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THE QUEST MOTIF IN SNYDER'S

THE BACK COUNTRY

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[...] there are some things we have lost, and we should try perhaps to regain them, because I am not sure that in the kind of world in which we are living and with the kind of scientific thinking we are bound to follow, we can regain these things exactly as if they had never been lost; but we can try to become aware of their existence and their importance.

C. Lévi-Strauss

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ABSTRACT

The present MA thesis analyses Gary Snyder's **The Back Country**, by way of a mythical approach. The objective of this analysis is to verify the applicability of the quest motif to this book of poems.

An "Outline of Snyder's Life" provides some general information about the writer. The "Introduction" is divided into a critical review of Snyder's work, and a commentary on the cultural influences he has received along his career.

Chapter Two, "Into The Back Country", analyses the sections which constitute **The Back Country**: *Far West, Far East, Kali*, and *Back*.

Chapter Three, "The Quest Motif in **The Back Country**", starts with the description of the mythical approach and opens up to the application of this approach to **The Back Country**, taking into account the three stages which form the hero's journey: Departure, Initiation and Return. Considering the book's sections as gradual steps of a mythical journey, the thesis tries to demonstrate that the book's structure and content convey not only a physical trip, but also a psychological journey into the unconscious, whose ending corresponds to the attainment of 'spiritual wholeness'.

The Conclusion shows how **The Back Country** fits into the quest structure, and to what extent a mythical approach may contribute to a new reading of this book.

RESUMO

Através de uma abordagem mítica, esta dissertação apresenta uma análise do livro **The Back Country** de Gary Snyder. O objetivo desta análise é verificar a aplicabilidade do motivo da *busca* ('the quest') neste livro de poesia.

Um "Resumo da Vida de Snyder" fornece informações gerais sobre o escritor. A "Introdução" é dividida em uma revisão crítica da obra de Snyder e um comentário a respeito das influências culturais recebidas por Snyder no decorrer de sua carreira.

No Capítulo Dois, "Into The Back Country", analisa-se as seções que formam o **The Back Country**: *Far West*, *Far East*, *Kali* e *Back*.

O Capítulo Três, "The Quest Motif in **The Back Country**", inclui uma descrição da abordagem mítica e a aplicação desta abordagem ao **The Back Country**, tendo em vista os três estágios que constituem a jornada do herói: Partida, Iniciação e Retorno. Considerando-se as seções do **The Back Country** estágios graduais de uma jornada mítica, pretende-se demonstrar que a estrutura e o conteúdo do livro expressam não apenas uma viagem fisica, mas também uma 'viagem' psicológica ao inconsciente, em cujo término um estado de iluminação é atingido.

A Conclusão mostra como o **The Back Country** se adapta à estrutura da busca mítica e até que ponto uma abordagem mítica pode contribuir para uma nova interpretação deste livro.

OUTLINE OF SNYDER'S LIFE

1930- Gary Snyder was born on May 8, in San Francisco, California. First son of Harold and Lois Snyder.

1932- The Snyder family moves to the state of Washington. His family is extremely poor during the Depression.

1942- The family moves to Portland, Oregon, and lives in a farm.

1943/45- Snyder enters high school in Portland. He spends the summer working at a camp on Spirit Lake, Washington.

1946/47- Summers: Snyder works for radio stations as a copy boy. He graduates from Lincoln High School, Portland, Oregon. In the fall Snyder begins undergraduate study at Reed College, Portland, on scholarship.

1948- Summer: ships out for New York as galley man.

1950- Snyder marries Alison Gass; he publishes his first poems in a Reed College student publication. Summer: works for Park Service, excavating the archaeological site of old Fort Vancouver.

1950-51- Writes his senior thesis at Reed: "The Dimension of Haida Myth", focusing especially on Amerindian ethnology.

1951- Graduates from Reed College with BA in Anthropology and Literature. Summer: works on Warm Springs Indian Reservation, Oregon. Fall: stays one semester in a

graduate programme in Anthropology at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

1952- Spring: Snyder returns to San Francisco, does odd jobs, and lives with the Zen Buddhist Philip Whalen. Divorces Alison Gass. Summer: works as a mountain forest lookout in Baker National Forest.

1953- Snyder leaves San Francisco and works as lookout in Sourdough Mountain. Works on **Myths & Texts**. Enters the University of California at Berkeley to study Oriental culture and languages (1953/56). Fall: meets Kenneth Rexroth, the San Francisco literary patriarch.

1954- Works at Camp A of the Warm Springs Lumber Company as choker. Writes two book reviews for *Midwest Folklore*.

1955- Summer: works on trail crew at Yosemite National Park (an experimental source of his book **Riprap**). Returns to graduate in Oriental Languages at Berkeley. Translates **Cold Mountain Poems**, twenty four poems by Han-Shan, a Zen hermit poet of the Táng dinasty era. Fall: the "San Francisco Renaissance" is inaugurated with Allen Ginsberg's reading of "Howl" at the Six Gallery in the Marina, San Francisco. Snyder meets Kerouac and Ginsberg. From the Fall 55 to the Spring 56 Snyder lives with Kerouac in a cabin in Mill Valley , an experience which is described by Kerouac in his book **The Dharma Bums**, where Snyder appears as "Japhy Ryder".

1956- May: leaves for Kyoto, Japan, to study at First Zen Institute of America. Lives in a Zen temple.

Studies Zen and the Japanese language.

1957- Leaves Japan and boards Sappa Creek in Yokohama; works for eight months as a wiper in the engine room. Visits Persian Gulf (five times), Italy, Turkey, Okinawa, Ceylon and Samoa.

1958- April: gets off ship at San Pedro; returns to San Francisco.

1959- Goes to Kyoto, Japan; studies Zen Buuddhism under the Zen master ("roshi") Oda Sesso. **Riprap** is published.

1960- **Myths & Texts** (New York: New Directions), including 48 untitled poems, is published. Snyder marries his second wife Joanne Kyger.

1961/62- Snyder, Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky travel to India where Snyder stays for six months.

1964- Snyder teaches English at the University of California, Berkeley. Receives the Bess Hoskin Prize. Separates from Joanne Kyger.

1965- **Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems** is published (San Francisco: Grey Fox Press). Snyder divorces J. Kyger. **Mountains and Rivers without End** is published. The writer returns to Japan in October to study Zen Buddhism.

1966- **A Range of Poems** is published. Snyder is awarded a prize by National Institute of Arts and Letters. Returns to the United States. Gives readings on college campuses.

1967- March: returns to Japan; lives at Banyan Ashram. Marries Masa Uehara on the rim of an active volcano on Suwa-No-Se-Island.

1968- **The Back Country** (New York:New Directions) is published. Snyder wins the Levinson Prize from *Poetry* (Chicago) for "Eight Songs of Clouds and Water" and is awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship. The Snyder family returns to the United States. His son Kai is born.

1969- **Earth House Hold: Technical Notes & Queries to Fellow Dharma Revolutionaries** (New York: New Directions) is published. Snyder's son Gen is born. **Regarding Wave** is published in a limited edition by The Windhover Press.

1970- **Regarding Wave** is published in an expanded edition (New York: New Directions).

1971- Snyder builds his house (called *kitkitdizze*) in the foothills of Sierra Nevada, San Francisco. Reads the paper "The Wilderness" at the Center for Study of Democratic Institution, Santa Barbara, California.

1972- **Manzanita** is published in a limited edition by the Four Seasons Foundation. Further sections on **Mountains and Rivers Without End** are published. Snyder attends the United Nations Conference on Human Environment, Stockholm, Sweden. Summer: Snyder returns to Japan to make a research about the Hokkaido wilderness for Friends of the Earth.

1973- **The Fudo Trilogy**, didactic poems pro-environment, is published in limited edition by Shaman Drum.

1974- **Turtle Island** is published, including "Manzanita" (New York: New Directions).

1975- Awarded Pulitzer Prize for Poetry for **Turtle Island.**

First MLA seminar on Snyder's poetry held in San Francisco, led by Bob Steuding and Richard Corum.

1976- **Gary Snyder**, by Bob Steuding, the first critical book-length study of Snyder is published (Boston: Twaine).

1977- Snyder's **The Old Ways**, a book of essays, is published (San Francisco: City Light Books).

1978- Snyder's Thesis "He Who Hunted Birds in His Father's Village: the Dimensions of a Haida Myth" is published.

1980- **The Real Work: Interviews and Talks 1964-1978** is published (New York: New Directions).

1983- **Axe Handles** (San Francisco: North Point Press), a collection of 71 poems is published. The second critical study of Snyder, **Gary Snyder's Vision**, by Charles Molesworth , is published.

1984- Snyder's **The Old Ways** is published in Brazil (**Velhos Tempos**, Porto Alegre: L&PM).

1986- **Left Out in the Rain: New Poems 1947-1985** is published (San Francisco: North Point Press).

1987- May: Snyder is inducted into the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters.

1989- **The Practice of the Wild**, a collection of essays about the nature of wilderness and freedom, is published (San Francisco: North Point Press).

1990- MLA panel in Chicago about Snyder - "Gary Snyder at 60".

1991- **Gary Snyder and the American Unconscious**, by the English writer Tim Dean, is published.

1994- Snyder teaches literature and wilderness thought at

the University of California at Davis and lives on San Juan Ridge, in the Sierra Foothills.

1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis presents an interpretation of **The Back Country**, written by the American poet Gary Snyder, by way of a mythical approach: the so called "metaphysical perspective of myth". I have selected this approach, among several others, because **The Back Country** presents some structural and thematic characteristics which suggest the applicability of such a method. To support my considerations, I have based myself especially on the mythical theorists Joseph Campbell, whose book **The Hero With a Thousand Faces** presents substantial notions about the motif and structure of the mythical quest, and Mircea Eliade, whose works provide complementary information about the process of mythical Initiation. Both the mythical quest and the hero's initiation are fundamental concepts in the book's analysis.

The main objective of my analysis is to present a new reading of this book, showing how a mythical approach may serve as a valuable device in literary interpretation. Besides that, evincing **The Back Country**'s qualities, I also hope to call attention to Snyder's qualities as a writer, contributing to spread the work of a writer who is practically unknown to Brazilian readers.

Regarding the structure of this thesis, it is divided into three chapters. Before the Introduction, an 'Outline of

Snyder's Life' is included, providing the reader with the most important information about the writer's life and career. Through this Outline, one may have a general idea about Snyder's background, as well as of his work. The Introduction starts with a critical review of Snyder's books, presenting some opinions about his work since the publication of his first book **Riprap**, in 1959. The main objective of this review is not merely to illustrate how Snyder has been received by the critics, but to show how this criticism has evolved together with the writer along his career. After this review, comes a commentary on some cultural influences which marked Snyder's work. First of all, I present the most important political, historical and literary facts which characterize the countercultural ethos, since it marks the beginning of Snyder's career. Next, I discuss the importance of five American writers who, each of them in a specific way, influenced Snyder, providing him with literary orientations, either regarding formal aspects, or even in terms of philosophical ideas. Another influence discussed in this introductory part is the Amerindian tradition, taking into account that Snyder, since his early childhood, has been interested in Amerindians, an interest deepened by his background as anthropologist. Last of all, I point out the presence of the Orient in Snyder's work, commenting on Japanese, Chinese and Indian cultures. To sum up, all these topics of the Introduction offer the reader a general view on the influences which contributed to the development of Snyder's poetry.

In the second chapter, I discuss **The Back Country** as a whole. Firstly, some general information on the book is presented, followed by the analysis of each of the sections which form the book: *Far West* (including the analysis of the poem "Trail Crew Camp at Bear Valley, 9000 Feet, Northern Sierra - White Bone and Threads of Snowmelt Water"); *Far East* (including the analysis of the poem "February"), *Kali* (including the analysis of the poem "Mother of the Buddhas, Queen of Heaven, Mother of the Sun; Marici, Goddess of the Dawn"), and finally, *Back* (including the analysis of the poem "Oysters"). The purpose of this chapter is to give an idea of the themes presented in each section (characterizing the transitions from one to another), thus preparing the reader for the next chapter, where the interrelations between the book's sections and the stages of the quest movement are established.

The following chapter, "The Quest Motif in **The Back Country**", investigates the applicability of the quest structure to Snyder's **The Back Country**. It includes first a discussion about the closeness between literature and myth, and also some comments on the concepts and theories related to myth. Next, the quest motif in **The Back Country** is discussed in depth, followed by the mythical analysis of the hero's journey, which is divided into three main stages: Departure, Initiation, and Return.

In the Conclusion, I examine the advantages of the mythical approach as a literary device and also to what extent

The Back Country may be considered a modern expression of the ancient motif of a hero's mythical quest.

1.1 - CRITICAL REVIEW ON SNYDER

> He has effectively done something that for an individual is difficult: he has created a new culture.
>
> T. Parkinson[1]

Gary Snyder has become a national celebrity, ranking among the best American contemporary writers, known not only as a poet, but also as a translator, scholar and as a public figure. Formal, aesthetical and metaphysical qualities make his poetry be widely read and appreciated by critics and by the public in general.

Apart from the high quality of Snyder's work, his personality, his life-style and his activities as a public figure transformed him into a 'culture-hero'. For Charles ALTIERI Snyder's importance lies in the fact that "he has articulated a possible religious faith at a time when cultural alienation was pushing many people to experiment with various non-Western metaphysical systems".[2] But if during the 70's the media pictured Snyder only as one of the *gurus* of the Beat movement, sometimes subjecting him to a momentary literary fashion, nowadays one cannot deemphasize or deny his role as one of the most important literary figures of America. In fact, from the very beginning of his career, Snyder has presented personal characteristics and qualities which assured him a

respected place in the literary scene. His creative power and his stylistic features allow him to express his individuality, what differentiates his work from the works of other writers too attached to the Beat mode. As Tim DEAN corroborates:

> [...] despite Snyder's association with the Beats - the dominant literary expression of cultural dissent in the 1950's - the kind of jeremiads declaimed against the culture which we associate with the Beats (say Ginsberg in "Howl") and the development of countercultural alternatives (say Kerouac in **On the Road**) also connected with that coterie are basically absent from the lyrics of **Riprap**.[3]

Thus, although Snyder has been labeled as a 'Beat poet', or as a follower of the American Romanticism of the Pound-Williams tradition, or even as an 'ethnopoetics' writer, one cannot view him as a stereotype which has to fit into a pre-established literary tradition, for "when we consider carefully the work of a poet like Snyder which does not fall readily into preconceived categories, we may be able to modify the models of tradition - or even the notion of tradition itself".[4]

Examining the critical comments on Snyder's work, one notes that some critics even disapprove of his double position as a writer and as a public man, arguing that he 'uses' poetry to attain social ends, thus causing the aesthetic quality of his poetry to be diminished. Probably the opinions of these critics, expressing only limited personal views, are not grounded on a careful reading of Snyder's poetry. Despite the negative criticism which insists on the idea that the figure of Snyder as a man overshadows that of Snyder the poet, his value

as a great writer remains and, as Bob STEUDING confirms, "more thorough readers have been aware of the quality and profundity of his work".[5] What happens is that while reading Snyder's poetry, it becomes clear that his personal life cannot be dissociated from his writings; in fact, his subjective and biographical response, as expressed in his work, opens up to a universal sphere, offering a 'spiritual force' for those who see in his poetry an opportunity for learning and for acquiring self-awareness.

Commenting on the over-emphasis of biographical data in the interpretation of Snyder's work, STEUDING, in the first book-length study on Snyder, has predicted that

> Although the impact of Snyder's personality and life-style at present lies heavily on much of the discussion of the poet and his work, his reputation, similar to that of other 'literary personalities' reviled or over-praised in their lifetimes, will rest on his poetry; and his original contribution to the literature of the country will become evident.[6]

The publication of Jack Kerouac's **The Dharma Bums**, in 1958 (where Snyder appears as "Japhy Ryder"), and Snyder's participation in the San Francisco Renaissance were the two main facts which decisively contributed for his recognition as a poet and as a spokesman of his generation. Snyder's poetic reputation was soon established: since the 1960's, after the publication of his first two books - **Riprap**, 1959, and **Myths & Texts**, 1960 - several important poet-critics, such as James Dickey, Robert Bly and Kenneth Rexroth, expressed favorable opinions about his poetry. In 1962 Robert Bly reviewed Snyder's work pointing out his originality and asserting that Snyder

could no longer "be lumped with the Beat Poets because his work reveals the grave mind of a man who is highly civilized".[7] After Bly's criticism, a continuing stream of opinions about Snyder's poetry has been published. The list of critics who reviewed Snyder's first books includes: Thomas Parkinson, Raymond Benoit, Thom. Gunn, Edward Zahniser, Wendell Berry, Ronald Hayman, Thomas Lyon, Jim Burns, Dell Hymes, Donald Davie, Lisel Mueller and David Kherdian (see Appendix One). Among the articles regarding Snyder's work which appeared in the 1960's one may point out, for instance: "To Hold Both History and Wilderness in Mind: The Poetry of Gary Snyder", by Richard Howard, 1965; "Gary Snyder, a Western Poet", by Thomas Lyon, 1968 (in which he discusses in detail the idea that Snyder's poetry exhibits the workings of the "Western literary imagination" rooted in the mythic consciousness of the American Indian); and Thomas Parkinson's "The Poetry of Gary Snyder", 1968, where he states that Snyder "has a gift for quiet, untroubled, accurate observation with occasional leaps to genuine eloquence".[8]

In the 1970's one can mention, for instance, the following critics: Thomas Parkinson, John Carpenter, Roy E. Teele and Daniel Jaffe (See Appendix One). The most important articles written in this decade emphasize that Snyder was involved in the 'Ecology Movement'; thus, he is often presented as a nature poet and eco-activist, as in the following articles: Wendel Berry's "A Secular Pilgrimage", Charles Altieri's "Gary Snyder's Lyric poetry: Dialectic as

Ecology", and Thomas Lyon's "The Ecological Vision of Gary Snyder". After 1975, when Snyder earned the Pulitzer Prize for poetry, the number of laudatory articles and reviews of his work has increased enormously.[9]

A chronological analysis of Snyder's work reveals that if a relative passiveness marked his position in the 1950's, the poet has evolved to a radical eco-activism and a communitarianism in the 1960's and 1970's when Snyder, especially with **Turtle Island**, began to awaken social consciousness through some poems in which he plays the role of a 'teacher', showing the oneness of all life forms. His voice has become a major force in the ecology movement and his approach to environmental matters has the task of explaining how we can live and work together on this planet. As he himself states:

> My poems, on one level, call the society's attention to its ecological relationships in nature, and to its relationships in the individual consciousness. Some of the poems show how society doesn't see its position in nature. What are we going to do with this planet? It's a problem of love; not the humanistic love of the West - but a love that extends to animals, rocks, dirt, all of it. Without this love, we can end even without a war, with an uninhabitable place.[10]

Turtle Island, where Snyder presents the ideas which became the foundation of his ecological poetry, shows that the poet is a rationalist with a well founded program for survival in a time of political and social oppression. Through his poems Snyder denounces the destruction of earth and the decadent contemporary civilization. As ALTIERI comments in general terms: "Ecology deals not with ideas, but with modes of action

and with the unity of interrelationship in nature, and its verification is the fulness of the environment it creates".[11] Or, as PARKINSON specifically argues: "Snyder is not interested in fad, fashion, or convention; he is interested in tradition, and he is concerned with constructing a valid culture from the debris that years of exploitation have scattered around the Pacific Basin".[12]

After the 1960's and 1970's Snyder's poetry, and also his prose, addresses a wide range of contemporary problems. Presenting the world as unified and integrated, his main attempt is to bring about the awakening of an ecological consciousness. As STEUDING confirms:

> Essentially mystical, Snyder's pre-scientific and mythological perception, grounded in his studies of Buddhism and primitive consciousness, has created a new kind of poetry that is direct, concrete, non-Romantic, and ecological. More than a follower of Pound and Williams, or a clever adaptor of Oriental poetic forms, Snyder's work will be remembered in its own right as the example of a new direction taken in American literature.[13]

In his poetic effort, Snyder tries to denounce that human power has been threatening the entire life-forms in the planet, his voice is that of "a spokesman for wild nature".[14] Through his poetry Snyder presents new possibilities for life, diffusing the idea that norms have to be found to save nature from destruction, and to assure men a more ethical way of living, led by deep philosophical and spiritual values. As SNYDER himself explains:

> As a poet I hold the most archaic values on earth. They go back to the late Paleolithic: the fertility of the soil, the magic of animals, the power-vision in solitude, the terrifying initiation and re-birth, the love and ecstasy of the dance, the common work

> of the tribe. I try to hold both history and wilderness in mind, that my poems may approach the true measure of things and stand against the unbalance and ignorance of our times.[15]

Snyder's deep and complex concepts about his role as a poet, as expressed above, give rise to antagonistic opinions from the critics who analyze his work; thus, if some accept his as "a Romantic Primitive seeking the mythic patterns of original archetypes to which all human life, whether knowingly or not, conforms, as does the rest of the natural world"[16] some other critics consider his effort too pretentious, as Charles ALTIERI, who says that

> Yet it is impossible for me, perhaps for most academics, to be completely satisfied with his [Snyder's] work. One reason may be his ambition. He wants not only to provide poems but to offer a total vision of a new redeemed man at home with himself and celebrating his place in the cosmos, yet the field of experience in his poems is quite limited and it therefore renders problematic his claims to totality.[17]

Considering the complexity of themes (and their implications) that a careful examination of Snyder's work reveals, and also considering that the poet has evolved throughout his career, it is predictable that the critics find it difficult to understand the totality of Snyderian poetry without accusing him of being 'ambitious' or whatever other adjectives used to classify his writings. In fact, most of the criticism on Snyder oscillates from one critical stereotype to another, causing the poet to be labelled as 'Beat', or 'Zen', or 'counterculturist', or 'Romantic', or 'ethnopoetic' or as 'the Thoreau of the 20th century'; these are undoubtedly limited points-of-view about the work of a poet who is not

"ambitious" in the derogatory sense of the word, but who offers to his readers a wide range of philosophical insights which, above all, dispense with any critical stereotyping.

After so many critics who analyzed Snyder's poetry applying to it restrictive viewpoints - most of them dependent on historical backgrounds or topic events to be consistent - the most recent criticism (from the 1980s on) tends to value Snyder as a legitimate representative of the American tradition, considering that this tradition is apt to encompass the appeal to a universal consciousness based on the most primitive values of man. It is important to emphasize that Snyder has been re-evaluated as an American and as 'universal', not only because "he exercized care to adapt his Eastern meditative habits to concrete dramatic experiences and to make his syntax reflect those habits of vision which justify and give resonance to his religious assertions"[18], but because his role as a poet has been much more revealing, as Tim DEAN claims: "[...] certain features of the American unconscious are made accessible via Snyder, and there is an extent which Snyder as a poet functions analogously to the psychoanalist in terms of bringing to consciousness elements which would otherwise remain unknown. This, then, is the meaning of Snyder as the poet of America".[19]

The importance of a re-evaluation of Snyder's qualities is undeniable for it can place the poet in his correct position in the American contemporary literature, as emphasized by T. DEAN:

> [...] despite his Zen Buddhist practice, his decade of living in Japan and his extensive travels in India and the Pacific, Gary Snyder is quintessentially a poet of America. However, the stereotyping of Snyder's work at the hands of the critics - as Beat, Orientalist, ecological and 'merely' political - has produced a situation in which students of American culture are apt to consider Snyder [...] as marginal to what is central and most important to the study of American literature and culture.[20]

In sum, a careful reading of what the critics have been stating about Snyder's work throughout his career (three decades of writing) is very much revealing. One may conclude that this criticism has evolved together with Snyder's poetry. Further, if the complexity of Snyder's idiom was 'partially' understood by the first critics who examined his work through restricted viewpoints, nowadays Snyder's position as a respected poet is assured, not only by the poet's work itself but also by those sensitive critics who really perceived the wide dimension of his writings.

1.2 CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON SNYDER'S POETRY

> I feel very strongly that poetry also exists as part of a tradition, and is not simply a matter of only private and personal vision.
>
> G. Snyder

One cannot discuss Snyder's poetry without having in mind that several were the influences which contributed to the development of this poetry. This is why here I comment on what I consider the most important cultural influences which mark Snyder's poetry: the countercultural ethos, the influence of

other American writers, the Amerindian influence and finally the influences of Oriental cultures.[21]

Through the commentary of these influences I intend to offer the background information for a better understanding of **The Back Country.**

1.2.1 - The Countercultural Ethos

Snyder's first poems were published in the early 1950's. Living at that time in San Francisco, California, the writer experienced and became involved with the 'Beat Movement', whose mentors - Kenneth Rexroth, Jack Kerouac, and Allen Ginsberg - came to be Snyder's close friends.

To characterize the scene where Snyder's first works appeared one has to consider not only literary aspects but also other facts which formed the historical atmosphere of the 1950's and 1960's. Several changes - political, social and countercultural ones - mark the 50/60 decades. During this time the United States could be described as conservative, anti-Communist and Imperialist. The American countercultural movement worked to denounce the problems of the nation which, from the point of view of several people, was morally affected by the Cold War, by the use of atomic bombs, by the ecological pollution and by the progressive and deliberate destruction of nature, procedures which clearly showed that the nations' representatives - its Government and its politicians - were not

very much concerned about spiritual and moral values. With the feeling of nihilism and of existential purposelessness, and oppressed especially by bureaucracy, some people began to express their revolt against the mechanized way-of-life the age and the nation offered to them. As a poet, Snyder was attuned to the several changes which marked the American nation. As David PERKINS observes:

> Hopeful speculations that a new consciousness was forming in the Western world were rife within the literature of the counterculture. Gary Snyder envisioned a "free international, classless world [...] a totally integrated world culture with matrilineal descent, free-form marriage, natural credit communist economy, less industry", and far less population. The lifestyle of the coming age will, said Snyder, be "based on community houses, villages and ashrams; tribe-run farms or workshops or companies, large open families; pilgrimage and wanderings from center to center.[22]

It was in such an atmosphere, formed by specific historical circumstances, that the counterculture proponents, claiming for metaphysical dimensions to substitute the general increasing feeling of rootlessness, suggested the creation of a new society (as proposed by Snyder in his above mentioned words), an alternative society based on new values, against the social and economic manipulations imposed by the political leaders, against the alienation promoted by advertisement and by the ideological system which prevailed in America. In these new social organizations, poets, considered also as 'prophets', would be the ideal 'leaders'. The 'alternative life' meant a life in rural communities, formed by people who, aware of the emptiness and falsehood of American social and moral conventions, would just 'drop out' of the bourgeois order,

seeking for new meanings for life. The movement created by these 'rebels' would be called *Beat Movement* (later on known as *Beat Generation*). As Bruce COOK states,

> [...] the Beats had perceived and managed to touch something essential that was only then beginning to take shape in the America of the 1950's. It was a very important and widespread something, compounded of a deep hunger for individual recognition, a desire to speak frankly and honestly about things that mattered, and, finally, a need for passionate personal involvement in major undertakings.[23]

The counterculture and the Beat Movement's proposals led to several libertarian movements of the time: for civil rights, drug's liberation (drugs, mainly marijuana, peyote and LSD, were valued as symbols of anti-repression and liberty), legal justice, medical care, gay liberation, opposition to wars and even for the life of impulse, achieved by any means - from drugs to transcendental meditation based on Oriental philosophical doctrines. Religious longings and the need to relate existence to transcendental realms led some writers to study Zen Buddhism (as it is Snyder's case), to immerse themselves in the hermetic tradition or even (as Allen Ginsberg) "to pray to virtually every god, goddess, spirit, or spiritual power the human mind has conceived".[24] Typical of the Beats is a usually eclectic religiousness which included Egyptian gods, Gnosticism, Zen Buddhism, Amerindian religions, Shamanism, alchemy, sutras, Indian spells, mantras, and even orgiastic intercourse; all these varied interests were considered to lead to religious-ecstatic emotions.

Claiming for an extra-official mode of life through a sardonic and apocalyptic way, a surprising number of rebels,

most of them from the young generation, refused to play the appropriated social roles. Besides the denial of roles, the rebels used also to take an indifferent and passive posture before the problems of the world. In fact the beats' attitude toward society was one of refusal rather than revolt; they were evasive, reacting through pointless antisocial acts rather than destructively; sometimes expressing their opposition to conventionality and materialism through self-destruction, criminality of conduct and nonconformity to the established social rules.

The term *beat* primarily refers to a group of writers who shared some literary concerns, and use the beatnik milieu as their subject matter. On the other hand, the term *beatnik* does not describe an artist, for beatnik is the one who - devoid of any literary ambition - provides the atmosphere and audience for the beat writers. *Beatdom* was a society composed largely by male, around 10% of which were of black people. Some beats were homosexual and homosexuality was regarded with vast forbearance.

If the beatniks were seen as marginals and even as delinquents, the beat writer was often seen as a serious and ambitious person, most of the times due to his status of a well-educated person - as in the case of Gary Snyder, a very learned man, with extensive knowledge of literature and history.

The emergence of the Beat writers became the most discussed phenomenon of the late 1950's. If in the beginning

some critics looked down on the Beat Movement, considering it the *consequence of a conduct of obsessive bohemians*, the work of gifted writers like Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Gregory Corso, Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen and Michael McClure brought to the movement some vigorous qualities, and caused it to be respected as a remarkable literary expression.

