

Gary Snyder, Dôgen, and "The Canyon Wren"

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I. Conversing with the World

Gary Snyder's *Mountains and Rivers Without End* (1996) is an anthology of ways of communicating across the boundaries perceived between species and spaces.¹ We can speak with the world and with all of the creatures in it, and the songs collected in the long poem show how this may be done. Readers may nonetheless find themselves puzzled by this poem, a four-section *mandala*?—or a 165 page *koan*?—in which each of four sections is composed of about ten shorter poems, each ranging from a few lines to several pages in length. Bones, roads, gods and goddesses, mountains, rivers, people, habitats, creatures, cities, and ideas are some of the categories that could be used to sort the elements of this world. What does it mean? Who is the poet talking to, and what is he saying? It is an archaic idea, Paleolithic in fact, that our songs are ways of communicating with the inanimate world around us; in today's poetic marketplace, alas, the most prestigious critics would not agree that literature should teach us to speak with the world. Or even other people in it: Harold Bloom has contended that it is the job of poetry not to teach us how to talk to others but rather to instruct us in how to speak with ourselves.² Snyder "strongly" resists the presuppositions inherent in Bloom's view of literary self-creation. Challenging the borders separating Bloom's Freudian self from others and from the world, Snyder offers a poetry that teaches us how to talk not just to ourselves or even just to other people; the poems of *Mountains and Rivers Without End* are about how we talk to the world, and how the world talks to itself. His works, in poetry and prose, insist that our "self" is not contained within the membranes of our bodily skin, but rather that we permeate the world we see and hear. To show how this

kind of communication comes about, I will focus on one seemingly simple poem in the collection, "The Canyon Wren."

Snyder's 35-line poem narrates the return to a place that will soon be lost, and thus a place that we cannot hope to visit again. As the poet looks forward from the moments narrated in the poem, the canyon in which the titular wren sings his song will soon be engulfed by the waters that will power a large hydroelectric plant. Despite this most ominous of ecological situations, the poem does not bemoan alienation and loss in the manner of any number of environmentalist texts. Rather, this poem points to ways in which we make a home in the world even though the world is utterly transient and even though so much of the world is strange to us. "The Canyon Wren" is not just about how we express ourselves in the world: it is the public record of the world speaking back to us.³

It could be said that the canyon in the poem, speaking through the bird, calls the poet home, and that the poet in restating the experience similarly calls the reader home. Keep in mind that the poet is, in this poem, visiting a place that he will never visit again, at least not in its present form. We tend to think of "home" as a most stable form of place—almost as an unchanging place—but one mark of modernity seems to be that "you can't go home again."

If Snyder's sense of place is on the one hand an alternative to provincialism, on the other it is a challenge to egotism in that he pictures not the mind dominating the land, but something rather more like a two-way conversation. His representation of the landscape speaks back to Wallace Stevens' jar on a hill in Tennessee, for the jar is really an object of meditation to focus the self in relation to the land and to facilitate the dominion of the self over the land. Drawing on the pragmatism of William James, Stevens energetically presents the focussing mind as the active principle in a passive landscape. Drawing on inclusivist philosophies of T'ang era China and medieval Japan while invoking the sensual, historical, and biological connections that give place its transient but real existence, Snyder's poem "The Canyon Wren" is a recognition the "agency" of the landscape.⁴ Against the feelings, moods, and intuitions that we gather together and call common sense, Snyder's poem presents the landscape to us as a *person*. We can speak to it, and it speaks to us.

