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“Support Your Right to Arm Bears”

Animal Imagery in Gary Snyder’s Poetry

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**ABSTRACT:**

Työni tavoitteena on selvittää, miten Gary Snyder käyttää eläinkuvastoa runokokoelmissaan. Lähestyn ongelmaa poikkitieteellisesti käyttäen ekokriittistä näkökulmaa yhdistettynä buddhalaiseen uskonnolliseen teoriaan.

Aineistoni muodostuu Gary Snyderin runotuotannosta. Tämän lisäksi myös Snyderin proosateoksia käsitellään viitekehyksen sitä vaatiessa. Koska buddhalaiset elementit ovat niin vahvasti läsnä Snyderin tuotannossa, olen myös käyttänyt buddhalaista uskontoteoriaa ja klassisia *sutra*-tekstejä tutkimuksessani, yhdessä ekokritisismiä ja Beat-sukupolvea käsittelevien teosten kanssa.

Varsinaisessa analyysiosiosassani jaan Gary Snyderin tuotannon eläinaiheiset runot kolmeen luokkaan: interpenetraatiota ilmentävät runot, toteemieläimiä käsittelevät runot ja eläinten elinympäristön tuhoamista käsittelevät runot. Näiden luokittelujen avulla lähestyn tutkimusongelmaani, eli miten eläimet on esitetty Snyderin runotuotannossa ja mikä niiden funktio on. Analyysiosuudessani käytän hyväkseni sekä aiempaa Gary Snyderiin kohdistuvaa kriittistä tutkimusta että ekokriittisiä ja buddhalaisia prinssiippejä. Työni osoittaa, miten eläimet Gary Snyderin tuotannossa usein ilmentävät ekokriittisiä ja buddhalaisia näkökantoja.

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**KEY WORDS:** Snyder, Animal, Totem Animals, Ecocriticism, Buddhism, Interpenetration



## 1 INTRODUCTION

Gary Snyder is first and foremost a poet of the natural world. As such, he is by no means alone, as nature has been one of the lasting elements of poetry since the early Chinese court poetry of the T'ang Dynasty, as well as in the Homeric tradition and all the way through the English Romantics and the American Transcendentalists to the present day. However, few poets have been able, or willing, to write poetry where the author is not merely an observer of nature, but rather an integral part of it, setting themselves on an equal level with all the natural phenomena around them, and giving nature itself a 'voice',

render[ing] nature as a speaking subject, not in the romantic mode of rendering an object for the self-constitution of the poet as speaking subject, but as a character within texts with its own existence (Murphy 2000: 196).

Nature is rendered a subject in Snyder's poetry through the representation of animals. This representation is what this thesis will examine. Other natural entities are also constantly present in Snyder's poems, but animals occupy a central role in his work, and it is also through them that he gives nature a voice.

Snyder is associated strongly with Zen Buddhism, and often also with the Deep Ecology movement, an environmental philosophy and facet of ecocriticism, based largely on the Norwegian mountaineer and philosopher Arne Naess' ideas that share many of the same themes that Snyder has brought to fore in his own work, such as the idea that humans are just "one of the many animal species interdependently living together in ecosystems on earth" (Thornton 1993: 42). This notion resonates well with both Snyder's Buddhist approach to poetry and with his environmentalist attitudes. This thesis will demonstrate how both Buddhist and ecocritical ideas are expressed through the use of animal imagery in Gary Snyder's poetry.

## 1.1 Research Question and Aims of the Study

This study will look at the poetry of Gary Snyder from an ecocritical viewpoint, focusing especially on the representation of animal imagery in his poetry. Furthermore, cultural as well as religious studies are brought in to the study to aid in the understanding of the political and religious implications of Snyder's poetry.

I will investigate the works of Gary Snyder with the aim of showing how animal imagery is presented in his poetry. Although the animals in the poems are the main objects of study, other natural objects included in the poems are also discussed, as they carry meanings inseparable from the poems. The natural phenomena discussed include non-sentient phenomena such as mountains, forests, rivers, seas and lakes, as well as sentient phenomena represented by such animals as the bear, coyote, deer, whale and various others. The question this study aims to answer is what the role allocated to animals in Snyder's poems is. The study will show the Buddhist notion of *interpenetration* as a key component in Snyder's poetry. This term is directly connected with the way animals are represented in his poetry, and is also an important aspect in modern ecological thinking that sees the world and its ecosystems as interpenetrating entities in a state of constant flux.

Apart from the notion of interpenetration, another potentially challenging term in this study is *nature*, for which one is hard pressed to find a logical and all-encompassing definition. In a sense, of course, everything is nature/natural, cities and nuclear plants as well as trees and chipmunks, as it is ontologically impossible to define anything as 'unnatural'. The idea of 'nature' has been repudiated by various literary schools, from formalist to deconstructionist, with declarations like "there is no such thing as nature", the ideas of the 'sign' and 'text' often by their sheer dominance in literary and cultural studies robbing something away from the reality of the natural world that humans perceive through their senses (Coupe 2000: 2). In this study I will use Laurence Coupe's definition of nature as a "collective name for 'individual plants, nonhuman animals, and elements'" (2000: 3).

## 1.2 Material and Method

Gary Snyder has published numerous works of both poetry and prose, but this study will concern itself primarily with Snyder's poetry. Poems spanning Snyder's whole career will be dealt with. Quantitatively speaking, the volume that has received the most attention in this study is *Turtle Island* which was published in 1974 and earned Snyder the Pulitzer Prize for poetry.

*Turtle Island* is perhaps Snyder's best known work, and is an important volume in that it stands on the watershed of Snyder's production, being written after his return to America after a twelve-year sojourn in Japan, and being in many ways a culmination point in regard to his ecological vision. *Turtle Island* makes for a good object of study also in that it has aroused such mixed reviews, many commentators criticizing the explicit political implications that the volume carries with it. Robert Kern, for example, sees the "didacticism" (1991: 116) of *Turtle Island* as a burden, compromising the poetic value of the work. However, this very politicization of animals and nature makes the collection a very appropriate object for this study.

*Turtle Island* contains fifty-eight poems altogether. Of these, thirty-five include animal imagery, and of these thirty-five I have chosen eleven to be dealt with in this thesis. These eleven poems are all printed whole in this thesis to show how the animal imagery relates to the other themes in the poems. *Turtle Island* is divided into four sections, three of poetry and one of prose. The poetry sections are called "Manzanita", "Magpie's Song" and "For the Children", and the accompanying prose section is called "Plain Talk". The prose section contains most of the same themes dealt with in the preceding poems, but is not further investigated in this study, as my objective is to look at the poetic imagery that Snyder uses.

Apart from the eleven poems dealt with from *Turtle Island*, I will also look at some of Snyder's other poems when necessary. Of Snyder's other work, his earliest volumes of poetry, *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems* (1959), and *Myths and Texts* (1960), provide insights into the beginnings of Snyder's career in poetry. These poems were written

prior to his immersion in Zen training and do not yet show as clearly the Buddhist notion of interpenetration that is so characteristic of his later poetry. Furthermore, explicit environmental politics are not yet present to the extent that they are in *Turtle Island*. There are, however, several poems in *Myths & Texts* especially where animal imagery is used. *Myths and Texts* is divided into three sections, called 'Logging', 'Hunting', and 'Burning'. The section titled 'Hunting' features frequent use of animal imagery and is therefore also examined in this thesis.

The main interest in *Danger on Peaks*, Snyder's latest volume of poetry from 2004 is in that it shows his attitudes towards some relatively recent events, such as the destruction by the Taliban of the Buddha statues of Bamiyan valley, and the events of 9/11, but apart from that, the collection is not as relevant to the aims of this study as, for example, *Turtle Island* and *Myths & Texts*, which are the richest in animal imagery. The rest of his poetry, as well as some of his prose works which provide some excellent views on his works, will also be discussed briefly, but not to the extent as *Turtle Island* and *Myths & texts*, the analysis of which will form the bulk of this thesis.

The method for this study is conducting a close reading of Gary Snyder's poetry and the themes and motifs related to it. In studying Snyder's poetry I will use Terry Gifford's definitions of Pastoral poetics as outlined in his essay "Pastoral, Anti-Pastoral, Post-Pastoral" (Gifford 2000a: 219-222), as his approach is very suitable in dealing with the material at hand. Gifford's classification and its value to this study will be introduced later in chapter 2.3 ("Ecocritical Tendencies in Gary Snyder's Poetry") in this thesis. Before embarking on the actual analysis of the poetry, an overview of some previous studies on Snyder's work as well as the theoretical framework related to this thesis is due. The cultural context in which Snyder's work can be placed in will also be discussed briefly, along with a presentation of the Buddhist principles that came to be of such great importance for Snyder's work.

An interdisciplinary approach is needed to examine Snyder's work. This is because of the roles Snyder played in both the influential Beat Generation movement and in the awakening of environmental consciousness in the United States. He was also a

prominent figure in the introducing and spreading of Zen Buddhism in the United States. Since Buddhist, and Zen Buddhist elements in particular, are so transparent in his poetry, some thought needs to be given to the influence that these elements had on his poems.

### 1.3 Previous Studies

I will next introduce some of the previous studies done on Snyder's work in relation to the study at hand, as this will help place this thesis in the context of Snyder criticism. The Buddhist and environmental aspects of Gary Snyder's vision have received a certain amount of academic attention in the past, and a substantial portion of this research has been collected into a volume edited by Patrick D. Murphy, *Critical Essays on Gary Snyder*. Murphy considers Snyder to be an "important spokesperson for American Buddhism, international environmentalism, and bioregional politics" (1991: 1), and these various roles allotted to Snyder are discussed in the volume.

Although the initial essay in the volume by Thomas Parkinson in certain parts reads more like a fan letter than a proper 'critical' essay, Snyder's poetics and ideas are also discussed in scholarly fashion by, for example, Thomas J. Lyon, who focuses on Snyder's ecological vision, noting the "endless interrelatedness" of the roots in Snyder's poetics; "new ecology, [...] Romantic writing" and "Oriental thinking" (Lyon 1991: 35). Prominent literary critic Charles Altieri focuses on the lyric style in Snyder's poetry, describing this style as creating a harmonious balance between the human and the non-human through the use of interpenetrating nature imagery (Altieri 1991: 50-51). Altieri also recognizes the importance of dealing with the "philosophical perspective[s]" (1991: 48) of Snyder's poetry as a means of producing a cogent analysis.

Sherman Paul states in his essay "From Lookout to Ashram: The way of Gary Snyder" that he does not know anyone "since Thoreau who has so thoroughly espoused the wild as Gary Snyder – and no one who is so much its poet" (1991: 58). Paul's essay is similar to Parkinson's in the way that the scholar's admiration of his subject is so clear

that it in parts creates an obstacle in gaining an objective view on the poet and his works. This is a rather common feature in many studies on Snyder. Bert Almon, on the other hand, contributes to the collection with a very concise critique on the Buddhist aspects of Gary Snyder's poetry. His work has proven to be of excellent value to this thesis, and his commentary appears in the analysis section of several poems here.

David Robbins is another Snyder enthusiast who considers Snyder's work to be "a turning point in our culture" (1991: 90). Robbins has decided to focus almost exclusively on the poem "Burning Island" in Snyder's *Regarding Wave*, and his research therefore is not as relevant to this study as some of the other contributors' work. Robert Kern has produced an excellent study on Snyder's poetics while managing to keep a very critical attitude towards the poetry. *Turtle Island*, especially, receives heavy criticism from Kern for its lack of finesse in the face of environmental politics expressed in the poems.

Michael Castro and Charles Molesworth have both investigated *Turtle Island*, both the poetics of it and the political connotations it carries, and the work of both of them is also used in this study. Jody Norton has chosen to focus on the influence that the Chinese T'ang poetry and the Japanese haiku had on Gary Snyder's poetry, and her incisive observations are also used in this thesis. Julia Martin examines the use of metaphor in Snyder's poetry, and her work also proved useful in the analysis section of this thesis.

The editor of the collection, Patrick D. Murphy, studies the importance of interpenetration in Snyder's poetry. His work deals mainly with *Myths & Texts*, and as such is also useful to this thesis. Finally, Katsunori Yamazato has produced an insightful essay on the Zen Buddhist elements of Gary Snyder's poetry in *Turtle Island*, and his knowledge on the subject is also used in the analysis section of Snyder's poetry in this thesis.

While not an academic work *per se*, John Suiter's *Poets on the Peaks* does detail the beginnings of Gary Snyder's poetic career, coupled with anecdotes of Snyder's

experiences and activities in the natural world, presenting how Snyder's mountaineering interests and conservation work shaped his views and, together with the Buddhist practice that he was starting at the time, filtered through to his poetry as well. Moreover, James I. McClintock's *Nature's Kindred Spirits* is a useful reference in putting Snyder's work in context with other American nature writers. McClintock, too, discusses the influences of Buddhism together with Native American traditions on Snyder's work.

Furthermore, Jennie Skerl has edited a collection of essays on the religious, political and environmental aspects of Gary Snyder and other Beat Generation writers in her volume *Reconstructing the Beats*, in which the first three essays, by Robert Holton, Daniel Belgrad, and Clinton R. Starr, deal with this theme. This volume, however, does not explicitly deal with either Gary Snyder, Ecological issues or Buddhism, but with the more general aspects of Beat politics and counterculture, neglecting to take into account the profound influence that Buddhism had on Snyder's writing. Robert Holton's essay, for example, does recognize Snyder's importance in bringing "to the fore alternative religious and environmental perspectives", that have proved to be "vital" for the American culture (2004: 26), and while he, together with Belgrad and Starr, does discuss the countercultural aspects and influences of Eastern religions in general on Beat writers, they do not consider them specifically related to Buddhism.

