



**GARY SNYDER'S POETIC VISION AS NOTHING BUT 'HEALING' WITH A FOCUS ON THE REALISTIC PICTURE 'THE ACTUAL AND THE REAL': AN ANALYSIS**

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Received: 22/02/17

Edited: 28/02/17

Accepted: 04/03/17

Area: English Literature

**Abstract:** *This paper is an attempt to show how Gary Snyder's poetic vision lays focus on the realistic picture of the actual and real and how he embarks upon new adventures in order to know life closely as a wild wanderer. This also reflects the author's poetic concept which is something that includes the realistic nature of life and his poetic universe which has a close relation to the actual and the real. It neatly examines how Snyder treats poetry as not only 'healing' but also as a living and growing organism in the modern world.*

**Keywords:** *Gary Snyder, Poetic Vision, Realistic Picture*

Gary Snyder who is acknowledged as one of the most admired and important poets of the post-war period, is a post-modern poet in the true sense of the word. For his concept of poetry makes a plea for nothing but simplicity of outlook and direct experience of reality. For this, the Japanese Haiku poetry and Zen Buddhist philosophy have gone a long way in shaping the mental outlook of Snyder and helping him establish a close relation between poetry and life. The common life of a peasant reveals to him the very depth of life. The normal events and the ordinary objects of nature are given a poetic treatment in his poetry.

Normally poets ignore the work-a-day world. Snyder, as a poet, has a responsibility to reflect the reality of the external surroundings however depressing it may be. To others, the work-a-day world appears rather unpoetic and so it does not deserve poetic treatment. Snyder strikes at the basis of this argument and holds that the primary duty of poetry is to represent life as much realistically as possible. Any concern that has no relation to life has no meaning for Snyder. This can even be treated as a special outlook of Snyder. In the words of the Indian poet-critic Nissim Ezekiel, "Snyder writes poetry according to experience rather than theme"(P19). He further adds: "Snyder pursues modes of expression closely related to his daily existence". As Prof. Vasant put it, "Snyder's choice of subjects is invariably

within the reach of his experience thereby giving his poems a feel of the actual ... his poetic universe is peopled by sons of the soil and filled by objects of the earth and sky and the rendering is direct and incisive. It is Snyder's earthliness that gives him the sense of solidity, the down-to-earth sense of comprehension and awareness of actuality". For example, one can observe this in his poem, "Home from Sierra":

Work once in the night, pissed  
 Checkt the coming winter's stars  
 built up the fire  
 still glowing in the chilly down  
 washing the mush not in the lake  
 All morning walking to the car  
 load up on granite stone  
 seeding sugar pine

Snyder's poetic line achieves solidity from a revealing presentation of objects. He may be considered as a poet establishing a healthy link between the poetic sensibility and the hardihood of his romantic, toiling ancestors. Snyder himself stated in an interview as:

"Poetry is our life. It is not that poetry has effect on life or a function in it or a value for it. It is our life as much as eating and speaking"  
 (Real Work 73).

The modern critic Scott Mclean goes even to the extent of saying as;

“Poetry is seen more and more by Snyder to be a binding force in the fabric of community life”

As Snyder’s poetic vision happens to be eco-mystical, he loves physical things. In the words of Crunk, “Gary Snyder is an original man. He has written a poetry which is quite unusual and very different from most poetry written in the last years”. The poems take place in “the Woods and at Sea”. In the Woods and at Sea Mr. Snyder has been able to enjoy and praise the physical life .....” Like D.H. Lawrence, Snyder feels that physical things have a life of their own, for physical things are not abstract but concrete. But the concreteness is evident only to a man of higher consciousness.

Snyder is very relaxed and at home with things in his poetic universe. He is not an abstract moralist. He is a believer in the wonder and dignity of life. All human beings attract his attention. A moralist goes by a selection whereas a free man like Snyder approaches things in an impartial spirit. Snyder is a real romantic poet because he loves all things with equal love and sympathy. He believes that all human beings are lovable. There is a kinship between Whitman and Snyder in this respect. The poem “Carfegena” by Snyder has a close connection with the poetic sensibility of Whitman. Often people may connect Snyder with the Beat Movement. But Snyder is different from such a cultural movement because his sensibility is totally different. One thing that distinguishes Snyder from all other poets is his sense of naturalness and marvellous feeling of being at home with everything. The poem “Mid-August at Sourdough Mountain Look out” describes the deepest experience of Snyder. It is a poem which recalls his own intimate experiences but the very pattern of remembering becomes a very concrete activity with Snyder.

