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Gary Snyder's American-Asian Shamanism

In Kyoto on 15 June 1956, in the second month of his first long sojourn in Asia, the young Gary Snyder (1930–) already found evidence of what he called “American-Asian shamanism”: “Leaving the temple this morning walked by a small fox shrine where a Zen monk was chanting: there I heard the subtle steady single-beat of oldest American-Asian shamanism. The basic song” (*Earth* 35). The passage indicates that Snyder sensed traces of shamanism in both contemporary Japanese Buddhism and Shintoism, since the chant was uttered by a Buddhist monk, whereas the shrine’s fox-spirit image represents a Shinto *kami*.¹ The passage also reveals that Snyder’s belief in shamanism includes an intercontinental feature: Shamanism is “American-Asian,” an epithet that links shamanistic practices in American-Indian and Asian traditions. Furthermore, behind the “American-Asian” epithet lies Snyder’s belief that the Pacific Rim forms a single cultural zone and a single bioregion.²

The present essay will try to answer the following questions. How does Snyder’s personal belief in shamanism both coincide with and deviate from concepts of shamanism generally accepted by scholars in the fields of religion, anthropology, psychology, and literature? What role does shamanism play in Snyder’s system of thought? What deities, spirits, and figures in Snyder’s writings are presented as American-Asian shamans and shamanesses? What impact does Snyder’s knowledge of shamanistic ritual exert on the structure and meaning of his poems? Finally, how does he carry his belief in shamanism into the activities of his life, and how are those activities depicted and presented in his poems?

I

SNYDER’S BELIEF IN SHAMANISM

We have to bear in mind that Snyder is by no means an amateur in the field of myth and ritual theory. When he studied at Reed College, Portland, from 1947 to 1951, he majored in anthropology, and his BA thesis on “The Dimension of a Haida Myth”³ treats American Indian myth with an emphasis on shamanism and the motif of the swan maiden. Therefore, if some of his notions of shamanism deviate from the mainstream of thought on the topic, it should not be ascribed to ignorance on his

part but rather to a need to develop his own system of thought, which has incorporated notions of shamanism along with many other religious and philosophical ideas. In order to discern the unique nature of Snyder's ideas, however, it is first necessary to ascertain what concepts of shamanism scholars in various fields generally accept.

An all-encompassing definition of shamanism is impossible, since study of the topic has branched out into many disciplines, such as religion, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and literature. Roughly, shamanism may be described as a system of practices ministered by a shaman or shamaness who functions as the healer, prophet, or controller of spirits and as a sorcerer for his or her community. *The Eliade Guide to World Religions* defines shamanism as "not a religion *per se*, but a system of ecstatic and therapeutic methods whose purpose is to obtain contact with the parallel yet invisible universe of the spirits and win its support in dealing with human affairs" (Eliade, Couliano, and Wiesner 214). Thus, Mircea Eliade considers shamanism to be a set of practices rather than a set of theological ideas.

Since the late nineteenth century, many scholars of religion and anthropology have made field trips to study the shamanistic practices of tribes in Siberia, on American Indian reservations, in south Asia, or in Africa; the tribes were isolated from and relatively untouched by modern civilizations. Largely drawing his conclusions from such field studies, Eliade holds that a shaman is a "great master of ecstasy," who is able to control "his helping spirits, in the sense that he is able to communicate with the dead, demons, and nature spirits without thereby becoming their instrument" (Eliade, Adams, et al. 13:202); the ecstatic states include "dreams and trances." As I. M. Lewis points out, "uncontrolled trance" is interpreted as illness, while "controlled trance" is "the essential requirement for the exercise of the shamanistic vocation" (48). In addition, Michael Harner considers the controlled trance to be "the Shamanic State of Consciousness," which involves "not only a 'trance' or a transcendent state of awareness, but also a learned awareness of shamanic methods and assumptions while in such an altered state" (26). This kind of controlled trance is not represented in Snyder's poetry, and from his writings as well as my interviews with him,⁴ we learn that Snyder himself has never practiced shamanistic trance, nor has he attempted to control spirits in his actual life. Snyder himself, therefore, has never experienced this crucial aspect of shamanistic behavior.

An important phase of the shaman's vocation is the initiation, roughly defined as the rite of admission into a special group, accompanied by trials involving pain or endurance to make sure the novice is worthy. The methods of shamanistic initiation vary among different tribes,⁵ but in general they involve, in one form or another, a means of confronting "psychopathological crisis." Once the new shaman has re-

covered from his initiatory crisis, he or she “displays a strong and healthy constitution, a powerful intelligence, and more energy” (Eliade, Adams, et al. 13:203). The pattern of an initiation rite can be identified in the deep structure of such poems as Snyder’s “Journey” (*Mountains* 52–56). Also, a shaman has to perform different rituals for members of his tribe, in particular the seance.⁶ When performing such rituals, he often wears richly ornamented costume, usually with “ornithological symbolism” (Eliade 404), and he or she will invariably chant, sing, and dance. The dance can be wild and dramatic and can be associated with animals.⁷ In fact, many songs involving animal-shamans figure in Snyder’s *Myths and Texts* (1960). Snyder says, “The shaman speaks for wild animals, the spirits of plants, the spirits of mountains, of watersheds. He or she sings for them. They sing through him” (*Old* 12). Mircea Eliade associates the shaman’s chant during such rites with the origin of lyric poetry.⁸ Snyder also notes that some ancient Chinese lyric poems such as the *Chu Ci*, the Songs of the South, written down by Qu Yuan in the fourth century B.C., are regarded by scholars as shamanistic songs (*Place* 85–90). Quite a few of Snyder’s poems mimic the shaman’s chant, as can be seen from some passages in *Myths* and “Burning Island” (*Regarding* 23–24).

A shaman always functions as the healer for his tribesmen’s illnesses. Michael Harner views the function of a shaman as a healer from a psychopathological perspective:

Through his heroic journey and efforts, the shaman helps his patients transcend their normal, ordinary definition of reality, including the definition of themselves as ill. The shaman shows his patients that they are not emotionally and spiritually alone in their struggles against illness and death. The shaman shares his special powers and convinces his patients, on a deep level of consciousness, that another human is willing to offer up his own self to help them. The shaman’s self-sacrifice calls forth a commensurate emotional commitment from his patients, a sense of obligation to struggle alongside the shaman to save one’s self (xiv).

