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Breaking the Anthropocentric Circle? Gary Snyder's Struggle with Language in *This Present Moment*

Abstract
Gary Snyder has a profound impact on various facets of the American ecological movement. His work bridges ecological consciousness with Eastern philosophies, challenging dominant human-centered worldviews through his ecopoetic vision. In *This Present Moment*, Snyder highlights the themes of interconnectedness, biocentrism, and agency for all sentient beings. His poetics foreground the idea that human beings are embedded within the fabric of the Earth along with all other sentient beings; nevertheless, while his language is inevitably grounded in human semiotics, his poems strive to strip themselves of anthropocentric expression. Snyder utilizes sparse, unembellished diction that resists symbols and abstraction; that is, he seeks to reflect the rhythms and flow of nature beyond the boundaries of human perception and meaning. His ways of overcoming linguistic constraints create a space for non-human presences to speak for themselves or to be present without being appropriated through an anthropocentric lens. By exploring these themes in *This Present Moment*, this article aims to demonstrate how Snyder reconfigures the web of relations between humans and the non-human world by generating a poetic practice that welcomes reciprocity and resists domination. The purpose of this study is to trace how Snyder's late poetry employs a biocentric mode of perceiving ecological relations and challenging human exceptionalism.
Keywords: Gary Snyder, *This Present Moment*, non-anthropocentrism, sentient beings, language and representation

Gary Snyder'ın *Şimdiki Zaman*'da Dil ile Girdiği Mücadele: İnsan Merkezli Döngüyü Kırmak Mümkün mü?

Öz
Snyder'ın şiir ve düz yazı külliyatı Amerikan ekolojik hareketinin birçok alanını etkilemiştir. Snyder ekolojik farkındalık ile Doğu felsefelerini birleştirerek egemen insan-merkezli dünya görüşlerine, ekopoetik bir bakış açısı ile meydan okur. *Şimdiki Zaman* (*This Present Moment*) isimli şiir seçkisinde, tüm türlerin birbirine bağlılığı, biyosantrizm (yaşam merkezcilik) ve tüm duyarlı varlıklar için eylem gücünün önemi temaları öne çıkar. Snyder'ın şiirsel anlayışı insanın ve diğer tüm duyarlı varlıkların yeryüzünün hep birlikte bir parçası olduğu fikrini vurgular. Şiilerinde kullandığı dil kaçınılmaz olarak insana ait bir göstergebilime dayansa da, şiirlerini insan merkezli ifadelerden arındırmaya çalışır. Snyder doğanın ritmini ve akışını insan algısı ve anlamlandırma sınırlarının ötesinde yansıtmayı amaçladığı için, şiirlerinde semboller ve soyutlamalardan mümkün olduğunca arınmış, sade, süssüz ve doğal bir dil kullanır. Bu şekilde, dilin sınırlarını aşmaya çalışırken insan olmayan diğer varlıkların kendilerini ifade edebilecekleri ya da insan-merkezli mercekten geçirilmeksizin var olabileceği bir alan yaratır. Bu çalışma *Şimdiki Zaman* (*This Present Moment*) isimli eserde bu temaları incelerken, Snyder'ın insanlar ile insan olmayan dünya arasındaki ilişki ağını yeniden nasıl kurguladığını, karşılıklılığı benimserken tahakküme direnen bir şiir pratiği geliştirdiğini göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu makale aynı zamanda, Snyder'ın bu geç dönem şiir seçkisinde, biyosantrik bir yaklaşımı benimserken insan ayrıcalıklığına nasıl meydan okuduğunu analiz etmeyi hedeflemektedir.
Anahtar Kelimeler: Gary Snyder**,** *Şimdiki Zaman,* insan merkezli olmayan bakış açısı, duyarlı varlıklar, dil ve temsiliyet

> Words are used as signs, as stand-ins, arbitrary and temporary, even as language reflects (and informs) the shifting values of the peoples whose minds it inhabits and glides through.
>
> (Snyder, *The Practice* 8)

> As the crickets' soft autumn hum
> is to us,
> so are we to the trees
> as are they
> to the rocks and the hills.
>
> (Snyder, "Little Poems" 51)