II. The Problem of Home in America

In the most well-known texts of American literature, we typically know home through its loss or estrangement.⁵ It is the place one cannot revisit because it has been outgrown, or because it has shifted with the passage of time. The canonical texts of American literature generally present the American protagonist as alienated from any sure sense of home, and the most celebrated writers of postwar America have lamented the power and variety of American alienation. The classic American narrative of homelessness is one in which the inability to feel at home on the personal level parallels a shifting sense of place at the national level. While Huckleberry Finn headed out for the territory rather than meet the demands of civilization, the American national identity was expanding into the westward territories, the limits of which would soon be exhausted. Or we have Ishmael, who takes to the sea along with comrades like Bulkington, for whom the land burned beneath the feet. With the closing of the frontier, as announced in the Turner Thesis in 1893, Americans did not settle down; the transience just lost its linear East-to-West simplicity, and this pattern of homelessness continues unabated in the twentieth century. Consider the beginnings of two great American literary works, *The Sound and the Fury* by William Faulkner and *Sula* by Toni Morrison. Each begins with the tragic awareness of homeland that has been sold and made into a golf course—and what better way to dominate a landscape than to build a golf course? Over and over again American writers have returned to this theme: you can't go home again.⁶

There is a small counter-tradition. Thoreau stubbornly insists on his right to a place, even if he appears to be squatting there, but American writers generally are not supposed to feel at home, and so, precisely because he has a sense of place, Snyder is a bit out of place in the context of American writers.⁷ With poems and essays that invite readers to compose a home in the world, he answers this American tradition of psychic homelessness. Snyder's expression of home-love stands out like a high peak in the literary landscape, as we see in one of his shortest poems, "On Climbing the Sierra Matterhorn Again After Thirty-One Years":

Range after range of mountains
 Year after year after year.
 I am still in love.⁸

As is proper for a true haiku, this poem is *shockingly* abrupt. The poem and its title are nearly equal in length, which adds to riddle of the poem: many readers will ask "Why?" The problem is not in the first two lines, wherein great spaciousness flows into or is parallel to an abundance of time—this abstract vastness in no way challenges the modernist values that underwrite canonical American literature. The third line, however, declares love, and it is this simple declaration that catches the attention. It is not the convention of a transient gather-ye-rosebuds love, nor does line three imply that the poet has suddenly discovered true home in the midst of spots of time. Nothing is being transcended. Rather, the poem reports that one may feel at home in America—generally and regularly—and it is not just the notion that one *can* go home, year after year and tomorrow after tomorrow, that challenges our expectations, but rather the idea that we already *are* at home. We might wonder how Snyder came to feel differently about home than other writers in the American mainstream.

III. Buddhism, Dôgen, and Snyder's Sense of Place

Perhaps the Buddha is to blame. It might be putting the cart before the horse to say that Gary Snyder came to see rocks and stones and trees as his "constituency" *because of* his study and practice of Buddhism, but it is certainly true that he has often articulated his beliefs about the interdependence of humanity and nature through Buddhist references and symbols.

Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism specifically, has questioned not just that there is an ontological separation between human beings and other life forms, but also that such a categorical difference exists between the animate and the inanimate. Mountains and rivers are said to walk and talk, Dôgen tells us, just as a human being does. This point has never been a settled one within Zen Buddhist discourse, and it is certainly not a simple

matter; when the monk Tung-shan repeatedly asked the elder teacher Kuei-shan for an explanation of the idea that the Earth itself proclaims the Dharma, Kuei-shan raised his fly-whisk for an answer. Perhaps this gesture proclaims that we ourselves are voiceless without inanimate media, or perhaps the whisk, in symbolizing the authority of the teacher, likewise tells us that there can be no communication of meaning apart from gross material reality or without hierarchical value systems.⁹ Perhaps the gesture raises the question, Who is teaching—the man or the flail? This concern about the division between animate and inanimate “beings”—and I must put beings in quotation marks because it seems utterly illogical to refer in English to an “inanimate being”—was a major controversy in T’ang China that becomes reborn in the lines of the twentieth-century American poet.¹⁰ In other poems Snyder ventures into a similar set of ideas through a different vocabulary, such as when he refers to rock people or tree people in the poem “Burning the Small Dead” in a manner reminiscent of a Native American storyteller, but more often it is an Asian philosophical notion or literary conceit that he will draw upon to stage communications between animate and inanimate beings.

