

TOM KILLION

Mt. Thoreau from Piute Pass, 2017
Multi-block print, 12 x 11



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MAGGIE PAUL

Between Humans and Nature

An interview with
Gary Snyder

Gary Snyder is a winner of a Pulitzer Prize for Poetry and the American Book Award. He has published more than twenty books of poetry including; *This Present Moment: New Poems* (2016), *Danger on Peaks* (Counterpoint Press, 2005); *Mountains and Rivers Without End* (1997); *No Nature: New and Selected Poems* (1993), which was a finalist for the *National Book Award*; *Axe Handles* (1983), for which he received an *American Book Award*; *Turtle Island* (1974), which won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry. He has translated literature into English from ancient Chinese and modern Japanese. Snyder has been awarded many great honours, including the American Poetry Society Shelley Memorial Award, the American Academy of Arts and Letters Award, the Bollingen Prize, a Guggenheim Foundation fellowship, the Bess Hokin Prize, and the Robert Kirsch Lifetime Achievement Award from the *Los Angeles Times*.

Introduction

Gary Snyder is a West Coast treasure. He shares this title with poets Robinson Jeffers, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Kenneth Rexroth, Phillip Whalen, Robert Duncan, and the geography of the Cascades, the Sierras, sequoias, redwoods, oak, and madrone.

A Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, eco-activist, and translator of Japanese and ancient Chinese literature, Snyder is variously described as a nature poet, a Zen poet, a Beat poet, and a poet of the San Francisco Renaissance. He is a radical in every sense of the word: both deeply grounded and yet constitutionally restless; manifestly rooted in the wilderness of the Sierra Mountains and yet unable to sit still while prime forests are felled and the seas are suffocated with bottle caps and grocery bags. He is, in the words of the late anti-war and civil rights activist Bayard Rustin, an “angelic troublemaker.”

*For a novelist’s play on Gary Snyder we can turn to Jack Kerouac’s novel *The Dharma Bums*:*

Japhy Ryder was a kid from eastern Oregon brought up in a log cabin deep in the woods with his father and mother and sister, from the beginning a woods boy, an axman, farmer, interested in animals and Indian lore so that when he finally got to college by hook or crook he was already well equipped for his early studies in anthropology and later in Indian myth and the actual texts of Indian mythology. Finally he learned Chinese and Japanese and became an Oriental scholar and discovered the greatest Dharma Bums of them all, the Zen Lunatics of China and Japan.

The Dharma Bums is a largely fictionalized account of Kerouac’s meeting with the young Gary Snyder in San Francisco during the mid 50s. Here they are immersed in the very beginnings of the Beat scene, touring the bars and engaging in drunken, spontaneous poetry readings with a cast of literary characters including, among others, Allen Ginsberg, Phillip Whalen, Neal Cassady, and Kenneth Rexroth. Kerouac and Snyder leave the city and head for the mountains where Snyder plays Virgil to Kerouac’s Dante, only instead of plumbing the depths of hell, Snyder teaches Kerouac the subtleties of mountaineering while both are engaged in an exploration of Buddhist thought. In truth, Snyder was not from eastern Oregon, his mother had been a student at the