Snyder’s own sense of the shaman’s healing function coincides with this idea of Harner’s, as may be seen from Snyder’s definition of the poet’s role: “The poet as myth-handler-healer is also speaking as a voice for another place, the deep unconscious, and working toward integration of interior unknown realms of mind with present moment immediate self-interest consciousness” (*Real* 172). Another feature of shamanism that is generally confirmed by scholars is the close tie between a shaman and his community, his tribe. Eliade explains that “the shamans have played an essential role in the defense of the psychic integrity of the community” (Eliade, Adams, et al. 13:206). John A. Grim points out that shamans help “form

tribal tradition through their own creative experiences” and he “calls on certain independent sets of rituals to respond to a variety of tribal needs” (40–41). Snyder also considers that a poet should act like a shaman in order to play “an essential role in the defense of the psychic integrity of the community,” in the words of Eliade; for Snyder says that a poet gives “what she or he has done as nourishment, and as spore or seed spreads the ‘thought of enlightenment,’ reaching into personal depth for nutrients hidden there, back to the community” (*Real* 174).

It is crucial to examine how Snyder incorporates ideas of shamanism into his own system of thought. Shamanism has been Snyder’s deep-rooted belief; it is pivotal in his ideology. Snyder says in the interview, “The Bioregional Ethic”:

Shamanism relates to the most archaic of human religious practices. All of our ancestors — white, black, mongoloid, Vedda, or !Kung — were doing it for most of prehistory. It informs the fundamental lore of the planet, that is to say, all of the worldwide body of folktale that we all share. The folk motifs of Native America are scattered all across Europe and Asia. We are all in the same boat, stemming from ten to thirteen thousand years back in the Pleistocene. We are all sharing the same information and the same religious disciplines. (*Real* 155–56)

This passage shows that Snyder believes in shamanism as piously as someone else would in a religion. His piety contradicts Eliade’s assertion that shamanism is “not a religion *per se*” (Eliade, Adams, et al. 13:214). The broad dissemination of shamanism during the Paleolithic period that Snyder refers to, however, has been confirmed by such scholars as Joan Halifax (3–6) and Eliade (Eliade, Adams, et al. 13:206). Even Snyder’s personal belief in shamanism is echoed by some prominent scholars in the field of myth and ritual. For example, Eliade himself has been suspected of having crossed the very border that he defined. Amanda Porterfield points out that for Eliade, shamanism is more than a system of practices, but is actually an “idealization”:

He celebrated the shaman as the truly religious man and interpreted the shaman’s ecstatic experiences of ascension and flight, dismemberment, and identification with the *axis mundi* as a paragon of religious knowledge. This obvious idealization grounds Eliade’s well-known theory of religious devolution (721).

Similarly Joseph Campbell is not only a leading scholar of myth and ritual but also a firm believer in the salvational power of myth and ritual to deliver modern humankind from spiritual illness and bring them wisdom.⁹

Furthermore, Snyder infers that even as modern civilizations rose to predomi-

nate during the past six or seven millennia, shamanism subsided into undercurrents and survived in many civilizations as subcultures:

This subculture of illuminati has been a powerful undercurrent in all higher civilizations. In China it manifested as Taoism, not only Lao-tzu but the later Yellow Turban revolt and medieval Taoist secret societies; and the Zen Buddhists up till early Sung. Within Islam the Sufis; in India the various threads converged to produce Tantrism. In the West it has been represented largely by a string of heresies starting with the Gnostics, and on the folk level by “witchcraft.” (*Earth* 104–05)

This idea of Snyder’s would be refuted by most scholars as sheer inference or speculation. However, it is shared by some figures, such as Eliade and Halifax, who have sought out evidence of shamanic practices surviving in today’s religions. Halifax argues that the *yamabushi* belief, a sect of Buddhism in Japan, originated in shamanism; for example, the fire ritual, *saito-goma*, that a *yamabushi* has to master originates in pre-Buddhist shamanism (88). Snyder’s coverage of shamanist survivals, however, is far more extensive, and the link that he posits between many subcultures throughout the world and their shamanistic origins has never been researched.

When Snyder speaks of “American-Asian” shamanism, what he has in mind are the once-related tribes in the Paleolithic age or even earlier ages that lived and migrated around the north Pacific Rim. Shamanistic practices of the tribes in Siberia, Manchuria, Japan, and northern America have been witnessed and studied by scholars of religion and anthropology since the nineteenth century. Snyder has been studying those materials since he was a college student. Even as a child living with his family on a farm in Washington State, he already knew that those people who were to become American Indians had migrated in ancient times from Asia to the American continent via Alaska (Gray 20). In his poem, “The Hump-backed Flute Player,” written in 1971 (*Mountains* 79–82), he mentions a travel route of American Indian tribes that implies this kind of intercontinental migration. He lists bioregions involving watersheds from northeastern Asia to northwestern America: “Amur, Tanana, Mackenzie, Old Man, / Big Horn, Platt, the San Juan.”

Most of the deities and powerful spirits appearing in Snyder’s poetry are still worshipped by people in contemporary Asia, and some are important American-Indian shaman-spirits. But only a few deities from Greco-Roman mythology are mentioned, and there is little mention of the Christian God or the saints. In Snyder’s portrayal, many of the Asian and American Indian deities and spirits bear shamanistic features.

II
AMERICAN INDIAN SHAMANS AND
ASIAN SHAMANISTIC DEITIES

Snyder's BA thesis focuses on the mythology of the Haida Indians, who used to flourish in Washington State, the area where Snyder grew up, and on Vancouver Island in Canada. The thesis treats in particular the shaman's power of transformation between bird and human forms. In the poems written in Snyder's twenties and thirties, shamans and animal spirits often appear, along with their transformations between the two states of being. In his first long poem, *Myths*, the voice of an American-Indian shaman is foregrounded and leads the voices of various animal spirits. For example, in "Hunting," the second section of the book, the shaman song leads the songs of the geese and that of the pheasant, and the shaman even appears in the modern era, searching for food for his tribe and confronting the reality of the modern world, in the form of a truck: "Two days without food, trucks roll past / in dust and light, rivers / are rising" (18).

In "Burning," the third section, the first song is again a shaman song chanted by a dancing shaman: "Limp fish sleep in the weeds / The sun dries me as I dance" (34). In fact, many of the animal spirits in the Haida myths in Snyder's BA thesis appear in *Myths* in the guise of shamans. Thus an American-Indian shaman wears the feather coat of a raven and transforms into a Raven God (28).

The year I wore my Raven skin
Dogfish ran. Too many berries on the hill
Grizzly fat and happy in the sun—
The little women, the fern women,
They have stopped crying now.
"What will you do with human beings?
Are you going to save the human beings?"

In that passage, by asking "are you going to save the human beings?" Snyder's raven-shaman is carrying out the grand mission to save his community: that of the human race.