The poet on the mountaintop cannot promise that love never dies, however much he enjoys the discovery of its rebirth, moment after moment. Recalling that Snyder’s happy reunion with the Matterhorn peak took place after thirty-one years in 1986, we are lead back to the young Snyder of the 1950s. We are very close to the moment when Snyder began his forty-year-in-the-making poem, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*. Was the Snyder of the early Fifties eternally at home, wherever he went? The first sentence of the first essay of his recent collected essays *A Place in Space* would suggest otherwise. In the essay “North Beach” Snyder tells us that “In the spiritual and political loneliness of America of the fifties you’d hitch a thousand miles to meet a friend” (3).¹¹ These are clearly not the words of a man who feels at home.

Snyder left America in the middle of the Eisenhower decade to study Buddhism in Japan. Given the typical American writer’s desperate alienation from a sense of place, what could the Buddhist philosophy of leaving home possibly have to offer to the American writer? The thirteenth century Zen master Dōgen presents the virtue of homelessness directly

in his essay "Guidelines for Studying the Way": "Long ago Shakyamuni Buddha abandoned his home and left his country. This is an excellent precedent for practicing the way."¹² Would the Buddhist practice of leaving home in order to discover true emptiness (and this concept might better be translated "interdependence as opposed to individual existence") not imply an exacerbation of this problem? That this Buddhist non-attachment could actually worsen American ungroundedness is certainly a risk, but it is a risk Snyder has negotiated skillfully.

Among the tributaries leading into the long poem are Snyder's lifelong Buddhist practice, his evolving ethic centered on concepts of reinhabitation and ecological justice, his vast knowledge of ethnopoetic lore, and, more specifically, his lifelong interest in Chinese landscape painting, but Snyder has singled out Dôgen among all these influences. In "The Making of *Mountains and Rivers Without End*," he notes that "in the late seventies my thinking was invigorated by the translations from Dôgen's *Treasury of the True Law* just then beginning to come out," and he draws our attention in particular to Dôgen's *Mountains and Waters Sutra* from this collection (157).¹³ In 1985 a selection of Dôgen essays entitled *Moon in a Dewdrop* was published, and this quintessence of Dôgen has become the primary reference in English. Snyder refers to Dôgen in a number of the essays collected in *A Place in Space*, he quotes Dôgen for one of the two epigraphs to *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, and he refers again to Dôgen in one of the shorter poems that make up the epic work, "The Canyon Wren."

Dôgen also makes frequent appearances in Snyder's recent prose. Snyder's essay "Nets of Beads, Webs of Cells," which was published under the "Ethics" section of *A Place in Space*, first appeared in 1990 in *Ten Directions*, the journal of the Los Angeles Zen Center, and the essay is a meditation on the first of ten precepts taken by Zen Buddhists. The primary ethical injunction within Buddhism is found in *ahimsa*, the Sanskrit word for "not harming." This rule or aim is easy to state and hard to keep, and Snyder's essay respects the complexity of the problem completely; he calls the precept our "existential koan" (*A Place in Space* 72), and discusses the expanding and contracting scales within which we might attempt to practice "not harming." We have the large end of the matter, such as when Snyder writes "The whole planet groans under the massive disregard of

the precept of *ahimsa* by the highly organized societies and corporate economies of the world" (73), but we also can go in another direction, one hardly considered from the human perspective, and it is Dôgen who suggests this direction to Snyder. Snyder quotes Dôgen's idea that we should consider matters beyond the human perspective:

One can wonder what the practice of *ahimsa* is like for the bobcat, in the bobcat Buddha-realm. As Dôgen says, "dragons see water as a palace," and for bobcats, the forest is perhaps an elegant *jikido*, dining hall, in which they murmur *gathas* of quiet appreciation to quail, sharing them (in mind) with demons and hungry ghosts. (72)

Snyder follows these delightful and elegant thoughts directly with a quotation from Dôgen's *Mountains and Waters Sutra*: "You who study with Buddhas should not be limited to human views." Dôgen and Snyder urge anyone who hopes to see the world fully to set aside the hierarchies of anthropomorphic vision. Ultimately, this multiplication of possibilities must mean that, when we are eaten by whatever it is that will eat us, be it cancer or tiger, we ought not blame our predator but only wish that there is no waste in the process. We forego our position at the top of the food chain, but, in accepting this vision of life as an infinite web, we also spare ourselves the resentment of being prey and the guilt of being predators.

