

RE-INHABITING THE ISLANDS: SENSES OF PLACE IN THE POETRY OF GARY
SNYDER AND DEREK WALCOTT

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ABSTRACT

RE-INHABITING THE ISLANDS: SENSES OF PLACE IN THE POETRY OF GARY SNYDER AND DEREK WALCOTT

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Building on the castaway narratives in both Gary Snyder's and Derek Walcott's poetry, I use Yann Martel's novel *Life of Pi* as a contemporary analogue for reading Snyder's Pacific journeys, in *Regarding Wave* and *Turtle Island*, and the quests of *Omeros*' fisherman protagonist, Achille. In chapter one, I read Snyder's *Regarding Wave*, analyzing how he revised place archetypes from rocks to waves in order to initiate a more balanced culture in harmony with natural rhythms. *Regarding Wave* demonstrates the poet's biocentric and historiographical critique of linearity and towers, and it embodies his thematic and poetic identification with "flows and spirals" (Snyder, *Regarding Wave* 24) because these symbols express a coherent sense of place in an archipelago, on Suwanose-Jima and Turtle Island. I argue that he fused the knowledge of a balanced animal-human household on Suwanose-Jima in the Ryukyu archipelago with Mahāyāna Buddhism for a vision of life as a bioregional member of the "great / earth / sangha" (*Turtle Island* 73), providing a spiritual context for environmentalism and an

environmental context for American Buddhism. In chapter two, I read Derek Walcott's *Omeros* as a poetic fusion of the creole present of St. Lucia within the "official" (Walcott "Muse" 49) archetypes of Western literature, mainly but not limited to Graeco-Roman mythology. Rather than assimilate St. Lucian culture into European literary forms, the long poem transposes and fuses the region's cultures and traditions for something new. I compare the two poets in chapter three through the New World poetic lens that Walcott develops in "The Muse of History," arguing that Walcott and Snyder negotiate the challenges of postcolonial and environmental poetry by writing intensely self-reflexive works that evoke the search for a healed sense of place. They draw their energy from the bitterness of a broken contract with nature to attempt to name the world again for everyone, and the way that they construe everyone is through the concept of a bioregion emanating in concentric ecological circles from their home ranges. Since they deal with ocean currents and watersheds, these communities are consequently transnational and hybrid.

INTRODUCTION: RECASTING THE CASTAWAY AS AN ISLAND RE- INHABITANT

American poet Gary Snyder's dialog with the people and places of the Pacific Rim during the 1950s and 1960s, traced in *Regarding Wave* (1970) and *Turtle Island* (1974), parallels the fictional arc of Yann Martel's novel, *Life of Pi* (2001). Similarly, St. Lucian poet Derek Walcott employs a castaway narrative to describe the development of a bioregional perception of the West Indies in *Omeros* (1990). June Dwyer analyzes Martel's novel through Tzvetan Todorov's theory of possible relationships with the Other, which Todorov applies to the European discovery of the Americas in *Conquest of America*. Dwyer reviews Todorov's paradigm as a triad of possible relationships: in the first the Other is an object, a mindless creature; in the second the Other is an inferior subject, a subaltern individual; and in the third the Other is an equal, accepted as s(he) is. She argues that in *Life of Pi* a "young ship-wrecked human grows up—so to speak—and takes his place in the circle of nature, rather than at the top of the heap," embodying Todorov's third relationship with the live tiger trapped on a life raft in the surrounding maritime wilderness (10). The castaway experience teaches Pi how to see his place in nature as a citizen of the earth, rather than as king of the food chain. I begin my analysis of Snyder's and Walcott's works with Martel's novel because it establishes a frame of reference for interpreting both poets' reinhabitation of their respective bioregions.

Life of Pi narrates the journey of a small Indian boy named Piscine, who re-names himself and negotiates the space between three competing religious discourses of Southern India: Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. He becomes shipwrecked while immigrating with his family to Toronto, and finds himself stranded on a lifeboat of the Japanese freighter *Tsimtsum*¹ with an injured zebra, a hungry hyena, an orangutan named Orange Juice, and a tiger named Richard Parker. When all hope of Pi's return to Southern India fails, and his death looms, Pi braves the tiger's lair under the tarpaulin cover on which he rests to fill his water bottle with the bilge in the corner of the boat. He decides to give up hope for a rescue by "paying attention to what is close at hand and immediate" and gets to work on "the business of survival" by taming and learning to co-inhabit the life boat with the tiger (Martel 169-71). After Pi discovers a solar still, sets it up, and works hard the remainder of the day fixing up the raft, he looks over the gunwale down into the water:

I thought I was alone. The stillness in the air, the glory of the light, the feeling of comparative safety—all had made me think so. . . . With just one glance I discovered that the sea is a city. Just below me, all around, unsuspected by me, were highways, boulevards, streets and roundabouts bustling with submarine traffic. In water that was dense, glassy and flecked by millions of lit-up specks of plankton, fish like trucks and buses and cars and bicycles and pedestrians were madly racing about, no doubt honking and hollering at each other. (175)

¹ Pi's senior thesis for religious studies concerning "certain aspects of the cosmogony theory of Isaac Luria" (Martel 3) suggests an intriguing homonym from Kabbalah: Tzimtzum, the first stage of God's creation of the cosmos when the creator hides his infinite light from a world of seemingly finite creatures. Martel's *Tsimtsum* operates analogously as the vehicle of Pi's shipwrecked removal from Pondicherry, removing Pi from the light of his family, religion(s), and native home in Southern India (Elior).

Pi's former experience of human isolation drops away from a self that finds and creates membership with the non-human animal world, of which the seas are the largest part, constituting roughly three-fourths of the earth's biomes. Just at the point when Pi loses touch with his home land, he grounds himself in the present moment by focusing on the maritime particulars necessary for survival.

In literary circles, Snyder is considered primarily an environmental poet and Walcott a postcolonial one. In order to link the two, I make use of Martel's environmental and postcolonial castaway, Pi Patel. I compare Snyder's *Regarding Wave* and *Turtle Island* to Walcott's *Omeros* as complementary attempts at topological mythopoesis for maritime regions. Each poet particularizes a storehouse of myths, symbols, and narratives for the kinds of conversation that can negotiate an ecologically healthy and local sense of place in a globalized world.

I argue in chapter one that although its author does not occupy a well-known position in ecofeminist discourse, *Regarding Wave* performs an ecofeminist critique of linear and immobile archetypes of foundation to articulate a dynamic conception of the human household based on Snyder's knowledge of East Asian religion and modern ecology. I continue my castaway analysis of Snyder's poetry by arguing in chapter three that the poet applies the lessons of his own trans-Pacific "spiritual education" (Murphy, *Literature, Nature, and Other* 106) to the politics of bioregional reinhabitation that he sets forth in *Turtle Island*. Snyder's self-reflexive works, *Regarding Wave* and *Turtle Island*, form the basis of a ship-wreck narrative best read according to the paradigm of Pi's transformation from deeply religious exile to pragmatic and productive ship captain.

I approach the complex and thematically robust *Omeros* from the same environmental castaway lens. *Omeros* is a complex multi-faceted work that, in my reading, evokes a healing process to reconcile the contradictory social forces structuring St. Lucia and the author's public identity. As an intensely self-reflexive work, it attempts to heal or mend the historical ambivalence of its characters and author. I focus on two significant journeys of the character Achille. I analyze the first as a healing quest in my second chapter and the second as the long poem's coda in my third chapter. Achille leaves the island of St. Lucia in his pirogue on the first quest to find "his name and his soul" (Walcott, *Omeros* 154). Walcott's searching Caribbean fisherman enacts a symbolic journey to Africa that results in his realization of how far away and atavistic this mother land is. Embracing the tough St. Lucian present as a place of "unsettlement" (140), Achille's choice for St. Lucia mirrors Pi's decision to give up hope for rescue, making the pragmatic choice to accept the life raft and the concomitant responsibilities of survival. Walcott's Achille is a metaphorical castaway and St. Lucia the life raft under which he uncovers a bioregional sense of place and home. Achille's second journey results from his frustration with a primitivist tourist economy and the condescension of indigenous workers in this economy.² He and Philoctete travel south towards Grenada searching for an uninhabited place to start over, and after an encounter with a whale scares them out of their wits, they realize the neocolonial nature of their desire and return

² Although effectively neocolonial in its appropriation of island geography and culture, the tourist industry is not an easy target of critique for the West Indian working class. When Walcott protested the construction of the Jalousie Resort and Spa because it effectively privatized St. Lucia's volcanic Pitons, a UNESCO World Heritage site, the local working class criticized his opposition to the Hilton Corporation because of the economic opportunity the resort development promised (DeLoughrey et. al. 24).

to Gros Ilet to continue their fishing trade in spite of its economic and ideological marginalization.

According to Elizabeth DeLoughrey, colonial castaway narratives like *Robinson Crusoe* construct islands as a-historical, perennially wild places in opposition to progressive European nations. DeLoughrey writes that subjects of the British diaspora could wash their hands of guilt by believing that their “settlement” truly civilized savage island nations they annexed to the Commonwealth. The colonial castaway narrative, like the many European *Robinsonades* of the nineteenth century, re-builds Western civilization at the moment savage wilderness threatens to erase it. When the castaway defeats a tiger-like menace of marauding pirates or bloodthirsty cannibals, he fights back with Western technology. The moment he successfully “civilizes” the island, a merchant or naval vessel arrives to take the survivor home, and he usually abandons his “island slaves, servants, mistress, wife, or children” (DeLoughrey 14). Contrarily, the environmental castaway narrative exemplified by Martel’s *Life of Pi*, and traced in Snyder’s and Walcott’s works, strikes a long-term balance with the wild. Pi comes to an ecological and interdependent vision of human and fish cities which are circulating and doing business. He gives up his sense of place within either the Occident or the Orient to join the bioregional community of the Pacific. Although Snyder intentionally travelled to Suwanose-Jima to found the Banyan Ashram with the poet Nanao Sakaki, he, no less than Pi, radically revised his view of the small volcanic island on which he floated in order to see it as a sacred and sustainable place. This place provided him with the spiritual and ecological lessons he would apply to his eventual place of settlement in the Yuba watershed of the Sierra Foothills on the North American continent. Walcott and his

heroic fisherman Achille both arrive at a strong sense of belonging with the Lesser Antilles through their post-shipwreck perception of a living sea. No one arrives to save Snyder and Walcott from their islands. Instead, they use their poetic resources to represent island culture as a survivable and desirable practice. They do not bring poetry to their chosen places; they uncover the poetry inherent to their chosen places.

Like most post-war modern poets,³ Snyder and Walcott develop a transnational sense of self and place. This transnationalism and incipient globalism is crucial for solving today's environmental problems. The serpentine contours of water run-off and irrigation look quite different from the geometric, albeit occasionally river-bound, lines of national boundaries. Like rivers and oceans, the atmosphere is a natural resource shared by all of the world's nations. Peter Singer argues that national communities need to think of the atmosphere as a global sink, which needs a world that can decide how to fix it. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) states in its "Fourth Assessment Report" (2007) that as a direct result of human activity greenhouse gases have clogged the global sink.⁴ Developed nations, because of their consumption levels and infrastructure, are the major contributors to this environmental problem. If oceans continue to rise, as they have been since at least 1961,⁵ low-lying islands and atolls will

³Ramazani, Jahan. "A Transnational Poetics."

⁴ "Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, as is now evident from observations of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice and rising global average sea level. . . . Most of the observed increase in global average temperatures since the mid-20th century is very likely due to the observed increase in anthropogenic GHG [green house gas] concentrations" (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2-5).

⁵ "Global average sea level has risen since 1961 at an average rate of 1.8 [1.3 to 2.3] mm/yr and since 1993 at 3.1 [2.4 to 3.8] mm/yr, with contributions from thermal expansion, melting glaciers and ice caps, and the polar ice sheets" (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2)

literally sink beneath the waves, and all coastal areas will be severely affected (Singer 17-18).

Describing the importance of the U.S. Apollo space missions for the nascent environmental movement of the late 1960s and 1970s, Ursula Heise writes:

In spite of their technological—indeed, to some extent, military—origin, images of Earth in space were quickly appropriated by the environmentalist movement and prominently displayed at the first Earth Day in 1970 . . . Thinkers as diverse as media theorist Marshall McLuhan and atmospheric scientist James Lovelock were deeply influenced by images such as this one [the famous “blue marble” photograph taken by *Apollo 17* in 1972]. (22-23)

J. E. Lovelock’s Gaia hypothesis⁶ supposes that the earth created the atmosphere as an organism to maintain constant temperatures for life, rendering the “blue marble” as a “nacreous shell from outer space such as that which Venus might have stepped out of” (Snyder, *Old Ways* 40). Seeing our blue planet surrounded by the emptiness of space made the finite, interconnected nature of our environment undeniable. The bioregional perception of outer space remains the stuff of science fiction, but this view of the atmosphere became respectable in the early 1980s when a large hole was found in the ozone layer over Antarctica, and in 1985, twenty-eight countries signed the Montreal Protocol to halt the production of chlorofluorocarbons. The literary efforts of Martel, Snyder, and Walcott provide viable myths, symbols, and narratives for perceiving the world’s oceans as commonly held resources that need international protection.⁷ They

⁶ Lovelock, *Gaia: a New Look at Life on Earth*.

⁷ The world’s oceans are the “*res omnium communis*” Arvid Pardo argued for in his famous speech before the UN General Assembly in 1967 (Pardo 8). Pardo’s argument to

offer readers ways to perceive a living sea instead of a semantically barren interzone, and thereby do a great service for the oceans and coastal inhabitants. Maritime regions have been traditionally situated in the liminal and Other categories of literary narratives, to these regions' extreme detriment. Country-sized patches of garbage swirl in the centers of the North Pacific and Atlantic Gyres. Snyder and Walcott help readers remember, perceive, and preserve maritime places in the Pacific and Atlantic. My comparison of both poets attempts to arrive at the senses of self and place necessary for inhabiting island and coastal regions on both sides of North America.

The critical basis for comparing senses of place in the poetry of two such sociologically different authors derives from a motivation to uncover deep similarities and significant contrasts. I chose Snyder and Walcott in order to straddle the continent and arrive at a nuanced understanding of bioregional places in maritime contexts. Working with the field biologist and conservationist Raymond Dasmann, activist Peter Berg initiated the discussion of bioregionalism in Northern California during the mid-1970s.⁸ As a local movement for living within the ecological household of a place, its members identify across watersheds and ocean currents. Among a host of literary scholars, I follow Scott Russell Sanders especially in believing that place is a crucial tool of analysis by which to unpack literary ecologies and understand how texts and their natural environments interact. This hermeneutic strategy of looking for the environmental ground of meaning is imperative because “if our interior journeys are cut loose entirely” from our chosen places, “then both we and the neighborhood will suffer” (Sanders 81).

treat ocean resources outside of national jurisdictions as mankind's common heritage was a major influence on the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

⁸ See Berg's *Reinhabiting a Separate Country: A Bioregional Anthology of Northern California* and Kirkpatrick Sale's *Dwellers in the Land: The Bioregional Vision*.

Literary scholarship can engage maritime regions by preserving evocative texts and explicating how their authors map “interior journeys” to those bioregional places. I chose Snyder and Walcott because of their similar views of ocean biomes and the environmentally viable senses of place their texts evoke.

