

From Lookout to Ashram: The Way of Gary Snyder

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PART ONE

I know of no one since Thoreau who has so thoroughly espoused the wild as Gary Snyder—and no one who is so much its poet. His root metaphor, the “back country,” covers all that Thoreau, explicitly or implicitly, meant by the “wild.” “Poetry and the Primitive,” one of the recent essays collected in *Earth House Hold* (1969), is his most important statement and the resolution of much of his work, an essay comparable in import, though not in distinction of style, to Thoreau’s “Walking.” Thoreau’s essay, originally a lecture called “The Wild,” is testamentary, and so is Snyder’s, though his is not terminal. It does not conclude a life but draws a phase of life to conclusion and, in this way and by the affirmation of writing, announces a new departure at a deeper depth of realization. The two essays that follow it, “Dharma Queries” and “Suwa-no-Se Island and the Banyan Ashram,” record his vows and practice, and the latter begins his life anew with his marriage to Masa Uehara, whom he celebrates in *Regarding Wave* (1969), his latest book of poems.

Earth House Hold, spanning the years 1952 to 1967, provides an excellent introduction to a poet whose poetry, because of its autobiographical nature and allusions to Oriental and American Indian lore, is not always readily available. Its title feelingly translates “ecology,” a science that Paul Shepard and Daniel McKinley consider subversive—subversive, and urgent, in respect to the attitudes and ends of overly-technological civilization.* Its subtitle, “Technical Notes & Queries to Fellow Dharma Revolutionaries,” suggests this revolutionary character, and as a manual for revolution, it offers a way (of thought and action) and indicates the studies and disciplines that, in the author’s experience, lead us back to the back country where we may enjoy “Housekeeping on Earth.” As “dharma” implies, this revolution turns on truth; it is what Emerson called a silent revolution of thought, and the thought, much of it, is Oriental, the “primal thought” spoken of in Whitman’s “Passage to India.” The revolutionaries are spiritual seekers whom Snyder, not without humor, now addresses as guerrillas. He once called them “Dharma-hobos” (in 1956) and Jack Kerouac, in the title of a novel relating his meeting and experience with Snyder, called them “Dharma-bums” (in

**The Subversive Science: Essays Toward an Ecology of Man*, Houghton Mifflin Co., New York, 1969.

1958). Kerouac even prophesied a “rucksack revolution” and in his novel Japhy Ryder (Gary Snyder) says: “Think what a great world revolution will take place when East meets West finally, and it’ll be guys like us that start the thing. Think of millions of guys all over the world with rucksacks on their backs tramping around the back country and hitchhiking and bringing the word down to everybody.” The revolutionary here—in the 1950’s—is one who withdraws from society; he “signs off,” as Thoreau would say, and becomes a saunterer, a holy-lander. Bum, for Kerouac, translates *bhikkhu*, monk; hopping freights and hitchhiking are in keeping with a free life of voluntary poverty. Or, in the phrase Snyder uses to characterize his friend Nanao Sakaki—a phrase that also characterizes him and reminds one of Bashō—the revolutionary may be a “wanderer and poet,” whose only moral imperative “in this yuga,” as Snyder declares for himself in the first journal, is to communicate. Now, at the end of the 1960’s, as the subtitle indicates, this social passivity, so much in the grain of Eastern thought, is disclaimed; “revolutionary” has the meaning of the 1960’s and the goal of revolution is represented for Snyder in the I. W. W. slogan, “Forming a new society within the shell of the old.” Snyder’s book begins where Kerouac’s *The Dharma Bums*, a book about individual salvation, ends. It reflects the changing life-style, the increasing activism and communitarianism, of the past decade, and its quiet confidence and sense of vast tributary support (mostly out of the past—Snyder dates some essays and poems from the time of the earliest cave paintings) are noteworthy. It may be described briefly as a development from lookout to ashram.

