

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Recent conflicts in America concerning the environment (the harvesting of old growth timber in the Pacific Northwest, or the proposed opening of public lands in southern Utah to mining interests, for instance) have precipitated a personal examination of "historical others" (Jensen 64), individuals that possess very different sensibilities from a larger capitalist culture. Two such writers, Henry Thoreau and Gary Snyder, use the wilderness to enact alternative patterns of living that are designed to change cultures that have lost touch with the land, and have spiraled into a future where nature is a mere afterthought.

In response to the growth of his society, Thoreau built a cabin at Walden pond as an experiment to determine if life could be lived simply and morally. His activities were an effort to "wake up" his "neighbors" who were just beginning to explore capitalism. "Moral reform," Thoreau believed, "is the effort to throw off sleep" (WAL 61). Thoreau's criticism of capitalism, agricultural reform, and slavery were generated to help his culture understand what it is to live morally, and "awake."

Gary Snyder is the voice of Thoreau in the late 20th century, and his work addresses a world fully enveloped in capitalism. The exploitation of wild creatures and places by world governments and multi-national corporations is the problem of the modern age for Snyder, and place-based living is a way of dissenting from a consumption-oriented culture. Reform begins with the individual living close to the land, but also involves people living in communities and creating patterns of living that are ecologically stable.

This paper is, in an immediate sense, a comparison of two "American" non-conformists, but it is also a response to cultural and environmental crises that both writers faced. Chapter I of this study introduces Thoreau and Snyder and establishes the parameters of this paper. Chapter II discusses Thoreau's views on capitalism, agricultural reform, and environmental degradation. Chapter III highlights Snyder's interest in place-based living and bioregionalism. Chapter VI brings Thoreau and Snyder together in a discussion of political and social reform. The final chapter of this study reflects how Thoreau and Snyder mesh as ecological philosophers.

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"Living Outside the Madness": Reform and Ecology in the Work
of Henry Thoreau and Gary Snyder

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Bryan Hiatt, Author

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List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used throughout this essay to refer to sources of quotations from both Thoreau and Snyder.

Thoreau:

WAL	<u>Walden</u>
LDJB	"The Last Days of John Brown"
RCG	"Resistance to Civil Government"

Snyder:

TI	<u>Turtle Island</u>
GWS	"Good, Wild, Sacred" in <u>The Practice of the Wild</u>
AFFW	"Ancient Forests of the Far West" in <u>The Practice of the Wild</u>
PRC	"The Place, the Region, and the Commons" in <u>The Practice of the Wild</u>
RW	<u>The Real Work—Interviews and Talks, 1964-1979</u>
OW	<u>The Old Ways</u>

"Living Outside the Madness": Reform and Ecology in the Work of Henry Thoreau and Gary Snyder

I. "[I]n the Wildness is the preservation of the World."¹

Thomas Lyon argues that certain writers "feel into nature, they know it; expressed as a mountain, ocean, [pond, or forest] perspective, it is their standard" (212). The modern impulse to consider the wilderness arguably originates with Romanticism, and it

implies an enthusiasm for the strange, remote, solitary, and mysterious . . . Rejecting the meticulously ordered gardens at Versailles so attractive to the Enlightenment mind, [the Romantics] turned to the unkempt forest. Wilderness appealed to those bored or disgusted with man and his works. It not only offered an escape from society but also an ideal stage for the Romantic individual to exercise the cult that he frequently made his own soul. (Nash, *Wilderness* 47)

Henry Thoreau and Gary Snyder are writers separated by nearly 150 years, yet they express similar relationships to the wilderness. They are both intellectual descendants of Romanticism, "American" individuals, and each incorporates the wilderness in forming a personal philosophy of social and political reform. Individualism here also includes a progressive political dimension that allows Thoreau and Snyder to write from a standpoint that is "outside the madness" of their respective cultures (Lyon 212). To be "outside" of culture suggests that one is a non-conformist, and dissents from the patterns of a dominant culture.

It is important to understand generally what culture is, because as a concept, it will appear throughout this paper. Culture is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [individuals] as . . . member[s] of society" (Tylor 1). Culture also includes the insignificant and often mundane behavioral patterns of everyday life. With these definitions in mind, this paper will explore aspects of Western-style capitalism (with an imperialist edge) present in the cultures of Thoreau and

Snyder. But the term capitalism becomes problematic when applying it to Thoreau's time in history. "Capitalism" existed in terms of private ownership, but was not yet a significant influence in American intellectual thought when Thoreau lived at Walden from 1845 to 1847. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' Communist Manifesto (1848) helped to define "capitalism," and the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. However, the first English translation of Marx and Engels' text appeared in a London labor magazine in 1850, and the "official" translated version was published in America in 1888 (Engels 1). The Enlightenment and Romantic minds sensed the changes that the new industrial existence brought to culture also. The economic influences present in 1840s America were of a transitional sort, moving from an agrarian based economy to industrial. For ease of explication in this text, America's transitional economics will be called capitalism.

Thoreau is one of the best known of American writers, and Walden is a seminal text in the formation of American environmentalism (Harding xv). Born in Concord, Massachusetts in 1817, graduated from Harvard University, he became an integral part of the Transcendentalist movement, and a pioneer ecologist. His sojourn at Walden pond was a time he devoted to personal writing projects, nature observations, and "experiment[s] in living" (WAL 34). After leaving Walden, Thoreau traveled, wrote, and helped maintain the family pencil manufacturing business. He is responsible, along with Ralph Waldo Emerson, Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Walt Whitman among others, for giving American literature a measure of world respectability late in the 19th century. He died in 1862 of tuberculosis at the age of 45.

Snyder's life over the years has been an odyssey. He graduated from Reed College in Oregon in 1951 with degrees in English and Anthropology, went to graduate school to study Linguistics in Indiana, and dropped out after a year to write poetry full-time. Besides logging,

Snyder worked on the docks in San Francisco, "read Buddhist philosophy . . . and became a founding father of the Beat Generation" (Turner 41). In 1956, he left for Japan and spent twelve years studying Rinzai Zen Buddhism. In 1969, Snyder returned to the USA and "settled on a mountain farmstead . . . [in northern California], where he continues to live as a poet, teacher [at UC-Davis], and spokesman for the wilderness" (Turner 42). His work includes poetry, including Turtle Island, the 1974 Pulitzer Prize winner, and various prose essays. Many scholars compare Snyder to Thoreau because of his interest in the wilderness. Snyder's work is especially relevant to environmentalists considering the many ecological problems our society now faces.

Both Thoreau and Snyder struggle to find a way "TO BE" (TI 81) in politically and economically oppressive cultures, and this inversion of Hamlet's contemplation of suicide is "closely related to [the] vision of an alternative culture" (Yamazato 230). Seeking a way "to be" is a life-affirming gesture, and is connected to discovering "what work is to be done, which is the old American quest . . . for an identity" (OW 79). The study of ecology, or the general awareness that "[a]ll units of [an] ecosystem are mutually dependent" (Odum 79), is connected to the "quest" that Snyder describes, and it allows each man to "see his [identity and spirituality] clearly and concretely in exploring the heart of [the wilderness]" (Yamazato 234).

Agrarian-based capitalism is a clear influence in the life of Thoreau and his neighbors in Concord, and he spent a good portion of his time at Walden exploring the idea of "useful" labor; the cabin, the bean field, and even the ways he attempts to earn a living (as a surveyor, huckleberry picker, and author) are examples of this. Additionally, a growing number of religious-minded Unitarian activists in the 1840s were intent on reforming individual farming methods and spirituality. This reform movement was characterized by tracts and lectures that were pervasive enough that Thoreau found it necessary to address them through a farming experiment (the bean

field) to counter the rhetoric. He was also concerned that his government claimed to be "the refuge of liberty," yet allowed the bondage of African Americans, and passed laws (e.g., the Fugitive Slave Law in 1851) that solidified the strength of slavery in America (RCG 229).

Thoreau's building of a cabin at the pond, the bean field experiment, and criticism of slavery were efforts in "self-culture," or acting against a dominant cultural discourse (Gross 202).

In the modern age, the progress of capitalism by private companies and governments is, in many ways, the destruction of land and other resources. For Gary Snyder, living closer to the rhythms of the wilderness is crucial in reshaping culture, and restoring a lost sense of humanity. His work seeks to "capture those areas of the consciousness which belong to the American continent, the non-white world . . . ultimately getting in contact with the natural world, which we've been out of contact with so long we've nearly destroyed the planet" (Lyon 215).² Getting back "in contact" with the wilderness includes experiments in place-based living, and involvement in communities and local politics to defend the environment. Exploring the landscape rhetorically is a necessary strategy for Snyder in changing the way people perceive an exploited landscape. Snyder, much like Thoreau, criticizes governments for their abuses of power, and in doing so, advances the political representation of the wild (Molesworth 154-155). This representative claim is simply the human advocacy of "green" politics. If environmentalists do not speak in public forums for exploited, voiceless contingents (whether it is a forest or an endangered species), Snyder argues, who will?

Ultimately, Thoreau and Snyder present indictments of civilization, "devoid of sensibility of and respect for other life forms, mindlessly engulfed in its own destructiveness" (Yamazato 235). The indictments presented here are an important thread in the history of American ideas. Both writers demonstrate the ability to reflect critically on the course of culture through a celebration of

the wilderness, and to actively dissent from it. Though smaller in scale, their experiments in living are as "American" as the Revolution in 1776, the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s and the Vietnam war protests, yet important in literature, and in the course of human events.

II. Henry Thoreau, Chanticleer on the Roof

Thoreau's Walden is a text with a purpose: "I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors" (WAL 1). Thoreau believed his neighbors were asleep, not literally, but mentally: "Moral reform is the effort to throw off sleep" (WAL 61). Why did Thoreau feel the need to act like a moral alarm clock? By the mid 1840s, American civilization had acquired a materialistic quality that left many individuals discontented. He "saw little to celebrate about his nation's first sixty-nine years. Americans seemed obsessed with . . . 'things'" (Nash, *Rights* 36).

The wilderness, on the other hand, was a "source of vigor, inspiration and strength [for Thoreau] . . . Human greatness of any kind depended upon tapping this primordial vitality . . . [T]o the extent a culture, or individual, lost contact with wildness, it became weak and dull" (Nash, *Wilderness* 88). Ralph Waldo Emerson, Thoreau's friend and mentor, argues that American "[s]ociety is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion . . . Whoso would be a man, must be a non-conformist" (Emerson, *Self-Reliance* 149). Emerson suggests that the individual has the power to act against his or her cultural environment through self-reliance. Thoreau recognized that America had moved away from consistent contact with nature, and that capitalism was diminishing the human spirit, much as Emerson recognized.

Independence Day

For a book that so famously concerns nature, Walden begins in an economic spirit that continues to resonate throughout the text. The general attack in "Economy," chapter one, is "not

[on] wealth per se, but exchange" (Milder 65). According to Thoreau, "men labor under a mistake.