The association of the Beat writers with San Francisco City is due to the fact that from 1944 on, that area - traditional home of refugees from the burdens of tradition - was distinguished by the development of artistic creativity (especially in the field of experimental poetry). Writers in the Bay area were concerned with creating a community and a culture of literary interest; the idea of this 'poetic community' was proposed by Robert Duncan, George Leite and Kenneth Rexroth, who expressed their aims through magazines (especially the one entitled *Circle*, that first appeared in 1944) which presented new political, social and literary ideas. Rexroth and Duncan, who early in the 1940's organized discussion groups and readings of poetry, created an embryonic literary community; but it was only in 1953, with the opening of the Poetry Center at San Francisco State College, that poetry in the Bay received a new impulse, which would decisively contribute to the formation of the so called "Beat Movement". The presence of Jack Kerouac in San Francisco also helped to establish the place for the development of a new cultural expression. In 1951 an important person would settle

in San Francisco - Lawrence Ferlinghetti - who opened the *City Lights* bookstore, a gathering place for writers, mainly counterculture poets. Allen Ginsberg moved from New York to San Francisco in 1953, finding there a very receptive literary atmosphere.

For the young generation affected by the Beatdom, the novelist Jack Kerouac came to represent the myth of the artist as a bohemian and as a saint. In his second published work, **On the Road**, he exposed his ideas celebrating the tradition of traveling across the country with no specific purpose other than pleasure; in this book he also praised the uninhibited or 'natural public behaviour' influencing the whole country. Ginsberg's contribution was also remarkable; his long poem "Howl", written in 1955 and presented at public sections of poetry-reading, became the expression of the beat wild dissatisfaction with society. Other important presences in the Beat Movement are of Gregory Corso, Peter Orlovsky, Peter Whalen, Helen Adams, Thom. Gunn, Brother Antoninus, Philip Lamantia, Jack Spicer and Michael McClure, who formed the "San Francisco School of Literary Renaissance". Through the intense activity of all these writers, who exposed their ideas through public performances and through specialized magazines, in the mid fifties the national news media finally became aware of the Beat phenomenon.

Regarding the style of the Beat poetry, one can say that it was developed by emotional and mystical poets who expressed their countercultural consciousness. Influenced by

Dadaist and Surrealist techniques; they sought for spontaneity in writing, rejecting past forms, style and attitudes, proposing a dissolution of form. They seized upon obscenity as an expression of "total personality" and used poetry to denounce their nonconformity and non-political radicalism. Thus, through the critique of the conventions which marked the literary tradition up to the beginning of this century, Beat writers created a completely new way of apprehending experience and transforming this apprehension into literary expressions.

Several interests appeared in the Beat Movement, from political and nihilistic concerns to the interest in environment's protection. Gary Snyder's forest and mountain background, his ecological concerns and his religious formation made him a natural hero-spokesman for one specific branch of the 'hippies', while other writers, as for instance Allen Ginsberg, would influence other fronts.

The Beat writers had such a great reception that they passed into not only social history but also literary history, as artificers of important literary accomplishments whose influence spread all over the world, affecting not only literature but also other arts and, in a general sense, causing even behavioristic and psychological changes.

All these comments, which illustrate the atmosphere of the countercultural revolt, help us to understand Snyder's background as a poet who began to write in the 1950's and 1960's, and who was deeply influenced by all the historical, political, social and literary circumstances which marked the

time. SNYDER himself describes his relationship with the first poets who would form the Beat literary group and the San Francisco Renaissance of the 1950's:

> I met a lot of poets in the fifties; and we nourished each other and we became a small, quote, "culture", warm and moist and nourishing - and we grew out of that, and I... - That was a particularly deep culture of San Francisco for me at that time, and my contact with, first of all, Kenneth Rexroth, my teacher of Chinese poetry Chén Shih-hsiang, Philip Whalen, Lew Welsh, Michael McClure, Philip Lamantia, Robert Duncan, and other poets of that time.[25]

Snyder's career was very much influenced by his involvement with the Beats. In the mid-fifties, when the poet found himself with several unpublished poems, the sessions of poetry reading organized by Ginsberg, Whalen, McClure, Lamantia and Snyder were an important chance that these poets had to exhibit their poems to a public audience. The famous reading held in November 1955, when Ginsberg's "Howl" was presented, was "a curious kind of turning point in American poetry"[26]; from that moment on, readings in the Bay Area (in coffee shops, schools and art museums) became a tradition, considered a new cultural form of oral art. Besides representing an opportunity for the young to present their works, these early readings also led to publication some writers, such as Ginsberg and Kerouac, spreading the Beat movement throughout the country.

1.2.2 - American Writers

Several critics have already pointed out the influences Snyder has received from some American writers. Among these

writers Henry D. Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot and Kenneth Rexroth are considered the most relevant ones.[27] The comments below illustrate to what extent and in which sense each of these writers contributed to the formation and to the development of Snyder's idiom.

a) Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)

In his essay "Walking", published in 1862 in the *Atlantic Monthly,* Thoreau states that he wanted to "speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil, - to regard man as an inhabitant or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society". Through these ideas, he became one of the first Americans to claim for the spiritual value of wilderness.

In several senses Snyder's poetry resembles Thoreau's ideas. Snyder himself confirms the possibility of Thoreau's influence by mentioning that he really studied **Walden** carefully. In fact, Snyder kept a journal with essays (which were later on reproduced in **Earth House Hold**) like those written by Thoreau and Emerson. This journal was not a simple diary, but a part of a descriptive and didactic discipline. The first part of the journal, called 'Lookout's Journal' - where Snyder records the summer of 1952, when he worked as a forest lookout on Crater Mountain - reveals the gradual steps which

led towards his particular vision of life and nature. As Scott MCLEAN confirms:

> Gary Snyder's poetry has continued a tradition first pursued in late eighteenth century Romantic thought and carried on in American literature most notably by Thoreau: a belief that the "outer and inner life correspond" and that poetry is "the self-consciousness of the universe", the voice of the universe reflecting on itself and on the interdependence of outer and inner nature.[28]

Several similarities - philosophical, psychological and aesthetical ones - could be traced out between Thoreau's poetry and Snyder's. Both exhibit a nonmaterialistic approach to living, giving value to the observation of nature, and thus mythologizing their own lives and locales - Thoreau in Walden Pond, and Snyder in the forests and mountains of the West - where they lived experimental lives. Thoreau's emphasis on the importance of wilderness inspired Snyder in **Mountains and Rivers Without End** and also in **The Back Country**. Both poets express an understanding of individual conscience, often acquired through the contact with nature. Snyder "seeks transcendent knowledge in Nature; experienced often in solitude. The landscape is Western, the theme a heritage from Thoreau".[29] Or, as Peter JONES states: "The 'intricate layers of emptiness' where 'Human tenderness scuttler/Down dry endless circles' Snyder attempts to fill with positive quiet, resembling that which Thoreau tried to find in nature".[30]

Both writers studied Oriental cultures (it is known that Thoreau used to read the **Bhagavad Gita** every day); commenting on the presence of Oriental aspects in Thoreau's and in Snyder's works B. STEUDING says that "The Transcendentalists

read the Orientals, and agreed, as does Snyder, that all was interrelated".[31] In the same way another critic emphasizes that "Snyder is at once a syncretist and a revolutionary; like earlier transcendentalists he grafts Oriental mysticism on American optimism".[32]

The idea of a new orientation to a life joyous, vigorous and disciplined (as expressed by Snyder in his long poem "How to Make Stew in the Pinecate Desert Recipe for Locke & Drum"[33]) was also promoted by both writers, who tried to revitalize society, attempting to raise consciousness in people. In this respect Thoreau and Snyder share a profound respect for the American Indian and for nonhuman life forms, also praising the religious nature of work, its organic and cyclic qualities.

No doubt that some transcendentalist characteristics, inherited via Thoreau's writings, are present in Snyder's poetry, especially the interrelation between natural and spiritual facts, so reinforced by both writers.

A remarkable example of Thoreau's legacy present in Snyder's work is illustrated by the ending of Snyder's "Burning #17"[34], which is also the last line of the whole book and which is nothing but Thoreau's last sentence in **Walden**, "written a century earlier and constituting another text concerned with the connection between one's relation to society and ones relation to nature"[35]:

> Into the absolute cold
> Into the spiral whorls of fire
> the storms of the Milky Way
> "Buddha incense in an empty world"

black pit cold and light-year
Flame tongue of the dragon
Licks the sun

The sun is but a morning star.

By mentioning Thoreau's 'sun' in the closing passage of his book, Snyder calls to the reader's mind the whole American Transcendentalist tradition epitomized in this line full of cosmic appeal.

b) Walt Whitman (1819 - 1892)

Among the similarities between Walt Whitman and Gary Snyder which have been pointed out by the critics, individualism, lusty sensuality, and optimism are emphasized. In STEUDING's words,

> [...] as poets and mystics, Whitman and Snyder record their personal voyages of spiritual discovery; but their concerns go beyond themselves. As cataloguers of the adventurous quest for spiritual knowledge and as singers of the health and 'inner' progress to their nation, they more properly assume the role of psychic historians and shamans.[36]

Reminiscences of Whitman's poetic characteristics - to which Snyder is indeed indebted - are to be found throughout Snyder's work. In the same way as Whitman's **Leaves of Grass** (1855), Snyder's book **Mountains and Rivers Without End** presents the poet's identification with all things, seeing and affirming unity behind all life forms.[37] In fact, in both writers there is the effort to eschew the literary, to avoid artifice and speak in a natural and direct way, "as American people speak,

without correct punctuation [...] with poetic discourse functioning all-inclusively [...] - functioning analogously, that is, to the American socio-political ideas of equality and democracy".[38]

If Whitman has claimed a national literature adequated to the national landscape and democratic politics, properly dissociated from the classical and Romantic European past, one finds in Snyder's poetry several of the characteristics of this Whitmanesque "American" literature, since Snyder also has a concern for "men and women and for all events and things", as stated by Whitman in the Preface of **Leaves of Grass**. Like Whitman, Snyder is aware of the need to perfect America, affirming Whitman's belief in democracy.

Other points of comparison are the 'cosmic consciousness' and the mysticism in Snyder's and Whitman's writings; besides that, in Snyder's concept of the social function of poetry the importance of the body is vital since it connects poetry and work (man and the world). For T. DEAN, Snyder's conceptions of the poetic is indeed Whitmanian:

> Snyder has said that physical labour is such an important element in his poetry because poetry derives - according to Whitman - from body and soul together. For Whitman, one dimension of the "soul" was the body's breath, the means by which outside and inside are related. In substituting for conventional metrics a poetry based on the breath-line, Whitman sough to link poetry both to the body and to the real, the American world. The breath-line materialises poetry.[39]

Taking the title of Whitman's poem "Passage to India", Snyder wrote his famous essay "Passage to More than India", exposing several points he shares with Whitman, especially the

"lessons of variety and freedom". In "Passage to India", Whitman praises "voyages of discovery which join mankind in brotherhood"; in his essay, Snyder discusses the existence of what he called the "Great Subculture", a manifestation of Whitman's "varied personalism". In short, I conclude with B. STEUDING who points out that Snyder, like Whitman before him, "calls for an end to debilitating materialism, for more open relationships between people, and for a sacramental relation to life in general".[40]

c) Ezra Pound (1885 - 1972)

In the *Afterword* of his book **Riprap**, Snyder says: "I grew up with the poetry of twentieth-century coolness, its hard edges and resilient elitism. Ezra Pound introduced me to Chinese poetry, and I began to study classical Chinese".[41] In fact, the most usual name mentioned by critics regarding the influences Snyder has received is Ezra Pound. As STEUDING states:

> Snyder has indeed learned much from the old master; for similarities in technique, the cultural affinities, and even, if one looks closely at Snyder's biography, the striking comparison in life-style and approach to the writing of poetry are too obvious to be overlooked. Certainly, Pound's concern for *le mot juste* and for the simple, straightforward statement have become a part of Snyder's poetic canon. Pound's attention to the well-made line, the clean image, and his unflinching dedication to the unpropagandized perception are clearly evident in Snyder's work.[42]

Other similarities between Pound and Snyder are also evident, as for instance, the rejection of wordiness and

sentimentality and the use of images, as stressed by Pound's theory of Imagism where the image is considered the basic unity of poetry. Snyder's images - concrete and holding to objects that are visual and sometimes sensuous - are significantly influenced by Oriental poetry, by Ezra Pound, and by William Carlos Williams' dictum "No ideas but in things". Another similarity is the direct approach to poetry, presenting objectively what is observed.[43] In his poetry Snyder tries to capture nature truly, reflecting his desire to go beyond the conventional Romantic concept of nature, as Pound's Imagistic principles suggest. Both writers seek the "real" in their poetry of nature.

But if there is a resemblance (not a 'revival') of Imagism to be noticed in Snyder's poems, some critics emphasize that Snyder has developed a personal way of employing Imagistic devices. According to George PERKINS, Snyder's poems "[...] longer than Imagist ones typically were, are more personal, and include narrative elements. And though they usually present objects and sensations in preference to general ideas, they present them by stating rather than by Poundian complexes of interactive, concrete details".[44] The critic goes on in his analysis of both writers, establishing differences between

> "frost on the horse turds", which Snyder observes at dawn in a mountain camp, and Pound's "Salmon-pink wings of the fish-hawk/cast gray shadows in water". Compared to Pound's exactness and multiplicity of notation, Snyder's image is simple and referential, it tells without saying so that the morning is cold. For Snyder's intention is not Pound's, Snyder aims to present things easily, casually, and naturally, and [...] with a momentum that impels us through the poem quickly and thus makes us register

> it as a whole experience. To arrest attention by dense nodes of language, as Pound, would violate this purpose.[45]

If one notes the presence of a certain Romanticism in Snyder's poems considering it an inconsistent characteristic if placed beside the influences from the Imagistic movement, it seems important, at this moment, to add STEUDING's considerations on this fact: "It would appear, then, that in the 1950's, 1960's and 1970's, the materialistic scientist of Imagism and the visionary aspects of Romanticism have coalesced".[46]

When using a prosodic motive[47] Snyder often thinks of this prosody as deriving from classical Chinese forms, and both he and Pound make interesting variations on Pound's line "Quick eyes gone under earth's lid". One knows that after **Cathay** and the Chinese **Cantos**, several writers - among them Snyder - were compelled toward Pound's brilliant invention using the Anglo-Saxon alliterative line in conjunction with a line of four or two main centers of stress divided by caesura or by line break. As STEUDING corroborates: "Pound and the Orient taught Snyder to lay down a line. As in Pound and in Chinese poetry, Snyder often uses stress centers rather than the conventional syllables. He couples and halves lines, pausing with a caesura or with a line break that is roughly in the center of the line".[48]

Those who consider Snyder's poetry too 'simple' probably did not read his books **Myths & Texts** and **Six Sections from Mountains and Rivers Without End**, volumes in which Snyder employs methods of presentation derived straight from Pound's

Cantos.[49] In **Myths & Texts** the influence of Pound appears in Snyder's "use of ellipse, his juxtapositioning of quotations, his loose thematic linking of sections, and his use of esoteric non-Western materials [...]".[50]

The concern for the social function of literature and for the didactic role of the poet is also present in both poets. One may compare the **Cantos**, where Pound points out the older values which could sustain Western's culture fall, with **Earth House Hold**, where Snyder promotes the cultural primitivism; or the strikingly similar "ABC of Reading", by Pound, and **Earth House Hold**, by Snyder, both written to teach some literary principles, sharing didactic and revolutionary concerns.

Last of all, the Orient as a source of inspiration and value is vivid in the works of Pound and of Snyder as well. They do share a mutual response to Chinese and Japanese poetry. Pound's interest in Oriental poetry has had great effect on several writers (although his knowledge of Oriental literature was only technical, while Snyder has a deep knowledge of its philosophical basis, as well as a deep knowledge of the cultures of China, Japan and India). Pound's example, thus, "helped to turn Snyder's eyes away from England and toward the Orient for modes of expression suited to presenting the new sense of things uncovered by mother science".[51]

However, no matter how perceptible Pound's influence on Snyder's work is, the latter has created along his career a personal poetry: "Pound [...] pointed the way to his valley,

but Snyder climbs the steep rock and drinks the cold mountain water on his own terms".[52]

d) T. S. Eliot (1888 - 1965)

In **The Real Work** Paul Geneson asks Snyder: "How did Eliot influence your poetry?" and Snyder's answer is: "Precision. I went from **From Ritual to Romance** to **Mabinogion** - the ways that take you back to the archaic roots. He had sense of the roots".[53] This answer reinforces the opinion of several critics who have pointed out the influence of T.S. Eliot on Snyder, especially in **Myths & Texts**, which has striking similarities with Eliot's "The Waste Land".[54] Analyzing these two books B. STEUDING has stated that

> The general purposes of each work are similar and both works were written during a time of excessive materialism and expansion brought about by the unrestrained application of technology. Both assess the psychic health of an era after a period of war and social upheaval. Many sections, even particular lines, are alike [...] "The Waste Land" might be seen as the paradigm of **Myths & Texts**.[55]

Describing the decay and the destruction of the world, these two works have an apocalyptical tone. The world Eliot depicts is that of "civilized man" before World War I, while Snyder's is the primitive world, before the 'civilization' created by man. In both poems the themes of changes in values, loss of faith and lack of reverence for life are present and these writers try to create a mythology which could provide a new energy to our culture - that of civilized man. In fact, a moralistic tone is present in Eliot, as well as in Snyder -

both, through their poems, attempt at reorientating man, trying to make him save his life. Some critics even view Snyder's poem as an attempt to respond to "The Waste Land" but one must carefully observe that "Eliot's poem is answered by Snyder's construction of an alternative, affirmative, generative myth"[56] since the ending of **Myths & Texts** posits a kind of positive, optimistic view - a 'new beginning'- while **The Waste Land**, by contrast, ends with the 'arid' land, with no optimism, with no open promise of regeneration.

e) Kenneth Rexroth (1905 - 1982)

Considered the cultural and spiritual mentor for the Beat Generation, Kenneth Rexroth organized and agitated cultural and political life in San Francisco in the 1950's presiding, for instance, at the historical reading of Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* and promoting several poets, including Gary Snyder.

Rexroth has translated ancient Greek, Latin, Japanese, Chinese and Spanish poetry (his superb translation of **One Hundred Japanese Poems** deeply impressed a whole generation of writers, and not only Snyder). He also used to go to the mountains to nourish his spirit on wilderness and quietness. Founding a sanctity in simple things and activities, believing in the sense of oneness with nature, in mystical experiences and in seeking for wisdom, Rexroth in effect, is the creator of

the "subgenre of nature poetry that is Chinese in esthetic but also indigenous to the American West".[57]

Early in 1921, at the age of sixteen, Kenneth Rexroth traveled to San Francisco and, recognizing the power and the beauty of the Western landscape, he began to write poems about the wilderness. He worked in the mountains, logging, rounding up wild horses and cutting trail. Rexroth was "one of the first poets to concern himself with the psychological reality of man in the wilderness; he made the preliminary connections between wilderness and mind. [...] In certain respects, Rexroth's wilderness poetry seems to have served as a guide to Gary Snyder".[58]

In fact, Rexroth was one of the first poets in the XXth century to write "mountain poetry"[59], as were called those poems set in the wilderness where the *persona*, usually solitary, observes the universe (stars, flora and fauna - pines, deer, bears, trouts, and birds). In most of his poems the natural scenery - representing beauty - is shown in contrast to the materialistic and mechanical world of men in cities. The influence of Rexroth on Snyder's poetry is easily perceptible; quoting from G. PERKINS: "From Rexroth a connection runs back to [...] younger poets as Gary Snyder and Robert Bly. [...] Along with the landscape itself, the younger poets caught Rexroth's [...] Romantic use of nature as an imaginative escape from the human and a primordial rebuke to urban, bureaucratic, technological man".[60]

In sum, Rexroth offered a paradigm of life-style to Snyder (Rexroth has studied Zen Buddhism, as Snyder would do) and the possibility of relating wilderness experience to art. He also revealed the importance of Japanese and Chinese nature poetry, and the significance of the Indian in the American consciousness.[61]

1.2.3 - The Amerindian Tradition

> Our whole culture is going someplace else. The work of poetry is to capture those areas of the consciousness which belong to the American continent, the non-white world [...] a world of mythology and intuitive insight that belongs to primitive culture.
>
> G. Snyder

When Snyder began to write, in the 1950's, the oral literature of the American Indians had already been translated by linguists and anthropologists. After Snyder (and others who opened up the 'territory'), other poets became interested in the Amerindian tradition[62] and their ancestral culture. Snyder himself declares his deep interest for "The world view of primitive man, close to the world, in its nakedness, which is fundamental for all of us - birth, love, death; the sheer fact of being alive".[63]

In his essay "Poetry and the Primitive"[64] Snyder emphasizes the idea that civilization has something to learn from the primitive, from the one Rousseau has called the 'Noble Savage'. Commenting on this article, T. DEAN states that:

> Aside from the dimension of idealization operative here, and against the claim that Snyder is appropriating the Noble Savage myth for counter-cultural purposes like any other number of 1960's 'hippy' discourses, we may adduce here Snyder's extensive knowledge of North Pacific Indian culture, his (not faddish) commitment to finding non-exploitative modes of inhabiting the American ground: if Snyder finds a model for such non-exploitative possibilities in primitive Indian cultures at a moment which coincides with a significant counter-cultural resurgence of interest in anything Indian, then we may look to the history of his poetic and ethical work as a measure of his difference from standard counter-cultural appropriations of the Indian.[65]

For Snyder, primitive peoples - for instance Cro-Magnon, Shamanistic, ancient Amerindian and Hottentot - embody an ideal for modern man who should recapture their way of life which was, as described by David PERKINS: "[...] communal, peaceful, anarchistic, sexually whole and harmonious, and mystically and ecstatically religious. Primitive man, in Snyder's portrait, seeks psychological and spiritual wisdom rather than technological lore. Above all, he feels himself to be one with the animals, plants, and the earth".[66]

According to E. YGLESIAS, Snyder's concerns are archaic in the primal sense "going into the deep past not to escape or to weep with loud lamentations, but to see whether, with the help of the earth-lore that is all forgot, it might be possible to open life to a more livable future".[67]

In his youth Snyder developed deep studies of anthropology, also having the opportunity to live in an Indian tribe. From the Indians he inherited the reverence for the land and for the life nature nurtures, the need to mythologize the transcendent and the 'coarse and lusty energies of life'. Studying the spoken literature of the American Indians, Snyder

became interested in "the aural as well as in the visual reception of poetry. He became fascinated with the use of the voice, as in primitive poetry, to delight and to structure art".[68]

Snyder sees the Indians playing a dual role in American history - as victims and as teachers at the same time. For the poet the Indians embody the model of primitive ecology and religious responsibility, of mythic consciousness and a tradition which values psychic and spiritual life. They are also 'scapegoats', victimized by the American struggle for progress. It is under the impression that the American Indian has a perplexing and tragic role that Snyder writes some poems to denounce white man's complicity in genocide and in the destruction of American genuine culture. In his essay "Passage to More than India"[69] Snyder links the image of the Indian with the war in Vietnam and suggests that the American Indian is "the vengeful ghost lurking in the back of the troubled American mind. Which is why we lash out with such ferocity and passion, so muddied a heart, as the black-haired young peasants and soldiers who are the Viet Cong".[70]

Indian beliefs in several aspects resemble those of Zen Buddhism, especially in the respect both share regarding nature preservation. Snyder's Buddhist conception of 'multi-leveled reality', which stresses the importance of visiting other mental realms is very similar to the Indian conception about the psychic life and the belief in the existence of many other worlds. Thus, one notes that since the very beginning of his

career (with **Myths & Texts**) Snyder presents a peculiar use of Amerindian myth interwoven with Oriental meditation.

The misty figure of the Indian and his archaic past stands behind many of Snyder's poems.[71] For a religious purpose, in some poems Snyder assumes the "role of shaman, the psychic healer".[72] Still practiced by some primitive peoples, Shamanism is one of the oldest forms of religion. Concerned about behaviour (and not about belief) it is directed toward maintaining the conditions which insure the continuation of the tribe. The shaman is a person with a deep knowledge of the unconscious mind; like the poet, he expresses his vision through chants. In Snyder's view poetry <u>is</u> shamanism since "[...] the poet articulates the semi-known for the tribe. This is close to the ancient function of the shaman".[73] Snyder considers the practice of poetry as the re-creation of a 'healing song related to the shaman's practice; the poetic function is then analogous to the function of the shamanism. Shamanistic lyricism "heals by making whole; as shamans, the poet restores the cultural and the natural to a holistic relationship of interdependence".[74] SNYDER also states that:

> The poet as healer is asserting several layers of larger realms of wholeness. The first larger realm is identity with the natural world, demonstrating that the social system, a little human enclave, does not stand by itself apart from the plants and animals and winds and rains and rivers that surround it. Here the poet is a voice for the nonhuman, for the natural world, actually a vehicle for another voice, to send it into the human world, saying there is a larger sphere out there; that the humans are indeed children of sons and daughters of, and eternally in relationship with, the earth. Human beings buffer themselves against seeing the natural world directly. Language, custom, ego, and personal advantage strategies all work against clear seeing. So the first wholeness is wholeness with nature.[75]

The presence of mythological animals is usual in Snyder's poems. His poetic treatment of animals illustrates the sense of the significance that man has seen and has artistically invested in them. Many myths of the Pacific Northwest Indians are expressed through the presence of animals, mainly through birds, bears and dears.[76] Also the Coyote - one of the forms which represents the ancient mythological figure of the trickster - is recurrent in Snyder's poems. "Coyote is beyond birth and death, and is at the same time commentator, participant, and creator".[77] Possibly depicting man's struggle with himself and his world, the Coyote is a projection of him and of his search for self-knowledge.[78] As P. JONES confirms:

> In Snyder's work, as in the archaic past, animals have become manifestations of man's psychic life - projections of its drives and fears. Man's close observation of animals has always shown him much of interest about himself, and, in this respect animals such as the bear and the deer assume great significance for Snyder.[79]

Among Snyder's work, Amerindian influence prevails in **Myths & Texts**, where the poet tries to form a new social mythology; in this book Snyder also makes use of the song and the chant, and even animals sing their own songs, as in primitive ritual. Snyder's intention is to reach a prehuman reality, the wilderness and the cosmos in which man lives as an animal with animals in a happy ecology. This precivilized reality Snyder finds embodied in Amerindian lore, especially of the Pacific Northwest and of California. Further, for STEUDING, in **Myths & Texts** Snyder "recreates the Indian's awareness of

the sacredness of all life forms, and the reader is made to feel this pre-logical, pre-scientific mode of consciousness".[80]

One may conclude by adding that in Snyder's essays and poems where the interest for the Amerindian culture is present, myths and folklore are not explored only for their anthropological values but especially "for the wisdom they embody, the states of mind to which they give access".[81]

1.2.4 - Oriental Cultures

> A poet faces two directions: one is to the world of people and language and society, and the other is the nonhuman, nonverbal world, which is nature as nature itself; and the world of human nature - the inner world, as it is in itself, before language, before custom, before culture. There's no words in that realm.
>
> G. Snyder

> Language and rationality, which, according to Zen Buddhists, is the workings of language in understanding mind, tell men only about their own minds. Zen addresses itself, therefore, to the nonverbal; and it stresses spontaneity and immediacy of response.
>
> B. Steuding

Snyder's relation to Oriental cultures is very deep. Early in his life he has pored over writings of the Far East - translations by Ezra Pound and Arthur Waley of Chinese poetry, translations of Lao Tse's **Tao Te Ching** and of Confucius' writings, the **Upanishads**, **Vedas** and the **Bhagavad Gita.** I will comment on three relevant Oriental influences in Snyder's work: the influence of the Japanese culture, the influence of Chinese culture and finally the influence of India.

As the 'Outline of Snyder's life' shows, Snyder has studied seriously both Chinese and Japanese, even translating

several poems from these languages. His spiritual journey toward the East - to replace the questionable basic cultural assumptions of the Western world - led him to deepen his interest in Zen Buddhism. This interest, which includes a lifelong practice, appeared when he was in graduate school. In 1956 the poet went to Japan to study Zen Buddhism[82] with the master ("roshi") Oda Sesso (to whom **Earth House Hold** is dedicated). Once in Japan, he spent many years as acolyte to this Zen master.