The revolution Gary Snyder intends is vouched for by his life and work, by his poetry and by these journals and essays—this record of a life. Like Thoreau, he is a figure: he himself exemplifies his thought. This has much to do with his distinction and attractiveness. In the early days of the Beats, Kerouac paid him the tribute of *The Dharma Bums*, which, for all of its rapturous sentiment, is essentially sound portraiture. Robert Bly, the often testy Crunk of *The Sixties*, called him an “original man” and in treating his early work outlined a program for the American imagination. James Dickey acknowledged him by distinguishing his orientalism from “the mail order orientalism of the West Coast crowd.” And Kenneth Rexroth, the senior West Coast poet to whom Snyder dedicated *The Back Country*, ranked him highest of the poets of his generation because of the range of his “real life” experience, his “life of eventfulness.”

While partial, these assessments are substantial and accord with the reasons for Snyder’s increasing reputation and recognition. His popularity among those whose response makes popularity a significant measure is almost as great as Allen Ginsberg’s. Like Ginsberg, he stands for something not easily defined, especially by someone of another generation. To the young in search of an estimable way of being in the world (poetry is its correlative, one of its insignia but not necessarily its end), he is a hero, as Ginsberg, in the guise of a character in Kerouac’s novel, once remarked (“Japhy Ryder is a great new hero of American culture”). An acceptable earnestness and moral seriousness have much to do with such popularity—certainly more than the poetry, which, as poetry, has not yet been suf-

ficiently considered. The poetry is immediately interesting in an exotic way, like Snyder himself, for both tell us, as Thoreau said of the best poets, that here is someone who has gone beyond “the tame and civil side of nature” and has seen “the west side of [the] mountain.” Snyder is learned, he has been to the academy, to Reed, Indiana, and Berkeley; but he is not an academic poet. His is not “white man’s poetry” but the “Indian’s report.”

I remember my introduction to him in a televised reading on the National Educational Television Network: the poet in Japanese student uniform announcing his beliefs, reading his poems in a bare (empty, “oriental”) room. How disciplined he was! How intensely attentive, every movement contributing to a ritual event, the speaking of the poem! Such economy and richness of spirit! (The portrait in *A Range of Poems* gives a similar impression.) I was immensely impressed by the self-possession and presence, the wonderful power of bringing one’s full being to the present moment, much as I was later when attending the lectures of a Zen master. Other readings in this excellent series had prepared my surprise, for some of them were performances. Perhaps Snyder’s was—a thought I entertained recently when I heard him read before a large audience and watched him create the situation he wanted by ritualizing the occasion (carefully untying and tying his bundle of books and papers—in his blue denim work clothes he might have just come in from the road—and using an oriental gesture of greeting) and by disciplining the audience’s attention with his own (by eye contact, precise explanation, exact breathing and saying of the poem, and significant silence). The thought did not disturb me because I preferred these conditions to the more familiar vaudeville—the playing down by which older poets identify with the young. And these conditions were appropriate to Snyder’s high conception of poetry and the poetry of love he was reading (from *Regarding Wave*, praise of the Goddess). Perhaps they transcended performance by transforming it into ritual participation; as I told Snyder afterward, I felt that the reading had been one of the memorable meetings of my life. Yet I was disturbed, as one may be when subjected to so much spiritual power and so willingly gratifies it, by the possibility of arrogance, and I found myself wondering whether the portraits in *A Range of Poems*, *The Back Country*, and *Earth House Hold* might not be a form of spiritual self-advertisement.

Snyder, unquestionably, is a remarkable man: he has a center, is assured, and possesses a disciplined freedom that appeals to both young and old. (The young perhaps respond most to his moral permissiveness, the old to his moral toughness.) Though in these respects he is above or beyond the younger generation as a moral hero should be, he is also of them because his life still seems open to novelty (“we have nothing to fear,” he says, “if we are willing to train ourselves to open up, explore and grow”) and because he identifies with them in point of departure (after World War II, he explains, “the suspicion grew that perhaps the whole Western Tradition . . . is off the track”) and in concern for what he calls “the Great Subculture” (“it transmits a community style of life, with an ecstatically positive vision of spiritual and physical love. . . . It has taught that man’s natural being is to be trusted and followed”).