*Big Sky Mind: Buddhism and the Beat Generation*, edited by Carole Tonkinson, also deals with the Beat Generation's relationship to Buddhism, but hers is not a scholarly work, rather an anthology of Beat Generation writers influenced by Buddhism, and the impact Buddhism had on the political and ecological aspects of their work is not dealt with in depth. In order to be able to cogently analyze Snyder's work and its Buddhist implications, it will obviously be necessary also to refer to the original sources that provided Snyder with the ideas that came to shape both his life and writings. These include works by famous Zen Masters like Dogen and D.T. Suzuki, as well as traditional *sutras* (Buddhist scriptures) collected in Dwight Goddard's *A Buddhist Bible* (1938). Donald S. Lopez Jr.'s *A Modern Buddhist Bible* (2002) is also an important reference in that it, too, deals with Gary Snyder and his fellow Beat Generation writers. In this volume, Lopez introduces Buddhist-inspired fragments from Beat Generation

writers together with diverse entries from other writers, as well as an essay by Snyder from *Turtle Island*.

An important contributor to this thesis is also Laurence Coupe's *The Green Studies Reader*. This collection also includes an entry by Gary Snyder, 'Language Goes Two Ways'. In this essay Snyder calls the world we live in "our postindustrial precollapse world" (2000a: 129). In addition to this, the volume includes many other, more optimistic views on environmental development. These studies contribute to the theoretical framework of this thesis. John Ruskin's notion of the "pathetic fallacy" (2000/1856: 27) is one obvious point of reference in interpreting Gary Snyder's poetry, as so much of so called 'nature poetry' falls under Ruskin's category of 'falsely' representing natural phenomena. Kate Soper, Donna Haraway, Terry Gifford and Patrick D. Murphy also address important issues in showing how nature has been constructed as feminine, or 'the other', in much of traditional literary theory and other scientific work. This question bears on this study, too, as Snyder's work in some cases forms a continuum to this kind of thinking. Although nature is never seen in Snyder's works as 'the other' *per se*, there is no doubt that to Snyder, nature definitely has certain feminine qualities, and this will also be discussed later on in this thesis.

## 2 BUDDHISM AND ECOCRITICISM IN GARY SNYDER'S POETRY

In this chapter I discuss the various elements that provide the tools for a critical analysis of Gary Snyder's poetry. A basic understanding of certain Buddhist principles is required in order to grasp the cultural and literary context that Snyder's work is placed in. After a brief foray in this ideological background, I will examine both Buddhism and ecocriticism in relation to Snyder's poetry, as it is an essential facet in decoding the meanings and political implications in his poems.

### 2.1 Ideological Background to Gary Snyder's Poetry

Some background information on Buddhism is important in order to better understand Snyder's use of animal imagery in his poems, as Buddhist ideas are so transparent in much of his work. In May 1956 Snyder left San Francisco and the United States on a freighter heading for Kyoto, Japan. There he was to start his formal education in the practice of Zen Buddhism of the *Rinzai* school under Miura Isshu Roshi, and later under Oda Sesso Roshi [*Roshi* is a term of veneration, meaning 'teacher']. His voluntary exile would last for twelve years, during which time he would only twice visit the United States, or 'Turtle Island', as he preferred to call it based on his studies in Native American creation myths (Snyder 2000b: 194).

Snyder had been exposed to Buddhist influences since he was a young boy of only nine or ten, after for the first time seeing Chinese landscape paintings (Tonkinson 1995: 171). From then on his interest picked up momentum, and one culmination point came in the year 1951, when he was twenty-one years of age. That is when he for the first time encountered the writings of D.T. Suzuki, the most prominent Japanese Zen Master to come and teach in the West, and this "effect would turn out to be nothing less than life-changing" (Suiter 2002: 19). Snyder's commitment to Buddhism solidified in the following few years prior to his leaving for Japan, and the experiences gathered in his Zen studies came to have a powerful influence on how animals and the rest of nature is presented in his poetry.

During and after his formal Zen training in Japan Gary Snyder's vision solidified, and Buddhism, along with ecology, became the key components in his work. This is often most plainly expressed in his prose works, all of which were published after he had already received serious training and taken his vows as a lay member of the *sangha* (Buddhist community). Despite being immersed in the Zen practice, Snyder was nevertheless able to maintain a critical perspective on his practice, realizing that if everyone took the same path as he, it would result in chaos, as not everyone can go and spend their lives in monastic communities: "We can't have twenty-five percent of the population going off and becoming monks at the expense of the rest [...] [s]itting ten hours a day means that somebody else is growing your food for you" (2000b: 94). Snyder's solution to this dilemma was simple: "We damn well better learn that our meditation is primarily going to be our work with our hands" (2000b: 94).

In Japan he further developed his ideas of a "planetary culture" (2000b: 43), based on the Buddhist creed of compassion and equality of all sentient, as well as non-sentient beings, outlining his program in his essays on ecology and Buddhism. The only way to fully understand Snyder's environmental and political views is by understanding the profound impact this idea of the equal value of all beings had on him, as to Snyder "[e]cological compassion is not a matter of sentimental humanitarianism" (Almon 1991: 81), but rather the most vital question facing all beings on earth. To Snyder's work, the unlimited scope of compassion in Buddhism was a key factor, and he considered the "traditional harmlessness and avoidance of taking life in any form" as having "nation-shaking implications" (2000b: 42).

The program Gary Snyder has in mind is outlined explicitly in his essays, where he calls for societies with "matrilineal descent, free-form marriage, 'natural credit' economics, far less population, and much more wilderness" (2000b: 43). He also states that continual economical growth is not healthy, but rather a "cancer", and the action he explicitly calls for is protection of all "scarce predators and varmints: '[s]upport your right to arm bears" (2005/1974: 98), and also outlines measures needed to be taken to achieve an "ecologically and culturally enlightened state of affairs" (2000b: 251). To

Snyder, this “interpenetration of primitive and civilized states of mind” is what is needed to return mankind to the “original mind” of Buddhism (Castro 1991: 138).

## 2.2 Buddhist Tendencies in Gary Snyder’s Poetry

D.T. Suzuki’s *Essays in Zen Buddhism* had a profound impact on Snyder (Aitken 1994: vii). Suzuki’s essays deal with many of the same themes that Snyder would later develop in his own poetry. Besides containing historical research into Zen Buddhism, the book also contains instructions and guidance for aspiring practitioners, and these guidelines are largely adhered to even in modern Zen practice in Japan.

One of the overriding themes in Suzuki’s essays is the notion of mutual dependencies, or interpenetrations, between all phenomena in the world. This is very similar to the way that relationships between all natural elements are seen in Deep Ecology. In Zen Buddhism (and in other branches of Buddhism, as well), every being, whether sentient or non-sentient, is considered to possess a ‘Buddha nature’, “if not in actuality, then potentially” (Suzuki 2000/1949: 64). Suzuki examines this question quite thoroughly, stating first that all things are essentially empty (*sunya*), have not been created (*anutpada*), are “nondualistic” (*advaya*) and lack “individualistic characters” (*nihsvabhavalakshana*). If these presumptions are accepted (many people would naturally deny these conjectures), the “logical consequence” would be that there is ultimately nothing to “separate one object from another” (2000/1949: 91). This ties in with the notions of interpenetration and equality between all beings that are so apparent in much of Gary Snyder’s poetry. Many poems in *Turtle Island*, for example, explore alternative modes of living and of organizing society, much like Suzuki denouncing “national aggrandizement” (2000/1949: 321) and gathering of wealth.

Of all Snyder’s poetry collections, *Turtle Island* contains the most direct social criticism, and this criticism takes on sometimes harsh and even violent overtones. The apparent anger in many of the poems in *Turtle Island* is very much directed at political decision makers. A case in point is the rather violent imagery in “Mother Earth: Her

Whales”, which will be discussed in the analysis section. The use of anger to achieve positive repercussions is an explicit feature in Tibetan Buddhism (this also is discussed in the analysis section of this thesis), but is also a feature in Zen Buddhism with its links to *bushido*, the martial arts, and Shaku Soen notes that “Buddhists do not shun struggle and warfare” if there is a cause “worth contending for or defending” (2002: 42).

This readiness to engage oneself in struggle in part also explains the revolutionary tones in many of Snyder’s poems. Snyder is known to have certain sympathies towards anarchic movements, as he sees many same qualities in the running of societies independent from state control with some of the Buddhist principles of non-interference and disregard for materialistic values (Snyder 2001: 289–290).

The importance of Hui-neng’s (Hui-neng is known as the sixth ‘patriarch’ of Zen Buddhism) “Platform sutra” to Snyder was also eminent (Suiter 2002: 22). Hui-neng also emphasizes the interdependencies of natural phenomena and vows “to bring them all unto deliverance” (Mou-lam 1994/1938: 509). Similar vows, usually sung out loud, are still in use on a daily basis in Japanese Zen practice, both during meditation and eating. The sacramental nature of eating and the proper use of dead animals are discussed in depth in the poetry analysis section of this thesis, as it is a recurring theme in Snyder’s poetry.

Another Japanese Zen Master that had a profound impact on Snyder was Dogen, the founder of the *Soto-shu* branch of Zen. Snyder later adapted the title of Dogen’s famous “Mountains and Waters sutra” in his own poetry collection *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, a highly complex work of religious and environmental issues, the writing of which lasted for fifty years. Dogen’s “Mountains and Waters sutra” (*sansuikyo*) deals with the theme of interpenetration, the “mountains” representing existence and the “waters” emptiness. Thomas Cleary notes that it is an interesting facet of Zen writing that things are used simultaneously “as a metaphor and at face value in the same text” (in Dogen 1986/13<sup>th</sup> Century: 87), much like in Snyder’s poetry where concrete animal representations also stand as metaphors for political ideologies, such as “the insects” that “side with the Viet Cong” (2005/1974: 22) in “The Call of the Wild”.

In the “Mountains and Waters sutra” the mountains are attributed with qualities that are usually considered human, and the interpenetrations of the human realm with the non-sentient realm are described as mountains actually walking: “don’t doubt the *walking* of mountains just because it doesn’t look the same as the walking of human beings” (Dogen 1986: 89). Snyder equates the mountains with human beings in *The Practice of the Wild*: “mountains walk out to put another coin in the parking meter, and go on down to the 7-Eleven” (2004/1990: 111). Japanese Buddhism, especially, has always had deep associations with mountains (Bernbaum 1997: 56-71), as the waters flowing down the mountainsides have been important in irrigation systems. Even today, one may find Buddhist shrines erected on the peaks of the highest and most remote mountains of the Northern Japanese (*Kita*) Alps, and there are whole temple systems built on mountains, such as on top of Hiei-zan, the broad mountain plateau just outside Kyoto.

### 2.3 Ecocritical Tendencies in Gary Snyder’s Poetry

Ecocriticism is a facet of environmental literary criticism. Beyond this simplistic definition, there is very much divergent thought on what exactly it is and is not in addition to this, and very little consensus on the subject. There is also “no single, dominant worldview guiding ecocritical practice” (Slovic 2000: 160), and therefore, the theory and practice of ecocriticism are constantly re-defined. To attempt to define what it is not, the one thing that somewhat separates ecocriticism from deep ecology, for example, is its preoccupation with literature, whereas deep ecology is most often seen as a branch of philosophy, and more intimately concerned with ethics than literature. Ecocriticism, and environmental studies in general, are often also seen as “soft” science and “hug-the-tree-stuff” (Slovic 2000: 161), partly because they do not yet have the venerability of older branches of literary criticism. However, it is very much a branch of literary criticism that is on the rise, and William Howarth even argues that ecocriticism is evolving beyond the more traditional branches of literary criticism by embracing fresh scientific trends such as quantum mechanics and chaos theory (2000: 164).

Ecocriticism can be practiced both by applying almost any form of literary criticism on a text concerned with environmental issues, and it can be practiced by approaching any text from an ecological viewpoint. Thus, the scope of ecocriticism is very broad, and its objects of study can be practically any texts where nature connects with culture. Ecocriticism also belies the notion that to represent nature, texts need to be explicitly naturalistic. Instead, the natural interdependencies of human and non-human are brought to the fore through the creative use of language (Coupe 2000: 158). One aspect of ecocriticism is also its study of both the meaning of various signs and, even more importantly, the value ascribed to these signs where they are concerned with natural phenomena.

Being in many regards closely related to ecocriticism, deep ecology is also very deeply concerned with the value of things, and with the value of “the entire community”, or, the whole ecosystem. Hence, deep ecology is often referred to as being ecocentric, and so in clear opposition to anthropocentrism. Deep ecology is also different from some of the other environmental factions in that it always emphasizes that non-sentient phenomena are also to be considered when ethics are concerned. This is in clear contrast to, for example, different animal rights groups. Christopher Manes argues that deep ecology’s main task is to find “the voice to articulate the language appropriate for a time of environmental crisis”, (Manes 1990: 144-149) and this is obviously where deep ecology and Gary Snyder’s poetry coincide.

Gary Snyder’s poetry is often associated with both Romanticism and Postmodernism. The same applies in many ways to ecocriticism, too, which is associated with “a typically postmodernist deprivileging of the human subject” (Head 2000: 235) while often at the same time harboring Romantic notions of nature. Snyder’s poetry is deeply ecocritical, especially in the political attitudes as expressed in the poems. Snyder’s poetry clearly expresses the fundamental ecocritical principles of “celebrating nature, berating its despoilers, and reversing their harm through political action” (Howarth 2000:163), the political action in Snyder’s case being his work as a poet and essay writer. Of course, he has also participated in conservation projects and local politics in his native California.

The ecological implications of Snyder's work form a continuum to Transcendentalist philosophers like Thoreau and Emerson, and the attitudes towards conservation are indebted to the work of the likes of John Muir, founder of the Sierra Club. Muir's work had already in the nineteenth century dealt with themes that the Deep ecology movement would in the twentieth century identify with, such as an anti-anthropocentric approach to nature, seeing all natural phenomena as depending on each other for their existence (Muir 2001/1954: 313, 316) instead of being "made especially for man".

