beyond humanism

mythic fantasy and inhumanist philosophy in the long poems of robinson jeffers and gary snyder

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Robinson Jeffers and Gary Snyder have been recognized as two American poets who present strong philosophical positions in their poetry, particularly in their long poems, and both have been adopted as major literary representatives of the Deep Ecology movement in America. Critics have given some attention to their philosophies; they have, however, tended to gloss over the use of the fantastic in these same poems, with its role in enabling the presentation of philosophical positions in contradiction to Western logocentrism and Judeo-Christian humanism left undiscussed. I wish to focus here precisely on this relationship between the use of fantasy, particularly mythic fantasy, and the presentation of alternative post-humanist philosophies in the works of these two California authors. But before doing so, I want to emphasize their significance as philosophical poets whose ideas are taken seriously by contemporary readers. This may in turn contribute to understanding why Jeffers was either villified or ignored by the New Critics, and why recognition of Snyder was delayed due to critical infatuation with confessional poetry.

The increasing popularity, to the degree that we can call an American poet popular, of Jeffers and Snyder has tended to parallel the rise of the second wave of ecology in the United States in the 1960s, 70s and 80s.

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In 1963, a year after Jeffers' death, a reader could find only two volumes of his poetry in print, both hardcover editions by Random House: the slim posthumous collection, *The Beginning and the End and Other Poems*, just published; and the much larger *Selected Poetry*, still being printed from the 1938 plates of the first edition. In 1965, however, Random House issued the slim paperback *Selected Poems* and the rediscovery of Jeffers began. In that same year the Sierra Club published a coffee-table sized picture book, edited by David Brower titled *Not Man Apart*, containing "photographs of the Big Sur Coast" and "lines from Robinson Jeffers." A conservationist organization put Jeffers back in the public eye. In the 1970s new editions of much of Jeffers' work became again available to the public from Livergith, New Directions and some small presses, with all of these volumes containing introductions and afterwords about Jeffers, his poetics, and his philosophy.[1] Although Snyder did not publish his first book of poems until the late 1950s, he published several in the 1960s, and yet the academy waited until a groundswell of public interest had already occurred before responding.[2] This groundswell resulted in large part from recognition of the relationship between his poetry and the ecological awareness that correlated with the anti-war movement, particularly its "hippy" and back to nature wings (see, for example, *Earth House Hold*). By 1975 the Pulitzer Prize winning *Turtle Island*[3] was able to realize sales of some 100,000. Similar sales were experienced by *Axe Handles*,[4] published nearly a decade later. Beginning this past year, Stanford University Press has begun publishing the definitive multivolume *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*.[5] Meanwhile, Snyder has not considered a collected or selected poetry volume because all of his books of poetry and prose remain in print. Recently, however, he did release a volume of previously uncollected poems, *Left Out in the Rain*.[6]

A largely nonacademic readership that tends to embrace Thoreau but reject Emerson for John Muir, and to prefer Aldo Leopold to Walt Whitman, comprises the bulk of the contemporary readers of Jeffers and Snyder in the United States. Within academia, both poets are usually only recognized for a few anthologized lyrics by English teachers, while anthropologists, ecologists and biochemists may very well have Jeffers and Snyder on their shelves alongside Aldo Leopold or Loren Eisley. Snyder probably draws the most diverse audience for a poetry reading of any American writing today. Also, he and Jeffers are two of a handful of literary authors mentioned in *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered*,[7] and the ones against which the others are measured. It is generally recognized that Jeffers and Snyder are widely read by many people who do not otherwise read poetry. But while interest in both Jeffers and Snyder continues to develop, such attention has not been without controversy and vilification.

"The Double Axe,"[8] the long poem by Jeffers to be studied here, aroused more political and critical controversy at the time of its publication following World War II than any other of Jeffers' more sensational long poems, and more than probably any other American poem with the exception of Howl. Divided in two contrasting halves, "The Double Axe" uses mythic fantasy in both parts, with an emphasis on horror in the retelling of a classical myth in the first half, "The Love and the Hate," and an emphasis on wonder in the mythopoeic creation of the second half, "The Inhumanist." Jeffers had been developing his use of mythic fantasy rife with archetypal psychological implications for over twenty years before the publication of "The Double Axe" and had been evolving along with that his own idiosyncratic philosophy.[9] But in "The Inhumanist" he presents the most explicit statement of his philosophy of Inhumanism, consciously developed as an alternative to the guiding philosophical forces of American culture. Gary Snyder's *Myths & Texts* draws on a variety of religious systems to present through a mythopoeic fantasy narrative an alternative philosophy to Western logocentrism, and he continues that project in his sequence in progress, "Mountains and Rivers without End."[10] His philosophy, drawing heavily on Zen Buddhism, also constitutes a type of "inhumanism." Snyder reacts to many of the same horrors of modern civilization that Jeffers condemns, but presents his condemnation and alternative philosophy through a very different poetics. In many ways, Snyder's philosophy could be labelled "post-humanism," going beyond both the humanism that Jeffers believed culminated in World War II and Jeffers' own antithetical Inhumanism.

Jeffers self-consciously adopts an anti-modernist poetics based on linear narrative structures and accentual verse.[11] Snyder, however, coming to maturity after the Second World War, could adapt modernist techniques in the form of fragmented, free verse composition and sequential structuring of his long poems, but without having to accept the literary tradition or philosophical tenets codified by the high modernist writers and the New Critics. Yet both utilize fantasy to present a clear cut philosophical position while avoiding heavyhanded didacticism. In this sense, one could argue that both are reacting to the polar dangers of modernist poetry: elitist aestheticism and Poundian dogmatism. Jeffers, however, unlike Snyder relies on a strong and clear narrative presentation free of the modernist compression and allusiveness that rendered modern poetry so necessarily "difficult" in order to guide the reader toward certain conclusions. These conclusions are meant to be more felt at the gut level than intellectualized in the rationalizing and self-deceiving mind. Snyder, abandoning all but a slim narrative thread, uses fragmentation, shifting point of view, and multicultural allusions to reorient readers' perspectives and break down their logocentric preconceptions. In other words, Jeffers' poetics uses traditional methods to lead readers toward new conclusions,

ones essentially antithetical to the prevailing philosophy; Snyder's poetics uses new methods to change the way readers draw conclusions, a way that moves toward a synthesis that neither produces, nor is trapped in the pendulum of, thesis-antithesis polarities.