Introduction

Gary Snyder's poetry is pivotal in the canon of American ecopoetry and has responded to many of the planet's most crucial events for nearly a century. The type of reality Snyder was acting against was mounting concerns about human-induced environmental destruction, nuclear power, devastating earthquakes, tsunamis, and oil spills in many parts of the world. To overcome the current ecological crisis, Snyder calls for reevaluating the concepts of progress and Enlightenment as the telos of Western modernity, and he rejects the formation of a new anthropocentric reality prioritizing human concerns and benefits over those of non-human entities. For these apparent reasons, Nick Selby describes Snyder's poetry as "the most ecologically self-conscious of twentieth-century poets and as the poet laureate of deep ecology" (134). This places Snyder at the forefront of American ecopoetry, a diverse and evolving tradition that ranges from observational and pastoral modes to politically engaged environmental critique. Snyder's contribution is particularly distinctive in its fusion of ecological awareness with spiritual philosophy, bioregional practice, and a lived ethic of interdependence. Unlike strands of ecopoetry that merely reflect on nature as a passive backdrop or as a metaphor for human emotion, Snyder's work embodies an ontological shift, emphasizing that humans are embedded within a broader ecological field. In this sense, deep ecology aligns with Snyder's outlook, which is deeply in tune with nature and with Far Eastern philosophies and ideologies. Snyder mainly opposes anthropocentrism and the materialism of American capitalism that fosters the domination of humans over the non-human world, the rich over the poor, and the West over non-Western societies. He has also led a life deeply intertwined with nature, blending his roles as a poet, environmentalist, Zen practitioner, fire lookout in the Cascades, and Buddhist monk. He built his home, Kitkitdizze, in the Sierra Nevada foothills as a reflection of his commitment to simple, sustainable living. Snyder seeks identification beyond humanity through organic wholeness by rejecting the categorization of nature into human and non-human, instead viewing the self as open, alive, and interconnected with all entities.

As many critics would argue, the "tendency has been to read Snyder's poetry – largely because of his Buddhist beliefs – as untroubled by the gap between landscape and poem, world and word, and to see its profound environmental awareness as stemming from a sense of a visionary interconnectedness of life" (Selby 135). Snyder recognizes that he is part of nature; however, he

is also aware of the paradox between revering nature and the problem of referring to nature with language, human-induced semiotics. In other words, he navigates the tension between using human language and expressing a non-human-centric vision of nature with this semiotic system, and this strain lies in how he tries to counterbalance this limitation. Thus, as a human poet using language, a fundamentally human semiotic system, inevitably remains within an anthropocentric framework, despite his lifelong attempt to step outside human-centered perception. This paradox makes his poetry even more compelling. Instead of pretending he can fully step outside of human language, he wrestles with its limitations, using every tool at his disposal to get as close as possible to a more-than-human perspective.

In the framework of this article, *This Present Moment* by Gary Snyder often conveys a deep reverence for nature, where references to sentient beings seem to be not merely labels but acknowledgments of their presence and interconnectedness with everything else. His use of names reflects his understanding of the natural world, often rooted in his Buddhist beliefs and environmental ethics; he names things carefully, aiming to dissolve the boundaries between humans and nature. Snyder relates the beliefs of Buddhism to his poetry and lists them as follows: "The marks of the Buddhist teachings are impermanence, no-self, the inevitability of suffering, interconnectedness, emptiness, the vastness of mind, and the provision of a Way to realization" (qtd. in Fredman 203). With his recent collection, Snyder is responsive to this paradigm shift and paves the way for embracing all life forms with their autonomy and ever-existing harmony without establishing hierarchy among one another. This article analyzes how Snyder's poetry highlights sentient life forms, such as animals and plants, as entities that stand out with intrinsic poise and value of their own. It also explores how Snyder problematizes language's referentiality by de-emphasizing human dominance in representing all sentient beings while still being bound by the limitations of human expression. In this collection, Snyder uses strategies to resist anthropocentrism's dictations, like interweaving non-Western and Indigenous semiotics, direct naming as an act of reverence, fragmentation and minimalism, and being an active observer and listener instead of being a speaking agent.

Toward a Post-Anthropocentric Poetics: Against Modernity and Materialism

Snyder's collection *This Present Moment* (2015) consists of poems written since 1990 and is divided into four parts, each exploring traditions and experiences linked across time. The first section, *Outriders,* revolves around the Beat Generation's resistance against American economic materialism and focuses on spiritual pursuits, investigations into Eastern and Native American religions, and the unstructured flow of emotion and creativity. Mainly, non-conformity and spontaneous flow of feelings and creativity are celebrated. The Beat term *outrider* signifies a figure passing on a countercultural legacy, suggesting a continuum that links past, present, and future. In the second section, *The Locals*, which includes many nighttime stories, Snyder engages with figures like Thomas Jefferson, reimagined in a local context despite his Virginian roots, and Chiura Obata, a Japanese American artist associated with California, to explore the layered meanings of locality and cultural memory situating the present within a longer historical arc. The third part, *Ancestors*, reacts to anthropocentric thought by emphasizing the Earth's rhythms, suggesting that time is not linear but cyclical. Finally, in *Go Now*, Snyder bids farewell to his wife Koda, portraying death not as an end but as a teacher, a moment that connects to all moments before and after. The temporal layering in this section culminates in the collection's eponymous poem:

This present moment
that lives on
to become
long ago (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 67)

The poem dissolves distinctions between now and then. The deictic "this" universalizes the present moment, revealing how it is embedded in broader temporal flows that affect all beings.

