Beatific Orientalism

Gary Snyder and Zen

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter examines Gary Snyder's interest in the Far East as a mode of reclaiming a native sense of America. The fifties counterculture turned to the Orient in search of a subterranean America, and Snyder's advocacy of Zen presented a vision of the nation as a sacred environment. Snyder combined religious and environmental aims in a unified attempt to become an American bard, and this chapter considers the structure and durability of his cultural creation.

Keywords: Gary Snyder, Zen, Beat movement, Ecopoetry, postwar literature

In the title poem of his 1983 collection Axe Handles, Gary Snyder combines his poetic heritage with a lesson to his son:

One afternoon the last week in April
Showing Kai how to throw a hatchet
One-half turn and it sticks in a stump.
He recalls the hatchet-head
Without a handle, in the shop
And go gets it, and wants it for his own.
A broken-off axe handle behind the door
Is long enough for a hatchet,
We cut it to length and take it
With the hatchet head
And working hatchet, to the wood block.
There I begin to shape the old handle
With the hatchet, and the phrase
First learned from Ezra Pound
Rings in my ears!
“When making an axe handle
the pattern is not far off.”
And I say this to Kai
“Look: We’ll shape the handle
By checking the handle
Of the axe we cut with—”
And he sees. And I hear it again:
It’s in Lu Ji’s Wê Fu, fourth century
A.D. “Essay on Literature”—in the
Preface: “In making the handle
Of an axe
By cutting wood with an axe
The model is indeed near at hand.”
My teacher Shih-hsiang Chen
Translated that and taught it years ago
And I see: Pound was an axe,
(p.58)
Chen was an axe, I am an axe
And my son a handle, soon
To be shaping again, model
And tool, craft of culture,
How we go on. (5–6)
Literally embedded in the middle of the poem is one of Pound’s sayings. The line is simultaneously the most visible and most buried in the poem—lodged in the middle, the indent like the ax in the center of the stump. In the figure of the ax handle, the “pattern is not far off” because one uses the cutting tool to shape the new piece; it is a way of recuperating a model to apply toward new tasks. Upon remembering Pound’s line, Snyder recalls the source of the line: a literary essay from fourth-century China. In citing Lu Ji, Snyder inserts a break after “Of an axe,” lining up this saying with Pound’s: each introduces a half-line of blank space, and the two fit together in the way that the newly shaped handle would fit into the worn hatchet-head. The poem thus suggests a unified ax on the page fashioned by matching Pound to Lu Ji—yet this ax does not appear in the manner of Pound’s apparitions, which flash before the reader by materializing from multiple juxtapositions. Indeed, the poem’s visual cues have little to do with images: when Snyder says “Look” to his son, this command is not about seeing but about imparting a lesson, and when the lesson has been learned, the poem further obscures the visibility of the ax: “And he sees. And I hear it again.” Kai does not see the ax—instead, he understands the method—and the poem is really about hearing: “the phrase/First learned from Ezra Pound/Rings in my ears!” Once Kai “sees,” Snyder himself understands a larger lesson (“And I see”) of cultural transmission. “Axe handles” does not present an ax but a chain of actors: Pound, Chen, Snyder, Kai. The lesson of the poem is finally about the creation and perpetuation of culture; Snyder applies an aesthetic lesson to the work of “How we go on.”

The ax handle is a striking figure for the simultaneous rupture and continuity of the lessons Snyder has learned from Pound. Snyder’s long career of lyrics, long poems, and didactic prose clearly matches the contours of Pound’s oeuvre. As Bob Steuding wrote in the first published monograph on Snyder:

Snyder has indeed learned from the old master; for similarities in technique, the cultural affinities, and even, if one looks closely at Snyder’s biography, the striking comparison in life-style and approach to the writing of poetry are too obvious to be overlooked. (39)
Of the generation of poets that followed Pound, Snyder is unique in his adherence to Pound’s belief in Oriental discipline for a wayward America.¹ In describing his high modernist inheritance, “the poetry of (p.59) twentieth-century coolness, its hard edges and resilient elitism,” Snyder explains the singular appeal of Pound: “Ezra Pound introduced me to Chinese poetry, and I began to study classical Chinese. When it came to writing out of my own experience, most of modernism didn’t fit, except for the steer toward Chinese and Japanese” (Riprap 65). Pound was Snyder’s portal to the Far East, but against Pound’s ideological model of Confucianism, Snyder advocates Buddhism, the scourge Pound wanted routed out of Chinese history. By crafting a statal ideal learned from Confucianism, Pound expressed what he believed the age demanded, and Snyder’s radical lessons from the East similarly reveal an American Orientalism for the postwar era. It has been my contention that Pound approached America by magnifying his own distance from it; he traveled East to get back home. Snyder’s East, too, is a mode for accessing an idealized homeland: he spearheaded a transpacific alliance, in which an Eastern spirit suffuses the Western landscape.

Pound’s civilizational vision was a catastrophic failure, but Snyder's anticivilizational philosophy has proven to be a durable creation. Though their ideologies mark opposite ends of the political spectrum, their philosophies share a central ideal: as Michael Davidson puts it, “Snyder, like Pound, wants to write Paradise on earth” (San Francisco Renaissance 112). Snyder’s Oriental transcendence follows from Pound’s terrestrial paradise: in Of Grammatology, Derrida credits the Pound-Fenollosa pair with enacting “the first break in the most entrenched Western tradition”—their “irreducibly graphic poetics” undermined theologism (92). In Derrida's history, these American Orientalists effected an epistemic break because through their fantasies of Chinese writing, they eluded the divine origins of the word. Pound turned to Fenollosa’s Orient in order to create an earthly ideal, and for Snyder, too, making an alliance with the Orient became a means of bypassing Western transcendence.² As poet-pedagogues, Pound and Snyder seek to reform their environments, and Pound’s belief in an “American Risorgimento” finds a new voice in Snyder’s lifelong commitment to the American wilderness.
Snyder was the Asiatic mystic of the Beat Generation, a subterranean culture which made a religion out of alienation from postwar America. First a counterculture hero, Snyder has been a lifelong ambassador for both Zen and American environmentalism. Snyder's enduring innovation was to knit together these two strands: in the words of John Elder, whose 1985 *Imagining the Earth* first considered nature poetry in the context of the environmental movement, “In part because of Snyder's inspiration, the conversation between poetry and the earth has also included, for me, a long journey out of the Western tradition—toward the lineage of Basho” (Foreword x). Snyder communed with the American wilderness through a “long journey” out of Western theological transcendence and into Far Eastern religion. Through this twinned allegiance to Zen and nature, Snyder popularized a new American transcendence. In (p.60) reading Snyder's work within a history of alliances between the United States and the Far East, we may understand Snyder's interlocking structure of Zen and environmentalism as a potent new instantiation of an American Orientalism constructed out of transpacific accords.
Snyder sailed to Japan in 1956, nearly a century after Japan's "opening," but he discovered a tantalizing Old Japan on the verge of disappearance just as Fenollosa had: American postwar occupation was at least as dramatic a Westernization as the Meiji government's rush toward modernization, and in both eras a small enclave of romantic American adventurers found their way to Japan to lament its waning exoticism. Timothy Gray notes Snyder's denunciation of Western influences which risk "polluting Kyoto's ancient sensibilities" ("Gary Snyder" 26). In Snyder's hands, however, Fenollosa's dream of the "Future Union of East and West" came true; Snyder simply made West East and vice versa within a single, cultural whole. Snyder's American–East Asian amalgam first began in poetry, but his ethical stances occasionally outstrip his verse and indeed exert a considerable pressure on his poetry, which repeatedly expresses a tension between words and the world. "Axe Handles" demonstrates a Poundian cultural inheritance in which aesthetic concerns give way to what Snyder has termed "the real work": Snyder's literary genealogy mutates into an actual one. This chapter frames Snyder's cultural ambitions within the rise of Zen in the United States and Beat Orientalism, and I read the pressures of Snyder's transpacific commitments on his verse. My readings of Snyder's poetry examine his use of an Oriental mode to access an America figured as wilderness, a Beat invention which extended a literary genealogy of American Orientalism into an era in which such appropriations became increasingly difficult to sustain.

Everything Zen
If Confucius was the mouthpiece for civilizational order in Pound's writing, Buddhism was a ticket into hip culture and a mode of critiquing Western civilization for the Beats. Pound’s continuum from Confucian China to Revolutionary America sank in the ocean that divided the two lands, and it was a Buddhism routed through postwar Japan that traveled to America as the ultimate accoutrement of 1950s counterculture. American Zen is one strand of a global and heterogeneous Buddhism, a supremely adaptable religion—necessarily the case for any successful world religion—and the liberties taken with Zen have made it into a singularly American concoction. Zen enlightenment promises a direct understanding of both things and nothing, and, ultimately, it aims for a transmission between internal and external natures, in which a heightened self-awareness translates into individual belonging to the natural environment. Zen blossomed in fertile American soil into a simultaneously opaque and diffuse entity which has proven to have lasting powers in a growing convert community; the full flowering of Zen was evident by the end of the twentieth century, when “native-born American teachers” rose to prominence.
Eastern Buddhism was officially introduced to America in the 1893 World’s Parliament of Religions in Chicago, in which Japanese delegates separated their formulation from the existing North-South axis of Buddhism. Judith Snodgrass explains the pitch of these representatives to their American audience: “Eastern Buddhism was the full exposition of the Buddha's wisdom, and it existed in Japan alone” (198). By elevating a single, sublime Eastern Buddhism above Indian, Chinese, and Tibetan local expressions, the Japanese delegates fit their construction into a larger, well-worn American groove from West to East: they transcended sectarian differences within Buddhism and dubbed it the spirit of the East. The presentation in Chicago was a reflection of a modern Buddhism that dated to 1869, forged during the Meiji period, in which a religion previously excoriated as an alien presence in Japan was recuperated as one of the building blocks of Japanese modernization. Modern Zen was part and parcel of Japanese nationalism and expansionism; indeed, Robert Sharf argues that Zen's vaunted spiritual superiority fed into Japan’s “obligation” “to assume the leadership of Asia” (49). Japan's Zen organization dispatched missionaries to far-flung destinations like the American West, a small part of the “rising tide of Japanese nationalism.” Zen was a Japanese export, packaged by a fledgling empire whose delegates sought to convert distant lands.
The Japanese delegates to Chicago at the turn of the century failed to spread their teachings in America, but their labors bore fruit decades later in a charismatic figure who swept the counterculture. D. T. Suzuki was, as Snodgrass puts it, the “culmination” of these earlier labors because he successfully transformed the particularity of Japanese Zen into universal terms (260–262). Suzuki translated essential Buddhist texts into English and in 1936 he published his first tract, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, but it was in the early 1950s that he “became a figure” with a series of lectures he gave at Columbia, famously attended by counterculture luminaries like John Cage and Allen Ginsberg. Suzuki swept aside the worldly trappings of Buddhism and transformed it into a mirror for American aesthetes increasingly dissatisfied with the hardening contours of domestic life in the postwar era. In book after book, Suzuki posed the question “What is Zen?” but he never quite pinned down the concept because American Zen thrived by making this question unanswerable. The answer is that Zen is nothing—or, to use Suzuki's terminology, it is “nothingness”; Suzuki emphasized Zen's concept of “no mind,” in which “seeing into one's nature” becomes “seeing into nothingness” (165). Zen's most alluring quality is what Sherman Paul calls its “fertile emptiness” (83), and Suzuki's gift was to suggest that Zen could point the way to the fathomless interiors of the self. Suzuki melded a range of disciplines and discourses to get at “the inexpressible moon” of Zen, and, following his lead, popularizers in the 1950s kept Zen apart from defined categories of thought even as they dangled the concept of Zen before them—and as they worried over what Zen was, they invariably ended up with a list of what it wasn’t. This negative construction led to charges of nihilism, but it was a misunderstanding that Suzuki risked because he sought to preserve the inviolability of Zen. One couldn't fret one's way to understanding; the pearl of Zen was the product of a new kind of enlightenment.