If in the 1950s the interest in the Orient - and especially in Buddhism - was common, one must note that among the writers of the Beat Generation only Snyder and the poet Philip Whalen (who became a Zen priest) deepened their relationship to Buddhism, applying it to their own lives. An important characteristic in Snyder's response to Zen is that "unlike many who tripped out on exotic religions in the 1960's, Snyder was as serious in this as in his other commitments"[83]; or, in the words of P. JONES, "Snyder's Buddhism does not partake of the fashionable commitment of the more superficial followers of Zen. He has accepted it as a discipline, not a pose".[84]

Gary Snyder's life and work clearly reflect the philosophical and psychological influences of Zen Buddhism. It is not simply a cultural influence, for Zen operates on the poet's psychic and aesthetic levels, actually shaping his creative productions. The writer, for instance (as Zen Buddhists often do, directing attention to the details of

physical life) lives in a typical Zen style. Besides that Zen provides inspiration and subject matter for his haiku-like poems and for Zen translations. Also the reverence Snyder demonstrates in regard to nature, as illustrated by his poems, seems to be very similar to Zen concepts about the natural world. As P. JONES points out:

> Zen encourages the enjoyment of nature and the outdoors. Its art is full of landscapes represented by a few deft brush-strokes. It is characterized by understatement, requiring vision. The artifice must be second-nature, so that experience can be given with immediacy, intuitive spontaneity, and impersonality.[85]

Snyder himself explains Zen's concepts of oneness by saying that: "Zen practice is a discipline which takes one to anything direct - rocks or bushes or people".[86] In another instance, he says "I find always exciting to me, beautiful, to experience the interdependence of things, the complex webs and networks by which everything moves, which I think are the most beautiful awareness that we can have of ourselves and of our planet".[87]

One of the four vows of Zen is "Sentient beings are countless. I vow to save them all". Developing the content of this sentence, B. STEUDING explains that Zen is in many ways ecological in outlook and orientation. The central concept of ecology is internal relationship: all forms of life are interrelated, dependent in some way on other components of a vast "web of life".[88]

This idea which considers everything as alive and holy, is often present in Snyder's poems which, like a meditative

practice, reveal and give access to the depth of the self, where nature, reality (or being) and man are one. Several poems written by Snyder mention his response to Zen philosophical doctrine; even physical practice of Zen meditation is explored as a theme for his poems, which also include descriptions of *zazen* (sitting meditation), examples of enlightenment experience, moments of self-transcendence and elimination of the self, and other Buddhist themes.[89]

Like Matsuo Basho, the Japanese classic Zen poet of the 17th century, Snyder uses the poetic form *haiku* (or *hokku* - a poem of 17 syllables divided into 3 lines), which is Zen influenced.[90] Through the haiku Basho called for a poetry of suggestion instead of a poetry of intellectual statement, so it must be a spontaneous expression of insight, in a light, compact, direct and deep way, saying little but producing a striking effect. In the terms set out by STEUDING,

> Snyder did not apply the haiku as Basho intended; for, as with other literary influences, he makes creative and individualized adaptation. One major reason for this liberty was Snyder's intention to capture the particular quality, or 'suchness', of the wilderness experience, one unknown to the Medieval Japanese.[91]

The reading of Snyder's haikus really reveals this individualized adaptation, as suggested by the critic (although Allen Ginsberg has affirmed that Snyder is one of the few American poets able to write genuine 'haikus'). Regarding the use of short forms of poetic expression SNYDER says:

> The idea of a poetry of minimal surface texture, with its complexities hidden at the bottom of the pool, under the bank, a dark old luring, no fancy flavor, is ancient. It is what is

'haunting' in the best of Scottish-English ballads and is at the heart of the Chinese *shi* (lyric) aesthetic.[92]

The *haiku* was a convenient form for Snyder when he was young and still a developing poet for it "blended his interest in Zen and the Orient [...], exhibited a strong resemblance to Imagistic theory and practice which fascinated him at this time. And it was a form which was easily adapted to his need to capture wild nature and the life of the common man".[93]

Several trends of the classical Chinese poetry can also be found in Snyder's poetry: nature orientation, the quiet nostalgia, the satisfying solitude, the sense of spontaneity, sensuous imagery, the absence of moralizing commentary and the objective description of an experience. The meditative teachings of Japanese and Chinese poets sharpened Snyder's attention to phenomena which can reveal the poetic form in reality.

In a similar way to the Chinese poetry of the Táng and Sung Dynasties, some of Snyder's poems build their effect through a series of "vivid natural images" which cause strong response in the reader's mind.[94] The theme of 'the nature of energy', often explored by Japanese and Chinese ancient writers, is also recurrent in Snyder.[95]

It is known that one of the typical 'heroes' of the literature of the 1940's and 1950's was the figure of the hobo, the hero of picaresque novels written especially by J. Kerouac (and before him, by Jack London). Although this 'literary hobo' seems to be very American, a similar figure can be found in Buddhist tradition - the *bihhiku* (or *bhikkus*), who is a

wanderer, a man of the road, who "pays attention to the affairs of the material world; acting in an apparently absurd way he happens to demonstrate the absurdity of human vanity".[96]

In several poems Snyder depicts the *bihhiku* position[97]; one may also point out the picaresque quality of **Mountains and Rivers Without End**, where Snyder identifies with hobos and other spiritual travellers who are searching for "the Dharma".

Among the extensive influences which evidence the impact of the Oriental culture to be traced in Snyder's poetry, one shall mention that of No drama. Like the *haiku*, No's simplicity and its impressionistic qualities, aim toward a fusion of the momentary and the timeless, the personal and the historical. The dramatic structure of Snyder's **Mountains and Rivers Without End** follows a certain type of No play. Depicting the gradual journey of a Zen monk through mountains, this book is all patterned on the ancient Chinese scroll which unrolls horizontally.

Commenting on the Oriental influence on Snyder's work MCLEAN says: "But if Snyder's work follows this thread in European and American literature [of nature], the basis for his poetry lies elsewhere, in oral traditions of transmission, in Chinese and Japanese poetics, and in the ancient and worldwide sense of the Earth Goddess as inspirer of song".[98]

Snyder's poems demonstrate that he has adapted Oriental forms and themes to the American Western experience and also to his own needs - artistic and psychic - especially regarding his

quest for wisdom. In fact, as a poet Snyder has made Buddhist psychology his own.

Regarding the influence India had on Snyder's work, one may notice that two sides of the country are revealed through the poet's books. First, there are those poems of 'early manhood', where India represents negative or demonic forces, embodying human debasement. No doubt that the physical impact of his visit to India deeply impressed Snyder; as the poet himself says, its philosophies and mythologies were "vast, touching the deepest areas of the mind".[99] This is why some poems written by Snyder reveal or manifest the negative side of Indian culture, depicting human degradation, death, decay and dirt through vivid pictures of the most terrifying aspects of life in India.[100] The complete poverty of the country, the marked contrasts between humanity and ignorance, communion and solitude, passivity and violence, came to represent for the poet a picture of the rawness of human existence.

The other side of India is the one which describes the country as a fertile and overtly sexual and erotic place.[101] Further comments on India appear in the section entitled *Kali*, the third constituent part of **The Back Country**. This is why, for the time being, only these brief comments on the influence of India are presented here.

One may ask why Snyder turned to Oriental philosophy when he began to write poetry instead of exploring only the American Indian environment and legends. As an answer, I include SNYDER'S own words: "For one thing I don't think that I

understood the richness and complexity of traditional primitive cultures. For another thing traditional Hinduism and Buddhism have added a great deal onto basic shamanistic and primitive ritualistic ceremonial practices and life styles".[102]

1.3 CONCLUSION

> So we sing. Poetry is for all men and women. The power within - the more you give, the more you have to give - will still be our source when coal and oil are long gone, and atoms are left to spin in peace.
>
> G. Snyder

All these commentaries about the influences Snyder has received throughout his career help us not only to visualize the dimension of his background but also to know the main aspects derived from these influences which will become projected in **The Back Country.**

As a first result, some themes became recurrent in his work, such as: a) the Orient, through references to Zen Buddhism (its discipline and training, its philosophy and meditation, and the hobo theme); and references to India and its mythology; b) nature and wilderness as sources of inspiration and energy; the reverence for life and a cosmic identification with all things from mountains to animals; c) ecological matters, showing the need for environmental preservation after man's destructive action on it; d)

Amerindian tradition and primitive myths, including mythologized animals.

In **Riprap**, Snyder's first book, there are some poems about mountains and work, but the poet is more a 'traveler', in search for something especial. As ALTIERI states:

> [...] his earliest lyrics make clear by their lack of full interrelationship how difficult it has been to achieve the easy, confident sense of interbirth in more recent poems. These early lyrics concentrate more on the moral task of achieving freedom from Western ways than on realizing the goal of a new religious vision.[103]

After 1968 poems about family love and the identification of woman with nature appear (maybe influenced by Snyder's third marriage and his definite settling in the country). As SNYDER says: "Maybe some of the solidity in **Turtle Island** is because of my sense of place, living here in Nevada County".[104] The intensification of some themes which appeared as germinal ideas in his earliest books, such as social revolution and the search for alternative sources of energy, is also perceptible in his recent writings (after **Turtle Island** and **Regarding Wave**). In his first poems "the language is essentially nominal and neither active in itself nor alive with interrelationships"[105]; only in **The Back Country** will some poems describe an organic and active cosmos and not only the mere act of naming particulars.

Snyder's trajectory as a writer shows that he does not follow "the academe" and his work is grounded in the 'rough-and-tumble' of the Far West. The range of tradition present in his writings is varied for he evokes the small but influential

heretical and esoteric movements which have expressed a mystical continuity which comes "from Paleo-Siberian Shamanism and Magdelanian cave-painting; through megaliths and Mysteries, astronomers, ritualists, alchemists and Albingensians; gnostics and vagrants, right to the Golden Gate Park".[106]

Although apparently simple, Snyder's poetry happens to fuse aspects of the Western culture (for instance, the social revolution) with aspects from the Eastern (for instance, the individual insight into the basic self), conveying action and contemplation as identical states of being and of secular grace.

Examining Snyder's work one notes that the writer developed a particular way of interpreting the sensibility of his age, creating a method of expression markedly peculiar to him. The analysis of the influences Snyder has received in the course of his career help us to conclude that the atmosphere created by the Countercultural Ethos, especially by the Beat Generation, provided him with several literary norms and themes which, in a derivative way, also led him to other directions, as for instance, the interest for Oriental cultures, the interest for the cultural identity of the country, the general state of revolt against oppressive social and political rules and the eco-activism, to mention just a few examples.

Thus, considering Snyder's background, one may even trace back the characteristics which found resonance in his work. The interest for nature and wilderness as a source of inspiration and renewal, and a consequent awareness of the

responsibility one has over earth's future, whose seed appeared in the Beat Movement, are constant interests in Snyder's poetry. The need for spiritual and transcendental experiences the Beat Movement had claimed for, is another important characteristic of Snyder's work. Last of all, the reaction against conventional rules which established formal and thematic aspects of poetry, as the beat writers would propose, is definitely present in Snyder's poems, where the colloquial expression and the open form may be constantly observed.

The evolution of Snyder's work thus presents several interesting features. If in the first poems he used to write more within the Imagist tradition of Pound and the Orient, as the years passed, his poems show a gradual development from the crafted to the visionary poetry, a characteristic especially reinforced by Snyder's interest in primitive oral poetry. But Snyder did not abandon the demands of Oriental nature poetry (for precision, sharpness and spontaneity) nor the Imagistic influences, for they are deeply grounded in the poet's mind. What happens is that insofar as the poet matures, all the influences he has received come to merge into a deepening of thought, transforming his work into a literary expression which, although personal, is at the same time undoubtedly universal.

NOTES TO THE **INTRODUCTION**

[1] PARKINSON, Thomas. *apud* STEUDING, Bob. **Gary Snyder**. Boston: Twayne, 1976. p. 161.

[2] ALTIERI, Charles. **Enlarging the temple**. London: Lewinsburg - Bucknell University Press, 1979. p. 161.

[3] DEAN, Thimothy. **Gary Snyder and the American unconscious**. New York: St. Martin, 1991. p. 94.

[4] DEAN, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

[5] STEUDING, *op. cit.*, p. 161. It seems important to justify that Steuding's book **Gary Snyder** is the most complete critical work on Snyder, this is why I quote it so often.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 161.

[7] BLY, Robert. *apud* STEUDING, p. 162.

[8] PARKINSON, *apud* STEUDING, p. 162.

[9] It would be impossible to transcribe all the titles here, nevertheless the most expressive critical reviews appear in Appendix One. Regarding academic studies on Snyder, see Appendix Two.

[10] SNYDER, G. **The real work** interviews and talks 1964-1979. New Directions N.Y.: 1980. p. 4.

[11] ALTIERI, p. 135.

[12] PARKINSON T., "The Poetry of Gary Snyder" In: **American writers today**, Forum Series vol.2. New York: 1982. p. 142.

[13] STEUDING, p. 168.

[14] SNYDER, G. **The real work**. p. 49.

[15] SNYDER, *apud* PARKINSON, "The Poetry of Gary Snyder". p. 153.

[16] HOFFMAN, Daniel (ed.) **Harvard guide to contemporary writing**, Cambridge, United States, The Belknap Press - Harvard University 1979. p. 524.

[17] ALTIERI, p. 149.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 131.

[19] DEAN, p. 3.

[20] *Ibid.*, 1-2.

[21] The sequence in which these influences appear in the text does not represent any hierarchic nor chronological order in relation to Snyder's career or work.

[22] PERKINS, David. **A history of modern poetry**, modernism and after, Cambridge, United States: The Belknap Press, Harvard University, 1987. p. 544.

[23] COOK, Bruce. **The beat generation**, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons,. 1971. p. 9-10.

[24] PERKINS, p. 530.

[25] SNYDER, G. **The real work**. p. 39.

[26] SNYDER, G. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

[27] Although Snyder himself affirms that he has received several influences of other writers - such as Carl Sandburg, Edgar Lee Masters, D.H. Lawrence, Robinson Jeffers, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams and William B. Yeats (see **The Real Work**, p. 56 to 58) I elected Henry Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot and Kenneth Rexroth as the most relevant ones for the purposes of this research.

[28] MCLEAN, Scott, *apud* SNYDER, G. **The real work**, *op. cit.*, Introduction.

[29] **Harvard guide** , p. 522.

[30] JONES, Peter. **50 American poets**, London: Heinemann, 1980. p. 346.

[31] STEUDING, p. 38.

[32] **Harvard guide**, p. 523.

[33] SNYDER, G. **The back country**, New York: New Directions, 1990. p. 28.

[34] SNYDER, G. **Myths & texts**, New York: New Directions, 1978. p. 54.

[35] DEAN,. p. 103.

[36] STEUDING, p. 99.

[37] Other poems which resemble Whitman's features are, for instance, "Look Back" (**Axe Handles**, North Point Press, Berkeley, 1983, p. 28) where the poet suggests how the body provides an image for the continuity of his own history and of the landscape's history and "Prayer for the Great Family"

(**Turtle Island**, New York: New Directions, 1974, p. 24), where Snyder expresses his reverence for the universe in a Whitmanesque style.

38 DEAN, p. 86.

39 *Ibid*, p. 153-54.

40 STEUDING, p. 98.

41 SNYDER, G. **Riprap**. Berkeley: North Point Press, 1990. p. 6.

42 STEUDING, p. 39.

43 A good example of Snyder's precision and objectivity is his poem "Water" (**Riprap**, p. 12), where the poet treats the "thing" in a direct way, avoiding unneeded words and thus coming close to achieving Pound's early Imagistic purposes.

44 PERKINS, George. **American poetic theory**, New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc., p, 558.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 558.

46 STEUDING, p. 36.

47 For example: the full use of consonant and vowel tone as organizing devices, the reduction of connective words having only grammatical functions and no gravity.

48 STEUDING, p. 23. Snyder's poem "Logging #14" (**Myths & texts**, p. 15) illustrates Steuding's comments.

49 PAUL, Sherman. *In* **Search of the primitive**, Baton Rouge, La; Louisiana State University Press, 1986, compares **Myths & texts to The Cantos**.

50 STEUDING, p. 67.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 45.

52 **Harvard Guide**, p. 522.

53 SNYDER, G. **The real work**. p. 57.

54 For further comparisons between **Myths & texts** and "The Waste Land" see: GITZEN, Julian "Gary Snyder and the Poetry of Compassion" In: *Critical Quartely*, vol. 15, n. 4, Winter 1973, pp. 341-57.

55 STEUDING, p. 72.

56 DEAN, p. 138.

[57] STEUDING, p. 112.

[58] *Ibid*, p. 111.

[59] *Ibid.*, p. 112.

[60] PERKINS, G. **American poetic theory**. p. 54.

[61] It is noteworthy that Rexroth has adapted techniques from the songs of the Hottentots and Eskimos.

[62] The Amerindian tradition refers to the American aboriginal races or the "West Indies", for instance, Navajo, Hopi, and Zuni tribes, especially those living in the Great Bay (Nevada, Californina, Utah), New Mexico and Arizona.

[63] SNYDER, G. **Earth house hold**, New York: New Directions, 1969. p. 118.

[64] *Ibid.*, p. 120.

[65] DEAN, p. 60.

[66] PERKINS, David, p. 585.

[67] YGLESIAS, *apud* SNYDER, **The real work**. p. xiii.

[68] STEUDING, p. 24.

[69] SNYDER, **Earth house hold**. p. 112.

[70] SNYDER, *apud* STEUDING, p. 24.

[71] For instance: "Through the Smoke Hole" (**The back country**, p. 125), in which the Hopi Indians cosmology and symbology are used as the basis for the poem, expressing the Indian's sense of the continuity of life.

[72] The poet-shaman appears, for instance, in the poem "The Blue Sky" (**Mountains and rivers without end**, p. 43-44), a poem that not only describes healing, but actually heals, since a kind of contemporary mantra is created and language, or 'song', becomes medicine.

[73] SNYDER, **The real work**. p. 5.

[74] DEAN, p. 112.

[75] SNYDER, **The real work**, p. 171-172. In some poems Snyder fuses archetypal elements from Buddhism with the Amerindian culture, as in the poem "Old Man Medicine Buddha" (**Mountains and rivers without end**), and "The Hump-Backed Flute Player" (**Mountains and rivers...**) where Hsuan Tsang and Kokopilau are present. Hsuan Tsang - considered by Snyder as a liberator and healer - spread the Buddhist doctrines throughout

China; Kokopilau, the Amerindian petroglyph of a hump-backed flute player which appears chiseld on rock walls throughout the South-Western United States and into Mexico, is associated with the end of the Pleistocene era and is generally thought to symbolize fertility and the coming of spring. Another example of Amerindian tradition in Snyder's poems is "Magpie Song" (**Turtle island**, p. 69) where the shamanistic bird - the magpie - appears.

76 Snyder has explored this theme in poems such as "Migration of Birds" (**Riprap**, p. 19), "Sixth-Month Song in the Foothills" (**The back country**, p. 9), and "Hunting #3" (**Myths & texts**, p. 20). The bear appears, for instance, in "A Berry Feast" (**The back country**, p. 3), in "Hunting #6" (**Myths & texts**, p. 23), and in "The Way West, Underground" (**Turtle island**, p. 4); the bear is seen as powerful and kingly, and was often depicted in Indian tales as a father-figure. The deer appears in **Myths & texts** in the poem "Hunting #8" (p. 26), where Snyder dramatizes psychic experiences and gives shape to dream.

77 STEUDING, p. 82-3.

78 In **Myths & texts**, Snyder uses this mythological creature to embody and dramatize the extreme states of human consciousness. In the following poems the figure of the Coyote is also present: "The Berry Feast" (**The back country**, p. 3,4,5,6), "Through the Smoke Hole" (**The back country**, p. 125), "Hunting #7 and #16" (**Myths and texts**, p. 26 and 34, respectively), "Burning #11 and 16 (**Myths & texts**, p. 46 and 52), "The Call for the Wild" (**Turtle island**, p. 21), "Manzanita" (**Turtle island**, p. 27), "Magpie Song"(**Turtle island**, p. 69) and "Piute Creek" (**Riprap**, p. 8).

79 JONES, p. 349.

80 STEUDING, p. 78.

81 PERKINS, D. p. 555.

82 The Zen doctrine is a Japanese form of Buddhism created from the fusion of Taoism and the Mahayana School of Buddhism. The origin of Zen is legendary, tracing back to Buddha (Sidartha Gautama) in India. Historically and chronologically speaking the development of Zen occurred due to some masters who spread the doctrine to other countries: the 28th Patriarch called Bodhidharma (Tamo, in Chinese; Sensei Daruma Taichi, in Japanese) who, in the year of 523, introduced Zen principles in China; Dogen (1200-1253) and the monk Eisai (1141-1251) who respectively introduced the soto and the rinzai schools (subdivisions of the original Zen) in Japan; and finally - D. T. Suzuki, who is the introducer of Zen in the Western world.

Since in the modern Zen there are no systems or doctrines to be dogmatically followed, as well as there is no

ascetic practice, the whole effectiveness of Zen depends less on assigned rules than on a direct enlightenment leading to a consequent transformation of man. According to Zen the vision of our own inner nature drives to the full understanding of the emptiness the world of phenomena represents. Through an intense perception of things-as they-really-are, the conceptual thought is transcendend and the reality is apprehended as a direct experience free from the illusion sustained by the ego and by man's discursive intellect - which have nothing to do with the essential nature of Existence. To our Western (Cartesian) mind, a philosophy like Zen may seem absolutely inconsistent. Indeed, there is a deep paradox in all Zen Buddhism: the very negation which Nothingness and Emptiness (*Sunyata*) seem to mean, is at the same time the confirmation of Zen. The basis of Zen experience is a state of absolute passivity interpreted dinamically. Therefore, it is only when man perceives himself destituted of all the concepts and dogmas his mind has been submitted to, that he may attain a meaningful reason for life.

[83] **Harvard guide**, p. 43.

[84] JONES, p. 351.

[85] JONES, p. 348-49.

[86] SNYDER, **Earth house hold**, p. 34.

[87] SNYDER, **The real work**, p. 35.

[88] STEUDING, p. 56.

[89] To illustrate the above mentioned considerations I suggest the reading of the following poems: "Kyoto, March" (**Riprap**, p. 22); "A Stone Garden" (**Riprap**, p. 23); "Six Years" (**The back country**, p. 54); "December" (**The back country**, p. 67) where the poet describes his practice of Zen discipline and alludes to his approaching enlightenment (in Zen terms *'satori'*); "Journeys " (**Mountains and rivers without end** and the poems #11 (p. 46), #12 (p. 47), and #8, p. 43 from **Myths & texts** (in this latter, entitled "John Muir on Mt. Ritter, the naturalist J. Muir is described at a moment of brief enlightenment experiencing what in Zen is called "kensho").

[90] To illustrate that, see SNYDER, **The back country**, "Hitch Haiku", p. 24-5; and also SNYDER, **Earth house hold**, p. 7.

[91] STEUDING, p. 60.

[92] SNYDER, **Riprap**, p. 66.

[93] STEUDING, p. 62.

[94] As an example of a poem which resembles the Zen-influenced Chinese nature poets, one may point out "Mid-August at Sourdough Mountain Lookout" (in **Riprap**, p. 3).

[95] As in "Without" (**Turtle island**, p. 6), "Source" (**Turtle island**, p. 26), "By Frazier Creek Falls" (**Turtle island**, p. 41) and "For Nothing" (**Turtle island**, p. 34).

[96] STEUDING, p. 49.

[97] For instance: "Lookout's Journey", **Earth house hold**, p. 24.

[98] MCLEAN *apud* SNYDER, **The real work**, *Introduction*.

[99] SNYDER, **Earth house hold**, p. 114.

[100] For instance: "Journey to Rishikesh and Harwar" (**Earth house hold**, p. 88) and "The Market" (**Mountains and rivers without end**, Section III); "Kali" (a whole section in **The back country**), "Mother of the Buddhas" (**The back country**, p. 92), "Wandering the Old, Dirty Country" (**The back country**, p. 93); "Circumambulating Arunachala" (**The back country**, p. 96); "The Truth is Like the Belly of a Woman Turning" (**The back country**, p. 101).

[101] As depicted in the poem "For a Stone Girl at Sanchi" (**The back country**, p. 74), which describes the ancient work of art, the **Kama Sutra**, a type of sexual yoga through which the sexual intercourse is compared to a prayer.

[102] SNYDER, **The real work**, p. 15, The writer adds that: "There is nothing in primitive cultures that is at all equivalent to Mahayana philosophy or logic. There is a science and true sophistication of certain states of mind and power that can come through shamanism but the shaman himself doesn't understand the power. Buddhism and yoga have been gradually evolving as a true science of the mind and science of the nature of things but of a different order from the physical sciences we've had so far, called in Sanskrit *Vidya*, or the holy science".

[103] ALTIERI, p. 132.

[104] SNYDER,G. **The real work**, p. 85.

[105] ALTIERI, p. 133.

[106] **Harvard guide**, p. 523.

2. INTO **THE BACK COUNTRY**

> [...] my earliest poems start here in America on the Pacific Coast, with travels in India and Japan in between. So it does complete a circle. Starting with Douglas fir and Ponderosa and ending with Douglas fir and Ponderosa.
>
> G. Snyder

From 1954 to 1964 Snyder wrote several lyric poems which, before being collected in book-form, first appeared in some journals and magazines, such as *The Critical Quarterly*, *Harper's*, *Northwest Review*, *The Yale Literary Magazine*, *Evergreen Review*, *The Nation*, *The Outsider*, *Poetry* and *Holiday*. These and other poems, written at a period of marked 'frustration and uncertainty', were finally published in America in 1968 under the title **The Back Country**, being simultaneously published in England.[1]

In a general sense, this book, considered 'a rambling work', is concerned with the poet's trials and tribulations in his attempt at 'defining himself', through the description of a 'psychic journey' in search for wholeness and sanity.

The Back Country is divided into four sections, namely:

I - *Far West* - with 21 poems, describes the poet's experiences in the American West, where he worked, during his youth, as logger and forest ranger;

II - *Far East* - with 16 poems written from 1956 to 1964, describing Snyder's wanderings through Japan and his studies of Zen at a monastery in Kyoto;

III - *Kali* - with 36 poems, most of them inspired in Snyder's visit to India and his readings of Shaivism and Tibetan Buddhism;

IV - *Back* - with 13 poems of an ultimate enlightenment and fulfillment when the poet, returning to the country in 1964, looks again to the West.

One cannot think that Snyder's choice regarding **The Back Country**'s structure was arbitrary. Since the poems were first published separately and independently, and do not appear in the book according to a chronological order which followed the dates they were written, this division into four sections frankly suggests that the writer - who himself has a vast knowledge of mythical concepts - had in mind a kind of a 'quest' structure, and thus filled the sections with poems which have a 'kinship' or sequential order.

Dedicated to Kenneth Rexroth, **The Back Country** opens up with a quotation from the Japanese poet Basho: " [...] So - when was it - I, drawn like blown cloud, couldn't stop dreaming of roaming, roving the coast up and down [...]". Pointing out the importance of the act of rambling 'through mountains and rivers', this quotation suggests that this book presents a persona whose vagrancy unfolds, arising the reader's expectancy regarding the 'boundaries' this vagrancy will reach.

The title, "The Back Country", an ambiguous one, may lead, at least, to four possible associations: a) wilderness; b) the backward countries; c) the unconscious - the back

country of the mind; d) enlightenment or, in Buddhist view, the place of total freedom one attains after a symbolic death. Regarding the themes developed in this book, they are wide and varied, including subjective insights, love affairs, mythical and symbolic elements and socio-political criticism.

In short, **The Back Country** is the resultant of a Northwestern perception, which dominated American writing for two centuries, allied to a perception of the Orient and to an awareness of the significance of the Indian in the American consciousness. As ALTIERI says: "**The Back Country** expands the frame of awareness - from localized Western contexts and images of the individual in nature, through journeys to the East and exercises in Eastern philosophy, mythology, and meditation, to a synthesis in which these materials all are restored within a simple domestic context".[2]

2.1 FAR WEST

> For myself personally all I would add [...] are some very ancient and to me beautiful and useful ways of handling things: attention to place; gratitude to the physical universe and to all the other beings for what they exchange with you; good health, good luck, good crops.
>
> G. Snyder

As its title suggests, the introductory part of **The Back Country** is, in a very general sense, about the American

West - at least it is the impression one has after a first reading of *Far West*.

In his youth Snyder and his family lived in a farm outside Seattle, where the poet early got acquainted with the Western scenery, with wilderness and outdoor life, developing "his attachment to nature and learned self-reliance, discipline, and the rugged ways of the American West, which sustain him to this day, and which frequently appear as the subject matter of his poetry".[3] This is why most of the poems included in *Far West* so well depict the Western landscape, its flora and fauna in often wild settings.

A second and more accurate reading of this part of the book is extremely revealing for one can perceive that the poems are not merely topical ones - they are not restricted to the Western scenery. In fact, they dramatize the sense of place and suggest a deep mystical-ecological (or *eco-mystical*) relationship between man and nature, thus conveying a much more universal message.

Far West is thus a vivid example of the Western literary imagination which emerges from a tradition rooted in the westward expansion and in the frontier experience of the nineteenth century (the West of Mark Twain, John Muir, James Fenimore Cooper, and Jack London). This tradition, suggesting a direct and often mystical perception of the world, is antagonistic to civilization, emphasizing the reverence for the wilderness and for the ecological mode of consciousness.

