worse success
- 20 Schools, girls, deals, try to get in
 To make this poem a froth, a pity,
 A dead fiddle for lost good jobs.
 the cedar walls
 Smell of our farm-house, half built in '35.
- 25 Clouds sink down the hills
 Coffee is hot again. The dog
 Turns and turns, stops and sleeps.

The spatiotemporal relationships which mark the first movement in the poem, the exposition (1-9), are set by accumulation of details in three lower units whose internal structure is charac-

terized by syntactic equivalence. The first series of prepositional phrases is followed by three verbal phrases where the gerunds induce a static effect, a feeling of suspended physical action which is a preparation for mental activity. These first nine lines are organized in three anaphoric sequences (three prepositional phrases, three verbal phrases, three nominal syntagmas two of which are almost perfectly parallel in syntactic structure), which from the viewpoint of the decoding reader are equivalent to a cluster of expectations: the subject is made explicit in line 10, introducing the flurry of thoughts which makes up the central part of the poem. External time is suspended, and all the time references are related to the sensations and thoughts of the speaker. This part, the development of the inner crisis of the speaker is also the critical part of the poem, with jagged lines and fragmented sentences, and the final parataxis —the crowding up of memories in the mind—culminating in the mention of the cedar walls, which are perceived both as elements of the external reality and as the oldest memory in the subject's life, the objective correlative for memory itself. This return to external reality, marked by a time adverbial which places the whole poem in a much clearer situational context («again» reveals that the thoughts of the speaker have covered the time interval required to heat the coffee), brings in the conclusion of the poem. Here, the metaphor of the dog shifts the perception of time from the private, inner dimension to the eschatological dimension, and the release of the mind coincides with the denouement of the poem.

«Nooksack Valley», with its three distinct movements and the tense fragmentation of the middle part, is in itself the enactment of a thought: both the thinking that takes place within a certain amount of time, and the difficulty of making it into a poem (see the lines 20-21). The latter point is developed in section 3 of «A Stone Garden», another poem where the landscape is an objective correlative for the speaker's inner condition. As Sherman Paul has remarked, «A Stone Garden» is the answer, or the follow-up, to «Nooksack Valley». The impulse to recoil from new experiences and to seek refuge in memories of time past, which is central in «Nooksack Valley», is answered in «The Stone Gar-

den» by the deep-felt impact with Japan, the new environment eliciting a variety of moods and responses. These reactions are so difficult to filter into the truthful permanence of poetry that inspiration seems to fall short:

3

Thinking about a poem I'll never write,
 With gut on wood and hide, and plucking thumb,
 Grope and stutter for the words, invent a tune,
 In any tongue, this moment one time true
 Be wine or blood or rhythm driving it through—
 Creating empty caves and tools in shops
 And holy domes, and nothing you can name;
 The long old chorus blowing underfoot
 Makes high wild notes of mountains in the sea.
 O Muse, a goddess gone astray
 Who warms the cow and makes the wise man sane,
 (& even madness gobbles demons down)
 Then dance through jewelled trees & lotus crowns
 For Narahito's lover, the crying plover,
 For babies grown and childhood homes
 And moving, moving, on through scenes and towns
 Weep for the crowds of men
 Like birds gone south forever.
 The long-long hawk of Yakamochi and Thoreau
 Flits over yonder hill, the hand is bare,
 The noise of living families fills the air.

The invocation to the Muse follows the traditional image of the poet at a loss on a perilous sea: and the danger that the poet is braving is precisely that of tradition without inspiration, the temptation to fall back on mere technique and settle for less than the authenticity that gives a true poem its universal significance. This section of «A Stone Garden», besides confirming the interest in sound patterns already visible in the first poems of this collection, brings out the themes of inspiration and composition which are then consolidated into the directives of 'Riprap', the closing poem:

Lay down these words
 Before your mind like rocks
 placed solid, by hands
 In choice of place, set
 Before the body of the mind
 in space and time:
 Solidity of bark, leaf, or wall
 riprap of things;
 Cobble of milky way,
 straying planets,
 These poems, people,
 lost ponies with
 Dragging saddles-
 and rocky sure-foot trails.

Poetry as solid construction work, the careful positioning of the single elements: artisan care, the paving of a riprap, not a standard road. The impulse behind the work may be far-reaching, and unpredictable, but the method is safe and reliable, and the work will not suffer the injuries (in Pound's words, the *usura*) of time because it is molded in the fire of experience:

Granite: ingrained
 with torment of fire and weight
 Crystal and sediment linked hot
 all change, in thoughts,
 As well as things.

Experience, which gives language the moral capacity to contain and outlast physical and mental change, is all-inclusive. The stuff of poetry is 'cobble of milky way' but also 'ants and pebbles' (line 18, not quoted here). The whitmanesque movement into the cosmos and perception of its unity in all dimensions, as well as the notion of the poet as the great equalizer — «dwarfing the great and magnifying the small» — are repossessed *via* the Zen doctrine of the empty mind, which removes the dominance of the conceptual (thus, in Snyder's journals, the joyous entry: «any single thing or complex of things *literally* as great as the whole»).