The better part of the man is soon ploughed into the soil for compost. By a seeming fate, commonly called necessity, they are employed, as it says in an old book, laying up treasures which moth and rust will corrupt and thieves break through and steal" (WAL 3). And "[y]oung people," Thoreau argues, "inherit farms . . . [and] these are more easily acquired than got rid of . . . Why should they begin digging their graves as soon as they are born?" (WAL 2). Labor is essentially a "site of humiliation" (Gilmore 179) where men and women have "no time to be any thing but a machine" (WAL 3). Many of these people, Thoreau believed, are "victims of their own greed and short-sightedness, individuals who have ironically defeated themselves through their misguided striving for betterment" (Robinson, *Agrarian* 330).

With labor described in life-defeating terms, Thoreau asks what is the "chief end of man, and what are the true necessities and means of life?" (WAL 5). By considering the essentials of life (food, shelter, clothing, and fuel), he sought to break past extraneous living items, or "luxuries" that are "positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind" (WAL 9). To demonstrate his own independence from society, Thoreau built a cabin at Walden pond as an example that "shelter" could be obtained honestly and cheaply. Shelter is the most basic of human needs, and a comfortable home had become the biggest "luxury" item of all. The modernization of life had created a spiritual distance between humans and the wild. "At last, we know not what it is to live in the open air, and our lives are domestic in more senses than we think . . . It would be well perhaps if we were to spend more of our days and nights without any obstruction between us and the celestial bodies" (WAL 19). To compound this spiritual distance, the "average house in [Thoreau's] neighborhood cost perhaps eight hundred dollars, and to lay up this sum [would] take from ten to fifteen years of the laborer's life" (WAL 21). What is important to Thoreau is the "cost

of a thing" and how much of a worker's life is "required to be exchanged for it" (WAL 21). Ten to fifteen years of work is hardly a bargain for adequate shelter.

In choosing July 4th for his departure to Walden pond, Thoreau "intended to make what a later generation would call a 'statement'" (Nash, *Rights* 36). He purchased a shanty from a local Irishman, disassembled it, and over the space of a few days, relocated it on Walden pond. Thoreau made improvements to the cabin with his own hands, and the labor held a spiritual quality. "Who knows but if men constructed their dwellings with their own hands, and provided food for themselves and families simply and honestly enough, the poetic faculty would be universally developed, as birds universally sing when they are so engaged?" (WAL 31). The labor in this context parallels the processes of the wild, where many animals construct dwellings by instinct. It is a "natural" occupation that Thoreau believed should be reintegrated into human life, and intellectual benefits would follow. The cabin, all told, cost \$28.12 1/2 cents. This figure is positive proof to Thoreau that a home can be obtained for a price that one might expect to pay annually in rent (WAL 33).³ Anyone with a measure of determination could "secure all the advantage without suffering any of the disadvantage" of acquiring a home (WAL 21). The shelter experiment demonstrates how Thoreau "minimize[d] his dependency on others and remove[d] himself as far as possible from the market economy" (Gilmore 182).

The Bean Field

In Letters from an American Farmer (1782), Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur writes of the new American agrarianism based on a vision of equals, made socially "independent through their economic dependence on the land, yet bound together in a . . . supportive community" (Robinson, *Community* 17). Crèvecoeur is the voice of the pre-Revolutionary farmer, and his America is a place of unlimited opportunity. By the mid 1840s, however, agricultural reformers were active in

surveying American farming to suggest better methods, and to prevent the populace from moving west to "obtain an easier living from the land" (Gross 196). In response to the rhetoric of the agricultural reformers while living at the pond, Thoreau cultivated a bean field, and it was an experiment through which he advanced individual agrarian reform.

The agricultural reformers believed that nature existed for the use of humankind and that agricultural methods were inefficient, bound to ignorance and custom that did needless "long-term damage . . . to the land" (Gross 196). Henry Coleman, a former Unitarian clergyman, believed that new management methods, such as strict crop rotations, scientifically designed fertilizers, and less cultivated acreage would better meet "the demands of the market" (Gross 197). According to Coleman, if these new methods were mixed with the traditional New England values of "honesty, industry, and thrift," the lure of the west would diminish (Gross 197). The reformers were fighting against the average person's impulse to follow the American dream at the frontier. "Good husbandry," Coleman writes, "promotes good morals" (Gross 197). Good morals, of course, are best cultivated on eastern farms.

Thoreau, however, did not view the organized reform of farming practices as a worthwhile undertaking. In fact, his specific comments to the reformers in Walden are, if anything, caustic.

A model farm! where the house stands like a fungus in a muck-heap, chambers for men, horses, oxen, and swine, cleansed and uncleansed, all contiguous to one another! Stocked with men! A great grease-spot, redolent of manures and butter-milk! Under the high state of cultivation, being manured with the hearts and brains of men! As if you were to raise your potatoes in the church yard!
(WAL 132)

There is little difference on the "model" farm between humans and animals. For Thoreau, farming must be separated from reformers like Coleman who associated it with social advancement and organized religion. The reformers were intent on extending the grip of religion, and transforming the wilderness into a garden.

Conversely, Thoreau's Transcendentalist philosophy "postulated the existence of a reality higher than the physical" and that a "parallelism existed between the higher realm of spiritual truth and the lower one of material objects" (Nash, *Wilderness* 84-85). The individual in Transcendentalism possesses the ability to transcend the material world using intuition and imagination. Puritan beliefs held that the wilderness and the human soul were both inherently evil, but according to Transcendentalism, "one's chances of attaining moral perfection and knowing God were *maximized* by entering the wilderness" (Nash, *Wilderness* 86). For Thoreau, activities in nature provided opportunities at higher observations, and one of these activities was farming, the most basic and important of human endeavors.

Thoreau states in Walden that he was "determined to know beans" (WAL 108). Why beans? He asserts directly that he needed a cash crop, a means to "earn ten or twelve dollars by some honest and agreeable method" (WAL 37). However, beans were considered a negligible means of earning money in Concord. If a farmer wanted to earn a quick dollar, corn, oats, or English hay were the most suitable for market. In 1850, half of the farmers in Concord "listed no beans at all in their reports for the U.S. Agricultural Census. And of the 60 that did grow beans, only four raised as many as 12 bushels, Thoreau's total in 1846" at Walden (Gross 199). According to Gross, farming must have *some* other purpose than a simple way of earning extra money.

Robinson argues that Thoreau's farming has spiritual and ecological implications, and that it cut "against the grain of social malaise that characterize[d] much of modern American society" (*Agrarian* 329). Thoreau believed that labor, "even when pursued to the verge of drudgery, is perhaps never the worst form of idleness. It has a constant and imperishable moral, and to the scholar it yields a classic result" (WAL 105). The result is contingent upon how the labor is

undertaken. For instance, he describes a man "making holes with a hoe for the seventieth time at least, and not for himself to lie down in! . . . Why concern ourselves so much about our beans for seed, and not be concerned at all about a new generation of men?" (WAL 110). The quality of human life in the latter example is locked in a cycle of physical bondage and it is consequently diminished. There is no real concern for the soul. Labor can be invested with meaning, and it is a matter of discovering the "imperishable moral," or lessons of the activity.

The spiritual aims, or "moral" of the bean field experiment can be linked to Thoreau's discovery of Native American archaeological artifacts.

As I drew a still fresher soil about the rows of my hoe, I disturbed the ashes of unchronicled nations who in primeval years lived under these heavens, and their small implements of war and hunting were brought to the light of this modern day. They lay mingled with other natural stones, some of which bore the marks of having been burned by Indian fires. (WAL 106)

The discovery of the fire pit, along with the music it generates (the tinkling of the hoe against the charred stones), places Thoreau's labor into "a mode of communion within a larger human family" that touches the "fabric of human history" (Robinson, *Agrarian* 335-336). Thoreau was well known in Concord

for his knowledge of Indian artifacts and Indian culture, and his discovery of such artifacts here is significant. It first serves to remind us of the historical fact of the displacement of the Indian from the land . . . Thoreau's discovery is therefore an initial sign of the gulf between the cultures, but it ultimately serves to suggest the bridge between Thoreau himself and the cultures that have been linked to the land before him. (Robinson, *Agrarian* 335)

Labor in the wilderness reflects Thoreau's place in the universe, and connects him to a group of respected wilderness fellow-travelers. The bean field enables him to work his "feet downward through the mud and slush of opinion, and prejudice . . . and philosophy and religion, till we come to a hard bottom and rocks in place, which we call *reality*" (WAL 66).

Not all of the bean field episode is devoted to descriptions of beans or even archeological discoveries. Other observations are rooted in the ecological processes of the wilderness (Robinson, *Agrarian* 337). The night-hawk that circles above Thoreau, while he hoes his beans and falls with a "swoop and a sound as if the heavens were rent," becomes a vital part of the scene (WAL 107). The flight of the bird "expands the spatial frame in which Thoreau performs his labor. He sees the hawk's soaring and diving as gestures of expansion that balance the digging and delving of his hoe" (Robinson, *Agrarian* 338). The hawk is a natural extension of the land Thoreau works, cousin to him and the unchronicled nations, "part of a larger framework of earth and sky" (Robinson, *Agrarian* 338).

Thoreau believed that his bean field was "the connecting link between wild and cultivated fields" (WAL 106). He actively cultivated a middle ground where he could escape a structured and imposing society, and learn something about himself in close proximity to nature. The value of his labor "came to \$16.94, but the spiritual value was the realization that the Massachusetts soil could sustain the seeds of virtue . . . [and] a new 'generation of men'" (Paul, *Resolution* 64). The beans are Thoreau's answer to the agricultural reformers because he took "exhausted, barren land, did nothing to improve it, obtained little from it" and yet was content with its yield (Gross 202). Ultimately, the choice of the crop is immaterial, and statements by Thoreau like "[i]t was no longer beans that I hoed, nor that I hoed beans," begin to make more sense (WAL 107).

The Curse of Trade: Huckleberries and Writing

Thoreau's conception of labor as illustrated through his cabin and bean field experiments at Walden naturally extend to other aspects of capitalism, including how he earned his money, and to his descriptions of the landscape. He "found that the occupation of a day laborer was the most independent of any, especially as it required only thirty or forty days in a year to support one"

(WAL 48).⁴ Thoreau was often hired by Concord property owners as a land surveyor due to his thorough knowledge of the landscape. With over three hundred days of the year remaining, he was free to roam the woods, and he often found himself picking huckleberries when in season. At the time of this death, Emerson lamented that Thoreau possessed "rare powers of action, that I cannot help counting it a fault in him that he had no ambition. Wanting this, instead of engineering for all America, he was the captain of a huckleberry party" (*Thoreau* 331-332).

Thoreau loved picking berries, and considered selling them to supplement his income. But he argues that the fruits of the field "do not yield their true flavor to the purchaser of them, nor to him who raises them for the market . . . The ambrosial and essential part of the fruit is lost with the bloom which is rubbed off in the market cart, and they become a mere provender" (WAL 116-117). He saw the exchange process as "emptying the world of its concrete reality and not only converting objects into dollars, but causing their 'itness' or being to disappear" (Gilmore 180). Berry picking is arguably an example of an activity with intrinsic moral and aesthetic value. "But I have since learned," Thoreau continues, "that trade curses every thing it handles; and though you trade in messages from heaven, the whole curse of trade attaches to the business" (WAL 47).