Gary Snyder is a canonical figure in modern American poetry and environmental literature. As a poet and essayist, he has inspired readers to “find [their] place on the planet, dig in, and take responsibility from there” for close to forty years (Snyder, *Turtle Island* 101). Roderick Nash praises Snyder in *Wilderness & the American Mind* for his “Thoreau-like” balance of “nature and technology, spirit and science, the Indian’s way and the white man’s, wilderness and civilization” (246). Max Oelschlaeger calls him the “poet laureate of deep ecology” in *Idea of Wilderness* (261). Lawrence Buell writes in *The Future of Environmental Criticism* that Snyder has been “particularly influential as a definer and spokesperson” of *reinhabitation*: looking to the land’s prior inhabitants as models for sustainable relationships to the land; and of *bioregionalism*: living in deference to the ecological limits of a particular watershed or “focus of citizenly allegiance” (135; 145). Patrick Murphy, through his publication of *Critical Essays on Gary Snyder*, *Understanding Gary Snyder*, and *A Place for Wayfaring: The Poetry and Prose of Gary Snyder*, has laid a significant foundation for literary scholars interested in articulating a syncretic vision of biocentric society through Snyder’s work and influences. Timothy Gray’s *Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim* makes an elaborate and compelling argument for the poet’s “incipient global consciousness” (x; introd.) of the seemingly disparate coastal peoples living as co-inhabitants of the Pacific bioregion.

To gain a sense of Snyder's situation, I cross the continent to analyze the racially hybrid poetry of the Sargasso Sea's Derek Walcott. Snyder's subject position of white American masculinity significantly influences, and potentially interferes, with his ecofeminist performance. Walcott's work affects an ambivalent stance toward history and the lingering effects of colonialism, while Snyder more readily develops a syncretic vision of primitive and modern traditions. The path of colonial reconciliation from the position of the colonized is fraught with resentment and bitterness. Rob Nixon calls on authors to seek a middle way, as does theorist of New World poetics, George Handley, between the hybrid experiences of postcolonial and globalized selves and the unadulterated, ideally pristine, experience of the ecocritical wilderness. Discussing the postcolonial-ecocritical tension from the perspective of Ramachandra Guha's critique of deep ecology in "Radical Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation," Cara Cilano and Elizabeth DeLoughrey confirm how problematic history can be for the experience of being at home. Since Snyder begins where he does in San Francisco, his *Regarding Wave* and *Turtle Island* are quiet about this problem of history, but *Omeros* answers directly, thematizing the problem in the metaphor of a wound. The ability to let go of the contingent and anthropocentric situation is a privileged ability. Cilano and DeLoughrey describe this tension as follows: "the ecocritical turn to originary nature can naturalize diasporic Europeans in the landscape, often resulting in a powerful ontological claim that erases white complicity in the expansion of empire, not to mention ongoing indigenous presence" (73). Oppressed people, living in urban jungles, on dusty, unwanted tracts of reservation land, or worse, view deep ecology as an elitist movement because its proponents effectively ask them to give up the material benefits of the developed world

which they have never had. Indigenous subsistence farmers are not particularly exuberant about living without or being prevented from accessing modern medicine, obtaining literacy, and using agricultural and industrial resources. The world's ecosystems cannot support a uniformly developed world. Pragmatic strategies that seek a middle path between the old and new ways are needed.

Walcott responds to this significant problem—heterogeneity and purity are binary opposites—by developing the poetics of a postlapsarian Adam, who draws his strength from the acidulous “apples of [his] second Eden” (“Muse” 41). Like his book-length autobiographical poem *Another Life* and his stage version of *The Odyssey, Omeros* entwines Western and African mythology with the author's creole present. He writes the self-reflexive *Omeros* to inspire an exuberant, place-based culture on St. Lucia without the neocolonial naiveté of a modern epic attempting to initiate an entirely new culture. Walcott hopes instead to inspire extant and hybrid St. Lucian islanders to live as if for the first time in spite of a history that would make them mimics.

As the historian Donald Worster describes popular literature of the environment during the 1960s, the purpose of *Regarding Wave, Turtle Island*, and *Omeros* is to “rescue human history from its self-destructive energies and bring it into conformity with the stabler history of nature” without forgetting or denying the scars of colonialism and Manifest Destiny (423). Lawrence Buell reasons that environmental literature offers “ways of imaging nature and humanity's relation to it” (*Environmental Imagination* 2). Snyder and Walcott offer various ways New World poets image the ecology of human society, mapping the search for reinhabiting the present with historical and environmental integrity. Both poets evidence a remarkable ability to fuse the seemingly disparate

cultural traditions of their particular bioregions. Snyder's exuberance for the timeless does not equate with historical naiveté, but it does evince the limits of his empathy. His interpretations of Pacific culture are well-respected and inspirational, but they emanate from an adaptive and mobile masculine center of white American subjectivity. This tension between performance and performer reveals itself in the author's quiet attention to colonial history. Snyder writes on behalf of the islander, but writing for does not give him access to the profound bitterness Walcott writes from. Walcott makes history a proper noun in his work, aligning it with the monsters of Graeco-Roman mythology—Cyclops, Medusa, and Circe—to signify how challenging it is for marginalized people to make the reconciliation white intellectuals do when they reinhabit an Old New World. Both sides can make this reconciliation, but it requires postcolonial authors to overcome a scarred present and it requires ecocritical authors to open history to the limits of their empathy.

CHAPTER ONE: *REGARDING WAVE* AND SUWANOSE-JIMA

Gary Snyder traveled the North Pacific, the East China Sea, the Indian Ocean, the Suez Canal, and the Mediterranean in boats like the *Anita Maru* cargo ship out of San Francisco Bay in 1956 and the *Sappa Creek* oil tanker from Kyoto in 1957 (Snyder, *Earth House Hold* 31, 54). While working in the *Sappa Creek's* engine room, a place he describes as “here in the belly of a whale,” he explored the rim of island and coastal communities around the northern Pacific as a bioregion of “citizenly allegiance” (Buell, *Future of Environmental Criticism* 135). In this chapter, I use the poems “Wave,” “Burning Island,” and “Rainbow Body” from *Regarding Wave* (1970) to explain how a Pacific Rim poet achieves membership in a bioregional community in order to illustrate how island culture provides the experiential basis for a revised understanding of ocean geography. *Regarding Wave* revises the environmental imagination so that ocean waves cease to connote emptiness and turbulence, and shift to signify the stitches holding archipelago communities together. As a consequence of this shift, islands acquire new meaning—Suwanose, the setting of “Burning Island” and “Rainbow Body,” ceases to be “latitude 29 [degrees] 36 [minutes]” (*Earth House Hold* 136) and becomes an ashram—abstract space becomes a model place. Snyder’s regional explorations, formal study of Buddhism in Kyoto, and growing awareness of ecology would all inform the vision of reinhabitation he formulated subsequently in the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Turtle Island* (1974). He would apply the spiritual and ecological lessons he learned on Suwanose in the Ryukyu archipelago and in the Pacific Rim at large to the task of reinhabiting his

North American homeland. I analyze his return to California through the poetry of *Turtle Island* in chapter three.

Regarding Wave marks a turning point from Snyder's early poetry of the 1950s. His early poems demonstrate the stylistic precision of modern poets like Ezra Pound and the haiku compression of the Chinese Han-shan of Cold Mountain.⁹ Robert Kern describes Snyder during this period as the practitioner of an eco-poetics of metonymy, not metaphor. He argues that his poetry "privileges not speech but silence" and "is more a seeing . . . a near-mute presentation, without commentary, of the world's ongoing processes" (109). *Riprap* (1959) and *Myths & Texts* (1960) utilize a "silent" poetics of metonymy rather than write towards an ultimate metaphor of reality. These early books of Snyder's evoke states of awareness associated with sacred places and meaningful actions by re-presenting the concrete particulars of those places and ways of being. The poem "Riprap" can be read as this style's ars poetica:

Lay down these words
 Before your mind like rocks.
 placed solid, by hands
 In choice of place set
 Before the body of the mind
 in space and time
 ...
 In the thin loam, each rock a word

⁹ *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems* (1965) translates the poetry of Han-shan or Kan-zan, describing him as a wise "mountain madman in an old Chinese line of ragged hermits" of the T'ang dynasty, who was a favorite of latter-day Zen painters (35). See "Ellipsis and Riprap" by Laszlo Gefin in Murphy's *Critical Essays on Gary Snyder*.

a creek-washed stone (*Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems* 32)

Poetry defined by “Riprap” lays down a signifying path of “creek-washed” stones to satori or a Zen awareness beyond language (Norton, “Importance of Nothing”). Bert Almon argues that *Riprap* and *Myths & Texts* embody the style of *sumi* painting, in which a few gestural brush strokes of black ink signify whole landscapes and a fullness of life beyond the ken of language.

In contrast, the focus of Snyder’s poetry of the late 1960s and early 1970s shifts to metaphor, lyricism, and social critique. During over a decade of extensive Pacific travel, Snyder was an ambassador to the East for Beats and Hippies and an ambassador to the West for monks and Buzoku, or the “Bum Academy” of Japan. The Buzoku, literally the Tribe, was a Japanese counterculture movement led by the poet Nanao Sakaki, who founded the Banyan Ashram with Snyder on Suwanose Island (Snyder, *Earth House Hold* 135). Patrick Murphy argues that Snyder draws evocative connections between a stunning diversity of discourses to “suggest the need for people to develop a syncretic rather than dogmatic or separatist spiritual path in the present” (*Understanding Gary Snyder* 94). As Snyder traveled the Pacific Rim, he regularly contributed to journals and magazines in the U.S. like *Green Flag*, *Harper’s Magazine*, and the *San Francisco Oracle*, informing his readers about Pacific citizens like the Buzoku and about the communal life of Amami islanders on Suwanose-Jima. He informed San Francisco Beats about Zen during the 1950s, critiqued modern U.S. society from the perspective of

primitive¹⁰ social structures for West Coast Hippies during the 1960s, and theorized a Buddhist sense of ecology for a spiritual vision of environmentalism during the 1970s.

Bert Almon argues that rather than the *sumi* style of metonymy, the late post-war poetry of *Regarding Wave* images a “world placed under a microscope,” analogous to the colorful *tanka* (thangka) art of Tibet (81). Thematically, the poet turns from spiritual searching and traveling to family and home. He does not refute the validity of his earlier work; he completes a circle, beginning with a search for transcendence and ending with a concept of good work in the life and death world of samsara.¹¹ *Regarding Wave* performs the good work of the “myth-handler-healer” Snyder defined in talks at Oberlin College and Brown University during the fall of 1978 as the “heal[er] that makes whole” by reconciling tensions between inner and outer states (*The Real Work* 172). The book of poems attempts to heal contemporary U.S. culture’s “symbol base” (170) by opening up the possibility of human attachment and responsibility across ocean currents, attempting to reconcile tensions between human society and the natural world. He aligns the themes of marriage, sexual intimacy, and family with the maritime place of Suwanose Island to ask his readers to “learn a logic of place” in an archipelago (Robbins 95); no easy feat for an industrial world that has treated the oceans as inter-zones of emptiness.

¹⁰ Primitive, in this context, means non-modern, and in no way should connote undeveloped or a-historical.

¹¹ The eighteenth century poem, “The Buddha’s Law among the Birds” by an unknown Tibetan lama of the Kahgyutpa sect, offers an intriguing interpretation of the life and death world of samsara. According to the poem, the “holy Lord Avalokita” assumed the form of a Cuckoo bird to teach the “feathered folk” the Dharma, which he does by sitting immobile in a large sandalwood tree for “many years day and night” (Conze 86-87). Eventually a parrot approaches the holy lord asking the meaning of his trance to which he replies: “Listen then, O parrot skilled in speech! / I have surveyed this ocean of Samsara, / And I have found nothing substantial in it . . . I dwell in solitude and silence, / In trance I meditate, from all distractions far removed.”

The tankers and transports on which Snyder relied for his oceanic travels form a synecdochic link in the chain of industrial capital responsible for a plastic-diluted, mercury-concentrated sea. Analogous to Henry David Thoreau's imbrications with the timber industry,¹² Snyder's work as a logger in the Pacific Northwest and his travel on tugs, tankers, and cargo ships signify the Marxist structure of real economy in which his poetry is situated. Harsh critics may argue that he can write about deep ecology, but the act of writing and consuming the Romantic wilderness narrative materially amounts to the privilege of education and leisure time. This criticism fails to account for the potential Romantic ecology has for providing the ideological basis to accept and embrace a tough and sustaining present. Speaking to this point in an address to the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) in Okinawa, Snyder affirmed that "ecological consciousness translates into a deeper understanding of interconnectedness in both nature and history" ("Ecology, Literature and the New World Disorder" 3). Re-joining the "circle of nature" (Dwyer 10) is always better than conquering the savage wilderness, even if the membership regained requires the modern subject to hitchhike on vehicles of industry. The ideological basis of Pi Patel's turn to the "business of survival" after the sinking of the *Tsimtsum* depends upon his ability to see "fish like trucks and buses and cars and bicycles and pedestrians" (Martel 175) and re-join the bioregional community on which his and the tiger's life raft floats. The perspective from which the

¹² Henry David Thoreau's famous essay "Ktaadn" both liberated him from Emerson's homocentrism (Oelschlaeger 134-135), and according to Lawrence Buell, was "a favorite kind of nineteenth-century magazine fare, consumed with relish in many a Victorian parlor" (Buell, *Environmental Imagination* 12). Thoreau was able to "contact" the "solid earth! The actual world" at the summit of Mt. Ktaadn because he accompanied his cousin George Thatcher on a prospecting trip for the timber industry up the Penobscot River (113).

castaway gives up the idea of rescue to strike a long-term balance with the wild and achieve bioregional membership is that of Romantic ecology. Donald Worster writes that for Romantics like Thoreau and his mentor Ralph Waldo Emerson, their central belief that “all nature is alive and pulsing with energy or spirit” motivated them to “search for holistic or integrated perception, an emphasis on interdependence and relatedness in nature, and an intense desire to restore man to a place of intimate intercourse with the vast organism that constitutes the earth” (82). The ethics of living as a member of the “vast organism” earth presupposes the Romantic ecology Pi finds after the sinking of the *Tsimtsum*, just as Snyder’s formulation of reinhabitation followed his fusion of Buddhism and ecology. The ethics of the “business of survival” and the ethics of the “real work” of living responsibly in the natural world can be formulated only after the natural world has been contacted and understood.

Snyder’s ability to return with his naturalistic and biocentric philosophy to the post-war United States of America depended upon his acknowledgement that although the ocean is brutal and antithetical to human life, it is also the origin of life. This mythic ambiguity of the sea finds expression in the French homonyms *mer* and *mère*, both sea and mother. Indeed, the nineteenth century, French zoologist Jules Michelet describes the sea as a kind of milk, a viscous fluid through which “ocean plants and animals” shimmer and appear “strangely iridescent” as though seen through a “diaphanous veil” (92). He concludes that it is nothing less than the “essence of life” (96), a Tiresias-like fluid of microbes and algae “hovering” between the animal and vegetable “kingdoms” (97). Like

Michelet's argument for a living sea, Snyder's poetry demonstrates this biocentric shift from *aqua nullius*¹³ to a sea held in common by human, animal, and vegetable kingdoms.