Suzuki reconfigured Zen for American consumption: he translated Zen into terms of profound religious experience familiar to American audiences—and his reading of William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* aided him in this regard. As Robert S. Ellwood explains in his study of Eastern religions in the United States:
Suzuki made the transmission process all the easier by stressing an interpretation of Zen which drew on Western existentialism at the expense of the discipline, cultic, and sociological sides of Zen in Japan, mixing in just enough of the latter to give it an excitingly exotic flavor but not enough to intimidate the adventurous spirit. (147)

Similarly, in discussing “Zen's adaptation in the West,” David L. McMahan discusses American attempts “to decontextualize it and de-emphasize elements thought to be ‘too Asian’ or ‘too traditional,’ or that simply don't work in the West” (219). American Zen thus does not rely on assimilating Asian elements into a Western paradigm—in fact the opposite is true: Zen hitches American transcendental ideals to an Eastern guiding star. Suzuki ultimately kept Zen pure from cultural otherness; he divorced Zen from his own race and nationality. Indeed, Zen's enigmatic transcendence benevolently recasts negative images of the Orient. The Zen koan, or riddle, retools the pithy sayings of Confucius, making playful what had previously been the object of racist ridicule. Pound's insistence on Eastern tyranny made aspects of his Orientalism unpalatable to the hipster crowd, but Zen turned Eastern discipline inward, into a mode of accessing the self. Zen rehabilitated these long-held caricatures of Oriental otherness, effectively channeling them into an American hunger for self-awareness.9
Thomas Merton explains the significance of Suzuki’s creation: in his estimation, Suzuki “has moved East and West closer together, bringing Japan and America into agreement on a deep level, when everything seems to conspire to breed conflict, division, incomprehension, confusion and war” (66). This is an altogether recognizable harmony, an American construction which positions a shared light against a darker division: this “agreement” resonates with prior dreams of transpacific union, and Suzuki’s “deep level” pierces to the heart of the self. Because Zen revels (p.63) in paradoxes, divisions between East and West simply fall away before the promise of limitless understanding, and Zen ultimately provides a reassuring way into the self and the natural world for its adherents. Merton captured the deeply moving experience of being in Suzuki’s presence: “It was like finally arriving at one’s own home” (61). For the subterranean crowd who positioned themselves at the margins of American culture, Zen was the means for an American homecoming.

In 1958, the Chicago Review devoted an issue to Zen, creating a time capsule of its formulation in the era. The table of contents provides a portrait of mid-century Zen: Alan W. Watts, who acted as a bridge between Zen Buddhism and the Beats, opens the volume with a discussion of the present state of Zen; D. T. Suzuki and Ruth Fuller Sasaki (who opened the first Zen institute in Kyoto) provide translations of Zen masters; three different articles attempt to read Zen through the lens of nature, psychotherapy, and philosophy; and three works by Beat artists Jack Kerouac, Philip Whalen, and Gary Snyder describe their personal experience of Zen enlightenment through ecstatic derangement, natural reflection, and Japanese discipline, respectively. Zen continues to flourish in this particular nexus of religious tract, social scientific inquiry, and personal experience, but it is through aesthetic appreciation that Zen became a byword of American culture. The literary end of Zen was extolled by R. H. Blyth, a follower of Suzuki who uncovered Zen alliances in the Western canon. Blyth’s Zen and English Literature influenced American disciples of Zen, and the text became an object of intense study for the Zen adherents of the Beat movement. In the hands of the Beats, Zen took on the texture it retains today: vacillating between noun and adjective, it presents an apotheosis of a nothingness that is capacious enough to take in everything.
Watts's essay in the *Chicago Review*, “Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen,” ponders the “complex phenomenon” of Beat Zen:

It ranges from a use of Zen for justifying sheer caprice in art, literature, and life to a very forceful social criticism and “digging of the universe” such as one may find in the poetry of Ginsberg and Snyder, and, rather unevenly, in Kerouac. But, as I know it, it is always a shade too self-conscious, too subjective, and too strident to have the flavor of Zen. (8)\(^\text{11}\)

At the other extreme is Square Zen—“the Zen of established tradition in Japan with its clearly defined hierarchy, its rigid discipline, and its specific tests of satori” (9)—but Watts critiques both ends: “Zen is ‘fuss’ when it is mixed up with Bohemian affectations, and ‘fuss’ when it is imagined that the only proper way to find it is to run off to a monastery in Japan or to do special exercises in the lotus posture five hours a day” (11). Though Watts casts Snyder's practice as Beat Zen, the editor of the edition stars Snyder's name and adds a footnote: “Mr. Snyder seems to have gone square,” referring to Snyder's contribution to the issue, an account of \(\text{p.64}\) “Spring Sesshin at Shokoku-ji,” a period of intense meditation at a temple in northern Kyoto. Snyder's essay describes the temple, the activities, the food consumed—all in a strict third person. Snyder adopts an objective perspective which keeps his Zen well away from the taint of being “a shade too self-conscious, too subjective.” The only mention of his own presence comes at a description of a nighttime rest period, when someone asks “Are there really some Americans interested in Zen?” (48). This small hint of Snyder's participation casts him as an American representative and underscores his exceptional status within the traditional Japanese scene. According to Watts's categories, Snyder's rigorous practice is as much an affectation as the frivolous Zen typically ascribed to Kerouac, but this “fuss” was the backbone for Snyder's standing in the United States.
Snyder's "Square Zen" earned him legitimacy; Davidson cites Snyder's years of training in Japan to counter the misperception that Beat religious practice "was in any way casual": "Consider the facts: Gary Snyder left San Francisco in 1955 to live in Japan off and on for the next twelve years while engaged in formal Zen training. During this time, under the tutelage of Roshi Oda Sesso, he took formal vows as a Zen monk" (San Francisco Renaissance 95). Snyder famously sailed off to Japan at the height of the Beat movement, but his absence from the scene paradoxically strengthened his position within the community; as Timothy Gray puts it in Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim:

While in Asia, Snyder served as his community's offshore representative, its far-flung cultural ambassador, keeping lines of communication open across the Pacific and giving Beats and hippies at odds with cold war nationalism a set of physical coordinates with which to plot their idealistic visions of peace, love, and Buddhist mindfulness. (xi)

In the United States, Snyder reigned as Zen expert, and in Japan, he was an authority on American hip. He fashioned himself as a local expert on both sides of the Pacific, and he repeatedly proposed bringing together the best of both, as in "Buddhism and the Coming Revolution," an essay published in Earth House Hold, a collection of journal entries and polemical tracts from 1952 to the mid 1960s, in which he writes, "The mercy of the West has been social revolution; the mercy of the East has been individual insight into the basic self/void. We need both" (92). Snyder's cultural authority relied on transpacific journeys which were simultaneously pilgrimages and ambassadorships.
Snyder's Zen ambassadorship presents a curious mirror image to that of Suzuki: Suzuki created an American practice that separated itself from his own racial and national identity, but Snyder's expertise is entirely constructed by managing his absence from the American scene and establishing his traditional practice in Japan. If Suzuki is heir to the 1893 Japanese delegates, Snyder harks back to the contemporaneous American (p.65) delegation of “Gilded Age misfits” who found positions of authority in Japan. Just as Fenollosa's Japanese experience created the platform for his later authority in the United States, it was through Snyder's specialized training in Japan that he emerged as the preeminent American representative of Japanese Zen. Snyder left the doctoral program in anthropology at Indiana University to study East Asian languages at Berkeley, but his postgraduate study really took place in Japan—indeed, he applied his anthropological training to his Chicago Review essay. Snyder fashioned his expertise along lines well established in American literary history, but his innovation is to capitalize on the fact of his absence from the American scene. Fenollosa's authority took the form of public addresses, both in Japan and the United States, but Snyder's mode of expertise is particularly striking for its reliance on transpacific exile for nearly the duration of the Beat movement: Snyder's absence made him an especially fitting representative for an enlightenment premised on an empty center.
Yet Snyder's distance from the American scene posed some risks as well. A persistent fear that Snyder had gone square in the Far East shadowed his work; the seriousness of his religious study has been a crucial element in redeeming Beat spiritual practice, but this same rigor could strip his writing of Beat ecstasy. In presenting the correspondence that linked Snyder to his distant community, Gray makes clear that Snyder's American constituency simultaneously desired and abjected their ambassador: “his quest for more knowledge threatens to render him inaccessible to those in San Francisco who so clearly depend on him” (Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim 163). His Beat friends repeatedly sketched Snyder as himself Oriental—Gray calls Snyder “the counterculture's yellowface character” (Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim 167)—hence registering the threat of his Asiatic authority; but it was a portrait that Snyder worked carefully to engineer.12 Sherman Paul recalls seeing Snyder for the first time: “I remember my introduction to him in a televised reading on the National Education Television Network: the poet in Japanese student uniform announcing his beliefs, reading his poems in a bare (empty, ‘oriental’) room” (78). Paul goes on to describe his concern over this presentation, wondering if it “might not be a form of spiritual self-advertisement,” but Snyder's expertise relied on such portraits. Indeed, Zen can't quite shake this wearying exoticism because its nontheological transcendence relies on its difference from Western religiosity. In a 1979 interview included in The Real Work, a collection of interviews, Snyder ridiculed the recognizable material trappings of Zen, saying:

We all realize by now that Zen is not aesthetics, or haiku, or spontaneity, or minimalism, or accidentalism, or Japanese architecture, or green tea, or sitting on the floor, or samurai movies (laughter). It's a way of using your mind and practicing your life and doing it with other people. (153)

(p.66) Yet it was precisely through the cachet of these cultural markers that Snyder secured his own position as cultural ambassador.
Snyder's Zen advocacy is part of a United States–East Asian alliance several decades in the making; as an element of Japanese imperial ambition which found a devoted following in the United States, American Zen is through and through a transpacific construction. Because his ambassadorship was sustained by special knowledge of the Far East and his own distance from his community, Snyder came to bear the markers of Oriental difference even as he argued for an understanding that transcended such characterizations. We have seen that the tenuous alliances of American Orientalism have been haunted by the specter of Oriental otherness, and firm commitments across the Pacific are required to sustain the relationship. American Orientalism is marked by wide-ranging attempts to imagine East and West together, and Snyder's American Zen relies on a significant inclusion of America itself, figured as a wilderness. Absence was crucial to Snyder's authority as an advocate of Japanese practice, but against this physical absence a crucial presence in America became necessary to complete his vision.