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As a personal account of our historical moment, "Why Tribe," the essay just quoted, comments after the fashion of other essays in *Earth House Hold* on the private experience recorded there. "At this point"—Snyder is referring to the observation on the Western Tradition—"many, myself included, found in the Buddha-Dharma a practical method for clearing one's mind of the trivia, prejudices and false values that our conditioning had laid on us. . . ." And this is where *Earth House Hold* begins, with a lookout on a mountain top clearing his mind and trying "to penetrate to the deepest non-self Self."

Earth House Hold begins in the back country which was also Snyder's boyhood world. Though he was born in San Francisco (in 1930), his formative years were spent in the Pacific Northwest. During the depression, his family tried dairy-farming in Washington, and, after 1942, lived in Portland, Oregon, where he attended Reed College. The Northwest is his personal geography: the low country of "Nooksack Valley," where, sitting in "a berry-pickers cabin / At the edge of a wide muddy field / Stretching to the woods and cloudy mountains," the smell of cedar reminds him of "our farm-house, half built in '35"; and the high country of the mountain wilderness of the North Cascades which he first entered in his youth. This landscape, especially the mountain wilderness, is aboriginal, like the "Fur Countries" that had early rejoiced Thoreau and the "great west and northwest stretching on infinitely far and grand and wild" that he later said qualified all of his thoughts—"That is the only America I know. . . . That is the road to new life and freedom. . . . That great northwest where several of our shrubs, fruitless here, retain and mature their fruits properly." Wilderness of this kind, Snyder reminds us, as much from personal experience as from historical report, is what Americans confronted on the frontier. Here was "a vast wild ecology" that was "mind-shaking." For Americans, nature, he says, meant wilderness, an "untamed realm of total freedom—not brutish and nasty, but beautiful and terrible." And it meant the Indian, whose ways Snyder, like Thoreau, seriously studied (his bachelor's thesis, "The Dimensions of a Myth," treats the Haida)* and whose ghost, he says in the portentous manner of Lawrence, "will claim the next generation as its own."

Snyder possessed this primitive landscape in many ways, among them by learning woodcraft as a boy, mountain climbing as a youth, and working in the forest as a trail-maker, logger, and lookout in his early manhood. And while he was possessing it, he was, as a student of folklore, mythology, religion, and Oriental languages, extending and deepening its meanings, transforming the back country

*The range of inquiry of this important work in Snyder's development is suggested by his conclusion: "In its totality the study of a myth is the study of 'man and his works.'" In the course of considering the anthropological, folklorist, psychological, literary, and social aspects of myth, Snyder surveys much that is of consequence to his later writing and seems to be making a statement about his vocation as poet.

into a spiritual domain. By the time he goes to Crater Mountain Lookout in 1952, the back country has become the "Buddha land," a place of spiritual enlightenment to which one ascends by means of the disciplines he practices there. Crater Mountain becomes "Crater Shan," another Cold Mountain, whose namesake Han-shan wrote the "Cold Mountain" poems that Snyder later translated, poems defining the back country as a condition of being: "Freely drifting, I prowls the woods and streams / And linger watching things themselves. / Men don't get this far into the mountains."* All high places become one and have this significance, as later, when climbing in the Glacier Peak Wilderness Area, Snyder recalls Cold Mountain and imagines himself a Tibetan mountaineer, a Japanese woodcutter, and an exiled Chinese traveler. The nature he enters is universal, like that Thoreau said he entered on his daily walk: "I walk out into a nature such as the old prophets and poets, Menu, Moses, Homer, Chaucer, walked in. You may name it America, but it is not America. . . . There is a truer account of it in mythology than in any history of America. . . ."