The *aqua nullius* to *aqua omnium communis* shift is implicit in *Regarding Wave's* aim to develop fluid categories of place-connectedness. The book's "Long Hair" section offers an evocative example in the poem "It" (42-43). Snyder explains the seemingly pretentious title with a bracketed subtitle: "*Reading Blake in a cowshed during a typhoon / on an island in the East China Sea.*" The poem establishes a dialog between the "it" of the Romantic mystic William Blake's words and the "it" of the rain-washed cowshed on Suwanose, performing the critique of *aqua nullius* by shifting presence from the English language to the sea. The poem opens with the *jiji mu – ge*¹⁴ perception of "cloud—cloud—cloud—cloud— hurls / up and on over," situating the somnolent clouds in the turbulent water cycle and illustrating ecology's jeweled net in which Snyder narrates the field composition. The clouds, the ocean, and the "bamboo hills" all undulate to the same rhythm, "the laws of waves" or, in Hindu mythology, the voice of Sarasvati. The cowshed provides shelter from the intense sub-tropical sun, but remains open to the wind and rain flailing in fists "down the length of the floor." This setting seems like the last place to read William Blake; even puppies tussle on wet slat beds. Despite the rural and tropical setting, Snyder exclaims, "I know what it means. / my language is home." He appears to gain a sense of home through poetry in his first language, but the location of that home remains in the cowshed, where "mind-fronts meet" and "bite back at each

¹³ Literally, the water of no one, this Latin term designates a legal concept for the economic uses of oceanic space between national and individual claims for ownership.

¹⁴ Zen term for interpenetration, "Phenomenon—Phenomenon—Undivided" (Campbell *Sake & Satori* 96), see discussion below of Snyder's earlier treatment of this idea in *Earth House Hold*

other.” His chosen place in the humble shack in the Ryukyus archipelago allows Snyder to “meet” and “bite back at” Blake’s meaning. He allows for the colonial prejudice of a blank sea to fade for the bioregional vision of being at home “on the edge of a spiral / centered five hundred miles southwest.” He is not on the edge of English society, but near the cyclone’s powerful center out at sea. He allows himself to be in the storm, open to the “quivering ocean air.” He redefines the literary “it” from English words to the liminal “ocean air” by turning from the present tense of the poem to bioregional imperative:

breathe it;
taste it; how it

Feeds the brain. (Snyder 43)

Reading Blake in a cowshed, the poem’s speaker centers himself in a turbulent maritime locale and defines a living sea in unequivocal terms.

The perception of a living sea is not a bourgeois indulgence. Ocean biomes are also the earth’s lungs, since all people and aerobic species, in general, depend on marine algae to produce a significant portion of the earth’s oxygen and to take in massive amounts of carbon. In their 2007 assessment of human impact on climate change, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reported that increased sea surface temperatures and solar radiation are impacting all coastal areas. Increased surface temperatures raise ocean levels by expanding water, and increased radiation burns coral reefs and disrupts the ecosystem. According to Captain Charles Moore, founder of the Long Beach, California-based Algalita Marine Research Foundation, massive patches of garbage swirl in the center of the north Pacific (Kostigen). Rich Grant of *The Telegraph*

reports that this garbage is killing millions of sea birds and 100,000 marine mammals each year. Christopher Small and Robert Nicholls also bring to attention that an estimated twenty-three percent of the earth's human population lives within one hundred kilometers of an ocean and less than one hundred meters above sea level (591).

Snyder inherits his Romantic view of ecology from Thoreau, who synthesized nineteenth century Naturalism with Transcendentalism. Snyder's perception of a living sea resulted from the poet's fusion of Buddhist doctrines and the theories of ecological science. According to Katsunori Yamazato, Professor of English Language and Culture at the University of the Ryukyus, Zen influences are hard to pin-point in Snyder's poems, but the religion's ethos is embodied throughout his work. In addition to Rinzai Zen, Shingon Mikkyo¹⁵ and Hinduism also inform his work (Yamazato, "How to Be in This Crisis" 231). The narrative of his prose collection *Earth House Hold* moves from the ethos of Mahāyāna Buddhist thought, symbolized by the harmonious tapestry of Indra's net in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, to a vision of modern ecology.¹⁶ The subtitle, "technical notes and queries to fellow dharma revolutionaries," identifies this collection of prose essays, journal entries, and poetic experimentation as a crucial source for reading Snyder's poems during the late 1960s and early 1970s. David Barnhill writes that Snyder took the Buddhist idea of interpenetration imaged by Indra's net and "applied it to ecology—or we could say that he has applied ecology to Hua-yen Buddhism [the Chinese 'Avatamsaka school']" (*Buddhism and Ecology* 189). In "Lookout's Journal," the poet

¹⁵ Yamazato defines this school of as a branch of Mahāyāna Japanese Buddhists, whose name literally means "the secret teachings" ("How to Be in this Crisis" 236).

¹⁶ The *Avatamsaka* is widely regarded in the Kegon or Hua-yen schools of Buddhism. The sutra develops the rhizomatic metaphor of Indra's net to describe the nature of reality as an "interborn" web of reincarnation whose members "are actually creating each other and all things by living" (Snyder, *Earth House Hold* 129).

exclaims in affirmation to this vision, “shifting of light and cloud, perfection of chaos, magnificent *jiji mu – ge* / interlacing action” defining the Japanese Zen term for interpenetration as a dynamic balance between opposing natural forces (*Earth House Hold* 16).

Contemporary critic David Robbins writes that “someday Snyder’s fusion of Buddhism, primitive religion and ecology will be recognized for what it is: a great, single-handed accomplishment of intelligence and feeling, a turning-point in our culture” (90). The connection between Buddhism and the ecological vision of reinhabitation is not immediately obvious. A considerable distance exists between a science that describes relationships between organisms and their environment and a religion that fosters an ineffable state of awareness. Ecological science dates back to the nineteenth-century German biologist Ernst Haeckel, who derived the term, eco-logy, from the Greek word *oikos* for house to denote the study of systems of energy exchange in earth’s metaphorical households.¹⁷ In the way that economists describe the house-keeping of human goods and transfer of capital, ecologists describe nature’s house-keeping and the flow of the sun’s energy throughout the ecosystem. Evoking the same concept in his haiku-imagist style of modern poetry, Snyder writes in a journal entry from the *Anita Maru*: “Salt—diatoms—copepods— herring—fishermen—us. eating” (*Earth House Hold* 31). The “cross-fertilization” (Gray 283) of Buddhism and ecology describes a sacred food chain in which each member affects and is affected by all the other members. In terms of environmental science, ecology during the 1970s and 1980s shifted from rational, economic models that maximized the productivity of linear ecosystems to more dynamic

¹⁷ See Carolyn Merchant’s “Rise of Ecology, 1890 – 1990” and Donald Worster’s “Words on a Map”

models that utilized mathematic theories of chaos (Merchant 171). Paraphrasing the William, Eugene, and Howard Odums'¹⁸ theorization of nature as a “pulsing steady-state system,” Merchant describes an ecosystem or biome as “one that exists on the edge between order and chaos” (172). Seemingly prescient of the Odums’ paradigm for ecology published in 1995, the opening poem of *Regarding Wave* offers consonant imagery and symbolism.

“Wave” initiates the book by defining an ecofeminist motif from Hindu mythology: the Goddess Vak or Sarasvati, “the flowing one,” (Snyder, *Earth House Hold* 124). If an eco-poetics of silent process symbolized by “Brahma, the creator, [who] is silence, stillness,” (*The Old Ways* 35) mark Snyder’s early work, then the shift to Brahma’s wife Sarasvati explores and celebrates “the dancing grain of things” (“Wave” 23) in order to develop a viable sense of place for maritime regions. Ecofeminism denotes a field of discursive overlap between feminism and ecology. As an intellectual movement, it is politically motivated to challenge oppressive ideology regardless of who it oppresses. As a biocentric philosophy, the potentially oppressed classes of beings are human and non-human. Ecology is a “study of interrelationship, place, and function, with its bedrock recognition of the distinction between things-in-themselves and things-for-us” (Murphy *Literature, Nature, Other* 4). A corollary of the ability to recognize “things-for-us” is the opposite formulation: “other entities can render us things-for-them” (4). Patrick Murphy argues that these ecological recognitions lead “directly into feminisms” because

¹⁸ Eugene Odum’s “synthesis of ideas from the organismic and economic approaches to ecology became the guideline for the environmental movement that emerged in the 1960s. Humanity might disrupt evolved ecosystems, but through scientific ecology and ethical principles, it could repair the damaged web of nature on which life depended for its continued existence” (Merchant 170-71).

the overthrow of “patriarchy and phallogentrism, demand male recognition of the other as not only different . . . but also of equal ontological status” (4-5). The recognition that other beings can use us as “things-for-them” pries open the closure of masculine identity to a feminist conceptual space in which self and other are “interdependent, mutually determinable, constructs” (5). Gender and ecological function are not conceived as hierarchical binaries in this space, but as evolving processes of mutual construction. As an activist, Carol J. Adams defines ecofeminism by opening the class of the oppressed, to include “the rest of nature” alongside downtrodden sexes, races, social classes, and other cultural identities (1). If ecofeminism is about the liberation of people qua people and people qua animal, then the subject position of its proponents should be insignificant next to the liberating possibilities evoked by their texts. Snyder’s identity is as viable as any for performing ecofeminist critique.

“Wave” consists of six “image clusters” (Almon 82) with one metapoetic aside, making for seven permutations of one basic sentence: “wave wife” (Snyder 7). Each cluster qualifies this proposition to make it clear that Snyder believes that the immanent world of biology and geology is an interdependent web of rhythms. Indo-European traditions feminize change and associate stasis with masculinity, grounding the vagaries of samsara in a changeless God-Brahma. The misogynistic implications to this gendering of the rock-wave binary are well-known, and they are repeated when change and movement are othered in an attempt to posit the spiritual-intellectual bedrock of an un-moved mover.¹⁹ With “Wave,” Snyder opens *Regarding Wave* with an acceptance of

¹⁹ The phrase un-moved mover derives from Aristotle’s *Physics*, Book Eight: “If there is a series of things, each moving its successor and being moved by its predecessor, the

—wind, shake

stiff thorns of cholla, ocotillo

sometimes I get stuck in thickets— (17-19)

As a white male from California, where cholla cacti and ocotillo shrubs grow, he acknowledges his personal distance from the ideals toward which he writes. The phallic imagery of the North American thickets in which he occasionally “get[s] stuck” identifies the place from which he writes and asks his readers pardon for any unconscious reifications of phal-logo-centrism his text performs. He wants to celebrate and live in a feminine world of wave-forms, but he knows that his cultural heritage and subject position choke his path with biographical and conceptual brambles.

Snyder spent his youth learning from the working class, bohemians, natives, and Asians, but he returned to the U.S. to raise his children, writing and teaching about these “Other” cultures. His Beat-era ethos of “yabyum” (20) practitioner from Kerouac’s *Dharma Bums* and the fact that he married three times are significant biographical thickets. Snyder’s poetic interest in Native American culture embroiled him in a bramble-like controversy surrounding white shamanism during the 1980s. Native American authors Leslie Marmon Silko²⁰ and Geary Hobson²¹ “polemically shook their fists at him

²⁰ Silko critiques Snyder for claiming land in the Yuba River watershed as he does in “Control Burn” despite his reinhabitory ethics because the “legal title still remains with the Maidu people” (215). She posits that *Turtle Island* is possibly worthy of a Pulitzer Prize, “but unless Snyder is careful, he is headed in the same unfortunate direction as other white pioneers have gone, a direction which avoids historical facts which are hard to swallow” (215).

²¹ Hobson identifies false shamanism through the sketch of a middle-aged Anglo-American “shaman” he heard in “the southern part of a southern state,” who exclaimed at a poetry reading: “‘I AM GERONIMO!’ in a squeaky falsetto” (100). Hobson describes these non-Indian imitators as the makers of “Tantra-like day-glo art superimposed on

for being the best-known contemporary popularizer of poetic interest in the Indian” because of his many crude imitators, who unjustly appropriated Native American culture (Castro 163). Silko argues that Snyder could be more forthcoming about his own ancestry and should work harder to identify himself as a “guest on this [Native American] continent” (215). Hobson believes that Snyder’s art is sincere, but he lampoons his many bandana-wearing, long-haired imitators because they are appropriating his people’s cultural symbols.

The poet ends “Wave” by invoking the muse he defines in *Earth House Hold* as anything “other that touches you and moves you” (124); he chants:

Ah [O!], trembling spreading radiating wyf

racing zebra

catch me and fling me wide (20-22)

The gerundive verbs signify his belief in cyclical processes. By juxtaposing the Anglo-Saxon root for the feminine with a “racing zebra,” he invokes a muse that has the power to move him—“a mountain range, a band of people, the morning star, or a diesel generator” (*Earth House Hold* 124)—and bring him “to the dancing grain of things / of my mind!” (23-24).

The turn from the inhuman ocean to a living sea marks a point when the anxiety of tradition is cast away for a feeling of awe and kinship with an elemental world.

“Burning Island” (23-25) opens in the I-thou space of deep ecology. The narrator dives down into the dark coastal sea, bamboo fishing spear in hand, a massive pink and gray bream swimming down beside him. During the speaker’s dive, he sings to elemental

traditional Plains Indian shield designs, and almost Kahlil Gibran in its message and tone” (104).

deities. He invokes the “Sky Gods” covering earth with rainsqualls like lids turning over and over. Turning to water-deities, the poet-speaker sees a rainbow reflected as “LAKHS²² of crystal Buddha Fields” in a cow’s drinking trough. With compressed syntax, he jumps to another image of water: the perception of the crystal water “sluicing off” is maintained even to a single droplet “right on the hair of the arm!” Robbins argues that this parenthetical section of the “crystal Buddha fields” suggests the great Hua-yen tenet, that the blissful totality of creation exists in the tiniest of its parts.²³ Gazing up at Antares, one of the brightest stars in our galaxy, and our view of the nighttime sky, the narrator wavers slightly from the “bowlful of shochu,” then looks up the “lanes of Sagittarius” to the densest part of the Milky Way galaxy. After praying to the Earth Mother and “All / Gods tides capes currents / Flows and spirals of / pool and powers,” the poet asks for peace “as we hoe the field / let sweet potato grow.” Melon and sweet potato were the few crops that Suwanose’s small amount of tillable volcanic soil could support. Contradicting the New Critical standard for universality, the poet’s biography intrudes when he asks the gods to “Bless Masa and me as we marry / at new moon on the crater / this summer / VIII. 40067.” Referring to a journal entry in *Earth House Hold* (147), he dates the marriage song to his new wife in August, 40,067 years after the earliest cave paintings.

On Suwanose, volcanic activity, boiling lakes, smoke plumes, and lava flows are common occurrences. The inhabitants that Snyder and the Buzoku joined were

²² Snyder would have come across the Sanskrit word lakh, a measure of 100,000 units, during his 1962 travels with his first wife Joanne Kyger, Allen Ginsberg, and Peter Orlovsky across India (*Passage through India*).

²³ “In every particle of dust there are present Buddhas without number.” “On the point of a single hair the whole Buddha land may be seen” (Chang. 224, 390.)

descendants of the Amami, who reinhabited the island after a fifteenth century volcanic eruption decimated the prior inhabitants. They spoke Amami dialect, kept pigs and cows, and played “the snake-head ‘jabisen’ instead of the catskin-head ‘shamisen’²⁴” (Snyder, *Earth House Hold* 137). The subtropical climate of Suwanose is quite hot; from the hours of 10:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., the inhabitants napped in the shade of the intense sun and heat (*Earth House Hold* 138). Snyder narrates a harvest and encounter with the literal and figurative ground in the poem “Roots”:

Draw over and dig
 The loose ash soil
 Hoe handles are short,
 The sun’s course long
 Fingers deep in the earth search
 Roots, pull them out; feel through;
 Roots are strong. (25)

Digging into the earth and sensing the interconnection of sweet potatoes, melons, and weeds, the gardening poet experiences his ecological connections to the volcano “belly keeper” of the earth and, through photosynthesis, the sun’s energy. The literal and figurative grounds of his being converge in an active moment of simultaneity.