Snyder refers to Dôgen in another essay, "The Old Masters and the Old Women." He reports in this essay a poem by "the most highly regarded Sung dynasty poet, Su Shih (Su Tung-p'o)" (104) that inspired another fascicle by Dôgen. In this essay Snyder identifies "direct perception" as the common ground between Sung dynasty poetry and early Zen Buddhism. From China, Snyder writes, "Japan inherited and added on to its own already highly developed sense of nature the worldview of T'ang and Sung" (104). One aspect of this worldview is the notion that the world teaches us—not just that we learn from it, but that it is our Teacher. The title of Dôgen's rather mystifying "Mountains and Waters Sutra" becomes a clue to how this belief works when we remember that a "sutra" is, basically, a teaching of the Buddha himself. So if we regard mountains and waters as a sutra, then nature is doing the teaching—it is not merely the case that Dôgen-as-Buddha is teaching us and is using the material

world for classroom props. This point is made explicitly in what is perhaps the most profound statement of Japanese religious belief, Dôgen's essay "Actualizing the Fundamental Point." Snyder translates key sentences from this idea in his own essay "Language Goes Two Ways" and illustrates the point with reference to a wren. He translates Dôgen this way: "'To advance your own experience onto the world of phenomena is delusion. When the world of phenomena comes forth and experiences itself, it is enlightenment'" (179). This thought might seem a mere philosophical game outside of actual experience, but Snyder's wren illustration actualizes the concept: "To see a wren in a bush, call it 'wren,' and go on walking is to have (self-importantly) seen nothing. To see a bird and stop, watch, feel, forget yourself for a moment, be in the bushy shadows, maybe then feel 'wren'—that is to have joined in a larger moment with the world" (179). The homey bird, then, is the teacher to show us the way home, the way to return to any place in such a way that we may find our original mind. This origin, this enlightenment, exists precisely in forgetting the self in the way that allows true understanding within the most ordinary contexts. Snyder's claim that his poem *Mountains and Rivers Without End* may be thought of as "a sort of sūtra" (*Mountains and Rivers* 158) is thus not an arrogant claim of his own enlightenment ("his own" since the words of a sūtra are conventionally considered to be the reported speech of the actual Buddha) but is rather an affirmation that the Buddha's authority can be heard in the songs of birds, seen in the beauty of mountains and rivers, or felt between the covers of a book of verse.

IV. "The Canyon Wren"

This idea, that the wren is not only our teacher but our own mind, receives its fullest expression in "The Canyon Wren," a 35-line poem that appears in section III of Snyder's four-movement epic poem. The first third of the poem is a rather matter-of-fact description of a raft voyage. Notice the many signals in this environment that call our attention up, down, over, around, back, and through:

I look up at the cliffs
 but we're swept on by downriver
 the rafts
 wobble and slide over roils of water
 boulders shimmer
 under the arching stream
 rock walls straight up both sides.

Words such as “wobble” and “slide” behave in the mouth like the raft on the river, and the language manifests the alterations of the experience in other ways as well. Snyder coins “downriver,” which would ordinarily describe a direction, to bring the river’s active force into the poem: downriver sweeps the raft along. The illusion of absolute independence from nature that we might habitually maintain through language is surrendered, and instead the rafters settle into an environment of constantly shifting forces and perceptions:

A hawk cuts across that narrow sky hit by sun,
 we paddle forward, backstroke, turn,
 spinning through eddies and waves
 stairsteps of churning whitewater.
 Above the roar
 hear the song of a Canyon Wren.