For the back country is *back*. It is reached by going back to what Peter Levi, in a recent review of Snyder's poetry, called the "sources" ("Snyder's work is a restoration of the sources, a defence of the springs," awakening in us a sense of a "lost dimension of life"). And back is *down*, a descent, as William Carlos Williams spoke of it, to the fertile chaos, the very "mother stuff" of our being, to the unconscious from which, Snyder believes, we can reconstruct, by means of meditation, whatever aspects of previous cultures we desire. Like the primitive wilderness—the "naked" world where both Thoreau and Snyder believe we are most alive—the sources are still there, a deeper down where love is rooted and creative forces play, the *nature* that is always woman ("no human man can belong to mountains except as they are nature, and nature is woman"). Here the mind is untamed and the "seeds of instinct," to use Thoreau's phrase, are nurtured (for a true culture, Thoreau remarked, does not "tame tigers"). It is a darkness, too, perhaps like the "back" where Coyote lives ("His house was back in the back of the hills") or the "Deep North" of Bashō's last journey, the "other shore," or the world after death, the back country of Snyder's "Journeys" that one enters only by dying. Finally, as wilderness and unconscious, outer and inner equivalents, the back country is *beyond*—beyond society, civilization and its discontents ("I did not mean to come this far," Snyder writes in "Twelve Hours out of New York,"—"baseball games on the radio / commercials that turn your hair—"). It is the "old, dirty countries," the backward countries he has wandered in, places where the old traditions are still living, and places like Suwa-no-Se Island where the primitive communal life he now advocates can be lived.

Earth House Hold—the very title declares it—records this deepening awareness of the significance of the back country. In it, one follows the random course of (a) life, sees it nurturing a poet, focusing and concentrating itself. The con-

**The Dharma Bums*, much of it about mountain climbing, is dedicated to Han-shan.

cluding essays, the most recent, comprise a platform or program, and are ardently didactic. But the early journals are exercises in recording one's life, part of a discipline of being. In this, they remind one of the journals of Emerson and Thoreau. The young man to whom they introduce us—they give us our first and earliest glimpse of Snyder—is already pursuing the way and is wholly intent on overseeing and shaping his perceptions; this, perhaps, accounts for the impersonal quality of the personal in Snyder's work and distinguishes him from the other autobiographical (confessional) poets of his generation. The journals are the work of a Zennist and a poet, a poet who has learned much about form from Pound but more, I think, from Chinese and Japanese poetry.

The first part of "Lookout's Journal," that covering the summer of 1952 on Crater Mountain, is the best of all the journals in *Earth House Hold*. In none of the others is the experiment in form and the experience so fully realized. It is, I think, a more daring work than any of the early poems collected in *Riprap* (1959)—larger, more open, able to contain, substantively and formally, more experience. The trajectory of experience it presents passes through *the* experience, which, unrecorded, is of the kind given in the carefully-wrought Poundian-cadenced poem of purification, clarity, and serenity commemorating the following summer's lookout, "Mid-August at Sourdough Mountain Lookout," the initial poem of *Riprap*:

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.

This might be called a satori poem. It fulfills the need recorded in the first journal: "to look within and adjust the mechanism of perception." And it reminds one of Thoreau's realization at Walden ("Both place and time were changed, and I dwelt nearer to those parts of the universe and to those eras in history which had most attracted me") and of Emerson's reliance on the power of prospects.

The journal gives the essential particulars of experience that contributed to such attainment. It begins in late June, at the Ranger Station, with the following brief entry:

Hitchhiked here, long valley of the Skagit. Old cars parked in weeds, little houses in fields of braken. A few cows, in stumpland.

Ate at the “parkway cafe” real lemon in the pie
“—why don’t you get a jukebox in here”
“—the man said we weren’t important enough”

One probably notices first the abbreviated syntax—an expression of economy, one that tells us that the traditional syntax isn’t essential enough and telegraphs a quick grasp of things, like sumi painting. We are given objective fragments, but even in this simplest entry they are arranged and placed on the empty space of the page. Like a haiku poem, they work by means of the art of omission, by what they suggest. They tell of arrival but indicate the journey (compare this entry with Kerouac’s account in *The Dharma Bums*) and give the sense of increasing sparseness and emptiness. We are in the back country now, old cars in the weeds, little houses, a few cows in the stumpland, a place not important enough—frequented and commercial enough—for a jukebox but still backward enough, in its values, as Hemingway would have noted, to serve unadulterated lemon pie. As Snyder pointed out in reviewing a book of prose translations of Chinese poems, “any irregular line arrangement creates a manner of reading and a rhythm, which is poetical.” So here. The entry is a poem. The balanced cadence of “Old cars parked in the weeds, little houses in fields of braken” is artful.