The poem “Rainbow Body” evokes the rhythm of a chant, mantra, or song. These are Snyder’s rhythms for a unique state of being that is filled with awareness. The five stanzas are vibrantly connected with imperfect rhyme. In the bamboo thickets, cicada gather in a “twanging shadow,” under the volcano summit near Algol (26). The place

²⁴ Jabisen and shamisen are regional words for the three-stringed banjo-like instrument common to folk, pop, and traditional Asian music

where “sea-people” and “sea-tangle tendrils” meet the “outward roil of lava” forms an intersection between sea and land that is perennially liminal, hovering in a balance.

Rational models of ecology maximized efficiency of energy transfer to reduce imbalance and waste. The linear models failed to take into account “irrational” events like storms.

Ecologists like the Odums theorize that biomes balance the chaotic and linear forces of life and death. By extension, eco-poetics balances antinomial forces of signification.

Snyder personifies this interstitial space as the island’s horizon: “lips, where you float / clear, wave / with the subtle currents.” He uses intense metonymy to transcribe this image within the “cobalt speckled curling / mouth of a shako clam” (27). The focal position of the narrator gradually resolves through each successive stanza. In the third stanza, the verb *swim* invokes a “sea-people,” but the phrasing is contracted: “at low tide swim out through a path in the coral.” Not until the fifth, does the poet remember how “we hoed and fished— / grubbing out bamboo runners / hammering straight blunt / harpoon heads and spears.” The poem ends with an image of rest for the islanders. After they “climb delicately back up the cliff,” “eat the melon and steamed sweet potato / from this ground,” they remember collectively the hoeing and fishing, and finally “sleep on the cliff / float on the surf / nap in the bamboo thicket / eyes closed, / dazzled ears” (27). The peace on which the poem ends is a picture of deep awareness. The negative image of “closed eyes” is juxtaposed with “dazzled ears” to describe a heightened state of sensitivity to subtle truths unavailable to visual sight.

Regarding Wave is an important work for reading the aspects of island culture that were crucial to Snyder’s spiritual education. In this chapter, I analyzed “Wave,” “Burning Island,” and “Rainbow Body” in order to isolate a post-*Tsimtsum* moment in

the castaway narrative of Snyder's trans-Pacific literary persona, from San Francisco to Kyoto and back again. "Wave" provides the book's dominant motif of a floating world on which human beings construct ecological relationships that float. "Burning Island" situates Snyder's synthesis of Zen and ecology within the context of the Ryukyu archipelago and the poet's "entry into new responsibilities of marriage and fatherhood" (Robbins 91). "Rainbow Body" serves as an example of "sacred song" (*Place in Space* 143) that gives readers access to the highly portable and floatable communal culture of Banyan Ashram on Suwanose Island. I briefly describe the ways in which Snyder brought a spiritual ecology of the Pacific Rim back to Northern California through his mid-1970s environmentalist manifesto *Turtle Island* in chapter three. This chapter focuses on the post-*Tsimtsum* perception of a living sea in order to articulate how Gary Snyder's symbols, place logic, and songs give readers access to a spiritual ecology.

CHAPTER TWO: O-MER-OS, SINGING THE SEA'S QUIET CULTURE

The previous chapter analyzed Gary Snyder's poetry about his Pacific travels to illustrate how the island culture of the Ryukyu archipelago provided him with the experiences necessary to formulate a viable interpretation of bioregionalism for the home he returned to on Turtle Island. In this chapter, I investigate further the richness of island culture as a bioregional muse by switching the terms of analysis. Instead of a white poet of the Pacific Rim, I look at the racially mixed Caribbean poet Derek Walcott and his long poem *Omeros*. Walcott successfully depicts St. Lucia's reinhabitation through a bioregional lens. Supposedly isolated geography requires the islander to find his or her home in the midst of a turbulent sea. Walcott's work is further distinguished from Snyder's because of how these poets' subject positions situate them in history. While Snyder's work evinces an exuberant historiography of the timeless, Walcott's work demonstrates overtly historicist aesthetics in order to integrate the Caribbean's bitter past. In this chapter, I use Walcott's *Omeros* to explain how a Caribbean poet regains a sense of membership in a bioregional community to illustrate the ways that island culture requires a revised understanding of ocean geography. Ocean waves cease to separate and shift into rhythms that transfer energy, transforming the island of St. Lucia from a castaway's life raft to an *etak* canoe;²⁵ a place of exile becomes home.

²⁵ *Etak* is a Pacific navigational system of "moving islands" that differs from the European abstraction of "static charts" (Lewis 184-85). The fixed portions of any travel route are relative as can be seen in the difference between solar time, which measures the

Colonial history of the Caribbean leads successively back from Afro-Caribbean independence in the twentieth century, through a trans-Atlantic economy of plantation colonialism and slave-trafficking, abolished in the nineteenth century, to the European encounter with the New World in the fifteenth century. According to Louis James, the 1492 Indian population of Hispaniola was between two and three hundred thousand. In 1514 it had shrunk to approximately fourteen thousand. Jana Evans Braziel calls this decimation “Carib genocide” (120). Officially independent in 1979, St. Lucia has not erased the scars of the colonization of the West Indies. The term “postcolonial” can suggest that the subject it signifies is a response to a dead and buried colonial situation. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin insist that this view of linear history is mistaken: “Independence has not solved this problem” (*Postcolonial Studies Reader*, 2). St. Lucia gained its independence, but the island, which the French and the English fought over so much from 1660 to 1814 that it became known as “Helen of the West Indies,” must still guard itself against internal divisions along race, class, and gender lines, and the continued oppression of indigenous people. The wounds of colonial history need to be continually sutured.

Colonists believed that the Caribbean islands were isolated and a-historical, as can be read in the “toponyms New Albion, New Britain, New Hebrides, New Ireland, and ‘Little England,’ or Barbados” (DeLoughrey 9). DeLoughrey writes that continental visitors “are more likely to perceive the islandness of Jamaica than, say, Iceland” (2). She argues that island space is constructed according to a “cartographic hierarchy of space”

diurnal motion of the sun, and sidereal time, which measures the diurnal motion of the earth past the sun. *Etak* is “alter/native” because it presupposes a function for landmasses that does not reckon within European way-finding systems.

(2) because all landmasses, strictly speaking, are islands, even North America, or, in Snyder's reinhabitory nomenclature, Turtle Island. In order to revise the traditional cartographic hierarchy of island spaces, postcolonial authors of the Caribbean turn to alternative theories of history and geography for "exploring the complex and shifting entanglement[s] between sea and land" (2). DeLoughrey looks at Kamau Brathwaite's theory of "tidalectics," an "alter/native" historiography that "resists the synthesizing telos of Hegel's dialectic by drawing from a cyclical model, invoking the continual movement and rhythm of the ocean" to articulate a "feminized vision of history" (2). If the linear progression of a discrete subject or nation defines a masculine chronotope, a cyclical model of moving and moved subjects defines a feminine chronotope.²⁶ "Alter/native" history does not find that isolated island spaces are behind the progress of continental civilizations; it finds both spaces engaged with cyclical and similar historical patterns. If history is a Hegelian progress toward freedom, those places without a written version of history appear primitive because they lack evidence of progress. The term "island" confers a-historical status to the native peoples, making them primitive in relation to continental civilizations with deep-seated written records. Since the Turtle Islander Snyder writes a sense of place according to a cyclical, recurring view of history, he *islandizes* the continent to create equity. The "Sainte Lucie" (Walcott, *Collected Poems* 314) native Walcott similarly writes an "alter/native" historiography.

²⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin defines the chronotope as a term that refers to "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (*Dialogic Imagination* 84). He contrasts the "constitutive category" of literature with the inherent forms of human cognition which Immanuel Kant argues for in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. For Bakhtin, the chronotope is not transcendental, instead it refers to "forms of the most immediate reality" and is suited to a literary purpose (85).

Unwritten history takes two forms: material artifacts and oral narratives. Material artifacts provide historical knowledge through interpretation, and the rules of discourse in which these interpretations are made can exclude certain stories from being told. For example, the British pig farmer Dennis Plunkett of *Omeros* attempts to write a history for the indigenous St. Lucian Helen. After months of researching “his ziggurat of books” (65), he ends up focusing on the “Battle of the Saints” (270) to add a single entry to a “warped bottle” (311) in the local museum, confirming that the “gold-crusted” (43) artifact came from a flagship in the battle. Plunkett’s intention to tell “not his, but her story [not his-story, but her-story]” (30) meets the discursive practice of a historiography of the written, and he arrives at a mere log entry on an “amusing” (311) artifact’s origins. Like material artifacts, oral narratives have a limited amount of credibility. The character *Omeros*²⁷ is not a writer, but a griot singer, and it is Walcott the writer who collects the island’s many voices, weaving them into seven books. Yet the voices’ ties to the past are unstable and easily severed by rationalist skepticism. Speaking with his ghost father, Achille realizes that he cannot answer whether or not he is “smoke from a fire that never burned” (139). He painfully realizes that “he was his own memory” (141), fallible and limited, and in the “tears glazing his eyes” (139), he sees the past and future reflected. Achille’s tear-choked clarity represents the ambivalence of bioregional reinhabitation. Knowing the old ways of ancient peoples requires imaginative memory that at times is painfully at a loss for logical justification.

The failure to make the imaginative leap to the past and adopt a place’s ancient rituals and ceremonies for the future leaves the wounds of displacement un-mended.

²⁷ The “chanterelle, / the river griot, the Sioux shaman,” who is the Caribbean incarnation of Homer (318)

Puerto Rican writer Antonio Pedreira laments his island's diminutive geography for condemning "us to live in perpetual submission" (115). Trinidadian writer V. S. Naipaul thinks that a satisfactory history of the islands cannot be told because "history is built around achievements and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies" (29). Naipaul's totalizing and highly contestable assertion serves as a hyperbolic example of how important written histories, monuments, and archeological ruins are for a traditional sense of place. The ocean-roiled, highly fecund ecology of tropical islands continually washes and grows over material evidence of human presence on the landscape. The metaphor of unearthing or pulling from beneath the water is a necessary trope for Caribbean literature if it is to uncover the islands' trans-Atlantic history. St. Lucia's material history—the hotels, the ruins of sugar factories, the sulfur mines, rusted anchors, canons, and the submarine rumors of sunken galleons from Imperial Spain—signifies "degradation and cruelty" dissimulated as indigenous origins (Walcott, "Muse" 44). Derek Walcott, in the role of epic poet, must uncover an indigenous history from the "midden fragments" ("Muse" 44) of colonialism.

A brief summary of Walcott's *Omeros* is necessary to explain the journey of the hero Achille as one from West Indian ambivalent castaway to place-conscious St. Lucian *etak* captain. Although the entire epic weaves and interposes Achille with a host of mythical counterparts, who include Walcott, his father Warwick,²⁸ and the Greek-Antillean pantheon, the story of the fisherman Achille can still be located and discussed as a complete narrative chord within the greater symphony of the poem. Achille has this

²⁸ Warwick Walcott died in 1931 only a year after his son's birth, and the poet encounters him in book one as a ghost. Similarly, Achille's father Afolabe is a ghost the fisherman encounters down a surreal "branch of the Congo" in book three (135).

girlfriend Helen and a fishing boat he named *In God We Troust*, leaving the typo to spite the local priest, explaining that “Is God’ spelling and mine” (sic 8). He believes that in order to keep his beautiful girlfriend around he must supplement his meager income by illegally poaching conch shells to sell to tourists during the rainy off-season. He provides luxuries like the “brand-new galvanize” (110) shower he built for her and “expensive shampoo.” He also gains a job on Dennis Plunkett’s pig farm through the help of his friend Philoctete. He fights with Hector, his rival, foil, and fellow fisherman, for Helen, the off-and-on employed waitress and tourist “cane-row” raider (36). Hector, loses his pirogue in a monsoon and decides to trade what he can for a taxi, a sixteen seat transport van he names the “Comet” to take tourists to and from the airport. As a taxi driver, Hector has a comparatively better job, but he has lost his connection to the sea. Helen moves in with Hector after she and Achille argue and fight about who should carry the basket at market. When Achille returns from his long fishing trip, readers find him in Omeros’ yard, raking the leaves of a “pomme-Arac”²⁹ tree under which the fisherman and blind old griot find an Arawak totem (162). The narrative in books four and five shifts focus to the nineteenth-century artist and activist Catherine Weldon, personal secretary to the Lakota chief Sitting Bull, and to the poet Walcott as he circumnavigates the Atlantic and Mediterranean. After Hector dies in a car crash in book six, Achille makes a noble decision to re-unite with Helen and raise Hector’s baby. Although they disagree whether the child should have an African or European name, Ma Kilman reports to the humming Omeros that Achille will “leave it / till the day of christening. That Helen must learn / where she from.” After healing the injured fisherman Philoctete and looking

²⁹ the pomerac or tropical apple tree

forward to a promised pig for next Christmas from the Plunketts, Ma Kilman exclaims, “You see? / Standing, Philo, standing straight!” (318). She concludes that “We shall all heal” (319). The wound of history and its cures form the dominant motif of *Omeros*. Each dramatic character enacts a healing process that represents Walcott’s integration of colonial and indigenous narratives of place.

When Walcott writes that New World poets need a “truly tough” aesthetic in “The Muse of History,” he means that the postcolonial Caribbean requires the exuberance of the New World poets Walt Whitman and Pablo Neruda in spite of tough situations like that of Helen and Achille. He argues that New World poets must be honest to history and simultaneously retain a sense of wonder for the natural world. Feeling resentment toward European colonists and slave traders is understandable, but according to Walcott, the desire to eradicate modern white influences from the West Indies is impractical, and the anger that motivates it is antithetical to the experience of elation for the elemental beauty of the region. Elation in the context of Walcott’s poetics essentially means “the possibility of man and his language waking to wonder here” in a chosen place, be it Suwanose-Jima, the Sierra Nevadas, or the Lesser Antilles. Walcott is not asking anyone to be thrilled about past crimes and present iniquities; he seeks a middle way between a distant metropole and atavistic Africa. Eschewing the revolutionary impulse to purify the region, Walcott urges New World poets to accept a bastardized region as if it were pure. Analogously, Achille laudably accepts Helen’s baby by Hector as if the child were his.

The title of *Omeros* refers to the Greek name for Homer, but the patrician title does not mean that Walcott is transplanting the Western literary tradition to the Caribbean. Instead, I contend that the title uses the Greek poet’s original name to initiate

an Adamic perception of St. Lucia as an archipelagic rival to the mythical Aegean isles. He juxtaposes Western myth with the West Indian cultural and natural environment, as can be seen in Walcott's mnemonic explication of the title, *O-Mer-Os*, in book one:

And *O* was the conch-shell's invocation, *mer* was
Both mother and sea in our Antillean patois,
Os, a grey bone, and the white surf as it crashes

and spreads its sibilant collar on a lace shore. (14)

Writing inter-textually, Walcott deconstructs patrician myth as only one trace among many of a sense of place in an archipelago. Walcott finds the revisionary ethos of his poetry in the transformation of the "Old Testament epics of bondage and deliverance" by African slaves ("Muse" 45). Walcott claims that traditionalists, who view the Caribbean as wholly African, take nostalgic positions based on an atavistic motherland. Objecting to T.S. Eliot's thesis that the culture of any advanced society is the incarnation of its religion,³⁰ he writes that slaves made the European languages and Christian religion of their oppressors into something new:

Each new oral poet can contribute his couplet ... no beginning but no end. The new poet enters a flux and withdraws, as the weaver continues the pattern, hand to hand and mouth to mouth, as the rockpile convict passes the sledge:

Many days of sorrow, many nights of woe,
Many days of sorrow, many nights of woe,

³⁰ Eliot writes that "no culture has appeared or developed except together with a religion," arguing that culture is "essentially, the incarnation (so to speak) of the religion of a people" (13,27)

and a ball and chain, everywhere I go.