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In "The Double Axe" Jeffers initiates his presentation of Inhumanism with a critique of Western culture that indicts it as a horror of Oedipal murder, incest and fratricide epitomized by the carnage of World War II. The first part of "The Double Axe," "The Love and the Hate" is a macabre fantasy in which the self-resurrected corpse of a dead soldier killed in the Pacific returns to the California family farm in order to gain revenge against those he deems responsible for his death. Jeffers combines a harsh condemnation of the political motivations for initiating war and the economic motives for prolonging it with a Freudian-based Oedipal horror story to produce a "negative fantasy" of abjection, as defined by T. E. Apter.[12] This kind of fantasy, rather than building on the sense of wonder that C. N. Manlove emphasizes in his books on fantasy,[13] "discovers and aggravates disintegration," and "is not a means of consolation and recovery but of registering losses and fears. Thus such a fantasy is predominantly 'negative' in that it does not resolve problems but rather magnifies them."[14] Julia Kristeva, in her study of abjection, explains the function of the controlling use of a corpse that Jeffers employs: "The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object."[15] For the half of the poem that must expose and condemn the very society in which the American reader lives, negative fantasy magnifies the sense of social disintegration that Jeffers wishes to emphasize through linking it with the personal losses of the war and the individual's fear of bodily defilement.[16]

When Jeffers has Hoult Gore kill his father by shooting him in the loins, he makes it very clear that while the sons may have to pay for the sins of the fathers in terms of cultural decay, warfare and environmental destruction, the fathers will not go unpunished. The Oedipal scenario, the underlying myth adaptively retold in "The Love and the Hate," is for Jeffers not simply a nuclear family tragedy but a cultural tragedy as well. But unlike in the classical Oedipal story and its fundamental archetype of father-son rivalry, Jeffers, building on a Freudian interpretation of Oedipus, makes the father, Bull Gore, responsible for this destructive triangle since it is he who first murders his son by patriotically encouraging him to go to war. It is a necessary tragedy of the son slaying the father because it is a product of the fundamental character of Western humanist culture.

That Jeffers' critique of modern Western society includes religious as well as secular humanism is made explicit by his parody of the Roman Catholic Mass when Hoult announces: "I am the resurrection and the death," and later states: "Take it in remembrance of me. This is my body / That was broken for nothing. Drink it: this is my blood / That was spilled for no need. Oh, yes: for victory: / That rat-sucked hawk-egg" (38). That his critique is not limited to the confines of "the family romance," Jeffers makes explicit through involving a young man who has a military deferment and who is Hoult's mother's lover. Named Larson with a pun on larceny, he is a symbol of profiteers who remain behind and reap the financial benefits of a war-time economy. Hoult murders Larson before killing his father.

To understand the significance of this action beyond the bounds of the Oedipal conflict, one has to recognize that Hoult's mother, Reine, serves a polysemous function in the poem, and at one level symbolizes the archetype of the Earth mother. As Earth mother, who at the end of the poem commits suicide after consummating Hoult's desire for incest, Reine Gore has given herself both to the patriotic ardor of the father and the mercenary ravishment of the profiteer. She is the Earth defiled by infidelity to her own nurturing function. Jeffers suggests this identification in the opening of "The Love and the Hate" when he describes her in relation to natural fertility. Her name further implies this through its archaic meaning, the loins thought of as the seat of emotions and affections. Her adultery adulterates the earth by mixing the seeds of two men without producing offspring. The men who engage in this travesty, the patriotic Bull and the profiteering Larson, are responsible for the "rain of gore" that war produces.

While this fundamental Earth-mother archetype and the mythic plot of Oedipal conflict structure the story, its major theme is a political attack on warfare conducted for political and economic gain. Thus, the immediate political situation of World War II is the focus of Jeffers' thematic concerns in "The Love and the Hate." And while the position on World War II, and warfare in general, presented in the poem derives from his basic philosophy, that philosophy is represented only implicitly in this fantasy. The use of a negative fantasy of horror allows Jeffers to build up a contrast between the unreal horror of the fictitious self-resurrected Hoult and the too real horror of the war. Jeffers thus combines political propaganda and horror fantasy in order to strike at the reader's mind at the rational and the irrational levels producing both intellectual and emotional revulsion. In contrast, the political elements recede into the background in the second half of "The Double Axe"—"The Inhumanist,"—as Jeffers creates a mythopoeic fantasy that explicitly presents his philosophy through the words and deeds of a more-than-human old man. This shift reflects the change in the context of Jeffers' composition of the poem. By the

time he began working on the second half, the war had ended, with the result that political immediacy gave way to philosophical immediacy, a concern with policy to a concern with values.

Jeffers' view of warfare as a form of puerile fratricide met with a tremendous outcry by his own publisher, who printed a disclaimer at the front of the book, and from critics at the time of its publication and throughout the fifties.[17] Yet it brilliantly foreshadows the attitude of a large segment of American youth toward both the Vietnam War and the threat of nuclear war, which Jeffers envisions at the end of "The Inhumanist." But like many of those who participated in the anti-war movement, Jeffers found negative critique unsatisfying and insufficient. He also recognized that victory would usher in a wave of egotistical vanity that would feed the humanistic narcissism that he saw as having given rise to the war itself. So he stated in his published preface to *The Double Axe and Other Poems* that "its burden . . . is to present a certain philosophical attitude, which might be called Inhumanism, a shifting of emphasis and significance from man to not-man; the rejection of human solipsism and recognition of the transhuman magnificence. It seems time that our race began to think as an adult does, rather than like an egocentric baby or insane person" (xxi). It is no surprise that Jeffers has been adopted as one of ecology's preeminent poets, particularly given that many who started

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The Publisher's Note from the original printing of the Livergith edition of Robinson Jeffers, *The Double Axe*, 1977. Courtesy of Random House.