Poetry is then, at the same time, acceptance and striving: its stuff is all-inclusive and reaching out to the ineffable, but the method is selective. However, the filter does not reside with intellectual formulations: the language speaks things, not ideas.

The world which becomes 'textualized' in the poetry is that of the American Romantic tradition, but the 'textualisation' is modernistic: more precisely, Snyder's early definition of poetry as «a riprap on the slick rock of metaphysics» (MT, 43) is in the line of William C. Williams's «No ideas but in things» (and thus, back to the early Pound).

Like *Riprap*, which contained the translation of Han-Shan's Gold Mountain poems, *The Back Country* includes the translation of a number of free-verse poems by an Eastern poet, the Japanese Miyazawa Kenji. The poems, which, as Sherman Paul has remarked, «show us what Snyder has tried to assimilate» (PS, 223), deal with the relationship between man and nature in the Buddhist universe.

It is interesting to see in what way Snyder has approached the same theme in his own poems, particularly in the first section of *The Back Country*.

«Sixth-month Song in the Foothills»

In the cold shed sharpening saws,
 a swallow's nest hangs by the door
 setting rakers in sunlight
 falling from meadow through the doorframe
 swallows flit under the eaves.
 Grinding the falling axe
 sharp for the summer
 a swallow shooting out over
 over the river, snow on low hills
 sharpening wedges for splitting.
 Beyond the low hills, white mountains
 and now snow is melting, sharpening tools;
 pack horses grazing new grass
 bright axes -and swallows
 fly in to my shed.

The repetition of a lexeme from the first line ('shed') in the closing line incapsulates the poem as it were, and the language capsule contains a remarkable amount of homophonic and/or homographic syllables. Ekbert Faas has noted that this poem seems to follow Olson's principles of 'composition by field', and indeed Snyder's peculiar use of verbs — elliptical gerunds and the shift from gerund to present tense — brings to mind Olson's directives. While the gerunds and the adjectival -ing forms provide a sense of immediacy, of the poem growing together with its actantial content, the simple present absorbs the experiential/phenomenological instant into a timeless dimension. Language is brought back to a primeval, referential role: its naming power, the «leap of words to things» mentioned in «A Stone Garden» places every thing or event on the same level as everything else, including the subject perceiving the whole. The subject is at the same time central and marginal and thus it is implicitly felt, but 'kept out of sight' until the end — a device not infrequent in Snyder's poetry. Under this 'poetry of the moment' lies the cosmology of 'interdependent co-creation' amply discussed in the essays of *Earth House Hold*, and this profoundly equalitarian conception of the universe in its eternal being/becoming contains a sacramental element that is revealed in this poem by the iteration of the lexeme 'sharpening'. Nature is wakening, and man participates in the seasonal change by literally and metaphorically sharpening his tools: the action itself takes on by repetition the importance of a ritual. It is a rite of passage, marking and celebrating an elemental change in the life of the universe, and the concluding image of the poem bears the joy and vigor of the new life breaking in. The punctuation itself takes on the role of signifier, cooperating with the running sounds and with the syntactic device of ellipsis to give the poem its dense texture of single images accumulating and finally rushing to the emphatic close. This type of ending has attracted the attention of the critics, for it is not unusual with Snyder to conclude his poems in a fashion which may seem «outwardly closed» (EF, 127). It must be noticed, however, that the 'capsule' effect is usually obtained with such an intense image that the poem tends to 'live on' at the non-verbal level in the mind of the reader. This featu-

re, which Snyder calls «communicative coherence», has become increasingly prominent in his subsequent collections of poems. Another poem from *The Back Country* which deserves to be discussed within this framework is:

«Burning the Small Dead»
 Burning the small dead
 branches
 broke from beneath
 thick spreading
 whitebark pine.
 a hundred summers
 snowmelt rock and air
 hiss in a twisted bough.
 sierra granite;
 mt. Ritter —
 black rock twice as old.
 Deneb, Altair
 windy fire.

The dynamic thrust of this poem brings to mind the phrase coined by Robert Duncan and later chosen by Snyder as the epigraph for one of his *Turtle Island* poems: «the snakelike beauty of the living changes of syntax». After a slightly tortuous beginning, marked by an anaphoric *incipit*, by dense noun phrases and both finite and non-finite verbs, the poem takes off, flame-like in its graphematic arrangement. This immediate iconic effect is reinforced by syntactic dilatation: the prevalence of nominal syntagmas, with the blanks and ellipses in the syntagmatic chain, suggest the drifting of the eye and the drifting of the mind. The syntactically loose units are arranged in a spatiotemporal sequence, so that the wandering is from the here and now to immeasurable distance in time and space: so that the final image of the windy fire, which brings together the physical, tangible elements (the wind, the burning branches) and the noological dimension (archetipal fire) in the poem, is Snyder's equivalent for Whitman's «a blade of grass is a journeyway to the stars». Or, as Snyder himself puts it in his journal, «any single thing ... *literally* as great as the whole» (EH,

31). The difference from the Romantic tradition lies of course with Snyder's rejection of all forms of display, both of language and feeling. The profound sense of mystery and interconnectedness in nature and between man and nature which underlies these quiet poems is suggested, not described: indeed, Snyder's poetry has been compared to *sumi* painting.