Thus, *This Present Moment* becomes not just a reference to a single point in time but a critique of modernity's linear, progressive temporality. Snyder emphasizes instead the co-existence of temporal layers, how memory, change, and decay shape consciousness and character over time. This vision also surfaces in "Anger, Cattle, and Achilles," where the poetic persona reflects on fractured friendships. The invocation of Achilles, an ancient figure of wrath, complicates the present tension between two friends. In line with the collection's theme, one of the two best friends of the poetic persona in the bar advises him to leave himself uncontrolled and let himself be dragged by the spontaneous flow of feelings. As a musician playing music in a bar, his friend asks him to enjoy the moment there: "listen to that music. / The self we hold so dear will soon be gone" (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 11). The theme here resonates with the Beat Generation's revolt against extensive materialistic culture and focuses on the free flow of emotions and creativity. This poem depicts how the poetic persona's two friends stop seeing each other and how one compares his rage to that of Achilles. The trio has once shared great experiences and moments in nature, such as traveling on the desert, "awakened to bird song and sunshine under ironwoods / in a wadi south of the border" (11). However, for reasons not explained in the poem, the two best friends of the poetic persona "quit speaking" and "one said his wrath was like that of Achilles" (11). By drawing an analogy with Achilles, the poetic persona emphasizes the enduring impact of anger and pride on human connections. The reference links mythic time with modern emotion, underscoring how past narratives shape contemporary selves and how unresolved emotions persist across temporal divides. This layered sense of time reflects Snyder's broader resistance to Western modernity's privileging of the self, autonomy, and material progress over communal memory and natural rhythms.

Another antidote to American materialism or prioritization of the individual experience other than music might be poetry, which generates a freer space for the stream of emotions without letting them take a rigid form. The space generated with music or poetry will foster a transcendental type of experience that echoes the themes of Beat touch, like spontaneity, raw emotion, personal freedom, a rejection of conventional literary and societal norms, and a deep engagement with the countercultural spirit of the mid-twentieth century. In another poem, "A Letter to M.A. Who Lives Far Away" in the *Outriders* part, Snyder elevates poetic discourse and relates it to non-Western semiotics and to the Zen school, which emphasizes the value of meditation and intuition. He notifies his friend about the nature of poetry writing:

> Since real poetry is born
> From a formless place
> Which is our Original Face
> Zen Buddhists say,
> In play.
> So if this helps you to be a writer
> It will please your new friend
> Gary Snyder (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 12)

Snyder draws from Zen Buddhism and Indigenous semiotics, by which I mean the symbolic systems, sign-making practices, and communicative relationships found in Indigenous worldviews that recognize the agency and voice of non-human beings to emphasize a more integrated, less hierarchical view of humans and nature. These semiotic systems often involve reciprocal communication between humans, animals, plants, and landscapes, viewing meaning as emergent from ecological and spiritual interconnectedness rather than human-centered interpretation. Snyder uses these perspectives to challenge Western linguistic conventions that privilege human subjectivity. By writing poetry, he believes one could have contact with our deep emotions and achieve intersubjectivity with all the other entities on Earth. In line with his definition of ecology, Snyder emphasizes the importance of "the study of biological interrelationships and the flow of energy through organisms and inorganic matter" (qtd. in Williams 135). Nerys Williams, in her exploration of humanity's complex relationship to the environment, notes that Snyder underscores "the need to remain aware of local communities" (135). Thus, in the second part of the collection, Snyder gives voice to alternative semiotics to the Western tradition. In the poem "Stories in the Night," Snyder interweaves non-Western and Indigenous semiotics, and he puts a subtitle to the poem as follows: "In Native California the winter was storytelling time" (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 29). Although Michael Davidson's analysis in the article "The San Francisco Renaissance" primarily addresses Snyder's position within the postwar West Coast literary scene, his insights into Snyder's effort to balance "poetic rhythms with respect for nature, meditation, and physical labour … through explorations of Native American and East Asian religious traditions" (73) remain relevant. These efforts are particularly visible in "Stories in the Night," where Snyder draws on the collective oral traditions of Native communities, suggesting that telling stories at night "don't need much light" (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 30). This evocation of a non-technological, communal mode of meaning-making signals a rejection of Western modernity and telos, which emphasizes individuality, speed, and logic. In the same poem, Snyder further critiques the anthropocentric assumptions of Western epistemology and institutional religion, as he announces:

> I could never be a Muslim, a Christian, or a Jew because the Ten
> Commandments fall short of moral rigor. The Bible's "Shalt not kill"
> leaves out the other realms of life,
>
> How could that be? What sort of world did they think this is?
> With no account for all the wriggling feelers and the little fins, the spines,
> the slimy necks — eyes shiny in the night — paw prints in the snow.
> (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 30)

These lines serve as manifesto commitments to oppose the dictates of the anthropocentric rules imposed by institutionalized religions. For the poetic persona, these religions lack ethics and exclude non-human sentient beings from their grace. What is more, when the legal theorist Christopher Stone asked the question "Should Trees Have Standing?" and whether "lawyers should be allowed to represent their interests in court" the answer of Snyder together with other poets in ecopoetic tradition is remarkable: "whether or not the lawyers do, the poet will" (Ashton 10). Poets such as A.R. Ammons, Wendell Berry, and Mary Oliver similarly voice the agency of the more-than-human world, often giving trees, animals, and ecosystems narrative presence and moral standing within their poetry. This poetic commitment to giving voice to non-human entities is inseparable from Snyder's ethical vision, which calls into question the presumed moral superiority of human beings. Furthermore, Snyder thinks that when it comes to savagery or ferocity, human beings can be even more savage than animals, as he cites Henry Thoreau, the American transcendentalist who engages with the relationship between civilized existence and the natural world, in the poem "Artemis and Pan:" "The wildness of the savage is but a faint symbol of the awful ferity with which good men and lovers meet" (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 10). Snyder's depiction of the wild blends sensory detail and mythological resonance. Snyder realistically depicts the wild by showing how two squirrels, driven by instinct, behave. He contrasts them with Artemis and Pan, the goddess of the hunt and the god of rustic music and primal desire, respectively. In classical mythology, Artemis represents untamed nature and chastity, often shown hunting in moonlight, while Pan embodies animalistic sexuality and chaos. Their pairing in the poem is a symbolic union of disciplined wilderness and feral desire:

> The "field" of the wild
> Ainu, *iworu*,
>
> feeling the field; outback the ears;
> outside the eyes, faint whiff — loose knees
>
> Two fluff gray-squirrel tails whip round an oak's
> gray bark
> Wildly horny ferociously aloof
> the ferity of lovers (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 10)

The opening lines engage multiple senses like "feeling the field" "outback the ears" "outside the eyes" and "faint whiff" which builds an embodied sense of wildness that goes beyond sight alone. In this scene, Snyder combines various types of beings; "Ainu[s]" – a Japanese ethnic group, the squirrels' playful yet instinct-driven movements, and at the same time, there is the deep-seated, almost ritualistic hunting scene with the mythological presence of Artemis and Pan, which creates a layered experience of wilderness, blending the mundane with the mythic. Artemis and Pan

> bring down a deer
> and skin it together
> eat fresh liver
> cooked over embers
> In the silvery light of the moon (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 10)

By imagining Artemis and Pan hunting and consuming the deer together, Snyder blurs the boundary between divine, animal, and human realms. The act is primal, sensual, and ritualistic, suggesting that wildness is not merely an animal trait, but something intrinsic to existence itself, including human passion, survival, and even love. Thus, Snyder constructs a layered wilderness that is mythic, embodied, and deeply interspecies.