No history, but flux, and the only sustenance, myth:

Moses live till he got old, / Where shall I be? (Walcott, "Muse" 47-48)

The West Indian poet represents his creole heritage through the "hieroglyphs, symbols, or alphabet of the official one" (49). "Moses lived till he got old" forms the official refrain to which the voice of the contingent "I" is added and owned. The official motifs travel and hop from singer to singer like sea almond seeds dropped by the swift in *Omeros* along its migratory flight. Each new local poet adds his couplet to the official language and storehouse of myth, creating motifs and rhythms of the region particularized through the supplemental voice of the individual always entering the flux and leaving it. Each Greek, British, and West Indian archipelago offers a particular and complete version of life in what Epeli Hau'ofa refers to as a "sea of islands" (32).

The iambic hexameter of *Omeros* invokes Virgil's *Aeneid* and Dante's *Divine Comedy* while it intones St. Lucia's present, rolling like the wash of waves against bright sands. Philoctete, the injured fisherman turned subsistence yam farmer, says in the long poem's first of many interlocked tercets: "This is how, one sunrise, we cut down them canoes" (3), juxtaposing St. Lucia's *laurier-cannelles* trees and his French patois with the style and tradition of Graeco-Roman epic poetry and European literature. New World poets inscribe the present with myth, as Jorge Luis Borges did with the gaucho figure of José Hernández's *Martín Fierro*. Walcott writes that Borges gave the pampas of Argentina "an instant archaism by the hieratic style," so that the "death of a gaucho does not merely repeat, but is, the death of Caesar" (38). Borges' hieratic style, opposed to the demotic speech of the Argentine plains, equates with Walcott's terza rima. Articulating

these New World aesthetics, the Martinique poet Édouard Glissant writes that “composite peoples, that is, those who could not deny or mask their hybrid composition, nor sublimate it in the notion of a mythical pedigree, do not ‘need’ the idea of Genesis, because they do not need the myth of pure lineage” (141). Fellow New World poet Snyder describes his reinhabitants as “composite beings,” who do not need an uninhabited and pure wilderness against which to define a New World: “simply put, we are all composite beings ... the ‘just this’ of the ever-present moment holds all the transitory little selves in its mirror” (*Place in Space*, 63-64). Writing the perennial moment requires a hybrid fusion of a place’s originating myths and its local voices. The present, hybrid moment of opposed social forces—the colonizer and colonized, the white and black races, the literate and illiterate—exceeds any one tradition or language that attempts to appropriate the present. The pretense of purity limits the self from what Snyder and Glissant call a hybrid present; those who value purity think themselves masters when they are really slaves. Similarly, Walcott argues that postcolonial insistence on purity and “genetics” has created intense strife and atrocities worldwide (“Muse” 57). Walcott’s “ever-present moment” can be heard with “dazzled ears” in island patios, in reggae music, in surf lapping against bright beaches, and through trade winds rustling the sea almond trees.

Patricia Ismond views Walcott primarily as an artist, who “accepts himself, in his time and place” (235). He is free of the historical legacy of “inferiority” and his writing calls for the West Indian peoples to act “with confidence towards what has been left” (235). In a region with no common language, only various influences of English, Spanish, French, Dutch, and numerous area-specific Creole forms of these languages,

“intertextuality has been seen as a trope for the Caribbean predicament itself” (James 4). Walcott’s fusion of West-African, Middle Passage, and West Indian literary forms with Graeco-Roman mythology and Western literature has earned him recognition despite the skepticism of more traditionalist critics, earning him the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1992. Walcott navigates these treacherous waters through his artistic embrace of both sides. Similarly, Snyder argues for “composite beings” of Old and New World histories to come together on the continent of Turtle Island (189). Despite a global market that penalizes attachment to any one place, Snyder urges his readers to work against modernity, “turn back to the land” (190), and reinhabit an Old New World.

Charles Pollard argues that the closest parallel in modern literature for understanding Walcott’s poetics of “discrepant cosmopolitan modernism” is James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Pollard argues for Walcott’s and Joyce’s “biographical convergence” (197) by observing that both were born on an island controlled by the Catholic Church and British Empire. Both were educated in the colonial system, growing to resent English rule and paradoxically love the language and its literary tradition. Both were accused of forsaking their ethnic heritage for imperial currency, and both consistently defended the view that the experience of island life, be it in Ireland or St. Lucia, should be articulated within the “originating myths” (198) of the patrician tradition. Walcott supplements the story of Odysseus with St. Lucia’s patios, the tropical sea almond, the fishermen’s canoes, and the volcanic Pitons to introduce a sense of “‘secondariness’ or belatedness into the structure of the [supposedly] original” form of “social and textual affiliation” (Bhabha 305, 292). Maria McGarrity observes that the modern epic is a common “cultural paradigm” for both Irish and Caribbean writers. Walcott actually makes this

comparison when he calls James Joyce “our age’s Omeros,” effectively making him another “griot / blues singer of West Indian Rhythms,” and making every “griot / blues singer” another Walcott, James Joyce, and Homer; literary artists entering the flux and leaving it (200). McGarrity’s argument is that what makes *Ulysses* and *Omeros* modern epics is the texts’ ability to explore the perennial theme of wandering and exile in the British Isles and the Antilles. Walcott’s poem of seven books of sixty-four total chapters with three cantos of perfect terza rima per chapter is a modern, Caribbean epic because it does not have to “stretch to make associations with the classics” (Walcott as qtd. in Bruckner 399). Like *Ulysses*, it uncovers Homer’s ethos through the particularity of a “traffic island” (Walcott, *Omeros* 252) in a sea of traffic islands.

Omeros develops a sense of Caribbean place through the long poem’s motif of historical injury. Jahan Ramazani writes that “nursed and inspected, magnified and proliferated, the metaphor of the wound forms the vivid nucleus of Walcott’s magnum opus” (*Hybrid Muse* 53). Indeed, the first book begins with lame Philoctete telling camera-wielding tourists how “we cut down them canoes.” He shows them the scar on his shin hidden beneath a sea-almond for “some extra silver,” but when asked about the cure he replies that “‘it have some things’—he smiles—‘worth more than a dollar’” (3-4). Ramazani writes Philoctete, is a “synecdochic figure for a general loss, in-jury, and impotence that must be healed for the (is)lands to be set in order” (Ramazani, “Wound of History” 410). Philoctete represents an aspect of the poet Walcott’s racial and cultural hybridity in which the scars of memory do not heal and what is needed is a “ceremony”

of initiation into the songs and prayers of a place's native people³¹ Philoctete is unable to join Hector and the other men fishing because he wounded his leg on a rusty anchor. So he goes to see the obeah woman Ma Kilman, owner of NO PAIN CAFÉ, who applies her "sibylline cure" by eventually bathing him in waters infused with various homeopathic herbs and a noxious flower "rooted in bitterness" (238). The flower with bitter roots, which she finds up a hill in the woods by following ant trails, alludes to the tree on the Stygian shore from which Aeneas plucks the golden bough in order to gain entrance to the underworld from the Cumaean Sibyl (Virgil, bk. 6, card 124). Ma Kilman, the "spidery sibyl" (245), takes an active role in facilitating Philoctete's recovery by following the "line of ants . . . signaling a language she could not understand" (238) to find the "cure that precedes every wound" (239). She demonstrates a strength and tenacity the Cumaean Sibyl lacks. The modernist anthropologist Sir James Frazier titled his comparative study of mythology, *The Golden Bough*, after the eponymous Graeco-Roman symbol to signify the deep-seeded myth of kingly succession rites he found throughout a myriad of ancient cultures. Walcott borrows these connotations of Aeneas' key, which Frazier drew on, to reinterpret it as the flower Ma Kilman finds growing from the damp roots of a cedar tree. He leaves it unnamed to signify the subtle grandmotherly wisdom of place beyond the ken of language.

Just as Ma Kilman follows the ants to the root for Philoctete's ceremonial bath, Achille must encounter the region's history through the process of a heroic quest for "his

³¹ An analogue for Walcott's healing can be found in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*. After cursing the torrential rain in the jungle, the psychologically damaged Tayo leaves the Pacific theater for WWII to return to U.S. hospitals and a drought stricken New Mexico. In Tayo's mind the drought and his personal haunting can only be healed through the ceremony of his grandmother's medicine man.

name and his soul” (154). The migratory sea-swift, a recurrent motif in *Omeros*, appears to Achille “like a sunlit omen,” and he follows it in his pirogue until the bird transforms into a “mind-messenger” that “sho[o]t[s] ahead of each question like an answer” and tows his boat into the “open ocean” (131). Unlike the colonial castaway, Achille learns to take up the present maritime region without nostalgia and homesickness for an atavistic mother land. The Greek Achilles’ St. Lucian brother³² comes to a *Tsimtsum* moment when the search for home shifts into an acceptance of the present. Walcott describes this moment for Achille as a point in his journey “when a wave rhymes with one’s grave ... and cancels the line of master and slave” (159). The swift leads him to a foggy mangrove swamp in which he beaches his pirogue and enters to meet his ghost-like father Afolabe beside the fire-lit tribal huts, a scenario like “the African movies / he had yelped at in childhood” (133). After passing the apsis of his canoe journey out from the island and the consequent experience of a dream-like Africa coming to him on his stationary boat, Achille and his mate paddle back. Their uplifted oar is stronger than “marble / Ceasar’s arresting palm” because the formerly outlying island transforms into a viable place in which the sea is “His Virgin Mother” and “every bird is [his] brother” (160). Achille does not travel to Africa; his canoe journey throughout the Antilles allows Africa to come to him. He enacts a symbolic form of travel similar to the navigational system of Pacific islanders. Achille, the canoe voyager, negotiates the currents so that home comes to him.

³² Explaining his choice of Graeco-Roman names for the characters of *Omeros*, Walcott states islanders really have names like Hector and Achille: “Someone would see a slave and say ‘he looks like a Pompey so we’ll call him Pompey.’ The place is full of slave names. But then we become our names. It’s O.K. to be Smith. You don’t own me because you call me that; I *am* Smith. There is a restless identity in the New World. The New World needs an identity without guilt or blame.” (as qtd. in Bruckner 397)

Walcott utilizes the canoe³³ as a maritime symbol of subjectivity because of the “alter/native” chronotope associated with it. Unlike the masculine imperial traveler, who gives meaning and history to a blank spatial environment,³⁴ nature gains presence in the navigational system of *etak* in which “the voyaging canoe is perceived as stable while the islands and cosmos move towards the traveler” (DeLoughrey 3). The canoe traveler remains relatively still; shores and waves are the things that move toward and away from him or her. The Pacific islander chronotope of *etak* travel displaces the center of agency from the subject to the region in which the canoe travels, making an imaginative leap from the fact that during small boat travel, passengers sit down and go relatively nowhere to cover large distances across water. Since Achille journeys to Africa by sitting still in the waters of the Windward Islands, his dramatic place-memory is shaped by an “alter/native” historiography.

Bill Ashcroft describes Walcott as a “symbolic Adam” who defines himself in his autobiography *Another Life* as a castaway Adam in a second Eden (*Caliban’s Voice* 87). As an Adamic poet, Walcott does not name the world for the first time; he names a perennially new world that has been named countless times before. The difference between a first and second Adam lies in the traditionally epic desire for continuity and the Adamic ability to recognize dis-continuity between classical, patrician poetry and

³³ The small narrow boat is named as the canoe, pirogue, or vaka in either the Pacific or the Atlantic.

³⁴ This traveler is epitomized in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* as a violent torch-bearer spreading England’s “sacred” fire: “Hunters for gold or pursuers of fame, they all had gone out on that stream [the Thames], bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire. What greatness had not floated on the ebb of that river into the mystery of an unknown earth! . . . The dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires.”

West Indian poetry entwined with the patrician tradition. George Handley defines this crucial difference as one between a classical A-damic and a qualified a-damic vision:

A return to the elemental task of the poet to name the world in relation is to begin again the process of building a culture of possibility, even if the poet must pretend that it happens *as if* for the first time. Without this *as if* qualification the poet will become blind to history and only see the broad spread of the world's innocent newness; poetry will function as a neocolonial *Adamic* possession of land. (*New World Poetics*, 3)

Walcott's poem "Names" exemplifies this poetics of seeing the world as if it were elemental (*Collected Poems* 305). Moving with geographic fluidity between the Middle East, India, and the West Indies, the poet asserts that he has "never found that [original] moment" before language, but nevertheless his "race began as the sea began / with no nouns, and with no horizon." Although each place acquires a palimpsest of names such as the Creole-English juxtaposition of "moubain: the hogplum, / cerise: the wild cherry, baie-la: the bay," the "fresh green voices" exceed any one language.

Achille fails his quest for his original name and learns to remain incomplete. The failed yet paradoxically healing process of learning the fragmentary history of his ancestors grounds the hero in his current reality, raking leaves in Omeros' yard. Postcolonial displacement creates the desire for another Troy or second Eden, but in order to avoid a "neocolonial" possession of the land, Walcott writes a self-reflexive epic that sings of heroes as if they were characters in originating myths. Unlike the thematic statements and invocations that begin the *Iliad* and *Aeneid*, Walcott ends *Omeros* with an explanation:

Why waste lines on Achille, a shade on sea floor?
 Because strong as self-healing coral, a quiet culture
 is branching from the white ribs of each ancestor (296)

Homer invokes the muse and Virgil sings of Aeneas, whereas Walcott explains why he “sang of quiet Achille” (320). Achilles, son of Peleus, and Aeneas, son of Anchises, are both bellicose heroes with anger. According to Walcott, *Omeros* is more an homage to the Caribbean people than an epic because he “was thinking of Homer the poet of the seven seas” (as qtd. in Bruckner 396). Achille is not a traditional hero, only a shadow of the archetypal Achilles. He represents the quiet culture of fishermen “using the old ways, who believed [their] work was prayer, / who caught only enough, since the sea had to live” (301). He is an ideal member of St. Lucia’s bioregional community “branching from” the cultural bones of originating myths and ancient fragments, practicing a sustainable economy in deference to the ecological health of the sea.

Speaking to potential objections to his Adamic poetics in his influential essay “The Muse of History,” Walcott writes that New World poets like Whitman and Neruda, who “reject ethnic ancestry for faith in elemental man,” are not naïve in their elation (40). He argues that elation is common to all great New World poets, whether they are drawing on narratives of Prospero and Crusoe, or Friday and Caliban (40). The myth of the noble savage is Old World nostalgia; New World poets draw their energy from the bitterness of “salt fruit at the sea’s edge” (41). The golden bough-like plant that Ma Kilman finds is not a native species; its seed was transplanted to St. Lucia in the belly of a sea swift (238), which means that in more ways than one, the root of synecdochic Philoctete’s

recovery owes its existence to the Gulf Stream and trade winds that facilitate the island's human and biotic traffic.