Mircea Eliade stresses a shaman's magical capacity for flight while in trance, gives evidence of Siberian shamanistic practices, and cites many examples from ancient Indian scriptures and Chinese Taoist writings (Eliade 404–405, 450–451). A bird-shaman's most important costume is the feather coat. In Snyder's poem "The Feathered Robe: For Yaeko Nakamura" (*Left* 68–69), a bird spirit puts on her feathered robe and performs a beautiful dance in the sky. In *Myths*, by putting on the "raven skin," the shaman is transformed into the persona's "guardian spirit." Michael Harner stresses the function of such a guardian spirit:

without a guardian spirit it is virtually impossible to be a shaman, for the shaman must have this strong, basic power source in order to cope with and master the nonordinary or spiritual powers whose existence and actions are normally hidden from humans (54).

The most important American-Asian shaman in Snyder's writings is undoubtedly the bear-shaman. In *Myths* (22), the hero is a bear-shaman who reigns in the mountains and can transform himself into human form and thus is able to bewitch a girl and marry her:

... 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.
.
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.
.
.
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.
.
.
.
This girl married a bear
Who rules in the mountains, Bear!

Snyder is probably fascinated by the bear cult of shamanism because he himself loves to dwell in the mountains like the bear, and the bear's hibernation in a cave reminds him of an ascetic's retreat and meditation. The cover of his essay collection, *The Old Ways*, features an American Indian bear-shaman and a coyote-shaman (see fig. 1). Snyder wrote three versions of the American-Indian tale about the marriage of a bear and a human, based on Catherine McClellan's *The Girl Who Married the Bear: A Masterpiece of Indian Oral Tradition* (1970) (Snyder, *Practice* 169). This story is adapted in *Myths* and in the poem "A Berry Feast" in *The Back Country* (*Practice* 3). A longer version of the bear-shaman story appears later, in *The Practice of the Wild*, in the form of a tale with commentary, as "The Woman Who Married a Bear" (155-174). The bear turns into a handsome man in order to court a village girl (156). After they are wed, he acquires the power to chant and prophesy like a shaman (158). In the comments following the tales, Snyder traces the development of the bear cult in Europe, stating that in Greek and Roman mythologies the people of Arkadia in northern Europe are descendants of the bear goddess Callisto and Zeus (171). In his comments following "Smokey the Bear Sutra," Snyder states that "Evidence in certain Austrian caves indicates that our Neanderthal ancestors were practicing a devotional ritual to the Big Fellow about seventy thousand years ago" (*Place* 29); and the bear cult is shamanistic, for it is "the surviving religious complex (stretching from Suomito Utah via Siberia) of what may be the oldest religion on earth" (29).

Thus, Snyder believes that the shamanistic bear cult is an intercontinental phe-

THE OLD WAYS

GARY SNYDER



FIGURE 1.
*Cover of The Old Ways:
a bear shaman and a
coyote shaman.*

nomenon, covering the areas of prehistoric Asia, North America, and Europe. In his poem, “The Way West, Underground” (*Turtle* 4–5), the poet traces the bear cult from the West Coast of North America to Japan and China, where the bear-shaman performed rituals with a flat drum and healed his fellow tribesmen with hallucinogenic mushrooms:

Black Bear heads uphill in
Plumas county,
round bottom scuttling through willows—
The Bear wife moves up the coast.
.
And ground the curve of islands
foggy volcanoes
on, to North Japan.
.
Mushroom-vision healer,
single flat-drum,
from long before China.

Then the poet tracks westwards, describing the bear-shaman in Tibet and Finland, and also mentions the contemporary running of the bulls in the streets of Spain as a variation of the bear cult. The poem ends by evoking a remnant of the bear cult

in Spain, a cave-painting of the bear's paw: "Red Hands with missing fingers, / Red mushroom labyrinths; / lightning-bolt mazes, / painted in caves."

Snyder not only traces the world-wide prehistoric bear cult but also views the bear cult as one of the shamanistic subcultures that survive in today's religions. When he was in Japan, searching for traces of bear worship in folk religious and Buddhist practices, he discovered that Fudō Myōō, a Buddhist deity, could have been a transformation of the bear spirit. He says:

Fudō Myōō, the patron of the *Yamabushi* (a Shinto-Buddhist society of mountain origins), whose name means the "Immovable Wisdom King," was possibly one of those traces. . . . it's an intuition based on Fudō's usual habitat: deep mountains. Fudō statues and paintings portray a wickedly squinting fellow with one fang down and one fang up, a braid hanging down one side of the head. . . . standing on rough rock and surrounded by flames. The statues are found by waterfalls and deep in the wildest mountains of Japan. (Place 29–30)

The worship of Fudō Myōō fuses Buddhism with Japanese Shintoism. The latter religion bears many shamanistic features, such as a belief in the supernatural power of sentient beings and nonsentient objects and in the efficacy of exorcism. Fudō Myōō possesses the power to control violent feelings and to "quell all lesser violence" (Place 30), and therefore can help worshippers to attain peace of mind. His function coincides with that of a shaman: "in defense of the psychic integrity of the community" (Eliade, Adams, et al. 13:206). In short, Snyder infers that the worship of the deity Fudō Myōō in Japan is rooted in a prehistoric shamanistic bear cult.

Fudō Myōō is worshipped as Aksobhya among Hindus in India, as Mi-bskyodpa in Tibetan Tantrism, and as *bu-dong ming-wang* (the Brilliant Lord of the Immovable) in China. In China and Japan, many of his manifestations appear wrathful, with flames around the body. Even though his facial expression is ferocious, it is believed that his wrath is always under control. In Japan, local Shintoist attributes are added, such as residing in a cave in the deep mountains and practicing asceticism. According to Katsunori Yamazato, Fudō Myōō is the main deity of *yamabushi* Buddhism, which is associated with "priests who discipline themselves in the mountains" (102). Snyder so greatly admires *Yamabushi* traditions that he has practiced them: in 1961 he was ordained a member of the sect in a formal ritual presided over by a Japanese *yamabushi* monk (Yamazato 102). No wonder that inside the Ring of Bone Zendo in Snyder's homestead, Kitkitdizze, there stands on the altar an image of this deity, which I photographed during my visit in July 2001 (see figs. 2 and 3). In an engaging speculation, Snyder infers that traces of a shamanistic bear cult remain embedded in Fudō Myōō, a Buddhist deity, but neither



FIGURE 2. In his Zendo, Snyder stands in front of his deities, Fudō Myōō on the left.

Snyder nor any other scholars have provided solid evidence drawn from anthropological or religious research to support that derivation.