Naming without Claiming: Snyder's Paradox of Language and Nature

Another strategy Gary Snyder devises to break the anthropocentric discourse is to name animals, plants, and landscapes with a deep reverence for nature instead of imposing metaphorical meanings that center on human experience. He employs a poetic practice through which he names animals, plants, and landscapes not to possess or symbolize them, but to honor their presence and being. What Snyder questions here is the mimetic principle of metaphor, which operates by placing human action at its center. In *The Rule of Metaphor* (2004), Paul Ricoeur analyzes the working principles of metaphor from an ontological perspective along with linguistic, semantic, and hermeneutic dimensions and concludes that metaphor creates a new meaning or understanding that goes beyond a mere substitution. Metaphors are embedded within larger narratives that shape our understanding of the world, and they include "the rhetorical process by which discourse unleashes the power that certain fictions have to redescribe reality" (Ricoeur 5). Ricoeur's understanding of metaphor is intriguing because he sees it as a way to reveal new meanings and reconfigure reality. The reality and meaning conveyed with metaphor are shaped by human perspective, according to Ricoeur. Ricoeur's view on metaphor is evident in Snyder's effort to decenter the human and adopt a more holistic, eco-centered worldview. In this sense, Snyder's metaphors do not merely translate non-human entities into human terms but instead strive to reveal and honor the intrinsic qualities and agency of those beings as they exist independently of human description. As Snyder aims to depict nature and creatures in a non-hierarchical manner, names may serve a metaphorical purpose for him, linking the literal and symbolic aspects of language. In his writing, Snyder problematizes the conventional understanding of metaphor that reflects human experience and prioritization of human-related concerns by renouncing an anthropocentric perspective. This is consistent with his Zen Buddhist philosophy, which accepts all sentient beings on their own accord without the need to relate them to human-imposed narratives. It can be concluded that Snyder's poetry resists the human tendency to give the natural world an anthropocentric meaning by incorporating a profound ecological consciousness. Yet, this approach presents a poetic and ethical tension, which is how a poet can name the world without appropriating it. This is precisely where Snyder's struggle with language lies, and his struggle is not only aesthetic but also ontological and ethical.

In the poem "The Names of Actaeon's Hounds," Snyder names all the hounds, but this naming is not merely cataloging; it functions in line with Paul Ricoeur's claim that metaphor creates "a new being in language" and reconfigures our perception of reality (Ricoeur 5). In this way, Snyder locates his poetry in a liminal space between myth and modernity, speech and silence, human meaning-making and animal otherness. The act of naming becomes a form of acknowledgment rather than appropriation: he names without claiming, resisting the mimetic urge to translate all experience into human terms. In the poem, Snyder engages with the myth of Actaeon, the hunter from Greek mythology who is punished for seeing the goddess Artemis bathing. In Ovid's

Metamorphoses, Actaeon is transformed into a stag not only as a physical punishment, but also this prevents him from speaking; his metamorphosis silences him, blocking him from revealing what he saw. This mythic loss of speech draws a sharp contrast to the poet's role as namer, a creator of language and meaning. Snyder reverses the silencing by offering a cascade of names for the hounds that tore Actaeon apart:

The Names of Actaeon's Hounds

Black-foot
Trail-follower
Voracious
Gazelle
Mountain-ranger
Fawn-killer
Hurricane
Hunter
Winged
Sylvan
Glen
Shepherd
Seizer
Catcher
Runner
Gnasher
Spot
Tigress
Might
White
Soot
Spartan
Whirlwind
Swift
Cyprian
Wolf
Grasper
Black
Shag
Fury
White-tooth
Barker
Black-hair
Beast-killer
Mountaineer (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 15)

With each name here, there is an emphasis on the speed, fury, and predatory nature of the hounds, which gives us a composite depiction of animals in the wild. The poem is made up of mere names rather than single labels; Acteon's dog names Black-foot, Trail-follower, Voracious, Hurricane, Glen, Seizer, Wolf, and Fury seem to evoke a sense of the wild. Like Ovid, Snyder also gives names to the hounds in line with their strength, behaviors, and unique features. Grounding the names in the hounds' physical traits: Black-hair, White-tooth, in natural incidents: Whirlwind, Hurricane, or their roles in the hunt: Hunter, Catcher, Grasper rings parallel with Snyder's goal of resisting metaphorical human-centric vision of nature. These names evoke an embodied presence and individuality for each animal. In doing so, Snyder reclaims language from mythic repression, shifting focus from the human who is silenced to the non-human agents who are named into presence. He refrains from using openly symbolic images in favor of concrete ones and labels them based on what they are rather than what they mean to humans. Rather than redescription through comparison to the human, Snyder's language seeks to let beings be**,** to name a thing in a way that gestures toward its distinct existence. He does not merely label nature, but listens to it, mimics its rhythms, and acknowledges its otherness. This is not a rejection of metaphor per se, but a recalibration of its use. The naming process imposes a framework that focuses on human vision despite the attempt at non-human-centric naming. While the titles of Snyder's poems may appear observational or respectful of non-human life, they are still filtered through human language, which inevitably categorizes and contains. Thus, Snyder's poetry occupies an interstitial space: it seeks to evoke the presence of non-human entities without subordinating them to anthropocentric frameworks, yet it remains bound by the semiotic and linguistic systems it attempts to transcend.