In *Far West* wilderness experiences are used in the interest of art: day by day activities or even pure and simple observations of nature are explored in such a way as to appeal to their metaphysical value. Besides that, most of the poems represent a 'state of innocence', since the hero shows self-sufficiency to survive in the American wilderness.[4]

Regarding the settings, the poems of *Far West* often take place in real locations: Willapa Bay, Queets Basin, Benson Lake, Smoke Creek, Piute Creek, Piute Mountain, Mount Ritter, Olympic Mountains, Bear Valley, Northern Sierra, San Joaquin, Sourdough, Ithaca, Newport, Elko, Dodger Point, Red Bluff, Redding, Sonora. All these names reinforce the Western atmosphere conveyed by *Far West*. The same is applicable in terms of recurrent animals which typify the rural scenery: bears, rattlesnakes, lizards, crows, swallows, mules, trout, deers, pigs, moles and the mythical Coyote and Magpie. Besides the animals, the references to Western flora are also remarkable, such as the slide-aspen, the larch tree, the cedar, the eucalyptus, the juniper, the myrtlewood, the sugar pine, the fir cone, the alpine fir, huckleberries, gooseberries and blackberries. All of them help the reader form a mental picture of the Western sceneries where the section is developed.

The themes explored in *Far West* are extremely varied. Some poems recount workers' stories (as "Sather"), while others are about the devotion to work, the close relationship between man and his tools and the sense of satisfaction that emerges from everyday activities when man feels integrated to his job.

Through the description of the job to be accomplished, Snyder makes his poetry an extension of physical labor. Many of Snyder's poems mention the tools he uses: the saw, the axes, the singlejack hammer, the rake, the chainsaw and the caterpillar, which are symbols of the Western working man. The sense, the reality, the dignity and the importance of work and experience appear in several of Snyder's poems where physical activity is the basis of a process which reveals spiritual wisdom. The reverence for work appears in "The Spring", "A Walk", "Sixth Month Song in the Foothills", "Fire in the Hole", and, for instance, in "After Work":

> The shack and a few trees
> float in the blowing fog
> I put out your blouse,
> warm my cold hands
> on your breasts.
> you laugh and shudder
> peeling garlic by the
> hot iron stove.
> bring in the axe, the rake,
> the wood
> we'll lean, on the wall
> against each other
> stew simmering on the fire
> as it grows dark
> drinking wine.

This poem illustrates the persona's veneration for the primitive tools "which enable him to live". The presentation of these inanimate objects emphasize their importance, in such a way that they even acquire a sacramental significance, calling attention to the ritualistic nature of simple actions and of every moment of life. As STEUDING says: "Collecting his tools, 'the axe, the rake', and entering his cabin for food and love,

[the poet] elevates these extensions and celebrates his central concern for craft and a job well done".[5]

From details and particulars, this poem achieves a status of a fulfilling act - the sacramental significance of quotidian triviality. From a casual situation, rooted in a subjective experience, the poem builds up an extremely expressive result which reveals that fulness may come from the total harmony between man and his apparently ordinary activities.

Another theme which is present in the *Far West* poems regards the evocation of a lusty life in contact with nature, as in "Burning the Small Dead":

> Burning the small dead
> branches
> broke from beneath
> thick spreading
> whitebark pine.
>
> a hundred summers
> snowmelt rock and air
>
> hiss in a twisted bough
>
> sierra granite;
> mt. Ritter -
> black rock twice as old.
>
> Deneb, Altair
>
> windy fire

In this poem the persona, while feeding white pine into his campfire, watches the stars. This contemplation of the physical distance of the stars leads to "an awareness of self in cosmos complemented by the perception of the cosmos contained within the self".[6] Through some natural details, this

experience conveys both simplicity and depth, and prepares for a meditative mode involving the dynamics of spatial relationships. The last lines, when the contemplative mind finally reaches the stars ("Deneb, Altair"), marks the fusion of two forces: a return to the limited space of the "burning branches" and a progression beyond the stars to a kind of "essence of fire". While contemplating the physical distance of the stars, the persona gradually moves to a third "windy fire" that establishes the connection between the two spaces in "the back country" of the mind. Through the description of a simple act like watching the stars, the poem reaches meditative qualities, revealing the deep unity between spatial distances. In a last instance, this poem also illustrates that the cosmos is a source of energy always in movement which equals man's internal source of energy or "the power within".

A third theme which appears in *Far West* is related to Indian culture and mythology, illustrated by the poem "A Berry Feast", written before 1955, to celebrate a summer spent with some friends in the woods of the Pacific Northwest. It shows that Snyder shares the Indians' "reverence for the land and the life it nurtures"[7], as the first of the four parts of this long poem demonstrates:

> Fur the color of mud, the smooth loper
> Crapulous old man, a drifter,
> Praises! of Coyote the Nasty, the fat
> Puppy that abused himself, the ugly gambler,
> Bringer of goodies.
>
> In bearshit find it in August,
> Neat pile on the fragrant trail, in late
> August, perhaps by a Larch tree

Bear has been eating the berries.
high meadow, late summer, snow gone
Blackbear
eating berries, married
To a woman whose breasts bleed
From nursing the half-human cubs.

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

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

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

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

Exploring the archaic and primitive knowledge, "A Berry Feast" mythologizes both the transcending and the coarse energies of life. The "berry", which is the fruit of marriage, symbolizing immortality and knowledge, conveys the relationships between human and animal, in a 'pre-human or precivilized reality' where wilderness, cosmos and man form a "happy ecology". Depicting a mythological reality typical of the Amerindian lore, the poem explores, for instance the symbolical figure of the Blackbear (which is related to instincts and to the feminine principle) and also the figure of the mythical Coyote who, according to the cosmogonic legends of Californian Indians, is the responsible for the dark and

malignant aspects in the world's creation (such as winter and death); in fact, ruining the angelic condition of man, Coyote assured man's continuation of life, in a chain of "effort, work, suffering, and death".

"A Berry Feast" illustrates the American Indian's sensibility to ecology, conveyed through a mythological consciousness, sometimes saucy (through a "trickster-like mood") but filled with zest for life. Regarding the poem's form, one has to mention that it brings a striking effect: its two last stanzas - from line 24 to the end - are formed by tetrameters which (with the exception of line 29) repeat the iambic foot; this effect of the poetic feet, differing from the beginning of the poem, which does not follow any metrical pattern, helps to reinforce the tricky presence of "the shadow", reproducing in form the shift of content and thus enhancing the tension and the prophetic force of the whole poem.

Other themes to be found in *Far West* are the clash between nature and civilization (as in "Oil" and "Marin-An"), the descriptions of backpacking trips into the pristine wilderness (as in "For the Boy who was Dodger Point Lookout Fifteen Years Ago") and the simple songs of peace (as "August at Sourdough" and "Home from the Sierra").

While reading *Far West* one easily notices that among these themes listed above, a recurrent pattern appears: the poems in which the persona rambles through the Western mountains. This sort of nature poetry, popularized by Kenneth

Rexroth (see pages 31-33), is called "mountain poetry": it is Chinese in esthetic, rejecting abstraction and dichotomy but also American, exploring the American setting, the country life and sometimes, the peculiarities of Amerindian culture. Removed from the crowd, the persona in "mountain poems" lives an ascetic and isolated life, evoking a certain melancholic tone. The solitary observer, who speaks in the first person, describes his adventures as an inhabitant of nature. Several "mountain poems" mention a star which orientates the poet. Nature - often picturesque - provides the reader with a sense of beauty which contrasts with the 'machinations' of man in the cities.

The interest of "mountain poetry" is not only its descriptive qualities; its intention is to reveal the dichotomy between civilization and nature, since nature - and the freedom it assures - is presented in contrast with life in the big cities. Pointing out the destructive action of man on nature, these poems are an attempt at raising people's consciousness to environmental problems. Suggesting the importance of a state of balance or a 'symbiotic' interrelation between man and his environment, they work to a further revitalization of society, pouring creative power into the world.[8]

As mentioned before, the value of the *Far West* poems does not rely only on their descriptive qualities. In fact, these poems lead us to a deeper reading for they convey the psychological reality of man in the natural scenery where wilderness comes to represent the same state of a free mind

thus, the 'topography' of the American West equals the 'topography' of the mind.

Developing the interpretation which equals wilderness to a psychic territory to be explored, one may infer that the backpacking trips described in *Far West* are journeys toward the expansion of the unconscious life through meditative procedures. Wilderness is a source of power (the 'power within') and personal energy through which one attains insightful thoughts, providing a free state of mind. The reading of *Far West* reveals wilderness as a "repository of possibilities and reminder of psychological richness that cities pervert or destroy".[9] As *Far West* illustrates, nature works as the ideal locale for contemplation which, in its tours, provokes a change of consciousness and, as a result, the liberation of the mind. From this whole process, wisdom appears.

In several poems which form *Far West* the persona establishes, within himself, the same state of being that nature demonstrates; in other words, nature is not viewed as separated from the self.[10] Achieving such a consciousness, the particular becomes equivalent to the universal, and vice-versa. This is why the poems which, at a first sight, seemed to describe the poet's personal affairs, in fact prove to encompass a much more universal message.

The poem "Trail Crew Camp at Bear Valley, 9000 Feet, Northern Sierra - White Bone and Threads of Snowmelt Water" is a perfect example of a "mountain poem":

Cut branches back for a day -
trail a thin line through willow
up buckbrush meadows,
creekbed for twenty yards
winding in boulders
zigzags the hill
into timber, white pine.

gooseberry bush on the turns.
hooves clang on the riprap
dust, brush, branches.
a stone
cairn at the past -
stript mountains hundreds of miles.

sundown went back
the clean switchbacks to camp.
bell on the gelding,
stew in the cook tent,
black coffee in a big tin can.

This poem describes a typical day's work, an ordinary day spent at a camp in Bear Valley, Northern Sierra, where the persona works clearing trails. At first sight it seems to be a mere report of the crew's manual labor (as if "jottings in a diary"), since the poem does not moralize, narrating the experience objectively, as mere elemental happenings. A more accurate reading, however, reveals the symbolic meaning of the simple actions described, as if the persona managed to "clear trails" in his own mind, becoming apt to deep perceptions.

The persona in "Trail Crew Camp" is an inhabitant of nature and the allusions to a natural environment (conveyed by words such as "willow', "branches", "buckbrush", "meadows", "creekbed", "boulders", "hill", "timber", "white pine", "gooseberry bush", "riprap", "mountains", "switchbacks") give the reader a concrete sense of the mountain's wilderness. The scenery is a symbolic expression of goodness in the natural

environment. Even the place where the poem is located is mentioned in its title: Bear Valley, 9000 Feet Northern Sierra, and the flora and fauna are true, giving the impression that the event really took place there.

The persona in the poem describes his activities with a sense of subjective disinterest, as if he were without any audience. This independence from the readers is reinforced specially through the poem's language, which is simple, natural, and direct, a literal speech with an apparent "casualness of phrasing", and through the absence of the pronouns "I" and "we". This elision of the subject of a clause broadens its sense, bringing a positive ambiguity: admitting both pronouns, the sentence does not center the action as restricted to a specific self. Focusing wholly upon the experience, avoiding self-expression, the poem detaches the actions from an ego, and consequently, from intellectuality and cultural resonance. One sees that the poem's syntax supports its intent in effacing the speaker's voice, for the speaker seems to be so involved in the actions that he foregoes references to himself as a subject; thus, self-reflexive implications are excluded by the preponderance of concrete details, with no abstractions or "occult philosophy". Through these concrete details, which assert the referential power of language, actor and action are mingled.

The presentation of a sequence of images, instead of the assertion of thoughts and feelings, conveys the spiritual discipline of an abnegated ego, concentrated on the immediately

given, characterizing the persona's neutral patience, typical of the man-in-nature, as contrasting with 'civilized man'. Nature, in fact, puts the self in its place - as one among many natural phenomena. Images - presented in a sequence of vivid natural perceptions of what is seen, heard, and smelled - produce strong responses in the reader's mind, often appealing to sensorial aspects, as in "hooves clang on the riprap", and "bell on the gelding" (sound); in "stew in the cook tent", and "black coffee in a big tin can" (smell), and in "stript mountains hundreds of miles" (sight). Regarding the utilization of conventionally poetic features, there is the alliterative effect in "trail a thin line through willow", where the recurrence of the [tr], [th] and [thr] sounds reinforces the mental picture of the steps in a trail; and also in "dust, brush, branches", where the [d] and [b] sounds suggest the hooves clanging on the riprap.

The actions narrated in the poem are also simple, presented without particularizing details that could create an expectancy regarding plot or character. The workers just cut branches, ride horses, live in tents and posses few things (like the"big tin can"). The physical effort is reinforced through images of going uphill through bush ("trail a thin line through willow", "up buckbrush meadows"), and difficult places (like creekbed and boulders) leading to the 'climax' at the stone cairn: the view for hundred miles, followed by the easy return downhill to camp at sundown ("the clean switchbacks") and to the peaceful tone of the poem's ending. Reaching the

mountains equals reaching the realm of meditation; in this sense, mountains have a transcendental symbolism, and may be interpreted as the opposite of the plains of reality.

Through the description of one's actions, the reader travels the rugged trail in his mind and reconstructs the history of one's own subjective trajectory finding out the interrelations between the human and nature. The universal value found in wilderness is conveyed through ordinary acts which open up to several metaphysical implications: a primitivist essentialism, the reverence for nature and work, and a resemblance of Zen Buddhist principles such as the concentration and simplicity. As mentioned, avoiding moral judgements, comparisons or juxtapositions, criticism, ironization or allusions to anything else, the poem does not deviate from the thing at hand, thus, simple physical acts illustrate how we relate to nature through our bodies. The joyful acceptance of the physical labor equals the acceptance of the flow of life, where working is an end in itself, not strictly purposive, as if the acts were not subsumed to other implications (political, didactic or representing the pleasure principle). Mind is focused with body; the body connects poetry, work, and the world. In a further instance, physical labor reveals the poetic fusion between body and soul.

"Trail Crew Camp" illustrates how a successful experience as a whole depends on several instances of difficulty. To achieve satisfaction one has to pass through several phases, each of them giving meaning to the others. In

this sense, the emotional sequence enacted by the poem suggests a dialectic balance: [a] in the first stanza one has a difficult journey, the physical effort which leads to [b] the sense of satisfaction, reached in the second stanza, ending with [c] the acceptance of quotidian triviality and the security of the rest as presented in the third stanza. So, one notes that the poem's structure - the division into three parts - reinforces its content and enables a dialectic reading. Also in some other senses the form of the poem reinforces its content, as in the first stanza, when "the creekbed [...] winding in boulders zigzags the hill", the lineation imitates the creekbed zigzagging. The same effect occurs regarding the stone cairn, since the word "stone" is placed in the middle of the stanza, like a cairn, which, in a symbolic reading, may represent an altar for worship.

The work of cutting branches, in the same way as the concluding details of eating and drinking, are fulfilling activities which, from a trivial content, achieve the status of sacramental acts, expanding the poem's content to a larger framework which incorporates the simplicity and yet the profundity of everyday experiences.

In sum, dramatizing the sense of place, in this poem the topical becomes universal and nature proves to be the ideal locale for contemplation, provoking the mind's liberation, enabling the persona to escape from slavery to 'civilization', provided that one understands that nature's flux - and so, life's flux - itself generates meaning.

2.2 FAR EAST

> The mercy of West has been social revolution; the mercy of East has been individual insight into the basic self/void. We need both.
>
> G. Snyder

The second part of **The Back Country**, entitled *Far East*, takes the reader to Japan, where the persona (up to now a legitimate representative of the West) wanders and observes the contrasts between the American culture depicted in *Far West* and the Oriental culture. This persona notes not only his differences in appearance from his hosts but also the differences on a moral level.

In this new section the hero turns to the East for alternatives to Western traditions. He goes to the Orient in order to continue his spiritual journey, after a dissatisfaction with the Western society he had lived in. In fact, Snyder really spent several years in Japan (from 1956 to 1964), where he studied Zen Buddhism and meditation. So, while reading *Far East*, one has to keep in mind that this section illustrates the influence of Snyder's commitment to Zen, reflecting the doctrine's sensibility.

Although Snyder has always explored the traditional primitive culture of the American Indian legends and the shamanistic and ritualistic ceremonial practices, Zen Buddhism, for its richness and complexity, added a grat deal to his work. SNYDER considers Zen Buddhism "a true science of the mind and science of the nature of things".[11] As he further explains, Zen

> [...] values daily life. It values such old-fashioned terms as responsibility and commitment. At the same time it has no external law for doing it. So you must go very deep into yourself to find the foundation of it [...] Zen is a practice that is concerned with liberation, not with giving people some easy certainty.[12]

Far East is a collection of 16 poems. Most of them reveal the philosophical and psychological influences of Zen, which served as inspiration and as subject matter to Snyder. The key to the *Far East* poems is to turn to the "flat, concrete surface of things, without bringing anything of imagination or intellect to bear on it".[13]

Most of the *Far East* poems resemble Zen Buddhist principles, which propose that contemplation is as important as action. Zen suggests that action may equal contemplation and both states of being are representatives of a secular grace from which wisdom emerges. Thus, poetry - leading us to philosophical conclusions - is a meditative practice which has the same value of action.

Following the same picaresque qualities and behavior presented in *Far West*, the persona who appears in the poems of *Far East* is also a man of the road, a wanderer (the *bihhiku*, the traditional Buddhist hobo) who takes pleasure in journeys either physical or psychic ones. (One has to remember that Zen encourages the enjoyment of nature and the outdoors, promoting the elemental reverence for life). If *Far West* described backpacking trips, in *Far East* one sees the description of the *kinhin*, a walking meditation, and the *zazen*, a kind of meditational backpacking.

The setting of *Far East* poems is different from the first part of the book. Now one travels through sceneries typical of the East: ricefields and cucumber vines, bamboo groves, ancient temples and castles, volcanoes; the Western flora of *Far West* gives place to deodars, lotus roots, two-leaf pines and grass bamboos. Once again the places described are real ones: Biwa and Lute Lakes, Kamo and Takano rivers; Domura and Ogi villages; Aso and Hiei Mounts; Atago mountain; Uji Hills, the monasteries of Shokoku-ji, Eihei-ji, Daitoku-ji, and other places such as Shigaraki, Yase, Kyushu, Shiga, Yokkawa, Fukui. Also real people are present in these poems: Mrs. Kuwabata and Mrs. Hosaka, Miss Nunome and Miss Yokota, the Matsudaira family, Hieizan, Kato, Nagazawa and Sakaki. All these names, from places to people, contribute to enhance the shift from an American rural scenery, as described in *Far West*, to the Oriental setting and atmosphere to be found in *Far East*.

Three main themes appear in *Far East*. Firstly, those poems which describe past experiences in contrast with present as "Four Poems for Robin", "A Volcano in Kyushu" and "Mt. Hiei", the latter quoted here:

> I thought I would
> sit with the screens back
> and sing: watching the
> half gone moon rise late
> but my hands were too numb
> to play the guitar
> the song was cold mist
> the wine wouldn't warm
> so I sat at the border
> of dark house and moon
> in thick coat - seeing stars rise

back of the ridge.
like once when a lookout
I took Aldebaran
for fire.

Describing the intimate experience of a speaker in the first person, "Mt. Hiei" seems almost a piece of prose, which could be divided into four sentences: "I thought I would...", "but...", "so...", "like once...". Despite its colloquial tone and the simplicity of the persona's acts, the poem leads the reader to a quietude with philosophical 'reverberations'. In this poem past and present are joined through the 'atemporality' of the stars. It also illustrates the Zen practice of the power-vision in solitude which is not concerned with political power, but the knowledge of the self, the power of 'no-power'. In fact, it is not limited to Zen doctrine; it is a basic human possibility which can come to the surface at any place, and any time, when one reaches inward and sees the relationships that hold there. This personal insight (expressed through the Buddhist concept of *oneness* and uniqueness) uncovers our ritual nature and our personal perception.
Secondly come the poems which, describing typical scenes of the Oriental culture, recreate a mysterious and fascinating world, unknown for Westerners, as is the case of "The Public Bath" (where the persona, who describes his experience sharing his nakedness with others, is overcome by the differences between them), "Pine River" and , for instance, "Yase: September":

Old Mrs. Kawabata
cuts down the tall spike weeds-
more in two hours
than I can get done in a day.

out of a mountain
of grass and thistle
she saved five dusty stalks
of ragged wild blue flower
and put them in my kitchen
in a jar.

The essence of old Japan is conveyed through the character of old Mrs. Kawabata. Her act is full of humanity and illustrates that the great distances between human beings can be overcome. She also represents the Japanese sense of natural value that resides in minute details. In this regard, one can note the presence of Zen meditative teachings which, leading to mind before language, claim for attention to phenomena, resulting in the revelation of the poetic form hidden in reality. As mentioned before (See Influences on pages 38 to 45) Zen takes one "to anything direct - rocks or bushes or people".[14] In fact, "Yase: September" allows the reader a series of inward associative excursions, and even a sudden illumination when he realizes that the simple "wild blue flower" becomes the connection between two diametrically different cultures.

Lastly, come those poems which describe Zen studies, as "Six Years" (a collection of 13 poems, 12 of them corresponding respectively to one month of the year plus an 'Envoy') written during the period from 1959 until 1964, and from 1965 until 1966 (the date of the death of Snyder's *roshi* Oda Sesso). These

poems convey Zen experiences, showing how the persona resolves the tensions brought by the historical burdens and by "the immensity of modern welfare". Zen practice (sometimes described in detail, as in "December"), is dramatized through the rhythm of repetition and the persona's absorption into his new environment, as "February", the second poem of "Six Years", illustrates:

> water taps running, the sun part out
> cleaning house sweeping floor
> knocking cobwebs off the shoji pap pap
> wiping the wood and the mats with a wet rag
> hands and knees on the veranda
> cat-prints - make them a footwiper
> of newspaper
> wash the motorcycle. fold clothes
> start a new fire under the kama.
> fill Mrs. Hosaka's kerosene stove tank,
> get the cat hairs
> out of the kotatsu.
> take the sheets in from the bamboo poles
> where they're drying
> put away the poles
> stand them up below the eaves and
> tie them with strings.
> scrub out the floor of the bath and move the
> mirror
> and towel rack
> sweep out the genkan footprints
> oil the clutch cable of the motorcycle
> through the oil nipple under the handle grip
> -take off sweater now because it's
> too hot
> put back on the denim jacket work
> Nansen mews angrily because he feels so sick
> all the different animals are persons
>
> what will I do about *Liberation*.
> bath
> charcoal. black. the fire part red
> the ash pure white

One aspect of the Zen doctrine present in "February" is the person's attentiveness in the daily work to the immediate

task at hand. In the poem one notes the acute awareness of subject/object interrelationships, when daily activities are "pervaded by mindfulness". The work is purely work, without the separation between intellectual interior life and exterior activities. This discipline - an attitude of the mind - assures the persona to become one with what he is doing, not losing "anything of the mind thereby".

As SNYDER himself comments about "February",

> [...] it is about doing a lot of little chores around the house. It is very close to what I am thinking of, in a very obvious way, of the act and the thought being together. And, in that sense, there is a body - mind dualism if I am sweeping the floor and thinking about Hegel. But if I am sweeping the floor and thinking about sweeping the floor, I am all one. And that is not trivial, nor is the sensation of it trivial. Sweeping the floor becomes, then, the most important thing in the world. Which it is.[15]

"February" reflects Zen's sensibility, focusing especially on the importance of work. One has to observe that if in *Far West* the theme of the importance of work already appeared (presented, for instance in the poems "After Work" and "Trail Crew Camp...", already analyzed) now in *Far East* this theme is broadened by a Zen perspective. Through spontaneous and pragmatic actions, "February" illustrates the typical Zen response, describing the persona's direct attention to the details of physical life. It presents a persona completely integrated to the activities he is developing in the course of one day, becoming "one" with what he is doing; it shows that there is no interference of intellectual thinking while the hard, purely physical labor is done and, thus, neither expectancy nor frustration.

The description of the work accomplished, presented through a list of verbs/actions developed, calls the reader's attention to the philosophical meaning hidden in labor. The poem reveals that inner transformations may arise from outward events.

Regarding the poem's content, one can point out that in "February" there are shifts from external activities to internal thoughts. Taking these shifts into account, the poem may be divided into six parts, as follows:

line 1 = impersonal description of the weather;
line 2 to 23 = series of verbs describing one's varied activities;
line 24 to 26 = the persona refers to himself in an indirect way;
lines 27/28 = the cat (Nansen) leads to a philosophical thought;
line 29 = the speaker presents a personal thought;
lines 30 to 32 = impersonal description of the day's ending.

One may notice that a cyclical movement is described in the poem, from the beginning of a day up to its ending, conveyed through the closural image of the fire and the ashes, which imprints a philosophical meaning to the quotidian labor and its repetition.

As a descriptive poem, "February" presents a sequence of activities through a series of verbs in the gerund ["cleaning", "sweeping", "knocking", "wiping"], followed by other verbs in the infinitive form ["make", "wash", "fold", "start", "fill", "get", "move", "oil"] and by some phrasal verbs ["take in", "put away", "stand up", "scrub out", "sweep out"]. These verbs are presented in an impersonal way, through ellipses, with the omission of the pronoun 'I' up to line 29 (thus stressing the change from external to internal reality); it reflects Pound's teachings and also Zen's suggestions that the poet must "leave things out of his statements". As a result, "February"'s content appears through a series of associative chains of significance and its reflective lyrics gradually form a larger framework which incorporates the thoughtful mind as an integrated part of the physical labor developed in a day.

The placement of the lines on the page, with some white spaces, suggest how these lines are to be read; in this sense, space means time and the marginal indentations indicate the voice and breath emphasis.

Although apparently a list of activities accomplished by a person, "February" has some symbolic implications which are assured especially by its three last lines: "6:30 bath/ charcoal. black. the fire part red/ the ashes pure white". A connection between the poem's first line, where "the sun part out" is presented, is established with the addition of the hour "6:30" as if representing the conclusion of a day. After the

description of a series of physical activities the word "bath" appears, suggesting a symbolic 'rebirth', for after an immersion in water one emerges regenerated, restored and purified. The symbolism of the two last lines can be divided into three elements:

- the black charcoal, which is the symbol of the hidden fire, the hidden energy, the control of the spiritual power; it also conveys the transmutation from black into red. The black color, as opposed to white, symbolizes both 'absence' (of color) and the 'absolute' (the mixture of all colors);

- the red fire, which symbolizes purification, conveys spiritual enlightenment and zeal; emanating from the sun, it represents a ray of light. It is an agent of transmutation, since things derive from fire and return to it. One can read the fire as the "mediator" between vanishing and appearing forms. The red color is the symbol of fire, light, purification and resurrection. As in the poem's context, the red is the color between night and day (sunset/sunrise);

- the white ashes represent the "residual value", the remains of fire; symbolizing the eternal return and the self purification. The white color symbolizes purity, hope illumination, revelation and eternal life; it is related to consciousness and peace, conveying a mutation or a rebirth.

Much of the symbolic effect of "February" is concentrated in these two last lines, which have a marked indefiniteness and restraint, allowing the reader open interpretations. The spontaneity of these final images,

presented as if dispersed thoughts, connote liberation, even "answering" the persona's concern for "Liberation".

"February" illustrates that Zen is "a way of using the mind", viewing daily life as a way to go deeply into the self to find its foundation, stressing the close correspondence between the external and internal landscapes. Through a disciplined activity, things, as described in the poem, acquire a wider significance, becoming processes themselves, and not mere mechanical, ordinary activities. Comparing Japanese's behavior with Americans, SNYDER once emphasized the importance Orientals give to work:

> If there is any thing that's unhealthy in America, it is that it is a whole civilization trying to get out of work - [...] There is a triple alienation when you try to avoid work: first, you're trying to get outside energy sources/resources to do it for you; second, you no longer know what your own body can do, where your food and water come from; third, you lose the capacity to discover the unity of mind and body via your work".[16]

Thus, in the end of "February" one sees that work is a source of spiritual energy, which purificates the inner self. Physical labor is but a process for a constant renewal of energy. This is the content of the brief enlightenment, the sudden illumination (in Zen terms "kensho") the persona experiences while watching the fire. Paying careful attention to the immediate, this persona happens to "lose his ego", becoming selfless to find freedom and affect the so desired "liberation". In sum, despite its concreteness and simplicity, "February" expresses a deep philosophical apprehension, affirming the possible reconciliation of opposites (such as black/white and body/mind) via a discipline of thought.

2.3 KALI

> The roaring of lions, the howling of wolves, the raging of the stormy sea, and the destructive sword, are portions of eternity too great for the eye of man.
>
> W. Blake

Between the years of 1961 and 1962 Gary Snyder and his friends Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky spent six months traveling through India. This experience was captured in the third section of **The Back Country**, named after the Hindu goddess of destruction and creation: Kali. Besides this trip to India, one can add that Snyder's interest in Indian religious texts - Shaivism and Tibetan Buddhism - also influenced the writing of *Kali*.

Compared to the two previous sections of the book, *Kali* strikes the reader by its depiction of aspects of "life laid bare". If in *Far West* and *Far East* one had a positive and life-affirming tone, conveyed through the American wilderness and through Zen doctrine respectively, in *Kali* the prevalent tone is negative, for India comes to represent the demonic hell or "a horrific hell on earth", which functions as the catalyst for the hero's inner struggle. This section of **The Back Country** depicts India's people inhumanity, their absolute poverty, the lack of privacy and the coalescence of passivity and violence.