Cultural Studies
Snyder enlisted Native American spirituality as a crucial interlocking term with Zen; he marshaled Zen's inward turn to self-nature as a way of accessing “Turtle Island,” which he explains in an introductory note to his 1974 poetry collection of the same name as “the old/new name for the continent, based on many creation myths of the people who have been living here for millennia, and reapplied by some of them to ‘North America’ in recent years.” To adopt “Turtle Island” as his own is to claim a belonging to the land reserved for native groups, but Snyder's innovation was to apply Eastern modes to his Western environment, thus matching a discovery of self with the discovery of wilderness. For Pound, Confucian China was a crucial detour in his return to Revolutionary America—the America that matched his ethical ideals—and the “way” of Zen was ultimately a long way home for Snyder. Explaining that “American Indian spiritual experience is very remote and extremely difficult to enter, even though in one sense right next door, because it is a practice one has to be born into” (Real Work 94), Snyder discusses his Eastern turn: “I knew that Zen monasteries would be more open to me than the old Paiute and Shoshone Indians in Eastern Oregon, because they have to be open—that's what Mahayana Buddhism is all about” (Real Work 95).¹³ Snyder's Zen exile was ultimately a way back to “Turtle Island”; we have seen that Zen was made native to America, and Snyder's Zen enlightenment provided a means of claiming his own nativity.
Snyder's romantic conception of the American Indian takes up nativist discourses of the 1920s, in which belonging to America meant being part of a "vanishing race": the American Indian could be found at the heart of nativist texts, but only with the certainty of demise. Walter Benn Michaels discusses the curious pride that attended to this particular sense of doom, in which besieged nativists found a strange solace in identifying with a native population imagined to be on the verge of extinction.\textsuperscript{14} In the limbo after World War II and before the minority nationalist movements of the late 1960s, a peculiar kind of American belonging was imagined within a discourse that returned to the American Indian. Leslie A. Fiedler discusses the reappearance of this figure in The Return of the Vanishing American (1968), remarking upon the flourishing trade in the Native American: “An astonishing number of novelists have begun to write fiction in which the Indian character, whom only yesterday we were comfortably bidding farewell (with a kind of security and condescension we can no longer imagine), has disconcertingly reappeared” (13). Yet if the Indian was vanishing in the 1920s, there was even less trace of him as mid-century writers devoured his land: this later traffic in Native Americans mined their territory in an attempt to find an America unmarred by the enveloping fears of the postwar era; the native wilderness promised an expanse which eluded the cold war logic of containment.

Fiedler opens his study by mapping out the “mythological” geography of America, and he singles out the West as “aboriginal and archaic America” (25). This mysterious West stands as a distant horizon; after sketching the westward march of American destiny, Fiedler asks, “Can we reestablish the West anywhere at all, then?” (27). He goes on to speculate on possible new Wests:

The earth, it turns out, is mythologically as well as geographically round; the lands across the Pacific will not do, since on the rim of the second ocean, West becomes East, our whole vast land (as Columbus imagined, and Whitman nostalgically remembered at the opening of the Suez Canal) a Passage to India. (27)
Snyder, of course, heads straight for “the lands across the Pacific”; he is a direct heir to Whitman's nostalgic logic, in which the West is a passage to the Orient. In seeking out the horizon, Fiedler wonders if “maybe the moon will serve our purposes, or Mars” (27) but instead of turning, as Fiedler puts it, “up and out,” we need only consider Snyder's Far East and Far West, terms notably used as section titles in his 1968 collection *The Back Country*: this meeting of far ends marks Snyder's horizon. A far-out vision obliterates the distance between East and West in the Beat imagination; in Snyder's geography, the East has been submerged into a mode of self-awareness which transforms the bohemian into a Native American.

(p.68) Fiedler quotes in full a poem by Snyder entitled “A Curse on the Men in Washington, Pentagon,” which Fiedler describes as a “dream of disavowing one's whiteness and becoming all Indian” (86). Appalled by the atrocities committed by American soldiers in Vietnam, Snyder writes,

As I kill the white man
the “American”
in me
And bring out the ghost dance:
To bring back America, the grass and the streams,
To trample your throat in your dreams. (87)

Snyder is not calling back the American Indian but America, “the grass and the streams”; he speaks in the voice of the Indian so that, as he writes, “my children may flourish.” The Indian is an extraordinary figure of unending vengeance; as Snyder writes in *Earth House Hold*, “Something is always eating at the American heart like acid: it is the knowledge of what we have done to our continent, and to the American Indian” (119). Snyder's reference to this deep stain in the American conscience goes back to *In the American Grain*, William Carlos Williams’s stern reminder of America's foundational atrocities, but Snyder's evocations differ in that he believes he can enter this vanished subject position by recuperating the native land.

Snyder describes what he will pass on to his children instead of an America tainted by war:

I'll give them Chief Joseph, the bison herds,
Ishi, sparrowhawk, the fir trees,
The Buddha, their own naked bodies,
Swimming and dancing and singing
instead. (87)

It is crucial that the Buddha is the pivot of this strophe because through his figure the poem can move from Indians and nature to the children and their joyous movements: this Eastern figure of self-awareness permits Snyder to make the transition from Ishi to his own family. In overlaying his American geography with Eastern insights, Snyder has made his children descendants of a vanishing race.

In *Earth House Hold*, Snyder argues forcefully for a continuation of an archaic line of thought and community. Essentially a handbook on communal living, Snyder lays out his rationale for what he calls the continuation of “the Great Subculture”: “the tradition that runs without break from Paleo-Siberian Shamanism and Magdalenian cave-painting; through megaliths and Mysteries, astronomers, ritualists, alchemists and *p.69* Albigensians; gnostics and vagantes, right down to Golden Gate Park” (115). This line can be continued in America by seeing the world within a Buddhist philosophy in which the world is “a vast interrelated network in which all objects and creatures are necessary and illuminated” (92). Buddhist practice permits the individual to access what is irretrievably lost:

The traditional cultures are in any case doomed, and rather than cling to their good aspects hopelessly it should be remembered that whatever is or ever was in any other culture can be reconstructed from the unconscious, through meditation. In fact, it is my own view that the coming revolution will close the circle and link us in many ways with the most creative aspects of our archaic past. (92–93)

The key point here is “whatever is or ever was in any other culture”; Snyder is singularly uninterested in cultural difference. There is no poignancy to his acceptance of “doomed” traditional cultures—instead, Snyder distills an ecstatic communion with nature from each culture he admires, thus creating an unbroken lineage to which he may attach himself.
American theorizations of Zen permitted this fantasy of reconstructing a kind of total culture in the unconscious. Suzuki borrowed psychoanalytic vocabulary in order to suggest the self-awareness unlocked by Zen practice, calling it “realizing the Unconscious in our individual consciousnesses” (199). Snyder takes up this terminology to explain the crucial transmission from self-discovery to a communion with wilderness: “To transcend the ego is to go beyond society as well. ‘Beyond’ there lies, inwardly, the unconscious. Outwardly, the equivalent of the unconscious is the wilderness: both of these terms meet, one step even farther on, as one” (Earth House Hold 122). The Great Subculture is a kind of unconscious for civilization which can be accessed through meditation. In a 1977 interview, Snyder exclaims, “I wish there weren't any civilization!” (Real Work 128); the Great Subculture is an attempt to elude the superego of civilization. In Freud's Civilization and Its Discontents, which argues that civilization itself can be mapped onto individual libidinal development, the highest level of civilization is “exploitation of earth by man” (45). Conversely, the Great Subculture is premised upon a reverence for the earth, and, further, by lodging this subculture within the unconscious, there is no development, absolutely no sense of history. Freud demonstrates that history is predicated on annihilation; previous stages cannot be preserved as new structures rise in their place. But the Great Subculture argues the opposite: it is a logic of preservation on many fronts, from the ability to access the past to the preservation of wilderness. This fantasy recalls Freud's imaginary Rome with all phases of its development intact: Snyder's culture sacrifices history and cultural difference on a tribal altar.
In acting out of his personal discontent with civilization, Snyder has been charged with cultural imperialism. Gerald Hobson and Leslie Marmon Silko have attacked white shamanism in particular, and when confronted with their criticism in a 1979 interview, Snyder replies with a lesson in his brand of cultural study: “Well, I think Mr. Hobson has a profound misunderstanding when he views a shaman as a cultural artifact. His idea is that a shaman is an Indian thing” (Real Work 154). Snyder goes on to clarify his own understanding of shamanism, “which is a worldwide phenomenon and not limited in any proprietary sense to any one culture” (Real Work 155). Snyder does not aim to present cultures but to create an extraordinary chain of being: the Great Subculture turns culture itself into a dead issue—as he puts it, an artifact. It is certainly the case that Snyder appropriates Native American practices, but at the same time that he makes use of these cultural practices, he is not interested in their specificity. Snyder's cultural interests are guided by a principle of recognition: instead of offering new and different knowledge, the cultures he mines provide proof for his ethical ideals because his forays into other worlds and eras are attempts to discover harmonies across time and space.