Although poetry may be seen as being "artifactual" and in opposition to "what is not made, nature" (Adorno 2000: 81), Snyder's poetry with its very concrete natural descriptions actually produces an antithesis to this artifactuality. Thoreau has famously remarked that "in Wildness is the preservation of the World" (1999/1854: 23), and Snyder's celebration of the wild may be seen as an attempt to preserve this very wildness. The medium for the celebration of the wild in Snyder's case is obviously language, both poetic language in his poetry collections and matter-of-fact environmental analysis in his numerous essay collections. To Snyder, languages are "naturally evolved wild systems" (Snyder 2000a: 127), and to accurately represent the wild, one's language must follow the same discourse.

Terry Gifford has examined the implications of the "Wild" and its associations with Snyder's poetry, concluding that the wild is represented as "wild ecosystems-richly interconnected, interdependent". Snyder's poems thus serve as instructions on "how to live on the earth now" (Gifford 2000b: 176). The measures needed to be taken in order to live harmoniously with one's natural surroundings, becoming "natives of Turtle Island" (Snyder 2005/1974: 105), is an important element in Snyder's poetry (Yamazato 1991: 230). Snyder's ideas and poetic practices in this regard are closely connected with those of Martin Heidegger's, who saw that "[p]oetry is what first brings man onto the earth, making him belong to it", this idea of "dwelling" (2000/1951: 91) being paramount to Heidegger's ecological thinking (Coupe 2000: 64). This notion of the interpenetration/interdependency of natural phenomena in Snyder's poetry is one of the main concerns of this thesis. Apart from the Buddhist notions of this idea, ecological

thinking is also dependent on the various interpenetrations and interdependencies of the natural world. Ecology, and deep ecology especially, looks for “the hidden interdependencies” (Kerridge 2000: 242) in the world, the revealing of which is one of the most striking elements also in Gary Snyder’s poetry.

John Elder calls Snyder’s notions of interdependence “bacteriological”, stating that it is in his expressions of “life’s nutrient cycle” that his poetry expresses the harmony between Buddhism and ecology (Elder 2000: 231). The word “bacteriological” here refers to the idea of nature’s constant renewal through “decay” in a “positive sense” (Elder 2000: 231). Laurence Coupe has also noted the similarities between Snyder’s “practice of the wild” and Claude Lévi-Strauss’s ideas on the importance of an “aesthetic response to plants and animals” (Coupe 2000: 121). Lévi-Strauss, like Snyder, underlines the importance of the myth, and denounces the Hegelian dichotomies and Cartesian dualism (Lévi-Strauss 2000: 132-134) that Snyder in his poetry also opposes by demonstrating the inherent non-dualism of the world. Snyder refers in many of his poems to the concept of the ‘Mother Earth’, as well as to that of ‘Gaia’. These concepts are used both by ecofeminists and deep ecologists (Garrard, 2004: 172), and it is therefore not surprising that Snyder, the “poet laureate” (Garrard, 2004: 20) of deep ecology also refers to them in order to resist the dominant culture of male superiority where nature is subjected to culture and female to male.

Although American literature contains an abundance of animal narratives, this phenomenon itself “precludes the emergence of specific animal poets” (Suarez-Toste 2004: 112). Despite the profusion of animal imagery in Gary Snyder’s poetry, he is not usually seen exclusively as an ‘animal poet’. More appropriately, Snyder’s work may be placed in the Pastoral tradition, the “traditional mode” (Bate 2000: 170) where relationships with nature are explored. Snyder’s politics are apparent in many of his poems, especially in those in *Turtle Island* and are, like Greg Garrard suggests, concerned with politics that do not only deal with “social relations between humans” (Garrard 2000: 183), but with the relations of all sentient and non-sentient beings.

Terry Gifford has divided the Pastoral tradition into three phases: “Pastoral”, “Anti-Pastoral”, and “Post-Pastoral” (2000a 219-222). Snyder’s poetry fits quite neatly in the last category of “Post-Pastoral”, being neither in the tradition of the classic Pastoral of ancient Greco-Roman cultures nor representing anti-Pastoral sentiments. According to Gifford, post-Pastoral can be divided into six “fundamentals” (2000a: 221):

[1] an awe in attention to the natural world; [2] the recognition of a creative-destructive universe equally in balance in a continuous momentum of birth and death, death and rebirth, growth and decay, ecstasy and dissolution; [3] the recognition that the inner is also the workings of the outer, that our inner nature can be understood in relation to external nature; [4] an awareness of both nature as culture and culture as nature; [5] the recognition that with consciousness comes conscience; [6] the ecofeminists’ realisation that the exploitation of the planet is of the same mind-set as the exploitation of women and minorities...

All of the above mentioned elements are present in Snyder’s poetry. The first and fourth “fundamentals” are the most obvious elements in his work, as his poems clearly express both an awe of nature and an awareness of the interconnectedness of nature and culture. However, instead of trying to force this categorization on my own analysis, I have decided to divide the poems dealt with in the analysis section of this study into these three categories: [1] poems depicting processes of interpenetration, [2] poems that elevate specific animals to the status of totem animals, and [3] poems that deal with the destruction of the natural habitats of animals and the effects of nature’s exploitation on them. These categorizations will be further discussed in the next chapter.

### 3 ANIMAL IMAGERY IN GARY SNYDER'S POETRY

Gary Snyder has famously remarked that “[a]s a poet I hold the most archaic values on earth” (2000/1960: viii). This archaism is reflected in the depictions of the wild in his poems. In referring to archaic practices in his poetry, Snyder has a distinct political agenda of ‘re-remembering’ the ancient ways in hope that they might be adopted in the modern world also. Leavis and Thompson have made a similar appeal in the essay “The Organic Community”: “[i]f we forget the old order we shall not know what kind of thing to strive towards” (2000: 76). Snyder’s poetry clearly sets out to show the thing strived towards, i.e. a more harmonious coexistence between the human realm and the natural realm of animals and wilderness.

Snyder’s poetry distinctly expresses the development of his ideas, his early poems collected in *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems* being renditions of his days as a trail crew worker and fire lookout. These poems do not yet explicitly show Buddhist influences, but later on, as he has started his formal Zen training, Buddhist imagery becomes one of the most apparent features in his poetry. To Snyder, this was only natural, as he sees that “[p]oetry must sing or speak from authentic experience” (2000b: 53). Snyder’s poetry has also been criticized for its didacticism, and Thomas Parkinson has argued that he does not care about poetry as art, that poetry is for him only “a set of instruments in a spiritual quest” (1991: 33), and Snyder’s will to ‘preach’ sometimes gets the better of him. To this also, Snyder freely admits to in a letter to Philip Whalen: “poetry is a PROCESS & shd [sic] be, in a Buddhist sort of way, didactic & sensual.” (2000b: 150).

The typical imagery that Snyder used prior to his Japanese sojourn included animals (bear, coyote, deer, etc.), natural landscapes and erotic overtones. All these remained in his later poetry, as well, with the addition of Buddhist imagery, the theme of the interpenetration of all phenomena being paramount. This interpenetration is among the core teachings of any Buddhist sect, and also informed Snyder in his poetry. After finishing his Zen studies in Japan and returning to the United States in 1968, Gary Snyder began work on his collection, *Turtle Island* (*Regarding Wave* was published in

between, in 1970). Snyder's environmentalism had become more militant since his return to his home country, and this new, more militant and angry voice was expressed in his poetry, in *Turtle Island*, in particular.

In this analysis I have chosen to categorize Snyder's poems into three categories: [1] poems depicting processes of interpenetration, [2] poems that elevate specific animals to the status of totem animals, and [3] poems that deal with the destruction of the natural habitats of animals and the effects of nature's exploitation on them. These categories are subtitled as 'Poems of Interpenetration', 'Poems of Totem Animals', and 'Poems of the Destruction of the Animals' Natural Habitat', respectively. This categorization is arguably idiosyncratic, and the poems could doubtless be organized in another manner, especially since there is significant overlapping between the themes in the various poems, but this categorization does allow a cogent analysis concentrating on one specific theme at a time, and is therefore the most valid for this study. Snyder's political stance is expressed in very clear fashion in the poem "For All", where he takes a piece of American patriotic text and alters it to better express the importance of seeing the whole ecosystem as one:

[...] I pledge allegiance  
 I pledge allegiance to the soil  
 of Turtle Island,  
 and to the beings who thereon dwell  
 one ecosystem  
 in diversity  
 under the sun  
 With joyful interpenetration for all.  
 (2000b: 504)

The "beings" in this particular poem represent both animals and humans, and it is noteworthy that Snyder here refers to them not as separate beings of different value, but more as indivisible, or even indistinguishable representatives of sentient beings. Such playful yet serious imagery is present throughout his works, and its motivation often is precisely to show the intrinsic sameness of both humans and the other animals. I will

next start my analysis of his poems, first starting with the poems that express interpenetration.

### 3.1 Poems of Interpenetration

The interpenetration of the human and the animal realms is a recurrent theme in *Turtle Island*. In the poem “Charms” (2005/1974: 28), for example, Snyder uses poetic imagery in depicting the narrator of the poem as an animal and thus enabling him to see the “mare or lioness” through the eyes of an animal: “Thus I could be devastated and athirst with longing/for a lovely mare or lioness, or lady mouse,/in seeing the beauty from THERE/shining through her, some toss of whiskers/or grace-full wave of the tail”.

Snyder’s reading of an important Buddhist treatise, ‘The Diamond Sutra’, also echoed his own intuitive reverence for nature, as according to the sutra, the teaching of the Buddha would bring deliverance to everyone,

whether hatched from an egg, or formed in a womb, or evolved from spawn, or produced by metamorphosis, with or without form, possessing mental faculties or devoid of mental faculties, or both devoid and not devoid, or neither devoid or not devoid, and lead them toward perfect Nirvana (Wai-tao 1994/1938: 88).

This Buddhist idea of the equality and interpenetration of all natural beings and phenomena occurs frequently in Gary Snyder’s poetry. A similar doctrine of interpenetration and equality was also expressed in the Transcendentalists’ writings, as Emerson already had noted in ‘Nature’ that “Each creature is only a modification of the other; the likeness in them is more than the difference, and their radical law is one and the same.” (Emerson 2003/1836: 21).

### 3.1.1 Interpenetrations of Humans, Animals, and the Earth

“The Way West, Underground” (Snyder 2005/1974: 4-5) is the second poem in *Turtle Island*. According to Charles Molesworth, the poem is best read as a “salutation” (1991: 150), much in the same way as many of the other poems in *Turtle Island* can be seen as saluting the animals inhabiting the continent North America/’Turtle Island’. Besides the bison, only mentioned at the end of the poem, this poem deals mainly with the bear myth. Snyder has traced this myth back to its origins among the Neanderthal people seventy thousand years ago (Snyder 2000b: 243), and the bear is a standard metaphor in much of Snyder’s poetry.

The theme of interpenetration is, however, even more pervasive in this particular poem than the bear’s importance as totem animal, hence its place here under ‘Poems of Interpenetration’. In its essence, this long poem is a presentation of the worldwide bear myth. It shows the bear’s importance, mainly to the indigenous peoples of the world, from the west coast of United States, through Asia to Europe and back to the United States:

The split-cedar  
Smoked salmon  
Cloudy days of Oregon,  
the thick fir forests.

After setting the scene in the first stanza, Snyder introduces the bear in the second stanza. As is usual with Snyder, “Bear” is usually spelled with a capital “B”. Snyder makes use of typographical space in the introduction of the bear, inserting a blank space between “heads” and “uphill”, thus slowing down the pace of the poem. This is a standard poetic device in many of Snyder’s poems, as is the use of hyphens for the same purpose (Norton 1991: 172-174). The hyphen is here used to prepare the reader for another image, the “Bear Wife” moving “up the coast”, both in the sense of heading “uphill”, but also in the sense of moving further north after fresh food, in this case blackberries. The section “where blackberry brambles/ramble in the burns” is an oddly

discordant one. The play on “sound symbolism” (as defined by Mick Short 1997: 114-115) and alliteration is obvious, but adds little poetic value to this section, merely illustrating the often playful tone Snyder incorporates in many of his poems:

Black Bear heads      uphill in  
Plumas county,  
Round bottom scuttling through willows—

The Bear Wife moves up the coast.

where blackberry brambles  
ramble in the burns.

In the next section of the poem, Snyder continues handling the bear myth, this time alluding to the religious importance of the bear to the indigenous people of Hokkaido, Japan, also referring to the practice of shamanism by the Ainu people.

And around the curve of islands  
foggy volcanoes  
on, to North Japan. The bears  
& fish-spears of the Ainu.  
Gilyak.  
Mushroom-vision healer,  
single flat drum,  
from long before China.

Women with drums who fly over Tibet.

After leaving Asia, the bear is depicted heading westwards, to Europe. Here the bear makes a stop in Finland where the bear was an important and respected figure of the forest. Also of note is the activity that the bear performs throughout her way, “eating berries” (see also ‘A Berry Feast’ in chapter 3.2.1), much as the “women with drums” of the previous section, who are following the bear, and seen in this poem as merging together with the bear.

In this poem the shamanistic rituals and the bear are interpenetrating, both the myth and the shamanism making a full circle around the globe. Snyder also identifies the Finnish sauna with the sweat lodge of the Native Americans of the Klamath area (around the

Siskiyou mountains on the West Coast of California, very close to Snyder's place of residence in the Yuba country of Northern California). The "Finns" mentioned in the poem are clearly from Lapland, and the traditional outfit described theirs, and Snyder equates the celebratory activities of "the Finns" with those of the Ainu.

Following forests west, and  
 rolling, following grassland,  
 tracking bears and mushrooms,  
 eating berries all the way.  
 In Finland finally took a bath:  
 like redwood sweatlodge on the Klamath—  
 all the Finns in moccasins and  
 pointy hats with dots of white,  
 netting, trapping, bathing,  
 singing holding hands, the while

see-sawing on a bench, a look of love—

In the following section, Snyder begins with a comparison of various names for 'bear' in European languages, noting the difference of the Finnish "Karhu" with Indo-European language versions. This is followed by another change in mood, the cursory remark "lightning rainbow great cloud tree/dialogs of birds" working as yet another geographical transition in the poem.