Indian cosmology is the source for Snyder's conception of poetic insight as linked with the very breath and pulse of creation (EH, 22), and his perception of form as «leaving things out at the right spot/ellipse ... emptiness» (EII, 5) comes from Buddhist metaphysics. But Snyder's use of ellipsis, both in his journals and in his poems, seems more in line with Taoist doctrines. Emptiness, energy, anti-action are central to the Taoist vision, which lies at the heart of haiku writing and Japanese Zen.

Although Snyder has written haikus — the journals include quite a few — it is not from such an external coincidence that one can infer a Taoist influence, of course; rather, one can see it in his practice of 'cutting down and cutting down' on the syntax, and interspersing his lines with empty spaces, which by contrast highlights semantic and sound/sight cohesion, the latter relying on the reader's ear and eye for patterns which are both graphemic and phonemic. The texture of «Beneath my Hand and Eye», for instance, relies a great deal on what Emerson called with a nice synesthesia «the musical eye»:

What my hand follows on your body
 Is the line. A stream of love
 of heat, of light, what my
 eye lascivious
 licks
 over, watching
 far snow-dappled Utah mountains
 Is that stream.
 Of power, what my
 hand curves over, following the line.
 «hip» and «groin»
 Where «I»
 follow by hand and eye
 the swimming limit of your body.

As when vision idly dallies on the hills
Loving what it feeds on. (BC, 108)

Although Snyder is primarily a poet of nature, *The Back Country* covers a wide range of moods and themes, and includes a number of pieces which develop the 'life-sketch' poems already present in *Riprap*. This type of lyric is usually structured as a sequence of stereoscopic images, or a catalogue of discrete details and gestures portrayed by way of non-finite verbs (gerunds and participles) so that the whole event is cut-off from external time, as it were. Possessive adjectives and even articles are removed, so that the resulting scene is strongly impersonal: the unobtrusive narrator highlights each gesture and sequence in a scene from daily life. An example of this is «Night» (BC, 71,) where the long catalogue of the last stanza provides the context for the love-making described, and turns the scene into a story:

the radio that was never turned off.
the record soundlessly spinning.
the half-closed door swinging on its hinges.
the cigarette that burned out.
the melon seeds spit on the floor.
the mixed fluids drying on the body.
the light left on in the other room.
the blankets all thrown on the floor and the birds
 chirping in the east.
the mouth full of grapes and the bodies like loose leaves.
the quieted hearts, passive caress, a quick exchange
 of glances with eyes then closed again.
the first sunlight hitting the shades. (BC, 71)

Elsewhere, the scene takes on a dramatic rather than a narrative quality, and the speaker intrudes into the character's minds or watches them with sympathetic humor: in «The Public Bath» for instance, this technique conveys the cultural distance of the speaker and the novelty of his experience:

the bath-girl

getting dressed, in the mirror,
 the bath-girl with a pretty mole and a
 red skirt is watching me:
 am I
 different?

the old woman

too fat and old to care
 she just stands there
 idly knocking dewy water off her
 bush. (BC., 41)

In the highly serious poetry of *Turtle Island*, this type of poem acquires ritual overtones: in «The Bath» each stanza ends in a refrain (*is this our body?*, or: *this our body*) which conveys the speakers' sacred sense of carnal union and creates a contrast with the levity of the family scene.

The short, quieter poems of *The Back Country* show a number of features which become dominant in the later collections — almost «structures the author is programmed to use». «Burning the Small Dead» may be considered as indicative in this respect: the syntax is cut down almost exclusively to a series of noun phrases, and the links are semantic rather than structural. To reinforce the 'capsule' effect, of a total experience lifted out of the flux of real time, the final lexeme («fire») constitutes a semic restatement of the beginning, where the lexeme «burning» is placed in thematic position. The cohesion is semantic, alliterative and also visual. This type of code is further elaborated in the *Regarding Wave* poems, where the exploitation of the phonemic/graphemic components is increasingly obvious, and sometimes *is* the point of the poem itself:

Pleasure Boats
 Dancing in the offing
 Grooving in the coves
 Balling in the breakers
 Lolling in the rollers
 Necking in the cbb
 Balmy in the calms

Whoring in the storm
 Blind in the wind
 Coming in the foam

One may observe that the insistence on verbs which give the inanimate subject an / + animate/ and / + human/ feature qualifies the result as somewhat 'pretty', but this is one of the few light-hearted pieces in the profoundly serious poetry of *Regarding Wave*.