In discussing the controversy of Snyder's use of Native American materials, Tim Dean registers his own hesitation:

Having acknowledged the validity of such critiques, I nevertheless cannot fail to register the absurdity of their implications, since if one were to adhere to the stricture of writing primarily from experience, all literature would be reduced to an autobiographical function, and nobody would be able to write authoritatively about temporally distant cultures. (489-490)
The curiosity of Snyder's case, however, is that all of Snyder's cultural studies are themselves “reduced to an autobiographical function”; he weighs and evaluates cultures for their use-value toward a crisis he feels deeply and personally, in which an overweening civilization threatens to obliterate the wilderness. Snyder never evinces a desire to “write authoritatively about temporally distant cultures”; instead, the reverse is true: there is only one viable culture, with multiple iterations. If we recall the lesson of “Axe Handles,” Pound, Chen, Snyder, and Kai were imagined together as a family: though each figure in the lineage represents an entirely different culture, the only culture that matters is the one crafted when they are bound together.

Native Hip
Snyder was less a student of culture than a leader of a cultural avant-garde—as Thomas Parkinson puts it, Snyder “has effectively done something that for an individual is extremely difficult: he has created (p.71) a new culture” (22)—and his creation was part and parcel of the Beat Generation. Snyder's Great Subculture bears all the marks of its formation as part of the counterculture revolution, but it also has the distinction of outlasting this initial context. Snyder picked and chose amid a panoply of cultures to fashion his variant of a mid-century revolution; to read his alternative mode of transcendence within the context of “beatitude” is to reveal both the terms of its creation and its singularity. This creation has taken on the dimensions of myth, thanks to Jack Kerouac's account of a season of “Zen Lunacy” in 1955: Kerouac's The Dharma Bums presents Japhy Ryder (Snyder) as “a great new hero of American culture” (32). On a summer night in Berkeley, Japhy presents his vision to Alvah Goldbook (Allen Ginsberg) and Ray Smith (Kerouac):

> I've been reading Whitman, know what he says, *Cheer up slaves, and horrify foreign despots*, he means that's the attitude for the Bard, the Zen Lunacy bard of old desert paths, see the whole thing is a world full of rucksack wanderers, Dharma Bums. (97)
Japhy has been reading Whitman’s “By Blue Ontario’s Shore,” and he has transformed Whitman’s description of the bard (“The attitude of him cheers up slaves and horrifies foreign despots” [348]) into a command for a generation of “young Americans wandering around with rucksacks” (97). Whitman’s song of the American bard distills a single requirement for this “leader of leaders”:

Underneath all, Nativity,
I swear I will stand by my own nativity—pious or impious so be it;
I swear I am charm’d with nothing except nativity,
Men, women, cities, nations, are only beautiful from nativity. (352–353)

The single aim of the rucksack wanderer is nativity; his wandering is not aimless but purposeful because he claims the land he ventures across. Snyder never questioned his belonging to a true America; instead, his spiritual flights were firmly grounded in American terrain.

Whitman celebrated the contradictions endemic to America, and he expanded the self in order to take in these paradoxes: “America isolated yet embodying all, what is it finally except myself?” (354). The miracle of Leaves of Grass is Whitman’s speech acts, a language willed to equal divine force: facing America from Ontario’s shore, Whitman proclaims,

I match my spirit against yours you orbs,
growths, mountains, brutes,
Copious as you are I absorb you all in myself, and
become the master myself. (354)

Whitman had to take in equal parts beauty and horror in order to match his spirit to the nation, but this romantic conflation takes on a slightly different form in Beat transcendence. The Beats sought to purify a degraded America; they rejected the sins that Whitman swallowed whole. Like Whitman, they projected their national visions into the self, but they shunned a consumer society that Kerouac depicted in The Dharma Bums as robotic lives “imprisoned in a system of work, produce, consume, work, produce, consume” (97). Though they embraced Whitman’s ghost, they turned to religion in order to purify themselves, and, by extension, America.
This religious turn was shaped by the shadow of nuclear annihilation: Whitman's “By Blue Ontario's Shore” opens as he “mused of these warlike days” (340), and the Dharma Bums, too, outfitted themselves for manmade disasters. The “rucksack revolution” was a response to new technological horrors: upon buying “a brand new rucksack,” Ray says, “I was all outfitted for the Apocalypse indeed, no joke about that; if an atom bomb should have hit San Francisco that night all I'd have to do is hike on out of there” (107). Beat ecstasy was a strategy for survival that turned away from “all that suburban ideal and sex repression and general dreary newspaper gray censorship of all our real human values” (31); the Beats saw “all that suburban ideal” as aiding and abetting the perversion of human values made spectacularly visible in the image of the bomb. *The Dharma Bums* narrativizes the Beat turn to Eastern spirituality as a mode of cleansing the self and the nation. In Buddhism, they discovered a religious practice premised on a belief that addressing the self was a means of restoring the world around them.

As a Beat celebrity, Kerouac was hounded for explanations of his generation, and his responses consistently foregrounded the spiritual aspect of the movement, as in his 1957 essay “About the Beat Generation”: “We all know about the Religious Revival, Billy Graham and all, under which the Beat Generation, even the existentialists with all their intellectual overlays and pretenses of difference, represent an even deeper religiousness” (562). For Kerouac, each element of the constellation of the hipster universe bore “hidden religious significance” (560), and his definition of the Beat Generation created an image of lonely angels:

It never meant juvenile delinquents, it meant characters of a special spirituality who didn't gang up but were solitary Bartlebies staring out the dead wall window of our civilization—the subterranean heroes who'd finally turned from the “freedom” machine of the West and were taking drugs, digging bop, having flashes of insight, experiencing the “derangement of the senses,” talking strange, being poor and glad, prophesying a new style for American culture, a new style (we thought) completely free from European influences (unlike the Lost Generation), a new incantation. (559)
In this definition, Kerouac sketches his universe: his religious journeys followed literary models—from his heroes, Melville and Rimbaud—and in positioning the Beats against the Lost Generation, he turned away from the wasteland of postwar Europe to consider the spiritual possibilities in postwar America. As a means of being “completely free from European influences,” Buddhism was one of many derangements that corresponded to Whitman's insistence on “nothing except nativity.”

Perhaps the most arresting document of the “new style,” one which provided a virtuoso showcase of an attempt at “talking strange” is Norman Mailer's 1957 essay “The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster.” The Beats themselves were “critical of Mailer's aggressive posturing,” but “The White Negro” endures as a defining essay on the hipster because Mailer's contribution to theorizing hip was to historicize and politicize it. Mailer read the mid-century appearance of the hipster in the wake of World War II and the specter of nuclear destruction, and the essay opens by sketching this frame: “Probably, we will never be able to determine the psychic havoc of the concentration camps and the atom bomb upon the unconscious mind of almost everyone alive in these years” (209). For all of these unknowns, Mailer settles upon one absolute certainty for the age: after the wholesale murder of the Holocaust and the bomb, “our death itself would be unknown, unhonored, and unremarked” (209). And “if society was so murderous,” Mailer insists that “the only life-giving answer is to accept the terms of death” (210). Robbed of death, the hipster must seek it out for himself, “on that uncharted journey into the rebellious imperatives of the self” (211). Mailer's existentialist model turned to “the Negro for he has been living on the margin of totalitarianism and democracy for two centuries” (211). For white neophytes unaccustomed to a marginal existence, the Negro became a living model. The hipster learned to survive in a murderous age because he “had absorbed the existentialist synapses of the Negro, and for practical purposes could be considered a white Negro” (213). Primitivism typically read the noble savage as innocent of civilization, but the American mid-century version flipped these values and read white innocence against the terrible knowledge of the Negro.
Mailer's White Negro is extraordinary because it lays bare the construction of the hipster; the Beats may not have stooped to such explanations, but Mailer reasoned through the necessity of an outsider position and read it into the postwar moment. Mailer's writing wavers when he attempts to make his words “swing”; his “jive” falls apart at the precise moments when transcendence is needed, thus revealing the mechanism of cultural appropriation that Beat luminaries shrouded in mystery. Mailer's blackface elicited a powerful response from James Baldwin, who wrote in “The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy” that he could not understand why “Norman appeared to be imitating so many people inferior to himself, i.e., Kerouac, and all the other Suzuki rhythm boys” (296). Baldwin cut right to the heart of the White Negro: “No one is more dangerous than he who imagines himself pure in heart for his purity, by definition, is unassailable” (297). The innocence that longs for blackness is a dangerous sham: as Baldwin writes, “The things that most white people imagine that they can salvage from the storm of life is really, in sum, their innocence. It was this commodity precisely which I had to get rid of at once, literally, on pain of death” (290). Baldwin decisively unMASKS white purity as both a privilege and a fantasy, thus undermining the “Suzuki rhythm boys” who imagined that their ecstatic communions could pierce through civilization and access a pure existence.
Mailer understood that the White Negro was one of a number of poses for the hipster, and in trying to account for the spectrum of possibility he lumped together varying modes of transport: “the Yoga’s prana, the Reichian's orgone, Lawrence’s ‘blood,’ Hemingway’s ‘good,’ the Shavian life-force; ‘It; God” (222). Mailer's list lacks the distinctions of Kerouac's catalog of derangement, and in the absence of an ordering logic, these disparate forces are brought together by a literalized bit of Beat lingo: “I dig.” In a riff on the phrase, Mailer reads the slang literally and elaborates on the concept: “one must occasionally exhaust oneself by digging into the self in order to perceive the outside” (222). The imperative of “digging into the self” echoes the dictates of Buddhism, yet Zen suggests a rather different tone from that of the orgiastic death of Mailer's strident existentialist. Zen has a different kind of response to the forward march of death that the American existentialist chooses to embrace: against Mailer's rebel, Zen offers serenity and an emptiness that holds the promise of the wilderness, a naturalized counterpart to Mailer's urban jungle.