We notice not only the poet’s attention to detail but also how that experience of attention is shaped by the movements and swirls of the water. It is in the next third of the poem that the Canyon Wren gives its teaching:

A smooth stretch, drifting and resting.
 Hear it again, delicate downward song
 ti ti ti tee tee tee
 descending through ancient beds.

Snyder has written in *The Practice of the Wild* that our senses are shaped by the physical landscape around us, and here it is possible to see that the birdsong itself is patterning itself on the slow fall of river water. With the next perceptual shift, there is an acceleration as wildlife, rivers, and literary connections suddenly combine, just before the poem comes to a strange and beautiful pause:

A single female mallard flies upstream—
 Shooting the Hundred-Pace Rapids
 Su Tung P'o saw, for a moment,
 it all stand still.
 "I stare at the water:
 it moves with unspeakable slowness."
 Dôgen, writing at midnight,
 "mountains flow
 water is the palace of the dragon
 it does not flow away."

What a strange thought—but much of the strangeness begins to come together here. The poet is hearing a birdsong throughout this experience, and the song holds all the small impressions and identifications together as a thread unifies a set of beads. Among these beads are prior incarnations of the poet at play on the river—Su Tung P'o and Dôgen before Snyder. For all three men (and for the bird) the object of meditation is the winding, roiling river.

Snyder has, in "The Old Masters and the Old Women" previously conjoined Dôgen and Su Tung P'o, but this poem is also the return to the matter of the wren, to what it means to witness such a bird. The matter of the wren arises in the essay "Language Goes Both Ways," and we now see that the title indicates that language goes from humans to the world but also comes back to humans from the more-than-human world. In line 13 of "The Canyon Wren" the poet and his companions "hear the song of a Canyon Wren," and this might be akin to the simple, referential designation of "wren" Snyder referred to initially in the essay. But then, quotidian as the detail might seem, the poet returns to the wren, and with deepening attention, enough to notice its "delicate downward song": "ti ti ti ti tee tee tee." The wren in this poem is singing the river, catching the ever-downward motion of the water, and has directed the poet's attention to the ways in which our language and thoughts are formed by the shapes and forces of our world. The falling water and the drop of the wren's song are suddenly there for the poet to perceive directly. Like Su Tung P'o he can see "it all stand still."

Which leads us back to Dôgen, our philosopher of place who, against monastery rules, preached his "Mountains and Waters Sutra" in the "hour

of the Rat" (*Moon in a Dewdrop* 107), meaning around midnight. In calling attention to Dôgen's willingness to break monastic rules by preaching at midnight, Snyder echoes Dôgen's insistence that we must step beyond humanistic conventions and boundaries. In conventionally humanistic terms it is absolutely meaningless to say that water is the palace of the dragon (line 26) and that it does not flow away. To say that a river is palatial might be an acceptable bit of poetic hyperbole, but to say that river water does not flow away violates the logic inherent in a human being's point of view. A fish may experience the water as not flowing, and so may a human being—if he or she is at home within the transience of "downriver."

Snyder's lines reformulate Dôgen's words pointing to a moment of non-dualistic realization. Snyder gestures toward what Dôgen is writing about when he claims that "Mountains and waters right now are the actualization of the ancient buddha way" (*Moon in a Dewdrop* 97), but there is an important difference between the language of "The Canyon Wren" and that of Dôgen's fascicle. Dôgen's words throw a heedless rider faster than a wild horse:

Because green mountains walk, they are permanent. Although they walk more swiftly than the wind, someone in the mountains does not realize or understand it. "In the mountains" means the blossoming of the entire world. People outside the mountains do not realize or understand the mountains walking. Those without eyes to see mountains cannot realize, understand, see, or hear this as it is. (98)