While reading *Kali*, the Indian concept of *maya*, which proposes a subtle balance of "terror and delight, pain and joy", helps us to understand the insertion of such a negative section in **The Back Country**. Thus, to the same extent that *Far*

West and *Far East* introduce and convey positive potentialities, *Kali* does the opposite, working as a way of balance, and illustrating that the complete process for the attainment of psychic wholeness includes also the knowledge (and the further acting out) of demonic potentials of the unconscious. Besides that, much of the negative tone of *Kali* comes from the fact that this third section of the book expresses the fear that cycles may not progress, considering the Hindu vision of all "as fleeting illusion bound to the wheel of Maya" as actually true.

In Indian mythology Kali is the earth-mother and the goddess of death. Also called "The Black One", she is depicted as black, and always associated with dark and obscene rites. Kali is the Cosmic Power, "the totality of the Universe, the harmonization of all pairs of opposites, combining wonderfully the terror of absolute destruction with an impersonal yet motherly reassurance".[17] The goddess congregates dual aspects - the terrible and the benign, the angelic and the demonic. According to CAMPBELL: "Her four arms exhibited the symbols of her universal power: the upper left hand brandishing a bloody saber, the lower gripping by the hair a severed human head; the upper right was lifted in the 'fear not' gesture, the lower extended in bestowal of boons".[18]

Despite its negative tone, *Kali* offers the reader an extreme richness of content, exploring varied subject matters. Some poems collected in *Kali* depict the debasement of man, the human carrion, as it is the case of "The Truth Like the Belly

of a Woman Turning" (which describes negative circumstances, the repression of creativity, the denial of human potential, the sense of "time wasted and energies lost"), "Wandering the Old, Dirty Countries", "Circumambulating Arunachala" and "On Our Way to Khajuraho" (which depicts the effects of the caste system). In these poems the persona experiences his "dark night of the soul", learning either from the social situations he witnesses or from his personal struggle against spiritual failure and uncertainty. In this sense, India dramatizes a psychic journey, representing the ideal 'landscape of evil' where people, due to extremely bad economic and social conditions, live in misery.

Kali, through its pictures of the terrifying "rawness of human existence", of India's poverty and of its people's suffering, happens to be the record of a journey to the underworld; in this process, the outward journey becomes the extension of the persona's journey into his own mind (the external equals the internal landscape), after his recognition that the same chaos one sees in the streets exists also inside ourselves. "Wandering the Old, Dirty Countries" illustrates the decay and dirt prevalent in India:

> - in your clean overalls
> who's poor?
> Evtushenko or the
> shop foreman won't say.
> I'm not speaking for America,
> But for poets -
> well yes malnutrition
> Bad teeth, shit-stained babies
> Flies around the eyes,
> And nobody pities them
> but the humanist bourgeoisie

and the Komsomol kids.

over the jolting buses
Bustards loosefeathered
Vultures hunched on hills

That fat baby flesh, *khol* eyes
feed them well.
Them soviets, them
men
Helping.

Through an overtly critical tone, ironically speaking "for poets", this poem denounces the human degradation in India and calls people's attention to the miserable conditions men survive in the world. As SNYDER himself declared, regarding the poet's commitment to social problems: "You have to act in the world. To act responsibly in the world doesn't mean that you always stand back and let things happen: you play an active part, which means making choices, running risks, and karmically dirtying your hands to some extent".[19] Having the writer's words in mind, one can state that this poem, for its striking effect denouncing a sad reality, is a way one has to "act in the world". At last, one may observe that in "Wandering the Old, Dirty Countries" the presentation of true images of misery is reinforced by symbolic figures such as the vultures which, as devourers of corpses (resembling the Great Goddess) evoke evil characteristics.

Besides the debasement of man expressed through the picture of the country's situation, one can state that another theme recurrent in *Kali* is the sense of life's transience as in "Looking at Pictures to be Put Away" and, for instance, in "What do They Say":

The glimpse of a once-loved face
gone into a train.
Lost in a new town, no one knows the name.
lone man sitting in the park
Chanced on by a friend
of thirty years before,
what do they say.
Play chess with bottle caps.
"for sale" sign standing in the field:
dearest, dearest,
Soot on the sill,
a garden full of weeds

"What do they Say" conveys the problem of aging, the passing of time and of man's inevitable mortality. The poem presents images of absence ("once-loved face/ gone into a train), the individual's isolation and loneliness ("lost in a new town/ (...) lone man sitting in the park"), the inability to communicate one's feelings ("what do they say"), and the fact that man, like things, become worn out ("Soot on the sill, / a garden full of weeds").

Two other themes to be pointed out as recurrent in *Kali* are the hell of drunkenness, as in "A Dry Day Just Before the Rainy Season", and the pleasures and dangers of drugs, as in "Maya", a poem dedicated to Peter Orlovsky:

white clothes - white skin -
white cows-
the dream of India-
and flowers-
teeth stained red,
hair silver
like that old Jain jeweller
wouldn't touch meat

a little *O* now and then

The title of the poem is very suggestive, for in Hindu philosophy the word 'maya' means "illusion" (often personified as a woman). Thus, one sees that drugs, in spite of bringing a temporary delight and an escape from suffering, are "similar to other earthly pleasures", enslaving men, keeping them - in Hindu terms - "on the wheel of birth and death".

Finally, the most important theme developed in *Kali* - as one can infer from the title of this section of **The Back Country** - refers to feminine functions, the "mysteriousness, grace and quiet power of women", illustrating the poet's identification with woman's psychological, biological and cultural position. This theme unfolds in several aspects: a) social problems such as prostitution (as in "Kyoto Footnote"), b) sexuality and love-making (as in "Night", "How Many Times", "Lying in Bed on a Late Morning", "The Manichaeans" and "For a Stone Girl at Sanchi"), c) a lost love (as in "Alysoun" and "Robin") and d) the mythical figure of woman (as in "Mother of the Buddhas", "Artemis" and "To Hell with your Fertility Cult").

In most of these poems Snyder's approach to the human body and to sexuality is "anti-Romantic": direct, commenting on details of love-making. To the writer, woman and the sexual intercourse are ways for experiencing the universe as a sacrament; thus, the lover's bed becomes "the place in which contemporary man enacts the dances and ritual dramas of the primitive".[20] The sexual act is considered more a spiritual

communion between two people than only a physical relationship, as "The Manichaeans" illustrates:

Our portion of fire
at this end of the milky way
(the Tun-huang fragments say, Eternal Light)
Two million years from M 31
the galaxy in Andromeda -
My eyes sting with these relics.
Fingers mark time.
semen is everywhere
Two million seeds in a spurt.

Bringing hand close to your belly
a shade off touching,
Until it feels the radiating warmth.

Your far off laughter
Is an earthquake in your thigh.
Coild like Ourabouros
we are the Naga King
This bed is Eternal Chaos
- and wake in a stream of light.

Cable-car cables
Whip over their greast rollers
Two feet underground.
hemmed in by mysteries
all moving in order.
A moment at this wide intersection,
Stoplights change, they are
catastrophes among stars,
A red whorl of minotaurs
gone out.
The trumpet of doom
from a steamship at Pier 41.

Your room is cold,
in the shade-drawn dusk inside
Light the oven, leave it open
Semi transparent jet flames rise
fire,
Together we make eight pounds of
Pure white mineral ash.

Your body is fossil
As you rest with your chin back
- your arms are still flippers
your lidded eyes lift *from a swamp*
Let us touch - for if two lie together
Then they have warmth.

We shall sink in this heat
of our arms
Blankets like rock-strata fold
dreaming as
Shiva and Shakti
And keep back the cold.

Through a practical and realistic tone, "The Manichaeans" relates the sense of human life to the act of love-making, considering that since man's mortality is inevitable one has to enjoy the present day. Contrary to its title, the poem describes the opposite of the Manichaeans' principles - which proposed that the denial of sensual pleasures is rewarded by immediate happiness after death - and thus ironically suggests that to make love is an enjoyable way to escape from life's shortness and temporality.

The Manichaeans' religious philosophy advocates that life depends on two contending principles of good (light, God, the soul) and evil (darkness, Satan, the body). In the poem these complementary principles are conveyed by symbols with ambivalent meanings such as: a) fire, which represents the origin and the end of all things, good (heat, vital energy) and evil (destruction), the body (the flames of erotic passion) and the soul (the essence of life); b) the milky way, linking the celestial (heaven) to the terrestrial (earth) world, represents the boundaries between a world of movement and motionless eternity; c) the Ourabouros, the snake (or dragon) who bites its own tail; its body is half-light and half-dark and it stands for Cosmic Unity, representing Time and Eternity, the organized universe as the opposite of the initial Chaos; d)

Chaos, the pristine stage of yet unorganized creation containing all opposing forces, represents the anarchic stage of a formless world and the dissolution of forms; e) the fossil, symbolizing both death and life, time and eternity, evolution and petrification. Finally, conveying the fusion of 'opposites', the union of the Indian mythological figures of Shiva (the Father) and Shakti (the Mother), suggesting that through sexual intercourse the two lovers of "The Manichaeans", become one again, attaining the 'original unity'.[21]

Regarding the lost love theme, several poems are about unhappy affairs, unsuccessful marriages, and incidents of unsatisfactory relationships with women, conveying the necessary loss the persona has to undergo to be saved. Commenting about these poems PARKINSON has stated that most of them come "from a wandering man, wandering in his travels, wayfaring in his sexuality, solitary, exploratory, inconstant, seaman and bindlestiff, finding his true Penelope only in the world of poetry and thought. Like much of Snyder's work, these poems have the quality of a very good *Bildungsroman*".[22] The poem "Robin" is a very good example of the lost love theme in *Kali:*

> I always miss you -
> last fall, back from the mountains
> you'd left San Francisco
> now I'm going north again
> as you go south.
>
> I sit by a fire at the ocean.
> How many times I've
> hitchhiked away;
> the same pack on my back.
>
> Rain patters on the rhododendron

cloud sweeps in from the sea over sand dunes
and stoopt lodgepole pine.

Thinking of the years since we parted.
last week I dreamed of you -
buying a bag of groceries
for Hatch.

This poem (which was written in Sutton Lake, Oregon, on 16 June, 1954), is dedicated to Snyder's first wife Alison Gass whose nickname was "Robin". The use of literal speech helps to convey that facts and images describe a "real experience"; thus mingling loneliness with nostalgia, the persona remembers past things, his lost love and his 'dreams' with the woman he misses so much. Even the form of the poem reinforces its content: memories from the past - as conveyed by lines 2-3 ("last fall...") and 14-15-16 ("last week...") - come before and after the lines which describe the events in the present time - from line 4 to 13 ("now...") - as if illustrating that the persona of the poem still feels himself entangled in his past.

Finally, to illustrate the poems which explore woman as a mythical figure one can point out the poem "Mother of the Buddhas, Queen of Heaven, Mother of the Sun; Marici, Goddess of the Dawn":

old sow in the mud
bristles caked black
down her powerful neck

tiny hooves churn
squat body slithering
deep in food dirt

her warm filth,
deep-plowing snout,
dragging teats

those who keep her
or eat her
are cast out

she turns her small eye
from earth to
look up at me.

Snyder once declared that to be a poet one has "to be tuned into some of the darkest and scariest sides of your own nature. And for a male, the darkest and scariest is the destructive side of the female".[23] This quotation serves as a key to the interpretation of "Mother of the Buddhas..." which unearths "the depths of human degradation" and the "destructive side of the female" through the symbolic figure of the Great Goddess - which is considered a source of primitive power, even prior to civilization.

The poem conveys an intensified sense of decay and dirt, through the symbolic reference to the Mother of the Buddhas (who resembles Kali) as an old sow. The symbolic meaning of this animal is extremely rich: the sow has a great fecundity, but may eat her young; as a devourer of corpses, the sow symbolizes the feminine principle devouring the male/hero. As CAMPBELL states, "The universal goddess makes her appearance to men under a multitude of guises; for the effects of creation are multitudinous, complex [...]. The mother of life is at the same time the mother of death; she is masked in the ugly demonesses of famine and disease".[24]

In primitive societies the Great Mother was considered the main element in the formation of the universe. She had a triple function: as a mother, as a sister/wife, and as a layer-

out (while man has the minor role of fertilizer). Among the most common forms the goddess takes is the sow-headed figure, symbolizing "multiplicity" (as the prolific sow) and "destruction" (since the sow feeds on corpses).

Further, the goddess represents the creative and redemptive roles of the female power a) on a cosmic scale as the Mother of the Universe; b) on the human plane as the Mother of the Hero. This mythical feminine figure is the paragon of beauty, the reply to all desires. She is mother, sister, mistress, bride, the comforting, the nourishing "mother figure" - the good or punishing mother, the desired but forbidden mother (Oedipus complex). Her presence is a lure to dangerous desires (castration complex) - she is both the chaste and the terrible.

In "Mother of the Buddhas..." the feminine figure acquires ambivalent connotations, admitting both readings, as the mythological figure of the Universal Mother who "imputes to the cosmos the feminine attributes of the first, nourishing and protecting presence"[25] and as the archetype of the Terrible Mother, the *anima*, which represents the repressed feminine part in a man. In the poem the persona owes to the goddess his birth (to be born is to come out of the womb) and, paradoxically, his death (to die is to return to earth).

The fifteen lines of "Mother of the Buddhas..." (symmetrically arranged into five stanzas) may be divided into two sections, according to the poem's content:

- the first three stanzas depicting the physical appearance of the Goddess, while the fourth comments on the Goddess's power;

- the last stanza establishing the relationship between the goddess and the persona in the poem.

This division makes the last stanza have a striking effect, since the closural image, introducing the persona in the context of the poem, comes after a listing of qualities centered in the goddess, with the intensification of this sudden shift from the goddess to the speaker.

In "Mother of the Buddhas..." one notes that Snyder's poetic diction tends to favour hard and precise monosyllables; the use of short words - a tough diction - conveys brevity and concreteness. Most of the lines have at most three stressed syllables, thus creating a light rhythmical movement, illustrating Snyder's tendency to favour precise monosyllables as opposed to "Latinate and polysyllabic".

The selection of images, organized in a multiplication of details around a central image, as if clustering around the goddess figure, increases the visual appeal. In fact, the poem is constructed upon a single metaphor: the sow is the goddess who causes the birth/destruction of her own son, implying several philosophical implications.

2.4 BACK

The poet holds the dark and the light in mind, together.

G. Snyder

Back, a collection of thirteen poems, is the title of the fourth and last section of **The Back Country**. In this section the persona is coming back to his place of origin - the far West. In fact, the reading of *Back* reveals that the trips described in *Far East* and *Kali* broadened the poet's knowledge about internal and external experiences and *Back* happens to be the ultimate synthesis of all the experiences and thoughts brought by these travels, allied to the poet's previous knowledge about nature and wilderness once described in *Far West*.

Although most of the *Back* poems present the same setting and atmosphere already depicted in *Far West*, this last part of the book is differentiated from the first one for its prophetic tone, offering the reader a cosmic perspective. *Back* is much more political than the previous sections, as if the persona, after having witnessed so many social problems, were now giving advice which could fit both East and West.

In terms of setting, most of the poems included in *Back* convey the atmosphere of the American Western region, once again mentioning real places, such as Lamark Col, Uintah mountains, Vallejo, Birch Bay and Samish Bay. Back to the same scenery once described in *Far West*, the persona now presents his experiences and perceptions with "a more comprehensive view". ALTIERI argues that *Back* reveals the cosmic perspective through the inverted mirror image:

> The mirror gathers and reflects what it regards without disturbing or altering it, yet it also creates another dimension, a composed and peaceful surface apart from what it contains. In possessing what is before it, the mirror creates a wholeness and a reality

> beyond what is imaged. The mediation of an act like "watching" creates a space similar to that of the poem, apart from and transcending his particulars - not into any symbolic depth "beyond" but into another ground of relationships inverted and infinite, though not symbolic. The mirror is an analogue of the Zen Void, which is not emptiness but a one-dimensional plenitude. Everything is contained in a single surface that in another sense is not really there at all.[26]

Regarding the themes presented in *Back*, most of them are a repetition of those already developed in **The Back Country's** previous sections, but with a new approach to them. Firstly, one can point out the love theme. In *Back*, that persona who once described experiences of failed love affairs, so frequent in the other three sections of the book, gives place to a persona who re-discovers love, now considering the beloved person and the act of love-making as an opportunity to face the universe as sacramental. Love is seen as worship, as in the following poems: "August was Foggy", "Beneath my Hand and Eye the Distant Hills, your Body" and, for instance, "The Plum Blossom Poem":

> Angel island.
> The sailboat slopping barely west,
> Floating over coiling
> tongues of filling mud.
> East face of the Sierra still is
> tilting;
> Two plums below Buchanan street
> on Vallejo
> Blow blossom petals
> eastward down the walk.
> We hold and caress each other
> Where a world is yet unborn;
> Long slow swells in the Pacific -
> the land drifts north.

Here the image of the plum blossom, which is the symbol of fertility and resurrection, is extremely suggestive: the plum tree flourishes in the end of the winter season, its

blossom stands for spring and, hence, for rebirth and immortality. In this sense, this poem conveys one of the most marked characteristics of *Back*, which is this atmosphere of renewal.[27] In "The Plum Blossom Poem" the sequence of images is presented through intervals of white space (indicating timing); this nonassertive technique does not 'interfere' in the persona's experience, but gives rise to a subtle rhythmic contour.

Another theme present in *Back* is related to the persona's travels as a merchant seaman, in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, as in "7.IV.64" and in "Twelve Hours Out of New York After Twenty Five Days at Sea":

> The sun always setting behind us.
> I did not mean to come this far.
> - baseball games on the radio
> commercials that turn your hair -
> The last time I sailed this coast
> Was nineteen forty eight
> Washing galley dishes
> reading Gide in French.
> In the rucksack I've got three *nata*
> Handaxes from central Japan;
> The square blade found in China
> all the way back to Stone -
> A novel by Kafu NAGAI
> About geisha in nineteen-ten
> With a long thing about gardens
> And how they change through the year;
> Azalea ought to be blooming
> in the yard in Kyoto now.
> Now we are north of Cape Hatteras
> Tomorrow docking at eight.
> mop the deck round the steering gear,
> Pack your stuff and get paid.

"Twelve Hours..." expresses subjective thoughts of a persona who 'travels' through time, presenting to the reader shifts from past time ["The last time I sailed this coast/ Was

nineteen forty eight"], present time ["In the rucksack I've got three nata"], and future time ["Tomorrow docking at eight"]. Besides these changes in time, also remarkable is the clash between contrasting images such as the "baseball games on the radio/ commercials that turn your hair" and the azalea (a herald of spring) that "ought to be blooming in the yard in Kyoto".

While reading "Twelve Hours...", one may observe that the theme of reverence for work returns and, since in this poem, the persona brings back three important things from his trip: handaxes (from Japan), a square blade (from China) and a novel. The allusion to these implements reinforce the importance of manual work as an extension to self (as already presented in the other sections of the book) and illustrates the universal value of tools (that in this poem function as a link between two different cultures). As SNYDER once declared:

> From many people I learned the practice of how to handle your tools, clean them, put them back; how to work together with other men and women; how to work as hard as you can when it's time for you to work, and how to play together afterwards. I learned this from the people to whom I dedicated my first book, **Riprap**. I came also to a specific spiritual practice, Buddhism, which has some extraordinary teachings within it. The whole world is practicing together; it is not rare or uncomon for people who are living their lives in the world, doing the things they must do, if they have not been degraded or oppressed, to be fully conscious of the dignity and pride of their life and their work. [28]

Regarding the poems concerned with political matters present in *Back*, one can mention "To the Chinese Comrades", a collection of 8 poems about Communism in China, as "Chairman Mao", quoted below, illustrates:

Chairman Mao, you should quit smoking.
Dont bother those philosophers
Build dams, plant trees,
dont kill flies by hand.
Marx was another westerner.
it's all in the head.
You dont need the bomb.
stick to farming.
Write some poems. Swim the river.
those blue overalls are great.
Dont shoot me, let's go drinking.
just
Wait.

Presenting the persona's direct suggestions to the Chinese Communist leader Mao Tse Tung (1893 - 1976), this poem works as a literary response to some socio-political events related to Communism in China. Differently from other poems of **The Back Country**, which subtly expressed political concerns, "Chairman Mao..." reflects the writer's political commitment through an open (and ironic) criticism of both Western and Eastern political systems. In terms of language, this poem calls the reader's attention by the ironical tone of the persona's discourse, addressing Mao as if a personal friend and giving him direct advice. Another remarkable feature of "Chairman Mao" is the indefinitness of its last line - "just wait" -, which strikingly reinforces the suggestive power of the whole poem.

Besides this political interest, some poems of *Back* denounce the wilderness' destruction, calling the reader's attention to the fact that a healthy society depends on a balance between civilization and wilderness as, for instance, "For the West", whose third and last part is quoted here:

Ah, that's America:
the flowery glistening oil blossom
spreading on water -
it was so tiny, nothing, now it keeps expanding
all those colors,
our world
opening inside outward toward us,
each part swelling and turning
who would have thought such turning;
as it covers,
the colors fade.
and the fantastic patterns
fade.
I see down again through clear water.

it is the same
ball bounce rhyme the
little girl was singing,
all those years.

Comparing Western civilization, and "America" in particular, to a "flowery glistening oil blossom/ spreading on water", this poem conveys the importance of a connection between wilderness (a source of "strength, inspiration and vigor") and civilization (the source of "culture and arts"), arguing that, otherwise, a people become "weak and dull" and the ecological consequences of progress and civilization become out of control. Depicting this dichotomy between civilization and nature, and the destruction of the wild scenery as an act of desecration and sacrilege, "For The West" becomes a political discourse in which the speaker sees "down again through clear water". As SNYDER stated, regarding his concerns for the preservation of nature:

> My political position is to be a spokesman for wild nature. I take that as a primary constituency. [...] It's a position simply of advocacy, taking the role of being the advocate for a realm for which few men will stand up. Some must be a spokesman for that, and

> I think that poets are better prepared to be the spokesman for that than most people are.[29]

Besides this concern for nature, the preservation of Indian culture also constitutes one of the themes developed in *Back*, as the poem "Through a Smoke Hole" illustrates:

> There is another world above this one; or outside of this one; the
> way to it is thru the smoke of this one, & the hole that smoke goes through. The ladder is the way through the smoke hole; the ladder holds up, some way, the world above; it might have been a tree or pole; I think it is merely a way.
>
> Fire is at the foot of the ladder. The fire is in the center. The walls
> are around. There is also another world below or inside this one. The way there is down thru smoke. It is not necessary to think of a series.
>
> Raven and Magpie do not need the ladder. They fly thru the smoke holes shrieking and stealing. Coyote falls thru; we recognize him only as a clumsy relative, a father in old clothes we don't wish
> to see with our friends.
>
> It is possible to cultivate the fields of our own world without much
> thought for the others. When men emerge from below we see them as masked dancers of our magic dream. When men disappear down, we see them as plain men going somewhere else. When men disappear up we see them as great heroes shining through the smoke. When men come back from above they fall thru and tumble; we don't really know them; Coyote, as men-
> tioned before.

Based on Hopi Indian cosmology and symbology, in this poem the "hole", that can be interpreted as a door, allows one to escape from the difficulties of the material world on earth; it also shows that Indians consider life as a ceaseless process of "growth and development" in which the individual evolves outward toward new forms. For the Hopi there were four successive worlds, which supports the conception of a multi-

levelled "reality" (that can be read as the different mental realms of our psychic life, the "doors" or perception and consciousness). The presence of mythological figures, such as the Raven (the black carrion bird which symbolizes the solitary demiurge), the Magpie (the noisy black-and-white bird, which symbolizes the talkative and the mischievous stealer) and the Coyote (the trickster-like figure) help to reinforce the content of the poem which requires a symbolic interpretation.

"Through the Smoke Hole" conveys the writer's interest for the cultural and for the archaic past of the American Indian. As STEUDING confirms "the Indian first led him [Snyder] to the Orient, and the Indian has seemingly led him back".[30] Having these words in mind one may observe that **The Back Country** starts with a poem that presents Indian's mythology ("A Berry Feast", previously discussed) and, purposely or not, includes the same theme in its ending, since "Through a Smoke Hole" is the penultimate poem of the whole book, thus reinforcing the writer's concern for the "mutual plight of white man and Indian." As SNYDER's words corroborate:

> We won't be white men a thousand years from now. We won't be white men *fifty* years from now. Our whole culture is going someplace else. The work of poetry is to capture those areas of the consciousness which belong to the American continent, the non-white world...[...] this world of mythology and intuitive insight that belongs to primitive culture.[31]

Finally, the last poem of *Back*, entitled "Oysters", deserves special considerations:

> First Samish Bay.
> then all morning, hunting oysters

A huge feed on white
wood State Park slab-plank bench-
and table
at Birch Bay
where we picked up rocks
for presents.

And ate oysters, fried - raw - cookt in milk
rolld in crumbs -
all we wanted.

ALL WE WANTED

& got back in our wagon,

drove away

This poem synthesizes a dialectical method through which "plenitude" and "change" are reconciled. Achieving plenitude often means either that one has to renounce change (as in Christianity, which promises plenitude "at the cost of renouncing flux") or that, through ascetic practice, one has to reject "all desire for plenitude" (as in Eastern religions). "Oysters" shows how these two conditions can coexist as necessary and even complementary: the feast can be fully enjoyed in its simplicity as an event in the present, not to be spoiled by any desire to transcend its meaning. The plenitude of the act is not imprisoning, allowing the persona of the poem to move on, experiencing change. The poem thus conveys a sense that one can change without any fear, for plenitude is not a state to be found only in the 'future', or as a result of ascetic practice: it can be experienced when one accepts and lives the present in its entirety.

Besides the philosophical elements present in "Oysters", the poem also touches on the social problem of

Western culture which entraps men into a mechanical way of life. The sentence "ALL WE WANTED" shows that the persona obtains full satisfaction from a very simple act, which contrasts with the materialistic way of life criticized along the book. This persona is free of any possession, controlling "his own destiny". This sentence works as a subtle criticism, for "to have all one wants" is the American dream, while in "Oysters" the persona proves to have overcome this dream.

"Oysters" seems to summarize the whole movement described by the persona since this poem presents a new way of achieving "all we wanted", reconciling the knowledge acquired from the experiences in the wilderness, with the wanderings Eastward.

As it is concluding a cyclical movement, "Oysters" returns the reader to the simplicity of **The Back Country**'s opening poems, reinforcing the cosmic perspective of apparently meaningless acts (such as eating), and illustrating that the consciousness about nature and life's real values depend on a continuing and open ended process. Curiously, the theme of eating appears in **The Back Country**'s first poem "A Berry Feast", and also in "Oysters". As the Ancient Chinese proverb says: "Nothing belongs to you until you have eaten it", thus the act of eating, although apparently devoid of a philosophical meaning, represents the total absorption of something which then 'belongs' effectively to you. In "Oysters" there is even an intensification of this act which is

reinforced by the listing of "oysters, fried - raw - cookt in milk/ rolld in crumbs."

Much of the poem's richness of meaning comes from its symbolic appeal. Despite being one of the lowest forms of animal life, the oyster represents man's entirety formed by the body (shell) and the soul (pearl). The shell represents the external appearance, the rough shape, while the pearl represents the essence, the spiritual perfection. Each oyster (like each man) has potentially a 'pearl' inside itself. The oyster symbolizes humility, patient labor, since it simply opens with the sun, and stores "internal richness"; it conveys the transfiguration of elements, the spiritualization of material things, and the perfection at the ending of a process of evolution. Thus, as the last poem of the whole collection, "Oysters" beautifully conveys the completion of a journey which, according to Snyder himself[32] "does complete a circle".

NOTES TO INTO **THE BACK COUNTRY**

[1] Published by New Directions Books and Fulcrum Press, respectively. See *Appendix III* for further information about critical reviews on **The Back Country**.

[2] ALTIERI, Charles. **Enlarging the temple**, new directions in American poetry during the 1960's. London: Lewinsburg-Bucknell University Press, 1979. p. 138.

[3] STEUDING, Bob. **Gary Snyder**, Boston: Twayne. p. 17.

[4] It is important to emphasize that Snyder himself, while in college, worked with the Forest Service and in logging camps, acquiring him a deep knowledge about the life of the Pacific Northwest, including Indian culture.

[5] STEUDING, p. 30.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 113.

[7] **Harvard guide to American writing**, Daniel Hoffmann (ed.) Harvard, United States: The Belknap Press, 1979. p. 522.

[8] As examples of "mountain poems" in *Far West* one can mention: "August on Sourdough, a Visit from Dick Brewer", "Trail Crew Camp at Bear Valley", "Burning the Small Dead", and also "For the Boy who was Dodger Point Lookout Fifteen Years Ago".

[9] PARKINSON, Thomas "The Poetry of Gary Snyder" In: Forum Series vol. 2 **American writing today**. R. Kostelanetz (ed.), New York: 1982. p. 150.

[10] Here one notices that Snyder's perception of wilderness - which is mystical and pre-scientific - is influenced by the Buddhist principles of 'oneness' (which poses that men are part of a great oneness) and that "all is mind"- a oneness with the universe which comes from the assimilation of the world by the mind.