Paul Jay believes that Walcott “divides his poetic persona between Achille, the descendent of African slaves, and Dennis Plunkett, the exile from England, in order to explore the African and European roots of his [own] identity” (548). Readers encounter the British Major Dennis Plunkett in the first book, where the author explains the Major's vague memories of a head injury, which he received during the Eighth Army campaign against the Afrika Korps in Tobruk and Alamein with an important, meta-poetic aside:

This wound I have stitched into Plunkett's character.

He has to be wounded, affliction is one theme

Of this work, this fiction, since every “I” is a

Fiction finally. Phantom narrator, resume (28).

The phantom voice narrating the poem continues the story as if the author never intruded at all. Like Gary Snyder's situated and self-conscious revision of place archetypes in *Regarding Wave*, Walcott needs to let his readers know that he is adding his voice to the mythic and creole sources structuring identity in the Lower Antilles. Plunkett recounts his old chums Tumbly and Scottie, and when he comes back to the fact that he lives on a “traffic island” in the Lesser Antilles, he wonders where “could this world renew the Mediterranean's innocence?” (28). His Eurocentric ideals lead to the nascence of his written history for the beautiful Helen.

Plunkett's character is only one entry into Walcott's poetic development of a viable form of cultural hybridity for himself in St. Lucia and archipelago cultures

generally. *Omeros* is a multi-faceted poetic exploration of bioregional identity through the exchange of the *dramatis personae* of Greco-Roman heroes, contemporary Antillean people, and the Cyclops, Medusa, and Circe of history. Angered by tourists and their simplifying historical gaze, “Achille would howl / at their clacking cameras ... the scream of a warrior losing his only soul / to the click of a Cyclops” (Walcott, *Omeros* 299). Medusa is a mythic figure of ambiguity, which Walcott uses to symbolize North American past, “that Medusa of the New World” (“Muse” 36). Textbook history for Walcott reduces its colonized students to ignorant natives. He retorts that “if History saw them as pigs, History was Circe / with her schoolteacher’s wand” (Walcott, *Omeros* 63-64). Walcott offers a poetic model of how bioregional reinhabitants can live meaningful lives in spite of the region’s intense hybridity and bitter history.

Despite the pain of memory, *Omeros* portrays the acceptance of “this archipelago of the Americas” (Walcott “Muse” 64). It dramatizes Walcott’s hope to assimilate “the features of every ancestor,” while retaining a sense of wonder and praise for the earth (“Muse” 36-38). The poem represents these diverse ancestors through its *dramatis personae*. The West-Indian poet grapples with the “Medusa” of historical trauma through the trope of antidote, and offers a provisional solution: Caliban’s cry equals Prospero’s spell. *Omeros* hybridizes the ancient Aegean seafarer with the West Indian self in order to integrate the region’s divided history. Achille is an exemplary character because he achieves this integrated place-consciousness of St. Lucia through the *etak* chronotope. He gives up the masculine heroic quest for his father’s ghost and learns a renewed commitment to his native home. The ocean surrounding him ceases to separate him from a continental center and shifts into an environment of sustaining rhythms.

CHAPTER THREE: SNYDER'S AND WALCOTT'S BIOREGIONAL MUSE

Walcott's *Omeros* and Snyder's *Regarding Wave* and *Turtle Island* should be taken together as variations on a syncretic theme of bioregionalism. A structure that fits both poets' imaging of a composite sense of place is bioregional reinhabitation: looking to prior inhabitants, human and non-human, as sapient beings, possessing the dignity, knowledge, and history necessary for the ecological health of a region as a whole. In this chapter, I compare *Omeros* and *Turtle Island* through this bioregional lens in order to articulate how archipelago geography and the revised castaway narrative are crucial to both works as tools to image a composite sense of place. The spiritual and poetic traditions from which these poets synthesize a viable place-based environmentalism can be explained by the ocean currents and watersheds that structure their communities. The environmental and postcolonial castaway motif that is apparent in both works explains how Snyder's and Walcott's literary personae accept and join the biocentric communities of their chosen places.

I follow the logic of Walcott's essay, "The Muse of History," which strikes a New World balance between the poetry of the French Saint-John Perse and Martiniquan Aimé Césaire in order to articulate how "the tone is one [bioregional] voice from these different [reinhabiting] men" (Walcott "Muse" 53). I argue through close reading that an analogous balance exists between chapter sixty of Walcott's *Omeros* and "I Went into the Maverick Bar" of Snyder's *Turtle Island*. The former is a coda of the long poem's full development of Walcott's castaway reckoning and place-consciousness of St. Lucia,

while the latter applies the “place logic” of island culture to the context of U.S. environmentalism in the mid-1970s. As Walcott argues of Perse and Césaire, the division of Caribbean and Californian poets by sociological difference denies each his full poetic range and power for coastal communities on the North American continent and archipelago cultures generally. Gary Snyder, as a white American and Pacific sea-farer, and Derek Walcott, as a mixed-race St. Lucian who did not leave the West Indies until he was near fifty (Burnett 38), are sociologically distinct. Walcott has famously described his subject position of mixed ancestry as “divided to the vein” (“A Far Cry from Africa”). Similarly, U.S. “settlement” of the continent traces a colonial history in which Snyder finds himself divided between a native Coyote culture and an antithetical America of “The Maverick Bar” he could almost love again. Yet, as ecocritical poets writing in the postcolonial Americas, they write from the same muse: a sense of the past as a “timeless, yet habitable moment” (Walcott, “Muse” 36). They distill a Medusa-like moment of historical ambivalence between an Old and New World to a simultaneous embrace of both.

Despite the strong thematic thread of being divided, both self-reflexive works are at home in a chosen place because of their bioregionalism. The cultural sources central to *Omeros* can be found along the Atlantic’s circulating currents: the music of Arawak flutes, the songs of enslaved and displaced West Africans during the Middle Passage and the poems of Britons and Continental Europeans. *Turtle Island’s* sources can be found along the Pacific Rim from the sutras of Mahāyāna Buddhists to the Coyote trickster and Bear Mother stories of Native Americans. Both Walcott’s and Snyder’s poetry and prose attempt to reinitiate a composite culture of place, based on the interconnected structure of

watersheds and ocean currents. The Yuba River feeds the Feather River, which flows into the Sacramento River, and out into the North Pacific Gyre through the Sacramento-San-Joaquin Delta. The North Atlantic Equatorial Current flows from West Africa through the Lesser Antilles, of which St. Lucia is member, into the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico, and north past the Dominican Republic into the Antilles Current and Gulf Stream. Land-based theories of topological identity divide peoples inhabiting these rivers and currents, but both Snyder's view of the Pacific and Walcott's understanding of the Atlantic offer versions of water-based models of place; soil-based nationalism evolves into a fluid globalism. Island isolation only holds if the surrounding seas and waterways retain their traditional status as boundaries between nations and individuals. Water cycles, in my reading, facilitate ecological, economic, and cultural exchanges between the seemingly disparate island societies that Snyder's and Walcott's works unite in bioregions.

One of the tools of analysis common to both of these poets' development of bioregional reinhabitation is the postcolonial castaway narrative of Yann Martel's novel in which Pi Patel, at the moment of breakdown, breaks through and gains awareness of the ocean as a community he can join. As I argued in chapter two, Achille transforms from castaway to pragmatic reinhabitant through his *etak* journey to ancestral Africa. In the following section, I trace another of Achille's castaway awakenings that dovetails with the poet Walcott's descent and return from Sulphur Springs in Soufrière (*Omeros* 299-303; chapter 60). Achille comes back to a post-*Tsimtsum* St. Lucia after his *etak* journey to the cinematic Africa of his father Afolabe. He embarks on this journey with Philoctete in the seventh book after Walcott's persona descends to the island's version of

Dante's Malebolge³⁵ in Sulphur Springs. Walcott follows Omeros down a "goat-track" (283) outside his "white hotel" (279) to the boat of a "charred [Charon-like] ferryman" (287), who takes the poet and his Virgilian guide into a lagoon near Soufrière. Transported into the lagoon underworld, they hike through the "foul sulphur of hell" (289) and the babbling dead souls of St. Lucia's condemned real estate agents and political traitors, "who in elected office, saw land as views / for hotels and 'elevated' into waiters / the sons of others" (scare quotes mine 289). Wondering whether his poetry has actually helped the victims of the island's traitors or inadvertently earned him a spot beside the sell-out politicians, Walcott wakes up from the nightmare without an explicit answer, but with a clear head. He goes down to the beach and sees Philoctete making New Year's benediction, washing in the "blessed space" (295) of the surf. They wave at each other and exchange morning greetings.

Following his observation of Philoctete's ritual, the narrator Walcott explains his motivations to write about Achille by describing how the fisherman's work was quiet and strong. He goes on to lament how the cyclopean "eye[s]" (299) of cameras and "simplif[ying]" (297) gaze of History have dehumanized these noble men and marginalized their work while simultaneously focusing attention on them. Evaluating Walcott's treatment of the native fishermen, Buell writes: "local work, life, landscape, become realized both as navel and periphery of global space and deep time with a resourcefulness few but Joyce have equaled" (*Writing for an Endangered World* 95). Reacting to the cruel primitivism of tourists and their cameras "flying to capture the scene / like gulls fighting over a catch," Achille yells at them and chases them away only

³⁵ Malebolge is Dante's name for the eighth circle of Hell, a place for frauds which literally translates from Tuscan dialect as evil "purse" or "pouch" (Raffa).

to be ridiculed by the “waiters in bow-ties on the terrace” (299). Despite the waiters’ feigned superiority, they remain on the terrace outside the master’s house. Walcott emphasizes their bow ties in order to allude to the archer Philoctete and Odysseus’ great bow. Philoctete was briefly mentioned in the *Iliad* and featured in an eponymous play by Sophocles. The heroes in Sophocles’ play deposit Philoctete on an island because his wound from a snake bite stinks and his cries of pain are too loud, but an oracle reminds them they need his peerless skills with the bow to win Troy and Helen. Odysseus and Achilles’ son Neoptolemus return to the island of Philoctete’s exile to bring his “infallible bow” (Breslin 247) back to the epic battle. They figuratively untie his bow. If the waiters have been simplified by History and reduced to lackeys on the master’s terrace laughing at poor Achille, they are unable to string Odysseus’ great bow and purge their island household of its unworthy suitors with the “clacking cameras” (299). The bow ties symbolize the contradictory life prospects of the Caribbean tourist economy for indigenous West Indians. Achille is only one islander who faces the oppressive tourist economy. As a waitress who “dint take no shit / from white people and some of them tourist,” Helen does not last long at her job (33). She responds to the lecherous and rude customers by ostentatiously ripping off her uniform and storming “out the hotel / naked as God make me” (34). Helen rebukes the humiliating service job by stripping the uniform and baring her body and self in defiance to the cyclopean tourists. Her proud expression of defiance earns her a bad reputation with the island’s remaining restaurants, so she sets up a stall near the beach to braid the tourists’ hair in “cane-row style” (36). Assimilating the tourist economy provides Caribbean subjects with a highly limited amount of social mobility that contradicts their dignity and marginalizes the defiant few

who refuse to wear the uniform. If s(he) rejects the service economy, s(he) faces the scorn of taxi drivers and waiters, and the simplifying gaze of first-world eyes, for living the old ways.

Achille's frustration at being what seems like "the only fisherman left in the world," combines with strange weather to convince him that his life prospects would improve "someplace" else, "some cove he could settle like another Aeneas, / founding not Rome but home" (301). Two arguable signs of global warming, surprising rains during the dry season and the rising levels of "bursting seas," convince Achille that "somewhere people interfering / with the course of nature" (299). Seven Seas tells him that like the Arawak, the egrets, and the parrots, "man was an endangered / species now" (300). Although he and Seven Seas know that the marlins, albacore, shrimp and human beings are endangered, the two islanders' limited spheres of influence can do nothing to halt the commercial trawlers' over-fishing, "the discos, the transports, the greed, [and] the noise" (301). Achille learns exactly how tenuous and endangered his lifestyle and habitat are by remaining committed to his work and his island. He finds this knowledge sufficiently "enraging" (300) to enlist healed Philoctete for a journey to somewhere, any place else. They load up the canoe and go south, "searching" for a neocolonial anti-isle,³⁶ an innocent beach where Achille could revert back to the simplicity of his childhood. They find no virgin bay in which to harbor their canoe and start life over. They keep going south, however, towards the Grenadines, like Jonah towards Tarshish, until they witness a surfacing whale—"Baleine," said Achille" (303)—whose disturbance of the water swamps *In God We Troust*. Shaken by the awesome display of the leviathan,

³⁶ DeLoughrey reads the "Antilles" of European exploration in the Atlantic and Pacific as "utopian counter-lands" (6).

Achille recovers his sense of place in the turbulent wake of the spuming sea monster: “he has known the frightening trough dividing the soul / from this life and the other, he has seen the pod / burst into spray” (303). He and Philoctete bail out the bilge water and decide to return to St. Lucia, “their wet, salted faces shining with God” (303). Nearly losing it at sea, their search for a neocolonial *Nouvelle Cythère*³⁷ shifts into a postcolonial acceptance of their native home. A numinous perception of the sea shines on the fishermen’s brine-encrusted faces, gazing northwards to Gros Ilet, to Helen, and to home.

As Walcott’s fictional vectors Achille and Philcotete paddle to the Grenadines, the historical Snyder boarded ocean freighters throughout the late 1950s and 1960s on a similar quest. His journey is worthy of comparison and attention because it ended in a similar acceptance of his home port and place. Chapter one demonstrated how Mahāyāna Buddhism, ecology, and Suwanose-Jima provided Snyder with the necessary “place logic” to return home with a viable interpretation of bioregional politics for the Sierra foothills. In this last section, I analyze how Snyder applied these spiritual and ecological lessons he learned abroad to his poetic practice by reading his engagement of U.S. culture in *Turtle Island*. Snyder shipped out from San Francisco to study and work at a Japanese temple in conjunction with the First Zen Institute of America in Kyoto in May of 1956 (Murphy, *Understanding Gary Snyder* 6). He studied under Oda Sesso Roshi, Rinzai Zen master and Head Abbot of Daitoku-ji Temple, until Sesso died in 1966 (Murphy *Understanding Gary Snyder* 8). Shortly after his first son Kai’s birth in 1968, he returned to the United States to seek permanent residence and was eager to take part in the

³⁷ Literally, new Aphrodite, the French explorer Louis de Bougainville used this toponym to re-name the Polynesian island of Tahiti.

growing environmental movement, which began with Rachel Carson's 1962 publication of *Silent Spring* (Sale).

Like the scorn Achille incurs for his commitment to the old ways, Snyder's home situation was also an impetus to ship out. The U.S. prevalence of Orientalism during the Cold War was severe enough in the 1950s that even Snyder's close friend Lew Welch said that his study of Asian languages at Berkeley was making him "slant-eyed" (Welch 107). According to Timothy Gray, Kerouac and Welch wrote a series of "yellowface" portraits about the young poet and his Oriental posture (157). Jack Kerouac's literary persona of Snyder, Japhy Ryder, has eyes that twinkle like the "eyes of old giggling sages of China" (*Dharma Bums* 11), and at the end of the novel, after Japhy has shipped out to Japan, Ray wonders if Japhy will "just disappear and we'll never see him again, and he'll be the Han Shan ghost of the Orient mountains and even the Chinese will be afraid of him he'll be so raggedy and beat" (208). Contrary to suspicious friends, Snyder was not in metaphorical danger of becoming Han Shan of Cold Mountain and losing his racial identity. He simply went on from New York and Mexico City "far, far, west" (*Back Country* 19), performing the nomadic role of bioregional scholar that Scott Russell Sanders admires in the "purposeful wanderings of the Australian Aborigines" ("Settling Down" 85). Like the westward-flowing equatorial currents from California, Snyder followed the natural paths of his environment in order to arrive at experiential knowledge of the Pacific Rim.