Each entry is a formal design, a field of experience, in which the poet intends the fragments (thoughts, perceptions, notations of objects) to relate, become whole. The unity of the entry is often the unspoken ground to which all refer, as in the following:

Granite creek Guard station 9 July
the boulder in the creek never moves
the water is always falling
together!

A ramshackle little cabin built by Frank Beebe the miner.
Two days walk to here from roadhead.
arts of the Japanese: moon-watching
insect-hearing

Reading the sutra of Hui Nēng.
one does not need universities and libraries
one need be alive to what is about
saying “I don’t care”

The ground, here, is the resolve to pursue the way; the entry is really very intense and builds to the attitude of not caring about the “world” below. The poet is still struggling with—perhaps rehearsing—the “complete and total choice” he made about this time to relinquish a “professional scholar’s career in anthropology” and set himself loose “to sink or swim as a poet.” The entry begins with the poet’s play (the rhythmic capitalization of the location) and with a haiku poem appropriate to resolute thought, and it moves associatively from the isolated little

cabin of a miner to the meditative arts practiced in seclusion by the Japanese, to his own discipline (reading the sutra) and thoughts (the recognition of a Zen truth about learning), and determined statement of choice.

This principle of form applies to the journal as a whole and to many of the poems. Snyder observes in this journal that form is “leaving things out at the right spot / ellipse, is emptiness.” This emptiness is not empty; it is the ultimate, the fullness of life of which a few carefully selected and carefully placed things may make us aware. The journal is not a diary or daybook.⁴ There are only sixteen dated entries for a period of two and a half months. While suggesting the distance between events, in an isolated place, these point to a fertile emptiness and not, as do the equally infrequent entries of the Sourdough Journal, to slackness and boredom. They also chart a complete event, the actual ascent and descent of “Crater Shan”—a pattern of experience that repetition, it seems, does not always recover in its original freshness and exhilaration.

On all accounts (we hear of it in *The Dharma Bums*), Snyder was an exemplary lookout. But this is not the primary work recorded in the journal. His work, he notes, is “*Zazen* non-life. An art: mountain-watching.” It begins with his arrival—with his openness and attentiveness to persons, places, and things. The second entry, for example, is a characterization by speech of Blackie Burns, a forester, one of the roughs, to use Whitman’s term, to whom Snyder dedicated *Riprap*. His speech, though strong, is not coarse, like some of the woodsmen’s anecdotes of the Sourdough Journal, and its theme is significant. Burns announces the ecological concern of Snyder’s work: “GREEDY & SELFISH NO RESPECT FOR THE LAND.” The capitalization, part of Snyder’s design of Burns’ speech, also serves to emphasize what is most important, an attitude of mind fostered by the Western Tradition (the Judæo-Christian tradition, according to Paul Shepard, which contributed to “the hatred for this world carried by our whole culture”). Greed and selfishness, Buddha said, were the principal causes of dissatisfaction and suffering and were to be overcome by disciplining the mind, by changing one’s point of view. Changing one’s point of view (adjusting the mechanism of perception) is the revolutionary issue; only a discipline as radical as that undertaken by Snyder will, he believes, create an ecological conscience, prepare us to respect the land, the very ground of our being. The ecological issue, therefore, is at the center of his spiritual undertaking, as is poetry. A few entries later, he writes:

—If one wished to write poetry of nature, where an audience?
Must come from the very conflict of an attempt to articulate
the vision poetry & nature in our time.