Snyder also thinks that the worship of a pan-Asian Buddhist deity, the Medicine Buddha, could have incorporated early shamanistic cults. It is generally agreed that two major functions of a shaman are to heal and to prophesy. The poem “The Blue Sky” (*No Nature* 76–80) includes an incident that attests to the Medicine Buddha’s power of healing and prophecy. It describes how, when the ninth-century Japanese poetess Ono-no Komachi was seventeen, she set out wandering to look for her father:

... She took ill
 on her journey, and sick in bed one night saw
 AZURE RADIANCE THUS-COME MEDICINE MASTER
 in a dream. He told her she would find a hot springs
 on the bank of the Azuma river in the Bandai mountains
 that would cure her; and she’d meet her father there. (77–78)

The poem stresses a pan-Asian feature, for the Medicine Buddha is invoked by the many names with which he is addressed in different Asian countries, such as “Master of Healing, AZURE RADIANCE TATHAGATA” (76) and “*Bhaishajyaguru* / *Yao-Shih Fo* / *Yakushi Nyorai*, / ‘Old Man Medicine Buddha’” (79).¹⁰ The poem quotes



FIGURE 3. *Fudō Myōō on the altar of Snyder's Zendo.*

a Romanized Sanskrit incantation to invoke the Medicine Master, and when the poem appeared later in *Mountains* (40–44) an English version was provided immediately afterwards. The bilingual incantation has the effect of a ritual chant:

Namo bhagavate bhaishajyaguru-vaidurya-
prabharajaya tathagata arhate samyak
sambuddhaya tadyatha om bhaishajye
bhaishajye bhaishajya samudgate
svāhā.

“I honor the Lord, the Master of Healing,
shining like lapis lazuli, the king, the
Tathagata, the Saint, the perfectly enlightened
one, saying OM TO THE HEALING
TO THE HEALING TO THE HEALING HAIL!
svāhā.” (41)

The incantation also recalls a chant uttered by a shaman in the preparatory stage of a seance.

In his essay “Goddess of Mountains and Rivers” (*Place* 85–90), Snyder discusses the legendary Chinese shamaness Wu-shan Shen-nu, the Divine Woman of Shamanka Mountain.¹¹ Snyder considers her to be a manifestation of the ancient shamaness who survives in classical Chinese literature. Snyder envisions the Divine

Woman “as a glimmering figure of cloud, mist, and light,” not “meaty, all breasts and hips like the goddesses of India, or athletic like those of Greece,” and he considers this Divine Woman to be a powerful shamaness: “The Mountain’s name, Wu, means ‘female shaman.’ Such women were very powerful in Neolithic and Bronze ages” (*Place* 87–88). The character “Wu” takes the form of an ideogram depicting two shamanesses dancing in a seance: 巫 (Xu 18–19; ch 5, pt 1). Here Snyder adopts Edward H. Schafer’s view in *The Divine Woman: Dragon Ladies and Rain Maidens in T’ang Literature*. Both Snyder and Schafer are quite right, because the practice of shamanistic rituals was prevalent in the Kingdom of Chu, which was located in today’s Hunan and Hubei provinces and which flourished from the eighth to the third century B.C., and the Wu (Shamanka) Mountain where the Divine Woman supposedly dwelled is located in the north of Hubei Province. According to Schafer, the Divine Woman also bears the imprint of a fertility goddess: “Undoubtedly, then, the Divine Woman of Shamanka Mountain was an ancient fertility goddess whose ritual mating with a shaman king was necessary to the well-being of the land,” and “she had the power to bear divine kings, to bring rain, and to provide men, animals and plants with abundant progeny” (37, 35). In Song Yu’s “The Rim-ing Prose of Gao Tang,” the Divine Woman is the lover of King Chu, who could be the manifestation of an ancient shaman king. In Snyder’s poem “The Mountain Spirit” (*Mountains* 145), there are two lines that seem to depict the image of the “Divine Woman,” a mountain spirit merging into clouds: “And the Mountain Spirit always wandering / hillsides fade like walls of cloud,” for in “The Rim-ing Prose of Gao Tang,” the Divine Woman tells the king that “at dawn I am the morning clouds and at dusk I am the showers” (Song 2; *juan* 19).

In Snyder’s poetry the most prominent Asian shamaness is the Japanese mountain spirit. According to Eliade, “In Japan shamanism is practiced almost exclusively by women. They summon the dead person’s soul from the beyond, expel disease and other evils, and ask their god the name of the medicine to be used” (Eliade, Adams, et al. 13:206). The shamaness in Snyder’s poetry, however, is not modeled after actual shamanesses, who still practiced trances in remote villages in Japan in the mid-twentieth century, but after the shamaness-like character in Japanese Noh plays. Snyder’s mountain spirit must be modeled after the image of Yamamba in the Noh play *Yamamba* (Brazell 209–225), a play attributed to Zeami (1363–1443). The word *yamamba* means a mysterious old woman dwelling in the mountains. In the play, she is an enigma, “simultaneously, a benevolent demon, a supernatural human, and an enlightened being” (Brazell 207). Snyder’s mountain spirit shares those enigmatic qualities. Yamamba performs dances in the play, as does Snyder’s mountain spirit in the poem.

Yamamba, the mountain that takes the form of a woman, is considered a *kami*. Motoori Norinaga says, “In ancient usage, anything whatsoever which was out-

side the ordinary, which possessed superior power, or which was awe-inspiring was called *kami*” (Tsunoda 21–22). Such animation of nonsentient beings is also part of shamanism. According to Joan Halifax, an American Indian Chukchee shaman stated that “All that exists lives,” and

The shaman personalizes all phenomena in the universe, endowing them with human qualities. The tree trembles beneath the axe. The drum wails under the baton. All things have emotions which are subject to influence. In a cosmos that is essentially as unpredictable as the human realm, the shaman’s tapping into power allows for the possible reversal of death, the transformation of form, and the transcendence of time and space (9).

In Snyder’s “The Mountain Spirit” (*Mountains* 140–147), the mountain *kami* in the form of an old woman performs a shamanistic dance and teaches the poet the art of transformation. During Snyder’s stays in Japan, he often went to watch performances of Noh drama. It seems clear that his enthusiasm largely came from responding to the shamanistic elements in Noh drama. There are always rituals to be held, sometimes ones involving exorcism, and many Shinto spirits appear on stage with the tint of a shaman or shamaness.¹² The dance portrayed in “The Mountain Spirit” is modeled after the dance in Noh drama because stamping one’s foot is a conventional Noh move; and the pine tree, an important image in the poem, is indispensable in a Noh play, for a pine wood, represented by three pine branches along the *hashigakari*, the corridor leading to the platform, is the regular setting of a Noh stage. In *Yamamba* the pine wood is also the subject of the chorus’s song: “Behind, in towering peaks of pine, / the wind wrecks dreams of constant bliss” (Brazell 220). Snyder’s shamaness, or the mountain spirit, has taught the poet illuminating ideas, such as “Nothingness is shapeliness” and “All art and song / is sacred to the real” (*Mountains* 145–146). She teaches him the shamanistic dance of metamorphosis, which enables the poet to change from his human shape to the shapes of other natural objects, such as ripples and pine branches, in order to experience the shaman’s transformative power.