Against the White Negro, Snyder offered the White Indian: in his revolutionary tract “Passage to More than India,” Snyder advocated melding Indians of the East and West in order to create an American tribe of “White Indians” (Earth House Hold 110). Mailer's White Negro was born from, in Mailer's words, "jazz's knifelike entrance into culture” (211), and Andrew Ross elaborates that “jazz was the Golden Fleece of the intellectuals' century-long search for a democratic people's art that was both truly organic and post-agrarian” (93). Unlike jazz's “postagrarian” organic creation in the United States, however, the Indian refers back to a preagrarian and, crucially, wild essence. Snyder's White Indian has the advantage of absolute nativity: while Mailer's Negro subsisted in his no-man's-land for two centuries, the Native American possesses an exponentially longer sweep of history. Mailer and Snyder each created a portrait of primitivism, but with a striking difference: the White Negro believes he can shoulder a history of racism and violence, but the White Indian need not carry the baggage of racialization. By reconfiguring space and time as Turtle Island and millennia, Snyder's figure is simply not bound to the contexts that imprisoned the White Negro.
Snyder's version of Beat transcendence presented a significant departure from Kerouac's desires, which he famously expressed in *On the Road*: *(p.75)*

I wished I were a Denver Mexican, or even a poor overworked Jap, anything but what I was so drearily, a “white man” disillusioned. All my life I'd had white ambitions...I was only myself, Sal Paradise, sad, strolling in this violet dark, this unbearable sweet night, wishing I could exchange worlds with the happy, true-hearted, ecstatic Negroes of America. *(180)*

Speaking of this passage, Baldwin notes in “The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy” that “there is real pain in it, and real loss, however thin” *(298)*. Kerouac's desire for racialized otherness in fact made Zen less interesting for him: in *The Dharma Bums*, Kerouac describes Ray and Japhy as “two strange dissimilar monks on the same path” *(176)*, but by the end of the text their paths have diverged. Kerouac's account repeatedly indicates Ray's skepticism about Japhy's Buddhism, as in Ray's most emphatic statement of his different practice: “I'm not a Zen Buddhist, I'm a serious Buddhist” *(13)*. The exuberant jumble of Kerouac's prose could never be whipped into the austerity of Snyder's Zen, and Kerouac's engagement with Buddhism was itself a pitched battle, in which he fought to curb his vices but ultimately failed. In the end, Kerouac chose one brand of Beat over another; he explains the options in his 1959 essay “*Beatific: The Origins of the Beat Generation*”:

Much of the misunderstanding about hipsters and Beat Generation in general today derives from the fact that there are two distinct styles of hipsterism; cool today is your bearded laconic sage...the “hot” today is the crazy talkative shining eyed (often innocent and openhearted) nut. *(569)*

Kerouac's preference for heat is evident; his dalliance with the cold of Buddhism was temporary. Yet the “innocent and openhearted” option was difficult to sustain, and it tumbled nearly as far from grace as the White Negro, an appellation which quickly became unsayable in a subsequent era of black nationalism.
Snyder's cooler variant of Beat enlightenment was forged in the same moment, but it was not susceptible to the same risks; “your bearded laconic sage” is alive and well today because its construction was impervious to cooling passions. Snyder's vision capitalized on a new resurgence of Orientalism and matched it to a desire for nativity—both through-and through-American predilections—but its genesis in the Beat context lent these desires a purification unique to the era. Just as Kerouac insisted that Beat spiritualism was a deeper version of the mainstream 1950s religious revival, Snyder's Japanese and American cultural visions were not rebellions but intensifications of both a long-standing American Orientalism and a contemporary response to the alienations of the atomic age. In Snyder's hands, Zen became a cleansing light and nativity a pure yearning—and their combination created a new culture.

**Natural Poetry**

Snyder's verse follows the dictates of his cultural formation: the central criterion for his poetry is that it must resonate with the communities that belong to the Great Subculture. In an essay entitled “Poetry and the Primitive,” Snyder opens with a definition: “‘Poetry’ as the skilled and inspired use of voice and language to embody rare and powerful states of mind that are in immediate origin personal to the singer, but at deep levels common to all who listen” (*Earth House Hold* 117). A resonance between personal and communal significance transforms a singular inspiration into a deeper, universal art. Snyder goes on to say that poetry is one of the few arts “with roots in the paleolithic” that “can realistically claim an unchanged function” (*Earth House Hold* 118). His work is thus emphatically not avant-garde; it seeks not to break tradition but to preserve it. Hence, though Snyder uses an array of forms in his verse, he never embraces formal experiment as such. In an unusual outburst in “Tanker Notes,” journal entries from the late 1950s, Snyder contrasts poems that “spring out fully armed” against “those that are the result of artisan care” (*Earth House Hold* 56). The former
leaves one with a sense of gratitude and wonder, and no sense of “I did it”—only the Muse. That level of mind—the cool water—not intellect and not—(as romantics and after have confusingly thought) fantasy-dream world or unconscious. This is just the clear spring—it reflects all things and feeds all things but is of itself transparent.

(Earth House Hold 56-57)

Snyder's transparent poetics suggests that the form of poetry should ultimately be dictated by the natural world. The role of the poet is “to embody rare and powerful states of mind,” and the words ought to bubble up from a “clear spring.”

Snyder's poetry is the source of a growing subfield in poetics which considers the intersection of literature and environmental concerns. John Elder's Imagining the Earth grew from his appreciation of both Snyder's verse and ecological commitments, and Elder argues that “behind America's flourishing poetry of nature lies a reinterpretation of culture” (Imagining 26), in which a new “engagement with culture as a process of decay” (Imagining 30) recontextualizes American culture within a larger, ecological frame. Poetry can provide this larger vision by invoking the natural world; poetry that incorporates natural processes has the unique ability, as Elder puts it, to “show a doorway out of the empty house” (Imagining 35): Snyder's verse steps out from the decaying house of culture and into a rich, natural world. Elder's study assembles a handful of poets who inhabit this doorway, or “ecotone,” which he defines as a “transition between two or more diverse communities” (Imagining 191); for Elder, the figurehead of his assembly is Snyder, who “characteristically (p.77) works at the entangling edge of science and poetry” (Imagining 192). The tension between a decaying civilization and a true culture with an ancient lineage drives Snyder's poetics. His detractors have faulted him for vacillating between “naïveté and desperation,” but it is precisely this edge between a celebration of nature and a critique of culture that his poetry mines—and through which surprising juxtapositions surface.

"Mid-August at Sourdough Mountain Lookout," the opening poem of Snyder's first published collection Riprap (1959), demonstrates this vantage point on a literal edge:

Down valley a smoke haze
Three days heat, after five days rain
Pitch glows on the fir-cones
Across rocks and meadows
Swarms of new flies

I cannot remember things I once read
A few friends, but they are in cities.
Drinking cold snow-water from a tin cup
Looking down for miles
Through high still air. (3)

The essentials of the Japhy Ryder myth are all here: his famed labor as a lookout, his specific knowledge of mountain terrain, and the distant dissolution of the city. The smoke haze in the mountain valley obscures the city, and the “cold snow-water” purifies the poet and the scene so that the poem may come to rest in “high still air.” The things he can’t remember are crucial to his natural vision, which evokes cultural decay in order to conduct a ritual of purification. In staging renunciation, Snyder’s monastic fantasies rely on a perpetual evocation of pollution in order to position himself in the upper air. It is not just that Snyder forgets his city friends—perhaps most important, he can’t recall “things I once read”: this poem has sprung from glowing pitch and melted snow—and not books. In Riprap’s “Milton by Firelight,” Snyder asks,

What use, Milton, a silly story
Of our lost general parents,
eaters of fruit? (9)

Snyder has a different ancestry for himself in mind, one which goes back much further than the tale of “lost general parents.” His poetry makes a concerted effort to break free from such literary antecedents in order to attach his words to the natural world.

Riprap’s title poem carefully matches the word to the world in order to create a path of natural transcendence. “Riprap” is defined on the title (p.78) page as “a cobble of stone laid on steep, slick rock to make a trail for horses in the mountains,” and the poem meditates on the labor of riprapping:

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.
The worlds like an endless
four-dimensional
Game of Go.
ants and pebbles
In the thin loam, each rock a word
a creek-washed stone
Granite: ingrained
with torment of fire and weight
Crystal and sediment linked hot
all change, in thoughts,
As well as things. (32)

The measured pace of the poem is sustained by the weight of the words Snyder ponders and balances: the small rhymes of “mind” and “time” and “loam” and “stone,” the assonance of “Dragging saddles” and consonantal play in “Granite: ingrained.” These perfections seem to occur as they would in nature: they sound less crafted than fitted together, and the careful positioning of the words creates a path dictated as much by the landscape as by language.
The beauty of the poem lies in its swift equivalences, in which radical connections appear as assumptions: words are rocks; “riprap of things” equals “cobble of milky way”; “poems, people” and “lost ponies” all share the same texture of existence. In the poem’s most expansive moment, worlds are imagined as “an endless/four-dimensional/Game of Go,” a game involving black and white stones on a board played throughout East Asia; the poem invokes this more distant perspective in order to sketch its largest view. From this galactic image, the poem narrows its focus to the dirt, to “ants and pebbles,” and then breaks open a single stone to look in the universe layered within it: “all change, in thoughts,/ As well as things.” The smallest bits of earth contain the full history of its “torment of fire and weight,” but most important, they can hold thoughts as well. Snyder rewrites Williams’s famous dictum of “no ideas but in things” to say instead that all things contain all ideas. To raise the single “creek-washed stone” into a repository of “all change” is to reveal in microscopic focus the nature of our world. Snyder insists that the people scattered over this earth are no different from stones; hence, like the stones in the soil, people are embedded in the middle of the poem, caught in a list between poems and lost ponies. A perspective gleaned from stones shuffles—and ultimately restores—the order of things.
Snyder's illustration of the way in which concepts are embedded in things presents an ecological understanding, in which the mind is no longer lord over nature but itself tied to solid materials. In "Riprap," Snyder coins the phrase "the body of the mind," which simultaneously calls forth and undoes Cartesian dualism. Unlike the long-standing elevation of the mind free from the body's constraints, in Snyder's vision the mind requires the body to achieve natural transcendence. This imbrication of the mind within its environment echoes the key concern of environmental literature, which aims to shift the repository of transcendence from the literary mind to the natural environment. In The Environmental Imagination, Lawrence Buell poses this concern as a critical question: "Must literature always lead us away from the physical world, never back to it?" (11). Buell refutes Leo Marx's argument that "Thoreau was not really that interested in nature as such; nature was a screen for something else" (11); Buell instead returns to primary experience by reconsidering a famous passage in The Maine Woods in which Thoreau encounters Mount Katahdin:

Yet even literary Thoreauvians would hardly deny that the passage refers back to an experience of confrontation with an actual landscape that struck Thoreau as more primal than anything he had met before, and that the evocation of that landscape and what sort of relation human beings might sustain to it are crucial preoccupations for Thoreau here. (12–13)

Buell suggests that a confrontation with nature may be something more than a reflection, and, further, he ascribes to the primal scene the power of organizing Thoreau's thoughts: the landscape inspires him to ponder "what sort of relation human beings might sustain to it." Building from Buell's argument, advocates of "ecopoetry" insist that the nature poem refers back to the world: its "major function is to point us outward." The poem is charged with directing its readers to the natural scene of its inspiration, and further, the scene itself exerts a considerable force on the poet's sensibilities.
Yet to write a poem which points beyond its textual confines, in which significance is not created within the lines but resides in the world (p.80) beyond, presents a challenge that gets to the heart of modern poetics. Pound’s Imagism insisted on presentation over mimesis—in Pound’s words, “In every art I can think of we are damned and clogged by the mimetic”25—and sought to present things themselves, but his images were powered by a faith in the word, as in his enduring belief in the direct reference of Chinese writing. Snyder, too, eschews the arbitrariness of the signifier by figuring language as a wild system,26 but his transparent poetics evinces a deep skepticism about the word. For Pound, the word was itself an organic entity, but Snyder ranks the primal world above the secondary word. Indeed, Snyder’s poetics has made his work less amenable to literary analysis: New Criticism insisted that meaning arose from within the poem,27 and the subsequent trend of discursive analysis read a belief in the primal world as a dangerous misperception. To think beyond the language of the poem has long been deemed naive or worse, but in separating himself from this critical mainstream, Snyder has cast his lot with a dream of incantatory language in order to connect himself to an archaic lineage. The ritual aspect of his verse—often heavily accentuated, as in Myths and Texts—makes evident this core poetic belief, in which words attend to a range of processes and perhaps even effect them but ultimately return to actors in the world.