Karhu—Bjorn—Braun—Bear

[lightning rainbow great cloud tree  
 dialogs of birds]  
 Europa. 'The West.'  
 the bears are gone  
 except Brunhilde?

or elder wilder goddesses reborn—will race  
 the streets of France and Spain  
 with automatic guns—  
 in Spain,

The final stanza of the poem completes the circle by making a return to North America, or Turtle Island. This return is not implied by any linguistic devices, as the comma at

the end of the last stanza would indicate a further continuation of the “Europa” theme. Snyder here associates Brunhilde, the strong mythological female figure with the bear, much the same he as he does Odysseus in *‘this poem is for bear’* (3.2.1). The bear here gets updated to the modern era as an automatic-gun-toting figure, a “wilder” reincarnation of old goddesses, but still a warrior like Brunhilde.

Also, Spain and France are here brought together with native American cave artists, the “Red Hands” painting “Bears and Bison”. Snyder is here alluding to the ancient existence of the bear myth being preserved in underground caves in Europe, artists through their paintings being responsible for the survival of the myth. Although on the surface, the poem deals with the bear, it is also an excellent example in showing Snyder’s vision of the interrelations of ancient myth and the ‘primitive’ peoples.

Bears and Bison,  
 Red Hands with missing fingers,  
 Red mushroom labyrinths;  
 Lightning-bolt mazes,  
 Painted in caves,

Underground.

In “Coyote Valley Spring” (2005/1974: 15), the deer, together with the bear and squirrel, is depicted as a “shifting thing” alongside airborne “birds, [and] weeds”. The poem draws a parallel with the animals and the earth itself, the nature of the earth also being depicted as a “shifting thing” constantly on the move:

Cubs  
 tumble in the damp leaves  
 Deer, bear, squirrel.  
 fresh winds scour the  
 spring stars.  
 rocks crumble  
 deep mud hardens  
 under heavy hills.

shifting things

birds, weeds,  
slip through the air  
through eyes and ears,

Coyote valley [...]

The poem attempts at a synthesis between the sentient and non-sentient realms, where the concrete movement of both realms is seen as an essential principle in the formation of an ecosystem. Therefore this poem clearly is one that belongs to the category where the principles of interpenetration are expressed through the use of animal characters.

In “Prayer for the Great Family” (2005/1974: 24-25), Snyder once again uses the “Mother Earth” metaphor, and the poem can be read as a “creation hymn” (Molesworth 1991: 150) of a kind. The “Great Family” of the poem’s title refers to all life on the planet, although, contrary to anthropocentrism, humans are actually excluded from the “Great Family”. However, the poem is a prayer made by man, and man is the underlying protagonist, as is apparent in the repetitious “*in our minds so be it*” at the end of each stanza.

Although stanzas three, four, and six are the only ones where animals are explicitly mentioned, the printing of the whole poem is in place, as it shows the interpenetrations apparent in Snyder’s animal imagery in the rest of his works, too:

Gratitude to Mother Earth, sailing through night and day—  
and to her soil: rich, rare, and sweet  
*in our minds so be it*

Gratitude to Plants, the sun-facing light-changing leaf  
and fine root-hairs; standing still through wind  
and rain; their dance is in the flowing spiral grain  
*in our minds so be it*

Gratitude to Air, bearing the soaring Swift and the silent  
Owl at dawn. Breath of our song  
clear spirit breeze  
*in our minds so be it*

Gratitude to Wild Beings, our brothers, teaching secrets,

freedoms, and ways; who share with us their milk;  
 self-complete, brave, and aware  
*in our minds so be it*

Gratitude to Water: clouds, lakes, rivers, glaciers;  
 holding or releasing; streaming through all  
 our bodies salty seas  
*in our minds so be it*

Gratitude to the Sun: blinding pulsing light through  
 trunks of trees, through mists, warming caves where  
 bears and snakes sleep—he who wakes us—  
*in our minds so be it*

Gratitude to the Great Sky  
 who holds billions of stars—and goes yet beyond that—  
 beyond all powers, and thoughts  
 and yet is within us—  
 Grandfather Space.  
 The Mind is his Wife.

*so be it.*

The poem is modeled “after a Mohawk prayer” (Snyder 2005/1974: 25), and is a synthesis of sentient and non-sentient beings where the whole biosphere is seen as forming a living whole. There is personification of nature in the poem, such as in referring to the Sun as a “he”, and also in the last stanza where the “Great Sky” is referred to as a person “who holds billions of stars”, and the space is referred to as a “Grandfather” whose wife is “The Mind”. However, the most striking example of interrelatedness, literally, is stanza number four where animals, or “Wild Beings” are referred to as “our brothers”. It is also implied that proper ways in relating to nature can be learned from these “Wild Beings”. The awareness that the poem attributes to animals is also something that is strongly reminiscent of the Buddhist doctrines that state that animals are capable of awareness, too. In this poem Snyder fuses this Buddhist idea with the belief systems of the Native Americans.

“Magpie’s Song” (Snyder 2005/1974: 69) is in many ways one of the more elegant poems in *Turtle Island*. The poem introduces an interpenetrating image of a human, semi-urban realm, and the animal realm, represented here by the coyotes and the

magpie. The Magpie can be seen as the poet's attempt to bring into human language "the voice that can capture this interpenetration" (Castro 1991: 138), an attempt that, despite the anthropocentric connotations, the poem realizes quite well. The first stanza of the poem is essentially a simplistic, haiku-like depiction of a nameless human observer sitting down "on excavation gravel" and hearing the coyotes' "howling and yapping":

Six A.M.,  
 Sat down on excavation gravel  
 by juniper and desert S.P. tracks  
 interstate 80 not far off  
     between trucks  
 Coyotes—maybe three  
         howling and yapping from a rise.

The second stanza presents the magpie, ironically, as a *lyrical* singer, reassuring the human receiver of his song, that there is "[n]o need to fear", implying that the true nature of the world can be found in the "Turquoise blue" of "the Mind". Here again, the notion of the interrelation of the human and the non-human is set forth in the Magpie's referring to the hearer as "brother". The stanza also has a certain quality of an epiphany, as the receiver of the song feels connected to the Magpie on a magical way, the song transmuting into coherent human language:

Magpie on a bough  
 Tipped his head and said,  
  
*"Here in the mind, brother  
 Turquoise blue.  
 I wouldn't fool you.  
 Smell the breeze  
 It came through all the trees  
 No need to fear  
 What's ahead  
 Snow up the hills west  
 Will be there every year  
 be at rest.  
 A feather on the ground—  
 The wind sound—*

*Here in the Mind, Brother,  
Turquoise Blue'*

The poem does carry with it certain anthropocentric qualities; as the receiver of the Magpie's song is obviously interpreting the song according to his (he is referred to as "brother") own conceptions of what a Magpie might indicate with her song. However, the poem is best seen as presenting the reader with the magical mantra of the Magpie that is part of "the jeweled net of interconnected systems" (Molesworth 1991: 153), echoing the Buddhist notion of animals as sentient beings capable of the fullest self-realization.

A noteworthy addition to Snyder's cast of animal characters that he adopted during his time in Japan is the inclusion of sharks and whales in his poetry. The whale will be discussed separately later. These creatures of the Pacific also reflect his notion of interdependence, which is evident in 'Shark Meat', from *Regarding Wave*:

[...] Miles of water, Black current,  
Thousands of days  
Re-crossing his own paths  
To tangle our net  
To be part of  
This loom.  
(2000b: 454).

Here the shark is seen crisscrossing his own "paths" only to eventually end up "tangled" with the human realm, represented here in the form of fishing nets. In addition to interpenetration, this poem is also connected with animals used as food, and with 'hunting magic', which will be discussed next. According to Snyder, the understanding of these "interdependencies" is vital in order to gain a full awareness of the planet's biosphere (2000c/1980: 34-35). The same connection between interpenetration and eating is also apparent in the poem "Night Herons" (2005/1974: 36) where interpenetration is viewed as a source of joy: "the joy of all the beings/is in being/older and tougher and eaten/up." This is a recurrent theme in Snyder's poetry.

### 3.1.2 Hunting Magic, or Animals as People

Much the same way as Snyder has traced the bear myth around the world, has he done with the concept of ‘hunting magic’. The essay “Poetry and the Primitive” (2000b: 52-61) explains Snyder’s view on the subject. By ‘hunting magic’ he means the straining of one’s consciousness and cognitive faculties to identify with one’s pray to the extent that it “out of compassion comes within your range” (Snyder 2000b: 54). This kind of view where the hunter is so intertwined with the pray he sees as a global phenomenon amongst the ancient peoples of Europe, North America, Japan and China. Evidence of such exists in Europe since the Paleolithic era until the start of what we term ‘civilization’. In North America, the concept was more alive amidst the Native Americans until a much later date due to its colonization happening at a comparatively speaking late date. The mythology of ‘hunting magic’ also encompasses the idea of rebirth where the animals and humans are amidst a constant circle of “mating and giving birth” (Snyder 2000b: 55) and then accepting death in the hands of the hunter and thus contributing to the sustenance of other life.

In “The Dead by the Side of the Road” from *Turtle Island* (2005/1974: 7-8), Snyder examines the consequences of building highways among the trails used by animals. The poem lists several different animals that have been killed by people using the road: the hawk, skunk, deer, and ringtail cat. Animals are presented as objects of compassion in this poem. “Interstate 5”, mentioned in the poem, runs through California along the Sacramento and San Juan Valleys, very close to Gary Snyder’s homestead, ‘Kitkitdizze’. Besides mentioning the animals, the poem also lists different ways in which the animals’ deaths can be put to use by, for example, making “a pouch for magic tools”. It begins with a question:

How did a great Red-tailed Hawk  
 come to lie—all stiff and dry—  
 on the shoulder of  
 Interstate 5?

Her wings for dance fans

“Dance fans” here has a double meaning. First, it creates a strong contrast with the wild and the urban consumer culture where a dead hawk’s wings are accessorized into fashion items. However, a deeper look into this also reveals the connection to ‘hunting magic’ and the Native American Ghost Dance movement, as the dancers wore birds’ feathers as ornaments already then. Snyder quotes an Arapaho dancer’s song: “I circle around/The boundaries of the earth,/The boundaries of the earth,/Wearing the long wing feathers as I fly/ Wearing the long wing feathers as I fly”. The next stanza continues with a description of the concrete actions following, but there is no elaboration on who “Zac” is. Several other animals’ fates adjacent to the road, described as almost murderous entity, are presented next:

Zac skinned a skunk with a crushed head  
 Washed the pelt in gas; it hangs,  
 tanned, in his tent

Fawn stew on Hallowe’en  
 hit by a truck on highway forty-nine  
 offer cornmeal by the mouth;  
 skin it out.

Log trucks run on fossil fuel

I never saw a Ringtail til I found one in the road:  
 case-skinned it with the toenails  
 footpads, nose, and whiskers on;  
 it soaks in salt and water  
 sulphuric acid pickle;

she will be a pouch for magic tools.

The Doe was apparently shot  
 lengthwise and through the side—  
 shoulder and out the flank  
 belly full of blood

In the final stanza, the poem demonstrates the proper behavior in conjunction with these dead animals. This proper behavior entails “Pray[ing] to the spirits”, and asking the deer and other animals “to bless us”. Snyder has repeatedly referred to this kind of practice also in other places in his works. In addition to “Poetry and the Primitive”, the essay

“Suwa-no-se Island and the Banyan Ashram” (2000b: 62-68) deals with the same concept where animals are seen as our relatives, as the “ancient sisters” referred to in this poem. This interpenetration of the human with the non-human realm, becoming “one with the other” (2000b: 65) is essential for the primitive hunter in Snyder’s view. The poem ends in a pessimistic tone, and again ‘guilty’ parties (such as in ‘Call of the Wild’, to be discussed later on) are mentioned such as in the prosaic remark that “Log trucks run on fossil fuel”). The appreciative behavior towards the animals is, however, also an important element in the poem:

Can save the other shoulder maybe,  
 if she didn’t lie too long–  
 Pray to the spirits. Ask them to bless us:  
 our ancient sisters’ trails  
     the roads were laid across and kill them:  
         night-shining eyes

The dead by the side of the road.

The “hunting magic”, or, identification with the non-human, is also referred to in other poems by Snyder, such as in poem number eight in the “Hunting” section of *Myths and Texts*, where the primitive (mythic) hunter’s methods are explained:

Deer don’t want to die for me.  
 I’ll drink sea-water  
 Sleep on beach pebbles in the rain  
 Until the deer come down to die  
     in pity for my pain.  
 (2000c/1960: 28)

The poem, however, begins with the magical song of the Deer herself getting ready for the hunting season:

“I dance on all the mountains  
 On five mountains, I have a dancing place  
 When they shoot at me I run  
 To my five mountains”  
 (2000c/1960: 26)

The “five mountains” are a reference to Native American ‘vision quests’ on mountains. Also, as in mountain worship around the world, it is common to have five peaks chosen in a particular area, one in each corner and one in the center (Bernbaum 1997: 28-30, 154). The relationship of humans and their pray, deer, is also examined elsewhere in Snyder’s work, “Long Hair” from *Regarding Wave* (2000b: 462) beginning with the following prose poem where the traditional roles of hunter and hunted have changed places, or rather, merged into one:

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.”

Patrick D. Murphy has traced this poem’s origins in the practices of the Salish, a Native American coastal tribe, and also points at the poem’s interpretation as “the proper relationship between hunter and hunted” (Murphy 1991: 221). Here the above mentioned switch between the roles of hunter and hunted and their mutual dependence on each other is realized in the extreme, and the deer shooting the man actually refers to the deer choosing the man to be the one who shoots itself. Thus a revolution of consciousness is achieved. Obviously, Snyder handles the subject using humor as a tool, and the mock-serious tone of the poem is used to highlight its serious subject matter of man’s relation to eating dead animals.