[11] SNYDER, G. **The real work**, interviews and talks 1964/1979, New York: New Directions, 1980. p. 153.

[12] *Ibid*, p. 153.

[13] SNYDER, **The real work** p. xviii.

[14] SNYDER, **Earth house hold**, New York: New Directions Books, 1969, p. 34.

[15] SNYDER, **The real work**, p. 7.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 103.

[17] CAMPBELL, Joseph. **The hero with a thousand faces**, Princeton New Jersey, Bollingen Printing,1973. p. 115.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 115. Explaining the symbolism of Kali, CAMPBELL (p. 17) adds that: "She brandishes the sword of death, i.e., spiritual discipline. The blood-dripping human head tells the devotee that he had loseth his life for her sake shall find it. The gestures of 'fear not' and 'bestowing of boons teach that she protects her children, that the pair of opposites of the universal agony are not what they seem, and that for one centered in eternity the phantasmagoria of temporal 'goods' and 'evils' is but a reflex of the mind".

[19] SNYDER, **The real work**, p. 106/107.

[20] STEUDING, p. 143.

[21] "The Manichaeans" resembles the well-known poem "To His Coy Mistress", by Andrew Marvel (1621 - 1678) - for the theme of both is the principle of 'carpe diem'.(For further comparisons see Marvel's poem in: **The Oxford Book of English , Verse** - 1250 - 1918. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1953 p. 399.

[22] PARKINSON, p. 150.

[23] SNYDER, **The real work**, p. 80.

[24] CAMPBELL, p. 302-303.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 113.

[26] ALTIERI, p. 114.

[27] One can even argue that the four seasons of the year, conveying a cyclical movement, fit perfectly to **The Back Country**'s structure: *Far West* = Summer, a period of beauty anticipating decline, symbolizes development, the innocence of childhood; *Far East* = Fall, a period of maturity, perpetuation and decline; *Kali* = Winter, a period of spiritual death, darkness and misery; *Back* = Spring, time of rebirth, spiritual growth and rejoicing.

[28] SNYDER, **The real work**, p. 135.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 49.

[30] STEUDING, p. 101.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 102.

[32] See epigraph on page 49.

3. THE QUEST MOTIF IN **THE BACK COUNTRY**

> The agony of breaking through personal limitations is the agony of spiritual growth. Art, literature, myth and cult, philosophy, and ascetic disciplines are instruments to help the individual past his limiting horizons into spheres of ever-expanding realization. As he crosses threshold after threshold, conquering dragon after dragon, the stature of the divinity that he summons to the highest wish increases, until it subsumes the cosmos. Finally, the mind breaks the bounding spheres of the cosmos to a realization transcending all experiences of form - all symbolizations, all divinities: a realization of the ineluctable void.
>
> J. Campbell

3.1 - THE MYTHICAL APPROACH

Due to the complex and varied meanings the word "myth" evokes, it seems important to include some considerations which may elucidate in which sense I will employ the term in this mythical approach to **The Back Country**. After the investigation of the term myth and its implications, I shall also present a commentary on the main theories which involve the mythical background.

3.1.1 - Literature and Myth

The closeness between literature and myth - their formal and functional resemblances - has been discussed time and again by several critics in the analysis of writers from the Greek classical tragedians to modern novelists.

In spite of the fact that the interrelation between

myth and literature goes back to ancient times[1], a historical analysis demonstrates that the critics' interest in myth as a device for literary analysis is recent - it is a matter of the late nineteenth and twentieth century's concerns. Modern literary criticism has often pointed out that universal archetypes and mythical patterns have been used as interpretative devices which enrich and give new dimensions to literary studies; in the same way, modern and contemporary writers have been using - as theme or as structure - ancient myths or allusions to mythical elements.[2]

The interrelation between myth and literature can be established, as I see it, by several aspects, such as the formal aspect, since both are structured through a plot (and one knows that the story form is the most basic way of structuring our awareness of the world); the historical aspect, since myth and oral literature have similar roots lost in prehistory but developed according to ritualistic functions and purposes; the psychological aspect, since both involve a deliberate *belief* to reinforce, stimulate or broaden social, religious or creative convictions; and finally, the philosophical aspect, for both have the capacity - through created persons and scenes - to arouse responses and affect us, suggesting opportunities of contact with transrational powers or realms, encouraging the readers to move beyond the boundaries of place, time and cultural values.[3]

3.1.2 - Concepts of Myth

From Plato to the most recent philosophers, innumerable concepts of myth have been proposed. If one seeks for the historical development of the term, one discovers the multiple senses the word "myth" encompasses. In fact, the concept of myth has undergone a gradual transformation which caused it to be re-invented as "a matrix of transformations", standing for a series of related possibilities.

Thus, the multiple nature of the term, the range, variety and different levels of generality and abstraction it encompasses, admits several definitions, varying from fabulous inventions to deeper interpretations of the world based on scientific methods. William RIGHTER, commenting on the very difficulty of writing about the subject, states that:

> The degree of overlap in usages, the way in which contexts are subtly altered, or even the relative appropriateness of several meanings to the same context, show the difficulty of controlling the connotations of the word 'myth', not only from one occasion to another but on any occasion where complex or many sided demands are made.[4]

Myth, in the traditional sense, is considered an anonymous story (or a complex of stories) which addresses basic problems of one society or era through the presentation of a model which serves to explain or to delineate various human situations, feelings, or modes of behavior. Myths reveal the mind and character of a people, reflecting its primitive beliefs or explaining the mysteries of the natural universe. In more recent theories[5], myth is the symbolic projection of a

peoples' collective values - a communal, almost instinctive, articulation of reality - becoming symbolic of peoples "hopes, values, fears and aspirations". In sum, myth is the dramatic representation of our "deepest instinctual life", of a primary awareness of man in the universe.

RIGTHER also presents several definitions of myth from different perspectives: for Allan WATTS myth is "a complex of stories - some no doubt fact, and some fantasy - which, for various reasons, human beings regard as demonstrations of the inner meaning of the universe of human life"[6]; for Ernest CASSIRER myth is "An autonomous form of the human spirit, with its own structure, function, expression, [...] with unity of feeling"[7]; finally, another concept of myth is offered by Roland BARTHES':

> Myth does not deny things, its function, on the contrary, is to speak of them; quite simply it purifies them and makes them innocent, fixes them in nature and eternity [...] In passing from history to nature myth makes a saving: it abolishes the complexity of human action, gives it an elemental simplicity; it suppresses all dialectic or anything which takes us beyond the immediately visible [...]. Myth creates a happy clarity: things give the appearance of meaning something in their own right.[8]

From these various definitions one notes that the concept of myth will depend on the documents the scholar selects for his approach. But there are some features recurrent in myths which help us to recognize the term. In every European language, the word *myth* denotes a 'fiction and narrative often involving the activity of storytelling'. Another characteristic is that by nature, myths are collective and communal, binding the tribe together, ordering people's common psychological and

spiritual activities. Ritualistic and religious elements are also often present in myths.

Although every people in its specific cultural environment may have its own mythology (reflected in legend, folklore or ideology) myth is, in a general sense, universal. It is also ubiquitous in time as well as place, transcending time and uniting the past with the present.

What modern thought views in myth is its hidden meaning and its place among the languages of the world. In literature myths are considered always symbolic of something greater than the characters or events described in the story. Besides that, myth brings to literature order and form - there is some order intrinsic to the mythical material itself: a myth establishes a general framework (of narrative) and has a power of 'synopsis'- a simplifying form of ordering.

In literature the term "myth" may refer to the author, to his work, or to society. In some works myths are used as a central, a structural device (featured as an integral part in the conception of the material), in other works myths are used as a means of giving depth to the material presented. In most of the cases, when a myth is employed, the reader is supposedly acquainted with a basic theme, plot or structure, familiar to him via other literary expressions (tales, folklore, the Bible) and, while reading, he relates mythical allusions to real situations, and makes deductions about future developments. Thus, at the end of the reading, he recognizes a universal model for interpretation. One may conclude that the major

function of myth is then to lead the reader to a speculative situation which, in its turn, happens to create a new reading dimension. Moreover, if myth develops the familiarity to a pattern, on the other hand, it also allows openings for the imagination.

Literature uses mythological elements as "a direct source for events and characters in which transcription is the relation", or it exploits myth for stimulus to "original conceptions and formulations".[9] For the writer, myth - through its suggestive power - directs the reader's attention towards certain relationships, actions, attitudes or ideas. The decision to exploit a myth may reveal the author's conscious desire to amplify his ideas by means of analogy: he chooses myth in response to the (spiritual) interests of modern readers and thus, mythic consciousness equals a 'prophetic' consciousness. But in this process of employing mythical structures, also subconscious desires may prevail, suggesting or even determining universal or archetypal situations or qualities which then impregnate the literary work. As a result, through myth the writer touches upon primitive energies, recovers some elements of the unconscious and exposes substantial qualities inherent to the human condition. Consciously or unconsciously employed, the use of myth by a writer represents a furthering of his own creative power.

Regarding the interest in myth by critics, one sees that mythical approaches represent an extremely useful interpretative key. As John VICKERY states: "[...] whatever

anthropologists may say about the meaning of the word "myth", critics legitimately extend or alter its sense to the needs of their own discipline".[10]

The mythic critic seeks out those artifacts hidden in certain literary forms which elicit dramatic and universal elements of human behavior. Through a mythical interpretation the critic may discover how certain works of literature create (and reveal) a kind of situation to which readers give perennial response. As RIGHTER states: "The use of myth patterns, divine presences, the discovery of underlying structures of ritual origin, the assimilation of particular literary works to universal archetypes, have all become the commonplaces of modern critical practice".[11] Myth criticism is an opportunity through which the critic is linked to other disciplines, thus broadening his approach to other extra-literary knowledge. For the critic, myth serves "as a reminder of the dangers of concentrating too narrowly on limited areas and approaches"[12]; it does not offer the danger of consigning the critic to preconceived models nor prevents him from profiting from the resources of other areas such as science, sociology, philosophy, anthropology, religion and cultural history.

Thus, in order to establish the critical interpretative perspective to be employed in the analysis of **The Back Country**, I shall comment on some current mythic theories I have examined and selected, among many others, emphasizing that a mythical approach may acquire several dimensions from sociological,

religious and psychological to rhetorical and semantic ones.

3.1.3 - Mythic Theories

Several theories explain the origin and value of myth, focusing on different aspects of this term and to include all of them would carry us too far from the main objective of this Chapter. Thus, I have selected four theories - among them the metaphysical perspective, which will serve as a basis for my analysis of **The Back Country** - to illustrate how theorists have been dealing with the complexities of "myth". By including some brief comments about these theories I hope to provide the reader with some information which may serve as a substratum for comparative speculations regarding my reading of Snyder's book.

3.1.3.1 - The Anthropological Perspective

The first name to be mentioned regarding the anthropological perspective is Sir James G. Frazer, from the Cambridge School of Anthropology.[13] Frazer's researches - especially expressed in **The Golden Bough** - developing the interest for language and myth, gave rise to several studies of the mythic and ritualistic origins of Greek tragedy and also of the use of mythic patterns in later literature.[14]

Frazer has interpreted mythology as a primitive, fumbling effort to explain the world of nature. He points out

the ritual character of myth, claiming that myths express in words the emotion or complex of emotions that rituals express in actions. For Frazer, ritual carries a measure of logical priority, since actions (such as ritual, dances and gestures) may be developed "more readily than is possible for the public or communal narratives of myth".[15] He concludes that ritual is permanent in form, while myth has a shifting character, and that although not originally etiological, myth may become so if the emotions which give rise to the ritual lose their immediacy; thus, myth could explain the existence and origin of the rituals.

Although belonging to the field of anthropology, and not specifically to literature, Frazer's concepts about rituals and mythic patterns hit upon certain vital structural literary principles of form and content, thus serving as a basis for further literary critics who were able to employ them in literary studies.

Among the critics who developed the anthropological perspective, the most representative is Claude Lévi-Strauss, who was influenced by Karl Marx's analysis of society as a global unity, by structural linguists (especially Ferdinande Saussure and Roman Jakobson), and by psychoanalytic theories which emphasize latent meanings. As a result, Lévi-Strauss considers myth as a particular kind of language possessing complex properties which assure us that its values and meaning persist throughout all interpretations. Translatable into social or moral issues, myths expand the context of the

original (logical or metaphysical) matter; as a conservative force, they perpetuate social and mental existence.[16]

Lévi-Strauss's works are based on the use of myth to reveal certain characteristics of the functioning of the human mind. His studies reveal striking facts such as the notion of the universality of myth, and the different functions myths may have in societies remote from one another: myths - even those from cultures separated by time - exhibit similar structural patterns, as for instance, a pronounced tendency to multiply similar narrative sequences, characters and attributes. As he says:

> [...] a myth is still felt by any reader anywhere in the world. Its substance does not lie in its style, its original music, or its syntax, but in the *story* which it tells. Myth is language, functioning on an especially high level where meaning succeeds practically at "taking off" from the linguistic ground on which it keeps on rolling.[17]

For Lévi-Strauss, myth conceals a message, it is a code to be 'broken' in order to unfold an inner meaning; as SCHOLES corroborates:

> In Lévi-Strauss' view a myth is a kind of message in code from the whole of a culture to its individual members. As long as a culture remains homogeneous, a particular myth will be simply aspects of the same message. The code can be broken, and the message deciphered if we arrange its *mythemes* [i.e. the reduction of a mythic narrative into relational units] in the proper way, which is not simply in the narrative order of their transmission to us.[18]

Cohering in a kind of system, myths, as Lévi-Strauss suggests, embody polarities and antitheses of human experience (Nature X Culture) and perform the task of mediating

irreducible opposites. In their narratives, myths present balanced adjustments which work to a viable resolution of the initial dichotomy. The process, as summarized by Edmund LEACH, is that "In every system we find a persistent sequence of binary discriminations as between human/superhuman, mortal/immortal, male/female, legitimate/illegitimate, good/bad [...] followed by a *mediation* of paired categories thus distinguished".[19]

In sum, for Lévi-Strauss, myth is the reunion of some materials (especially narrative) grouped together which deal with a specific aspect or element of a certain culture. Myths stand behind these materials and reach us through a modified form, which is reconstructed when one articulates a certain interpretation.

3.1.3.2 - The Psychological Perspective

The psychological perspective on myth consists especially of Freudian and Jungian ideas. This perspective has developed parallel to the discoveries in anthropology and revealed, above all, the interrelation between myths and dreams.[20]

Differently from the anthropological analysis, which regarded myth as the dream of the race (thus with a cultural, social and public function), the psychological examination of myth/dream shows that while myth reveals a narrative order, a temporal sequence, the dream mechanism is dominated by

"condensation, displacement, and splitting". Based on these facts, the psychoanalytic view allies myths not with dreams (related to the unconscious), but with daydream, where the mechanisms of the unconscious may be modified by the impacts of external reality. As CAMPBELL explains, the difference between dream and myth is that "Dream is the personalized myth, myth the depersonalized dream; both myth and dream are symbolic in the same general way of the dynamics of the psyche. But in the dream the forms are quirked by the peculiar troubles of the dreamer, whereas in myth the problems and solutions shown are directly valid for all mankind".[21]

Psychological theories are based on the presupposition that myth may reveal some universal features of the human psyche. Although Sigmund Freud and Carl G. Jung are concerned with the origins and forms of myth, their conclusions about the production of myth by the human mind and the meaning of symbols, images and narrative models diverge significantly.

Freud sees myth as derived from the basic elements of existence - its topics are those of the child's ego which persist into adulthood. According to him the genetic motif for myth is the libidinal impulse; thus, the basis of a theory of culture derives from the hypothesis of a repressed instinct. Freud extents this concept to cultural and social behavior, claiming that the unconscious - submitted to a mechanism of impulses/repressions - speaks through the symbolic language of dreams, which is captured by myth, ritual and art.

Freud's response to myth is extremely complex,

presenting ideas and notions which border on fictional anthropology (such as the concept of 'the primal horde'). In **Totem and Taboo**[22] Freud argues that one can compare men's childhood to the history of primitive societies. Thus, psychoanalysis establishes that man's psychic realm and society's have the same dynamic source. For Freud the psychoanalytic viewpoints inferred from dreams and the study of some neuroses may be applied to myth, thus explaining their origins. He does not accept the hypothesis that myths simply come from a 'theoretical impulse' to explain natural phenomena. In Freudian psychoanalysis the impulse which created myths comes from the same psychic complexes which are the basis of dreams. These conclusions help to elucidate not only the origins of myths but also of several other cultural institutions, such as religion, morality, justice and philosophy.

If for Freud the genetic motif for myth is the libidinal impulse, Carl Jung sees it in a more complex process of psychic maturation, based on a recurrent pattern of challenge/response. In Jung's view, myths are an inherent function of the human mind. The unconscious is an irreducible symbolic structure which has some parts common to all individuals. Rather than considering the psyche determined during infancy, Jung sees it as a result of its own continuous development through time. The Jungian psyche thus created *archetypal images* which are inherited from the whole complex of the human race's experience. These images appear in the

individual's dreams, as well as in the myths of the world.

In Jung's view, myths are the means by which archetypes become manifest to the conscious mind. The *archetype* - a structure of the collective unconscious - is an image, motif or thematic pattern which recurs so often in history, religion, literature or folklore that it acquires transcendent symbolic meanings. According to Jungian psychology, archetypes (or 'primordial images') are myth-forming structural elements always present in the unconscious psyche. They belong to 'the realm of activities of the instincts", representing inherited forms of psychic behavior. Archetypes are found among different mythologies: certain images recurrent in the myths of different peoples tend to cause the same psychological responses, often serving similar cultural functions. As W. RIGHTER corroborates:

> For Jung the archetypes are transcendental symbolic forms found universally in the psychic life of man, embodied in a collective unconscious in which the individual psyche unknowingly participates. In dreams, myths, magic, ritual and art these forms reveal themselves, and their repetition lends itself to comparative study, so that the fundamental features of our accumulated experience and feeling may be seen in terms of the total human inheritance, the formal outlines, continuity and coherence of which can, thanks to such symbolism, be effectively traced.[23]

Coping with the polarities and ambivalences presented by myth - regression/progression, world/self, inner/outer - the hero within myth, the individual outside myth (the reader), and the creator (the writer) achieve psychic transformations which assure the emergence of "the truly individual person"- the one who is morally and culturally responsible. So, myth has

an important role in Jung's theory, and as such it lends itself to those who are seeking the unconscious levels which may be found in literature, also called 'the underthought'.

3.1.3.3 - The Philosophical Perspective

From the Sophists and Neoplatonists to German Romanticism[24], philosophy has a good deal to say about myth. According to a philosophical perspective, myth is a mode of consciousness that symbolically structures the world, thus contributing to the creation of a meaningful and objective world.

Among the philosophers who investigated myth formation, Ernest Cassirer is one of the most representative names, besides Susanne Langer.[25] Cassirer, the anthropological philosopher, analyses the cultural role of myth (considering myth one of the symbolic forms human beings use to apprehend existence) and the mythopoeic consciousness (the nature of mythical thinking). He developed a philosophy of human culture, defining man according to his cultural activities, as a maker of language, myth, religion, science, art and history - calling each of these cultural creations a *symbolic form*. Man has surrounded himself by myth (and other symbolic forms) "to the extent that he cannot see anything without these forms as media. Rather than inhabiting a world of things, he inhabits a world of symbolic reality".[26]

Cassirer concludes that myth is an independent

expression of the human spirit, a basic and ineradicable activity of human consciousness, and cannot be reduced to any other cultural form such as art, language and science. To Cassirer the two primordial symbolic forms are language and myth; for him, myth has an order of its own, which derives from its inherent formal structures. Myth is not analytic, but synthetic. In mythic expressions unity and organicism dominate with no limits set for time and space. As he states:

> [...] *primitive man by no means* lacks the ability to grasp the empirical differences of things. But in his conception of nature and life all these differences are obliterated by a stronger feeling: the deep conviction of a fundamental and indelible 'solidarity of life' that bridges over the multiplicity and variety of its single forms.[27]

Regarding the association between literature and myth Cassirer believes that the poet and the mythmaker have an identical power of personification, but while mythical thought contains an element of naive literal belief, in literature the writer releases his forms from the necessity of this belief. As ADAMS further explains:

> Cassirer examined myth not as a story or congeries of stories but as a *way* of thought and expression, a primitive means of constituting reality. He saw language and myth as a twin birth, with language moving toward emancipation of itself from mythical categories to those of science. Although he acknowledges a symbolic form called art, he did not explicitly relate myth and literature except by analogy. Yet it is clear that with a little extension we can see his mythic categories present in literary art, purged of the elements of naive referential belief they possessed in primitive culture. [28]

For Susanne LANGER, on the other hand, myth is a sort of "life-symbol", a medium which develops in its own way. The origin of myth is not a 'religious feeling' but a fantasy

(especially dreams, considered by the philosopher as primary forms of fantasy). Langer points out that the lowest form of story is a kind of dream-narrative with no intention of coherence or consistency of action; insofar as the story goes abroad it demands significance, undergoing various changes 'in the interest of coherence and public appeal'[29]: personal symbols are replaced by universal symbols, animals personify human roles. As she explains: "[...] the development and integration of story-action makes the symbols of fantasy take on more and more reasonable outward form to fit the role in which they are cast. A higher fictional mode emerges - the animal fable, the trickster story, or the orthodox ghost-story".[30] Besides fairy-stories, the high development of fantasy also gives rise to myths. Myth-formation also requires a 'thematic shift', the so called 'myth-making instinct'.

For LANGER myths begin with the recognition of "realistic significance in a story". Characterizing myth, she states that it is taken with religious seriousness, as historic fact or as a mystical truth; "its typical theme is tragic [...] and its personages tend to fuse into stable 'personalities' of supernatural character". She also adds that the material of myth is "the symbolism of dream-image and fantasy".[31] According to her, the purpose of myth is "a recognition of natural conflicts, of human desire frustrated by non-human powers, hostile oppression, or contrary desires [...]. Its ultimate end is not wishful distortion of the world, but serious envisagement of its fundamental truths".[32] In short, for Langer

myths present a world-picture and an insight into life.

3.1.3.4 - The Metaphysical Perspective

This perspective, concerned with the objective which the content of myth may have, questions the indeterminate role that myth plays for the modern imagination. The metaphysical dimension claims that the 'language' of myths brings references beyond its more obvious source in human affairs, leading to a metaphysical basis.[33]

Man in the archaic world obviously did not formulate metaphysical concepts in theoretical language, but instead made use of symbols, myths and rites to express the complexities of the ultimate reality of things; through these means he developed a 'system' which amounted to a sort of 'metaphysics'. Thus, implicit in the very state of a myth and in its meaning, is the recognition of a certain cosmic situation which consequently implies a metaphysical position.

To envisage mythical patterns in literature - especially of the quest movement and of initiation - is an approach typical of our time. There is an increasing effort on the part of literary critics, historians and psychologists to discover in literature some mythical values and their metaphysical implications which go beyond the artistic realm. Several literary oeuvres - since the Medieval romances, such as Arthur, The Fisher King, Percival and others, whose heroes were involved in the Grail Quest - have an initiatory structure: the

difficult and dramatic "quest", which results in the hero's entering another world.

Although initiation and also the quest structure, in the strict sense of these terms, are not so frequent in the Western world, anthropological and psychological studies have revealed that some initiatory symbols and scenarios survive in man's unconscious level. Thus, it is common to find critics who claim that the presence of initiatory elements in literature may reveal a process of spiritual transformation. As ELIADE states: "The nostalgia for initiatory trials and scenarios, nostalgia deciphered in so many literary [...] works, reveals modern man's longing for a total and definitive renewal, for a *renovatio* capable of radically changing his existence".[34]

The concepts related to the metaphysical perspective - especially the 'quest' and the 'initiation' - are fundamental to my analysis of **The Back Country**. In this respect, one can state that two are the main theorists who dwelt upon this perspective: Joseph Campbell and Mircea Eliade. While analyzing **The Back Country**, I founded myself in concepts and considerations derived from both: Campbell's notions for a model of the quest structure, and Eliade's for complementary comments regarding the essence of mythical actions.

According to CAMPBELL, myth directs the mind and the heart by means of "profoundly informed figurations, to that ultimate mystery which fills and surrounds all existences".[35] For him, even in the most common moments myth directs the mind to an unmanifested realm which is beyond the eye. Then, when

achieving its goal, myth dispels the need for life ignorance "by effecting a reconciliation of the individual consciousness with the universal will"; this occurs when the individual realizes "the true relationship of the passing phenomena of time to the imperishable life that lives and dies in all".[36]

Explaining the origin of myth ELIADE says that "primitive man of archaic societies felt himself connected with the Cosmos and its rhythms; for this man the Cosmos had a history, a *sacred history* which should be preserved and transmitted through myths".[37] Then, the myths "preserve and transmit the paradigms, the exemplary models, for all the responsible activities in which men engage. By virtue of these paradigmatic models revealed to men in mythical times, the Cosmos and society are periodically regenerated".[38] According to ELIADE, in the contemporary world, the structure of myth - although emptied of its religious content - is preserved by celebrations of a nonreligious society, through its public ceremonies, sports, competitions, youth organizations, literature of popular appeal, and specially by propaganda, pictures and slogans. In the same way, although meaningful rites of initiation have just disappeared in the modern world, vestiges of initiatory structures are still found, for instance in Christian rites such as Baptism and the ordination to priesthood.

The quest and the initiation are mythical motifs related to a hero's transformation or redemption. In the quest, the hero undertakes a long journey during which he must

perform extremely difficult tasks, fight against monsters or grotesque creatures, solve complicated riddles and overcome obstacles, in order to attain a change in his personal status. In the initiation, the hero undergoes a series of psychological and physical painful ordeals, basic to the process of passing from ignorance and immaturity to social and spiritual adulthood, thus achieving a well established place in his social group. Both the quest and initiatory rites inspire and guide spiritual activity, giving access to what is considered *meaningful* in grasping the reality of the world. Besides that, they also give man the image of himself as integrated in society, teaching "the essential oneness" of the individual and the group.

More details about the quest and the initiatory process are presented in the analysis of Snyder's book. For the time being, I hope that these basic comments suffice for giving the reader a general notion of the main ideas to be developed in my study of **The Back Country**, to which a critical-interpretative perspective, derived from the metaphysical approach on myth, is applied.

Conclusion

There are several other theories or approaches to myth, some of them reflected in the works of widely known critics.[39] The variety of theories of mythical functions demonstrates that there is no single concept of myth but there is a "primary mode

of mythical imaginatio" which is applied in different ways, to different ends.

After the presentation of some of the mythical theories, one sees that all these groups of myth critics share the interest in myth as a narrative, symbolic and structural phenomenon that can be extremely useful in literary analysis, since myths "provide the matrix out of which literature emerges".[40] As a consequence, literary plots, characters, themes, and images can be considered "complications and displacements" of similar elements present in myths. In fact, there is a mixture in all these theories of "a desire to give an adequate explanation of the phenomenon of myth and to evaluate its place in the whole spectrum of human thought".[41]

Relating myth and literature, we are able to understand the presence and the evolution of motifs within a specific work of literature, basing ourselves in patterns and concepts that may reveal significant aspects of these works. Above all, we are encouraged to move beyond the limitations of place, time, and cultural perspective. As VICKERY corroborates: "[...] myth criticism may help close the gap between formal analysis, whether semantic, rhetorical, or archetypal, and the functional, genetic concerns of the literary historian, biographer and psychoanalyst".[42]

The awareness of myth enables the critic to perceive elements which are latent in the work and which can reveal patterns and modes of interpretation. Quoting VICKERY again, he says that "Knowing the grammar of myth gives a greater

precision and form to our reading of the language of literature. In recognizing that mythic features reside beneath as well as on the surface of a work, myth criticism differs substantially from earlier treatments of the mythological literature".[43] Finally, one has to add that the interrelation between myth and literature provides the reader with a concrete apprehension of the cultural dynamics which shapes the characters, especially if they are involved in a mythic role.

In sum, myth stimulates the artist and also provides the critic with models and concepts that can be applied to the interpretation of some specific works. Literature - re-creating and perpetuating myth - functions, in several cases, as myths used to function: creating a meaningful place for man in the world.

3.2 THE QUEST STRUCTURE IN **THE BACK COUNTRY**

Structured in the form of wonder tales or of religious stories, literature, either oral or written, abounds in descriptions of legendary heroes who develop quest movements. To mention just a few examples of heroes whose tasks are universally known, one can point out Buddha, Prometheus, Jason and Aeneas.[44] The fundamental purpose of these stories and tales is to work as symbolic expressions of unconscious "desires, fears and tensions", masked by the conscious patterns which control human beings' behavior.

If popular tales describe the hero's physical actions, in religious or metaphysical ones, the hero's deeds are much more in the moral realm. But, although different in purpose, there are little variations in the morphology of the hero's adventures, in the roles played and in the sort of victories won.

The quest movement itself is a process of transformation: experiencing each of the stages of a symbolic journey, the hero is gradually conducted across difficulties or 'thresholds of transformation', which happen to cause significant changes in his character, altering his conscious and unconscious life. These difficulties or, in mythical terms, the so-called *rites of passage*, are sort of "experiences of severance" through which the mind is re-educated to abandon vicious attitudes which mark a non-spiritualized existence. As a result of the quest experience, the hero attains wisdom or enlightenment. After that, he radically leaves behind his old life patterns.