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

THE DOUBLE AXE AND OTHER POEMS is the fourteenth book of verse by Robinson Jeffers published under the Random House imprint.* During an association of fifteen years, marked by mutual confidence and accord, the issuance of each new volume has added strength to the close relationship of author and publisher. In all fairness to that constantly interdependent relationship and in complete candor, Random House feels compelled to go on record with its disagreement over some of the political views pronounced by the poet in this volume. Acutely aware of the writer's freedom to express his convictions boldly and forthrightly and of the publisher's function to obtain for him the widest possible hearing, whether there is agreement in principle and detail or not, it is of the utmost importance that difference of views should be wide open on both sides. Time alone is the court of last resort in the case of ideas on trial.

out as anti-war activists in the 1960s have become the eco-activists of the 70s and 80s. One sees in Jeffers an effort precursive of the contemporary environmentalist movement to shift attention "from man to not-man" by calling for a new way of perceiving the human-world relationship. And whether one is talking about ecofeminism, deep ecology, or the Gaia hypothesis, invariably these reperceptions require that humanity be decentered, and the ecosphere take center stage.[18] Indeed, the plot of "The Inhumanist" unfolds the protagonist's own efforts to achieve this shift of attention and perception, this turning increasingly outward and away from humanity. He says aloud near the end that "it is deep peace and final joy / To know that the great world lives, whether man dies or not. The beauty of things is not harnessed to human / Eyes and the little active minds: it is absolute" (113).

This "Inhumanism," however, should not be confused with the "anti-humanism" that has been identified with Continental thought, particularly that of Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze and others, precisely because, like that of the environmental movement, Jeffers' philosophy develops beyond negative critique to a position of affirmation. Inhumanism does not remain reactive to humanism, but replaces it as the guiding philosophy for a humanity that seeks to achieve maturity. For Jeffers humanism will not lead to such maturity but to suicide as a result of codifying an illusion of human-as-center presence. But rather than simply negating and critiquing such a Ptolemaic theory of the universe, he proposes an Einsteinian one. And while Jeffers had briefly introduced tenets of this theory as early as "Roan Stallion" in the 1920s, he did not present it anywhere else as fully developed as it appears in the second half of "The Double Axe."

The prologue of "The Inhumanist" introduces an ageless old man who has become caretaker of the fire-razed Gore farm of the first half of the poem. While an inexperienced youth could serve as authorial spokesman in "The Love and the Hate" denouncing social ills, the elucidation of a positive, alternative philosophy requires a more experienced and less impassioned figure. The caretaker is introduced in a post-war setting in which nature has reflowered the hills and covered the scars of human violence, "the pain, the hate and the love / Have left no ghost" (52). In the second of the fifty-two numbered sections of this half of the poem, Jeffers has the caretaker begin his mythic role as sage philosopher by declaring the interconnectedness of the universe and attacking religious ideas that present anthropomorphic conceptions of God, and, by implication, anthropomorphic conceptions of nature that are based on humanist anthropocentrism. Then Jeffers introduces the double-bladed axe as a key symbol of regeneration, its two lobes symbolizing its function as both life-giving and life-taking. The caretaker remarks: "It was a symbol of generation: the two lobes and the stiff helve: so was the Cross before they christened it. But this one can clip heads too" (54).[19]

Jeffers embeds the axe in a complex web of sacred, symbolic, archetypal and allusive significations reiterated and suggested throughout the poem. The axe is an archetypal symbol and a magical fantasy device and the sage-figure is a standard mythic figure and fantasy character. But Jeffers' specific combination of the two, bearing a new philosophy within the modern American setting, renders this half of "The Double Axe" a creative mythopoeia, "a new invention" rather than a retelling of myth like "The Love and the Hate."[20] Jeffers contextualizes the old man's philosophizing as part of re-establishing the fundamental religious relationship of humanity and universe.[21] Such a relationship historically preceded the anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism of modern Christian humanism and it must be reinstituted as the foundation for replacing the false philosophy of humanism with Inhumanism.

As a Janus-faced symbol the axe is both destructive and regenerative, but it must be mastered and guided to destroy purgatively rather than wantonly, and the caretaker is only able to assume that guiding role after he has killed his human half (in section 42), who is represented by a doppelganger. Having eliminated that half of his own being, he dominates the axe. Nonetheless, the axe retains a life of its own, imposing on him a responsibility as standard bearer for a philosophy that is purgative in the cause of regeneration. Mastering the axe requires that he also wields it. In the context of the first half of "The Double Axe," the inhumanist caretaker and his axe can be understood as having an antithetical relationship to civilization and its destructive technology. Carl Jung has said that humanity produced "useful gadgets" but in the process tore open "the abyss." Both halves of "The Double Axe" present that abyss in the forms of warfare and nuclear destruction—a choice of imaging that renders Jeffers' poem quite timely forty years later in the shadow of Chernobyl. In the first half of the poem he uses a negative horror fantasy to denounce the political and cultural values that result from the anthropocentrism at the heart of all forms of humanism. In the second half, he uses a positive mythopoeic fantasy to offer an alternative philosophy that may let humanity mature beyond humanism into a decentering philosophy before it commits adolescent suicide. It is, after all, the inhumanist old man who survives the nuclear war described at the poem's end. Jeffers desired throughout his long life to see a new humanity born on this earth, and in "The Double Axe" he tries to provide a mythopoeia to assist that birth and guide the new entity's growth.

The axe's basic function as a cleaver, a tool for cutting away, serves as a symbol of Jeffers' belief that humanity matures by cutting away illusions, by stripping away the baggage and the superficial appearances that surround and suffocate the individual. To become an inhumanist, one must cease to be self-infatuated. A number of the incidents and dialogues that the old man carries on in "The Inhumanist" emphasize this need to

get down to basics, another tenet of the environmental movement that Jeffers foreshadows in his poetry and in his own life. Jeffers, Una and their two children lived in a stone house with a tower along the Monterey coast, for which Jeffers hauled the stones up from the rocky beach himself. They lived a simple life and remained friendly but aloof, with a specific time of day designated for visitors so that Jeffers could write undisturbed. While the Sierra Club's phrase, "Not Man Apart," remains apt for Jeffers' belief in the relationship of humanity to nature, he would have added a corollary: "Man not too close to other men." As he wrote in 1956, "turn away from each other to that great presence to which humanity is only a squirming particle."[22] He emphasizes throughout "The Inhumanist," as elsewhere, the need to turn outward toward the world rather than inward to the self. This is dramatized not only by the caretaker's murder of his doppelganger but also by his daughter's decision to leave home and run away with her lover. Family also can become a locus of narcissism and unhealthy inward turning, as suggested by the mother-daughter conflict portrayed in the family living closest to the old Gore farm. In the much earlier "Tamar," the protagonist turns inward to the family engaging in incest in an attempt to develop her own identity, and such actions destroy her. In contrast, the caretaker's daughter in "The Inhumanist" leaves to initiate her own life and develop her own values.