— The Mountain Spirit and me
like ripples of the Cambrian Sea
dance the pine tree
old arms, old limbs, twisting, twining
scatter cones across the ground
stamp the root-foot DOWN
and then she’s gone. (*Mountains* 147)

III
THE IMPACT OF SHAMANISTIC RITUAL ON
SNYDER'S POETIC STRUCTURE

Since shamanism has been Snyder's personal belief since his youth, his poetry is bound to be profoundly affected by it. In some poems the shamanistic elements are immersed so fully into the deep structure that they have become unobtrusive. "Journeys,"¹³ in *Mountains and Rivers without End* (52–56), can serve to exemplify the impact of shamanistic ritual on the deep structure of Snyder's poetry. By deep structure, I mean the poetic persona's psychological development, which underlies the holistic structure of the nine sections that make up "Journeys." In fact, "Journeys" is one of Snyder's most significant poems; Abraham Rothberg praises it as one of his best poems because in it "Zen contemplation, drugs, Amerindian rites . . . achieve a sense of unity in diversity, order in chaos, godhead in nature, a way of proceeding through sense and intuition with the very essence of reality" (34). It is certain that Buddhist thought permeates the last passage of "Journeys," but the ritual elements in the poem are broader than "Amerindian rites." I would argue that the structure of the poem is informed by the initiation rite of shamanism.

"Journeys" consists of nine different trips, which take place on the American continent, in Japan, and in fantasylands. They include the farm and its environs, west of Puget Sound in Washington State, where Snyder spent his childhood (passages 4, 5, and 8); the rooms, basements and sewer system of a big city (passage 7); and fantasylands like the underground maze (passage 1), or central images of the universe as manifested in lofty mountains and a great plain (passages 2, 3, 6, and 9). Almost all the trips carry some mystic, fantastic elements. If we scrutinize them closely, most bear a shamanistic tint as well. If all nine trips are strung together, the process of an initiation rite for a novice shaman becomes evident. At the beginning of passage 1, we witness violence and magic transformation.

Genji caught a gray bird, fluttering. It
was wounded, so I hit it with a coal shovel;
it stiffened, got straight and symmetrical,
and began to grow in size. I took the bird by
the head with both hands and held it as it
swelled, turning the head from side to side.
The bird became a woman, and I was embracing
her. . . .

Joan Halifax says the novice shaman has to go "through a profound process of psychic turbulence and combustion" (7), and Snyder's lines express turbulent physical struggle and violence. Genji is supposedly a cat that Gary Snyder fed when he

lived in Japan. The poem "The Genji Story" in *Left Out in the Rain* says, "I once had a gray brindle tomcat named Genji" (52). Snyder names the cat after the famous Prince Genji, the hero in Lady Murasaki Shikibu's novel *Genji Monogatari*, written in the early eleventh century. The cat Genji must be a *kami*; and the bird is a spirit or a shamaness who, like the swan-maiden, can switch from human to bird form and back again.

At the beginning of the poem the poetic persona becomes violent and hits the wounded bird. On the surface, the killing could be interpreted as a benevolent act to relieve the bird's physical pain, but if the killing, the physical blow, is part of a ritual, it is meant to help the bird pass over the threshold of death so that it can transform into human form and act as the novice's guardian spirit. Here, a shamanistic, magical transformation has taken place; and, as a matter of fact, similar visions of transformation are quite common in shamanistic trances. Deguchi Onisaburo, a shaman in Japan, is reported to have gone through an initiation in 1898; one of his visionary experiences consisted of witnessing the transformation of the underworld king from "a white-haired old man with a gentle face into a frightening demonic monarch" (Drury 2).

John Weir Perry offers a list of ten myth and ritual features that characterize the reorganization of the self in the therapy of a person suffering from schizophrenia, and Joan Halifax uses those features to illustrate a novice shaman's spiritual process of initiation, because to become a shaman any novice has to emerge in a sound state from a psychological crisis that resembles schizophrenia (Halifax 7). The features will be employed here to illustrate the underlying structure of Snyder's poem. Seven of the ten features can be identified in Snyder's "Journeys": feature one, "Psychic, cosmic, and personal geography" being focused on a center; feature two, death occurring in the process of dismemberment and sacrifice; feature three, "the theme of regression" or a return to an earlier time, to paradise, or to the womb; feature five, "a feeling of being overwhelmed by the opposite sex"; feature seven, "a sacred marriage"; feature eight, "a new birth" as "part of rebirth fantasies and experiences"; and feature ten, "a four-fold structure of equilibrium and depth."

In the poem's first paragraph, there is "a sacred marriage" between the novice and his guardian spirit, for the novice "was embracing" the bird-shamaness, who bears the clear imprint of American-Indian myth, and they were "holding hands" and journeying together through "an enormous maze, all underground." The underground journey could imply a journey into the subconscious. As to John Weir Perry's point, that in the curing process, there is "a feeling of being overwhelmed by the opposite sex," in passage 1 of "Journeys," when the novice is about to get lost and miss the route, it was "the woman" who saved him from losing his way by transferring "a piece of fresh-tasting apple / from her mouth to" his. And then the novice "woke." The "apple" imagery suggests a parody of the Christian

lost paradise, in which Eve becomes the prototype of a shamaness who leads the novice on the path to awakening.

There are two passages (5 and 8) that echo what John Weir Perry calls the “theme of regression,” and “a return to an earlier time, to Paradise, or to the womb (Halifax 7).” The field that the poetic persona walks through looks like the neighborhood of the farm where Snyder lived in childhood: “Walking a dusty road through plowed-up fields / . . . / to a bank of blinding blue wildflowers / and thick green grass on leveled ground / of hillside where our old house used to stand” (passage 5). Here is a regression into the idyllic land of his childhood, the paradise, but in his childhood there also lurked Freudian anxiety and family crisis: “I saw the footings damp and tangled, / and thought my father was in jail, / and wondered why my mother never died, / and thought I ought to bring my sister back.” Another trip involving regression is depicted in passage 8, in which Snyder and Lew Welch, his fellow-poet and classmate at Reed College, “rode in a bus over the mountains — / rutted roads along the coast of Washington / through groves of redwood.” Again it is a regression into his past, not into his childhood world, but into a youthful love relation: “I brought / a woman here once long ago, / but passed on through too quick.”