One of the most concrete animal representations in *Turtle Island* is the poem “One Should Not Talk to a Skilled Hunter about What Is Forbidden by the Buddha” (2005/1974: 66). The title is a quotation from Zen Master Hsiyang-yen. The first stanza of the poem is essentially a rendering of a Buddhist funeral ceremony, the “*Shingyo*”, or ‘Heart Sutra’, a common chant in Buddhist funeral ceremonies. The poem is very

explicit in describing the physical attributes of the “grey fox”, and the images of “musky smell” and “dead-body odor” are quite graphic. The poem starts with measuring and outlining the physical attributes of the dead fox:

A gray fox, female, nine pounds three ounces.  
 39 5/8” long with tail.  
 Peeling skin back (Kai  
 reminded us to chant the *Shingyo* first)  
 cold pelt. crinkle; and musky smell  
 mixed with dead-body odor starting.

The second stanza depicts the realization of the interpenetration found in nature, as the “aluminum foil”, the smallest particle inside the body of the fox is an allusion to the effect that the human realm has on the animal realm:

Stomach content: a whole ground squirrel well chewed  
 plus one lizard foot  
 and somewhere from inside the ground squirrel  
 a bit of aluminum foil.

The secret.  
 and the secret hidden deep in that.

The “aluminum foil” acts as a metaphor for the human presence in the wilderness, and the “secret” here is how the human and non-human are linked together, even if unawares of the consequences of this interrelatedness themselves. The effect that the human production of non-recyclable produce has on nature is also referred to in the poem “LMFBR” [short for Liquid Metal Fast Breeder Reactor], which makes reference to the death dance of the goddess *Kali*, caused by the overproduction of “[a]luminum beer cans, plastic spoons, plywood veneer, PVC pipe, vinyl seat covers, don’t exactly burn, don’t quite rot, flood over us [...] (2005/1974: 67). Snyder also examines the processes of meat production and ethical treatment of animals in his poem “Steak” (2005/1974: 10), the poem depicting cows “Steaming, stamping/long-lashed, slowly thinking/with the rhythm of their breathing”. The key phrase here is the word “thinking”, as Snyder suggests that the thought process is not reserved to humans only.

This example from *Left Out in the Rain*, where Snyder, in addition to the use of overt Buddhist references, demonstrates his characteristically wry sense of humor, is also worthy of consideration:

‘How Zen Masters Are Like Mature Herring’

So few become full grown  
And how necessary all the others;  
    Gifts to the food chain,  
    Feeding another universe.

These big ones feed sharks.  
(2005/1974: 518).

These examples illustrate the apparent simplicity of Snyder’s poetry, and scholar Jody Norton suggests that it is this use of “sparely modified, generalized imagery [that] indirectly reflects the Zen Buddhist conviction of the pointlessness of intellection” (Norton 1991:170), also inscribing the Zen Buddhist notion of the emptiness and interconnectedness of phenomena (Norton 1991: 167).

### 3.2 Poems of Totem Animals

Gary Snyder has presented his audience with depictions of many different animals during his long career, but a few of those animals stand out as being more important than others, whether by their sheer numeric appearance or by other factors (such as, how famous some of his poems of the coyote are). Thus, they have effectively become totem animals in Snyder’s poetry, animals whose significance far surpasses that of others and attaches to itself meanings greater than animals only mentioned in passing, as it were. I will start my analysis with what is arguably the most important totem animal in Snyder’s whole *oeuvre*, the bear.

### 3.2.1 The Bear

In his essay ‘Unnatural Writing’, Gary Snyder had already demanded of “A New Nature Poetics” that, “it use Bear as a totem” (2005/1974: 262). Many of his poems indeed use the image of the bear, the section entitled “Hunting” of *Myths and Texts*, where he examines the ancient myth of humans marrying bears, even being dedicated to the bear. I will next show how Snyder has used the bear image in one of his most influential literary works, ‘Smokey the Bear Sutra’. As a sutra, i.e. religious writing, the work is neither purely prose nor poetry, but somewhere in between. I will, however, include it in this thesis because of its importance in Snyder’s production.

‘Smokey the Bear Sutra’ (2005/1974: 241-244), written in 1969 and published in 1973 as part of *The Fudo Trilogy* and in 1995 as part of *A Place in Space*, illustrates better than any of Snyder’s other works his peculiar vision of Buddhism blended with ancient myth and radical ecology. In his postscript (2005/1974: 243-44) to the sutra he discusses the worldwide “B\_\_r cult”, which he considers to be among the oldest religions in the world, dating back 70 000 years, and “stretching from Suomi to Utah via Siberia”. He also reminisces on the sutra’s reception on its original private publication in 1969, Snyder himself handing out free copies in his old park Service campaign hat, and “Forest beatniks and conservation fanatics read[ing] them with mad glints and giggles” (2005/1974: 244).

The sutra is rather long to print here as a whole, especially as the first part of it is a purely prosaic representation of certain geographic aspects of the North American continent. I will therefore begin my analysis at the beginning of the actual poetic portion of it. The sutra (2005/1974: 241-43) is constructed in the form of a traditional Mahayana Buddhist sutra and begins in the Jurassic era, “about 150 million years ago” with the Buddha addressing “all the assembled elements and energies”, the “Discourse concerning Enlightenment on planet Earth”. In the Discourse the Buddha announces to his assembly that because in the future the human race will get into trouble over its head, he will be reincarnated then and show himself in “his true form of SMOKEY THE BEAR”.

According to Snyder, the mission of this future Buddha will be to indicate that “all creatures have the right to live to their limits and that deer, rabbits, chipmunks, snakes, dandelions, and lizards all grow in the realm of the Dharma”, and therefore should be considered as equals to mankind. This Buddhist notion of the interconnectedness of all beings has already been discussed earlier in this thesis, as it is one of the most important components that Snyder has used in formulating his own vision. Snyder’s sutra continues and takes on political implications, ‘Smokey the Bear’ being no longer a mere benevolent counselor to mankind, but instead “trampling underfoot wasteful freeways and needless suburbs; smashing the worms of capitalism and totalitarianism”, performing the task that Snyder sees as necessary to creating a new and healthier culture.

The figure of ‘Smokey the Bear’ is drawn from the Tibetan Vajrayana (also known as Tantric, or esoteric) Buddhism, and he is holding a “*vajra* shovel”. The Tibetan Buddhist tradition is somewhat different from mainstream Buddhism, having the element of anger as a potential and positive force, and Snyder is using this tradition to express his own “anger and denunciation” of “the abuse of living creatures that many religions ignore: animals and trees” (Almon 1991: 84). Snyder’s ‘Smokey the Bear’ is indeed no kind instructor: “Wrathful but Calm, Austere but Comic, Smokey the Bear will illuminate those who would help him; but for those who would hinder or slander him, HE WILL PUT THEM OUT”.

Gary Snyder’s roots in the Beat Generation credo are also apparent in the sutra, as ‘Smokey the Bear’ will protect “hoboes and madmen, prisoners and sick people, musicians, playful women, and hopeful children”, all standard imagery in Beat literature, as well as “those who love woods and rivers, Gods and animals”. Further on in the sutra, Snyder specifies ‘Smokey the Bear’s’ ‘enemies’, and demonstrates their fate:

And if anyone is threatened by advertising, air pollution, or the police, they should chant SMOKEY THE BEAR’S WAR SPELL:

DROWN THEIR BUTTS

CRUSH THEIR BUTTS  
 DROWN THEIR BUTTS  
 CRUSH THEIR BUTTS

And SMOKEY THE BEAR will surely appear to put the enemy out with his vajra shovel.

The sutra, as described above, presents the core of Gary Snyder's philosophy as a poet, and has its origins in Snyder's practice of *zazen*, i.e. sitting meditation as practiced in Zen Buddhism, Snyder having a vision during his meditation of "The Old One [bear]" being what the Buddhist texts refer to as "The Ancient Buddha" (2005/1974: 243). According to Snyder, "It might take this sort of Buddha to quell the fires of greed and war and to help us head off the biological holocaust that the twenty-first century may well prove to be" (2005/1974: 244). The sutra continues to carefully follow the structure of a traditional sutra, stating what the merit of those who recite the sutra will be, i.e. they "Will enter the age of harmony of humans and nature, Will win the tender love and caresses of men, women, and beasts". Snyder also ends the sutra according to tradition passed on for centuries, ending with the customary statement "Thus have we heard", followed by the less than orthodox "may be reproduced free forever".

While 'Smokey the Bear Sutra' is a popular work, Snyder's most important contribution to presenting the bear in poetic form is poem number six from the section 'Hunting' in *Myths & Texts* (as previously discussed, this 1960 poetry collection is divided into three sections: 'Logging', 'Hunting', and 'Burning'). Several of the poems in 'Hunting' are dedicated to animals, such as birds (2000c/1960: 20), deer (2000c/1960: 26) and, the bear (2000c/1960: 23-25). The 'Hunting' section begins with the song of the "shaman" (2000c/1960: 19), and it is partly the role of a shaman that both the narrator of the poem, and indeed the bear in the poem, presumes. Also, like a shaman, the speaker here acts as a narrator of myth. According to Patrick D. Murphy "the poet acts as vehicle for a social mythology" (Murphy 1991: 211), and this holds especially true for the poem at hand which represents the reader with a mythology of human-animal relationships.

The poem has two specific levels; a frame narrative that takes place in the present, and an inner narrative that presents the myth content of the poem. The poem begins with the above-mentioned dedication, and continues with what can be conjectured is the voice of the bear himself: “As for me I am a child of the god of the mountains”. The bear is here explicitly associated with the god of the mountains (in Snyder’s view of Buddhist mythology, Fudomyo-o) to whom Snyder refers to as a bear and “The Ancient Buddha” (2005/1974: 243). After the initial dedication and opening statement, the scene, as it were, is set in the first stanza that begins with the frame narrative that depicts a realistic natural scene:

*this poem is for bear*

“As for me I am a child of the god of the mountains”

A bear down under the cliff.  
 She is eating huckleberries.  
 They are ripe now  
 Soon it will snow, and she  
 Or maybe he, will crawl into a hole  
 And sleep. You can see  
 Huckleberries in bearshit if you  
 Look, this time of year  
 If I sneak up on the bear  
 It will grunt and run

In the frame narrative the bear is represented as a peaceful herbivore that will run if approached. The reader is also instructed to study the bear droppings which, according to Snyder, provide “a window into a bear’s life” (2004/1990: 175) and thus tell the observer of the bear’s recent locations and actions. The next several stanzas present the reader with the inner narrative that relates the myth at hand. The myth is based on ancient Native American stories of girls marrying bears (Snyder2004/1990: 181-182), and presents in poetic form what Snyder would later on study in detail in his essay ‘The Woman Who Married a Bear’ in *Practice of the Wild* (2004/1990: 166-186). The inner narrative begins where the girl in question meets the bear:

The others had all gone down  
 From the blackberry brambles, but one girl

Spilled her basket, and was picking up her  
 Berries in the dark.  
 A tall man stood in the shadow, took her arm.  
 Led her to his home. He was a bear.  
 In a house under the mountain  
 She gave birth to slick dark children  
 With sharp teeth, and lived in the hollow  
 Mountain many years.

In the previous stanza the “bear” is explicitly equated with “man”, and the “man’s” “house” is his “cave”. The stanza has a dark undertone to it, as the day has already grown “dark”, the man/bear appears from the “shadow” and their eventual children are also “dark”. The content of the stanza makes it clear that the poem has moved from depicting a real world into depicting a mythic reality where it is possible for humans and bears to marry and conceive children. Next, a song is presented that recites the many names of the bear and relates the mythic invocation of the bear hunter:

snare a bear: call him out:  
 honey-eater  
 forest apple  
 light-foot  
 Old man in the fur coat, Bear! come out!  
 Die of your own choice!  
 Grandfather black-food!  
     this girl married a bear  
 Who rules in the mountains, Bear!  
     you have eaten many berries  
     you have caught many fish  
     you have frightened many people

The song is both venerable and familiar in its tone and thus represents the various different feelings towards the bear who is both respected as a “grandfather” and a figure whose name it is impolite (Snyder 2004/1990: 173) to utter directly and feared as it has “frightened many people”. The hunters also wish the bear to die of its “own choice”. This is a direct reference to Snyder’s idea of the ‘hunting magic’ realized.

In the next stanza the poem describes modes of conduct of the various bear species. The image of the bears “sucking their paws” reminds the reader of their seemingly human



“Give me my belt.  
 “I am near death.  
 “I came from the mountain caves  
 “At the headwaters,  
 “The small streams there  
 “Are all dried up.

Obviously, at least part of the reason that the bear goes voluntarily into his death is also the fact that the hunters have effectively become his brother-in-laws. This is an allusion into the perceived relation of humans and bears that the poem communicates, i.e. that in essence the realms of the human and the bear are so interrelated that they are essentially all the same as each other. The poem then ends with a return to the frame narrative where the poet rather unusually brings an image of himself into the poem:

-I think I’ll go hunt bears.  
     “hunt bears?

Why shit Snyder,  
 You couldn’t hit a bear in the ass  
     with a handful of rice!”

It is noteworthy that neither the poem nor the poet describes the hunting of bears in a negative way. This is only natural if the implications of the ‘hunting magic’ concept are taken as seriously as they are in this poem. The bear has thus become to represent an idealized companion in the rituals of ‘hunting magic’ and a figure of mythic proportions to be both feared and respected.