Thoreau's experiences as a writer are similar to his discussion of huckleberries, and they further illustrate the influence of exchange in the market system. He is cognizant that supply and demand drive sales, as is demonstrated in his discussion of the parable of an Indian selling baskets in Concord (WAL 12).⁵ Thoreau produced a similar basket, A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, to celebrate a rafting journey with his brother John, who died shortly after the trip. The book sold poorly, and of the first printing of a 1000, 706 books came to rest in the Thoreau family attic (Gilmore 190). Sentimental "value" versus commercial success (concerning A Week) becomes crucial when Thoreau argues that the "life which men praise and regard as

successful is but one kind. Why should we exaggerate any one kind at the expense of the others?" (WAL 12). Capitalist society, past and present, values profit, and if the product fails to sell it is arbitrarily deemed a failure. Such an outlook often marginalizes topics of intellectual and emotional importance.

An Eco-Consciousness

Thoreau's observations concerning capitalism inevitably led him to consider the importance of preserving the wilderness. "The Ponds" begins with physical descriptions of Walden, and it is clear that the pond is a source of activity and fascination.

Sometimes, after staying in the village parlor till the family had all retired, I have returned to the woods, and, partly with a view to the next day's dinner, spent the hours of midnight fishing from a boat by moonlight, serenaded by owls and foxes, and hearing, from time to time, the creaking note of some unknown bird close at hand. These experiences were very memorable and valuable to me, --anchored in forty feet of water . . . surrounded sometimes by thousands of small perch and shiners, dimpling the surface with their tails in the moonlight . . . It was very queer, especially in dark nights, when your thoughts had wandered to vast and cosmogonical themes in other spheres, to feel [a] faint jerk, which came to interrupt your dreams and link you to nature again. (WAL 118)

Life literally teems under and around Thoreau, and the tranquillity of the event permits a cosmic journey. The pond and the surrounding landscape are invested with spiritual meaning. He even states: "I got up early and bathed in the pond; that was a religious exercise, and one of the best things which I did" (WAL 60).

The discussion of Flint's pond is a necessary addition to Thoreau's "spiritual" experiences at Walden, because it acts as a denunciation of labor based on the utility of the landscape. For Thoreau, "commercial agriculture has an impact on the physical world which is just as devastating as its effect on the farmer" (Gilmore 179). His rhetoric is noticeably indignant as he progresses into a discussion of the physically defaced Flint's pond. "What right," Thoreau declares, "had the unclean and stupid farmer, whose farm abutted on this sky water, whose shores he has ruthlessly

laid bare, to give his name to it? Some skin-flint, who loved better the reflecting surface of a dollar, or a bright cent, in which he could see his own brazen face" (WAL 131-132). Every object on the farm has a dollar amount attached to it, including the crops, flowers, fruits, and as Thoreau mockingly states, even the farmer's god. The land at Flint's pond exists "merely as an object--a resource--and [the farmer] exploited it with a vengeance" (Nash, *Rights* 36). Outraged and left helpless to prevent the exploitation of the land, Thoreau makes his protest through his writing. He is, in a sense, an "originating participant" in the formulation of our modern ecological sensibilities (Robinson, *Agrarian* 332). His attention to the scientific names, and to the habits of the animals at Walden reinforce this claim.⁶ "How can you expect the birds to sing," Thoreau asks, "when their groves are cut down?" (WAL 129).

Ice

In the midst of all the economic influences in American culture, Thoreau needed to find an object from the wilderness that raw capitalism could not spoil. In "The Pond in Winter," he describes an ice harvest performed by a hundred Irishmen with "car-loads of ungainly-looking farming tools, sleds, [and] ploughs" (WAL 196). The ice harvest is directed by a local farmer who "wanted to double his money, which, as [Thoreau] understood, amounted to a half a million already" (WAL 196). He examines the activity with an appreciation of the labor involved in a harvest. The Irishmen

went to work at once, ploughing, harrowing, rolling, furrowing, in admirable order, as if they were bent on making this a model farm; but when I was looking sharp to see what kind of seed they dropped into the furrow, a gang of fellows by my side suddenly began to hook up the virgin mould itself, with a particular jerk, clean down to the sand, or rather the water . . . and haul it away on sleds. (WAL 197)

Though the virgin "landscape" is hooked, jerked, and uprooted, there is little indignation in Thoreau's reactions. Instead, he focuses on describing the curiousness of the event, and as the ice is transported into town, it becomes an "object of interest to all passers" (WAL 198).

The discussion of the ice harvest does not entirely concern its market value, but rather its enduring and spiritual qualities. The ice marketers tell Thoreau that they have in storage years-old ice that is as "good as ever" (WAL 198). This admission prompts him to connect the endurance of the ice to the human condition: "Why is it that a bucket of water soon becomes putrid, but frozen remains sweet forever? It is commonly said that this is the difference between affections and the intellect" (WAL 198).⁷ True knowledge manifested in the intellect is enduring in nature, much like the ice from the pond. It is a curious analogy to be sure, $H_2O_{(s)}$ = the human intellect, but Thoreau attempted to construct a way for the ice to remain pure, unlike the huckleberry picking and authorship examples where the "bloom" is rubbed off by trade (WAL 117). As the ice is sold and transported around the world, people of varied cultures figuratively drink from the same well. He even describes himself, perhaps a bit arrogantly, meeting Bramin, a priest for the three major Hindu deities: Brahma, Vishnu, and Indra (WAL 199). Thoreau recognized that capitalism was a part of the new American way of living, but there are ways to color the process; in this case, he appropriated Hindu spirituality to rationalize the ice trade and give it cosmic significance.

Philanthropy

In his discussion of philanthropy in "Economy," Thoreau outlines the difference between social criticism (as we have discussed so far) and social responsibility. His philosophy of individualism inevitably came into conflict with the philanthropic impulses of his culture. Thoreau asserts that there "are those who have used all their arts to persuade me to undertake the support of some poor family in town" (WAL 49). But when he extended his help, these families "have one

and all unhesitatingly preferred to remain poor" (WAL 49). For Thoreau, there is a troublesome balance between the impulses of organized philanthropy, and "stand[ing] between any man and his genius" (WAL 49).

Thoreau believed that philanthropy is in many cases motivated by the doer's guilty conscience (WAL 52). "If I knew for a certainty that a man was coming to my house with the conscious design of doing me good, I should run for my life" (WAL 50). There is some tongue-in-cheek humor in Thoreau's statement here, but it does not mask his contempt for organized "goodness." He does not completely denounce philanthropic activities, however, because the motives of such endeavors are generally honorable. His version of social responsibility is closer to "living well" as an example to others. "[L]et us first be as simple and well as Nature ourselves, dispel the clouds that hang over our brows, and take up a little life into our pores. Do not stay to be an overseer of the poor, but endeavor to become one of the worthies of the world" (WAL 53). Thoreau believed that the individual should live a simple life and take an initiative in his or her existence. Philanthropy should not concern overseeing the poor, but rather living in a manner that shows others the path toward self-reliance. Ultimately, "[i]ndividuals, like nations, must have suitable broad and natural boundaries, even a considerable neutral ground, between them" (WAL 95). Philanthropy in many ways seeks to change the way the people choose to live, and it makes them dependent upon the values of a dominant culture. Thoreau sought to live a "moral" existence at Walden, and philanthropy, along with capitalism and agricultural reform all helped to negate the self-reliance of the individual.

Self-Reliance

Thoreau's observations concerning his culture are grounded in minute particulars. The "delicacy and precision of his seeing and knowing . . . exemplify the state of awareness, or

condition of being 'awake' that he hoped to recover at Walden" (Robinson, *Agrarian* 333). But what about Thoreau's "neighbors" lulled to sleep by capitalism? "I would not have any one adopt *my* mode of living on any account, . . . but I would rather have each one be very careful to find out and pursue *his own way*" (WAL 48). To allow the reader to accept his experience would be the "literary equivalent of the use of money" (Gilmore 187).

Thoreau did not have an especially optimistic view of his "neighbors" capacity for change. In fact, he believed that everyone "needed to be provoked,—goaded like oxen, as we are, into a trot" (WAL 73). His capitalist culture simply did not provide individuals with opportunities at bettering their own souls, hence the need to speak out. "Millions are awake enough for physical labor," he lamented, "but only one in a million is awake enough for effective intellectual exertion, only one in a hundred million to a poetic or divine life. To be awake is to be alive. I have never yet met a man who was quite awake" (WAL 61). The "divine" life for Thoreau is cultivated by close contact with the wilderness. The individual must "wade sometimes in marshes [beyond the bean field] where the bittern and meadow-hen lurk, and hear the booming of the snipe; to smell whispering sedge where only some wilder and more solitary fowl builds her nest" (WAL 211). Wilderness, along with individual self-reliance, were stabilizing forces in Thoreau's life, and helped him to "affect the quality of the day" (WAL 61).

III. Gary Snyder and the Practice of the Wild

In the last thirty years, Gary Snyder has emerged as "one of America's singular voices raised in the defense of nature and against industrial civilization" (McClintock 109). His work "stands outside the dominant discourse . . . In doing so, he identifies with that which the dominant order defines as binary opposite, in particular, that 'wildness' which the ideology of 'civilization' requires to be 'other' in order to confirm its own 'selfhood'" (Martin 4). My purpose in looking at Snyder's work in The Practice of the Wild (1990) is to demonstrate a continuation of the Thoreauvian voice, one that pushes for a measure of political and social reform beyond individualism. Within this section, I will look at three essays, "Good, Wild, Sacred," "Ancient Forests of the Far West," and "The Place, the Region, and the Commons," in an effort to display Snyder's vision of place-based living, bioregionalism, and political activism. Four poems from Turtle Island (1974), "Front Lines," "Call of the Wild," "Dusty Braces," and "Why Loggers Rise Earlier than Students of Zen," will contribute to the development of this account of Snyder's vision.

Good, Wild, Sacred

It is clear from the first few paragraphs of "Good, Wild, Sacred" that Snyder believes that western culture views the landscape only for its utility value. By examining what is unique, even sacred about the land, "we can get some insight into the problems of rural habitation, subsistence living, [and] wilderness preservation" (GWS 78-79). Viewing the landscape in a non-utilitarian fashion is the first step toward living a more "native" lifestyle. "Native" suggests "belonging to [a] place . . . It doesn't matter what color your skin is, it's a matter of how you relate to the land. Some people act as though they were going to make a fast buck and move on. That's an invader's mentality" (RW 86).⁸ When people of capitalistic culture begin to see the land as sacred, the land

is "forever not for sale and *not for taxing*" (GWS 81). This ecological view of the land emerges as a threat to the "assumptions of an endlessly expansive materialist economy" (GWS 81). It is this type of anti-exchange sentiment that Thoreau articulated so clearly in Walden.