In passage 3 the novice, whose image reminds one of an Indian warrior, undergoes the frightening experience of battling against a powerful deity, the Sun-god.

. . . something began to lift up from behind.
I shot my arrows, shot arrows at it, but it came —
until we turned and ran. “It’s too big to
fight” — the rising thing a quarter mile across —
it was flaming pulsing sun.

Just as the novice Deguchi Onisaburo in his shamanistic trance is overwhelmed and frightened by the king of the underworld (Drury 2), here the novice in “Journeys” is terrified by the Sun God, the king of the celestial realm.

Snyder’s novice travels vertically several times. Stephen Larsen explains that the arrangement of worlds and universes in the spiritual “realm is vertical (in the mythic imagination vertical movement is sacred movement and horizontal is secular)” (110). Mircea Eliade comments that “The initiatory rituals peculiar to Siberian and Inner Asian shamanism include a symbolic ascent to Heaven up a tree or pole” (Eliade, Adams, et al. 13:203), and Nevill Drury mentions that in the Japanese shaman Deguchi Onisaburo’s initiation journey in a trance, he went to regions of Heaven and Hell and to the center of the world “at the summit of the huge axial mountain.” In Snyder’s “Journeys” there are numerous scenes describing the novice’s visits to similar regions, and most visits involve vertical movement. In paragraph 2, the poetic persona has a vision of the macrocosm in a microcosm; he looks

downward at the “axial mountain,” the Olympic Mountains, from a small sandspit, which can be likened to the sacred hole of an American Indian kiva, a passage into another world:

and stood on a white sandspit looking in:
over lowland swamps and prairies
where no one had ever been
to a view of the Olympic Mountains. . . .

The Olympic Mountains here refer to the range in northwest Washington State, west of Puget Sound, from 3,000 to 8,000 feet in elevation. When Snyder was a child living on a farm north of Seattle, he could watch the mountains on any clear day. The mountain range could also represent what John Weir Perry sees as the center, where the “psychic . . . and personal geography” is focused (Halifax 7), for in the very last passage it is in the mountains that the poetic persona undergoes a unique encounter with death.

There are also journeys deep into the underground. In a dream, the poetic persona and the bird-shamaness walked “through an enormous maze, all underground. / Occasionally we touched surface, and redescended” (passage 1). It seems to be a visit to purgatory, for the passage depicts scenes of neither heaven nor hell. Passage 6 also depicts vertical shamanistic flight, soaring up to heaven and then descending to the human world and subsequently into hell. A hike in the lofty mountains is described as a visit to the heavenly realm above the clouds; and the human world shrouded in clouds, in contrast to the heavenly realm, is called the “lowlands.” The “descending” image to the lowlands implies a vertical downward flight.

High up in a yellow-gold
dry range of mountains
.
finally can see below,
a sea of clouds.
Lower down, always moving slowly over the
dry ground descending, can see through the breaks
in the clouds: flat land
.
Descending to this humid, clouded level world:
now I have come to the LOWLANDS.

Here a description of Snyder’s favorite activity of hiking in the mountains bears an imaginative touch, suggesting the vertical descending flight of a shaman from the heavens to earth.

The crowded urban region, where people swarm and the waste piles up, is liter-

ally the hell visited by the poetic persona: “locked *inside* is hell” (passage 7). This hell refers to the “underground building chambers clogged with refuse,” the tiny rooms in concrete blocks, and the dark cinema halls. And the hell is materialized especially forcefully in the images of the toilets and sewage: “huge and filthy, with strange-shaped toilets full of shit. / Dried shit all around . . .” (passage 7). As an ecologist, Snyder is condemning the polluted urban environment. Human beings live in a hell that they themselves have created. The novice has visited the center of the cosmos, heaven, the lowlands, purgatory, and hell. The trial of a shamanistic journey is almost complete.

The last passage of “Journeys” treats the subject of death and is as enigmatic as it is illuminating. The experience of death is pivotal for the initiation rite, for in emerging from the ordeal sound and strong, the novice becomes a shaman who can master the secret of death. The death experience depicted in the passage is shamanistic in nature and has profound significance.

Ko-san and I stood on a point by a cliff, over a
rock-walled canyon. Ko said, “Now we have come to
where we die.” I asked him—what’s that up there,
then—meaning the further mountains.
“That’s the world after death.” I thought it looked
just like the land we’d been traveling, and couldn’t
see why we should have to die.
Ko grabbed me and pulled me over the cliff—
both of us falling. I hit and I was dead. I saw
my body for a while, then it was gone.
Ko was there too. We were at the bottom of the gorge.
We started drifting up the canyon. “This is the
way to the back country.”

According to Eliade, in the initiation trance, “the novice is killed by semidivine or demonic beings, so the future shaman sees in dreams his own body dismembered by demons” (Eliade, Adams, et al. 13:203). John Weir Perry also stresses the “process of dismemberment and sacrifice” in the death experience (Halifax 7). In the last episode of “Journeys,” the death experience appears less violent and more ethereal than in typical scenes of shamanistic initiation. The “Ko-san” in this passage, who acts as the guardian shaman, represents Snyder’s Japanese friend Morinaga Soko. He is the one who teaches the novice the truth about death, by asking such questions as when is the time to pass over the threshold and where is its realm. Ko-san says, “Now we have come to / where we die” and tells the novice that the mountains further away represent “the world after death.” And Ko-san helps the novice to cross the threshold by pulling him over the cliff. The two encounter their physi-

cal death in the process of falling from the cliff and being crushed on the rocks below. No pain is described, however, nor is any bloody scene or act of dismemberment depicted. The novice just says, "I hit and I was dead." While a shaman novice would watch the act of his own dismemberment as a bystander, here Snyder's novice, also a bystander, sees his own corpse only briefly, the words used to describe it are sparse, and the atmosphere is ethereal: "I saw / my body for a while, then it was gone."

Here Buddhist ideas have modified the motif of dismemberment. The ethereal quality of the scene is due to Snyder's Buddhist belief in the transience of all beings and in reincarnation. Because nothing abides and human beings' obsession with self (including the body) is illusory, in a cosmic time frame the corpse should disappear in the blink of an eye. Belief in reincarnation will also ease people's fear of death, since everyone will pass through many lives, all similar in essence. Death is no longer an unknown, frightening experience, but a door through which one enters another familiar phase in the cycle of life and death. That is why the novice says that the realm one enters after death "looked just like the land we'd been traveling." At the end of the poem, the novice's comprehension that "This is the way to the back country" could be interpreted in terms of Zen Buddhism. The words indicate that the poetic persona has experienced enlightenment concerning the truth about life and death. The pulling over the cliff can be likened to the Zen master's act of striking the disciple's head with a stick. After the physical blow or the pulling comes the sudden realization of the nonduality of "here" and "there," front and back, life and death.