### 3.2.2 The Wolf

The wolf is another important animal in Snyder’s poetry and is present in many of his poems. The wolf makes an important appearance in “Spel Against Demons” (2005/1974: 16-17), which is Snyder’s adaptation of a Buddhist ‘exorcism’ spell, the magical literary form also known as *dharani* (Almon 1991: 83). The poem deals with the destruction of nature and shows the wolf as a positive presence, a thing with such

“self-restraint” that it is set as a model of correct behavior towards nature. Animal imagery in general is used in the poem both to achieve paradoxical images as well as to express political/ecological goals. The three first stanzas in the poem state the conditions that the poem sets itself against. The repetitive phrase “must cease” at each stanza’s end is foregrounded through this simple repetition:

The release of Demonic Energies in the name of  
the People  
must cease

Messing with blood sacrifices in the name of  
Nature  
must cease

The stifling self-indulgence in anger in the name of  
Freedom  
must cease

this is death to clarity  
death to compassion

The conditions the poem mentions are all related to the destruction of nature by man, and both war in the form of “Demonic Energies” and nationalism as “stifling self-indulgence” are criticized. After stating the reasons for the need to counter these conditions, the next stanza continues with bringing in a paradoxical element to the poem in the image of the wolf. The wolf here stands as a metaphor of the “self-restraint” of nature and the primitive set against “executions” and “slaughterings”. The section contains a double paradox. The first one is that the wolf is not usually depicted as having great self-restraint, and the second one states that the slaughter is “the work of hysterical sheep”. Sheep are not usually known as very bloodthirsty animals, and they stand in as a metaphor of mankind, in this case the allusions on “executions” and “slaughterings” referring to the United States in particular:

the man who has the soul of the wolf  
knows the self-restraint  
of the wolf

aimless executions and slaughterings  
are not the work of wolves and eagles

but the work of hysterical sheep

Further on in the poem, more paradoxical motifs are introduced as, for example, the act of “devouring” is usually more characteristic of “The Demonic”, as are violent actions like “cut[ting] down” and “plow[ing] back”. This imagery comes from Snyder’s studies in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition (Yamazato 1991: 236), and is strongly reminiscent of his “Smokey the Bear Sutra” that was discussed previously in this thesis. Originally, “Spel Against Demons” actually appeared together with “Smokey the Bear Sutra” in *The Fudo Trilogy*. Despite the violent imagery, the poem sees that real power lies in “[f]earlessness, humor, [and] detachment”, and similar word play and humor as in “Smokey the Bear Sutra” is used here where knowledge is switched to “Gnowledge”:

The Demonic must be devoured!  
Self-serving must be  
    cut down  
Anger must be  
    plowed back  
Fearlessness, humor, detachment, is power

Gnowledge is the secret of Transformation!

The final section of the poem is modeled after the Tibetan Buddhist sutra tradition, and “ACHALA” stands for Fudomyo-o, the Buddhist deity (Yamazato 1991: 236-237), whom Snyder also identifies with the bear myth (Snyder 2000b: 243-244):

*Down* with demonic killers who mouth revolutionary  
slogans and muddy the flow of change, may they be  
Bound by the Noose, and Instructed by the Diamond  
Sword of ACHALA the Immovable, Lord of Wisdom, Lord  
of Heat, who is squint-eyed and whose face is terrible  
with bare fangs, who wears on his crown a garland of  
severed heads, clad in tiger skin, he who turns  
Wrath to Purified Accomplishment,

whose powers are of lava,

of magma, of deep rock strata, of gunpowder,  
and the Sun.

He who saves tortured intelligent demons and filth-eating  
Hungry ghosts, his spel is,

NAMAH SAMANTAH VAJRANAM CHANDA  
MAHAROSHANA  
SPHATAYA HUM TRAKA HAM MAM

The mantra in the end of the poem is the same that can also be found in “Smokey the Bear Sutra” and is translated as “I dedicate myself to the universal diamond—be this raging fury destroyed” (Snyder 2000b: 242). This is the same type of intertextuality that was also used between the previously discussed poem number six from *Myths & Texts* and “A Berry Feast”. In effect, these intertextualities invite comparisons between the bear and the wolf, as well as the bear and the coyote. The coyote shall be discussed next.

### 3.2.3 The Coyote

“A Berry Feast” is as much a poem about the bear as it is of the coyote, but the image of the coyote saying “fuck you!” is so iconic in Snyder’s poetry that the poem is most often seen as celebrating the coyote and its role of trickster in American letters. The poem is also one of Snyder’s most famous ones, largely because of its inclusion in one of the pivotal moments of the Beat Generation, the 1955 Six Gallery reading in San Francisco. Snyder’s reading of his ‘Berry Feast’, a favorite of “early ecological radicals”, would also prompt some critics to later dub his poetry as “The Bearshit-on-the-Trail School of Poetry”. (Suiter 2002: 14.)

The poem first appeared as the first poem in the ‘Far West’ section of *The Back Country* (2000d/1968: 3-7). It is divided into four numbered sections, and dedicated to the Matson couple, Snyder’s friends from the early 1950s (Suiter 2002: 181-182). Joyce Matson is also present, although anonymously, in section 2 of the poem. The literary

names of the Matsons are purely incidental. In section number one the various traditionalist images of coyote the trickster start the poem off:

*For Joyce and Homer Matson*

1

Fur the color of mud, the smooth looper  
 Crapulous old man, a drifter,  
 Praises! of Coyote the Nasty, the fat  
 Puppy that abused himself, the ugly gambler,

In the second stanza the reader is once again presented with Snyder's most important totem animal, the bear. The bear is on a "high meadow", which means that she is once again in the mountains. Similar to the bear poem in *Myths & Texts* (discussed in 3.2.1), the myth of the human mating with a bear is again explicit. The reference to "half-human cubs" also alludes to ancient Greek mythology where various mythological creatures of half-human and half-animal descent are frequent:

In bearshit find it in August,  
 Neat pile on the fragrant trail, in late  
 August, perhaps by a larch tree  
 Bear has been eating the berries.  
 high meadow, late summer, snow gone  
 Blackbear  
 eating berries, married  
 To a woman whose breasts bleed  
 From nursing the half-human cubs.

Somewhere of course there are people  
 collecting and junking, gibbering all day,

"Where I shoot my arrows  
 "There is the sunflower's shade  
 –song of the rattlesnake  
 coiled in the boulder's groin  
 "Ka'k, k'ak, k'ak!  
 sang Coyote. Mating with  
 humankind–

As well as the bear, even the coyote is here presented as “mating with humankind”. Otherwise, people are referred to in this stanza in a dismissive way, “collecting”, “junking” and “gibbering”. As is common in Snyder’s poetry, different animals sing different songs in many of his poems. In this stanza the reader is presented with those of the rattlesnake and the coyote. The section ends with an image of human development destroying the natural habitats of the various animals mentioned in the poem:

The Chainsaw falls for boards of pine,  
 Suburban bedrooms, block on block  
 Will waver with this grain and knot,  
 The maddening shapes will start and fade  
 Each morning when commuters wake—  
 Joined boards hung on frames,  
     a box to catch the biped in.

    and shadow swings around the tree  
 Shifting on the berrybush  
     from leaf to leaf across each day  
 The shadow swings around the tree.

The second section begins with an idyllic scene with a real-life background (Suiter 2002: 182). The nursing mother is contrasted with the mother whose “breasts bleed” in the first section. Here, in the purely human world, the mother’s breasts produce milk straight to the family’s cups:

2

Three, down, through windows  
 Dawn leaping cats, all barred brown, grey  
 Whiskers aflame  
 bits of mouse on the tongue

Washing the coffeepot in the river  
 the baby yelling for breakfast,  
 Her breasts, black-nippled, blue-veined, heavy,  
 Hung through the loose shirt  
 squeezed, with the free hand  
     white jet in three cups.  
 Cats at dawn  
     derry derry down

There is an explicit reference to the traditional song “Derry Derry Down” that underlines the familiar yet slightly erotic nature of the previous part. It is also noticeable how many different animals this long poem contains. Besides the main character coyote, the rattlesnake also sings a song, and the poem lists animals in almost a catalogue-like manner: bears, cats, mice, trout, owls, sparrows, oxen, magpie, birds, horsemeat and lizards all make their appearance in the poem. The poem also shows the coyote in one of its many forms as creator, deciding which animal shall be which. Patrick D. Murphy has argued that in Snyder’s poetry, the coyote acts as a “savior-figure alternative to Christ” (Murphy 1991: 222) and it is this role that the coyote plays here:

Creeks wash clean where trout hide  
 We chew the black plug  
 Sleep on needles through long afternoons  
 “you shall be owl  
 “you shall be sparrow  
 “you will grow thick and green, people  
 “will eat you, you berries!  
 Coyote: shot from the car, two ears,  
 A tail, bring bounty,  
 Clanks of tread  
 oxen of Shang  
 moving the measured road

Bronze bells at the throat  
 Bronze balls on the horns, the bright Oxen  
 Chanting through sunlight and dust  
 wheeling logs down hills  
 into heaps,  
 the yellow  
 Fat-snout Caterpillar, tread toppling forward  
 Leaf on leaf, roots in gold volcanic dirt.  
 When  
 Snow melts back  
 from the trees  
 Bare branches            knobbed pine twigs  
 hot sun on wet flowers  
 Green shoots of huckleberry  
 Breaking through snow.

The coyote is described in this poem as ever resurrecting. Here it is shot, but further on in the poem it is once again alive and well. Beat poet Michael McClure argued (in Snyder & Harrison 2010: 96) that this mischievous, “bites you in the ass” characteristic of the coyote is something that many people first came to contact with in this particular poem. Like the first section, the second section also ends with images of human work in nature, first with an image of ancient, presumably Oriental field work, then with a modern, Occidental image of a Caterpillar, a replacement of the ancient ox, at work. The third section again begins with a scene from the human world, this time with more explicit sexual imagery:

3

Belly stretched taut in a bulge  
 Breasts swelling as you guzzle beer, who wants  
     Nirvana?  
 Here is water, wine, beer  
 Enough books for a week  
 A mess of afterbirth,  
 A smell of hot earth, a warm mist  
 Steams from the crotch

In the next stanza the coyote is saved, rather miraculously, by the magpie, an animal with its own trickster features as well, and the coyote utters its famous “Fuck you!” which, again, is referred to as a song:

“You can’t be killers all your life  
 “The people are coming—  
     —and when Magpie  
 Revived him, limp rag of fur in the river  
 Drowned and drifting, fish-food in the shallows,  
 “Fuck you!” sang Coyote  
     and ran.

This rambunctious scene is then immediately contrasted with the almost pastoral image of the bear and the berries it’s eating. Then the section ends again with a return to the human world where the anonymous narrator describes the events of what the reader is led to believe is yesterday. The voices of the human narrator and the coyote are mixed

here to the extent that it is difficult to say where one ends and the other begins. The obvious mischievous and profane nature of the coyote is apparent in the utterings where the “bright ladies” are encouraged to tighten their legs and the sexual imagery is complimented with other, rather morbid, imagery:

Delicate blue-black, sweeter from meadows  
 Small and tart in the valleys, with light blue dust  
 Huckleberries scatter through pine woods  
 Crowd along gullies, climb dusty cliffs,  
 Spread through the air by birds;  
 Find them in droppings of bear.

“Stopped in the night  
 “Ate hot pancakes in a bright room  
 “Drank coffee, read the paper  
 “In a strange town, drove on,  
 singing, as the drunkard swerved the car  
 “Wake from your dreams, bright ladies!  
 “Tighten your legs, squeeze demons from  
 the crotch with rigid thighs  
 “Young red-eyed men will come  
 “With limp erections, snuffling cries  
 “To dry your stiffening bodies in the sun!

Woke at the beach. Grey dawn,  
 Drenched with rain. One naked man  
 Frying his horsemeat on a stone.

In the final section of the poem the reader is led to believe that the coyote dies, and the poem then takes on an almost elegiac tone. Pastoral images of rivers glinting and “haze in the valley” are complimented with imagery of finally no human or urban infractions, just a faraway flatland city, as opposed to the mountainous regions where the bear and coyote roam:

4

Coyote yaps, a knife!  
 Sunrise on yellow rocks.  
 People gone, death no disaster,  
 Clear sun in the scrubbed sky  
                   empty and bright

Lizards scurry from darkness  
 We lizards sun on yellow rocks.

See, from the foothills  
 Shred of river glinting, trailing,  
 To flatlands, the city:  
     glare of haze in the valley horizon  
 Sun caught on glass gleams and goes.  
 From cool springs under cedar  
 On his haunches, white grin,  
     long tongue panting, he watches:

Dead city in dry summer,  
 Where berries grow.

Of course, the coyote resurrects once again and is finally seen “on his haunches”, grinning and panting and, significantly, watching the rest of the world as well as the humankind. The final two lines depict the city as a “dead” place, yet berries grow there. This paradoxical image connects directly to the coyote as a master of paradoxes and also ties the poem’s title together with its ending. The poem’s ending hearkens back to the peaceful and somber imagery of the bear in the beginning of the poem and contrasts that with the ever-changing nature of the coyote. Although the coyote is the main protagonist of this particular poem, it still does not surpass the bear as the most important totem animal in all of Snyder’s poems of animals. It does, however, lend his cast of animal characters another, more humorous, side.

### 3.2.4 The Whale

Although sea-life does not feature very prominently in Snyder’s poetry, the whale is an exception. Snyder added whales to his poetic cast of animals after his travels back and forth across the Pacific. “Mother Earth: Her Whales” (2005/1974: 47-49) is one of the longest and most ambitious poems in *Turtle Island*, and like Snyder’s animal poems in general, also includes other animals besides the central one (the whale in this case).

The poem attempts to bring together environmental politics from three different continents (Asia, and North and South Americas), together with mythology, ecological history and Deep Ecology, and lyrical nature imagery. Bert Almon has called the poem “a good prose essay mysteriously reincarnated as a bad poem”, referring especially to its “too many discordant elements” (Almon 1991: 87). The poem is indeed rather rambling, but it does nevertheless manage to convey a sense of urgency in regard to actions that need to be taken to stop an ecological disaster. The urgency is already plainly expressed in the third stanza, and again in the fifth. From stanza eight onwards, the poem is best read as a political manifesto rather than a conventional poem.

The first stanza contains lyrical nature imagery, and works mainly to create a sense of sympathy towards the owl, lizard and sparrow, and thus sets the stage for the anger and denunciation apparent later on in the poem. This is political rhetoric at its purest; first it arouses sympathy for the subject at hand and then contrasts the sympathetic subject with the unsympathetic actions threatening its very existence:

An owl winks in the shadows  
 A lizard lifts on tiptoe, breathing hard  
 Young male sparrow stretches up his neck,  
     Big head, watching—

The second stanza then reminds the reader, on a more abstract level, of the importance of the sun for the very concrete phenomena that it supports, and also incorporates the notion of interdependence, the sun’s rays finally having an effect on the actual diets of people:

The grasses are working in the sun. Turn it green.  
 Turn it sweet. That we may eat.  
 Grow our meat.