The hero's re-education equals his "dying to the world" for when he comes back to society he is reborn and "filled with creative power". Inspired in the hero's new life, community or mankind also changes its values and, after a transformation, achieves an improvement in its original state.

The hero of the mythical experience is often a person of peculiar features, an exceptionally gifted personality and sometimes, extraordinary powers; he has to overcome the human normal limitations - either personal or historical. As CAMPBELL

says, the hero is the one who, while still alive, knows and represents the claims of the super consciousness which throughout creation is more or less unconscious. The adventure of the hero represents the moment in his life when he achieved illumination - the nuclear moment when, while still alive, he found and opened the road to the light beyond the dark walls of our living death.[45]

Through the hero, through his deeds, visions and ideas, society - which honors him - will be reborn. This is why he *dies* as a modern man and, transfigured, he assumes the role of an eternal man, acquiring universal dimensions. After his personal enlightenment, his great deed is then to return to society (which suffers from a symbolic deficiency) to teach people the lesson of "life renewed". His adventure provides him with the means for the regeneration of community. In this regard, the typical hero of fairy tales achieves mere microcosmic triumph, while the monomythical hero reaches "a world-historical macrocosmic triumph"[46] involving society as a whole. This is the sense of his adventure: to serve as a human transformer.

For the effective interpretation of **The Back Country**'s structure and content as the process towards enlightenment or, in other words, as the quest movement, one has to take for granted that the figure of the writer - Snyder and his personal life - has to be effaced. Thus, the 'persona' in the poems, from now on, according to the proper terminology employed in the mythic approach, will be called the creative "hero".

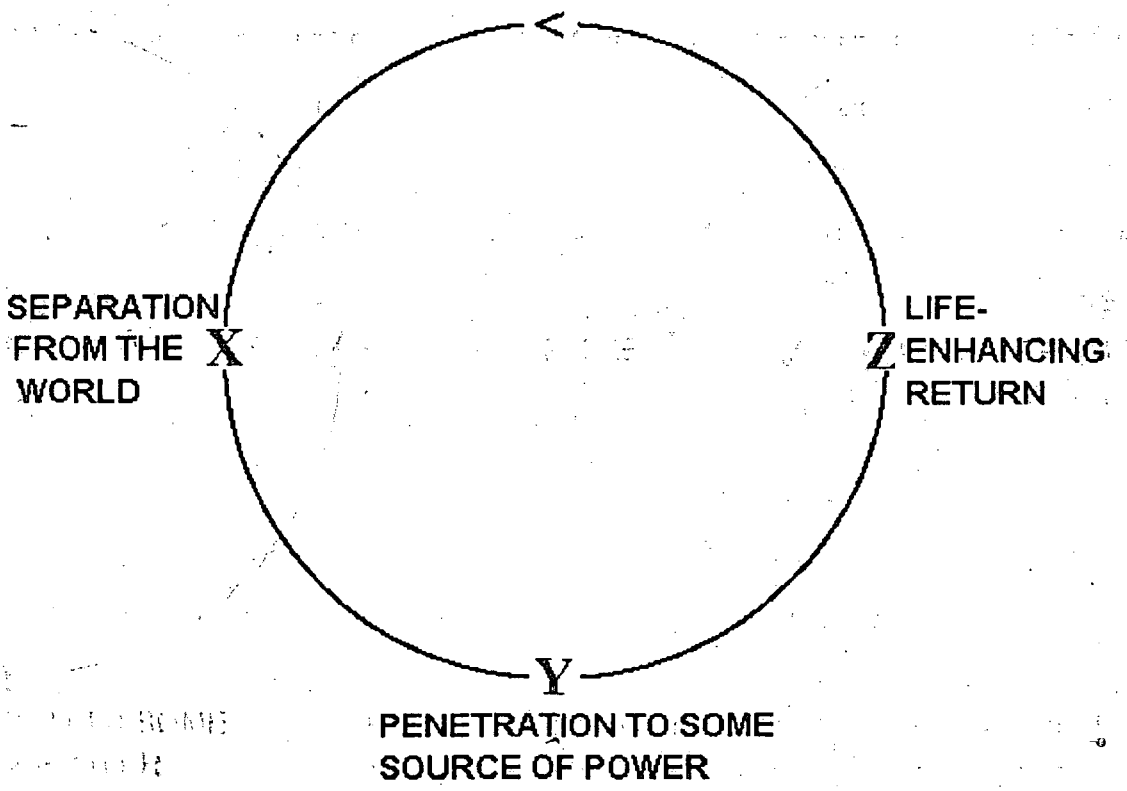
Campbell divides the adventure of the hero - his archetypal journey - in three main stages, namely:

1) Departure,

2) Initiation and

3) Return.

He uses the word *monomyth*[47] to describe the whole process or a 'nuclear unit' formed by the stages above mentioned. CAMPBELL says that: "The adventure of the hero normally follows the patterns of the nuclear unit [...]: a separation from the world (x), a penetration to some source of power (y), and a life-enhancing return (z), when the hero comes back as one *reborn*".[48] The diagram below, showing a cyclical movement, illustrates the stages of the hero's journey:



Developing his initial considerations, Campbell presents a more elaborated analysis, dividing the whole journey in the following steps:

1. The mythological hero, setting forth from his commonday hut or castle, is lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds, to the threshold of adventure.

2. He passes the threshold.

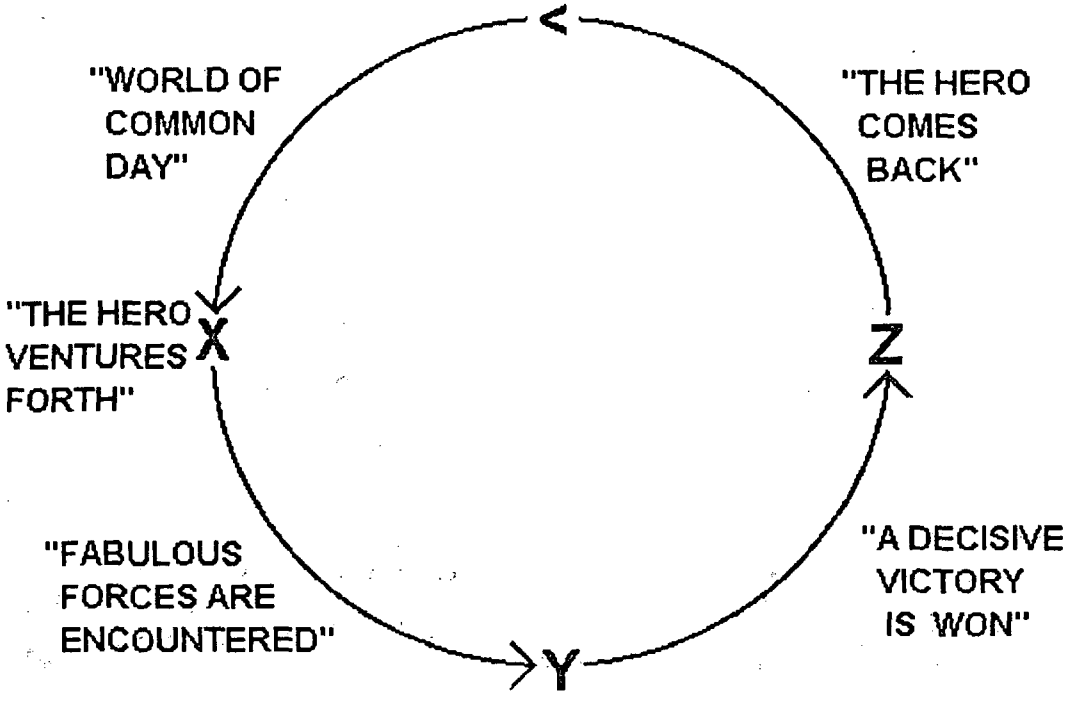
3. Beyond the threshold, then, the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar forces yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests), some of which give magical aid (helpers).

4. When he arrives at the nadir of the mythological round, he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward. [...] it is an expansion of consciousness and therewith of being (he attains illumination, transfiguration, freedom).

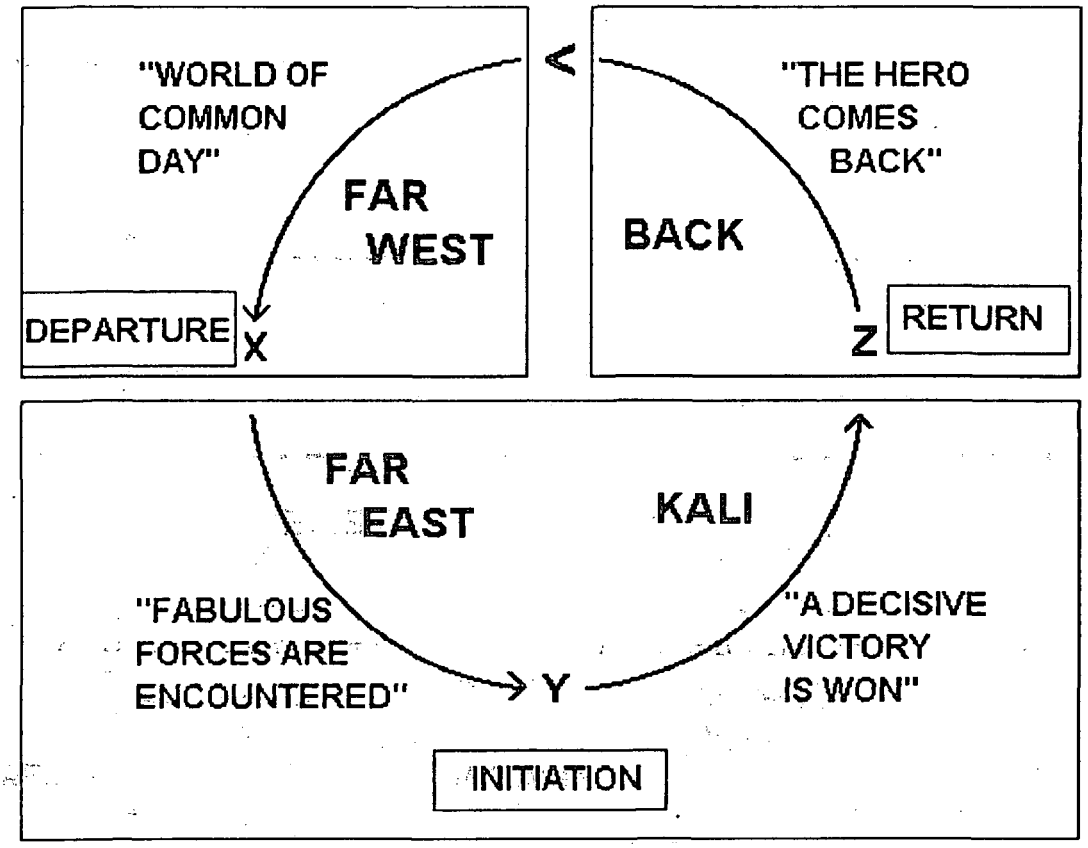
5. The final work is that of the return. [...] The boon that he brings restores the world.

As CAMPBELL explains the hero's journey in a summarized way: "The hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man".[49]

Applying Campbell's words to the picture above presented we come to the following formula:



And now applying the diagram to **The Back Country**, considering its four constituent parts, we come to the following:



Relating Snyder's book to Campbell's monomythic structure, one sees that in **The Back Country** "the world of common day", the first stage of the hero's journey, is represented by the American West described in *Far West*, where the persona lives (sometimes in preliminary departures to the woods) up to his definitive departure (X) to Japan. This is the moment of separation, when the hero, in search for wisdom, "ventures forth traveling to a distant place and separating himself from others". The quest for wisdom has begun, starting in *Far East*. This voyage to the Orient marks the encounter with "fabulous forces" - the hero, through Zen experiences, has the opportunity to explore realms strange to the ordinary man.

Besides *Far East*, the third part of **The Back Country** *Kali* also constitutes one of the important moments in the hero's initiation (Y). In this stage of his quest for wisdom, the creative hero becomes aware that the existential condition, the very nature of life, includes suffering and negative experiences. Finally, with the ending of *Kali*, a "decisive victory is won" and the hero is released to return (Z) home. *Back*, the fourth and last part of **The Back Country**, corresponds to the ending of the hero's adventure, when he returns to society with the *boon* which, in the book in question, is the acceptance of man's state in nature allied to his social commitment. Attaining existential knowledge, the poet-hero thus offers this boon, his 'vision', to the reader.

Regarding J. Campbell's thesis that the quest motif is the key to all effective mythology, Snyder, who devoted himself to the study of anthropology and mythology, stated that the *monomyth* corresponds "on the one hand to primitive rites of initiation, and on the other to the psychological journey into the unconscious required of the individual who would attain 'wholeness'".[50] These words may serve as an introductory comment to my analysis of **The Back Country**.

In sum, one sees that in **The Back Country**, although the hero's trips are developed in terms of physical, wild territory, they may be interpreted as moments of a psychic journey through which the hero - after some trials - learns several ways that re-educate him to develop an active role in society which, in a further instance, depends on a

psychological balance resultant from his "attainment of wholeness".

In the following pages I develop the considerations presented above, through a more detailed analysis of the stages which constitute the mythical hero's adventure as applied to Snyder's book.

3.2.1- DEPARTURE

According to this mythical interpretation of **The Back Country**, its first part *Far West* is the equivalent to Campbell's "world of commonday". It is represented by the Western typical scenery where the hero lives, constituting the setting of most of the *Far West* poems.

Following the steps which form the quest movement, the hero's first act towards a change of personal status is the opening of a destiny. As CAMPBELL asserts: "the mythological hero, setting forth from his commonday hut or castle, is lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds to the threshold of adventure".[51]

In *Far West* the hero voluntarily leaves his 'umbilical spot', or, in other words, his place of origin, to carry out his destiny, since the "familiar life horizon has been outgrown; the old concepts, ideals and emotional patterns no longer fit".[52] Although the persona in **The Back Country**, while responding to the call to adventure, receives no supernatural aid to leave his place of origin, he finds "all the forces of

the unconscious at his side" to support him in his task. One can even argue that Mother Nature herself, working as a protective figure[53], helps the adventurer to continue his voyage.

As the quest unfolds, with the personification of the hero's destiny, he goes forward up to "the entrance to the zone of magnified power"[54], which in **The Back Country** will be represented by the passage from *Far West* to *Far East*. In mythical terms, this region on the unknown may be a desert, a jungle, a deep sea, or - as in **The Back Country** - an alien land (Japan and India), and it symbolizes a free field for the projection of the unconscious content. This passage into a new zone of experience represents a movement from the known into the unknown and, as CAMPBELL puts it, "the powers that watch at the boundary are dangerous; to deal with them is risky; yet for anyone with competence and courage the danger fades".[55]

This passage of the mythical threshold has several implications: it equals a form of self-annihilation which will result in the hero's further rebirth; this disappearance, or transit into another sphere, corresponds to the passing of a worshiper into a temple (the temple interior and the heavenly land "beyond, above, and below the confines of the world", are one and the same). This passage into a temple is an allegory which denotes the life-centering, life-renewing act, since at the moment of entry, the hero, as a devotee, undergoes a metamorphosis.

Thus, the ending of *Far West* and the transition to the

next section corresponds to the beginning of the hero's journey or his answer to "the call to adventure"; this call marks the dawn of his illumination, the awakening of his self.

This transition from *Far West* to *Far East* reveals to the mythical hero an unsuspected world: in **The Back Country** this world, described in *Far East,* is the Eastern (Oriental) culture and its peculiarities. As already mentioned, in several instances the *Far East* poems point out the differences between Western and Eastern cultures. From this moment on the hero is "drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood"[56]; it is the moment for crossing the threshold towards his Initiation, the moment of a spiritual evolution which will mark the individual's transfiguration.

3.2.2 - INITIATION

Following the mythical quest, the next step of the hero's adventure is his "Initiation". According to CAMPBELL "[...] if anyone undertakes for himself the perilous journey into the darkness by descending, either intentionally or unintentionally, into the crooked lanes of his own spiritual labyrinth, he soon finds himself in a landscape of symbolical figures". This second stage of "the Way" marks "the purification of the self", when the senses are "cleansed and humbled", and the energies and interests "concentrate upon transcendental things".[57]

The initiatory process is an arduous road, which

represents a passage "from the profane to the sacred, from the ephemeral and illusory to reality and eternity".[58] The departure into the "land of trials" represents the beginning of a long path of initiatory conquests and moments of illuminations. Dragons are "slain and surprising barriers passed - again, again, and again". Meanwhile, there are "a multitude of preliminary victories, unretainable ecstasies, and momentary glimpses of the wonderful land".[59]

The term "initiation" itself denotes some rites or oral teachings which produce a radical change in the religious or social status of an individual. In philosophical terms, the Initiation equals an "ontological mutation of the existential condition": after his "ordeal" the individual becomes a totally different being, he becomes *another*. The transition which occurs with the hero is that he achieves a cultural status gaining access to the metaphysical realm; through Initiation "men attain the status of human beings; [...] it is a fundamental existential experience because through it a man becomes able to assume his mode of being in its entirety".[60]

We have seen that previously to the hero's Initiation, the 'call to adventure' marks the abandoning of his place of origin [Departure]. According to CAMPBELL the passage to the second stage of the mythological journey signifies

> [...] that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown. The fateful region of both treasure and danger may be variously represented: as a distant land, a forest, a kingdom underground, [...] but it is always a place of strangely fluid and polymorphous beings, unimaginable torments, superhuman deeds, and

> impossible delight. The hero can go forth on his own volition to accomplish the adventure [...] or he may be carried or sent abroad by some benign or malignant agent [...].[61]

In my analysis of **The Back Country**, *Far East* and *Kali* are interpreted as stages of the initiatory process, each of them representing peculiar moments of the hero's transformation. The persona, who goes forth "on his own volition", really leaves his loved far West and travels to "unknown zones" like Japan (described in *Far East*) and India (where the *Kali* poems are set), both "distant lands". These two countries arise ambiguous feelings in the hero, causing him to experience "both treasure and danger". The contact with other cultures produces radical changes in the hero's status; if in *Far West* the persona's view was markedly restricted to subjective affairs, in this second stage the persona broadens his mind, changing from a personal sphere to a social and spiritual sphere, becoming interested, on the one hand, in Zen Buddhism and, on the other, in socio-political matters. As ELIADE corroborates, the Initiation "introduces the candidate into the human community and into the world of spiritual and cultural values".[62]

This second step of the hero's journey marks the beginning of his initiatory process, characterized by the hero's voyage to the underworld, where he has to face and overcome a series of obstacles. As CAMPBELL states "once having traversed the threshold, the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials".[63] In **The Back Country**, after the idyllic

experiences described in *Far West*, the persona really traverses "thresholds" experiencing some symbolic trials which may even be grouped into three different kinds:

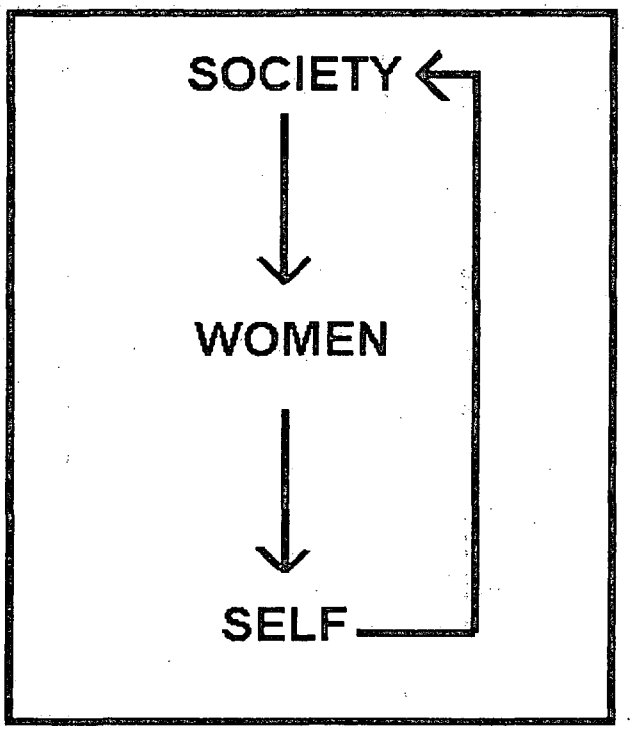
a)Society in general - The contrast between *Far West* and *Far East/Kali* illustrates that the hero has to overcome the social and cultural differences between West and East. As if wandering in a labyrinth, the hero faces famine, degradation and human decay, experiencing a series of facts which arouse his social and political consciousness. This is illustrated by some poems such as "Yase: September", "AMI 24. XII. 62", "The Public Bath", "A Volcano in Kyushu", "Asleep on the Train", "This Tokyo", "Wandering the Old, Dirt Countries", "On Our Way to Khajuraho", "7:VII", and "The Truth Like the Belly of a Woman Turning".

b)Women - Through several love affairs, the hero experiences loss and suffering, but also discovers women's positive potentialities, as illustrated by the poems "Four Poems for Robin", "Alysoun", "To Hell with your Fertility Cult", "For a Stone Girl at Sanchi", "Robin", "Could You See the Whole Real World with Her Ghost Breast Eyes Shut Under a Blouse Lid?", "Another for The Same", "The Manichaeans", "Artemis", "Madly Whirling Downhill", "For Plants", "Mother of the Buddhas", "Lying in Bed on a Late Morning", "How Many Times", and "[After Ramprasad Sen]".

c)Himself - experiencing the difficulties in the "road to the self" the hero's trajectory leads him to the center of his being. In **The Back Country**, learning the discipline of Zen,

and experiencing solitude, the hero suffers a spiritual transformation resultant from an immersion into his self, as illustrated by the poems: "Mt. Hiei", "Work to Do Toward Town", "Six Years", "Looking at Pictures to be Put Away", and "Tasting the Snow".

One may note that the hero's trials, if grouped according to their sphere of interest, demonstrate that his experiences incorporate aspects from larger frames (social problems), to a very personal realm, resulting in a concentration upon the hero's personal insights. After experiencing the common difficulties of the seeker in the "road to the self", the hero's trajectory leads him to the center of his being, as shown by the diagram below:



Since the creative hero's illumination reverberates in the social sphere, the instances of personal enlightenment, in fact, happen to have a "communal" extension, for any individual represents a limited fraction of the "total image" of man. The "fullness of man" is only accomplished in "the body of the society as a whole", since separated from society one "breaks connection with the sources of his existence". As CAMPBELL emphasizes: "[...] anyone in exile from the community is a nothing. [...]. Each carries within himself the all; therefore it may be sought and discovered within".[64]

The hero's experiences concerning women have a wide symbolic meaning. In mythological terms, the woman represents "the totality of what can be known. The hero is the one who comes to know." As CAMPBELL explains, insofar as the Initiation progresses

> the form of the goddess undergoes for him a series of transfigurations: she can never be greater than himself, though she can always promise more than he is yet capable of comprehending. She lures, she guides, she bids him burst his fetters. And if he can match her import, the two, the knower and the known, will be released from every limitation. Woman is the guide to the sublime acme of sensuous adventure. By deficient eyes she is reduced to inferior states; by the evil eye of ignorance she is spellbound to banality and ugliness. But she is redeemed by the eyes of understanding. The hero who can take her as she is, without undue commotion but with the kindness and assurance she requires, is potentially the king, the incarnate god, of her created world.[65].

Thus, the poems about women's potentialities illustrate that the persona (the initiate) passes through a process which reveals that male and female are "two halves of a split pea" or, in other words, are a pair of opposites which together form a whole. The male figure may be considered the symbol of the

initiating principle, while the female symbolizes the goal to which initiation leads. Both "are to be envisioned alternately, as time and eternity".[66] That is to say, the two are the same, each is both, and the dual form is only an effect of illusion, which itself, however, is not different from enlightenment.

Regarding the types of Initiation, one can state that although all of them are much alike, there are three basic types[67], namely:

a) tribal initiation, when spiritual and cultural values are revealed to the individual, making him a responsible member of the society;

b) rites of entering a secret society;

c) rites connected with a mystical vocation (the "shaman", or the "medicine man").

In **The Back Country** one may point out some characteristics peculiar to both, the tribal initiation (a) and to the mystical vocation (c). Analyzing the "tribal initiation" first, one may argue that the persona in **The Back Country** is an individual to whom spiritual and cultural values are revealed (not by the leaders of a tribe, but through his personal motivation) and who, after this revelation, becomes a 'responsible member of society'. He passes "beyond the 'natural mode' of being and gains access to the cultural mode".[68] An interesting characteristic of the tribal initiation is that it implies a ritual death followed by a "rebirth"; this initiatory "death" may be interpreted as a *descensus ad inferos*, which in **The Back Country** is conveyed by the *Kali* poems, with the hero's

stage in India, a place that represents a true "hell on earth".

Now investigating the possibility of relating **The Back Country** to a mystical vocation (c), one sees that although the book does not present 'ecstatic experiences' (dreams, visions, trances) peculiar to shamanistic rituals, nor instructions imparted by the old master shamans, the hero's personal discoveries, which transport him to transhuman realms, and his further position as a spokesman of social and spiritual problems, makes him a kind of shaman. Thus, the Initiation of **The Back Country**'s hero may be interpreted as 'shamanistic' in the sense that this hero, after 'illumination', becomes a consecrate being capable of communicating personally with a metaphysical realm. In fact, in a further extent, the persona makes "visible and public" the systems of symbolic fantasy present in the people's psyche.

This reading of **The Back Country** as related to rites of mystical vocation is, in several instances, corroborated by Snyder himself, who emphasizes this link between his work and shamanism in the sense that he believes that the poet is the one who reveals the "semi-known"[69] to people, in the same way the shaman's function is to reveal the "semi-known" to the tribe. Defining "shamanism", SNYDER states that

> [...] it relates to the most archaic of human religious practices. All of our ancestors - white, black, Mongoloid, Veda, 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. [...] But the practice of shamanism in itself has as its very center a teaching from the nonhuman, not a teaching from an Indian medicine man, or a Buddhist master. The question of culture does not enter into it. It's a naked experience that some people have out there in the woods.[70]

Snyder often refers to poetry as the production of 'healing songs'; for him, the poetic function is similar to the shamanistic function. As a shaman, the poet restores the "cultural and the natural to a holistic relationship of interdependence", healing by making whole. According to SNYDER, shamanism could be defined "as man's basic mind-science and practice from the Upper-Paleolithic down to the beginning of civilization - interesting is that it was empirical, experimental, pragmatic, and international. Poetry within the civilized area of history is the fragmented attempt to recreate a 'healing song' aspect of the shaman's practice".[71]

Concluding the considerations regarding the hero's Initiation one may see that through the *Kali* poems - representative of the dark aspects of the unconscious mind - the persona happens to exorcise the negative forces hidden by the unconscious, which according to Campbell's words equals to the moment when "a decisive victory is won", followed by the release of the hero, who is now free to return to his place of origin.

3.2.3 - RETURN

In the final stage of the adventure, the hero is "born back into the world from which he came". In **The Back Country**, the hero-persona returns to the West, his place of origin, as described in *Back*. In the same way that for his departure the hero received no assistance from supernatural forces, in *Back*

the hero-persona is brought from his adventure by his own.

After his adventure out of a known land into 'darkness', once having accomplished his adventure, the hero comes back "out of that yonder zone". The ending of the hero's adventure equals a 'rebirth' or, in other words, the birth of something new to substitute the old values. This birth is twofold: there is a birth within the hero's soul and another one within the body social. On the one hand, as a result of his quest, the ritualistic journey effects in the adventurer a transformation in his conscious and unconscious life. On the other hand, regarding the social implications brought by the quest, now occurs a social 'catharsis' or a purification of the community which profits from the hero's personal experiences. In mythical terms, when the hero comes back and is reintegrated with society, there is a continuous "circulation of spiritual energy into the world".