How Snyder tries to problematize the anthropocentric trap is not about eliminating language but changing how it functions. Fragmented syntax, minimal use of language, and resisting explanation are the arsenals that Snyder uses to delegate the individuality and presence of non-human beings on their terms while trying to minimize the human presence. He declines to describe the hounds' relationship to Actaeon, their human master, in this poem. The hounds' abilities, features, and roles in nature are foregrounded instead. The hounds are creatures with unique identities connected to the natural world, and their names neither humanize them nor reduce them to mere accessories to human narrative. They are sentient beings connected to the natural world, and how they are mentioned in the poem shows Snyder's deep respect for all sentient beings' individuality. By carefully selecting names that truly reflect the hounds' traits and features, he instills a sense of presence and dignity in them. The titles of Actaeon's hounds, such as Wolf, Swift, and Catcher, still classify them under a human logic of strength, mobility, and hunting. Even as he confronts anthropocentrism by letting nature *speak* through direct observation and little intervention, he recognizes that language will never be able to fully bridge the gap between the human experience and the wild, independent life of the non-human world.

"How to Know Birds" is another poem that once again turns the focus from human-centered experiences to a close relationship with the natural world, particularly birds (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 25). In this poem, knowing birds involves more than just knowing their names; it also entails comprehending their movements, figures, and links to their environment. Here, Snyder's repeated theme of resisting anthropocentrism can be seen as he emphasizes the birds themselves rather

than putting them in the framework of human issues. In "How to Know Birds," Snyder encourages us to perceive and observe all sentient beings according to their own terms and to question the human type of methods of knowing. As opposed to the human's reflex to first consider naming the bird, the poem emphasizes comprehending birds' movements, habits, and relationships to their environment in the first place. Snyder's strong sympathy for animals and his reverence for their autonomy can be seen in his problematizing of anthropocentrism and prioritizing biocentric knowledge. True understanding, for Snyder, comes from observing and appreciating the bird's presence in its natural environment instead of humans' attempts to classify or categorize them.

Snyder lays bare the mechanism that human beings know both human and non-human entities only when they name them. Only when human beings can refer to a being with language, is it assumed that this entity exists for the human. Yet, Snyder nullifies this illusion by trying to reveal that non-human beings do exist even if we do not give them names with their own unique features, styles, and/or routines. In the poem about birds, he shows some important expertise about birds' features, moves, and patterns. Starting with the first lines, depending on time and space, human beings reside in, birds can exhibit an infinite number of moves and actions:

> The place you're in
> The time of year
>
> How they move and where in the meadows, brush, forest,
> rocks, reeds, are they hanging out
> alone or in a group or little groups?
>
> Size, speed, sorts of flight
>
> Quirks. Tail flicks, wing-shakes, bobbing —
> Can you see what they're eating?
>
> Calls and songs?
>
> Finally, if you get a chance, can you see their colors,
> details of plumage — lines, dots, bars (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 25)

Snyder establishes his observation of birds in a biocentric context here namely the physical environment and seasonal timing. Rather than jumping to the act of naming birds as humans generally do, the poetic persona invites readers to pay attention to their natural surroundings, showing that location and time are factors for our understanding of animals, not names. This biocentric approach shows that animals are part of their ecological context but not simple objects for human identification with language. This poem can be said to affirm Snyder's aphorism-like statement that "language is, to a great extent, biological" (qtd. in Middleton 216). With the help of his poetry, Snyder exhibits the idea that "poetry itself is a manifestation of biology" (qtd. in Middleton 216). Readers are also encouraged to focus on how birds move through various

landscapes like meadows, forests, rocks, reeds, and they are fully integrated into nature, being autonomous beings. Just like human beings, birds also have some social patterns, like living alone or in a community. On close observation, one can be in command of their complex social dynamics and behaviors. Snyder's juxtaposition of birds to humans' patterns of interaction and behaviors acts as a challenge against the inclination to see animals solely through a human lens.