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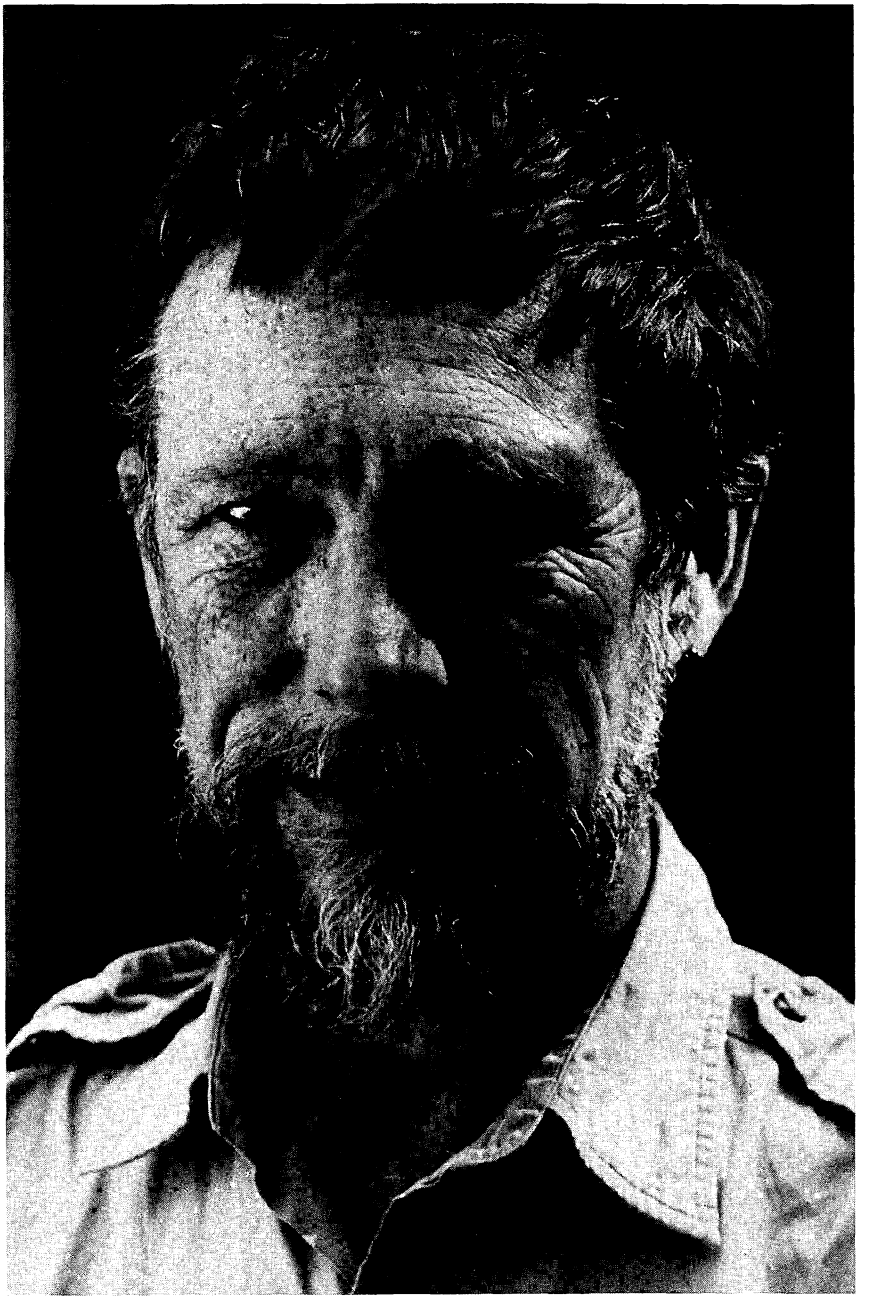
Like Jeffers whom he had read in the early 1950s,[23] Gary Snyder has always believed that poetry could become a force for change in the world, although he has tended to see that change as much nearer the horizon than his predecessor. Speaking of his contemporary, Allen Ginsberg, Snyder remarked in 1973 that "Ginsberg is not just a poet, he is a social force, and Howl is not just a poem, it's a social force."[24] Snyder, clearly seeking to become a social force and ascribing to the claim by Pound he frequently quotes that poets "are the antennae of the race," denounces in Myths & Texts many of the same ills of Western culture that Jeffers attacks.[25] In particular, he focuses on the economic and ecological results of Judeo-Christian religious beliefs that posit a "Jehovah" figure who requires the sacrifice of nature in his praise, demanding that the sacred groves of Diana be cut down in the New Testament book appropriately titled "Acts." But Snyder goes beyond Jeffers at virtually every point of his criticism. In part because the sequential form of compressed fragments, a loose link of elliptical episodes, allows greater narrative flexibility, Snyder can quickly give a tangential critique of a particular event or image in the narrative or draw in wide ranging allusive references without seriously disrupting the progression of the poem. Jeffers' straightforward chronological narratives do not allow such flexibility. As a case in point, part one of *Myths &*



Portrait of Gary Snyder. Photograph by Hank Meals, courtesy of Gary Snyder.

Texts, "Logging," primarily criticizes the ecological devastation perpetrated by Judeo-Christian culture. At the same time, this critique encompasses the ecological errors of the Orient from which Snyder will heavily draw for the religious dimensions of his mythopoeia. But as part of his grounding of this mythopoeic task, he presents these ecological errors both through mythically presenting American destruction, with saw mills serving as sacrificial altars: "Sawmill temples of Jehovah. / Squat black burners 100 feet high / Sending the smoke of our burnt / Live sap and leaf / To his eager nose" (15); and through presenting the deviation of Japanese commercial logging from that culture's own nature myths: "Pines, under pines, / Seami Motokiyo / The Doer stamps his foot. / A thousand board-feet / Bucked, skidded, loaded— / (Takasago, Ise) float in a mill pond; / A thousand years dancing / Flies in the saw kerf" (6).