The death experience depicted here is also shamanistic in the sense that it is permeated with a trancelike, dreamlike quality, that it features an ethereal variation on the dismemberment rite, and that it includes a scene of shamanistic flight, in a slow-motion, floating manner:

Ko was there too. We were at the bottom of the gorge.
We started drifting up the canyon.

At this point, the novice has experienced what John Weir Perry termed "a new birth" and has attained an enlightenment that contains "a balance of all elements" in a "structure of equilibrium and depth" (Halifax 7). The novice has leapt into the terrifying abyss of death and comes out sound, with a profound knowledge of a brand new world, "the back country," the realm of nondualism. After passing through all trials he has healed himself, and his "constitution" is both "strong and healthy," making him fit to be a shaman (Eliade, Adams, et al. 13:203). The novice in Snyder's "Journeys" has become a shaman who has mastered the knowledge of many realms, celestial and underground, human and spiritual, and of life and death. The shamanistic elements in "Journeys" are not only abundant but built

solidly into the deep structure of the poetic persona's psychological development. The shamanistic elements, however, are modified by Buddhist ideas, and there are also many American-Indian mythical elements, such as the bird-shaman and the kiva. It is appropriate, therefore, to call "Journeys" a shamanistic poem with both Asian and American-Indian elements.

IV

SNYDER AS AN AMERICAN-ASIAN SHAMAN

Snyder not only adopts elements of shamanism in his poetry, but in his own life also tries to enact rituals of worshipping and communicating with natural elements and cosmic forces. After his family settled down in 1970 at his California homestead, Kitkitdizze, in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada, he often held rituals with shamanistic features in his community. For example, the poem "Building" (*No Nature* 366) describes how a groundbreaking ritual was held when he and his neighbors built the schoolhouse. They "Buried a five-prong vajra between the schoolbuildings / while praying and offering tobacco." The *vajra* is a thunderbolt symbol made of bronze used in Tibetan Tantric rituals, while tobacco was an offering in some American-Indian rituals. The groundbreaking ritual that took place in northern California in the 1970s thus bore distinctively Asian and American-Indian elements.

The most renowned ritual, however, the one with greatest significance for Snyder both as a person and as a poet, was his wedding with Masa Uehara on 6 August 1967, on Suwa-no-Se Island¹⁴ in Japan. The wedding ceremony was officiated by Nanao Sakaki, the abbot of Banyan Ashram, a small religious commune on the island, where Snyder and Masa Uehara resided and worked.¹⁵ The location and date that they chose for the wedding were imbued with mythical and symbolic meanings. The place—at the edge of the crater of an active volcano—suggests that Snyder wished to be blessed by the most dynamic natural elements: not just the active volcano but also the ocean that surged around the tiny island. Standing on the crater's edge, the couple could hear the volcano roar "like an airport full of jets" with billowing steam, and they looked down eight hundred feet into the center of the crater with "red molten lava in a little bubbly pond" (*Earth* 141–42). Their wedding rite proceeded as follows:

Standing on the edge of the crater, blowing the conch horn and chanting a mantra; offering shochu to the gods of the volcano, the ocean, and the sky; then Masa and I exchanged the traditional three sips—Pon and Nanao said a few words; Masa and I spoke; we recited the Four Vows together, and ended with three blasts on the conch (142).

Exchanging three sips of wine is part of a traditional Japanese wedding; blowing the conch horn and chanting a mantra are parts of *yamabushi* and Tantric ritual; chanting the Four Vows¹⁶ is part of Mahayana Buddhist daily worship that is practiced widely in China, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, and South Asia. Although the wedding rite took place in Japan, the features of the rite were pan-Asian. Snyder and Masa Uehara chose the date according to Chinese and Japanese custom, which holds that one should take great care in selecting an auspicious date for a wedding. According to the lunar calendar, 6 August 1967 is the first day of the seventh lunar month. It is the date of the new moon, which symbolizes the renewal of all things and the new life of the marriage. In arranging his wedding, then, Snyder incorporated various Asian cultural elements—Japanese Shintoism, Japanese *yamabushi* tradition, Japanese wedding custom, Tibetan Tantrism, Mahayana Buddhism as practiced generally in Asia, and various Chinese customs.

Snyder believes that since a human being is merely a minute particle in a vast, dynamic cosmos, he should worship nature and beseech its blessing. His poem written for the wedding, “Burning Island” (*No Nature* 172–73), expresses precisely that belief. The persona in the poem invokes successively Wave God, volcano keeper, Sky Gods, Earth Mother, and all Gods, to give the couple their blessings, and then promises that he and his wife will work diligently and be pious followers of dharma (Buddhist laws):

O Wave God who broke through me today
 Sea Bream
 massive pink and silver
 cool swimming down with me watching
 staying way from the spear
 Volcano belly Keeper who lifted this island
 for our own beaded bodies adornment
 and sprinkles us all with his laugh—

 As we hoe the fieldlet sweet potato grow.
 let sweet potato grow.
 And as sit us all down when we may
 To consider the Dharma
 bring with a flower and a glimmer.
 Let us all sleep in peace together.
 Bless Masa and me as we marry

“Burning Island” itself can be seen as the preparatory prayer in a ritual uttered by a shaman, invoking deities of the natural elements and beseeching their protection.

David Robbins views “Burning Island” from the angle of myth and ritual theory;

he thinks that the volcanic explosion itself is a great cycle, symbolizing the marriage rite of the universe: “the great action behind the island cycle is the ancient ritual of marriage as a cosmological event, signifying creation’s renewal” (101). I would add that the explosive eruption of a volcano of course brings destruction, but eventually the congealed lava will become new land; the explosion and its aftermath form a cycle of renewal. Robbins also thinks that the wedding rite is a threshold across which man and woman become husband and wife and may become parents; therefore the poetic persona in “Burning Island” is searching for future equilibrium in the midst of dynamic nature. In the shamanistic era, marriage was not merely a personal matter, but related to the cosmos, for it signified the renewal of the world, turning “chaos” into “cosmos” (Robbins 90–91).