In "Good, Wild, Sacred," Snyder compares an Australian aboriginal tribe, the Pintubi, and their connection to the landscape, with the industrialized habits of modern-day Japan. In 1981, Snyder visited Australia at the "invitation of the Aboriginal Arts Board to do some teaching, poetry readings, and workshops" and also to understand the issues concerning the development of aboriginal lands (GWS 82). His experiences with the Pintubi caused him to reflect on the connections among religion, culture, and land. The story begins for Snyder in the back of a pick-up truck, visiting remote places valued by native peoples and corporations looking to exploit mineral deposits. The tribesmen with Snyder sang traveling songs, each appropriate to a specific destination. As the truck moved, he could not keep up with the explanations of the many songs attached to passing objects in the landscape. "I realized after about a half an hour . . . that these tales were to be told while *walking*, and that I was experiencing a speeded-up version of what might be leisurely told over several days of foot travel" (GWS 82). In the absence of a written language, the traveling stories were *the means* of preserving the myths and stories of the Pintubi culture. The stories were maps "you could memorize, full of lore and song, and also practical information" (GWS 82).

On another occasion, Snyder was shown a ritual-place in the desert.

As we climbed the bedrock hills these ordinarily cheery and loud-talking aboriginal men began to drop their voices. As we got higher up they were speaking whispers and their whole manner changed . . . We crawled up the last two hundred feet . . . They whispered to us with respect and awe of what was there. Then we all backed away. (GWS 83-84)

This experience was "very powerful" and remained "very present in [Snyder's] mind" (GWS 84).

The spot visited by the group was a place where young men were taken for tribal ceremonies.

This "reverence" for a particular place is important to Snyder because in Western culture there are few areas, even within organized religions, where sacredness is attached to a natural location (GWS 81).

Japanese culture is characterized by much more confined living spaces than that of Australia, and, partly due to Japan's emergence since World War II as an industrial power, possesses a much different conception of the landscape. Snyder observes that Japan has many compartmentalized Shinto shrines, and they are traditionally centers of great spiritual power for Buddhists. Shinto is "the way of the spirits," and objects within the shrines are manifestations of *kami*,

a formless "power" present in everything to some degree but intensified in strength and presence in certain outstanding objects such as large curiously twisted boulders, very old trees, or thundering misty waterfalls. Anomalies and curiosities of the landscape are all signs of the *kami*-spirit power, presence, shape of mind, energy. (GWS 87)

The shrines are never maintained in any fashion: there is no hunting, fishing, thinning or burning of the landscape. Manipulating the land would diminish the *kami*. These religiously protected areas are examples of the old Japan, manifestations of what the landscape "might have been" (GWS 88).

A particularly useful contrast to the Shinto shrines is an area, specifically a row of hills near Kobe, that was hoed to the ground in the 1960s and the dirt carted away via conveyor belt and barge to create an island in Kobe harbor. This process took nearly twelve years to complete and helped Kobe become one of the busiest harbors in the world (GWS 88). According to Snyder, Japanese developers regularly "take bulldozers to . . . nice slope[s] of old pines and level [them] to the ground for a new town," or in this case, an island in a harbor (GWS 88). If the land is not part

of a shrine, there is no spiritual significance attached to it, and it is fair game for developers, no matter how pristine.

Around the campfire in the evenings, the elders of the Pintubi tribe sang more traveling songs, much like the ones Snyder heard in the back of the pick-up truck. The tribesmen

kept a steady rhythmic beat to the song by clapping two boomerangs together. They stopped between songs and would hum a phrase or two and then argue a bit about the words and then start again . . . It was during the full moon period: a few clouds would sail and trail in the cool night and mild desert wind. I had learned that the elders liked black tea, and several times a night I'd make a pot right at the fire, with lots of white sugar, the way they wanted it. (GWS 83)

The singers would generally finish half of a figurative journey each evening, and Snyder's role here goes beyond his tea making abilities. He is an anthropological conduit bringing the lore of a culture to a wider audience. These songs are important because they document how "landscape, myth, and information [are] braided together in pre-literate societies" (GWS 83). He wishes to bring attention to a culture in which there is a spiritual connection to the landscape—a functioning link to the past—that should be preserved. His ecological consciousness is opposed to capitalistic interests, and he realizes that land, and *native cultures* are becoming a scarce and precious resource. And Snyder brings this message forcefully home to his readers. "There is no quiet place in the woods where you can take it easy . . . The surveyors are there with their orange plastic tape, the bulldozers are down the road warming up their engines" (RW 118). All land, whether half way around the world or around the block, is under the knife.

Japan's compartmental shrines are "virgin priestess[es]" admired for their beauty only, while other patches of exploited land are much like a woman in a bad marriage, "overworked endlessly" (GWS 89). Snyder's view of Japan and the Pintubi are arguably vital, connected components in his philosophy of the landscape. To re-imagine the landscape and begin to see it as the Pintubi tribe does, the individual must first recognize that there is a "problem with the self-

seeking human ego" (GWS 92). By understanding that unnecessary development is harmful to the environment, the individual is ready to rethink what "sacred" land is, and will be open to seeing areas as "cultures of old" perhaps did, as invested with a "spiritual density" (GWS 93).

Recognition of the spiritual value of the land comes only with the knowledge of plants and animals of an area, and the stories of indigenous peoples (GWS 93). This knowledge, which Snyder calls "knowing of the lore," involves "discovering how earlier communities lived in [a] place, not so we can imitate those people literally, but [rather] learn from them wisdom we have lost" (McClintock 119). Urban dwellers "are often not aware of [a former] interdependence with place. Our songs and stories and myths [today] do not arise so much from necessity, nor do they provide information crucial to survival" (Turner 43).

One of the ways an individual can begin to know the land is to establish roots and live in a specific place. Eudora Welty provides a working definition of place in "Place in Fiction" (1958) that augments Snyder's view of the landscape. Welty argues that place

absorbs our earliest notice and attention, it bestows on us our original awareness; and our critical powers spring up from the study of it and the growth of experience inside it. It perseveres in bringing us back to earth when we fly too high. It never really stops informing us, for it is forever astir, alive, changing, reflecting, like the mind of man itself . . . Sense of place gives equilibrium; extended, it is a sense of direction too. (Welty 128-129)

This vision of place translates easily into an ecological perspective, in which the landscape is the focus of attention. Welty is working toward an ideal that exists in the mind, yet functions as a physical, stabilizing force in the individual's life. Thoreau's observations in "The Ponds" invoke Welty's description of a sense of place. He was genuinely affected by the "life" that circulated around him at Walden. Snyder, much like Thoreau, works from Welty's perspective, and uses the wilderness as a foundation in living, both personally and politically.

In the pay of a man
From town.

Behind is a forest that goes to the Arctic
And a desert that still belongs to the Piute
And here we must draw
Our line. (TI 18)

The wilderness has a distinct human quality here, and the images of violence are successful because they suggest the coercion of the landscape. "Front Lines" is reminiscent of Thoreau's descriptions of Flint's Pond as Snyder draws from the same ecological impulse to defend the land.

It is not just the land that is in danger of disappearing or being reshaped; wild animals face eradication if they range too close to human enclaves. In "The Call of the Wild," Snyder describes an old rancher who is annoyed by the howls of coyotes: "He will call the Government / Trapper / Who uses iron leg-traps on Coyotes, / Tomorrow. / My sons will lose this / Music they have just started / To love" (TI 21). He recognizes that some people are alienated from the call of the wild and cannot hear the beauty, as his sons do, in the coyote's song. Civilization mandates the destruction of beasts that pose a threat to utilitarian interests, and so-called civilized living.

Land use issues are enigmatic questions in modern culture, but Snyder's ecological vision is rooted in the attention to place because it provides ecological stability (McClintock 111). Grass-roots political activism by individuals and communities is necessary in defending the land against aggressive governments and developers. People need to

volunteer to be on committees to study the mining proposals, critique the environmental impact reports, challenge the sloppy assumptions of the corporations, and to stand up to certain county officials who would sell out the inhabitants and hand over the whole area to any glamorous project. It is hard, unpaid, frustrating work for people who already have to work full time to support their families. (GWS 95)

What strengthens one's sense of place is understanding that development is often not the best option for the land. People "will fight for their lives like they've been jumped in an alley" when their

place is threatened, and this defensiveness will help advance the cause of contemporary environmentalism (McClintock 120). As people begin to "understand where they are, and what it would mean to live carefully and wisely . . . in a place" (RW 86), they act against capitalistic culture, much in the way Thoreau did when he built his cabin and grew his beans: it is their statement.

Environmental political activism and place-based living, however, do not automatically make the landscape sacred. It is up to us to discover and even create sacred places. Snyder argues that children in his rural neighborhood "have secret spots in the woods. There is a local hill where many people walk for the view . . . There are some deep groves where people got married" (GWS 95). Sacred aspects of the land are cultivated by experience. For Snyder, the "cry of a Flicker, the funny urgent chatter of a Grey Squirrel, the acorn whack on a barn roof" are "signs enough" of the sacredness of the wild (GWS 96). The point is "to make intimate contact with the real world, real self. *Sacred* refers to that which helps take us . . . out of our little selves into the whole mountains-and-rivers mandala universe. Inspiration, exaltation, and insight do not end when one steps outside the doors of the church" (GWS 94). There are forces, corporate and state-sanctioned, at work in the world with the aim of exploiting natural habitat for profit. This knowledge prompts Snyder to advocate a rootedness that "will move people to make changes, even revolutionary ones, in the ways they organize their politics and economies" (McClintock 120). Viewing land as sacred helps in the cultivation of place, and this is an important step beyond Thoreau's commitment to individualism.

Old Growth

"Ancient Forests of the Far West" describes Snyder's unique experience with forests, from growing up in Washington state outside of a second growth forest, to his work as a logger with the

Warm Springs Logging Company (McClintock 110). What emerges in this essay is a view of forests as possessing more than a profit value, one which moves away from silvicultural descriptions like "stand" or "board feet" (Kirkland 11). Snyder fights against the impulse to envision forests in terms of simple economics, much as Burt Kirkland writes in Forest Resources of the Douglas Fir Region. Kirkland claims that, as of 1945, the timber supply in the Pacific Northwest amounted to over 439 million acres (4), and that if managed carefully, could last "perpetually" to fuel the growth of post-war America (11). For Snyder, forests are living entities which humans can learn much from, and must not simply manage.

As a child, Snyder explored his local forest, and he gained insight and inspiration from the ghosts of the ancient trees "as they hovered near their stumps" (AFFW 118). He eventually understood that a forest is more than a collection of trees. This knowledge is best modulated through his experiences as a mountaineer: "To be immersed in rock and ice and cold upper space is to undergo an eery, rigorous initiation and transformation. Being above all the clouds with only a few other high mountains also in the sunshine . . . is one of the first small steps toward Aldo Leopold's 'think like a mountain'" (AFFW 117-118). Leopold's metaphor is appropriate here because it suggests putting oneself into the landscape and knowing what it *is*. Snyder's ecological involvement with forests is a way of "thinking" like a forest.