Snyder is pre-eminently a poet of nature. And at the beginning of his career he knows, as he says in the subtitle of a recent essay, that poetry (requiring the highest discipline of the poet, and communicating the “vision”) is an “ecological survival technique.”

The entries that follow his resolution on Zen enlightenment record the strenuous

and wayward pursuit. The entry of July 11, somewhat in the nature of a Whitman catalog, conveys by its randomness an eager readiness for new experiences other than those recorded. The first entry from the mountain lookout gives the elevation, which, honestly acknowledged, is only a matter of feet (“8049 feet”). Everything goes wrong, he’s dispirited (“Even here, cold foggy rocky place, there’s life—4 ptarmigan . . .”) and has only energy enough to read science-fiction. But the second half of the entry, with the comparison of the light of the lookout to that of a shoji, reports reviving spirits and resolve; and thereafter, with the entry of July 28 from “Crater Shan,” the journal gives an account—happy and contented, I think, when compared to the Sourdough Journal—of his discipline and its fruits.

Unlike the other lookouts whose radio conversations he enters in the journal as necessary fact, as ballast to his own experience, he is intensely occupied (“poor lonely lookouts,” he remarks, “radioing back and forth”). He is not lonely, no more than Thoreau at Walden, who explained that “nearest to all things is that power which fashions their being.” He has a close schedule of work and study, and, like Thoreau, metaphorically and literally, is transacting business with the “Celestial Empire”:

- first I turn on the radio
- then make tea & eat breakfast
- study Chinese until eleven

- make lunch, go chop snow to melt water,
read Chaucer in the early afternoon.

On August 10, he reports,

First wrote a haiku and painted a haiga for it; then repaired the Om Mani Padme Hum prayer flag, then constructed a stone platform, then shaved down a shake and painted a zenga on it, then studied the lesson.

Transcriptions from the texts he is reading or recalls indicate his progress—most are from Oriental scripture, but Chaucer’s line on “drasty ryming” is cited (perhaps he is reading *Paterson IV*) and an American Indian song is used to express his own feeling (“Is this real / Is this real / This life I am living?”). Sometimes a haiku poem marks his contentment—and the loneliness:

sitting in the sun in the doorway
picking my teeth with a broomstraw
listenin to the buzz of the flies.

By exposure, he comes to know his environment:

The rock alive, not barren.
 flowers lichen pinus albicaulis chipmunks
 mice even grass.

He meditates on the vastness of time, and the sufficiency of time, for change in the lithosphere, and, as the syntax tells us (“When a storm blows in, covering the south wall with rain and blotting out the mountains.”) he himself is caught up in the tremendous elemental action, the finality of it. And then, toward the end of his stay, he makes the crucial entry:

Almost had it last night: *no identity*. One thinks, “I emerged from some general, non-differentiated thing, I return to it.” One has in reality never left it; there is no return.
my language fades. Images of erosion.’

Whether he ever has it is left in doubt, but the concluding entry shows that whatever good to senses and spirit he has had has not been lost on his return to San Francisco:

Boys on bicycles in the asphalt playground wheeling and circling aimlessly like playful gulls or swallows. Smell of a fresh-parked car.

This exceptional journal—a brief *Walden*—was the work of an exceptional young man, only 22, who already knew the imperatives of art set forth in the poetic directive of “Riprap.” Like Roy Marchbanks, another of the roughs by whom he was taught as a member of a trail crew in Yosemite National Park in 1955, he respects workmanship, in this instance the perfect selection and placing of granite rocks in “tight cobble patterns on hard slab.” So he instructs himself in a poem that exemplifies his skill and remains his test of art:

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.