When he arrived in Kyoto, the country's capital was then in early stages of recovery from the horrors of the Second World War. Compounded with bleak economic prospects, the Japanese people suffered intense depression, referred to as the *kyodatsu*

condition (Gray 170). Most of the Asian people Snyder encountered as an expatriate were more interested in Surrealist art and the novels of D. H. Lawrence than the *Dhammapadra* and *Avatamsaka Sutra*. Peter Berg³⁸ explains that Japanese intellectuals viewed the Zen tradition as dangerously complicit with the state apparatus, reporting that “it was Zen priests who prayed with young kamikaze pilots before their suicidal missions” (383). He argues that Snyder’s contribution to American Buddhism was the alliance of Eastern philosophy with nature instead of state power. Works like *Regarding Wave* demonstrate the thangka style of his Buddhist ecology. The poem “Smokey the Bear Sutra” exemplifies the poet’s strategy for extending his syncretic doctrine of nature-oriented Buddhism to political activism on the North American continent. Snyder invokes the Great Sun Buddha of *Fudōmyō-ō* mantras³⁹ in juxtaposition with the National Park Services’ forest guardian, who purifies the wilderness with a firefighter’s shovel in his right paw “that digs to the truth beneath appearances; cuts the roots of useless attachments, and flings damp sand on the fires of greed and war.” The Sun Buddha’s U.S. incarnation in Smokey the Bear raises his left paw “in the Mudra of Comradely Display,” toward all the forest’s creatures. Snyder presents a guardian of the wilderness for the biocentric, transnational communities of the Pacific Rim.

Instead of the modern haiku-imagism and archetypal revision of his late 1950s and 1960s poetry, *Turtle Island* (1974) consists of lyric poetry and prose essays.

³⁸ Along with Raymond Dasmann, Berg was a leader in the circa-1970 Californian bioregional movement. He currently works with the *Planet Drum Foundation*.

³⁹ Katsunori Yamazato explains that *fudō* means “immovable” in Japanese and that “*Fudōmyō-ō* is a deity that belongs to the *Shingon* school” (“How to Be in this Crisis” 236). Snyder refers to *Fudōmyō-ō* as the diamond sword wielding “ACHALA the Immovable, Lord of Wisdom, Lord of Heat, who is squint-eyed and whose face is terrible with bare fangs” (*Turtle Island* “Spel Against Demons” 17).

Contemporary environmental problems convinced Snyder that his work needed to be directly engaged in these topical matters, such as Lake Erie's ecological death and the burning of its tributary, the Cuyahoga River. Bert Almon observes that Snyder's "philosophical position is now [1977] influenced by the Vajrayana sect," a Tantric school that engaged practitioners with the very reality, *samsara*, from which "most Hindu and Buddhist sects seek detachment," (Almon 83). The lyric poem "Call of the Wild" clearly confirms Snyder's tough assessment of Western society. Looking upward as military jets arc across the sky, he muses about the competition between "non-farmer jet-set bureaucrats" ("Mother Earth" 48) and low-impact reinhabitants of the region: "WE SHALL SEE WHO KNOWS HOW TO BE" ("Call of the Wild" 81).

The poem "I Went into the Maverick Bar" (Snyder 9) demonstrates his application of trans-Pacific knowledge to the local question of how to be on Turtle Island. The Maverick Bar near Farmington, New Mexico reminds the poem's speaker of "High School dances," "Madras, Oregon," where he worked as a logger, and the "short-haired joy and roughness" of American "stupidity." Biographically, the poem narrates Snyder's visit to an actual Maverick Bar in Farmington, a "redneck" place "full of Texans" near the Four Corners, on his way to research industrial strip mining on Black Mesa (MacAdams and Dorr). The OED states that the word *maverick* comes from the nineteenth century Texas politician, Samuel Augustus Maverick, whose immense (neglected) herds would wander unbranded ("Maverick"). His neighbors would take up the unclaimed waifs and brand them. These unbranded cattle came to be called mavericks. The term quickly became associated with independent-mindedness and individualism. However, the title of the poem is ironic; the cowboy patrons, waitresses,

and “country-and-western band” are more like unclaimed waifs than self-made individuals. The bar patrons have an American lack of tradition, which upon inspection turns out to be nothing but a neon-lit nostalgia for cowboys, big sky country, and the high school prom. Snyder foregrounds the bitterness of this irony by stating “I could almost love you [America] again.” The poem resolves outside the bar, as the speaker gazes at the bluffs “under the tough old stars,” where the poet turns back to “the real work,”⁴⁰ the concrete particulars of survival. Defining this question of praxis during an interview for the *Ohio Review* with Paul Geneson, Snyder says, “the problem is, where do you put your feet down, where do you raise your children, what do you do with your hands” (*Real Work* 55). The castaway’s path home is not through rescue, but through his or her ability to act as if his or her life raft is the *Tsimtsum*. Snyder’s post-*Tsimtsum* quest ended when he stopped searching and began his critical work at home, living as a representative Turtle Islander. He built his exemplary home Kitkitdizze in the Sierras,⁴¹ founded the Ring of Bone Zendo in Nevada City,⁴² and served on the California Arts Council. The poet embodied the praxis of his bioregional reinhabitation by placing his feet in a chosen place and setting his hands to work incorporating “his own labor with the materials” of his poetry (Handley 6).

The process of place-making transforms abstract Cartesian space into a geographic area “seen, heard, smelled, imagined, loved, hated, feared, revered” (Walter 142). The process of space becoming place is synonymous with history (Buell, *Future of*

⁴⁰ The following line, “what is to be done,” refers to an essay of the same title by Lenin about the formation of the Bolshevik revolution.

⁴¹ See Yamazato, “Kitkitdizze, Zendo, and Place” and Snyder, “Kitkitdizze: a Node in the Net” *Place in Space*.

⁴² See Snyder, “A Brief Account of the Ring of Bone Zendo, I.”

Environmental Criticism 63). Colonial map-making disregards the sedimentary thickness of a region's history so it can reproduce the institutional conditions necessary for the experience of an imperial center. Lawrence Buell offers five categories of "place-connectedness," and of the two dealing with temporal dimensions, colonists ignore the region's prior history and the prior inhabitants' memory of the region (*Writing for an Endangered World* 64-68).⁴³ Achille's and Philoctete's search for an innocent place to start over exemplifies the neocolonial motivation to de-historicize the wilderness and isolate island landmasses from the archipelagos in which they reside. Colonial and neocolonial modernity violently re-constructs sacred sites of wilderness and subsistence hunting, fishing, and farming areas into expensive real estate, hotels, industrial zones, museums, and national parks. Narratives that motivate the search for a sense of place in a postcolonial context must respond to the significant challenge of history by answering the question of how to regain a place after the map-makers and bulldozers have irrevocably altered the region.

Rob Nixon argues that postcolonial studies have been slow to articulate an environmental ethos because the postcolonial preference for "cross culturalization" antagonizes the ecocritical preference for "virgin wilderness" (235). The initiation of

⁴³ Subjects relate to a place both spatially and temporally. Spatial senses of place either emanate outward in concentric circles of decreasing intimacy from a "central point" (64), such as a first name, parent, or hearth, or, they scatter across a "patchwork of specific entanglements that make up one's primary life routines" (66), constituting an archipelago of familiar places. Temporally, individuals layer the places they remember onto the regions they inhabit. As an example, Buell describes Gary Snyder's northern California as "a palimpsest of contemporary rurality, Asian classical learning, travel reminiscence, and native mythography and folklore" (66-67). Just as individuals remember and continually form layered places, the localities "themselves are not stable, free-standing entities" (67), but dynamic processes. Buell's last category of place is neither spatial nor temporal, but the "dream of a rightful homeland" (71) that subjects may never have seen, such as Zion or Palestine.

places after and beyond colonialism and hyper-modernity must strike a balance between these opposed discourses. Bioregional authors must follow concentric circles out from their “home range” (Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World* 64) into the “specificities of the international,” not into “transcendental abstraction” (Nixon 236). Members of a bioregional place arrive at this balance by shifting the terms of the argument from an ambivalent decision between either a pre- or postcolonial center to a syncretic hope for both. Since indigenous memory before colonialism only survives in oral narratives, artistic products, and material fragments, the syncretic places written by Snyder and Walcott engage the environmental imagination of ancient peoples’ modes of life in the search for a sustainable and meaningful society. *Turtle Island* applies Suwanose’s “place logic” to the Sierra Nevadas in an attempt to recover the “ancient solidarity” between “Anglos, Black people, Chicanos, and others beached up on these shores at the deepest level of their old cultural traditions” (Snyder, *Turtle Island* “Introductory Note”). *Omeros* invokes an ancient seafaring muse in order to sound the “low-fingered O of an Aruac flute” so that St. Lucia’s castaways “all heal” (Walcott, *Omeros* 153; 319). John Elder equates the attempt to recover the ancestral balance of human and natural history to Sigmund Freud’s construct of an illusion.⁴⁴ The balance of human beings and nature may be an illusion, but it is an idea that fulfills a psychological need (*Reading the Mountains of Home* 109-110). Ancient solidarity may be an illusion because of the historical paucity of ancient memory, but today’s environmental problems make it a “compelling

⁴⁴ Freud defines an illusion as a belief that is possible, but unrelated to evidence and “derived from human wishes” (*Future of an Illusion* 39). He classifies impossible beliefs as delusions. Illusions may turn out to be true—the Messiah may come, Antillia may be out there, global warming may be a liberal conspiracy—but Freud argues that “examples of illusions which have proved true are not easy to find.”

psychological” (Elder 110) answer to the question of home. While Snyder’s and Walcott’s ancient islands may ultimately be illusions, the pragmatic value of these islands equates with religious belief.

The articulation of place in an archipelago shifts the colonial, modern imagination of *aqua nullius* (empty water) to a biocentric view of the ocean. *Turtle Island* translates and revises the Pacific Rim’s eclectic mythology of the California Maidu, Salish, Uto-Aztecan, Iroquois, American, Japanese, Chinese, and Hindu traditions. The book constructs a literary persona at home in an ecologically open world, structured by watershed river systems and ocean currents. As a poet and activist, Snyder writes and lives as a citizen of the Pacific, and in his oeuvre, island life on the Banyan Ashram signifies a post-war, environmentalist Bodhi tree. Snyder went home after Banyan, hence *Turtle Island’s* applied Suwanose “place logic” to North American reinhabitation. *Omeros* deals with the West Indian panoply of Carib, Arawak, West African, British, Greek, and Roman traditions. Walcott’s biocentric view of the ocean can be read in his poem “The Sea is History” (*Collected Poems* 364), in which his strategy of tracing Biblical, European, and West Indian history in natural imagery is relatively straightforward. The poem excels in its biocentric juxtaposition of nature and civilization: “then came the synod of flies / then came the secretarial heron / then came the bullfrog bellowing for a vote” (*Collected Poems* 367). This historical rendering of ocean biomes is tantamount to the Pacific geographer Epeli Hau’ofa’s thesis in *We Are the Ocean* that islands are not isolated landmasses surrounded by a watery desert of abysmal depth, but interconnected nodes in archipelagos of seafaring communities with as much culture and history as continental nations. Island colonists assumed the former in order to justify the

systematic exclusion, and in many cases, the extermination of native peoples from the landscape.

Walcott and Snyder deconstruct this nesomaniac⁴⁵ desire to start over on historically empty islands by subverting the colonial myth of “isolated” virgin land masses. Walcott describes the European quest for the island utopia as a “near-delirium” for a spectral *Cythère*, “near and then further,” always on the horizon (*Collected Poems* 481). To return to a point I make in the introduction, the analogue for Snyder’s deconstruction in Martel’s narrative would be Pi’s immigration to Toronto after washing up on Mexican shores. Pi’s major concentration in religious studies and zoology at the University of Toronto and Snyder’s fusion of Buddhism and ecology are both syncretic strategies for leading meaningful lives in the “circle of nature.” St. Lucia, on the other hand, parallels Pi’s life raft, which the castaway learns, through a bioregional lens, to view as a home. Achille gives up the desire to start over in some idyllic place in order to re-commit himself to his work as a fisherman and to his home with Helen in Gros Ilet. Both critiques uncover how islands participate with rhizomatic networks of transnational migration, subverting the ideology of a colonial center for an *etak* worldview of centered sea-farer to whom nations gravitate.

The settling down in a chosen place that is synonymous with bioregionalism is radically opposed to colonial ideology. Describing the mentality of imperial functionaries, Benedict Anderson asserts that these imperial professionals traveled as virtual exiles through the empire’s frontier, hoping to return to the metropole through a demonstration of talent in the outlying colonies. This belief of the colonists in their

⁴⁵ James Michener coined this term from the Greek *neso* (island) and *mania* (extreme enthusiasm) to identify himself as a lover of islands (as qtd. in Day 1).

upward social mobility was a prime motivator and a significant factor in rendering the New World as Europe's frontier. The capitals of European empires were a summit that the colonial functionary hoped to ascend:

He travels up its corniches in a series of looping arcs which, he hopes, will become smaller and tighter as he nears the top. . . . On this journey there is no assured resting-place; every pause is provisional. The last thing the functionary wants is to return home; for he has no home with any intrinsic value. (Anderson 57)

The syncretic sources from which Snyder images reinhabitation demonstrate his subtle knowledge of the Pacific Rim, and Walcott uncovers the regional fusion of patrician archetypes with Creole voices. They both give up their nesomaniac desire and the hope for rescue or the ascent to the metropole by promoting local bioregional centers in their chosen places.

The island is a crucial trope for Western narratives of experimental “governance, racial mixing, imprisonment, and enslavement,” in Thomas More’s *Utopia*, William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, and Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (DeLoughrey 13). The island-adventure genre, novels of the “accidental arrival” on an exotic and fecund island, involves facing down society’s other and re-establishing the “repeating island” of Great Britain on a savage “*terra nullius* (empty land).” In short, the colonial castaway narrative served as propaganda for “muscular Christianity, British nationalism, and empire” (58). Its island setting was not a place to remain on or learn from; it was the savage wilderness. Modern anthropological studies of island peoples have confirmed the ideology of the

shipwreck genre,⁴⁶ by over-zealously studying islanders' "shallow time depth" over and against their ethnic history.⁴⁷ In order to overcome the historical emptying of island places by the colonial imagination, archipelago regions need island poets, who "plumb the subterranean and the subaquatic layers of human and planetary change" in order to articulate a viable sense of place (DeLoughrey 17). *Omeros* answers DeLoughrey's call by enlarging the geographic sphere of St. Lucia and *Turtle Island* does so by critiquing U.S. society from the perspective of a Pacific citizen. This meta-terranean and meta-aquatic awareness attempts to assert itself beyond colonial discourse.

What Lawrence Buell calls "place-connectedness" does not ultimately result from Romantic escapes from civilization and its history. Bioregional reinhabitants need to be sensitive to the temporal dimensions of place, and in today's densely populated world most places have "competing human tales inherent in the land" (Handley "A Postcolonial Sense of Place and the Work of Derek Walcott" 2). Analyzing Robert Frost's poem "The Gift Outright" for its ability to articulate America's historical amnesia of prior inhabitants, George Handley argues that individualist narratives of the perennial wilderness occupy the binary pole of a "false dichotomy" (6-7) between nature and civilization in order to dispossess the landscape from prior inhabitants. The rhetorical strategy for developing a poetic and historic sense of place is for the poet to "expose his own labor with the materials of the poem," returning again and again to the critical question: "what are the forms of labor and of dispossession that allow us this possibility,

⁴⁶ Kevin Carpenter reports that between 1788 and 1910 over 500 desert island stories were published in England alone (8).