Furthermore, as Timothy Gray points out, the date of the wedding—6 August 1967—has another significance: it marks the twenty-second anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. Gray also infers that the marriage, the marriage of an American and a Japanese, “signaled a peaceful [truly ‘pacific’] union of East and West” (Gray 33). I would add that the choice of the atomic bombing anniversary also evokes another set of mythic and ritualistic meanings—the human race crossing the threshold from a phase of war and destruction into an era of peace and closer union by means of marriage. Snyder and Masa Uehara enacted not only a sacred ritual that involves the movement of natural forces but also a sacred marriage that beseeches the blessing of peace for the human race.

Based on the ritual details and the chants described in Snyder’s essay and the poem, we know that he conducted his own wedding rite as a shaman in the community of Banyan Ashram. But when the ritual is shared by readers of the poem and the essay, the shaman–poet Snyder engages a much larger community. An American performing a marriage rite with an Asian woman at an Asian site, Snyder turns himself into an American–Asian shaman. On an even broader view, Snyder is writing a new chapter in the postcolonial era. As a white American, he has made an extraordinary effort ever since his youth to learn from nations oppressed by Western power and to learn from the undercurrents of modern civilization. American-Indian, Chinese, and Japanese religious and philosophical ideas form the backbone of his system of thought. As someone who is ethnically “white,” he reveals regret for the relentlessness and brutality of the frontiersmen and the American army: “Something is always eating at the American heart like acid; it is the knowledge of what we have done to our continent, and to the American Indian” (*Earth* 119). Snyder takes positive action by trying to rediscover what Western powers have buried, such as American-Indian culture, and to make amends for what those powers have marred, such as Hiroshima.

In a word, Snyder has integrated myth and ritual theory, in particular as embodied in American-Indian and Asian shamanism, into his system of thought and

into his personal belief. He not only presents American-Indian shamans and Asian deities with a shamanistic tint as major figures of spiritual power in his writings, he fuses shamanistic ritual elements into the underlying structure of some of his poems. In addition, he carries his belief in ritualistic acts into both his personal life and community activities and acts as a shaman himself. His willingness to act out his personal belief in American-Asian shamanism is a means to personal fulfillment and also allows us to see him as a forerunner in a potential integration of Eastern and Western cultures.

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NOTES

- 1 In Japanese Shintoistic belief, a *kami* is a sacred power or force. The word can refer to a deity in Shintoism, to the spirit of a distinguished man, or to a force, a being, or an object in nature.
- 2 For Snyder's belief in the Pacific Rim as a coherent region, see Gray.
- 3 Snyder's thesis later appeared in book form (Snyder, *He Who Hunted*).
- 4 I interviewed Snyder at Kitkitdizze in July 1999 and again in July 2001. The 2001 interview was published (in Chinese) as "Interview with Gary Snyder: Cultural Consciousness of American West Coast and Asian Civilization," in *Chung Wai Literary Monthly* (Dec. 2002), 200–225.
- 5 See Mircea Eliade's "Shamanism: An Overview" (Eliade, Adams, et al. 13:204) and Joan Halifax's *Shamanic Voices* (9).
- 6 I. M. Lewis says that a "Séance may be held to make contact with the spirits of the upper or lower worlds" (46). The various functions of a seance include contacting spirits to find out the cause of an outbreak of disease, to discover the reason for a run of bad luck in hunting, or to liberate a person from the spirits of a hostile shaman (Lewis 46), and to capture or call back a wandering soul or a diseased person's soul (Eliade 447–48, 419–20). During a seance, the shaman in a trance will often undertake a magic flight (Eliade 404–405).
- 7 Amanda Porterfield mentions that in 1634 an Englishman in Massachusetts observed an American-Indian shaman assume the characteristics of his spirits and their demands; he roared like a bear, sometimes groaned like a dying horse, and smote his naked breast as if he were mad (727).
- 8 Eliade writes, "It is likewise probable that pre-ecstatic euphoria constituted one of the universal sources of lyric poetry. In preparing his trance, the shaman drums, summons his spirit helpers, and speaks a secret language or the 'animal language' that imitates the cries of beasts and especially the songs of birds. He ends by attaining a 'second state' that provides the impetus for linguistic creation and the rhythms of lyric poetry" (Eliade, Adams, et al. 13:207).
- 9 Joseph Campbell in *The Power of Myth* says that "Myths inspire the realization of the possibility of your perfection, the fullness of your strength, and the bringing of solar light into the world. Slaying monsters is slaying the dark things. Myths grab you somewhere down inside. As a boy, you go at it one way, as I did reading my Indian stories.

Later on, myths tell you more, and more, and still more. I think that anyone who has ever dealt seriously with religious or mythic ideas will tell you that we learn them as a child on one level, but then many different levels are revealed. Myths are infinite in their revelation" (148).

- 10 "Master of Healing, Azure Radiance Tathagata" is a translation from his full name in Sanskrit. The Romanization of the Sanskrit "Bhavshajyaguru" means Master-of-Healing Buddha, which corresponds to "Yao-shih Fo," Buddha the Healing Master, in Mandarin Chinese and to "Yukushi Nyorai" in Japanese.
- 11 The legend of the divine woman was created by Song Yu (circa third century B.C.) in his "The Riming Prose of Gao Tang." The writings of both Qu Yuan and Song Yu are full of shamanistic features.
- 12 Snyder has been a great fan of Noh plays. His poem "The Feathered Robe" (*Left* 68–69) is inspired by the Noh play *Hagoromo* (see his footnote to the poem [*Left* 69]). In most Noh plays there are Buddhist rituals of exorcism. The old-woman characters, such as Yamamba and Komachi, who look mad but in fact are enlightened beings remind one of shamanesses. The frequent feats of transformation in Noh plays remind one of a shaman's transformative powers. For example, in the play *Dōjōji* (Brazell 195–206), the daughter of a lord's steward thinks that she is going to marry a man; when he rejects her, she gets so enraged that she turns into a huge serpent *kami*.
- 13 An earlier version appears in *Six Sections*, 34–37. The text differs slightly from the one in *Mountains and Rivers without End*.
- 14 This small volcanic island is situated south of Kyushu, the southernmost of the four main Japanese islands. Its latitude is 29°38" N and longitude 129°43" E. Its volcano erupts frequently, the most recent eruptions occurring in 1949, 1988, and 2001.
- 15 Snyder's article, "Suwa-no-Se Island and the Banyon Ashram" (*Earth* 135–143), gives details of Masa Uehara's and his own life in the ashram and of their eventual wedding. His wife is a native of Okinawa and thus belongs to an ethnic minority in Japan.
- 16 The Four Vows include the following affirmations: "To save all living beings without limit. To put an end to all passions and delusions, however numerous. To study and learn all methods and means of enlightenment without end. To become perfect in the supreme Buddha law."

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