Snyder is a wild wanderer. He embarks upon new adventures in order to know life closely. The poem, “Above Pate Valley” reveals Snyder’s interest in going near the creek. It gives a new experience in which he discovers the glory of nature. The poet

makes this discovery amidst work and activity. This seems to be a significant feature of Snyder. The passage from “Above Pate Valley” makes this point very clear:

“Hands and knees  
Pushing the Bear grass, thousands  
of arrowhead Leavings over a  
Hundred yards. Not one good  
Head, just razor flakes  
on a hill snowed all but summer  
A land of fat summer deer  
They came to camp on their trails.  
I followed my own trail here.  
Picked up the cold-drill,  
Pick, singlejack and sack  
of dynamite  
Ten thousand years” (Riprap 9)

Snyder undertakes a very arduous journey across the creek. He comes across a pass, pine groves, green meadows, cool air and a flower. He makes his way through his hands and knees across the grass. What is interesting is that Snyder identifies himself with the entire surrounding in a mood of activity filled with sympathy and love. A new dimension of human nature is seen in this journey across the creek. Legs and hands get tired but the interest in making the journey is sustained by a real longing for knowing life in greater depth. Usually deep experiences are supposed to arise in deep states of passivity and inactivity. Snyder is not in disagreement with that but he extends this dimension of experience to include the range of activity which also expresses the being of man in a dynamic way. There is a tremendous emphasis upon activity and its significance in all the poems of Snyder. In this sense, Snyder is a very modern poet. Here ‘modernity’ does not mean ‘recentness’. Here it means the value of an ancient insight made relevant in the modern context. This modern outlook of Snyder goes in the name of ecological consciousness or eco-mystical awareness or environmental awareness.

The poet’s cry is that nature should be seen and studied as far as possible in realistic and

objective terms. It is Pound who helped Snyder to achieve this goal of presenting a direct experience of reality in nature poetry. In the words of Bob Steuding, "Snyder, like Pound, sought the "real" in his poetry of Nature" (P40). A sensuous and concrete grasp of life and nature is more interesting to him than an abstract handling of them. This special feature is evidently echoed even in his earlier poems. One such example can be cited in the poem, "Mid-August at Sourdough Mountain Lookout":

"Down Valley a smoke haze  
Three days heat, after five days rain  
Pitch glow on the fir-cones  
Across rocks and meadows  
I cannot remember things I once read  
A few friends, but they are in cities  
Drinking cold snow-water from a tin-cup  
Looking down for miles  
Through high still air" (Riprap 1)

Like the Romantic poets, Snyder loves being alone with Nature. Poets, ideally speaking, are fascinated by nature and its different moods: "Some of the major Romanticists were most fascinated by nature's silence and solitude, as were Wordsworth and Keats; others by its panorama and magnitude as was Byron; still others by nature's contrasting moods and combination of moods" (Russel Noyes xxiii) Snyder feels highly elated and fascinated by all aspects of nature: silence, solitude, magnitude and all contrasting moods and phases. But whatever he does, with some objectivity. For example, when the poet experiences a mood of melancholy, nostalgia, silence and solitude in this poem, he is also conscious of his aim to capture a memorial moment in his mountain journey. Passing through the valley, experiencing heat and rain, seeing new files, feebly remembering his books and friends, drinking cold water from a tin-cup and surveying the entire mountain landscape create a pen-picture of realistic contact with Nature. In his poem, "Water" the poet describes a realistic picture of an experience with nature very vividly:

"Pressure of Sun on the rockslide

Whirled me in a dizzy hop-and-step shadow,  
Pool of pebbles buzzed in a Juniper Shadow,  
Tiny tongue of a this-year rattlesnake flicked  
I leaped, laughing for little boulder-color coil  
Pounded by heat raced down the slabs to the creek.

Deep tumbling under arching walls and stuck,  
Whole-head and shoulder with the water,  
Stretched full on cobble-ears roaring  
Eyes open aching from the cold and faced a trout" (P10)

Snyder describes his life in tune with nature in the form of water. The sun is shining very fiercely. The poet, in a state of tiresomeness, simply moves to a place full of pebbles. Small snakes are found moving about. Heat is creating a fatigue for him. All rocks are hot because of the pressure of the sun and it does not become a fit place for rest and relaxation. Though it is very hot, he does not feel dissatisfied with the hot climate. Instead, he turns to water for rest and relaxation and treats it as an important manifestation of nature.