⁴⁷ Patrick Kirch found that archeological and ethnographic studies on the "anthropologically famous" Tikopia were too focused on "internal processes of change" to incorporate the historically "vital key" of "now-defunct regional exchange networks and the repeated arrival of drift-voyage immigrants" (4).

this luxury, to see nature as denuded of humanity?” (Handley 6). Walcott’s and Snyder’s self-reflexive works are exemplary answers to Handley’s prescription to integrate the mythic and historic wilderness. Handley argues in *New World Poetics* that like Gary Snyder, Walcott “recycle[s] an ancient human memory of our belonging in the natural world” by seeing the region’s beauty and mystery despite its traces of colonialism and slavery (9). *Turtle Island* and *Omeros* do not elide a tough and alienating history; they draw their energy from a bitter past to build a bioregional culture of possibility. The ancient Anasazi cliff dwellers whom Snyder invokes in the first poem of *Turtle Island* exemplify a lost way of life, like that of the equally ancient Arawaks. The flocks of camera-wielding tourists and derisive waiters in bow-ties impel Achille to search for a pristine island, but like Snyder’s early-rising log truck drivers hauling up the “Tyler Road grade / to the logging on Poorman creek” they remain in their inherited places because “there is no other life” (*Turtle Island* “Why Log Truck Drivers Rise Earlier than Students of Zen” 63). Both poets employ the potential resentment against the modern forces that marginalize ancient and primitive lifestyles as motivation to work pragmatically with what has been left for the long-term ecological health of their chosen places. Their poetry initiates a search for ways to work alongside the tourists and loggers for the long-term benefit of the wild.

Derek Walcott and Gary Snyder effectively argue against attempts to extricate a European Old World from a peoples’ history of the New. Revolutionaries may hope for the erasure of patrician history, but this is a “filial impulse” that only perpetuates the tradition it fights (Walcott, “Muse” 36). Confounded by the scarcity of “alter/native” ways to image the region, the English-educated and Barbados-born poet, Edward

Braithwaite, asks of Christopher Columbus in his long poem *The Arrivants* whether the Italian navigator crossed the Atlantic only to “return to terrors / he had sailed from before” (53). The Old World myths of Cathay and Antillia clouded the “dis—/cover[er’s]” perception of the fifteenth century Arawaks and the tropical archipelago. If Old World ideology violently re-inscribed the region, then Braithwaite asks “what to do, man ... Put a ban on all marriages? Call / You’self X” (56)? Walcott’s response to the ambivalent experience of postcolonial identity is the both/and “assimilation of the features of every ancestor” (“Muse” 36). Walcott’s expansive hope to embody “every ancestor” and Snyder’s biocentric dream of a democracy of “The People / Standing Tree People / Flying Bird People / [and] Swimming Sea People” (*Turtle Island* “Mother Earth” 48) exemplify the bioregional reinhabitation of the New World. The two poets write for North American membership in bioregional communities in spite of the scars of colonialism, slavery, modern economic exploitation, and industrial pollution.

Snyder writes about his earliest memories of the Pacific Northwest in 1995 after the quincentennial of Columbus’ New World “dis—/covery,”⁴⁸ describing the sources from which he constructs a sense of place:

An elderly Salish Indian gentleman came by our farm once every few months in a model T truck, selling smoked salmon. “Who is he?” “He’s an Indian,” my parents said. . . . He knew better than anyone else I had ever met, *where I was*.
(Snyder, “Reinhabitation” 184)

The poems and essays collected in *Turtle Island* revise the continent’s toponym, from the legacy of Italian exploration to an ancient Iroquois creation myth. Snyder sets aside his

⁴⁸ See James Barron’s 1992 article, “He’s the Explorer/Exploiter You Just Have to Love/Hate.”

family roots in Texas and Washington as sources of place-knowledge to reveal how the New World landmass is an ancient island. This is a heuristic to recover an ancient balance between national membership and natural membership, hinted at by the ancient Indo-European “root *nat*” common to “nation, natal and native” (Snyder “Ecology, Literature and the New World Disorder” 4). Raymond Williams demonstrates that unqualified pastoral desire is false consciousness by tracing English longing for “a way of country life” back through an “escalator” of repeated references to a previous era, ultimately arriving in the “well-remembered garden” of Eden (*Country and the City* 9-12). The ancestral *Turtle Island* and *Omeros* can be mistakenly read as a problematic form of pastoral memory, which harks back to an Eden separated from the remembering subject’s inherited place by an ocean of space and time. *Turtle Island* and *Omeros* mend this problematic by articulating the desire to uncover natural belonging in the present. In these books, the scarred landscape becomes a tough, but sustaining source of presence and vitality. For example, in Snyder’s “Above Pate Valley” set in Yosemite National Park, the narrator rests during lunch after clearing trails (*Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems* 11). During the summers of 1951 and 1954, Snyder worked for the logging industry in Oregon and Washington as a timber scaler and log setter (Gray 68). The speaker of the poem rests in a “green meadow watered by the snow” and eats “cold fried trout in the / trembling shadows.” Spotting a glittering obsidian arrowhead, he gets on his “hand and knees / pushing the Bear grass.” Although he looks keenly at the “thousands / of arrowhead leavings over a / hundred yards,” there is “not one good / Head, just razor flakes.”⁴⁹ The pastoral memory of the poem’s speaker is realistic. The poet searches

⁴⁹ According to Mark David Spence, the last Yosemite Indian to live in the national park,

earnestly for the “thousands of arrowhead leavings” of ancient Turtle Island cultures, but ultimately he must pick up the tools he walks in with—“cold drill, / pick, singlejack, and sack / of dynamite”— and learn to accept modernity alongside his desire to live according to the old ways.

A similar entwining strategy can be read at the end of book three in *Omeros*, after Achille’s *etak* journey and before the poet’s autobiographical tour of the Atlantic and treatment of the historical Catherine Weldon:

. . . Achille raised his hand
from the drumming rudder, then watched our minnow plane
melt into cloud-coral over the horned island. (168)

As Achille restores his ties to St. Lucia and Helen, he sees the author’s “minnow” plane rise above the volcanic Pitons from his pirogue. The transnational poet writes an indigenous character, who looks back at him. Building on this sense of simultaneity in the next chapter, the poet imagines the metaphorical and functional similarities of oars and telephones:

I reached from my raft and reconnected the phone.
In its clicking oarlocks, it idled, my one oar.
But castaways make friends with the sea; living alone (171)

The poet does not confuse his phone with an oar. He unites the native and modern, restoring continuity to a fractured region and making “friends with the sea” on which he travels. The poetic strategy of both authors is to unite the local mythos with modern

Jay Johnson, left for the adjacent Mariposa County in 1996 (131).

symbolism for a sensibility that is pastoral but pragmatic; not a pristine past but the recoverable fragments.

Both Snyder and Walcott negotiate an ambivalent position in history through syncretic strategies to include as many ancestors as is bioregionally possible. Both take a revised view of the traditionally blank ocean as a historical link between the island-rhizomes of archipelagos and the unifying principle of surrounding coastal peoples. California joins Japan on the edge of the North Pacific Gyre. The Antilles joins the British Isles on the edge of the Sargasso Sea. The volcanic Suwanose-Jima in the East China Sea provided Snyder with the spiritual and ecological lessons of place, which he brought home to California. The supposedly isolated geography of St. Lucia required Walcott to formulate a historical understanding of the sea by which he could uncover the transnational place of his home in the Windward Islands. Both poets' primitive and modern fusions attempt to recycle ancient memories of natural belonging for a viable future. Arrowheads and paddles ultimately function like dynamite and telephones. Defending a balanced use of modern tools according to the ancient "subsistence patterns of a place" known by the "peasants, paisanos, paysan, peoples of the land" (Snyder, *Place in Space* 184), these New World poets subvert linear history into a circle of progress that returns again and again to the old ways. Martel's postcolonial and environmental shipwreck narrative serves as a clear lens for explicating Achille's acceptance and commitment to St. Lucia. The lens works equally well for Snyder, treating *Regarding Wave* as the poet's Pacific search and *Turtle Island* as his return home to the real work, the practical business of long-term survival.

CONCLUSION

I noticed Gary Snyder's *Earth House Hold* in the poetry section of Asheville's Downtown Books & News because of the image of a bisected nautilus shell on the cover of the New Directions edition. The shell's geometry reminded me of Keri Hulme's *the bone people*, a novel which draws extensively from Maori historiography and its iconographic koru whorls. I could understand Hulme's chronotope of recurrent history only after studying Benedict Anderson's and Homi Bhabha's theories of nationality in *Imagined Communities* and "DissemiNation." Reading cross-culturally I saw alternative ways to construct the passage of time, and through the writing of the islander Hulme, I was very interested in the literary representations of cyclical histories. I thought that Snyder's identification with the nautilus might follow Hulme and articulate a narrative of domestic renewal negotiated between the modern nation and processes of the wild. Like James Joyce and H. D., Snyder represents myths as historical motifs, but he critiques these spiraling tropes from an ethical position of biocentrism. His works extend from high modernism's imbrication with mythology to voice principles of wilderness preservation, serving human and non-human communities.

Unlike the "calendrically" (Anderson 26) marching feet of the nation's contingent individuals, a culture's mythos comprises powerful "symbol bases" (Snyder 170) on which the poet labors to make coherent with the present situation. I now see Joyce as an exemplary island writer, whose *Ulysses* prepared me for the Caribbean revision of

Western mythos that Derek Walcott depicts in *Omeros*. If the modern poet balanced the mythic past with the human situation, the ecocritical poet balances the mythos with the biocentric present. Both modern and ecocritical poet's renew the mythos by naming the historical nightmare from which the oppressed try "to awake" (Joyce 28). Environmental literature impelled me to enlarge my view of who and what could be oppressed. My work in ecocriticism is motivated to integrate anthropocentric history and the bioregional subjects excluded from its march—historicist critique for the oppressed and the "rest of nature" (Adams 1) too. Snyder's biocentric and historiographical poetics circa 1970 turn away from linearity and towers for "flows and spirals" (Snyder, *Regarding Wave* 24), because these symbols express a coherent sense of place in an archipelago, on Suwanosejima and Turtle Island.

In chapter one, I prepare for Snyder's post-*Tsimtsum* return to Turtle Island by reading *Regarding Wave*, analyzing how he developed a thangka style of poetry to revise place archetypes from rocks to waves in order to initiate a more balanced culture in harmony with natural rhythms. I argue that he was able to do this because of his first-hand experience living on a volcanic island with the Amami people and Buzoku, spear-fishing and sweet potato-farming. Suwanose is also the island on which he married Masa Uehara, and the overtly linked *Regarding Wave* demonstrates the poet's thematic shift from masculine searcher to family man. In order to address the contemporary scene of West Coast poetry and environmentalism, I contend that he fused Suwanose's archipelago knowledge of a balanced animal-human household with Buddhism for a vision of life as a bioregional member of the "great / earth / sangha" (*Turtle Island* 73),

providing a spiritual context for environmentalism and an environmental context for American Buddhism.

I cross the continent in chapter two to study Derek Walcott's *Omeros*, published thirty years after *Regarding Wave*, as an equally important articulation of environmental literature from the islands. It deals with the creole present of St. Lucia within the "official" (Walcott "Muse" 49) archetypes of Western literature, mainly but not limited to Graeco-Roman mythology. Rather than assimilate St. Lucian culture into European literary forms, it juxtaposes them for something new. Walcott formulates a cyclical view of history through the post-*Tsimtsum* metaphor of a fallen or inherently wounded nature. This wound is stitched into each character as a motif of *Omeros* in order to be healed by mending the distance between imperial history and the region for a place in which the poem's characters and the poet can reside. This healing process takes the forms of the rituals and the ceremonies of ancestral peoples: Achille takes a canoe journey, Philoctete sees St. Lucia's obeah woman, and Plunkett writes a history for Helen. Just as Gary Snyder's return to the U.S. was motivated to mend the distance between our history and the natural processes of the Pacific Northwest, Walcott's return to ancestral ceremonies articulates a sense of place in history and the Lesser Antilles, demonstrating his bioregional reinhabitation of the Caribbean New World.

I compare the two poets in chapter three through the New World poetic lens that Walcott develops in "The Muse of History." Walcott's essay theorizes an Adamic sensibility for the New World, which retains a sense of wonder alongside the memory of past atrocities. The risk with the Adamic poet is that he forgets or represses the tough history of indigenous peoples in order to retain a sense of wonder. Walcott and Snyder

negotiate the challenges of New World poetry by writing intensely self-reflexive works that evoke the search for a healed sense of place.

Both poets critique a linear view of Western progress. The “calendrically” marching time of the nation leads people in false consciousness towards a Hegelian idea of freedom, while surreptitiously leading them away from a pastoral garden, alienating them from a sense of natural belonging and a sense of home. The response of both authors is to mend this false dichotomy between civilization and nature by subverting linear history for a cyclical view of progress back to the past and the bones of a culture. This poetic strategy is nothing new. Eliot’s modern poet was an impersonal archeologist of the “present moment of the past,” but the mythic past, Eden or *Tsimtsum*, he chose to look at was fundamentally Western and imperial (“Tradition and the Individual Talent”). The ambivalent subject of history is not sure what version of paradise to look back to—Troy, Eden, or Afolabe’s village, Paleolithic hunters, Han Shan of Cold Mountain, or the Anasazi. Walcott’s and Snyder’s pasts are fundamentally bioregional. They draw their energy from the bitterness of a broken contract with nature to attempt to name the world again for everyone, and the way that they construe everyone is through the concept of a bioregion emanating in concentric ecological circles from their home ranges. Since they deal with ocean currents and watersheds, these communities are consequently transnational and hybrid, but they are not eclectic or postmodern pastiche.

Walcott and Snyder initiate the search for belonging outside the metropole in the bioregional places people inherit by applying a both/and logic to the hybrid cultures competing for narratives of place. Their strategy is to entwine these competing discourses in a coherent aesthetic that is inspiring and feasible. Snyder and Walcott recycle ancient

human memory from historical fragments. Both poets transcend naïve pastoralism through self-reflexivity. They break down the fourth wall and expose the means in which these poems are written. They do this in order to model the approach to home and place from the logic that the most particular is the most general. They do not attempt to construct universal metaphors from the heterogenous strands of their experience and knowledge. Instead they focus on “what is close at hand and immediate” (Martel) by placing field compositions in juxtaposition with modern myths and symbols. Both poets write for the simultaneity of the myths and texts of their experience—myths like “Fire up Thunder Creek and the mountain—Troy’s burning!” and texts or personal experiences like “Sourdough mountain called a fire in: / Up Thunder Creek, high on a ridge” (Snyder, *Myths & Texts* 53). They elevate their local places and bring high culture down for a meeting in a balanced middle. The preceding chapters explicate Snyder’s bioregional reinhabitation in order to demonstrate the poet’s integration of false dichotomies obstructing the path to long-term environmental health for the people of the Pacific Rim. My comparison with Walcott of the Atlantic makes notes towards the ecocritical call for viable senses of place for bioregional citizens on both sides of modernity and the North American continent I call home. Thanks to my research of Snyder, I relish calling this place Turtle Island!

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