The wave is the central rhythm in nature, the essential vibration at the core of all things, and through it nature is identified as woman: «wave wife woman wyfman» (RW, 3). Thus, the communion with woman is also the extreme identification with nature, the moment when man is reunited to his deepest Self and made whole with creation. The rejection of artifacts and intellectual complications is complete, and the emphasis on the theme of contemplation of/identification with nature, on cycles of life, purification rituals and dance show that Snyder has realized the program that he had set out for the poet in *Earth House Hold*: «Poets, as few others, must live close to the world that primitive men are in: the world, in its nakedness, which is fundamental for all of us — birth, love, death; the sheer fact of being alive» (EH, 118). The man who at one time doubted his own capacity to meet the demands of his karma (cf. BC, 47) has found that to be a poet one should know «the wild freedom of the dance, *extasy*/silent solitary illumination, *enstasy*» (RW, 40). Hence, the emphasis on the sensual and the sexual in *Regarding Wave*, and the identification of the yogins (= poets) as the party of rescue for the exploited classes («animals, trees, water, air, grasses»): the counterpoint of the celebration of nature and fertility is the theme of ecological destruction. A central image and a recurrent structural motif in the phonetic and graphetic pattern of the poems, the wave is also an archetypal symbol: the primeval impulse of creation, against the collective structures and mind structures of the age, epitomized in the image of trade (cf. RW, 47).

While *Regarding Wave* is a poetry of revelation, the finding of the centre whence love and poetry radiate, the previous collections are structured into stages marking a quest or a transformation. *The Back Country*, in its fourfold division (Far East, Far West,

Kali and MAB) maps the wandering into different cultures which is also a journey down into the dark powers of the unconscious and then back, in a spiralling sequence: for the return is not to the beginning in its initial dimension (= memory and longing) but to a new sense of place, achievement and fullness of life (cf. BC, 112). The topography, that is, is mental and spiritual rather than merely geographical, and the circular itinerary is also a search for renewal. Purification and renewal is also the basic impulse in *Myths and Texts*, a complex work accomplished between 1952 and 1956. The obvious source of the title is the standard denomination of many collections of Amerindian lore, but, more than that, the title is also an attempt, as indicated by Charles Altieri, to bring together nature and culture: which is to say that Snyder's political choice is not one of evasion. Although he disparages civilization, he does not take refuge into nature, but rather tries to reach deep into the values and mind-structure embodied in the universal language of myth: thus his poetic discourse is a complex weaving of preliterate categories. Throughout the three sections of the book, «Logging», «Hunting», and «Burning», these materials are drawn together into a three-phase cycle, and within each phase they are treated synchronically, in a modular fashion, with the motifs of contemporary life. Although this division into sections and subsections and the obvious Poundian cadence of the single units seem to indicate a fragmentary make-up, the underlying structure falls into the archetypal pattern destruction-healing-renewal (PS, 218) and is further unified by the motif of the Mother-Goddess, announced in the epigraph:

So that not only this our craft
is in danger to be set at naught;
but also the temple of the great
Goddess Diana should be despised,
and her magnificence should be destroyed,
whom all Asia and the world worshipping.

Acts 19:27

In the first section, built on the paradigm civilization-destruction-sterility, the starting verse, a negation of hope which

will be reversed in the thoreauvian close of the book («the sun is but a morning star», against the opening «The morning star is not a star»), introduces the mother goddess as Io; she then reappears indirectly through different allusions and is finally celebrated in the third section:

«Earthly Mothers and those who suck
the breasts of earthly mothers are mortal
but deathless are those who have fed
at the breast of the Mother of the Universe».
(MT, 39)

The second poem in «Logging», which introduces the theme of spoliation of nature, starts with a citation:

But ye shall destroy their altars,
break their images and cut down their groves.
Exodus 34:13 (MT, 4)

which brings to mind, as Sherman Paul has indicated, Thoreau's reworking of the same passage to introduce the very same theme in *Walden*: «How can you expect the birds to sing when their groves are cut down?» (PS, 219). This motif is further expanded in poem 14 of «Logging», where the sacred groves from different cultures and religions are brought together, to emphasize the destructive power of civilization, already indicated in the previous poems:

The groves are down
cut down
Groves of Ahab, of Cybele
Pine trees, knobbed twigs
thick cone and seed
Cybele's tree this, sacred in groves
Pine of Seami, cedar of Haida
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 suburbs
Bulldozed by Luther and Weyerhaeuser (MT, 14)

The best gloss of this passage is perhaps provided by Snyder himself in the later prose passage where he recalls Lévi-Strauss's view that civilization has been on a steady decline since prehistory. The dying out of nature and civilization is treated on two levels throughout this first section: logging as the actual job of cutting down trees, and logging as an extended metaphor for the forms of exploitation inherent to Christian civilization. Thus, history and History are brought together: the rough life of the loggers, their personal stories, the harassment and the clash with organized power -*raubbau*, perpetrated against man and the natural habitat. The seventh poem, in this progress from personal to collective story, is an illustrative sample of this narrative style:

.... Ed McCullough, a logger for thirty-five years
 Reduced by the advent of chainsaws
 To chopping off knots at the landing:
 «I don't have to take this kind of shit,
 Another twenty years
 and I'll tell 'em to shove it»
 (he was sixty-five then)
 In 1934 they lived in shanties
 At Hooverville, Sullivan's Gulch.
 When the Portland-bound train came through
 The trainmen tossed off coal.
 «Thousands of boys shot and beat up
 For wanting a good bed, good pay,
 decent food, in the woods»
 No one knew what it meant:
 «Soldiers of Discontent». (MT, 9)

The poem, the story of the underdog, is preceded by a statement of distrust of intellect and ideology:

«We rule you» all crowned or bc-Homburged heads
 «We fool you» those guys with P.H.D.s.
 «We eat for you» you
 «We work for you» who?
 a big picture of K. Marx with an axe,
 «Where I cut off one it will never grow again».

O Karl would it were true
 I'd put my saw to work for you
 & the wicked social tree would fall right down.
 (MT, 7)

In this game of juxtapositions, of voices, stories, language registers, which includes the counterpoint «poetry of the machine/poetry of nature» (the routine work of machines tearing and scraping and chopping, nature quiet but teeming with creative life), is also included the voice of collective memory — Indian prophecy and vision:

«You shall live in square
 gray houses in a barren land
 and beside those square gray
 houses you shall starve». (MT, 12)

And the fulfillment of the prophecy comes in the final poem of «Logging», where the element of sterility, adumbrated in the scene of castration of poem 11 (the gelding of the ponies) is made explicit:

Her body a seedpod
 Open to the wind
 «A seedpod void of seed
 We had no meeting together». (MT, 15)

Sterility evokes the image of the great fire of purification, preceding renewal,

so you and I must wait
 Until the next blaze

and finally, after a new scorching indictment of the «men who hire men to cut groves», comes the closing message in «Logging», a declaration of faith in the vocation of the artist and in the ultimate value of his work:

Pa-ta Shan-jen
 (A painter who watched Ming fall)
 lived in a tree:
 «The brush
 May paint the mountains and streams
 Though the territory is lost». (MT, 15)

The language and structure of «Logging», which reminds one of jazz in its variations in rhythm and sound (cf. DA, 38) acquires a much richer and denser texture in «Hunting»: the step back in history to cultures where hunting was a lifesustaining activity, and, more than that, the hallmark of societies which had not yet put asunder the personal and the communal, or the 'sacred' and the 'profane', is made in a language which has the stylistic complexity of the oral traditions. A sequence of songs dedicated to different animals in different Amerindian tribes evokes a world where men and animals were on intimate terms: for hunting, as Snyder would later explain in *Earth House Hold*, involves love and compassion: «Hunting magic is designed to bring the game to you — the creature who has heard your song, witnessed your sincerity, and out of compassion comes within your range. Hunting magic is not only aimed at bringing beasts to their death, but to assist in their birth, to promote their fertility» (EH, 120). One can see why Snyder feels closer to Castaneda than to Lévi-Strauss: anthropology, from the other side of the fence, means recapturing not the rationale but the sense of wholeness which is the prime feature in primitive thought, its blending of ordinary and 'non-ordinary' reality. And, in doing this, the poems shuttle back and forth between the contemporary cultural models and the time when women were married to whales, thus recreating the same Rabelaisian and Dadaistic/Surrealistic overtones which the author attributes to the Coyote literature of the West. The shaman-poet, who all throughout is «hatching a new myth» («Hunting», 1) is also bringing his language back to its primeval, oral and communal qualities. If one were to venture a description of this section of *Myths & Texts* in terms of the many Northwestern cultures evoked in it, one might envisage this series of songs as Snyder's own preparation for a po-

tlatch: his own giving away of giftsongs. All throughout, he *is* painting the territory that is lost: the total and immediate apprehension of nature, which teaches compassion:

Buddha fed himself to tigers
 & donated mountains of eyes
 (through the years)
 To the blind,
 a mountain-lion
 Once trailed me four miles
 At night and no gun
 It was awful, I didn't want to be ate
 maybe we'll change. (MT, 29)

Out of compassion comes renewal, and, significantly, the last poem in «Hunting» is a celebration of birth in the Amerindian and Zen Buddhist tradition. This syncretic procedure is emphasized in the third section, «Burning», where the backcountry of the West becomes the meeting point of various mythologies, as this brief excerpt will show:

Bluejay, out at the world's end
 perched, looked, & dashed
 Through the crashing: his head is squashed
 symplegades, the *mumukwan*,
 It's all vagina dentata
 (Jump!)
 «Leap through an Eagle's snapping beak»
 Actaeon saw Dhyana in the Spring,
 it was nothing special,
 misty rain on Mt. Baker,
 Neah Bay at low tide. (MT, 44)