The imperatives of composition are modernist: the unit of composition is the single word, like rock, a solid particular thing of weight and texture that exists in place and time and appeals to the senses (“body of the mind”); and the act of composition is architectural, a building by words, a deliberate handwork—the kind of labor with things that Thoreau said removed the palaver from the scholar’s style and that, for Snyder, identifies him with workingmen. Poetry is his craft: “a riprap on the slick rock of metaphysics,” as he says later in *Myths & Texts*. The “riprap of things” includes all things, the “cobble of milky way”—the phrase is wonderfully extravagant in Thoreau’s sense, like his own metaphor of fishing in the upper air—and “ants and pebbles,” the diminutive things that, one recalls in “Song of Myself,” were the objects of Whitman’s altered perception, the proofs of love. The substance of the *poetry*, what the art of poetry, the riprap of words, achieves is universal: a footing in the existential world, the granitic result of experience under pressure in a world of time and change that, carefully used, is the foundation of the way.

Tested by these standards none of the other journals is as good. The Sourdough Journal (1953) is written in rather loose paragraphs, is more routine, anecdotal, descriptive. The slackness is due to passivity, to awareness without an edge, the flatness of experience without subjectivity. Artiness and a feigned naïveté distress one immediately. The journal opens with, “The antique car managed it to Marblemount last week”—*antique*, used again in “patter from antique *Reader’s Digests* he’s found chez Lookout,” puts one off, as does “managed” and the very cadence of the line. And one soon reads a Huck Finn-ish sort of entry: “. . . in the bunkhouse found a magazine with an article about an eighteen-year-old girl who could dance and paint and sew and was good looking, too, with lots of pictures.” The journal is troubled—these are some of the indications—and, though it finally rises above this level, comes to neither resolution nor form.

The journal of Snyder’s first stay in Japan, “Japan First Time Around” (1956-1957), is also in paragraphs, with little design. It is both impressionistic and meditative, recording the assimilation of Japan to his previous experience and the fluid movement of an open speculative mind. “Tanker Notes” (1957-1958) are the random jottings of the poet-seaman, the ebullient fireman of the *Sappa Creek* (“—madly singing and laughing [the Han-shan of the boiler room], perched on pipes high on the shipside painting lower engine-room white—this is what I was born for—”). The poet is now one of the roughs and complements the austere training in Zen he has just undergone (see his essay, “Spring Sesshin at Shokoku-Ji”) with its worldly, humble aspect. Much of this journal is given over to the conversation and folk-experience of the crew; and an occasional ungrammatical phrase, like that of the opening sentence (“was took on launch to this

ship”), is the stylistic identification. Its longest entry, a high-spirited account of riotous shore-leave in Samoa, depicts the rhythm of Snyder’s way of being and is morally justified as a spontaneous act (“Everyone so beautiful”) and perhaps as fulfilling a “higher sense of responsibility to holy ghosts and foolishness and mess.” The last journal, that of a week’s mountain climbing in the Glacier Peak Wilderness Area (1965), seems more like the first in design than any of the others, but the design is imposed and arty and the observation superficial, as in this portion of the second entry:

descending to a previous pond for
lunch over steep heather
pick your way thru like a beast

Justine strips down and washes breasts and arms, tho all is
chill; her jeans color of the lakeside sedge and hillside heather,
hair color of the mountain wind.

[Pugh creek goes into the Whitechuck
the Whitechuck goes into the Sauk
the Sauk goes into the Skagit
the Skagit goes into the Sound.]

Rats, lambs, men, and whales
all drink milk.

<p style="text-align: center;">North Fork Sauk Trail White Mt Shelter 5→ White Pass 9→</p>
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The ascent of Glacier Peak (in the company of Allen Ginsberg), though effectively given in short phrases, incomplete sentences, and stage-by-stage entries, is good but not as good, I think, as Kerouac’s account of mountain climbing in *The Dharma Bums*.

All of these journals lack the continuous intensity of the first, but all are significant landmarks in Snyder’s development and valuable glosses on the poetry that accompanies it. The Sourdough Journal conveys the sense of some burden of crisis, of waiting-out experience—“Chinese [*Hsiao-ching*]; plus Blake’s collected, *Walden* and sumi painting, pass the time.” The only entry approaching those of the first journal is a long meditation on desire and discipline that ends with the following example of awareness of relationship: “the desk is under the pencil.” As the poem on Dick Brewer’s visit tells us, he is lonely and determined to go to Japan (“Me back to my mountain and far, far west”). The journal ends with

an entry from Berkeley where he has gone to prepare himself for Zen study there.