In the third stanza, the poem’s political implications are voiced for the first time. Snyder refers here to the destruction of the Amazon rainforests and sets up the “living actual people” as parallels to the “thirty thousand kinds of unknown plants”. The poem implies that the loss of the plant life is equally tragic to the suffering of the people.

The fourth stanza is again a lyrical one, and contrasts the gentle images of “The Whales” with those of the “robot in a suit”. The “robot” here is an obvious metaphor for a politician unconcerned with natural boundaries according to different biospheres. Instead, the “robot” acts as a defender of the nation state, and the italicized “*them*” creates a sarcastic reference to the ecological unsoundness of the nation state:

Brazil says “sovereign use of Natural Resources”  
 Thirty thousand kinds of unknown plants.  
 The living actual people of the jungle  
 sold and tortured—  
 And a robot in a suit who peddles a delusion called “Brazil”  
 can speak for *them*?

Still in the fourth stanza, the poem’s political agenda is counter-balanced by a lyrical tone. The stanza very effectively depicts the whales in a way designed to arouse sympathy towards them, and the whale here takes on implications of an almost ethereal being in complete accord with the seas and the planets themselves:

The Whales turn and glisten, plunge  
 and sound and rise again,  
 Hanging over subtly darkening deeps  
 Flowing like breathing planets  
 in the sparkling whorls of  
 living light—

Snyder had become disillusioned with Japanese environmental politics during his stay in Japan, and was frustrated to see the same kind of mindless destruction of nature going on in North America, as well. Snyder voiced his anger and desperation in his poems, and the fifth stanza of “Mother Earth: Her Whales” is a case in point. The poem is also exemplary in showing Snyder’s Buddhist training in relation to his notion of interdependence, the poem including animals, as well as the earth itself, as active parties to be listened to. Snyder’s disillusionment and outright disgust with Japanese environmental policies and prioritization of economy over ecology is apparent:

And Japan quibbles for words on  
 what kinds of whales they can kill?

A once-great Buddhist nation  
 dribbles methyl mercury  
 like gonorrhea  
 in the sea.

After the stanza on Japan, the poem moves westward, chronicling the environmental history of China. Snyder uses “Père David’s Deer”, or, “Elaphure” (a large Chinese deer) as a metaphor for the destruction of nature. The species has become nearly extinct in China, and the poem associates this with logging and erosion caused by exploitative agriculture:

Père David’s Deer, the Elaphure,  
 Lived in the tule marshes of the Yellow River  
 Two thousand years ago—and lost its home to rice—  
 The forests of Lo-yang were logged and all the silt &  
 Sand flowed down, and gone, by 1200 AD—

Stanza number seven brings together various elements, both animal imagery, bioregional politics and deep ecology. The stanza contrasts the nation-state with the ancient “flyways” of “Wild Geese”, pointing to the artificialness of concepts such as “China” compared with the “tigers, the wild boars, [and] the monkeys” that are oblivious to such political arrangements:

Wild Geese hatched out in Siberia  
     head south over basins of the Yang, the Huang,  
     what we call “China”  
 On flyways they have used a million years.  
 Ah China, where are the tigers, the wild boars,  
     the monkeys,  
         like the snows of yesteryear  
 Gone in a mist, a flash, and the dry hard ground  
 Is parking space for fifty thousand trucks.  
 IS man most precious of all things?  
 —then let us love him, and his brothers, all those  
 Fading living beings—

There is also an important rhetorical question in the stanza, namely: “IS man most precious of all things?”. The emphasized “IS” here shows the poet’s own ambivalence

on the subject. However, the conclusion reached is that if man truly is the “most precious” being, then the animal world that the poem considers equal to mankind should be treated with the same kind of respect allotted to man.

Further on in the poem, Snyder evokes the ‘spirits’ of the animal kingdom, urging them to action, to fight for their rights. This is where the poem appears more as a political manifesto than anything else:

North America, Turtle Island, taken by invaders  
 who wage war around the world.  
 May ants, may abalone, otters, wolves and elk  
 Rise! And pull away their giving  
 from the robot nations.

This stanza, together with the following one, illustrates clearly Snyder’s notion of animals, as ‘people’ in their own right, acknowledging their equal value. What is most striking here is the reference of animals to “People”. Snyder draws the imagery here from the Sioux Indians’ (2005/1974: 108) way of referring to animals as people. According to Snyder, this is a question of “a new definition of humanism and a new definition of democracy” (2005/1974: 106), meaning that unless the natural world is given the value it deserves, it will “revolt”, much like the “ants, [...] abalone, otters, wolves and elk” of the previous stanza, and begin to “submit non-negotiable demands” (2005/1974: 108) on the human habitation of the planet. Of interest here is also the use of the word “*Solidarity*”, which refers to the desired mode of conduct towards the other animals:

*Solidarity*. The People.  
 Standing Tree People!  
 Flying Bird People!  
 Swimming Sea People!  
 Four-legged, two-legged, people!

The same kind of references to animals as people in Gary Snyder’s poetry can also be found as early as in the 1960 poetry collection *Myths & Texts* where explicit Native

American references are used in conjunction with Snyder's notion of language as a wild system in poem number 12 from the section 'Logging':

–Drinkswater. Who saw a vision  
 At the high and lonely center of the earth:  
 Where Crazy Horse  
     went to watch the Morning Star,  
 & the four-legged people, the creeping people,  
 The standing people and the flying people  
 Know how to talk.  
 I ought to have eaten  
 Whale tongue with them.  
     they keep saying I used to be a human being  
 “He-at-whose-voice-the –Ravens-sit-on-the-sea.”  
 (2000d/1960: 13)

The allusion to “the high and lonely center of the earth” refers to the “vision quests” of the Native Americans where the highest mountains in their visibility were ascended as means of attaining visions (Bernbaum 1997: 154). Also, in this as well as in some of Snyder's other poems (for example, the poem on deer from “Hunting 8” in *Myths & Texts*), the obvious connection between and “tongue” and poetic language is made (Murphy 1991: 221), and the eating of whale tongue here acts as a symbol of the poet apprehending the language of the other “people”.

In “Mother Earth: Her Whales”, the culmination point in the poem comes and a summary (if rather rambling) of Snyder's political and ecological views, comes in the next stanza, as he poses the question that for him is the most important one imaginable. The stanza questions both capitalist and communist political ideologies as viable answers to questions of ecology, human habitation and societal organization:

How can the head-heavy power-hungry politic scientist  
 Government two-world Capitalist-Imperialist  
 Third-world Communist paper-shuffling male  
 non-farmer jet-set bureaucrats  
 Speak for the green of the leaf? Speak for the soil?

(Ah Margaret Mead...do you sometimes dream of Samoa?)

After the almost cursory reference to anthropologist Margaret Mead (the narrator obviously assumes the researcher still longs for the way of life of the ‘primitive’ societies), the robots/politicians are likened to “vultures” who do not see the need to make radical changes, but rather bicker on how to divide the planet in ways that would make it “last a little longer” and thus reveal their extreme alienation from nature:

The robots argue how to parcel out our Mother Earth  
 To last a little longer  
     like vultures flapping  
 Belching, gurgling,  
     Near a dying Doe.

The political implications of the poem have now traveled a full circle, and the poem equates the politicians/vultures of the last stanza with ravens picking at the earth itself (the extract is from a 17<sup>th</sup> century folk ballad called “The Three Ravens”:

“In yonder field a slain knight lies—  
 We’ll fly to him and eat his eyes  
     with a down  
 derry derry derry down down.”

The final stanza of this lengthy poem repeats the most lyrical sections of the first and fourth stanzas, thus in typical Snyder fashion producing a poem that has the appearance of an almost *mandala*-like circle:

An Owl winks in the shadow  
 A lizard lifts on tiptoe  
     breathing hard  
 The Whales turn and glisten  
     plunge and  
 Sound, and rise again  
 Flowing like breathing planets  
  
 In the sparkling whorls  
  
 Of living light.

What differentiates “Mother Earth: Her Whales” from “The Call of the Wild”, for example, is the explicit call to revolt. Where “The Call of the Wild” (which I shall analyze in the next chapter) exudes anger, “Mother Earth: Her Whales” actually presents a call, or in this case a wish more that anything else, that nature might recuperate and “rise”.

### 3.3 Poems of the Destruction of the Animals’ Natural Habitat

Human encroachment on the natural habitats of animals is a recurring theme in Gary Snyder’s poetry. I will next examine two separate strands of said encroachment, namely the utilization of animals by humans, and the destructive effect of war on them.

#### 3.3.1 People Utilizing Animals

“Dusty Braces” (2005/1974: 75) is a paradoxical poem that illustrates both the author’s anger and veneration to his ancestors, which are seen here to symbolize nature’s destruction by man-made development. The poem may be approached as a sort of confessional, the poet acknowledging his own debt and relation to the “lumber schooners [and] stiff-necked/punchers, miners, dirt farmers, railroad-men” who are responsible for the extinction of the “cougar and grizzly” in many areas in North America:

O you ancestors  
 lumber schooners  
     big moustache  
 long-handled underwear  
 sticks out under the cuffs  
  
 tan stripes on each shoulder,  
 dusty braces—

The repetition of “nine bows” in the next stanza is an important feature in the poem. Bowing, or *gassho* in Japanese, is a traditional Buddhist form of respect. This respect is not shown merely to fellow human beings, but may also be extended to include inanimate objects. In Japanese Zen temples, for example, *gassho* is often a required form of greeting when entering the common washing area, whether other people are present or not. The act of bowing in this poem is not used to denote the kind of feeling a person of lesser value shows to a person of higher value, but is used to express the inherent equality and relation between the one bowing and the one bowed:

nine bows  
 nine bows  
 you bastards  
 my fathers  
 and grandfathers, stiff-necked  
 punchers, miners, dirt farmers, railroad-men

killed off the cougar and grizzly

nine bows. Your itch  
 in my boots too,

—your sea roving  
 tree hearted son.

After all nine forbears have received their bows, the poem ends in a way reminiscent of a letter sent to the ancestors of the poet. Despite the denunciatory proclamation of “you bastards”, the sense of paradox is preserved by the “nine bows” preceding the proclamation. The synthesis that the poem articulates is the debt of a modern environmentalist to his less-than-eco-conscious ancestors.

Snyder also uses in many of his poems statements that are very plain and at the same time express a clear political agenda, even if animals are not always represented. However, trees and bushes can take on animal-like qualities in Snyder’s poetry. In “Front Lines” (2005/1974: 18), for example, he uses a powerful image of trees that actually breathe, and ends the poem with a metaphorical ‘call to arms’: “The trees breathe [...] in the sick fat veins of Amerika [...] the skinned-up bodies of still-live

bushes [...] Behind is a forest that goes to the Arctic/And a desert that still belongs to the Piute/And here we must draw/Our line.” The same kind of need to communicate a direct course of action is apparent in “Control Burn” (2005/1974: 19), too: “I would like/with a sense of helpful order,/with respect for laws/of nature,/to help my land/with a burn. a hot clean/burn”. This is a continuation of the themes expressed already in ‘Smokey the Bear Sutra’ and shows the poet’s pessimistic yet straightforward outlook into required action. The effects of the utilization of animals and its political implications and even direct instructions are discussed next.

The first four stanzas in “Tomorrow’s Song” (2005/1974: 77) alternate between political implications and representations of interpenetration. The poem may be interpreted as a “salute to the future” (Molesworth 1991: 153), and it includes one of the poet’s most radical suggestions, the right of the natural world to be represented in political decision-making. The first and third stanzas look at the natural environs through an ecological perspective. The first stanza expresses Snyder’s political outlook that “the mountains and rivers,/trees and animals” should have a vote in a true democracy. This is in keeping with one of Snyder’s slogans in the “Plain Talk” section of *Turtle Island*, “Power to all the people” (Snyder 2005/1974: 104), the “all” referring the non-human as well as the human. The idea that the natural landscape and the animals inhabiting it should have a vote in the congress may at first seem rather far-fetched, but is a recurring theme in Snyder’s political prose essays, such as in the accompanying essays in the “Plain Talk” section at the end of *Turtle Island*. The third stanza looks at the future in the poet’s hopeful assumption that the fossil fuel industry be abolished, the stanza expressing the poet’s conviction that true power comes from within, and that ‘less is more’.

The USA slowly lost its mandate  
 in the middle and later twentieth century  
 it never gave the mountains and rivers,  
   trees and animals,  
     a vote.  
 all the people turned away from it  
   myths die; even continents are impermanent

The second and fourth stanzas again express interdependence, the second stanza strongly reminiscent of “the secret/and the secret hidden deep in that” of the poem “One Should Not Talk to a Skilled Hunter About What Is Forbidden by the Buddha”, the “ground squirrel tooth” in the coyote’s excrement representing in a very concrete sense the interpenetration processes in nature:

Turtle Island returned.  
 my friend broke open a dried coyote-scat  
 removed a ground squirrel tooth  
 pierced it, hung it  
 from the gold ring  
 in his ear.

We look to the future with pleasure  
 we need no fossil fuel  
 get power within  
 grow strong on less.

The fourth stanza is one of the most successful representations of interpenetration in *Turtle Island*. The first three lines are representations of physical work. The work in question could be any one of numerous farm chores, but it is strongly suggestive of the rhythms of doing trail work, where one moves in constant unison with one’s crew in perfect rhythmic patterns. In strictly objective terms, this may not be very obvious, but to someone familiar with trail work the connotations to poems like “Riprap” (*riprap* is a trail in mountainous country, made especially for the use of horses and other pack-animals to provide sure footing) where Snyder has fused “movements of body and speech” (Gray 1990: 297) seem apparent. This is also implied by the reference to “wilderness” in the last stanza, as most farm work is not usually done in wilderness areas, whereas trail work most often is. Trail crew work is an important theme in Snyder’s debut collection *Riprap*, but is, apart from this poem, not very much present in *Turtle Island*.