Green mountains walk because they are permanent? If you can recognize yourself as "walking" but do not see that you are also the mountains you walk on, then you have dualistically split yourself from the mountains that condition your existence. Dôgen calls this being "outside the mountains." Those who walk on mountains and understand that they are continuous with mountains also know that not only do mountains walk—they play in water: "All mountains walk with their toes on all waters and splash there" (101). Snyder on the river, Su Tung P'o shooting the Hundred Pace Rapids, and Dôgen's mountains have each had this experience. Like people, mountains refresh themselves in mountain streams. Dôgen's writing manifests a casting off of the dualistic separation

of subject and object, and his essays express the world from this non-dualistic standpoint. The experience reported in "The Canyon Wren" is an experience of the mingling of mountains and waters in the most personal way. The reference to Dôgen in "The Canyon Wren" does not take us into the world where "Dôgenese" is spoken, but it brings us to wonder, What do Dôgen's assertions that mountains splash their feet have to do with the everyday problems of real human beings? What is the value of seeing things "all stand still" as the poet Su Tung P'o reportedly did and as the poet in "The Canyon Wren" momentarily does? Are these perceptions of any use? The poem suggests they are.

After referring to Su Tung P'o and Dôgen, the poet and friends make camp along the river, and the poetic register shifts from natural and literary to historical referents:

We beach up at China Camp
between piles of stone
stacked there by black-haired miners,
cook in the dark
sleep all night long by the stream.

The brief acknowledgement of the historical, economic, and political events that condition our world is then followed by a hauntingly beautiful statement that quietly sits somewhere in between the elegiac and the celebratory:

These songs that are here and gone,
here and gone
to purify our ears.

Purify our ears of what? Of the illusion of separation. Our sense that place is external to our being divides us from the land, but it also divides us from each other. After the experience of wholeness brought to him by the song of the Canyon Wren, the poet reports that he and his friends pull out of the river at China Camp, where piles of stones were stacked "by black-haired miners." Place-names like China Camp mark the reduced status of some people within the political scheme of things, although the poet judiciously avoids an uncritical apprehension of such hierarchies.

The poet is actualized by long dead miners just as much as he is by the wren.

The experiences of the poet in the poem (like those of Dôgen and Su Tung P'o before) have the effect of personalizing the world itself, animate and inanimate beings both included, and one corollary of this effect is that the wren is a "person." The Chinese pronunciation of one character meaning person is "ren." The wren's song purifies our ears of the notion that our lively awareness, which we mistakenly call our humanity, is the singular, unique possession of human beings. Chinese workers, poets from various centuries, and birds all have this awareness, and it can be shared.

All of the poems from *Mountains and Rivers Without End* were first published outside of this volume, and the poem "Canyon Wren" appeared in Snyder's *Axe Handles* and his selected poems *No Nature*.¹⁴ In the selected poems, however, the poem carried an appendix to give us a bit more information about the stretch of the Stanislaus River in which the events of the poem occur. Snyder tells of the gorges cut from "nine-million-year-old latites," and that friend Jim Katz and other friends had asked Snyder "to shoot the river with them, to see its face once more before it goes under the rising waters of the New Mellones Dam."¹⁵ The song stayed with them during the whole voyage, and Snyder wrote the poem after dark in China Camp. The canyons beautifully sung in the poem are gone, but in a sense they remain, an eternal moment ducking, floating, paddling, turning, and riding in the skin of the poem, "The Canyon Wren." The "ti ti ti ti tee tee" that was engulfed in water sometime after the poem was written in 1981 cannot really be considered gone from this present moment, the only one in which we can be at home.

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NOTES

¹This paper was first presented at the *Connotations* conference, held in 1997 in Halberstadt, Germany. The topic of the 1997 conference was "A Place Revisited." I would like to thank Lothar Cerny for his always helpful suggestions.

²Bloom says in an interview that "people cannot stand the saddest truth I know about the very nature of reading and writing imaginative literature, which is that poetry does not teach us how to talk to other people: it teaches us how to talk to ourselves." *Criticism in Society: Interviews with Jacques Derrida, Northrop Frye, Harold Bloom, Geoffrey Hartman, Frank Kermode, Edward Said, Barbara Johnson, Frank Lentricchia, and J. Hillis Miller*, ed. Imre Salusinszky (New York: Methuen, 1987) 70.