While nature is ardently defended as a source of values and as an immortal entity surviving humanity's onslaughts in "The Double Axe," it is relegated only a passive role in the progress of the poem. While Jeffers occasionally treats nature as more actively impinging on human development, his focus remains humanity. As Snyder has remarked, Jeffers is so concerned with getting human mischief out of nature that his Inhumanism remains human centered and fails to give humanity a role in nature commensurate with people's active potential.[26] This was a problem that Snyder had recognized as early as 1952, the year he began writing the sequence: "(reject the human; but the tension of human events, brutal and tragic, against a non-human background? like Jeffers?)."[27] As David Wyatt notes of this passage in his comparison of Jeffers and Snyder, "the answer was to be no. Snyder chose eventually not to reject but to immerse himself in the human, to lose himself in life."[28] Snyder carefully avoids the trap of focusing only on the errors of humans in an effort to correct those errors on the one hand, and treating nature as separate from and independent of human beings on the other. As Snyder notes in *The Old Ways*, the Earth, in accordance with the Gaia Hypothesis, has created people as part of its multi-billion year evolutionary program; and, while they may have been a mistake, people are still a part of the program.[29] Thus, a role for them must be found that will allow human culture to enter into a balanced relationship with nature. And while political issues and actions form a part of that finding, as emphasized in Snyder's collection of short poems, *Turtle Island*, the founding of a balanced relationship must be based primarily on a new post-humanist religious philosophy. Like "The Double Axe," *Myths & Texts* serves as a mythopoeia to help reorient American culture toward developing just such a philosophically based culture.[30]

To this end, the "Logging" section of *Myths & Texts* critiques previous cultures and turns toward nature to provide symbols and examples to guide the development of a new human-nature relationship. This critique

is set within a fundamental archetypal plot, the individual quest.[31] Specifically here, it is a quest that involves the dream visions of the shaman and the Zen enlightenment of satori, both of which must be rendered as fantasy episodes given their ineffability. The first archetypal symbol that Snyder finds in nature to contribute to his mythopoeia is the "Lodgepole Pine," which the narrator discovers while working as a logger in the period of experience prior to the quest, that period in which the narrator's increasingly penetrating critique of his own culture necessitates his search for vision. The seedcones of the Lodgepole Pine "'endure a fire which kills the tree without injuring its seed. / After fire, the cones open and shed their seeds / on the bared ground and a new growth springs up'" (4).

The Pine not only exemplifies the regenerative cyclical character of natural growth but also the phoenix myth of Western culture. The apocalypse that Jeffers sees as essential to an end to humanism and the advent of Inhumanism is here seen as a normal part of natural growth. Thus, cataclysm and disaster remain millenialist in Jeffers, spiritually purgative and redemptive; in Snyder their purgative function is diminished to a component in a balanced process of renewal. At the same time, Snyder de-emphasizes the individualism prevalent in American culture that pits the drive toward personal and national immortality at the expense of nature against the natural process of cyclical renewal that expends individual trees in order to perpetuate the species. Not only does the fire destroy the old trees to make room for seedlings but also it turns the dead wood into fertilizer. This clear cut distinction is emphasized in "Logging 3" through Snyder first introducing the phoenix-like Lodgepole Pine and then describing a dairy farm developed on clear-cut land: "But it's hard to farm / Between the stumps: / The cows get thin, the milk tastes funny, / The kids grow up and go to college / They don't come back. / the little fir-trees do" (5).

Implicit throughout "Logging" is Snyder's suggestion that America lacks a balanced relationship with nature because it consists of a rootless population, one that does not contribute to the cyclical growth and maintenance of its place of origin. Jeffers does not address this issue at all in the development of his Inhumanism, but seems more to believe that humans are out of place wherever they go because they are self-consciously out of nature.[32] Until their philosophy changes they will remain out of place. Snyder would agree with this; but in his emphasis on developing a new culture in the midst of the old rather than waiting for new growth to spring out of the post-apocalypse ashes, he views the reorientation of individuals toward rooting themselves in a place as a step in reorienting their minds in a new world outlook. Jeffers' mythopoeic fantasy does not present a process of discovering a new religious philosophy that the reader can imitate, but only presents a full-blown position for the reader to adopt. At the same time, Jeffers' cataclysmic conclusion

suggests that this new philosophy can only take hold after an apocalypse.[33] Nowhere in "The Inhumanist" does Jeffers suggest an explanation for why the old caretaker has been able to transcend American culture and develop a new philosophy.

The caretaker arises from the Gore Place full grown with his philosophy essentially intact without need of any visionary quest. In contrast, the narrating protagonist of *Myths & Texts* is a visionary seeker, one who criticizes the corrupt culture but also participates in it as a logger until the last two sections of "Logging" when he rejects the Jehovah-based nature-sacrificing culture in which he has lived and turns toward other religious cultures: Hinduism, Native American shamanism and Buddhism. Snyder's turning here represents both the spiritual quest of his own life and the quest of that segment of the post-World War II generation that rejected suburbia and "the life of Riley," as well as the Sixties generation turning increasingly toward Native American and Buddhist beliefs as an alternative to the Judeo-Christian heritage. Jeffers, on the other hand, was never able to imagine himself outside of the Western tradition of religion and philosophy. The reason why Snyder, however, has been taken far more seriously than most other writers who have attempted to capture these non-Western alternative beliefs is that he has pursued them far more seriously and diligently. Jack Kerouac captures something of the flavor of this difference in his roman a clef *The Dharma Bums*, in which Japhy Ryder is modeled on Gary Snyder. Not content simply to read about Buddhism in translation, Snyder not only learned Japanese and Chinese but also went to Japan to study Buddhism with a Rinzai Zen roshi. Snyder's poetry, in addition to introducing many readers to the basic principles of a decentering ecology, has also introduced many to basic Native American and Buddhist practices, both of which are presented in the "Hunting" and "Burning" sections of *Myths & Texts* respectively. But unlike Jeffers' caretaker who presents to the reader what he has learned, Snyder's narrator-protagonist presents the process of gaining vision itself.

In "Hunting 1" of *Myths & Texts*, Snyder makes clear the role of his narrator as visionary quester: "I sit without thoughts by the log-road / Hatching a new myth / watching the waterdogs / the last truck gone" (19). The logging season is over and the protagonist remains behind in the wilderness to seek a vision, not simply for himself, but for his society, a vision that he can translate into a culturally guiding myth. And Snyder presents this vision through a series of fantastic episodes in which the quester undergoes a variety of physical transformations, ones far more radical than the special effects of "Altered States."