Grasp the tools and move in rhythm side by side  
 flash gleams of wit and silent knowledge  
 eye to eye

As the stanza proceeds further, the human protagonist is seen sitting “still like cats or snakes or stones”. This refers to the Buddhist practice of *zazen*, where the aim is to sit perfectly still and allow the changes of the sky and other phenomena pass by. Snyder has also previously referred to animals as potential models for this practice. The stanza ends with the paradox of the “gentle and innocent” wolf, who nevertheless, can be as “tricky” as the Machiavellian prince:

sit still like cats or snakes or stones  
 as whole and holding as  
     the blue black sky.  
 gentle and innocent as wolves  
     as tricky as a prince.

The poem ends with an allusion to the ‘real work’, a common metaphor in Snyder’s work for the concrete “work” to be done “in the service/of the wilderness”. There is also a typical reference to the ‘Mother Earth’ metaphor, nature here depicted as “the Mother’s breasts”:

At work in our place:

*in the service  
 of the wilderness  
 of life  
 of death  
 of the Mother’s breasts!*

Charles Molesworth has suggested that the poem is “Snyder’s final mediation” (1991: 153) between natural reverence and the political implications this reverence may carry with it, and the policies of the poet are indeed never far away when dealing with the rights of animals. Already in his previous volume of poetry, *Regarding Wave*, the natural world is inextricably joined together with the political, for example in the poem “Revolution in the Revolution in the Revolution” where nature is set in juxtaposition with the Marxist notion of “masses”. The poem contrasts the workers in political systems with the natural world that is subjugated in the civilized societies, drawing

radical conclusions on the exploitative capabilities inherent in even the most benign of societies:

[...] “From the masses to the masses” the most  
 Revolutionary consciousness is to be found  
 Among the most ruthlessly exploited classes:  
 Animals, trees, water, air, grasses [...]

If the capitalists and imperialists  
 are the exploiters, the masses is the workers.  
 And the party  
 is the communist.

If civilization  
 is the exploiter, the masses is nature.  
 and the party  
 is the poets [...]  
 (2000b: 457).

Here again, it is noticeable that the poet is seen as the “party”, and this is indeed not surprising as Snyder has with such alacrity taken upon himself the role of a representative of the natural world, referring to “the wilderness” as his “constituency” and seeing himself as “a spokesman for a realm that is not usually represented either in intellectual chambers or in the chambers of government” (2005/1974: 106). Snyder also agreed wholeheartedly with D.T. Suzuki’s notion of ecology being “the big issue” (Miles 1998: 209), and this is apparent in the political views expressed in the poems discussed here.

Of course, Snyder has also taken part in conventional politics in his home county as well as handled the political aspects of Buddhism in many of his prose works, such as in his influential short essay ‘Buddhism and the Possibilities of a Planetary Culture’ (2000b: 41-43), where he severely criticizes both the Eastern political systems, as well as that of his own country with its “needless craving” (2000b: 41) and “greed made legal” (2000b: 43). Snyder was also both influenced and impressed by Henry David Thoreau’s anarchist political ideas and reverence for nature (Tonkinson 172), accepting Thoreau’s political motto as expressed in ‘Civil Disobedience’: “That Government is best which governs least” (Thoreau 1999/1854: 265), and developing the idea further in

his own work, calling for an anarchism that would “refer to the creation of nonstatist, natural societies” (2000b: 337).

He was, however, disillusioned with the political practices of ‘Buddhist’ nations: “Institutional Buddhism has been conspicuously ready to accept or ignore the inequalities and tyrannies of whatever political system it found itself under.” (2000b: 41), but during his earlier years in the West Coast, he found Buddhism and its political implications to be a real alternative to the Western capitalist societies. This is not very surprising, either, as Buddhist political theory in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was also concerned with the same themes, with varying emphasis, the scholar-monk Buddhadasa advocating “dictatorial dhammic socialism” (Buddhadasa 2002:145), and B.R. Ambedkar, an Indian Buddhist politician, making radical comparisons between the Buddha and Karl Marx, stating that they both had the same end in mind, their difference being only in the means by which this end could be attained (Ambedkar 2002: 97). The wars that raged on during the publications of many of Snyder’s major works of poetry obviously also had an impact on his work, and their influence to animals also became a subject. This shall be discussed next.

### 3.3.2 A War on Nature and its Effect on Animals

In times of war, nature always suffers, and many of Snyder’s poems deal with war and its effects on nature. The following is a prime example of such a poem, as besides depicting utilization of nature, the effect of war on it is an even more important theme in the poem. Besides the effect of actual war on nature, the poem also deals with what the poet perceives as “a war against earth” in a broader sense, i.e. the effects of human encroachment on nature. “The Call of the Wild” (2005/1974: 21-23) is one of the most angry and denunciatory poems in *Turtle Island*, and once again, the coyote is an important presence.

The poem is divided into three sections, each of them making implicit accusations on certain groups of people and on the acts they perform. In the first section, the person

accused is defined as a “heavy old man”. He is further described as a former miner and logger. Both of these professions can be seen as causing damage to the natural environment, and therefore work as metaphors for industrial exploitation of natural resources (minerals and trees, respectively). His religion is also defined (Catholic), and this is one of the instances of Snyder making explicit the connections between Christianity and the destruction of natural resources, although, in this particular poem, Snyder does not contrast Christianity with an alternative religion, such as, Buddhism or the shamanistic practices of the ‘primitive’ peoples. The action the “heavy old man” intends to take is to “call the Government”, represented here in the form of a “Trapper/Who uses iron leg-traps on Coyotes”. This first section also contains an allusion to the poet himself contemplating his sons’ loss of “this Music” as Snyder refers to the sound of the coyote howling as music:

The heavy old man in his bed at night  
Hears the Coyote singing  
                  in the back meadow.  
All the years he ranched and mined and logged.  
A Catholic.  
A native Californian.  
          and the Coyotes howl in his  
Eightieth year.  
He will call the Government  
Trapper  
Who uses iron leg-traps on Coyotes,  
Tomorrow.  
My sons will lose this  
Music they have just started  
To love.

In the second section, the “heavy old man” is contrasted with “ex acid-heads from the cities”. Here Snyder presents similarities between two usually incompatible types of people. However, what is important in this parallelism is the fact that to the narrator in the poem, these two types are not contrasts in regard to their relationship with nature. Although these “ex acid-heads” are depicted as having “Converted to Guru or Swami”, i.e. to eastern religions, they nevertheless do not differ from the “heavy old man” in their fear of the coyote. North America in this poem is referred to as “The land of Coyote and Eagle”, both of which represent vitality, contrasted with the imagery of

lethargy that the “ex acid heads” concept of India entails. The poem does not look kindly at the hippie generation who are describes as being alienated from nature:

The ex acid-heads from the cities  
 Converted to Guru or Swami,  
 Do penance with shiny  
 Dopey eyes, and quit eating meat.  
 In the forests of North America,  
 The land of Coyote and Eagle,  
 They dream of India, of  
   forever blissful sexless highs.  
 And sleep in oil-heated  
 Geodesic domes, that  
 Were stuck like warts  
 In the woods.

And the Coyote singing  
   is shut away  
   for they fear  
   the call  
   of the wild.

And they sold their virgin cedar trees,  
   the tallest trees in miles,  
 To a logger  
 Who told them,

“Trees are full of bugs.”

The end of the second section is very ironical, as the coyote and the trees are “shut away” and sold, and this is done by a group of people purportedly more in tune with nature than the average citizen. The coyote is shut away because it arouses fear, and the trees felled and sold because they are apparently deemed detestable because of “bugs”. In the third section, the range of the poet’s accusations is widened to incorporate “The Government”, and all of America alongside it. “The Government” is here depicted clearly as male, women having their place only “beside them”, the men. The poem echoes ecofeminist notions of the power-relations between male-female and culture-nature (culture is here associated with advanced technology). Julia Martin, especially, is uncomfortable with Snyder’s frequent depiction of women and nature as sufferers under

men and culture and the subsequent idealization of them into the mythology of the “Mother Earth” and “Gaia” and seeing “the mythic feminine as an image of totality” (Martin 1991: 206), a metaphor for everything that is deemed better than the exploitative patriarchal culture that the in the poet’s view dominates both nature and women:

The Government finally decided  
 To wage the war           all-out. Defeat  
   is Un-American.  
 And they took to the air,  
 Their women beside them  
   in bouffant hairdos  
   putting nail-polish on the  
   gunship cannon-buttons.  
 And they never came down,  
   for they found,  
   the ground  
 is pro-communist. And dirty.  
 And the insects side with the Viet Cong.

The poem also makes clear allusions to the war in Vietnam. America is seen to represent capitalist ideology, which is contrasted with the “ground” that is “pro-communist”, and which the capitalist war-machine destroys. Snyder introduces emotional, yet concrete, imagery on the effects war has on nature:

So they bomb and they bomb  
 Day after day, across the planet  
   blinding sparrows  
   breaking the ear-drums of owls  
   splintering trunks of cherries  
   twining and looping  
   deer intestines  
   in the shaken, dusty, rocks.

All these Americans up in special cities in the sky  
 Dumping poisons and explosives  
 Across Asia first,  
 And next North America,

A war against earth.  
 When it’s done there’ll be

no place

A Coyote could hide.

The image of “[a] war against earth” is a particularly strong and explicit one. The statement echoes the poet’s anger, together with a sense of urgency in taking action to prevent the further destruction of nature. The apparent compassion in the poem towards animals is what prevents the poem from slipping too deep into what Almon describes as a “self-righteous” (Almon 1991: 86) tone. In both the preceding and the following stanzas, the “Coyote” as a symbol of nature is once again contrasted with the exploitation of nature:

*envoy*

I would like to say  
Coyote is forever  
Inside you.

But it’s not true.

The poem ends with an “*envoy*”, or postscript, and like in many of the poems in *Turtle Island*, contains a “closural force” (Kern 1991: 119) that acts as a vehicle for expressing political thought in its simplicity and straight-forwardness. Kern considers this type of ending to be very typical to Snyder’s poems, especially the ones collected in *Turtle Island*, where the poems are “aimed at an audience—an audience, one might add, of the already initiated rather than one to be persuaded” and where the poet’s purpose is to “perform” his adopted role as spokesperson for nature, his silent “constituency” (Kern 1991: 118-119). As stated in the very beginning of this thesis, this is indeed an important function of Gary Snyder’s poems, as he is one of the few poets who are willing and capable of performing in such a role.

#### 4 CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has examined how animal imagery is presented in Gary Snyder's poetry. The conclusions that this thesis has reached are that the representations of animals in Snyder's poetry depict both Buddhist as well as ecocritical ideas. The Buddhist ideas found in the poems have been discussed in the poetry analysis themselves, as well as in the section on the theoretical framework for this thesis. The notion of *interpenetration* has been shown to be a central concept in decoding the meanings of the animal imagery in the poems discussed. The ecocritical framework was discussed in the theory section, and also discussed in the light of its political implications in the analysis section.

The politics expressed in Snyder's poetry are environmental, and they show an ecocritical tendency that resonates with the ideas of Deed Ecology. The interpenetration of all natural phenomena, which is a common concept both in Deep Ecology and Buddhist philosophy, is in this thesis seen as an important component also in Snyder's articulation of the political implications in seeing the non-human realm as having inalienable and equal rights with the human realm. This notion places strong demands on contemporary culture and politics if it is taken with the seriousness that the poet has intended.

The question whether Snyder was interested in, or influenced by Buddhism is obviously a redundant one in this context, as no one is likely to spend twelve years of their life studying it unless they were serious about their commitment. However, as I feel that not enough emphasis has been put on the dominant role Buddhism played in Snyder's work, this paper has set out to demonstrate this particular element in his repertoire. The back and forth influence between Snyder and the Deep Ecology movement has been well documented before, for example, in Laurence Coupe's *The Green Studies Reader* (2000: 121, 127-131). Also, Snyder's active attempts to influence contemporary culture have been discussed, and it is in his role as mentor that Snyder still continues to wield an influence, both as a writer whose work is gaining in popularity and critical acclaim, and in his work as visiting lecturer in UC Davis in California, where some of his

unconventional teaching methods have included taking his students out to the same mountains and places he has himself written about.

This thesis has studied animal representations in Snyder's poetry, but it would also be interesting to do further research into the way rest of the nature is represented in his poetry. *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems*, for example, include animal and other nature references in practically every poem. It would be interesting to find out the role of the nature representations there, as they are not as clearly political as the animal representations in *Turtle Island*, for example. The volumes of poetry between *Riprap* and *Turtle Island*, especially *The Back Country* and *Regarding Wave*, are also full of animal references (some of which were already discussed in this thesis) and other natural phenomena that are beginning to show the influence of Snyder's Buddhist training.

After the publication of *Turtle Island* the references to animals become more infrequent in Snyder's work, and in *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, for example, it is non-sentient nature that is depicted more than the animals of his previous poetry. Non-sentient nature representations are at least as numerous in Snyder's poetry as representations of animals, and seeing as Snyder has some rather unconventional ideas on supposedly non-sentient nature, this would be an important aspect of study, as well.

Also, it would also be interesting, if rather ambitious, to examine the way that the whole Beat Generation that Snyder, too, is part of whether he likes it or not, depicted nature in their works. The Beat Generation is usually conceived of as being a predominantly urban movement. This is in large part due to the fact that the most popular and well-known works of the Beats, such as *On the Road*, *Howl* and *Naked Lunch*, really do focus more on the depictions of urban life spent on the brinks of both society and law.

Gary Snyder is often seen as the singular exception to this rule in the Beat canon, but in fact many of the less known works by Jack Kerouac, for example, contain large amounts of both descriptions and narrative sequences taking place amongst the great outdoors. The same is true of the works of Beat poets like Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Philip

Whalen and Lew Welch. The extent of a vast study like that is obviously beyond the scope of this thesis, but it would definitely provide plenty of material for further research.

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