Snyder counts himself, to a large extent, a part of the logging tradition, and this, on the surface, seems to contradict his feeling for the environment. His initiation into logging came from his father as a young boy, on one end of two-end saw: "'[D]on't ride the saw'--don't push, only pull--and I loved the clean swish and ring of the blade, the rhythm, the comradeship, the white curl of the wood that came out" (AFFW 118). He was drawn to logging because it held special meaning for his family and neighbors; it was their livelihood. The labor involved was "primary, productive,

and needed" by community members (AFFW 119). In "Dusty Braces," we learn a little of Snyder's genealogy: "O you ancestors / lumber schooners / big mustache / long-handled underwear / sticks out under the cuffs . . . / you bastards / my fathers / and grandfathers, stiff-necked / punchers, miners, dirt farmers, railroad-men / killd [sic] off the cougar and grizzly . . . / Your itch in my boots too, / --your sea roving / tree hearted son" (TI 75). The past comprises part of Snyder's personality, as a descendant of people who settled the west. His sympathies are rooted in the environment with the poem's ending signature, your "tree hearted son." This poem is an acknowledgment of Snyder's own "karma--the formative influences on him--[but this] doesn't mean he accepts the destructive ways of those ancestors" (Almon 87). Snyder's dilemma is how to balance the environmental degradation caused by large scale logging and the needs of a smaller community.

In the summer of 1954, Snyder began a stint as a chokersetter in a logging outfit, and this experience helped refine his environmental view. Chokersetting is a part of a skidding operation that occurs after the board feet of an area has been estimated, the trees marked, and then felled. Next, Caterpillar tractors (Cats) move into the area with long cables that have "three massive chains that end in heavy steel hooks" which the chokersetter wraps around a group of felled trees that are to be "yarded in" (AFFW 121). The chokersetter must "determine the sequence in which [logs are] hook[ed] so they will not cross each other, flip, twist over, snap live trees down, hang up on stumps, or make other dangerous and complicating moves" (AFFW 121).

Most of the trees Snyder hauled in 1954 were old growth timber, some were "eight-foot-diameter tree[s] and many [were] five and six footers" (AFFW 123). They were a "great presence" and a "witness to the centuries" (AFFW 125). He kept a small piece of bark from one exceptionally large tree as a way of honoring its memory. The bark is a symbol of the "forest's offerings to all of

us" (AFFW 126). Nevertheless, though regrettable, the loss of these huge trees is acceptable. Snyder argues that logging during the 1950s was practiced wisely through selective thinning by the Forest Service, and that the actions of the loggers were justified, especially since the stand of trees was harvested before the Forest Service began to use the clear-cut method of logging, which produced such disastrous results in the 1960s and 1970s (AFFW 126).

For Snyder, silvicultural and entomological information about "natural communities are helpful in establishing better human communities" (McClintock 14). With this in mind, the Forest Service for many years after World War II was a "true conservation agency and spoke against . . . clear cutting" (AFFW 133). But according to Snyder, the "big logging companies had . . . managed to over[-]exploit and mismanage their own timberlands and so they turned to the federal lands, the people's forests, hoping for a bailout" (AFFW 132). By "1969, 61 percent of timber harvested on western national forests was clear-cut; on eastern fronts, some 50 percent of the volume was clear-cut (G. Robinson 76).⁹ The Forest Service leadership "cosied up to the [timber] industry," and the radical change in timber harvesting methods, Snyder believes, are the Forest Service's most enduring and shameful legacies (AFFW 133).

The Forest Service leadership sees no difference between "a monoculture plantation of even-age seedlings and a wild forest," both forever sustainable with proper management (AFFW 133).¹⁰ Such a view disregards everything from micro-organisms to larger forest animals. Snyder argues that "just because certain organisms keep renewing themselves does not mean they will do so--especially if abused--forever" (AFFW 133). The forests that Snyder describes, containing much plant and animal diversity, do not fit into the Forest Service's view of logging rotations, where even-aged trees are harvested after a life span of 150 years or less (AFFW 133).

Ancient Forests, especially those in the Pacific Northwest, are the "fullest examples of ecological process" (AFFW 127). Ecology is especially important when considering forests because it "encourages a biocentric perspective that emphasizes kinship, even equality, between humans and other forms of life" (McClintock 3). The ground below the trees contain "huge quantities of dead and decaying matter as well as new [growth that] preserv[es] the energy pathways" of the forest (AFFW 128). A forest is a "palace of organisms" that contains as "many as 5,550 individuals . . . per square foot of soil to the depth of 13 inches. As many as 70 different species have been collected from less than a square foot of rich forest soil. The total animal population of the soil and litter together probably approaches 10,000 animals per square foot" (AFFW 128). The numbers that Snyder cites testify to "life" teeming under his feet, and the passage resembles Thoreau's descriptions of fishing at Walden pond (WAL 118). Both writers use the "life" that occurs under and around them to advance an environmental perspective. For Snyder, nature's "organic unity is most clearly seen in the flow of energy through ecological systems" (McClintock 14) via "pathways" (AFFW 128). Young and old trees are fed by rich soil and elegant root systems, and thousands of "individuals" exist beneath the surface sharing the stored energy.

"Ancient Forests," despite all its descriptions of ecological processes does not move toward an indictment against the logging industry. There is a place for logging, if it is done responsibly. It is not the loggers' fault that society mandates the cutting of trees to satisfy its industrial habits. Most loggers are simply trying to earn a living, and in many cases, logging provides jobs in rural communities where there are no other economic opportunities. In "Why Log Truck Drivers Rise Earlier than Students of Zen," Snyder describes a truck rumbling up a dirt road in "Thirty miles of dust." There is literally "no other life" for the logger (TI 63). Loggers are

responsible for their actions to a limited degree, but real blame for irresponsible logging practices should rest with people who are "educated at the best universities--male and female alike--eating fine foods and reading classy literature, while orchestrating the investment and legislation that ruin the world" (AFFW 119).

Snyder's descriptions of logging here are very similar to Thoreau's account of the ice harvest at Walden pond. In both instances, a "labor" is described thoroughly by the writer, and even though the activity in question is connected to the market system, it is justified in the end. Thoreau saw the ice harvest as an aesthetic and spiritual event; Snyder views logging as a legitimate means of earning a living, if forests are managed wisely by the government and logging companies. Logging can be equated with "farming, crafts, home skills," occupations that "are all valid" (RW 88).

On a larger scale, "Ancients Forests" is essentially a call for increased awareness and regulation of the logging industry. Snyder is defending a larger sense of place in this essay, while making a direct call for reform. He asks "for slower rotations, genuine stream[-]side protection, fewer roads, no cuts on steep slopes . . . and only the most prudent application of the appropriate smaller clearcut" (AFFW 134). A ban should also be placed on logging in all old-growth forests. This is a militant demand, but justifiable in the face of continual resource extraction by logging companies. Logging in this essay becomes one part of a web of issues, such as livestock overgrazing, and massive dam projects that threaten to shrink the wilderness (AFFW 141). Snyder is intent on showing that the trees, animals, and insects that inhabit forests are vital parts of a shared "ecological integrity and sustainability," even the pests (AFFW 143). The forests are a well-spring for Snyder, sources of life that must be defended against exploitation and mismanagement. And

in coming to know forests better, even understanding the "dry" statistical information, individuals can enlarge their perspective and be more a part of an "organic" community.

Bioregionalism

In "The Place, the Region, and the Commons," Snyder extends his view of the landscape beyond the concept of place, as developed in "Good, Wild, Sacred" and "Ancient Forests." The commons have existed for thousands of years, and have diminished with the advent of modern civilization and the privatization of land ownership. These areas were a place of "common pool resources" that all could use according to their needs (PRC 30). Between the extremes "of deep wilderness and the private plots of the farmstead lies a territory which is not suitable for crops. In earlier times it was used jointly by members of a given tribe or village . . . It is necessary for the health of the wilderness because it adds big habitat, overflow territory, and room for wildlife to fly and run" (PRC 30). This "overflow territory" supplied elements of life that a simple agrarian existence could not, for instance game and fish.

The commons were once important to sustenance economies the world over. In England during the 1700s, the "wool business, with its exports to the Continent was an early agribusiness that had a destructive effect on the soils and dislodged peasants" (PRC 32). In America, the doctrine of Manifest Destiny gave pioneers a perceived God-given right to wrest the commons from Native Americans. It is perhaps impossible to have a modern view of certain lands as shared, Snyder explains, especially if a resource is connected to it (PRC 36). The recovery of the commons, however, becomes critical because without it, individuals cannot maintain a measure of self-reliance. The commons can provide opportunities for involvement in the "web of the wild world," where an individual can make "Natural Contact" with the environment (PRC 36), can act upon impulses like Thoreau's to "wade sometimes in marshes" in the discovery of self (WAL 211).

Bioregions are a natural extension of the commons. They follow the geographical form of the land, and according to Snyder, are a more accurate distinction of an area than political boundaries. People "can regain some small sense of [an] old membership by discovering the original lineaments of our land and steering—at least in the home territory and mind—by those rather than the borders of arbitrary nations, states, and counties" (PRC 37). One of the ways Snyder defines a region is by looking at its distinctive plants. In the Pacific Northwest, the coastal Douglas Fir is a common tree. The Douglas Fir's

northern limit is around the Skeena river in British Columbia. It is found on the west of the crest through Washington, Oregon, and northern California. The Southern coastal limit of Douglas Fir is about the same as that of the salmon, which do not run south of the Big Sur River. Inland it grows down the west slope of the Sierra as far as south as the north fork of the San Joaquin River. [This] outline describes the boundary of a larger natural region that runs across three states and one international border. (PRC 38)

For people living in this region, the Douglas Fir is a sure sign of "rainfall and temperature range [that] will indicate what your agriculture might be, how steep the pitch of your roof, what raincoats you'd need" (PRC 38).

By understanding the larger natural region, one can begin to understand the "spirit of the place" and also realize "that you are a part of a part and that the whole is made of parts, each of which is whole" (PRC 38). This recognition of the self in a greater universe is very similar to the spiritual significance of Thoreau's discovery of the buried Native American fire pit at Walden (WAL 106). Knowledge of an area (bioregionalism) helps defeat the alienation of humans from their environment. In the same sense that Thoreau believed his "neighbors were asleep" in the 1840s, Snyder argues that there are "tens of millions of people in North America who were physically born here but not actually living here intellectually, imaginatively, or morally" (PRC 40). As individuals become more aware of their bioregion, they are "*born again*" and become more native (PRC 40).

It is imperative to be in close contact with the land so that opportunities for a Thoreauvian "transcendence" can become typical in the life of the individual.