Snyder’s poetry represents serious and concerted efforts to lead us back to the work of sustaining communal life. His poetry is occasionally consumed by physical labor, as in The Back Country’s “How to Make Stew in the Pinacate Desert: Recipe for Locke & Drum,” which is a straight recipe in the second person with a sprinkling of place-names. Snyder contextualizes his writing as a kind of seasonal labor in a 1973 interview, explaining that

the way I live now, I probably write more in the winter. Because in the spring I go out in the desert for a while, and I give a few more readings, and then when I get back it’s time to turn the ground over and start spring planting, and then right after that’s done it’s time to do the building that has to be done. (Real Work 42)
The list of chores continues. In his 1977 *Ohio Review* interview with Paul Geneson, Snyder relegates poetry to a secondary concern:

Geneson: You would like to see poetry “grounded” essentially, rather than off in some metaphysical flight?

Snyder: I would like to see people “grounded.”

Geneson: In touch with their environment?

Snyder: In touch with their own lives.

Geneson: In touch with their bodies?

Snyder: Yes. And the let the poetry do what it wants from that. Get the people grounded and the poetry'll take care of itself. (*Real Work* 72)

(p.81) In Snyder's world, poetry comes after “the real work” has been finished—as a result, his poems are artifacts of moments of lived transcendence. As Snyder explains in another 1977 interview, “I always looked on the poems I wrote as gifts that were not essential in my life; if I never wrote another one, it wouldn't be a great tragedy” (*Real Work* 127). He goes on to say that he can't help writing poetry, but his poems are essentially a way of marking lived experiences.

Snyder's poems are thus always occasional poems, yet the burdens of occasional poetry are no less weighty for being tied to an event. In “As for Poets,” the final poem of *Turtle Island*, Snyder demonstrates how to be a poet in six small segments, one for each of the five ancient elements of the physical world and the sixth, mind, added by Buddhist philosophers. The segments move from “The Earth Poets/Who write small poems” to “The Space Poet,” whose poems, “like wild geese,/ Fly off the edge” (87–88). Each poet is planted within his respective element, and the poems produced are akin to the things and animals that belong to earth, air, fire, water, and space. The final segment is the most intriguing:

A Mind Poet
Stay in the house.
The house is empty
And it has no walls.
The poem
Is seen from all sides,
Everywhere, 
At once. (88)

The house stands even though it is empty and lacks walls; it is 
akin to “the body of the mind,” in which the mind was 
anchored to its environment. The missing walls are 
paradoxically necessary to imagine the emptiness within, and 
the virtue of this contradiction is that it creates an inside and 
an outside while at the same time demonstrating their 
contiguity. This last kind of poem in “As for Poets” marks a 
crucial inner insight that is simultaneously exteriorized; as 
Snyder makes clear in a note to the poem, “Now, we are both 
in, and outside, the world at once” (114). The extraordinary 
home of the Mind Poet permits a transmission between 
interior and exterior realms.

The Mind Poet's empty house recalls Snyder's earliest verse, 
his translations of the Tang Dynasty poet Han Shan, entitled 
Cold Mountain Poems. As Snyder writes in a note to the 
preface, “Kanzan, or Han-shan, ‘Cold Mountain’ takes his 
name from where he lived. He is a mountain madman in an old 
Chinese line of ragged hermits. When he talks about Cold 
Mountain he means himself, his home, his state of 
mind” (Riprap 35). These translations are heir to Pound's 
pioneering translations from the Chinese in Cathay,28 but in 
contrast to the different voices in Pound’s (p.82) renderings, 
the poems of Snyder's translations are all told through a single 
voice. Snyder has created a reflection of himself in these 
translations,29 as evidenced in Kerouac's description of Japhy 
Ryder translating these poems in The Dharma Bums: Japhy 
explains, “Han Shan you see was a Chinese scholar who got 
sick of the big city and the world and took off to hide in the 
mountains,” to which Ray promptly responds, “Say that sounds 
like you” (20). “Cold Mountain” names the poet and his abode, 
thus binding the poet to his environment, and Poem 16 
presents this house:

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. (Riprap 54)30
Han Shan is the exemplary Mind Poet and a model for Snyder himself, whose transparent poems all aim to access the emptiness at the center of the house.\textsuperscript{31} The singular burden of Snyder's poetics lies in the requirements for “A Mind Poet”: his verse enacts an extraordinary transmission in which “we are both in, and outside, the world at once.” Snyder's insistence that the poem does not stand apart from nature has meant opening his verse to the outside, and, further, “The east wall beats on the west wall” because an empty center brings far corners into striking distance.

The “environmental imagination” insists that the person is subject to nature, but this truth is not enough to make a poem. It is not that the poem is insufficient to the world—this would only mean a failed poem—but that poetry on the edge between the physical world and the literary imagination must provide a channel between these two realms. Snyder chided Romantic poets for turning to a “fantasy-dream world” for transcendence as a weakness which mistakenly suggests the insufficiency of the natural world, but his nature poems are no less tied to a dream of transcendence: Zen correspondence is crucial to his poetics. Snyder's poetry adheres to the natural order of things, in which the poem is part of the world—but in order to evoke this world within the poem, the poem must signal the necessarily partial quality of its evocation by referring to an emptiness at its heart. Zen makes possible the transmission from inside the house of the Mind Poet to the great outdoors; its “nothingness” presents an ineffable wilderness which resides both in the world and deep within the self. Snyder is finally a Mind Poet; the equivalence between Han Shan and Cold Mountain describes the central ambition of his poetics, in which words stack together like the walls of the Mind Poet's home, marking the division between inside and out but permeable to both, which share a single truth of nothingness.

\textbf{(p.83) Inhuman Touch}
Snyder takes pains to specify the kind of communion with nature he espouses, separating revelatory insight from the traditional Western model. In \textit{Riprap}'s “T 2 Tanker Blues,” he explains the sublimity of nothingness in long, Whitmanesque lines:

\begin{quote}
Mind swarming with pictures, cheap magazines, 
drunk brawls, low
\end{quote}
books and days at sea; hatred of machinery and
whoring my hands and back to move this military
oil—
I sit on the boat-deck finally alone: borrowing the
oiler's dirty cot,
I see the moon, white wake, black water & a few
bright stars.
All day I read de Sade—I loathe that man—
wonder on his challenge,
seek sodomy & murder in my heart—& dig the
universe as playful, cool, and infinitely blank—
De Sade and Reason and the Christian Love. (29)

The poem opens with a trash-littered mind and moves to
contemplate “the moon, white wake, black water & a few
bright stars” in a moment of respite from the filth. In
contrasting his moment of tranquility against Sade's “low
books,” Snyder's “playful, cool, and infinitely blank” universe
rises above “De Sade and Reason and Christian Love.”
Foucault positioned Sade at “the threshold of modern culture”
as the herald of an epistemic shift in Western thought in The
Order of Things (210), but Snyder wants nothing to do with
this kind of progress. Snyder casts away the archaeology of
the Western mind to offer a hip, “infinitely blank” universe in
its stead.

Snyder poses Sade's inhumanity against a truly “inhuman”
possibility, and the poem continues by showing us the glories
of this other inhumanity:

Inhuman ocean, black horizon, light blue moon-
filled sky, the moon,
a perfect wisdom pearl—old symbols, waves,
reflections of the
moon—those names of goddesses, that rabbit on
its face,
the myths, the tides,
Inhuman Altair—that “inhuman” talk; the eye that
sees all space is
socketed in this one human skull. Transformed.
The source
of the sun's heat is the mind,
I will not cry Inhuman & think that makes us
small and nature great,
we are, enough, as we are—
Invisible seabirds track us, saviours come and
save us. (29)
Snyder elaborates upon what he first described as “moon, white wake, black water & a few stars”: the moon provides an entire world of associations, and Snyder notably cites the Japanese saying that a rabbit is visible (p.84) on the moon—a hint of an Eastern inhumanity that resonates with the “Game of Go” found in “Riprap”; and in marked contrast to the name of Sade, Altair names a star, a proper name for an inhuman entity. Indeed, Snyder takes apart the human body to argue for a transforming inhumanity: the “socketed” eye is itself a moon that can see the constellations glowing “in this one human skull”—thus revising Emerson’s “transparent eyeball” within an inhuman perspective. In making an analogy between looking out at the sky and gazing deep within, into a comparably wild interior, Snyder insists that one is not greater than the other: “I will not cry Inhuman & think that makes us small and nature great.” This is precisely the failing of “De Sade and Reason and the Christian Love,” and Snyder's alternate vision presents an essential equality between the universe within and without “this one human skull.”
Against the single savior of Christian Love, Snyder presents a streaming plurality of saviors in the form of seabirds, creatures who faithfully track us and see us as part of their natural world. Snyder often returns to these kinds of saviors—he imagines being followed by wolves and other wild animals—because it is through this kind of vision that we may see the “infinitely blank.” In suggesting a natural perspective through a bird’s-eye view, Snyder replaces Sadean inhumanity with a nonhuman perspective. Dean reads Snyder’s “impersonalist aesthetic” (487) to argue that “it is not so much a question of speaking on behalf of the other as it is of opening a conduit through which the other—including the otherness of nonhuman nature—may speak” (485). Discussing the significance of Snyder’s endeavor “in which nonhuman nature gains a voice” (490), Dean analyzes Snyder’s attempt to “treat nonhuman nature ethically” as ultimately a “de-egoizing” movement (494). Such gestures are possible only if the human perspective is cut down from its heights, but to conflate the outside universe with the interior of the individual skull is less a sign of humility than a differing system of equivalences. Snyder’s alternate ethical system, which argues for the integrity of nonhumanity, undermines Western models of transcendence to install a voice with expansive capabilities—indeed, the voice that can say “I will not cry Inhuman & think that makes us small and nature great” echoes Whitmanesque grandeur. Dean frames Snyder’s aesthetics in the context of Eliot’s “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” and following this insight, I believe we may replace Tradition with the Great Subculture and Individual Talent with Zen enlightenment. Eliot famously compared the Individual Talent to a piece of metal filament which registered shifts in the monuments of Tradition, and in Snyder’s case, the “infinitely blank” mind can encompass the essence of the Great Subculture.