"Logging" ends on a passive, elegiac note in which the protagonist longs to accept the Hindu notion of the kalpa cycle that will guarantee a cataclysm that will wipe clean the Earth and initiate a new round of human rebirth.[34] But the speaker cannot resign himself to such inactivity

and hence the quest of "Hunting," the second segment of the *Myths & Texts* triptych, to undergo the mysteries of shamanistic vision. The "Hunting" section, then, ends on an ecstatic note that emphasizes the possibilities for the human component of the natural world. Blending Native American and Buddhist beliefs, the protagonist announces: "How rare to be born a human being!" This ecstasy launches the speaker into "Burning," in which he undergoes a regenerative submersion into his own evolutionary origins and re-emerges in an identification with "Maitreya the future Buddha." He has left behind both the destructive linear regression of Western humanism and the passive cyclical resignation of Hinduism to adopt a syncretic mix of Buddhism and primal mind.[35] This syncretism produces a new myth for America based not on post-apocalyptic rebirth but on continuous rebirth through reperceiving the interrelationships of matter and mind, nature and human, and text as sensory experience and myth as perception. Snyder's mythopoeic conception of an interpenetrating universe appears on the surface to be utterly fantastic, contradicting as it does common sense notions of quotidian reality; at the same time, it more accurately reflects the reality of the universe as a dynamic flow of energy organized moment to moment in a variety of material forms, with the human form one node in Earth's natural energy pathways.

This synthesis is encapsulated in the final sequence of "Burning" in which a forest fire is presented in both its mythic and textual dimensions with neither dimension privileged over the other but recognized as one "experience": "*the text* / Sourdough mountain called a fire in: / Up Thunder Creek, high on a ridge / . . . . // *the myth* / Fire Up Thunder Creek and the mountain—/ troy's burning! / The cloud mutters / The mountains are your mind" (53). This essentially Zen ending says that in effect everything is already a Buddha if we can just recognize it as such. Thus, in contrast to Jeffers' millenialist and apocalyptic Inhumanism that requires disaster for regeneration, Snyder's post-humanist myth posits that the separation of humanity and nature is an illusion that exists only as long as humans believe it. Since belief and behavior simultaneously interpenetrate, the alteration of either affects the other. The vision quest leads to a new perception, and new perception leads to new behavior, of which vision quests are but one form. As Snyder conceives the relationships between mind and matter, philosophy and behavior, perception is the liminal state that determines whether or not the intellectual membrane separating experience and belief, sense and thought, will be permeable.

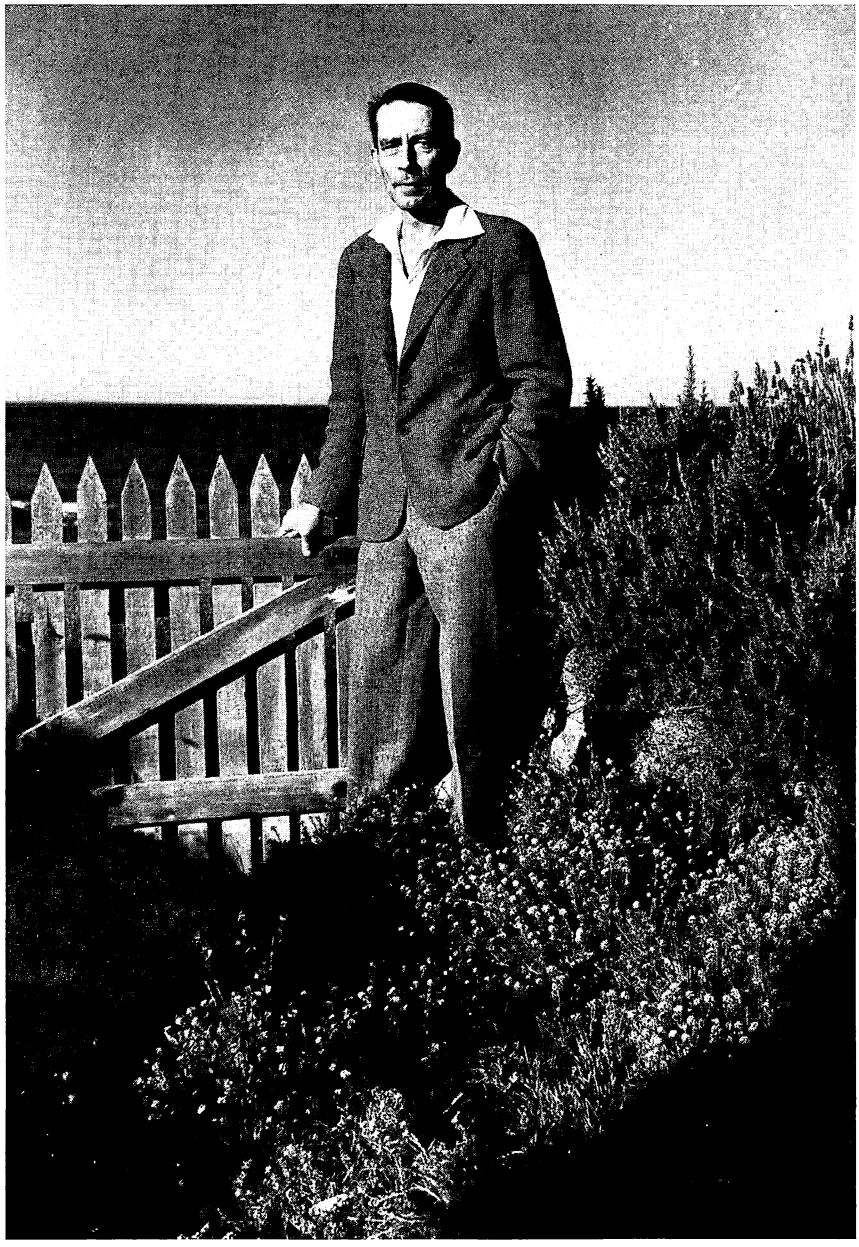
iii

"The Double Axe" and *Myths & Texts* share much in common in terms of what they oppose and their authors use the negative psychological effects of horror in their acts of condemnation. Jeffers does so through the

production of a complete fantasy narrative in "The Love and the Hate"; Snyder limits his use of horror to specific images. But since the main function of the horror is to negate, both poets rely in their horror episodes on retelling old myths and recreating ancient images. When it comes to providing an alternative philosophy, both turn to mythopoeia, innovative fantasizing, with an emphasis on wonder and the marvelous in their depiction of human potential.[36] In Snyder's poem this is best represented by the physical transformations the quester undergoes in the process of gaining shamanistic vision in "Hunting" and "Burning," while in Jeffers' poem it is best represented by the final scene of the old man waking up in the red dawn ready to transcend humanist civilization.