The text itself jumps from Amerindian mythology (the vagina dentata being a frequent motif in Amerindian lore, especially in the West) to classical mythology. These excursions into mythic time (one thinks of Walden, which was «my Asia and my Africa» to Thoreau) are connected by a network of unifying motifs: the presence of Bluejay in this section, for instance, corresponds to

that of Coyote in the second and Raven in the first, all three of them marking change. The motif of the Mother of the Universe is another archetypal image, giving depth to the Jungian element of the collective unconscious: and it is collective memory that makes possible the transition from local history to a cross-cultural recalling of 'freedom riders':

«Forming the New Society
 within the shell of the Old»
 The motto in the Wobbly Hall
 Some old Finns and Swedes playing cards

 Bodhidharma sailing the Yantze on a reed
 Lenin in a sealed train through Germany
 Hsüa Tsang, crossing the Pamirs
 Joseph, Crazy Horse, living the last free
 starving high-country winter of their tribes.
 Surrender into freedom, revolt into slavery-
 Confucius no better-
 (with Lao Tzu to keep him in check) (MT, 40)

This type of poetic discourse, stretching from the short Chinese-type quatrains to larger narrative sequences and from the static icon-like image of the Raven,

Raven
 on a roost of furs
 No bird in a bird-book
 black as the sun.

to the incantatory language of ritual, all the while incorporating different but interacting cultural themes, is both an enactment of the mythic process and a proof of its universal value. Snyder himself, in his multidimensional study of a Haida myth, had made the remark that the sudden transitions and the unexpected transformations so frequent in the structure of myths are particularly congenial to our age, since its literary masterpieces (Joyce, Eliot, Mann, Kafka) are often modelled on myth (HM, 91). In *Myths & Texts*, this great play of transformation ends by returning to the arche-

typal image of the purifying blaze advocated in the first section: poem 17, called 'the text', records an actual fire on Sourdough mountain and the hard work of putting it out; poem 18, called 'the myth', is a revisitation of the same fact in mythic terms, for «the mountains are your mind». Thus, nature and culture are brought together in the Thoreauvian ending, which is the embodiment of Snyder's own speculations on the function of myth:

it provides a symbolic representation of projected values and empirical knowledge within a framework of belief which relates individual, group, and physical environment, to the end of integration and survival.
(HM, 111)

Thus, Snyder's earliest work — his dissertation on a Haida myth — already indicates the direction in which he will move as a poet: «Poetry as a Survival Technique» is the title of one of the *Earth House Hold* essays. Before this essay, Snyder had already provided with *Myths & Texts* an impressive example of a poetry of survival: defending the groves, that is, a plurality of cultures which have bequeathed us a sense of continuity with the rest of creation, and poetry itself.

In a letter of 1959 published in Cyd Corman's magazine, *Origin*, Snyder announces that a new poem is growing:

I had a big dream last night exposing & revealing the necessary plan of «Mountains & River Without End» which has been growing without design; it is going to be the first complete poem of SPACE and questions of time in space; sense of distance, heart of journey. (0,63).

«Mountains and Rivers Without End», which is the title of long Chinese scroll paintings, already indicates a lengthy work-in-progress: the first six sections have been published so far, and they indeed mark this work as Snyder's most difficult to date. The network of images from and allusion to non-Western cultures, the abruptness of the transition and the exclusive principle of organization in the single poems justify the impression of obscurity, at least from the viewpoint of readers who are not well-read in Eastern doctrines. The structuring principle in each poem, as clari-

fied by the author, is a small phrase which functions as a synopsis. In «Bubbs Creek Haircut» for example, the synoptic phrase is «double mirror waver» (6S, 6), a reference to the mutually reflected mirror which is the key image in *Avatamsaka* Buddhist interdependence philosophy: thus, throughout the poem, images and emblems of the private personal past are juxtaposed to images from past cultures which formed a pre-literate international continuum. «Night Highway Ninety-Nine», as explained by the author, develops the phrase «slip through», which recalls the Buddhist image of *graha*: the poem flows into space and time, history and myth. (FE, 135-137).

«The Blue Sky» is the title of the last of the published sections — a poem which may at first give the impression of a mixture of linguistic and folkloric motifs, assembled with a montage technique. Incantatory language, dream language, catalogues tracing single lexemes in ancient languages: all this seems to inscribe the poem in the literary-scriptural genre. What these fragments reveal, when one starts 'mapping' the text, is a 'sunwise' itinerary from East to West, and then back East, where the Eagle flies: the quest myth archetype, structured in an inter-mythic fashion. The 'going round the world' is a standard structure for the vision quest: a rebirth which also brings peace, health, wholeness. While tracing the circuit of the sun in different cosmographies, and naming the magic beings associated with them, the poem also investigates the linguistic associations between medicine — healing, giving wholeness, providing charms against evil — and the East. While Snyder indicates as the pivotal point in the poem the image of the sky as a «bent curved bow» (6S, 42) which is also a description of the structure of the poem, the ending perhaps contains richer implication of meaning:

OLD MAN MEDICINE BUDDHA
 where the Eagle
 that Flies out of Sight
 flies.