What makes Snyder's bioregional perspective unique is that it moves away from the "monotheistic" impulses of government and culture, which often advocate "uniformity, universality, and centralization" of behavior (PRC 41). Bioregionalism, on the other hand, lends itself naturally to cultural differences. For instance, Snyder recalls a Wasco man he worked with as a chokersetter who married a Chehalis woman. When the two would fight, she "would call him a 'goddamn grasshopper eater!' and he'd shout back 'fish eater!'" (PRC 42). This example, based in the cultural difference of foods between two Native American tribes, is an example of how bioregionalism works. Indigenous peoples often utilize food sources that occur naturally and are not mass produced. This "[c]ultural pluralism" is a vital part of a bioregion, and plants, landforms, and people are all "*part of [a] culture*" (PRC 37).

The latter half of "The Place, the Region, and the Commons" details Snyder's own bioregion, what he calls "Ninesan County," in honor of the Native Americans that inhabited the land for thousands of years prior to the arrival of white settlers. There are descriptions of local landforms, flora boundaries (much like the example of the Douglas Fir), the people, and his own work—the responsibilities of agrarian life—on the San Juan ridge (PRC 44-45). These "Ninesan County" descriptions are compelling because they mesh people with the physical landscape, much like a wilderness-human panorama (PRC 47). Snyder's bioregion is growing physically, and he believes that there is a sense of community present that will endure beyond any political upheavals. To "work in a place is to bond to a place: people who work together in a place become a community, and a community in time, grows a culture" (*Rediscovery* 462). To Snyder, this is the practice of the wild.

Forever Not For Sale

Snyder's view may seem radical by mainstream cultural standards, but his place-based lifestyle and criticism of capitalism are ways of dealing with environmental difficulties our society presents to us all. Considering a forest as sacred, for instance, may appear an elaborate rhetorical device, but it is simply a means for Snyder to convince his audience to look at the landscape beyond its profit value. If he succeeds, this new consciousness changes our conception of the use of forests, or any other object of utilitarian value. The land is now transformed and "forever not for sale" (GWS 81). The three essays discussed here all help define this view of Snyder's environmental blueprint for living, which provide a means for a change, however humble. The environment can be a source of strength, as Thoreau articulated, and how radical Snyder's work appears depends upon how seriously the individual believes that culture is damaged, and in humankind's capacity to help the landscape heal.

IV. Thoreau, Snyder, and the Politics of Reform

So far in this paper, we have examined Thoreau and Snyder separately, and in terms of their ecological sensibilities. Snyder's work has emerged with a distinctive political element, but beyond the politics involved in place-based living is a distrust of governments, which Thoreau also shared. The use of the term politics, however, becomes problematic because its meaning can splinter into dozens of directions. But in this study

the term *politics* is used in its broadest sense; it refers to the total complex of man's interactions in society. When one asks what characterizes the politics of an age, one is concerned not only with its governmental structures . . . but also with ideas and attitudes concerning the nature of man and his relationship to the universe and his fellowman. (Meyer 7)

Both writers faced social crises because of the politics of their culture, and made attempts address them. "The Last Days of John Brown" and "Resistance to Civil Government" are Thoreau's responses to his government's continued sanctioning of slavery and its imperialist activities in Mexico in 1846-48. Snyder recognizes, much as Thoreau did with slavery, that the exploitation of wild creatures and places by world governments and corporations are accepted as "moral" practices. In the poems "Spel Against Demons," "It Pleases," and "Mother Earth: Her Whales" in Turtle Island, Snyder discusses the political representation of the wild as a way of advancing environmental politics. "Four Changes," also from Turtle Island, discusses larger social questions, like over-population and pollution, and as a text contains "practical and visionary suggestions" for the present and future (Molesworth 145).

John Brown

Henry Thoreau and John Brown. Initially, the student of history might not connect these two men, but their paths did cross, and "The Last Days of John Brown" provides a little known, yet important insight into Thoreau's political philosophy. In fact, "The Last Days of John Brown" and

"Resistance to Civil Government" are "indications of [his] participation in history despite his aversion to politics" (Meyer 20). Thoreau's home of Concord, Massachusetts was a relatively enlightened community with many individuals involved in Abolitionist activities. On occasion, he fugitive slaves in the Concord area, and guided others to Canada. In "the winter of 1851, the Fugitive Slave Law grant[ed] Southern slave holders or their agents the right to seize and carry back to the South any run away slaves they found in the North" (Harding 314), and it prompted many in Concord to examine more closely the morality of slavery, including Thoreau.

Prior to the Civil War, John Brown gained national attention as "one of the leaders of the anti-slave forces in the Kansas territory, and had battled with the Border Ruffians, who swarmed over from Missouri and hoped to make Kansas a slave state" (Harding 415). Brown seized a Federal armory in Harper's Ferry, West Virginia in 1859 in an attempt to make the U.S. government face the issue of slavery. He believed that the abolition of slavery would not come through legislation, but through "bloodshed" (Burns, *The West*). The insurrection was unsuccessful and Brown's militant band was quickly captured in a Harper's Ferry fire station by Union General Robert E. Lee, and all were later executed for treason and murder. Prior to the events at Harper's Ferry, Brown stayed briefly in Concord to raise money for his anti-slavery activities and found a sympathetic audience in Thoreau, Emerson, and other abolitionists (Harding and Meyer 56).

As the news of Brown's insurrection surfaced in Concord, Thoreau was quick to publicly defend him when many of his "neighbors" condemned him as a murderer. He found a spiritual significance in Brown's actions despite his own aversion to the use of force. Though he was "more attracted by Brown's ideals than by his actions, by his courage than by his deeds," Thoreau

considered Brown above all a Transcendentalist, "one who followed the voice within himself even though it led him into opposition with the state" (Harding 418).

Brown's deeds at Harper's Ferry reopened a stagnant cultural conversation and Thoreau recognized its importance.

Men have been hung in the South before for attempting to rescue slaves, and the North was not much stirred by it. Whence, then, this wonderful difference? We made a subtle distinction, forgot human laws, and did homage to an idea. The North, I mean the *living* North, was suddenly all transcendental. It went beyond the human law . . . and recognized eternal justice and glory. (LDJB 194)

The people of Concord began to see the immorality of slavery more clearly because of Brown's actions. The public attention brought to slavery and Brown is the extension of individual thought beyond everyday routines, what before was justice is now injustice, and what was "best [is] deemed worst" (LDJB 194). Thoreau here illustrates a light in the human soul that motivated America's revolutionary forefathers, and will motivate others in the future in the defense of themselves, and of other "oppressed people[s]" (LDJB 194). It is the ability to truly *see*.

For Thoreau, a recognition of inward spiritual truth is important in understanding Brown's actions, and this truth should not be dictated to the individual from the pulpit, religious or secular. One can only imagine the lively rhetoric that circulated in Concord that prompted him to say: "Look not to legislatures and churches for your guidance, nor any soulless *incorporated* bodies, but *inspired* or inspired ones" (LDJB 196). Thus he places the individual outside of organized institutions where opinion is often dictated. Brown's actions shed light on a moral evil that was sanctioned by the state and lingering in the cultural landscape. Ultimately for Thoreau, Brown's death was a translation, a type of metamorphosis that keeps the spirit of his anti-slavery principles alive (LDJB 198).

A Night in Jail

According to Harding and Meyer, "Resistance to Civil Government" is one of the most influential political statements in modern times (42). Specifically, Thoreau's "non-payment of his poll tax . . . [and subsequent jailing] was primarily a protest against a government that supported slavery" and a war in Mexico (Harding and Meyer 8). This tax-rebellion was based in the principles of Transcendentalism, which states that there are higher laws, the laws of conscience, that take precedence over civil laws when conflicts occur (Harding 207). "One afternoon," Thoreau writes, ". . . when I went to the village to get a shoe from the cobbler's, I was seized and put into jail, because . . . I did not pay a tax to, or recognize the authority of, the state which buys and sells men, women, and children, like cattle at the door of the senate-house" (WAL 115). Thoreau accepted the legitimate functions of government, but he was suspicious of how it operated (Harding and Meyer 138). Though a government may be founded on the idea of preserving justice, by promoting slavery and imperialism, the state essentially sanctioned injustice. Thoreau's withholding of certain taxes is an act of conscience taken against an immoral public policy. "The only obligation, which I have a right to assume, is to do at any time what I think right" (RCG 227).

Thoreau describes the government as a machine with certain frictions, and some frictions are less serious than others. But when "oppression and robbery are organized, I say, let us not have such a machine any longer" (RCG 229). And the problem for Thoreau rests with the government's rhetorical claim that it has secured freedom for all.

[W]hen a sixth of the population of a nation, which has undertaken to be the refuge of liberty are slaves, and a whole country is unjustly overrun and conquered by a foreign army, and subjected to military law, I think that it is not too soon for honest men to rebel and revolutionize. What makes this duty the more urgent is the fact, that the country so overrun is not our own, but ours is the invading army. (RCG 229)

The right of dissent when oppressed is a part of Thoreau's argument against a morally corrupted state. He is a defender of moral rights here, and this is a step beyond his "respect" of Brown's violent actions at Harper's Ferry.

One of the difficulties that Thoreau recognizes with slavery is that it is connected to commerce and agriculture rather than to humanity (RCG 230). Slavery exists wherever individuals sacrifice their reason and conscience for profit. The problem is one of confronting a system that financially benefits the merchants and farmers of America. There is another class of individuals, whom Thoreau describes as children of Washington and Franklin, who are "*in opinion* opposed to slavery and to the war, who yet in effect do nothing to put an end to them" (RCG 230). This group of people are concerned with relevant social issues, perhaps even possess Abolitionist opinions, but do not know how they can change a larger cultural system, and quietly accept the business that slavery generates. These individuals "hesitate, and they regret, and sometimes they petition; but they do nothing in earnest and with effect" (RCG 230).

For Thoreau, slavery in many ways is connected to an apathetic and immoral general populace. When Emerson asked Thoreau why he went to jail for not paying the poll tax, his reply questions the morality of the petitioner: "'Why did you not?'" (Harding 206). Emerson admitted in his journal that Thoreau's "position was at least stronger than the Abolitionists who denounce the war and yet pay the tax" (Harding 206).¹¹ The individual must maintain his or her conscience and avoid handing it over to the state by blindly obeying illegitimate laws. Neither populist mandates "nor legal precedence should usurp the individual's responsibility and right to choose morality over the state's policy" (Harding and Meyer 138). Thoreau's purpose in "Resistance to Civil Government" is to distance himself from an oppressive state, and to free his conscience from any sense of obligation to it. It is not, however, the individual's duty to right all the wrongs of society,

"but it is his duty, at least, to wash his hands of it, and, if he gives it thought no longer, not to give it practically his support. If I devote myself to other pursuits and contemplations, I must first see, at least, that I do not pursue them sitting upon another man's shoulders" (RCG 232). Consistency in thought and action is critical. It is not enough to say you would free the slaves or stop the war in Mexico if you were in power; tax dollars sustain the actions of government. Living under oppressive governments, individuals are "made at last to pay homage to and support [their] own meanness" (RCG 232).

In Thoreau's philosophy, a deeply held commitment to individualism means that the government should have no absolute right over the individual or their property. Governments will never be truly enlightened until they "recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which its own power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly" (RCG 245). If this recognition by the government is not forthcoming, and if the injustice of government requires the individual to be an "agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law . . . What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn" (RCG 233).