The period at Berkeley (1953-1956) was long and solitary. "I was living in a little cottage," he recalls, "and studying Chinese and Japanese . . . and going up to the woods and mountains in the summer, writing and reading. Intellectually, and in every way, that was a period of great excitement for me. . . ." (The last months of this period are recorded in *The Dharma Bums*.) This intellectual quickening and growth is apparent, I think, in the journal of his first stay in Japan, for in this journal his thoughts are coalescing and acquiring their subsequent direction. As in the earlier journals, he is aware of the vastness and complex processes of geological time; he meditates, he says, on "ecology, food-chains and sex." The relation of sex to food-chains and ecology is indicated in this entry: "Depth is the body. How does one perceive internal physical states—yoga systems I guess—well well. soil conservation / reforestation / birth control / spelling reform: 'love the body.'" Sex has become a prominent element in his thought, and he is working out a love ethic. He approvingly cites Lawrence; he sees that "the Goddess is mother, daughter, and wife at the same time" ("Looking at girls as mothers or daughters or sisters for a change of view. Curious switch"); and he begins to chart the connections between Zen, Avatamsaka and Tantra:

The giving of a love relationship is a Bodhisattva relaxation of personal fearful defenses and self-interest strivings—which communicates unverbally to the other and leaves *them* do the same. "Enlightenment" is this interior ease and freedom carried not only to persons but to all the universe. . . .

So Zen, being founded on Avatamsaka, and the net-network of things; and Tantra being the application of the "interaction with no obstacles" vision on a personal-human level—the "other" becomes the lover, through whom the various links in the net can be perceived. . . .

Poetry, too, is now defined as an act of love, and the poet of nature is a poet of love:

POETRY is to give access to persons—cutting away the fear and reserve and cramping of social life: thus for Chinese poetry. Nature poetry too: "this is what I've seen."

This ethic is central, of revolutionary consequence. It contributes to ecological survival: "the organism alters itself rather than continue fruitless competition." And it contributes to a social vision which is set forth in two dreams:

—dreamed of a new industrial-age dark ages:
filthy narrow streets and dirty buildings with rickety walks over
the streets from building to building—unwashed illiterate brutal
cops—a motorcycle cop and sidecar drove up and over a fat

workingman who got knocked down in a fight—tin cans and garbage and drooping electric wires everywhere—

One night I dreamt I was with Miura Rōshi, or maybe an unheard of Polish revolutionary poet with a bald head—looking at Berkeley. But a new Berkeley—of the future—the Bay beach clean and white, the bay blue and pure; white buildings and a lovely boulevard of tall Monterey pines that stretched way back to the hills. We saw a girl from some ways off walking toward us, long-legged, her hair bound loosely in back.

The latter dream, one of the testimonies of intensive meditation, is a Joycean epiphany calling the poet to his work. It answers the choice he puts himself earlier:

. . . the poet must choose: either to step deep in the stream of his people, history, tradition, folding and folding himself in wealth of persons and pasts; philosophy, humanity, to become richly foundationed and great and sane and ordered. Or, to step beyond the bound onto the way out, into horrors and angels, possible madness or silly Faustian doom, possible utter transcendence, possible enlightened return, possible ignominious wormish perishing.

He has found a way-in, not a way-out, not Rimbaud's way; and when he goes to the back country it is not to trade but, in the phrase from this journal that defines the work of the later essays, to "knit old dharma-trails." And, he says in "Tanker Notes," he will rely as a poet on neither contrivance nor visionary derangement but only on the Muse, on reverential love, on the cool water of inspiration, the "clear spring" of the mind, deeper than the intellect and the unconscious, that "reflects all things and feeds all things but is of itself transparent."

The second part of this essay will appear in the Fall 1970 issue of TIR.