Snyder’s fullest exploration of the communion between mind and universe unfolds in his life’s work, *Mountains and Rivers without End*, begun in 1956 and completed and published in 1996. Kerouac recorded the genesis of this text in *The Dharma Bums*, in Japhy’s voice: (p.85)
Know what I'm gonna do? I'll do a new long poem called “Rivers and Mountains Without End” and just write it on and on on a scroll and unfold on and on with new surprises and always what went before forgotten, see, like a river, or like one of them real long Chinese silk paintings that show two little men hiking in an endless landscape of gnarled old trees and mountains so high they merge with the fog in the upper silk void. (200)

Snyder's long poem follows a Chinese convention which he elaborates in “Blue Mountains Constantly Walking,” an essay published in *The Practice of the Wild*: referring to “several surviving large Chinese horizontal handscrolls from premodern eras titled something like ‘Mountains and Rivers Without End,’” Snyder explains that “‘Mountains and waters’ is a way to refer to the totality of the process of nature. As such it goes well beyond dichotomies of purity and pollution, natural and artificial. The whole, with its rivers and valleys, obviously includes farms, fields, villages, cities, and the (once comparatively small) dusty world of human affairs” (102). In aiming to represent an unfolding totality, *Mountains and Rivers without End* follows an American tradition: the long poem tends to describe a full vision of a single world, whether it is Eliot's unreal city, Pound's idealized state, or Stevens's supreme fiction. The forty-year creation of *Mountains and Rivers without End* expresses a desire that resonates with—and perhaps even exceeds—those of his modernist predecessors: Snyder wants to present “the totality of the process of nature” as he experiences it.33

Snyder's experience of “the whole” is integral to his vision, and the mountains and rivers of his title call to mind one of the most oft-cited tales of Zen enlightenment. Alan Watts cites this parable in *The Way of Zen*:

> Before I had studied Zen for thirty years, I saw mountains as mountains, and waters as waters. When I arrived at a more intimate knowledge, I came to the point where I saw that mountains are not mountains, and waters are not waters. But now that I have got its very substance I am at rest. For it's just that I see mountains once again as mountains, and waters once again as waters. (127)
In naming the representative figures of Zen's most important lesson, *Mountains and Rivers without End* thus brings together the Great Subculture and Eastern transcendence, Snyder's Tradition and Individual Talent. Snyder underscores this significant intersection of aesthetic representation and Zen enlightenment in his book's epigraph, in which he cites Dogen, the thirteenth-century founder of the Soto school of Zen: "If you say the painting is not real, then the material phenomenal world is not real, the Dharma is not real. Unsurpassed enlightenment is in a (p.86) painting. The entire phenomenal universe and the empty sky are nothing but a painting."

*Mountains and Rivers without End* thus layers poetry onto the Zen premise of the shared reality of the painting and the "entire phenomenal universe." The form of the book, borrowed from Chinese art, renders visible its terrain, which paradoxically transcends its textual boundaries by being "nothing but" a book. Whitman insisted that his book was no book, but *Mountains and Rivers without End* relies on a Zen sleight of hand to make this point.

Snyder's long poem unrolls in pieces—the poems bear the marks of their creation at different points in his life—but there is a steady, ambling pace to *Mountains and Rivers without End*, and its poems describe a series of revelatory walks through different landscapes. The opening poem, "Endless Streams and Mountains," shows us the painting on the scroll by describing the path that wends through it. Snyder likens the eye following this path to a body walking it, and by the end of the scroll, "The watching boat has floated off the page" (6). The boat shares the ability of the person standing before the painting: both can watch. And, further, both can slip beyond the painting: just as the boat floats away, Snyder describes his own walk away from the painting: "—I walk out of the museum—low gray clouds over the lake—chill March breeze" (8). In fact, upon leaving the museum he sees a scene of clouds and lake which mirrors in small part the picture within; this actual scene shares the same ontological status as the Chinese scroll.

The poem closes by repeating its opening tones:

> Walking on walking,
> under foot earth turns
> Streams and mountains never stay the same. (9)
“Blue Mountains Constantly Walking” insists on the moving force of the mountains themselves, and “walking on walking” elegantly describes the experience of visually walking through a landscape which is itself a living, walking entity. This repetition seals the identity between the walker and the path—and even the earth itself, turning and walking its own path in the firmament.

In the penultimate poem of *Mountains and Rivers without End*, we hear the voice of the mountain itself. “The Mountain Spirit” describes a dialogue between the poet and the Mountain Spirit that takes place in the White Mountains:

A voice says

“You had a bit of fame once in the city
for poems of mountains,
here it's real.”

*(p.87)*

What?

“Yes. Like the lines

Walking on walking
under foot  earth turns

But what do you know of minerals and stone.
For a creature to speak of all that scale of time—
what for?

Still, I'd like to hear that poem.” (141-142)

This Mountain Spirit is fashioned after a Japanese mountain spirit, “a mysterious old woman dwelling in the mountains,“34 the title figure of the Noh play *Yamamba*; the figure of the Eastern shaman thus makes possible what Dean termed Snyder's understanding of “the literary as a realm in which otherness is given airtime” (490).35 The Mountain Spirit cites *Mountains and Rivers without End*’s opening lines and requests a reading, and Snyder has cast his own poem—indeed, the book—into the wilderness. By the end of his career-spanning volume, he finds an ideal audience: the mountains themselves. Through this repetition of the beginning of his book, we may posit an arc for *Mountains and Rivers without End* as a whole in which the poet who “had a bit of fame once in the city” returns to the “real” of the mountain.
Later that night, the Mountain Spirit approaches
in a dream:
Old woman? white ragged hair?
in the glint of Algol, Altair, Deneb,
Sadr, Aldebaran—saying, “I came to hear—” (143)

We recognize “Altair” from the long night of “T 2 Tanker
Blues,” and Snyder names the stars that illuminate the
Mountain Spirit. On this lit stage, Snyder recites a poem
within the poem, also entitled “The Mountain Spirit” but
distinguished by a different font on the page. This internal
poem begins by repeating again the opening tones of “walking
on walking” but goes on to provide a portrait of the mountain.
After hearing the poem, the Mountain Spirit proclaims

“All art and song
is sacred to the real.
As such.” (146)

The Mountain Spirit employs the language of Zen suchness¹³⁶
and nothingness to posit a relationship between aesthetics and
“The real.” The framing mechanism creates a burrowing effect,
in which we crack open the poem to discover another poem
inside, with the same title. Like the world embedded in the
single stone in “Riprap,” the innovation of (p.88) this
frametale creates a correspondence between inside and
outside by imagining a further interiority, thus mirroring
within the poem a larger continuity between poem and
world.¹³⁷

In “The Making of Mountains and Rivers without End,” an
essay appended to the completed poem, Snyder discusses the
end of the text:

People used to say to me, with a knowing smile,
“Mountains and Rivers is endless, isn’t it?” I never
thought so. Landscapes are endless in their own degree,
but I knew that my time with this poem would eventually
end. The form and the emptiness of the Great Basin
showed me where to close it. (158)
The final poem of the book, “Finding the Space in the Heart,” describes his many visits to the Great Basin over the years. At each encounter, he experiences the same glorious emptiness, an ability to return that is at odds with a developing Western literary experience, which Snyder signals in a small reference: “Off nowhere, to be or not to be” (151). 38 Hamlet’s question does not apply to Zen consciousness because, of course, they are the same. No dilemma is possible between being and not being because they are both nowhere:

    all equal, far reaches, no bounds.
    Sound swallowed away,
    no waters, no mountains, no
    bush no grass and
    because no grass
    no shade but your shadow. (151)

The ultimate Zen realization of the book is to say that there are no mountains and rivers at the same time that the book presents them in their totality. Mountains and Rivers without End closes by pointing to the materiality of the book:

    The space goes on.
    But the wet black brush
    tip drawn to a point,
    lifts away. (152)

The book is the Chinese scroll: both are as real as “the material phenomenal world,” and both have the same ending —“the material phenomenal world.” Just as Snyder walked away from the painting to see a small part of it outside of the museum, we readers are urged to get up from the poem to see in our world a fragment of what we’ve witnessed on the page.
The lesson of *Mountains and Rivers without End* is ultimately a familiar one, one we heard in “Mid-August at Sourdough Mountain Lookout” in which the mountain reveals its single truth. The journey toward Zen (p.89) enlightenment is not a developing story but a web of mirroring instances, and the text celebrates the multiple overlapping steps of its revelatory walks. The modernist epic was fascinated by underworlds, but there is no model for depth in Snyder's poetics: his longest poetic endeavor reveals endlessly reflecting surfaces upon surfaces: “walking on walking.” When Snyder rejects civilization and celebrates the unconscious, he replaces a depth model with an endless horizontal strand, and his complete jettisoning of theological transcendence—in contrast to Pound, who posited an earthly paradise but also believed in hell—for the completed present moment of Zen enlightenment lends his American epic the singular distinction of complete success. Pound lamented in *The Cantos* that he “cannot make it cohere” (816), but Snyder can turn to the Great Basin to close his epic and signal its full completion because the landscape, poem, and poet share the same emptiness.39 This shared identity reveals the flat surface of his long poem; his epic is one scroll which repeats the single gesture of pointing beyond.
Within its unfolding instances, however, *Mountains and Rivers without End* presents multiple surfaces as the terrain changes over time and space; from its unifying premise, the individual poems trace a shifting consciousness and landscape. Snyder has been attacked for his occasionally strident political voice, his cultural appropriations—notably including his depiction of women—but *Mountains and Rivers without End* is largely free of these elements. The strangeness of *Mountains and Rivers without End* lies in its perpetual enlightenment; Snyder's epic calls forth the world with complete confidence—even the Mountain Spirit dances to his verse—and ultimately presents a poem of America. Yet the time has passed for a “rucksack revolution,” and in the wake of the minority nationalist movements in the 1960s and 1970s, Snyder's own recourse to Eastern and Native American cultures undermined the very universalizing gestures that such modes provided. Pound could no longer imagine the kind of unity Whitman fervently believed, and Snyder's late adoption of the mantle of the bard may seem downright fantastic. But the death knell for the bard had sounded long before Whitman's version of it, and Snyder's fusion of East and West was a true innovation that saw America as a wilderness—for which he labored as an impassioned spokesperson. I believe Snyder's self-styled continuation of Whitman's legacy stands at the end of a line of poetic voices that strove to speak for the whole of America, yet the imaginative work required to sustain this possibility ultimately led Snyder away from poetry. Back in 1956, Snyder sailed for Japan as his literary star was ascending; he let go just when everyone else was hanging on because poetry, finally, was a lesser calling than Zen and environmental advocacy.
For mid-century artists who shared in a new romantic vision that revered angels at the edge of the postwar cultural consensus, the siren call of Whitman's vista could be met by finding an alternate path home. (p.90) Snyder modified the United States–East Asian alliances of American Orientalism to condition his own belonging to the American landscape—but his extraliterary commitments did not find their most effective vehicle in poetry. The paradox of his recapitulation of Whitman's totality is that Snyder's oeuvre exemplifies the compartmentalization of the postwar era: in contrast to the modernist totality exemplified by Pound's insistence that it could all come together in the poem, Snyder's political, scientific, and religious convictions, despite his efforts to bind them together, stand as separate pursuits.42 Poetry as a whole was a casualty of the postwar era, but Snyder's particular investments reveal the waning of one kind of Orientalist imagination in particular: as the literary romance of the Pacific Rim was unmasked as an economic one, the poetry that continued to circle this basin was branded as imperial fantasy.43 The world continues to spin away from the Mind Poet, whose celebration of stillness seems like a distant idyll—and whose continuing belief in totality has become a liability.

