

THE POETICS OF DEEP ECOLOGY

Part II: An Irreverent Tribute to Gary Snyder

by Lone-Wolf-Circles

My poem, "Full Circle," from the book and cassette of the same title, is sincerely dedicated to Gary Snyder, already a favorite poet of mine for eight years when I wrote it in 1977. In its imagined dialogue, Gary, uncomfortable with the implied violence in my warrior's stance, questions my intent:

"Who are you, to speak for the water?"

I share her vision,
wed her daughter.

"Who are you, to speak for the trees?"

I experience their motion,
translate their quiet.

"Who are you, to gnash your teeth,
in defense of animals?"

I eat the deer's flight,
smell like a bear."

Presumably my answers confirm the depth of my commitment. It is the sign of a master when readers (students) are enticed to react; to act.

In *Back Country*, *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems*, and *Myths and Texts*, Snyder uses a detached Buddhist approach. Playing with perspective, everyday occurrences and activities take on added significance, a sense of the magical. This is in keeping with his Eastern approach, rather than Occidental, where tricks of perception are cultivated to transcend logic and induce the child-like state of bliss, awareness, and acceptance called Satori. I was a thirteen-year-old runaway reading Snyder while keeping warm in parking-lot Goodwill Boxes, flooded with awareness, struggling with bliss, and even then a stranger to acceptance. As an unrepentant savage, at the risk of contributing to my karmic debt and to world aggression, I prefer discernment to acceptance. Our negative reactions are as important as the positive in defining diversity over homogeneity. I prefer my olive branch sharpened on one end. Like the trade pipe made out of a brass tomahawk, so popular with the savages of two hundred years ago. Come to my camp as a friend, you get the end with the bowl, smoking. Enter my camp as an enemy, you get the benefit of the axe side.

With the publication of *Regarding Wave*, simultaneous with the growth of his family, Snyder seems to take on the more passionate Taoist approach of experiencing through that about which he writes. He earned national acclaim in 1975 with a Pulitzer Prize for his *Turtle Island*, where Gary talks for all the many diverse expressions of Creation. In speaking for other forms of life, (and so-called "nonlife"), we as humans-poets-seers-teachers — validate our existence as one member of this planet-

ary family, justify our brain size, and ennoble our spirits.

Gary has been at the forefront of contemporary ethno-poetics, and the responsibility to teach cultural values and Earth-stewardship it historically implies. He writes in the collection of essays *The Old Ways*:

"Men of goodwill who cannot see a reasonable mode of either listening to or speaking for, nature, except by analytical and scientific means, must surely learn to take this complex, profound, moving, and in many ways highly appropriate, world view of the yogins, shamans, and ultimately all our ancestors, into account. One of the few modes of speech that gives us access to that other yogic or shamanistic view is poetry or song."

Overriding any philosophical argument of activism versus pacifism, it is this exemplification of the sacred approach to environmentalism, this recognition of song and poem as invaluable tools of awareness and change, that links his work with the work of our Earth First! movement. Paganism. From *Old Ways* again:

"Now, I like to think that the concern with the planet, with the integrity of the biosphere, is a long and deeply rooted concern of the poet for this reason: the role of the singer was to sing the voice of the corn, the voice of the Pleiades, the voice of bison, the voice of antelope. To contact in a very special way an 'other' that was not within the human sphere; something that could not be learned by continually consulting other human teachers, but could only be learned by venturing outside the borders and going into your own wilderness, unconscious wilderness. Thus, poets were always 'pagans'..."

Celebrating the magic state where perceiver becomes the perceived, the audience becomes the performers, the students become the teachers, and the message becomes superfluous once fully understood. From *Myths and Texts*:

"Dream, Dream,
Earth! those beings living on your surface

none of them disappearing, will all be transformed.

When I have spoken to them
when they have spoken to me, from that moment on,
their words and their bodies which they

usually use to move about with, will all change.

I will not have heard them. Signed.

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Coyote."

Poet taking us to the limit and

beyond. Poet as coyote, as trickster. I see the creative requirements to be an "Earth Firstler" in these lines from "What You Should Know To Be A Poet":

"all you can about animals as persons."

"the wild freedom of the dance, **ecstasy**
silent solitary illumination, **ecstasy**
real danger. gambles. and the edge
of death."

Or, also from *Regarding Wave*, "Hunting Season":

"Once every year, the Deer catch human
beings. They do various things which
irresistibly draw men near them:
each one
selects a certain man. The Deer
shoots
the man, who is then compelled to
skin it
and carry its meat home and eat it.
Then
the Deer is inside the man. He
waits and hides in there, but the man
doesn't know it. When enough deer
have
occupied enough men, they will strike

all at once. The men who don't have
Deer in them will also be taken by
surprise, and everything will change
some. This is called 'takeover from
inside'."

Like poem-seed, swallowed by the world of man, affecting things from the heart. "It all gathers, humming, in the egg." Yet he must realize it is not enough merely to observe, when he writes "Front Lines," (from *Turtle Island*):

"The edge of the cancer
Swells against the hill - we feel
a foul breeze —
And it sinks back down.
The deer winter here
A chainsaw growls in the gorge.
Ten wet days and the logtrucks stop,
The trees breathe.
Sunday the four-wheel jeep of the
Realty Company brings in
Landseekers, lookers, they say
To the land,
Spread your legs.
The jets crack sound overhead, it's ok
here;
Every pulse of the rot at the heart
In the sick fat veins of Amerika
Pushes the edge up closer —
A bulldozer grinding and slobbering
Sideslipping and belching on top of
The skinned-up bodies of still-live
bushes
In the pay of a man
From town
Behind is a forest that goes to the Arc-

tic

*And a desert that still belongs to the
Piute*

*And here we must draw
Our line."*

No one is a real artist unless she/he has personally "drawn the line" on the unacceptable.

Gary has taken poetry from cutesy-butterfly-McEwen stuff to incantations worthy of the ancient rites of death and birth, dipping the words in the sweat of hand-farmers and the semen of Pan. He has abbreviated the Orientalized lessons of the likes of Alan Watts into the streamlined vehicle of verse; taken it from the lips of holy men to the lips of deer and bear; taken poetry from the hills of Marin to the blackberry-lined secrets of the Sierras. I wonder, uneducated heathen that I am, did Gary write about himself again, mind dizzy from afternoon sex, stomach full of berries:

"With the Sun and Moon

*In his belly,
The Space Poet
Sleeps.*

No end to the sky —

*But his poems,
Like wild geese,
Fly off the edge."*

We earn power-dreams through our individual heroics, and through dreams we are inspired to act. To draw the line. And to write words — words that take off, like the man Everett Ruess, showing us the way of no turning back.