³In Zen Buddhism, particularly in the discourse of the Rinzai sect, the "koan" is literally a "public record," but is usually far more puzzling an utterance than one finds in the typical town hall file cabinet. The most famous koan is probably Hakuin's "sound of a single hand," which is, according to Foster and Shoemaker, "perpetually misquoted" as the sound of one hand clapping. See *The Roaring Stream: A New Zen Reader*, ed. Nelson Foster and Jack Shoemaker, foreword by Robert Aitken (New Jersey: The Ecco Press, 1996) 325. For an overview of the use of the koan in Rinzai Zen Buddhism, see Isshu Miura and Ruth Fuller Sasaki, *The Zen Koan: Its History and Use in Rinzai Zen* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1965).

⁴For statements from Zen (Ch'an) teachers T'ang era China, see *The Roaring Stream*. On medieval Japanese Buddhism in relation to literary genres and themes, see William R. LaFleur, *The Karma of Words: Buddhism and the Literary Arts in Medieval Japan* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1983).

⁵For an up-to-date discussion of American literary homelessness, see Arnold L. Weinstein, *Nobody's Home: Speech, Self, and Place in American Fiction from Hawthorne to DeLillo* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993).

⁶Barbara Johnson writes that Toni Morrison presents home as "always already lost" in *Sula*. See *The Feminist Difference: Literature, Psychoanalysis, Race, and Gender* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998) 75.

⁷We cannot really say Snyder is alienated from the tradition, as "alienation" is clearly an out-of-place term with which to describe Snyder's relationship to literary tradition. At any rate, the difference of Snyder's view from that of the mainstream American view, which tends towards a wide variety of naturalisms in which man struggles with his environment, is not properly recognized. The phrase "sense of place," if turned around to refer to the idea that a place might have its own "sense," more properly gestures toward the sense of place in Snyder's work. In this particular poem, the canyon wren's mouth (through which the place speaks to the poet) and the poet's ears are the "ears of the place" through which the canyon hears the wren's song.

⁸Quoted from *No Nature: New and Selected Poems* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1992) 362.

⁹We cannot, according to Zen Buddhist beliefs, arrive at such knowledge via the "mind-road" of conceptual thought. Zen has sometimes been accused of anti-intellectualism because of the alacrity with which the Zen master will derail this train of concepts, and one Zen Master Seung Sahn, teaching in America, has popularized the slogan, "Open mouth already big mistake!"

¹⁰Tung-shan's words are collected in *The Roaring Stream*. Foster and Shoemaker append a note of explanation to Tung-shan's question about the doctrine that "nonsentient beings" actually teach: "The question of whether nonsentient beings possess Buddha-nature and thus, by extension, are capable of expressing Dharma—a major controversy in early T'ang China—grew out of differing interpretations of the *Nirvana Sutra*, particularly the line, 'All beings, without exception, possess Buddha-nature'" (117).

¹¹First published in *The Old Ways: Six Essays* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1977), this essay has been collected in *A Place in Space: Ethics, Aesthetics, and Watersheds* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1995). The reference to America's political loneliness appears on page 3 of *A Place in Space*.

¹²Dôgen Eihei's "Guidelines for Studying the Way," translated by Ed Brown and Kazuaki Tanahashi, appears in *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dôgen*, ed. Kazuaki Tanahashi (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1985) 31-43.

¹³The essay describing the genesis of the poem appears just after the last poem of *Mountains and Rivers Without End* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1996) 153-58.

¹⁴The line "cook in the dark" quoted in this paper is actually "cool in the dark" in my first edition hardcover copy of *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, but the line is "cook in the dark" in *Axe Handles, No Nature*, and later paperback printings of *Mountains and Rivers Without End*.

¹⁵The note follows the poem in Snyder's *No Nature* 306.