The central position of the atemporal present, *flies*, may be connected with the previous description of the sky as a «bent cur-

ved bow», and of the word «comrade» as «under the same sky», and the link is perhaps easier to locate by recalling the following passage from S. Diamond's *Anaguta Cosmography*, quoted by Snyder in *Earth House Hold*:

Time flows past the permanent central position ... they live at a place called noon, at the centre of the world, the only place where space and time intersect. The Australian aborigines live in a world of ongoing recurrence — comradeship with the landscape and continual exchanges of being and form and position; every person, animals, forces, all are related via a web of reincarnation — or rather, they are 'interborn'. It may well be that rebirth (or interbirth, for we are actually mutually creating each other and all things while living) is the objective fact of existence which we have not yet brought into a conscious knowledge and practice (EH, 129).

The centrality which is emphasized at the level of the signifier (the graphematic element at the end of the poem), correlates both with the idea of interdependent co-creation, pursued by the linguistic associations throughout the poem, and with the intersection of time and space, the timeless now:

sometimes it is possible to cut crosswise the timestream of rebirths — the grand plans and dances, eschatologies and evolutions, and be *now*: the 'marvelous emptiness' in all possibilities and directions which embraces the game of time and evolution (EII, 134).

Thus, the eagle becomes the symbol which unifies the references to different cultures and cosmologies coded in the text; the interdependent co-creation of different cultures, which are reducible to a primaval nucleus, an *unicum* of creation. The flight of the eagle into the 'marvelous emptiness' is the textualization of the extensional interpretation of world and poetry, as based on rational and non-rational categories (imagination, dream, the unconscious), which in Snyder's poetics precedes the performative element, textualized for instance in the ending of the *Turtle Island* poem already quoted:

.....
 I came back to myself,
 To the real work, to
 «What is to be done». (TI, 9)

Turtle Island, the collection which won the 1975 Pulitzer Prize for poetry, marks a further development of the themes which were already ingrained in Snyder's early work: the Indians, the geological history and the archaic past of the American continent (a theme emphasized by the dating of the poems, reckoning from the earliest cave paintings) are juxtaposed to the present violation and spoliation of the land. The latter theme is treated in violent tones, and the «rot at the heart/in the sick fat veins of Amerika» (TI, 18) again evokes the image of the purifying blaze:

.....
 Fire is an old story.
 I would like,
 with a sense of helpful order,
 with respect for laws
 of nature,
 to help my land
 with a burn, a hot clean
 burn.

.....
 And then
 It would be more
 like,
 when it belonged to the Indians
 Before. (TI, 19)

The theme of the Indians and their sacred respect for the land is juxtaposed to the sense of cultural loss, and to the new lower forms of acculturation, which turn the sacred into a commercial concern:

The Chamber of Commerce eats there,
 the visiting lecturer,
 stockmen in Denver suits,
 Japanese-American animal nutrition experts

from Kansas,
with Buddhist beads (TI, 10)

The use of Eastern doctrines as pacifiers — a new tool to oil the former revolutionaries into the system — is exposed in «The Call of the Wild», while «Mother Earth: Her Whales» deals with the sweeping industrial monoculture:

.....
And Japan quibbles for words on
what kinds of whales they can kill?
A once-great Buddhist nation
dribbles methyl mercury
like gonorrhea
in the sea. (TI, 47)

The theme of the Eastern nations denying their own nature-related cultures leads to the central image in this collection,

North America, Turtle Island, taken by invaders
who wage war around the world (TI, 48)

which is glossed in the chapter of *The Old Ways* dealing with the lost sense of inhabitation in contemporary cultures⁶. The same theme is to be found in a poem from the *Fudo Trilogy*, where the juxtaposition of mythic/historic motifs from different cultures is dealt with in totally imaginative terms, and in a mock-heroic tone. The iconography of the Great Buddha and of the American West, the geology and geography of the American continent, the language of Amerindian cosmologies and Indian prayer are brought together in the discourse of Smokey the Bear,

Indicating the Task: his followers, becoming free of cars, houses,
canned food, universities, and shoes, master the Three Mysteriers of their

6. Snyder's essays provide useful glosses to his poetry, which, as one critic has noted, is not always readily accessible in its complex intertwining of cultural allusions.

own Body, Speech and Mind; and fearlessly chop down the rotten trees and prune out the sick limbs of this country America and then burn the leftover trash.