Notes:
(1.) In addition to Snyder's interest in the Orient, Michael Davidson reads Snyder's poetic method as “a version of Pound's ideogrammatic method, juxtaposing one cultural tradition on top of another with a minimum of critical commentary” (San Francisco Renaissance 103); Christopher Beach similarly argues that “Snyder is drawn to Pound's ideogrammatic method and social and economic critiques” (198).

(2.) In “Regarding Silence,” David Gilcrest compares Western and Eastern transcendence: “The idealist epiphany of Plato and the theist epiphany of Augustine both stand in stark contrast to what we might call the materialist epiphany recorded in Taoist and Zen literature” (26).

(3.) Seager 92. Seager provides a clear overview of American Buddhism.

(4.) Snodgrass discusses this history on 118.

(5.) Seager 90.
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(6.) Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, 203. Fields's groundbreaking account linked American Buddhism to the counterculture, and Seager pinpoints this bias: “In effect, he gave countercultural Buddhists a sense of their own indigenous Buddhist lineage” (x).

(7.) Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake* 205.

(8.) Fields cites James as “an early and important influence” for Suzuki: “James had classified the various elements of mystical experience; in the same way, Suzuki categorized satori” (*How the Swans Came to the Lake* 205).

(9.) This chapter focuses on the successful rise of Zen in the postwar era, but in the following chapter I discuss American sentiment against Buddhism and Japanese Americans during World War II.

(10.) Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake* 204. Describing Japhy's cottage, Kerouac mentions Blyth's text in *The Dharma Bums*: “books, books, hundreds of books everything from Catullus to Pound to Blyth” (17). Jeff Humphries provides a more recent reading of Buddhism and literature, in which he turns to Buddhism as a corrective to dualism, “a particularly troublesome aspect of every Western theory of literature” (xii).

(11.) Watts singled out Snyder as a “Buddhist beatnik hero”: “my only regret is that I cannot formally claim him as my spiritual successor. He did it all on his own, but nevertheless he is just exactly what I have been trying to say” (quoted from Tweed and Prothero 231).

(12.) Davidson makes a similar point in *Guys Like Us*: “Snyder is himself a product of orientalist discourse through Jack Kerouac's portrayal of him as Japhy Ryder in the novel *The Dharma Bums*” (86).

(13.) Bernard W. Quetchenbach notes that “his acknowledgment that he turned to Buddhism because Native American religions were not accessible to non-Indians is well known” (102).

(15.) Katsunori Yamazoto, citing Junjiro Takakuso's *The Essentials of Buddhist Philosophy*, explains this figure from the Avatamsaka sutra, Indra's net, as "a net decorated with bright stones on each knot of the mesh," and the jewels reflecting each other endlessly, reflecting "the real facts of the world' mutually interpenetrating" (232). Yamazoto notes that Snyder's Buddhist creation, a "daring new synthesis," is "perhaps not feasible in the vision of traditional Buddhists, as Snyder himself is aware" (234).

(16.) In the foreword to Suzuki's *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, Carl Jung discusses the Zen postulate of "no mind" in psychological terms, as the "readiness of the unconscious contents to break through to the consciousness" (22).

(17.) Freud presents a vision of Rome in which both Nero's Golden House and the Colosseum appear in one spot (18).

(18.) Ross 88. As Ross puts it, "Mailer's essay was an attempt to provide a political form for the disaffections of the hipster code" (87). John Tytell identifies "The White Negro" as "the first philosophical manifesto of the Beat movement" (309).

(19.) Eric Lott writes, "Mailer and other white Negroes inherited a structure of feeling whose self-valorizing marginality and distinction require a virtual impersonation of black manhood" (484).

(20.) Davidson elaborates this distinction: "When translated into poetics, these differences in spiritual practice can be seen in the opposition between a poetics of immediacy and improvisation, derived from Whitman or jazz, and a poetics of objectivist clarity and economy, associated with Pound or Williams" (*San Francisco Renaissance* 98).

(21.) *Some of the Dharma*, Kerouac's tome of notes which charts his efforts to make peace with Buddhism, describes multiple attempts to transpose Buddhism into Western terms.
(22.) Quetchenbach 118. Quetchenbach notes in particular the “didactic and superior tone” (116) that marks some of Snyder's poems. Davidson, too, notes the “shrill, hectoring tone” of Snyder's pedagogical poetry (San Francisco Renaissance 109). In a reading of Turtle Island, Charles Altieri concludes that “the need to prophesy creates a burden that Snyder's particular use of aesthetic structures for epistemological functions cannot easily carry” (763).

(23.) J. Scott Bryson offers a definition in his introduction: “Ecopoetry is a subset of nature poetry that, while adhering to certain conventions of romanticism, also advances beyond that tradition and takes on distinctly contemporary problems and issues, thus resulting in a version of nature poetry generally marked by three primary characteristics” (5): “ecocentrism, a humble appreciation of wildness, and a skepticism toward hyperrationality and its resultant overreliance on technology” (7).

(24.) Scigaj 38. Scigaj argues that “sustainable poetry maintains a healthy balance” between the “textual and referential needs” of the poem (78). His argument takes on language theory to argue for a phenomenological reading of contemporary poetry; the simultaneous resistance to and use of key poststructural terms in his study invites further questions.

(25.) From “I gather the limbs of Osiris,” Selected Prose 42.


(27.) Edward Brunner explains, “To read New Critically, nothing intertextual was required. By insisting on the autonomy of the artwork, the New Criticism democratized the reading site. At the same time, the New Criticism succeeded in professionalizing that reading site by claiming a distinct set of interpretive procedures that would do justice to the literary text” (6–7).

(28.) In Orientalism, Modernism, and the American Poem, Kern reads Snyder's translations as “a replay of Waley's debate with Pound” (233).
(29.) Kern explains that Snyder left out the “domestic and mundane dimensions of Han-shan's character” because he is “more interested in his antinomian spirituality and his eccentricity and irreverence” (Orientalism, Modernism, and the American Poem 236).

(30.) This poem represents Snyder's most dramatic intervention as a translator of Han Shan: he breaks the poem into two strophes, and the second half is translated into colloquial American English.

(31.) These open houses were also a kind of blueprint for Snyder's actual house in Northern California.

(32.) It was Kerouac who took this idea literally when he famously typed On the Road onto a single scroll of paper. Snyder's long poem is in fact less continuous than Kerouac's novel.

(33.) Mountains and Rivers without End is in fact Snyder's second epic: he completed Myths and Texts in 1956, a “poem sequence” whose aim is, as Snyder explains in his introduction, “to find a way to actually ‘belong to the land’” (viii).

(34.) Chung 49. Chung explains that “the dance portrayed in ‘The Mountain Spirit’ is modeled after the dance in Noh drama” (50).

(35.) In Greening the Lyre, Gilcrest argues that “it is clear that an ecocentric ethic is better served by aesthetic strategies that eschew the nonhuman speaking subject in favor of a rhetoric of alinguistic agency” (59). Snyder presents his nonhuman subjects in a variety of ways, but this speaking subject appears as a kind of reward for a lifetime of poetic endeavor: at the far end of his epic, Snyder permits himself to have a dialogue and dance with the mountain.

(36.) As Watts explains, “To arrive at reality—at ‘suchness’—is to go beyond karma, beyond consequential action, and to enter a life which is completely aimless” (The Way of Zen 144).

(37.) The dance of “The Mountain Spirit and me” results in a passage reminiscent of a nursery rhyme (147). Once poetry is opened to reveal poetry, a strange hollowness pervades the poem's finale.
(38.) A second reference to Shakespeare appears in Snyder's depiction of the landscape: “The tooth/of a far peak called King Lear” (151).

(39.) In “Mountains and Rivers Are Us,” Kern reads the end of Snyder's epic against other modernist epics which were “notoriously difficult to conclude and even resistant to closure, ending, in some cases, only with the deaths of their authors” (122).

(40.) Feminist critics have found much to deplore in Snyder's poetry, as in Riprap’s “In Praise of Sick Women,” which opens with “The female is fertile, and discipline/(contra naturam) only/confuses her” (6).

(41.) In “Created Space,” Nick Selby reads Snyder's epic against “Emerson's desire to see America as a poem” (42–43) in order to register the poem's “anxieties that haunt American culture” (42); he argues that “Despite its echoes of Far-Eastern poetics, its structural use of Japanese Noh theatre, and its reliance on classical Chinese landscape painting as an aesthetic model, Snyder's text explicity foregrounds the sorts of impossibilities of reading the land that Emerson's vision of America as a poem discloses” (48). I trace such “anxieties” in Snyder's career, but I find Mountains and Rivers without End to be curiously less interested in these issues; indeed, Snyder's final version of Mountains and Rivers without End emphasizes its Eastern aesthetics and serenity.

(42.) Ecocriticism also exists at a crossroads between disciplines which tend toward increasing specialization. As Quetchenbach explains in defining nature writing, “Though this nature writing is conceived in various ways, there is something of a consensus that the blending of scientific, personal, and philosophic perspectives and the tension between those perspectives is intrinsic to and central to nature writing as it is currently practiced in America” (2).

(43.) In Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim, Gray writes, “The search for an alternative Pacific Rim discourse motivates my own study of Gary Snyder” (20). See Gray's first chapter for an insightful account of the development of Pacific Rim discourse.