In presenting alternative philosophies by which human culture might mature past the age of internecine struggles and adolescent efforts to subdue nature in order to enter a state of cultural "climax"—that point of balance achieved in mature ecosystems[37]—both poets turn to fantasy. They make the fantastic an integral part of their poesis. One benefit of using fantasy that both poets realize is that of employing archetypal elements and recurring motifs that reduce the need for exposition because of the universality of the symbols. Another benefit is the basic defamiliarization of the readers' world that occurs. Both poems take place on Earth in contemporary American society, but the introduction of fantasy elements, whether horrific or marvelous, sensitizes the readers and puts them on guard against presuming that the seemingly mundane will remain mundane. One sees this same strategy in a number of current television shows utilizing fantasy as the vehicle for serious moral lessons, such as "Beauty and the Beast." In the fantastic world of *Myths & Texts* a forest fire may prove to be much more than mere combustion, while in the fantastic world of "The Double Axe" the axe itself may have more significant qualities than two sharp blades.

But one important difference to recognize in the works of these two poets is the far greater use of negative horror in Jeffers, not just in "The Double Axe" but in nearly all of his long poems. I can understand this only as a result of Jeffers' fundamentally apocalyptic mentality, one which accepts the religious concept of purgation and penance that runs through so much of the Western culture that he criticizes, and which causes him always to focus on humans and their failings apart from nature and never successfully integrated with it. One may also understand it in terms of Jeffers' preference for the Freudian psychological model in contrast to Snyder's decidedly Jungian model. Snyder's fantasy, although it contains horrific aspects, is predominantly wonder-inducing, and this too is the result of basic philosophical beliefs. Snyder's syncretic spiritual values neither require penance or purgation nor do they countenance the inevitability of apocalypse. The kind of cyclical conception of the world, embodied in the kalpa cycle and in the Christian round of fall and redemp-



Portrait of Robinson Jeffers, c. 1935. Photograph by Ansel Adams. Courtesy of the Trustees of the Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust. All rights reserved.

tion, that Jeffers essentially embraces is subsumed by Snyder's Zen conception of the world in which the possibility of enlightenment, and its translation into new ways of living, is ever present. Thus, apocalypses may occur but are not inevitable and the emphasis in Snyder's mythopoeia is on the possibility of their obsolescence, both intellectually and practically.

It has been said that there can be no construction without destruction. Both of these American poets would agree, but Jeffers emphasizes a physically violent destruction of decadent individuals and civilizations, and hence his tendency toward the horrific; Snyder emphasizes a perceptual rebirth that will dispel the individual's illusory beliefs without which the decadent civilizations would collapse, and hence his tendency toward the marvelous. And one can see this divergence of viewpoint within the contemporary environmentalist movement, as well as in other radical movements. Some members of Earth First!, for example, have called the AIDS epidemic a means by which the biosphere will reduce human population to help restore ecological balance; others believe that a cataclysm, such as disastrous global warming or severe ozone depletion, will occur to reduce population and force civilization to alter radically its values and practices. In the 1970s and early 80s American Maoist and Trotskyist groups debated the "inevitability" of nuclear war, which side if any to support, and whether or not it was a precondition for the arising of a "revolutionary situation." Contemporary utopian and dystopian literature, as well, is almost always predicated upon a significant population-reducing cataclysm to clean the slate in order to allow new beliefs and cultural practices to take hold. And certainly millenialist jeremiads will increasingly promise the day of reckoning as the year 2000 approaches. Jeffers stands squarely in this apocalyptic line; Snyder in contrast must be viewed as far more optimistic about evolutionary change. He seems to believe that recognition of the potential for disaster can provide the basis for people learning enough to change their behavior and thereby avert the apparently impending doom.

Both poets use fantasy in their long poems to present philosophical alternatives to humanism, and both represent salient positions within the contemporary environmental movement as well as general views about how future change will come about; but Jeffers' and Snyder's philosophies prove to be as different as the poetics of the works in which they appear. Whether Jeffers' Inhumanism and Snyder's post-humanism represent two possible alternatives to modern humanism; or, instead, this triad of humanism, inhumanism and post-humanism constitutes a Hegelian dialectic remains to be seen. Jeffers would tend toward the former, since he operates by means of dichotomies; Snyder would tend toward the latter, since he operates by means of interrelationships and connections. In a sense, these two American environmentalist poets, and the differences

between them, raise a fundamental philosophical question. How does the world work: by means of explosive nuclear tension, or by means of the dancing vibrations of matter whereby all parts are both wave and particle? Each reader must answer this question for him or herself as part of determining, as Snyder says, "how to be in some specific ecosystem of the far-flung world."[38] Reading these poets may help each of us answer that question.

notes

An earlier version of this essay was presented at the International Association of Philosophy & Literature Conference, Warwick, UK, July 1986. I thank the University of California, Davis, for providing me with a grant to attend that conference.

1. *Cawdor/Medea* (New York, 1970) originally appeared in separate volumes; William Everson printed two volumes of Jeffers' early work, *The Apine Christ and Other Poems* and *Brides of the South Wind* (Cayucos, California, 1974); *The Women at Point Sur* appeared in 1975 (Auburn, California); *Dear Judas and Other Poems, The Double Axe and Other Poems,* and *The Women at Point Sur and Other Poems* appeared in 1977 (New York); and in 1981, *What Odd Expedients and Other Poems of Robinson Jeffers* was published (Hamdon, Connecticut).

2. In 1959 Snyder published *Riprap,* reprinted in *Riprap & Cold Mountain Poems* (San Francisco, 1965), *Six Sections from Mountains and Rivers without End, Plus One* (Bolinas, California, 1970), and with New Directions in New York he published *Myths & Texts* in 1960, *The Back Country* in 1968, *Earth House Hold* in 1969, and *Regarding Wave* in 1970. This list excludes British and small press editions of these books, as well as chapbooks. For a complete bibliography through 1976, see Katherine McNeil, *Gary Snyder: A Bibliography* (New York, 1983). One of the first academic essays was written by Thomas Parkinson in 1968, "The Poetry of Gary Snyder," *Southern Review* 4 (1968), 616-32.