Snyder is one with Wordsworth, Whitman, Emerson and Thoreau in his ability to adjust himself to environment and situations which nourish the inner self. Wordsworth's 'Prelude' speaks of the glory of the inner self and how it points out that personal experiences have deep spiritual significance. Thoreau's 'Walden', Emerson's 'Self-reliance' and Whitman's 'Song of Myself' lays focus on the divine essence and man's spiritual powers to have faith in one's choices of life and come to terms with one's deeper self to arrive at an essence which inheres in all things. As a poet, Snyder's main function is to be at home with everything. He keenly observes everything and tries to intuitively feel their presence. This process of being at home with everything and feeling things intensely require a different level of poetic sensibility which Snyder richly possesses.

Poetry is, according to Snyder, "not simply moralistic propaganda" because even the so called moral aspect as a rational background. So Snyder feels and thinks that poetry is some activity which

brings about a deep psychological integration in human consciousness. He gives a special word to this process and goes to extent of calling it 'healing'. In his opinion, 'healing' is a concrete process wherein all mental disorders are removed. Man has to be at home with himself. This 'at-homeness' is nothing but the outcome of health in human consciousness. Snyder's entire subject for his poetry is with the behaviour of human consciousness. To bring about changes in the behaviour of human consciousness is what he calls it 'healing'.

Snyder is of the view that man's personality is something which has to expose to nature and only then the healing process begins. Nature is, in his opinion, an important factor in the integration of human consciousness and much emphasis is laid upon experience of nature as it chastens human personality and subdues unmeaningful impulses. In all ancient cultures, Snyder saw a very valuable point of wisdom manifested in man's longing for deep communion with nature. Man's profound kinship with nature made him balanced and healthy. It is only after the advent of reason which became a factor for civilizing human consciousness, much disorder came to prominence. Generally speaking, glorification of reason led to disrespect for the ancient roots of wisdom. Modern man has become a monster on account of his rational orientation. Now the deceased modern man has to be healed and one has to learn this technique from the ancient tradition. The poem "Magpies song" makes a reference to this need:

"Here in the mind, brother  
 Turquoise blue,  
 I wouldn't fool you  
 Smell the breeze  
 It came through all the trees  
 No need to fear  
 What's ahead  
 Snow up there every year  
 be at rest  
 A feather on the ground –  
 The wind sound

Here in the mind, Brother  
 Turquoise Blue"

Snyder's point here is that man has become divided in his sensibility. This fragmentation in man is the result of too much dependence on reason and disconnection with nature. Man must, according to him, become whole in consciousness for which he must live in natural surroundings and get his superficial rational self dissolved amidst these forests, trees, mountains and wilderness. Snyder admonishes by saying that 'Smell the breeze'. Smelling the breeze come through all trees. Without being exposed to all forms of nature, man cannot live a whole life. There is no necessity for fear because there is snow upon the hills. What Snyder means is that all forms of nature like breeze, snow, hills are at the service of man in healing him. This seems to be the secret message of this poem, "Magpie's Song".

Snyder believed that all levels of human sensibility must be synthesized without any imbalance synthesizing different levels of human sensibility is a form of healing and man must respond to all forms of life without a sense of evenness and balance. In "The Hanback Flute Player", Snyder speaks of the value of synthesizing different layers of human consciousness. This synthesis takes place with the proper co-operation and powerful interplay between man and nature. This is well portrayed in these lines:

Spiral, Wheel  
 a breath of mind  
 desert sheep with  
 Curly horns  
 the ringing in your ears  
 is the cricket in the stars.

These lines, in fact, represent the psychological growth of Snyder himself. Snyder himself achieved a powerful spiritual integration by making through different cultures and traditions like Shamanism, Buddhism, Tantarism and the vegetable universe. Mind must be deeply unified at all levels. Without healing, mind cannot be unified at all. The purpose of healing requires man's experience of exposure to

nature. Snyder makes a reference to desert sheep with curly horns. It is quite true that looking at animals brings about a new vision to man's knowledge of himself. Looking at stars brings a new knowledge to man. This new knowledge is much connected with the integration of the deepest part of the unconscious level can only be healed and it cannot be saved. Healing is a treatment given to the healthy behaviour of human consciousness. The mind-based modern man must be exposed to nature and its surroundings and he must be healed through imagination and participation in the deepest forms of life with the help of intuition and imagination. It is on this basis that Snyder calls poetry 'healing'.

What sounds significant and notable is that Snyder treats poetry not only as 'healing' but also as a living and growing organism and it draws its strength from several regions. In this context, Snyder is basically in total agreement with the Emersonian poetic concept, memorably formulated in his essays "Nature", "Circles" and "The Poet" which passionately argue that "life must aspire to the condition of poetry and poetry must aspire to be a dynamically vibrant living thing! In the words of Snyder, "Poetry is to teach people to get in touch with their lives and environment". In other words, his poetic concept is something which includes the realistic nature of life and his poetic universe has a close relation to the actual and the real.

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