In *Back,* one sees that the cyclical journey of the hero-persona is finally accomplished, and he returns to the same place he has left with his "life-transmitting trophy": he offers a new perception of existence, giving emphasis to the importance of a balanced way of life, where the respect for nature has a fundamental role. As the result of his "miraculous passage and return" the hero attains in *Back* what CAMPBELL calls "a reconciliation of the individual consciousness with the universal wit".[72]

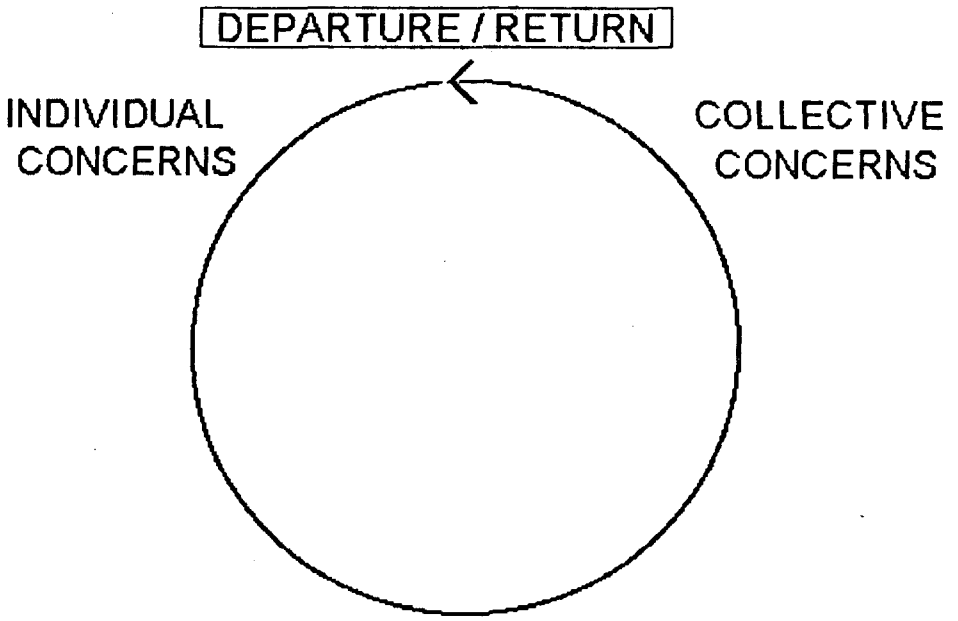
Campbell's structure of the mythical journey establishes that the final element necessary for the quest

completion is that after his understanding of the nature of human existence, the hero's deeds must reverberate in the community, in the people's mind, acquiring didactic dimensions. According to him:

> The two - the hero and his ultimate god, the seeker and the found - are thus understood as the outside and inside of a single, self-mirrored mystery, which is identical with the mystery of the manifest world. The great deed of the supreme hero is to come to the knowledge of this unity in multiplicity and then make it known.[73]

We have seen that the Initiation is a "fundamental existential experience", which enables the hero to assume his mode of being in its entirety, living the "wholeness" of existence. Thus, *Back* illustrates the ending of a whole cyclical journey in search for this "wholeness". In this final section of **The Back Country**, the hero-persona, after passing through the initiatory experience, attains the status of 'human being', gaining access to a 'spiritualized' (meaningful) life. In the mythical vocabulary, *Back* equals the hero's resurrection: his fundamental mode of being changes and "the sacredness of human life and the world" is revealed to him.[74]

In the conclusion of the hero's trajectory we have a movement not from a place to another but from a state to another:



As a result of the experience of Initiation "yesterday's profane and illusory existence gives place to a new, to a life that is real, enduring, and effective".[75] The fundamental change accomplished by the hero when he finishes his journey, as the *Back* poems illustrate, is the transformation of the "natural", acultural man, into a new mode of existence: he becomes a *real* man, learning the deep meaning of existence (a world open to the transhuman, a transcendental world) assuming the responsibility of the "real man" and participating actively in the cultural life. As ELIADE puts it, the hero becomes a being "born to the spirit, i.e., one who does not live exclusively in an immediate reality".[76]

To complete the full round of the mythical quest, the hero now has to bring his boon back into the kingdom of humanity, where it may redound to the renewing of the

community. But crossing the return threshold the hero faces a problem: that his deeds - superhuman symbols - have to be interpreted to serve now as "practical teaching" for common men. As CAMPBELL asserts:

> The world of human life is now the problem [...] the field of unconsciousness so contracts that the ground lines of human comedy are lost in a welter of cross-purposes. Men's perspectives become flat, comprehending only the light-reflecting, tangible surfaces of existence. The vista into depth closes over. The significant form of the human agony is lost to view. Society lapses into mistake and disaster. The Little Ego has usurped the judgement seat of the Self.[77]

The hero's ultimate task is how to transmit his message. In fact, the return does not represent that the hero's difficult task has reached its ending, for the "final crises of the round" is marked by the difficulties the hero has to pass, in returning from the mystic realm into the "land of common day" and thus transmitting what he has learnt from his excursion. It is not easy for the returning hero, who has experienced a soul-satisfying vision of fulfillment, to accept as real all the transitory joys and sorrows, "banalities and noisy obscenities of life". But to complete his adventure, he must overcome "the impact of the world". As CAMPBELL corroborates:

> [...] whether rescued from without, driven from within, or gently carried along by the guiding divinities, he has yet to re-enter with his boon the long-forgotten atmosphere where men who are fractions imagine themselves to be complete. He has yet to confront society with his ego - shattering, life-redeeming elixir, and take the return blow of reasonable queries, hard resentment, and good people at a loss to comprehend.[78]

Typical of the hero's journey is the fact that it is

difficult for the community to justify the long retreat that the hero has to pass. This is one of the consequences of the hero's return for, despite the fact that society yearns "for some personality who, in a world of twisted bodies and souls, will represent again the lines of the incarnate image", it resists the criticism and the changes proposed by the hero. But the hero is the one who re-opens people's eyes, so that through all his delights and agonies of the world panorama, a spiritualized meaning for existence is seen again. This requires a deeper wisdom and results in a pattern of "significant representations".

As the ultimate result of the cyclical journey's completion the hero is accepted as "[...] a reflection of the World Axis from which the concentric circles spread - he is the perfect microcosmic mirror of the macrocosm. To see him is to perceive the meaning of existence. From his presence boons go out; his word is the wind of life".[79] In sum, the effect of the hero's successful adventure is the "unlocking and release again of the flow of life into the body of the world", represented as a streaming of energy, or spiritually speaking as a "manifestation of grace".

NOTES TO **THE QUEST MOTIF IN THE BACK COUNTRY**

[1] Present, for instance, in the tragedies of Classical Greece, in the epic, lyric, and dramatic poetry of the Renaissance (often developed within a Christian frame of reference), in English Romanticism (with Edmund Spenser, Christopher Marlowe, George Chapman and William Shakespeare), and in Asia (the No Drama, which is rooted in ancestral legend and rites).

[2] In this regard HUTCHINSON, P., in his book **Games authors play** (New York: Methuen: 1983, p. 73) states that: "The major authors of the twentieth century - including Joyce, Eliot, Lawrence, Mann, Gide, Faulkner - have all betrayed considerable interest in myth, the greatest impetus to this probably having been given by Joyce's **Ulysses**, which contains numerous allusions to Homer's **Odyssey**". Also VICKERY's words (In: "Literature and Myth" In: **Interrelations of literature**, The Modern Language Association of America, New York: 1982, , p. 86) are worthy to be mentioned: "The modern literary concern with myth was initially associated with the early representatives of modernism - William Butler Yeats, T.S. Eliot, Joyce, Rilke - then with the exponents of neoromanticism, surrealism, and religious conviction until by degrees it came, on the contemporary scene, to be represented by parodists, ironists, and black humorists from Jorge Luis Borges and Barth to Ionesco, Nabokov, Walter Percy, Gunter Grass, John Updike, and John Hawkes. With them myth [...] is an essentially comic invitation to the infinite varieties of narrative proliferation and interpretative possibility". Some other examples are Thomas Mann's **Death in Venice**, which incorporates a fragmentary series of mythological references to Charon; John Updike's **The centaur**, which provides the reader with a 'Mythological Index'; Michel Butor's **Passing time**, which employs three mythological models (of Oedipus, Theseus and of the Biblical Cain), and Scott Fitzgerald's **The great Gatsby**, which explores the 'Grail Quest' motif.

[3] These four aspects represent my personal classification of the basic elements which constitute the interrelation between myth and literature. For further considerations on the same subject matter see: VICKERY, John *op. cit.* p. 67-87 and RIGHTER, William **Myth and literature**, London, Routlege and Kegan Paul, 1975.

[4] RIGHTER, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

[5] For instance C. G. Jung's and C. Lévi-Strauss'.

[6] WATTS, Allan, *apud* RIGHTER, p. 5.

[7] CASSIRER, Ernest, *apud* RIGHTER, p. 5.

[8] BARTHES, Roland, *apud* RIGHTER, p. 10.

[9] VICKERY, p. 69.

[10] *Ibid*, p. 82.

[11] RIGHTER, p. 45.

[12] VICKERY, p. 83.

[13] A group formed by Frazer, Jane Harrison, and F.M. Cornford. Another anthropologist involved with the study of myth to mentioned here is Franz Boas.

[14] For instance Gilbert Murray's **The rise of the Greek epic** (1907) and his essay "Hamlet and Orestes" in **The classical tradition in poetry** (1927), and Jessie L. Wetson's **From ritual to romance** (1920).

[15] VICKERY, p. 73.

[16] For further information see: ADAMS, H. **The interests of criticism**, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc.1969, p. 144-46; EAGLETON, T. **Literary theory**, Oxford, England. Blackwell Pub, 1973., p. 103-104; LÉVI-STRAUSS, Claude. **Myth and meaning**, Norfolk: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980, and SCHOLES, Robert, **Structuralism in literature**, London: Yale University Press, 1974, p. 60-74.

[17] LÉVI-STRAUSS, Claude. **Structural anthropology**, p. 206, apud SCHOLES, op. cit. p. 61.

[18] SCHOLES, p. 69.

[19] LEACH, E. *apud* CROSSAN, J. D. **The dark interval.** Argus: Niles, Illinois, 1975, p. 51.

[20] Related to this perspective one can also mention Otto Rank, Karl Abraham, Sándor Ferenczi, Géza Róheim, Theodor Reik, and Erich Fromm, who can serve as reference to the psychological approach.

[21] CAMPBELL, Joseph. **The hero with a thousand faces.** Princeton, New Jersey: Bollingen Printing, Princeton, 1973 p. 19.

[22] FREUD, Sigmund **Totem and taboo.** Rio de Janeiro:Imago Ed. Ltda, 1974.

[23] RIGHTER, p. 17.

[24] Especially through the works of F. Schlegel, F. Schelling, and F. Nietzsche.

[25] One cannot omit the importance of Roland Barthes' concepts about myth. He treats myth as both a system of signs and a system of beliefs, in order to preserve its sense and its significance. "The system of signs is based on the system of language and functions connotatively in such a way as to covertly produce meaning that appears to be natural or ultimate or 'given' when in fact it is manufactured. Such an approach concentrates on the range of sign-producing activities and their contemporary forms rather than on the mythologies of prehistory and ancient time" (VICKERY, 78). For further information on Barthes, see SCHOLES, p. 148-157 and also RIGHTER, p. 11.

[26] ADAMS, p. 108.

[27] CASSIRER, Ernest. **An essay on man.** New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1944, p. 26.

[28] ADAMS, p. 121.

[29] LANGER, Susanne. **Philosophy in a new key.** New York: Mentor: 1954, p. 141.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 141.

[31] *Ibid*, p. 142 -44.

[32] *Ibid*, p. 143.

[33] Myth is "in its primary and purest form, the closest verbal approach to an immediate *intuition of reality*" [**Dictionary of World Literary Terms**, Joseph T. Shipley (ed.), Oxford, UK: Allen & Unwin, 1970]. Used to explain or to teach "certain deep-lying aspects of human and *trans-human existence*" [**Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry & Poetics**, Alex Preminger (ed.). Princeton: United States Princeton University Press, 1974], myths acquire metaphysical dimensions while expressing and touching upon transcendental realms.

[34] ELIADE, Mircea **The quest.** Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1969, p. 126.

[35] CAMPBELL, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

[36] *Ibid*, p. 238.

[37] ELIADE, Mircea. **The myth of the eternal return** or cosmos and history - Princeton New Jersey Princeton University Press, 1974 p. xiii.

[38] *Ibid*, p. xiv.

[39] Other approaches which could also be included here are the formalistic, the religious (or spiritual), the

historical, the folklore and the sociological perspective. The religious approach views myth as a series of "latent, oblique, or untranslatable symbols recurring in literature because of their human centrality and power" (VICKERY, p. 85). According to the sociological (or 'functionalist') point-of-view, advanced by B. Malinowski and E. Durkheim, functionalism is adapted to the nature and to the interpretative boundaries of the literary text, describing myth in terms of its operational power within a social structure, often connected with a ritual which represents a stage in the development of the individual through his life-cycle: birth, initiation, marriage, death. In this approach, myth is limited to its context; the function proceeds from the particular occasion and the meaning of the myth is controlled by that occasion. (For further information, see RIGHTER, 15-16). One could not forget the names of Northrop Frye, J. J. White, and Lilian Feder. FRYE sees myth as "constituting the structural principles or meaning of literature. Myth in its earliest manifestations is protoliterature insofar as its narrative sequences, recurring images, and dramatic actions are of the same order as those of oral and written literature, however much refined and shaped by history and culture" (VICKERY, p. 85). White applied myth with reference to the novel, classifying the mythological novel in four categories; Lilian Feder - whose approach refers especially to poetry - is concerned "to indicate how classical myth functions [...] as an aesthetic device which reaches into the deepest layers of personal, religious, social and political life" (HUTCHINSON, p. 74).

[40] RIGHTER, p. 22.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

[42] VICKERY, p. 83.

[43] *Ibid*, p. 80-1.

[44] Buddha (V century b. C), the title ("the Enlightened") of Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, an Indian sage of whom various mythical stories are related. Prince Gautama set forth from his palace and, assuming the garments of a monk, he wandered as a beggar for several years while practicing an ascetic life which led him to the knowledge of the Way (later spread out within the whole Oriental community). Prometheus - A divine personage of Greek mythology. He created the first man, shaping him with clay. When Zeus (Jupiter), to punish human race, deprived it of fire, Prometheus brought the fire from heaven to man. Prometheus was then punished by Zeus, who had him chained to a rock on Mount Caucasus, where an eagle or vulture fed constantly on his liver, which was ever reproduced. Jason (around 371 b. C.) a Tessalian prince who, according to Greek legend, led the Argonauts and with Medeas' help, obtained the Golden Fleece. He sailed through the

Clashing Rocks, fought against the dragon and the fire-breathing bulls which guarded the Rocks' entrance, and returned with the power to take the throne from a usurper. Aeneas - The youngest member of the Trojan royal family. According to the ancient tradition, he survived Troy's fall and went to some place in Italy. He is regarded as the remote founder of the Roman Empire. His heroic travels through Italy are described in Virgil's poem **Aeneis**.

[45]CAMPBELL, J. p. 259.

[46] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

[47] From James Joyce's **Finnegans wake**, New York: Vicking Press Inc., 1939, p. 581.

[48] CAMPBELL, p. 35.

[49] I*bid.*, p. 30.

[50] SNYDER, G. Bachelor's Thesis "The Dimensions of a Myth", *apud* STEUDING, Bob **Gary Snyder**, Boston: Twayne, 1976, p. 69.

[51] CAMPBELL, p. 245.

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 51.

[53] As suggested by CAMPBELL, p. 72.

[54] CAMPBELL, p. 77.

[55] *Ibid*, p. 82

[56] CAMPBELL, p. 51.

[57] *Ibid*, p. 101.

[58] ELIADE, **The myth of the eternal return**, p. 18.

[59] CAMPBELL, p. 109.

[60] ELIADE, **Rites and symbols of initiation**, p. 3.

[61] CAMPBELL, p. 58.

[62] ELIADE, **Rites and symbols of initiation**, p. x.

[63] CAMPBELL, p. 97.

[64] CAMPBELL, p. 383 - 385.

[65] *Ibid.*, p. 116.

[66] *Ibid.*, p. 170.

67 ELIADE, **The quest**, p. 112/113.

68 Ibid., p. 113.

69 See quotation on page 29.

70 SNYDER, **The real work**, p. 155-156.

71 *Ibid.*, p. 175.

72 *CAMPBELL*, p. 238.

73 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

74 ELIADE, **Rites and symbols of initiation**, p. 19.

75 ELIADE, **The myth of the eternal return**, p. 18.

76 ELIADE, **The quest**, p. 115.

77 CAMPBELL, p. 308.

78 *Ibid.*, p. 216.

79 *Ibid.*, p. 347.

4. CONCLUSION

> The poet's function is still his primitive oral function of defining and illustrating the concerns of the society that man is producing, but this fact is not generally realized. It is not realized partly because the language of poetry is still thought of as a rhetorical and sub-logical language: the principles of mythical language are still largely unknown.
>
> N. Frye

Through this thesis I have tried to demonstrate to what extent a literary interpretation can be enriched by a mythical approach[1], provided that the object of analysis - as it is the case of **The Back Country** - shows some qualities that suggest and, further on, make possible such an approach.

My objective was thus to uncover a mythical pattern in **The Back Country**, and consequently, also a message disguised under its structure, leading to a new interpretation of the book. According to my analysis, **The Back Country** fits perfectly well into a mythical interpretation: from its structural features - the division into four sections - to the content of its poems the book has a mythical appeal allied to a deep symbolic and psychological significance.

The four constituent sections of **The Back Country** indeed may be read as the complementary stages which form a mythical hero's quest. In *Far West* wilderness works as a temple where the hero attained insightful thoughts; thus, equating 'wilderness' to a psychic territory to be explored, the backpacking trips described in this first section of the book may be considered incursions into the wild territiry of the

mind or, in other words, journeys towards the expansion of the unconscious life. *Far East*, the second step of the hero's quest, illustrates what Snyder has said (see epigraph on page 73) about the need of an integration between West and East: "we need both". So, at this stage one sees that social revolution and individual insight complement each other. In this second stage the hero also demonstrates that meditational practice (poetry or Zen Buddhism) are basic elements in the spiritual journey. In *Kali* there is the ultimate discovery of positive and negative potentialities, either in the social, personal, sexual or psychic realms, demonstrating that the complete process for the attainment of 'psychic wholeness' includes the investigation of the demonic potentials of the unconscious. Finally, the further acting out of these potentials occurs in *Back*, the last stage of the hero's journey, which represents the completion of the whole quest movement; at this stage the particulars - conveyed by the Western scenery - become effectively universal and wisdom, resultant of several elements now integrated, is finally achieved.

In terms of the book's circular structure, presenting the hero's journey as starting and ending in the same point, it leads us to the symbolism of the circle: the union of consciousness and unconsciousness, since the circle itself - the symbol of totality - represents psychic 'dynamism'; standing for the ultimate oneness, the return to unity after multiplicity. This idea of wholeness is also reinforced by the symbology of the number four - corresponding to the four

sections of the book - that conveys the functional aspects of consciousness: (thinking, feeling, sensation, intuition). In esoteric terms the number four conveys the way to the spiritual realization, fitting perfectly to **The Back Country**'s content.

Regarding the book's themes, there are in **The Back Country** at least three peculiar themes which suggest a mythical reading:

- a) those poems in which woman is presented as a goddess. With the mystical marriage of the hero and the Queen Goddess. - who is incarnated in every woman - the hero wins the "boon of love". All the tests he had to endure symbolize the crises of realization by means of which his consciousness became able to endure the full possession of the mother-destroyer, his "inevitable bride".

- b) those poems which convey the mysticism of sexual love, illustrating that in the archaic world the concept of "profane" did not exist and every act with a definite meaning (hunting, agriculture, sexuality) in some way participated in the sacred and had a ritualistic character. Thus, those poems which seem 'erotic', in fact, suggest that sexuality equals a rite where woman is the "other portion"of the hero himself.

- c) the poems which convey the primitive value of work and of some tools. Here one has to remember that in mythical terms any construction ritual is in fact a repetition of the primordial act of the cosmogonic construction. As ELIADE explains: "The sacrifice performed at the building of a house, church, bridge, is simply the imitation, on the human plane, of

the sacrifice performed *in illo tempore* to give birth to the world."[2]

For these reasons, which involve elements derived from the book's form and content, I came to the conclusion that repeating, deliberately or not, a paradigm, **The Back Country** admits a mythical interpretation, lending itself to be read as a mythical expression, and calling to itself all the implications of a mythical reality. In ELIADE's words "insofar as an act (or an object) acquires a certain reality through the repetition of certain paradigmatic gestures, [...] there is an implicit abolition of profane time, of duration, of "history", and he who reproduces the exemplary gesture thus finds himself transported into the mythical epoch in which its revelation took place".[3] In this sense, **The Back Country** may be considered an expression which is not temporal, with no dependence on the contemporary setting to be interpreted: despite some topical poems and those poems which address social and political problems, as a mythical expression the book is freed of history's boundaries, acquiring wider interpretative possibilities.

As a model, **The Back Country** illustrates the possible link between the unconscious and the practical action; as CAMPBELL corroborates, the whole sense of the mythical hero's journey is that

> [...] it shall serve as a general pattern for men and women, wherever they may stand along the scale. Therefore it is formulated in the broadest terms. The individual has only to discover his own position with reference to this general human formula, and let it then assist him past his restricting walls.

> Who and where are his ogres? Those are the reflections of the unsolved enigmas of his own humanity. What are his ideals? Those are the symptoms of his grasps of life.[4]

In this sense, after a thorough mythical analysis of **The Back Country**, I conclude that the mythical approach really contributes to a new reading of the book, helping the reader to discover several possible 'meanings' which were latent in the book.

Besides investigating the applicability of the quest motif to **The Back Country** it was also one of my objectives to investigate how a mythical approach may serve as a valuable device in literary interpretation. Right in the beginning of **The Hero with a Thousand Faces** Campbell states that myth is "the secret opening through which the energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestations. In fact, for its mythical qualities, **The Back Country** is a "human cultural manifestation", which helps to elucidate the forces that promote 'human mutual understanding' since it discusses man's problems and points out viable solutions to them. In this regard, the detailed analysis of **The Back Country's** sections shows how literature as myth may really affect consciousness and fulfill some psychological needs, proving that poetry is one of the several instruments which may contribute to a spiritual quest.

According to the results of this work, the application of the mythical background has a great value in literary criticism, contributing to sharpen our perception of themes, structure, and imagery. Besides that, applied to **The Back**

Country, the mythical quest motif, proved to be a telling metaphor of some of the 'mysteries' of human existence. By means of deeply "informed figurations" myth happens to direct us to the ultimate unmanifest things which are "just beyond the eye". In a further instance, I conclude that to grasp the full meaning of **The Back Country** as a mythical work one has to consider it not only an expression of the unconscious, but also an intended statement of some spiritual principles which lead us - hero and readers - to the so desired state of 'wholeness'.

Always having in mind that there is no "final system" for the interpretation of myth, what I intended to evince at the ending of this mythical approach (in a sense not only restricted to **The Back Country**, but applicable to other literary works) is how mythical acts indeed translate the individual's "life-crises" and "life-deeds" into classic and impersonal patterns, thus revealing for the whole of society the "profoundest depths of human character". However, to accept **The Back Country**'s mythical value one cannot forget that the psychological implications of myth in ancient times have to be readjusted to our times when the individual must achieve alone (or at least with no guidance) his "portion of wisdom". As CAMPBELL confirms:

> This is our problem as modern, "enlightened" individuals, for whom all gods and devils have been rationalized out of existence. Nevertheless, in the multitude of myths and legends that have been preserved to us, or collected from the ends of the earth, we may yet see delineated something of our still human course. To hear and profit, however, one may have to submit somehow to purgation and surrender.[5]

Even **The Back Country**'s hero must be interpreted as a "modern hero": the modern individual who "dares to heed the call" but cannot wait for community guidance (or acceptance); he just offers his great boons, as if sharing his supreme ordeal not with his tribe as a whole, but with other individuals attuned to it.

Besides that, **The Back Country** illustrates that the deeds of a mythical hero are not restricted to ancient tales, but still survive in poems set in recent times. As demonstrated, the book transmits a mythical paradigm; it is an 'exemplary model', which recovers, reactualizes and thus preserves an ancient form of collective interest: that the fulfillment of the hero's deeds reverberate in the communal life. **The Back Country** indeed rescues for the contemporary thought a traditional wisdom (especially in the sense that it reinforces the indissoluble connection between man and Cosmos) touching and bringing into play the "vital energies" of the human psyche.

Thus, taken as a mythical expression, **The Back Country**'s best quality is that it reveals or, at least, suggests to the reader some basic conditions for meditation. The final 'boon' that the book's hero shares with 'society' (the readers) is a state of illumination which encompasses: a) the mystical relationship between man and nature, b) the reinforcement of the importance of primordial activities, such as the devotion to work, c) the raising of social and political commitment to environmental problems, d) the consciousness

about the complementary roles of man and woman. One cannot forget that the function of mythical literature is exactly to provide these conditions and then, as the result of a reading, effect the awakening of the individual's mind. Myth is the penultimate for "the ultimate is openness - that void, or being, beyond the categories - into which the mind must plunge alone and be dissolved".[6]

Further, in **The Back Country** Snyder also develops his interest in the psychological power of myth and in the symbolic behavior of man. Through this book one sees that the writer articulates his own mythology, a "social mythology" which happens to be a personal way to claim for transformations in the social realm. Stimulating myth consciousness, **The Back Country** calls the reader's attention to at least two significant aspects: firstly, the social extension of myth, emphasizing the place and value of the mythical or creative hero today as a mouthpiece of innumerable social problems; secondly, the spiritual extension of myth, since the persona's quest works as a pattern for the individual's quest for liberation and for further enlightenment. For these two aspects **The Back Country** exemplifies the pragmatic character of poetry, functioning as an instrument "for learning and for acquiring self-awareness."

As **The Back Country** also illustrates, myths, by arising primordial realities, reveal man's innermost needs; as SNYDER emphasizes: "Reality is a myth lived [...] it provides a symbolic representation of projected values and empirical

knowledge within a framework of belief which relates individual, group, and physical environment, to the end of integration and survival".[7] The writer considers myths as the constructs through which men perceive and understand the physical world - the reality. So, as a 'mythmaker' he tries to assume a state of consciousness similar to the primitive's mythological apprehension of reality, developing, later on, this same state in the reader. In this respect, **The Back Country** has a "cathartic" effect, brought by the completion of the quest cyclical movement.

But to convey, as **The Back Country** does, the essence and meaning of a hero's mythical quest today, is a difficult task. First of all, because modern man does not think in terms of collective reality (community today is the entire planet and not the tribe), secondly, because most of the old mysteries of life have already been solved, losing their force. Thus, the patterns have to be readjusted to encompass a wider range of problems, situations and 'individuals'. It is exactly in doing so that **The Back Country** increases its content for the book's best quality resides, as I see it, in - through the deeds of a hero - bringing back an ancient model (the "illuminating hints from the inspired past") and applying it to modern affairs, bringing to light basic questionings inherent to human existence. After the reading of **The Back Country**, one may infer that the "mighty hero of extraordinary powers" who seeks for wisdom is each of us; not "the physical self", but the "king within".

The redeeming insight of **The Back Country**'s hero equals a new birth, since after several - good and bad - experiences he acquires a new knowledge of existence. Through the hero's successful mythical trajectory, the book proposes a true "revolution of consciousness", suggesting to the readers some essential values which may effect transformations not only in the innerself but also in the social realm. As SNYDER has said: "I feel that mythology and folklore are the *koans* of humanity and that all of humanity has that as its store of feelings to deeply return to over and over again, and to make one more leap into a very sizable community".[8]

By reintegrating several aspects - the inner and outer worlds, the "potentials of language" and the world before language, the archaic (the "fundamental man") and the contemporary (the products "generated by history"), the life of human beings and the life of the rest of nature, man and woman, the personal and communal - and by following a mythic pattern, **The Back Country** reveals the "myth-lore foundation" that underlies our society. It allows the isolated man to know himself as a "piece of cosmos", bound to other lives - to "the small dead branches", to "Coyote the Nasty", to the "half gone moon", to "the ragged wild blue flower", or even to the "old sow in the mud". Spreading the thought of enlightenment this book undoubtedly offers the most basic elements for the attainment of the ultimate state of spiritual wholeness.

NOTES TO THE **CONCLUSION**

[1] As already stated, I have followed the metaphysical approach to myth - the one related to the potentialities of the unconscious. But some elements of a Structuralist approach may sometimes be found in this thesis, since in my analysis I try to adapt to a model [of the mythical journey] the structure and content of **The Back Country.**

[2] ELIADE, Mircea **The myth of the eternal return**, or cosmos and history, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1974. p. 30.

3 Ibid., p. 35.

[4] CAMPBELL, Joseph. **The hero with a thousand faces**, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1973, p. 280.

[5] CAMPBELL, p. 4.

6 Ibid, p. 104-105.

[7] SNYDER, Gary "The Dimensions of a Myth", Bachelor's Thesis, Reed College, 1951 pp. 148 - 149 *apud* STEUDING, Bob **Gary Snyder**, Boston: Twayne Publishers, G.K. Hall and Co., 1976, p. 68.

[8] SNYDER, **The real work**, Interviews and Talks 1964-1979, New York: New Directions, 1980, p. 84.

APPENDIX ONE

ARTICLES AND REVIEWS

AIKEN, William. "With a Watchful and Elegant Mind"; review of **Regarding Wave**, *Kayak* 26, 1971, 59-66.

ALLEN, Donald (ed.) **On Bread and Poetry: A Panel Discussion with Gary Snyder, Lew Welch and Philip Whalen** Bolinas, Cal: Grey Fox Press, 1977.

ALMON, Bert "Buddhism and Energy in the Recent Poetry of Gary Snyder", *Mosaic*, vol. 11 n. 1, 1977, pp. 117-25.

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_____."Enlarging the Temple" **New Directions in American Poetry During the 1960s**. Lewinsburg, Pa: Bucknell University Press, 1979.

_____."Gary Snyder's **Turtle Island**: The Problems of Reconciling the Roles of Seer and Prophet" *Boundary* IV, 1976, pp. 761-77.

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