(FT)

Wearing blue work overalls and the broad-rimmed hat of the West, Smokey the Bear gives a symbolic meaning to the *insignia* of the mountain lookout, for he bears in his right paw «the Shovel that digs to the truth beneath appearances; cuts the roots of useless attachments, and flings damp sand on the fires of greed and war». «Wrathful history from the vantage point of the Jurassic, «about 150 million years ago», with the same attitude with which the speaker at the end of *Myths & Texts* looks at the 'whole spinning show' from the heights of Sourdough Mountain: he has vision, power and compassion.

In tracing the various forces which have shaped the attitudes borne out in Snyder's work, his critics have insisted on the American Romantic tradition and of course on Oriental scriptures. The 'interdisciplinary' nature of his poetic discourse, ranging from anthropology and ecology to linguistics and Eastern philosophy, has also been discussed. What has been more summarily dispatched is the nature of his criticism of Western society — an element of considerable complexity, since Snyder's critique of Western civilization and rediscovery of the primitive are accomplished within, not outside, a framework which is admittedly that of pragmatism⁷. In taking note of this, one critic has quoted Robert Duncan's remark concerning Snyder's 'disguised Marxism': but Snyder himself has disavowed Marxian ideology, although in some instances he has produced an ecological version of class exploitation. On the whole, however, his view of Western history as propelled by an economic impulse inextricably tied to the religious is more in line with Max Weber's analysis than with Marxian ideology. In condemning greed, Snyder repeatedly qualifies

7. Snyder's Orientalism is no escape from the demands of the contemporary predicament: quite the other way, he has severely criticized institutional Buddhism for its indifference to social and political circumstances (EH, 90). His pragmatic vein is even more obvious in *Now India*, the journal of his trip to India.

it as Christian: his attraction to Eastern and Amerindian cultures in their traditional forms owes to the fact that within them a different set of beliefs has engendered a non-capitalist rationale of nature and property. Quite coherently, Snyder advocates a counterculture, not a class conflict: the issue is revolution in the consciousness, and the result a new ethic.

At the same time, the pragmatic vein in his Orientalism betrays a Western, and more than that, a Protestant attitude toward reality: salvation is to be achieved by working in this world, not by escape into ascesis. To stand firmly in one's vocation and profession — Luther's commandment, «bleiben Sie in deinen Beruf» — is as much a part of Snyder's life and work as his rejection of the religious assumptions of which the 'gospel of work' is the secularized version. His celebration of *Turtle Island*, i.e. pre-industrial societies in North America, is his own non-ethnocentric rewriting of American history, in the effort to cancel the stereotypes of the «lazy», «poor» and «ignorant» Indian, *alias* the Protestant excuse for aggression and domination which are going on today. To this *Beruf* he has committed himself, and like the work of other U.S. poets/translators who are concerned with tribal poetics, his appreciation of Amerindian cultures *in their own terms* has nothing to share with the popular taste for the 'Indian way' in its often depressing (and to the real Indians, insulting) aspects, such as the revisitation of the old stereotype of the Indian as the embodiment of 'wisdom'.

Embracing the primitive and trying to lead poetry back to its performative/communal aspects are two dictates of Snyder's poetry which stem quite naturally from his *Weltanschauung*, and place him in the company of modern and contemporary poets trying to antagonize the hyper-rationalism and solipsism of our age. This trend, in its dual form of grafting the primitive onto modernism and of tapping non-Western sources as the esoteric/gnostic current of the Western tradition, presents the potential risk of cultural relativism — the Whitmanian gusto for the 'grand ensemble' leading to a gleaning of decontextualized linguistic or cultural fragments which, as one poet has remarked, can be as offensive and violating as the attitude of U.S. soldiers in Viet-nam (FE, 235).

In Snyder's case, cultural pluralism and syncretism are all but gratuitous, for, as an even cursory reading of his work will show, his cultural options are one with his work with language and form. While his search for the primitive has produced an attempt to break up the syntax (*via* Williams) and to emphasize the pre-logical, sensual elements in language (the sound/sight texture so increasingly prominent in his later poetry), his best-known ecological lyrics are embodiments of a nature philosophy which has been turned into a structural principle: the interdependent co-creation of all beings, i.e. in ecological language the interdependence of systems, becomes the «bonding» in his poems, the network of links and combinations within each poem which makes it into a self-maintaining but hardly 'closed' whole, 'living on' in the mind of the reader. The dynamic patterning of microcosmic and macrocosmic dimension, the balancing of time and space, the interrelation of physical and mental elements featured in these poems bespeak the affinity between the ecological and the structural approach. His songs celebrating natural cycles and his excursions into myth confirm this patterning at the level of larger units of poetry⁸.

In evaluating Snyder's dissertation, written in 1951, from the vanguard point of the Seventies, N. Tarn observed that he came quite near to a structuralist view of myth: his poetry of the earth, which develops so many themes already in the grain of that first work, indicates that Snyder has come to possess as a poet what he had almost discovered as a scholar.

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8. An interesting discussion of ecology and structuralism can be found in R. SCHOLLS, *Structuralism in Literature* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974), chapter 6 («The Structuralist Imagination»).