Each bird here is taken as an individual being; the term "quirks" refers to the individual, unique actions of each bird. This line especially emphasizes their distinctive habits and traits. By highlighting these small and quotidian realities about birds, Snyder keeps the viewer away from a generalized and objectified view of these animals, and he encourages a deeper and more personalized connection to all sentient beings. This detailed observation exhibits deep respect for their being and uniqueness. Their autonomy can be recognized in their behaviors such as tail flicks, wing-shakes, and calls, emphasizing that birds are complex creatures whose beings cannot be reduced to mere symbols or metaphors. This leads to a broader ecological philosophy in which every sentient being is linked to a larger and interconnected system. Snyder also shares auditory details about birds, like their songs, as well as sensory and visual features. Listening instead of speaking is another theme that emerges in Snyder's poetry to highlight that humans should listen more to the natural world rather than constantly describe or interpret it. Instead, he attempts to represent natural sounds, movements, and rhythms without subordinating them to a human meaning-making agenda. The very last two lines of the poem are a resolution, implying that it is time to share the name of the bird, as if the whole observation of the bird is for legitimizing the name, which is generally evoked by the features of the bird. However, with the last line, Snyder undermines this tendency and announces that naming can only be secondary to being: "That will tell you the details you need to come up with a name/ but/ You already know this bird" (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 25). These lines clearly show that knowing a bird and recognizing it go beyond the act of naming or categorizing it. On the contrary, knowing a bird comes from observing its essence, like its movements, behaviors, and place in the world. Naming is all about humans' reflexes and acts of control, which feel irrelevant in nature. It is observed that Snyder posits birds as subjects and that we humans are just observers of their place in nature; thus, in the poem, he avoids exploiting birds to reflect human experiences but focuses on emotions outside of human needs or narratives. The birds, like all sentient beings, are placed in a biocentric framework where they are taken as integral participants in nature, not as extensions of human perception.

Snyder is critical of the potential of language to reflect the dynamics of nature and sentient beings, including human-related issues. Like Neil Goodman, Snyder is very much interested in the power of naming and how it shapes understanding and perception. Goodman, in his book titled *Ways of Worldmaking,* looks at epistemological categories like truth, reality, or meaning from a critical lens and adopts a more contingent philosophy. He lays bare that although language cannot convey any absolute meaning, it can still offer many, depending on the stance and/or context, as follows: "Countless worlds made from nothing by use of symbols" (1). Putting the emphasis on the "variety and formative function of symbols," Goodman proposes the term "worldmaking" to show that worlds, realities, and truths can be made for each context; that is, one single world or absolute truth/meaning is anachronistic (1). From this proposition, it can be inferred that shrewd

suggestions of Western anthropocentrism urge us to perceive sentient beings in the anthropocentric world around a single truth, which is also conveyed by anthropocentric language. By refusing to adopt this mindset, Snyder tries to make his world by problematizing the idea of identifying and naming anything following logos, the organizing principle. In another poem in the collection, the naming issue, this time, counts for human beings. The poem "Old New Mexican Genetics" offers a meditation on the historical categorization of race and identity in colonial Mexico presented through a list of racial classifications (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 16). Starting with the title of the poem, old but new, apparently, Snyder is complicating and putting the dualities at stake. It captures a historical moment when society's attempt to control and define people's identities by naming, depending on genetic lineage, was both reductive and complex. The poem points to issues of race, power, and identity in a colonized landscape, especially in the cultural fashion and hierarchical society of eighteenth century New Mexico. The poem is a critical exploration of the colonial racial caste system in New Mexico, exposing how identities were socially constructed to reinforce power dynamics. Snyder's use of historical categories emphasizes the fluidity of race and the absurdity of trying to confine human diversity within rigid definitions. Through this, he invites readers to reflect on how history, genetics, and culture intertwine to shape identities across time:

> *Español*. White. But maybe a Mestizo, or anyone who has
> money and the right style
>
> *Indio*. A Native American person
>
> *Mestizo*. One Spanish and one Indio parent
>
> *Color Quebrado*. "Broken color" —a rare category of 3-way or more
> mix. White / African / Indio
>
> *Mulato.* White/African ancestry
>
> *Coyote*. Indio parent with Mestizo parent
>
> *Lobo*. One Indio plus one African parent
>
> *Genizaro* (Janissary). Plains Indian captives sold and used as slaves
> (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 16)

By making use of fragmented and minimalist language and avoiding a symbolic tone again, Snyder aims to reveal the temperamental, arbitrary, and repressive character of colonial race classifications. Español, Indio, and Mulato identities are all socially and artificially constructed labels that are used to control and polarize people based on their heritage. In his critique of the colonial system that enforces these designations, Snyder highlights how identity is used to uphold colonial power and impose hierarchies. He draws attention to the ridiculous intricacy of colonial racial categorization, particularly with terms like Coyote and Color Quebrado. These classifications frequently become disarrayed, demonstrating the pointlessness of attempting to define human identity in strict, formalistic terms. So, the poem seems to imply that such fabricated labels and/or names are insufficient to capture the mobility of human identity. The first lines set the context

and specific timeline: "Santa Fe, at the Palace of the Governors, this 18th century listing of official genetic possibilities" (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 16). Santa Fe, New Mexico, Palace of the Governors is mentioned here as the site of colonial power and dominance. Dating back to the 18th century, Snyder refers to a list categorizing people by their racial or genetic composition, highlighting the constructed and arbitrary nature of this categorization.