Poems and Politics

In the work of Gary Snyder, political criticism finds a prominent place. He "does not accept conventional political descriptions and divisions" (McClintock 111), claiming for instance, that the "'U.S.A.' and its states and counties are . . . inaccurate impositions on what is really here" (TI 1). What, then, is here? For Snyder, "what is here" is life: humans, plants, and animals existing in a complex "swirl in the flow, a formal turbulence, a `song'" (TI 1). Snyder, much as Thoreau, is concerned with governments that force people to sacrifice their integrity and become, often unknowingly, slaves to a system.

The combination of life that Snyder calls a "song" is directly connected to his conception of Turtle Island, a name "for the American continent derived from Native American creation stories" (Castro 132). Turtle Island allows us to "see ourselves more accurately on this continent of watersheds and life-communities" (TI 1). "Seeing" his position within the global culture primarily involves living simply, but it also includes addressing the larger problems of society, much like Thoreau's position on slavery.

In "Spel Against Demons," Snyder uses his Buddhist background to detail the "Demonic Energies" that plague the planet (TI 16). These negative energies are arguably connected to the consumption of consumer goods.

The stifling self-indulgence in anger in the name of
Freedom
must cease
this is death to clarity
death to compassion (TI 16)

"Self-indulgence" is here connected to freedom, and consumption leads to the death of "clarity" and "compassion," which is arguably a spiritual death. The question that emerges here is, was America, or any country, organized to consume? Snyder suggests that many cultures have evolved into consumptive machines, and any freedom in that system is consequently diminished in meaning. Individuals who act irresponsibly in society are associated with the "Demonic," and their self-serving ideals must be "cut down" (TI 16).

But, cut down by whom and by what method? "*Down* with demonic killers who mouth revolutionary / slogans and muddy the flow of change, may they be / Bound by the Noose and Instructed by the Diamond Sword of ACHALA, the Immoveable, Lord of Wisdom, Lord of Heat" (TI 17). The "killers" that "muddy the flow of change" resemble politicians and other "misguided" radicals. The Buddhist god that Snyder petitions, Achala, "represents the struggle against evil.

His appearance is fierce and angry. The sword in his right hand is to smite the guilty, the lasso in his left hand is to catch and bind the wicked" (Getty 35). Despite the violent imagery, the message to the reader is not of violence: "Anger must be / plowed back / Fearlessness, humor, detachment, is power / Gnowledge (sic) is the secret of Transformation!" (TI 16). Anger defeats the cause of change, power comes in facing new situations with humor and detachment, and knowledge becomes the key to understanding and eventual change. This poem curiously mixes anger and spirituality, yet encourages restraint. Almon suggests that the anger in "Spel Against Demons" is drawn from a Buddhist tradition called the Vajrayana, where wrath and force are often used as teaching tools. The anger that Snyder displays "grows out of an outrage of the abuse of living creatures" by governments (Almon 84). "Spel Against Demons" is a vehicle for Snyder to vent his own anger concerning the course of his culture, while using that anger to achieve a higher level of consciousness.

In "It Pleases," Snyder addresses the political center of America and its relation to wild nature.

Far above the dome
Of the capital--
.....
A large bird soars
Against white cloud,
Wings arched,
Sailing easy in this
humid Southern sun-blurred
breeze--
the dark-suited policeman
watches the tourist cars-- (TI 44)

The bird here functions as a means of expanding the frame of reference, soaring above a rooted center of political power, much like Thoreau's night hawk in the bean field (WAL 107). However, this poem does more than contrast the wild and civilized worlds. "The center of power is nothing! / Nothing here. / Old white stone domes, / Strangely quiet people, / Earth-sky-bird patterns / idly

interlacing / The world does what it pleases" (TI 44). The government here is nothing more than a tourist attraction with "old stone domes" celebrating dead heroes that attract "strangely quiet people." Washington DC is no better than Las Vegas. Enduring power rests with the bird soaring above the capital of freedom, much as the ecological balance rests for Thoreau with the night hawk at Walden. Both writers attempt to shift the power that society holds back to the wilderness.

In "Mother Earth: Her Whales," Snyder presents a plethora of information and images that includes a "manifesto calling for [the political] uprising [of animals in the natural world], lyrical passages describing the lives of whales, . . . rhetorical denunciations [of governmental] 'robots', . . . fragments of ballads and [other] historical sketches" (Almon 87). The poem begins with images from the natural world: "An owl winks in the shadows / A lizard lifts on tiptoe, breathing hard" (TI 47). These creatures are watching "the grasses working in the sun," growing and sustaining life from which all animals at various levels of the food chain interact. The tone of the poem changes dramatically, encompassing a string of indignant observations:

Brazil says "sovereign use of Natural Resources"
 Thirty thousand kinds of unknown plants.
 The living actual people of the jungle
 sold and tortured—
 And a robot in a suit who peddles a delusion called "Brazil"
 can speak for *them*? (TI 47)

Snyder argues that world-wide exploitation of the landscape "encloses local commons, local peoples. The village and tribal people who live in the tropical forests are literally bulldozed out of their homes by international logging interests in league with national governments," specifically Brazil (PRC 34-35). Many governments reconfigure the definition of tribal forests to "public domain" in an effort to legalize the rape of the land (PRC 35).

In "Mother Earth," Snyder's observations extend to other countries, including Japan. He begins by describing the flight of whales: "The Whales turn and glisten, plunge / and sound and

rise again, / Hanging over subtly darkening deeps / Flowing like breathing planets / in the sparkling
whorls of / living light--" (TI 47). Again, the transition between stanzas is abrupt.

And Japan quibbles for words on
what kinds of whales they can kill?
A once-great Buddhist nation
dribbles methyl mercury
like gonorrhea
in the sea. (TI 47)

It is implied here that if Japan could retouch its past spirituality, it would sense the beauty of the whale, and there would be little need for commercial whaling. Snyder's arguments against whaling are similar to Thoreau's arguments against slavery, in that the "green world [is] oppressed by the same exploitative, hierarchical values and institutions that once denied rights to slaves and continue to oppress many women, racial minorities, and laborers of all colors" (Nash, *Rights* 212).

The connection between human slavery and environmental exploitation is critical in linking Thoreau and Snyder together as philosophers. Slaves were once considered biologically different from their masters, and "an ethical code based on natural rights did not apply to [them] because they were not considered members of the human race" (Nash, *Rights* 204). This sentiment is what forced Thoreau into commenting on the John Brown incident, and withdrawing his tax support from a system "involving nearly four million slaves, four hundred thousand slave holders, and eight million Southern whites" (Nash, *Rights* 205). If slaves were once ethically and biologically different from other (white) humans and then granted rights, should the same rights in the future be granted to plants, animals, and landforms?

"Mother Earth" also functions as a call for a "natural world" revolution: "May ants, may abalone, otters, wolves and elk / Rise! and pull away their giving / from the robot nations" (TI 48). What humans often forget is that the natural world is our "source" of life. Plants and animals are "givers" that supply organized nations with vital resources. The uprising becomes more specific:

"*Solidarity*. The People / Standing Tree People! / Flying Bird People! / Swimming Sea People! / Four-legged, two-legged, people!" (TI 48). By calling for a unification of both human and animal worlds, Snyder speaks for an under-represented, exploited contingent, even gives it a voice (McClintock 18). And utility-minded governments and corporations are incapable of speaking for the natural world:

How can the head-heavy power-hungry politic scientist
 Government two-world Capitalist-Imperialist
 Third-world Communist paper-shuffling male
 non-farmer jet-set bureaucrats
 Speak for the green of the leaf? Speak for the soil? (TI 48)

Calling for fair political representation of wild creatures and places expands our manner of perceiving the natural world, while exposing immoral practices of governments and corporations.

The political representation of the wild is more than a literary conceit because it serves as a critique of representative government. Roderick Nash believes that the extension of political rights to the natural world is the next stage of American liberalism, and in *The Rights of Nature*, he traces an important, progressive line: the American Revolution (1776), the Emancipation Proclamation (1863), Women's Suffrage and the Nineteenth Amendment (1920), the Indian Citizenship Act (1924), the Fair Labor Standards Act (1938), the Civil Rights Act (1957), and the Endangered Species Act (1973). All of these political and legislative acts extended ethical thinking beyond accepted cultural bounds to grant basic rights of living (Nash, *Rights* 7). Whether or not the political representation of the wild is achieved is not immediately important here. The point is that Snyder is moving toward defining what our culture's ethics should be concerning the environment. Its realization is the human advocacy of environmentally-conscious politics. Perhaps, then, the gap between exploitation and so called extremist environmental preservation can be bridged.

Four Changes

In "Four Changes," a prose section in Turtle Island, Snyder advances what Molesworth calls the "new ethics," which is the definition of Snyder's opinion and relationship to society in the late 1960s (Molesworth 145).¹² In "Four Changes," Snyder "proposed social and political solutions to the four interrelated ecological problems of overpopulation, pollution, consumption, and 'transformation'" (Castro 135). "Four Changes" is by no means a blueprint for the future, and he even admits that the document is "[f]ar from perfect" (TI 91). However, "Four Changes" provides a useful reference point to specific issues that refine Snyder's political vision.

The first dilemma in "Four Changes" is over-population. Snyder describes humankind as "part of the fabric of life—dependent upon the whole fabric for his very existence" (TI 91). It is the obligation of humans to respect the "unknown evolutionary destinies" of other animals, and to act as "gentle stewards of the earth's community of being" (TI 91). For humans to act effectively in this role, there must be a smaller human population. Half of the present world population (as of 1969) would provide the best dynamic for humans, animals, and plants to exist together peacefully (TI 92).

The solutions to the population dilemma partly rest with governments; they first must be convinced that the population problem is severe. Immediate participation "by all countries in programs to legalize abortion . . . [and efforts to] try to correct cultural attitudes that tend to force women into child-bearing" must be advanced (TI 92); what these "attitudes" are Snyder does not elaborate. Men also must fully consider sterilization.¹³ These three suggestions are perhaps impossible to mandate, especially in a democracy. Many governments in our world are simply concerned with "extending their own powers" (TI 92). But the key in reducing the population drastically lies in redefining the way people live. Alternative social structures over long periods of

time will contribute to a "steady low birthrate" (TI 92), and this subverts power-hungry governments. Snyder here points toward developing, indigenous forms of human relationships that will act in the place of governmental population reform, for instance group marriage in communities allow the joys of child-rearing to be shared among a number of couples, "so that all need not directly reproduce to enter into this basic human experience" (TI 93).