3. New York, 1974.

4. San Francisco, 1983.

5. *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers,* edited by Tim Hunt, 4 vols. (Stanford, 1988-).

6. *Left Out in the Rain: New Poems 1947-1985* (San Francisco, 1986).

7. Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered* (Salt Lake City, 1985).

8. *The Double Axe and Other Poems* (New York, 1977). Citations throughout are to this edition.

9. Jeffers began this process with "Tamar" in 1924 and continued it throughout his long and short verse, but particularly in other long poems, such as "Roan Stallion," "The Tower Beyond Tragedy," *The Women at Point Sur,* and "Cawdor." As James Shebl (*In This Wild Water: The Suppressed Poems of Robinson Jeffers* [Pasadena, California, 1976].) notes, "in the unpublished draft [of the original preface for *The Double Axe*—p.m.] Jeffers described the content of the book as representing 'a new manner of thought and feeling which came to [him] at the end of the war of 1914'" (15).

10. Citations are taken from the New York, 1978 edition of *Myths and Texts*: Gary Snyder: Myths and Texts. Copyright © 1960, 1978 by Gary Snyder. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corporation. Citations from Robinson Jeffers, *The Double Axe and Other Poems* are reprinted by permission of W. W. Morton, © 1977, Livergith Publishing Corporation. For a discussion of two of the published sections of "Mountains and Rivers without End" as hesitation fantasies—"the fantastic" as Tzvetan Todorov (*The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre.* Translated by Richard Howard, 1973 [Ithaca, New York, 1975]) defines it—see my essay, "Mythic and Fantastic: *Gary Snyder's 'Mountains and Rivers without End.'*" *Extrapolation* 26 (1985), 290-99.

11. See *Selected Poetry,* xiv.

12. T. E. Apter, *Fantasy Literature: An Approach to Reality* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1982).

13. C. N. Manlove, *The Impulse of Fantasy Literature* (London, 1983), and *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies* (Cambridge, 1975).

14. Apter, *Fantasy Literature*, 6.

15. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection.* Translated by Leon S. Roudiez (New York, 1982), 4.

16. This summary of "The Love and the Hate" is based on my essay, "Robinson Jeffers' Macabre and Darkly Marvelous Double Axe," which focuses on the function of fantasy in the structuring of the poem and the presentation of its themes (*Western American Literature* 20 [1985], 195-209).

17. See Shebl, *This Wild Water*, and Alex A. Vardamis, *The Critical Reputation of Robinson Jeffers: A Bibliographical Study* (Hamden, Connecticut, 1972).

18. For example, on ecofeminism, see Karen J. Warren, "Feminism and Ecology: Making Connections." *Environmental Ethics* 9 (1987), 3-20, and Michael E. Zimmerman, "Feminism, Deep Ecology, and Environmental Ethics." *Environmental Ethics* 9 (1987), 21-44; on deep ecology see George Sessions, "The Deep Ecology Movement: A Review." *Environmental Ethics* 9 (1987), 105-25, and Devall and Sessions, *Deep Ecology*; on the Gaia hypothesis, see James E. Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (New York, 1979), for ecofeminist critiques of Deep Ecology, see Jim Cheny, "Eco-Feminism and Deep Ecology" *Environmental Ethics* 9 (1987), 115-45 and Ariel K. Salleh, "Deeper than Deep Ecology: The Eco-Feminist Connection" *Environmental Ethics* 6 (1984), 339-45.

19. Jeffers may in part be polemicizing against Whitman's use of the double axe as a symbol of capitalist industrial and urban expansion in "The Song of the Broad Axe." The two poets have extremely divergent views about industrialization and American expansionism. Whitman's optimism and belief in the inexhaustibility of nature would certainly have been viewed by Jeffers as part of humanity's egocentric immaturity.

20. Regarding this point, see Marshall B. Tymm, Kenneth J. Zahorski and Robert H. Boyer, *Fantasy Literature: A Core Collection and Reference Guide* (New York, 1979), 13-14.

21. See especially section 45, pp. 104-105.

22. Quoted in Shebl, *This Wild Water*, 22.

23. See Snyder's *The Real Work: Interviews and Talks, 1964-1979*, edited by Scott McLean (New York, 1980), 56.

24. Ekbert Faas, *Towards a New American Poetics: Essays & Interviews* (Santa Barbara, 1979), 121.

25. *Real Work*, 71.

26. Based on a conversation with Snyder at the University of California, Davis, April 18, 1986.

27. *Earth House Hold*, 4.

28. David Wyatt, *The Fall ito Eden: Landscape and Imagination in California* (New York, 1986), 202.

29. *The Old Ways* (San Francisco, 1977), 38-40.

30. For a close reading that emphasizes the structural complexity of this poem, see my essay, "Alternation and Interpenetration: Gary Snyder's *Myths & Texts*," forthcoming in *Critical Essays on Gary Snyder.*

31. See Lee Bartlett, "Gary Snyder's *Myths & Texts* and the Monomyth." *Western American Literature* 17 (1982), 137-48, and Bob Steuding, *Gary Snyder* (Boston, 1976).

32. See John Elder, *Imagining the Earth: Poetry and the Vision of Nature* (Urbana, Illinois, 1985), 9-18.

33. Wendell Berry, another environmental writer, displays a similar attitude at times in his poetry; and perhaps it is not coincidental that he shares the same tendency with Jeffers to remain within the Judeo-Christian tradition for his religious values. See *The Collected Poetry of Wendell Berry* (San Francisco, 1985).

34. This passive longing, however, should not be construed as pessimism, as Charles Molesworth claims (*Gary Snyder's Vision: Poetry and the Real Work* [Columbia, 1983]). He, unfortunately, misquotes the poem changing the word "lie" to "die" (34), a crucial error that fosters a distorted reading.

35. I use this term as Jamake Highwater defines it in *The Primal Mind: Vision and Reality in Indian America* (New York, 1981).

36. I use the term "wonder" here according to Manlove's definition given in both of his works cited in note 14; I use "marvelous" according to Todorov's definition.

37. Snyder, *Real Work*, 173.

38. *He Who Hunted Birds in His Father's Village* (Bolinas, California, 1979), x.