Like how Snyder shows the difficulty of referring to Actaeon's hounds or birds with names or descriptions, he problematizes how classification or categorization fails to reflect the very essence of being for humans as well. How he tries to refer to Español, for instance, is a clear indication of how human semiotics fails to name some group of people accurately: "Español. White. But may be a Mestizo, or anyone who has enough / money and the right style" (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 16). As these lines suggest, these labels are not indeed inherent or absolute, but they depend on context and are fluid, which can be manipulated by wealth or influence. Anyone holding money and codes, even if their skin is not white, can exploit the privileges that come with the identity in colonial and post-colonial systems. Snyder critiques the social construct of race, where identity can be bent to suit economic or political purposes. Among these "genetic possibilities," there is a more direct and short description for "*Indio*" who is referred to as "A Native American person" (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 16). Unlike the definition of Mestizo Indio, Native Americans are categorized more simply and reductively within colonial systems; in other words, their identity is reduced to a racial or ethnic label that ignores the complexity of their cultures and histories. These labels are, as Goodman explains with the term he coined, "worldmaking," the reflections of a worldview created by a colonial mindset that viewed racial purity as ideal and any mix as a deviation of a "broken" state. In Snyder's poem, another genetic possibility is defined as follows: *"Color Quebrado*. 'Broken color' —a rare category of 3-way or more / mix. White / African / Indio" (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 16). Color Quebrado is a rare category, and its label "broken" reflects how society perceives certain racial mixes as unusual aberrations and outside the expected categories. Another intricate category might be "coyote," which again gives the sense that mixed-race individuals are associated with trickery or positioned in the liminal space between wild and domestic. Snyder critiques the colonial gaze that dehumanizes and exoticizes mixed-race people. This poem explores the colonial obsession with racial classification and the dehumanizing effects of such systems. At this point, the reader is encouraged to question the social constructs of race and identity, which conceal violence and control embedded in names and/or labels. These systems continue to shape our understanding of humanity today. In line with Snyder's broader philosophy, the poem rejects simplistic, anthropocentric views of identity and embraces the complexity and fluidity of human existence.

Conclusion

In *This Present Moment,* Snyder criticizes the anthropocentric view of Western ideology, which is reflected mainly in the use of language by drawing analogies or metaphors based on human-centered viewpoints. Instead, against the backdrop of ecocentric thinking, Snyder uses tropology by focusing on the uniqueness and performativity of sentient beings without referring to their relation to humans. In doing so, he questions and problematizes any narrative prioritizing human concerns and the ethos of modernity, encouraging human progress while disregarding the rights

and essence of non-human sentient beings. Resisting the dictations of the anthropocentric way of thinking, Snyder welcomes a paradigm shift towards a more biocentric approach, which emphasizes non-duality and interconnectedness, rather than dominance or human-centered hierarchies. In this collection, Snyder names animals, plants, or natural phenomena in ways that emphasize their autonomy and sacredness, free from human associations often rooted in his Buddhist beliefs and environmental ethics.

In conveying deep reverence for nature, where names are not just labels but acknowledgments of a being's presence, Snyder cannot escape the human lens, which is language, the human semiotics. Even in resisting metaphor, it can be concluded that his work still functions within human perception; after all, the initiative to avoid anthropocentric metaphor itself is an intellectual move. Complicating the referential nature of language, in many poems under scrutiny in the collection, Snyder uses sparse, fragmented lines in a way that these poems are an extension of the natural world rather than a structured and imposed human artifact. Although this technique might create an effect where language does not dominate the subject but exists alongside it, it concomitantly underlines the paradox of trying to represent non-human sentient beings through a human medium that pinpoints Snyder's incessant negotiation between ecological commitment and linguistic constraints. In a similar fashion, Snyder's problematization of the anthropocentric metaphor reflects a deeper concern with how human life is categorized or compartmentalized via language that serves systems of control or exploitation. Naming conventions, even for sentient human beings, frequently restrict people to roles, tasks, or identities that are influenced by socio-cultural hierarchy. By deconstructing these patterns in his depiction of all sentient beings, Snyder subtly encourages us to reevaluate our understanding and relationships with all forms of life, including our own, beyond the parameters of instrumental or dualistic thought.

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