The second dilemma in "Four Changes" is pollution. Snyder argues that "pollution is directly harming life on the planet: which is to say, ruining the environment for humanity itself. We are fouling our air and water, and living in noise and filth that no 'animal' would tolerate, while advertising and politicians try and tell us we've never had it so good" (TI 94). He is cognizant of two types of pollution: one is the physical waste that clutters the planet, and the second is "mind" pollution doled-out by advertisers and governments. His goal is "clean air, clean clear-running rivers" and healthy populations, which will in turn will lead to "unmuddied language and good dreams" (TI 94). The pollution section also calls for international legislation banning harmful pesticides and the demand that "[s]trong penalties for water and air polluters" be mandated (TI 94). The elimination of the combustion engine would remove a serious polluter from the planet. Since fossil fuel is the key to the continuance of industrial society, Snyder's immediate solution is individual conservation until other non-harmful energy sources are discovered: this includes recycling, hitch-hiking, car-pooling, all are ways of "thinking and doing." The call in the pollution section is for increased individual awareness of consumption patterns, and how these effect the larger environment.

The consumption section of "Four Changes" states that all animals, including humans, must consume and dispose to exist, but to use more than is necessary in sustaining life is "biologically unsound" (TI 97). The key to this consumption/disposal equation is simplicity and

independence in the life of the individual. Gardening, mid-wifery, home maintenance skills, all help the individual to function semi-independently in society (TI 98). In an echo of Thoreau's call to "simplify" life (WAL 62), Snyder asserts: "Learn to break the habit of unnecessary possessions—a monkey on everyone's back . . . Simplicity is light, carefree, neat and loving, not a self-punishing ascetic trip" (TI 98). When people begin to move away from unnecessary possessions and use their resources wisely, a liberated way of thinking emerges that allows a world without egotism (TI 98-99). For Snyder, there is "no self in self; no self in things" (TI 80). It is the process of eliminating the "luxuries" of living, as Thoreau called them in Walden, and for the individual to consider what is necessary to live simply.

In the transformation section of "Four Changes," Snyder states that "[n]othing short of [a] total transformation [of social operation] will do much good" (TI 99). This section more clearly articulates his utopian vision of political entities dissolved and replaced by bioregional councils that will develop as the influence of the state decreases or is entirely overthrown. The councils will not come from violence, but rather a "revolution of consciousness" and are best equipped to handle region-sensitive issues (TI 101). Economics, for instance, could be a "sub-branch of Ecology, and production/distribution/consumption handled by [regional] companies, or unions, or cooperatives, with the same elegance and sparseness one sees in nature" (TI 98). But the key to change is individual rootedness. We all must find a place on the planet, dig in, and take responsibility there, "learn about it, and start acting point by point" (TI 101).

In Deep Ecology for the 21st Century (1995), Snyder affirms the need for change in an addendum to "Four Changes." He argues that the

apprehension we felt in 1969 has not abated. It would be a fine thing to be able to say, "We were wrong. The natural world is no longer as threatened as we said then." One can take no pleasure, in this case, in having been right. Larger mammals face extinction and all manners of species are being brought near

extinction. Natural habitat is fragmented and then destroyed. The world's forests are being cut at a merciless rate. Air, water and soil are all in worse shape. Population continues to climb. The few remaining traditional people with place-based sustainable economies are driven into urban slums or worse. The quality of life for everyone has gone down, what with resurgent nationalism, racism, violence, both random and organized, and increasing social and economic inequality. There are whole nations for whom life is an ongoing disaster. I still stand by the basics of "Four Changes." (Deep Ecology 149-150)

This extended quote validates Snyder's social and political view as detailed throughout this essay.

The basic tenets of "Four Changes" question the legitimacy of government and the values associated with capitalism. If living conditions are getting progressively worse with no signs of improvement, the need for ecologically improved living patterns are more than ever imperative.

Identity Achieved

The activities of illegitimate governments are important to Thoreau and Snyder in understanding more fully that the wilderness is not the only motivator. In each case, it is the writer versus a larger cultural system, and their responses to the illegitimate functions of government are, as Yamazato argues, "part of a quest . . . for an identity" (243). Governments are a presence that cannot be ignored, and Thoreau's "Resistance to Civil Government" or the criticism of social structures in Snyder's "Four Changes," for example, demonstrate that dissenting opinions are healthy and crucial options so that everyone can see the flaws in culture. Part of discovering an identity is living in a way that is personally "moral," and coming to terms with the "immoral" practices of culture and government. This recognition, along with an interest in the wilderness, is an identity achieved.

V. Conclusions

Ralph Waldo Emerson writes that the "life of man is a self-evolving circle, which, from a ring imperceptibly small, rushes on all sides outward to new and larger circles, and that without end. The extent to which this generation of circles . . . will go, depends upon the force or truth of the individual soul" (*Circles* 169). This project has sought to compare two wilderness-minded individuals; both seek, in Emerson's terms, ways to expand the circle of their lives, and are, I believe, powerful voices in the chaos of capitalism. Their work concerns finding new levels of consciousness, even expanding the circle of culture; it is also important in understanding a critical aspect in the history of "American" ideas: the right of dissent. The wilderness is the base point of reference, but each man moves in different directions: Thoreau and the "individual" are synonymous terms, as are Snyder and "community." They are radical thinkers because they stand for what capitalistic culture has relegated to "other" (Martin 5).

Thoreau's experiences at the pond are based in what I have defined in this paper as social criticism, an area where the individual has only a limited social responsibility, as the philanthropy discussion in "Economy" indicates. The bean field experiment in Walden, for example, is a response to organized agricultural reform and demonstrates that farming need not be oppressive to the human condition, and that ecological and cosmic observations can go hand-in-hand with wilderness-oriented activities. There were also moments for Thoreau when the wilderness was eclipsed by larger social issues, like slavery. Criticism and action against the state are just as important as building a cabin or growing beans. Perhaps what is most crucial about Thoreau's work is his recognition of exploited landscape. Because of this, and of course, the work of many other wilderness writers since, we can genealogically trace the beginnings our own ecological consciousness, spiritually and intellectually, back to him.

Perhaps what most distinguishes Snyder from Thoreau is his interest in place, and its connection to environmentally conscious patterns of living. Ideally, place, "in the here-and-now, is where nature, social community, and spiritual achievement are brought into balance with one another" (McClintock 111). The "balance" that is place is an important step toward Thoreau's ideal of reducing life to its "lowest terms" (WAL 61). And "[m]odern civilization--East and West--", according to Snyder, "has tended to ignore the lives of other beings that coexist with humanity" (Yamazato 245). This disregard of other creatures is responsible for the ecological crisis we are in today. In The Practice of the Wild, Snyder has attempted to influence the way his readers view the land, and come to terms with the ecological problems of our world. In the same spirit as Thoreau's experiences at Walden, he advocates that the "experiment of living" last a lifetime. Living simply and in a way that "doesn't cheat" is the actuality of Snyder's vision, whether it is in the country or city (RW 88). His political criticism, much as Thoreau's, questions the state's ability to speak for what it cannot understand. Political involvement by place-based people is imperative in shifting the balance of "representative" power, so that patterns of living and the course of future legislation and can become ecologically stable.

Ultimately, Snyder blends the insights

gained in his cross-cultural quest in Japan and Western traditions (including the indigenous American cultures) to create a vision that transcends the mythic American land. By creating the myth of Turtle Island and unfolding it to the reader in his poetry and prose, he urges his readers to reconsider the validity of the old myths on which modern society is based. (Yamazato 245)

Reimagining culture is, I think, the most radical proposition that Snyder proposes. He moves away from what is "American," and in many ways is a modern prophet--an important voice from the wilderness calling for change for the health of the planet. Thoreau also sought to reshape culture, and his words, though meant for another time and place, are still valid, and can help us all live morally.

Finally, Thoreau and Snyder make culture richer by dissenting from it. Where would our modern, trouble-filled society be without the individual blazing a new trail when the usual paths are trodden down? or dominated by a particular system or group? Both provide a wider view of culture, one that is based in the wilderness, yet seeks to encourage change for the health of civilization collectively. It may be optimistic to think that the wilderness can effectively change culture, but the message is powerful for those willing to hear. In examining these two writers, we must recognize what each writer seeks to recover: a "Wildness" (e.g., a return to simpler living patterns and a closer relationship to the landscape) lost in capitalism, that is, as Thoreau noted in "Walking," the "preservation of the World" (112).

Endnotes

Chapter I

1. This quote is drawn from the Thoreau's "Walking," 112. A complete source citation is listed in the bibliography.
2. Lyon is citing a 1965 television interview entitled "Phillip Whalen and Gary Snyder, Poetry U.S.A." (Bloomington, Indiana: National Education Television, 1965).

Chapter II

3. We must note, however, Thoreau's debt to Emerson who permitted him to squat on his land, and borrow his tools to complete the building of the cabin.
4. The day laborer of the modern age is the least independent, and most exploited of all workers. In this sense, Thoreau's independent work life is significantly dated.
5. The Indian is surprised and irritated to learn, after much effort in weaving his baskets that none of his white townsmen would buy them. The Indian had not "discovered that it was necessary for him to make it worth the other's while to buy them, or at least make him think it was so" (WAL 12).
6. Thoreau's observations of the "silly" loon (*Colymbus glacialis*) (WAL 156-157), the water-bugs (*Gyrinus*) on the pond (WAL 126), and the red squirrel (*Sciurus Hudsonius*) in the forest (WAL 182) are a few examples, among many, of this ecological tendency.
7. This analogy, according to one reader/scientist of this text, should be interpreted in a rhetorical spirit. Frozen H₂O, after all, can absorb odor and be just as putrid as a bucket of standing water.

Chapter III

8. Concerning the term "native," Snyder is quick to point out that we are "all indigenous to the planet." But Snyder argues that native tribes rightfully have first claim to the term (*Rediscovery* 462).
9. Glen Robinson's figures are from the U.S. Senate's Public Land Subcommittee "Hearings on 'Clear-cutting' Practices" (1969), 449. Additionally, Edward Craft, Congressional Liaison for the Forest Service from 1950 to 1962 claims that "when timber markets were good [in the 1950s and 60s], industry lands were increasingly cut over and the pressure was on the Forest Service to constantly increase the cut of Forest Service timber" (Craft 22). The Forest Service's Congressional appropriations became connected "to the amount of timber that it would guarantee could be harvested off national forest lands in a . . . year" (Craft 22). And, as in any business, revenues were expected to surpass expenditures. So, "in order to get money from Congress, [the Forest Service] had to cut so much timber, and second, in order to return more revenues to the Treasury than it expended, it had to cut more and more timber" (Craft 23).

10. "Even-aged" is seedling growth that occurs after an area has been clear-cut (G. Robinson 68).

Chapter IV

11. Harding calls this exchange between Emerson and Thoreau a legend. There is no record of an official visit to the jail by Emerson, despite the circulation of the story in Emerson's family (8).

12. "Four Changes" was published in 1969 and included in Turtle Island (1974).

13. In this discussion, Snyder chooses to ignore the issue of contraception, excluding the use of "intrauterine loops" (TI 92) for women, when for many it seems especially logical to prevent life rather than seek to eliminate it through abortion. To Snyder's credit, he claims that "the whole population issue is fraught with contradictions," and that humans must somehow find ways to implement a world-wide "steady low birth rate" (TI 92).

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