

ABSTRACT

Managed Arboreal Spaces: Moral Expectations of Human-Nature Interactions in the Poetry of William Wordsworth and Gary Snyder

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In the face of the environmental difficulties plaguing 21st century America, poetry from across the Anglo-American literary tradition can provide useful ways to understand how we should interact with nature. While facing different historical, cultural, and environmental circumstances, both William Wordsworth and Gary Snyder help us think through moral human management of nature. I examine the treatment of both poets' treatment of managed arboreal spaces from Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*, *The Prelude*, and other collections, and from Snyder's *Turtle Island* and *danger on peaks*. These interactions lead us to a moral law which binds humans to respect nature's ability to survive. If humans follow this moral law, then, according to both authors, humans will become equal participants in geocentric human-nature communities. I argue that these poetic representations of both ideal and immoral human management provide us with tools to determine the morality of contemporary land management and logging practices.

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MANAGED ARBOREAL SPACES: MORAL EXPECTATIONS
IN THE POETRY OF
GARY SNYDER AND WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction and the Morality of Human Treatment of Trees

When I was a young boy, I spent my summers running around the woods of my neighbors' cattle ranch. My brothers and I would spend hours exploring, trying to avoid snakes and sticker burrs. Most of what we traversed were the extensive woods that were part of the Post Oak Belt region of Texas. Years later, in 2010, several of the trees were levelled in order to make room for pastures for the raising of cattle. My first reaction at seeing these downed trees was sorrow at the loss of some of my favorite childhood places. Yet this also provided needed space to a large herd of cattle. Some would argue that this is an example of humans doing whatever they can to expand their herd and make more money. Others might see it as an inappropriate use of natural resources through unnecessary land clearing. The rancher was advancing an anthropocentric agenda without consideration for the life of the trees. Can one justify the destruction of life for the propagation of life?

While an unlikely duo, William Wordsworth and Gary Snyder think through morally acceptable ways for humans to interact with nature. Both authors use specific locations and topographies in order to illustrate both what is ideal and undesirable for human-nature interactions, relationships, and communities. They specifically consider different kinds of managed arboreal spaces, from nut groves to logged forests, as sites where the moral implications behind our land use practices come to the foreground. Both authors, in their own specific contexts, represent the current state of human interaction

with nature, the threat human society poses to nature, and both offer some form of redemption, hope, or possibility for integration of the two in geocentric communities. Comparing the use of managed arboreal spaces in both of these poets leads to a more robust understanding of how we, as humans, should responsibly manage green spaces.

Tension between human culture and nature is not new. It has been represented in some of the earliest works of literature. Robert Harrison notes that in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Gilgamesh “must go to the ‘land’ and slay the forest demon Huwawa” (15). The hero of the epic must conquer the spiritual presence in the forest in an attempt to immortalize himself through glory. At that time, lumber was scarce for Sumerians, so people who found it were glorified and praised, so Gilgamesh’s motivations make sense in context (Harrison 17). At the same time, Gilgamesh’s antagonism towards nature angers the gods. Harrison further suggests that “the abomination of forests in Western history derives above all from the fact that, since Greek and Roman times at least, we have been a civilization of sky-worshippers, children of a celestial father” so “the forests became monstrous for they hid the prospect of god” (6). The Western association of god with heaven has led Westerners to think of forests as inherently other and inferior. I agree with Harrison that Western culture has broadly led to our current tensions between humans and forests. This state of affairs is even more exacerbated in our landscape where 80% of Americans, according to the 2010 census, live in cities (“Growth in Urban Population”). We are simply not around forests as in decades and centuries past, which supports the subconscious idea that humans live in cultured cities and wild nature is “out there.”

So what? Why does it matter that we have exchanged ranches and cabins for apartments, duplexes and suburban homes? It was not long ago (between 2001 and 2006) that the United States lost over 10,000 square miles of arboreal spaces, 10% of which was “lost to the built environment, an area roughly the size of Rhode Island” (Clement et al. 631). This is part of a larger issue, as the world has lost 129 million hectares of forest spaces since 1990 (FAOUN 16). That is roughly the area of 241 million American football fields. There are signs of hope in that there has been a global increase in protected forest areas and a slight slowing in rates of deforestation from 0.18% to 0.08% (FAOUN 3). However, “tree mortality and associated forest dieback is projected to occur in many regions over the 21st century...posing risks for carbon storage, biodiversity, wood production, water quality amenity and economic activity” (IPCC 67). These issues are exacerbated by a rising global human population which stresses the resources of the remaining arboreal regions (FAOUN 23). If we do not reframe how we understand the role of human management of nature, we will continue to threaten the entire biosphere’s survival. One of the major causes of deforestation is “the competition for space between man and other species” which “is demonstrated by the conversion of land to agriculture, aquaculture, infrastructure, urban development, industry, and unsustainable forestry” (Pearce and Brown 12). In first decade of the 21st century, most of the increase in developed land in the United States came “predominantly from the conversion of croplands and forestland. Forests, in particular, have been the largest source of land converted to developed uses in recent decades, with resulting impacts on forest cover” (Alig et al. 220). With our forests in America and across the globe in such peril, we must find better ways to understand them and manage them.

This thesis attempts to understand how humanity should think about and interact with nature in arboreal spaces through the poetry of William Wordsworth and Gary Snyder. I will use these two authors in particular for two reasons. First of all, both authors believe themselves to be surrounded by cultures which reject or ignore the power, importance, or value of nature. Wordsworth is an English poet whose writings span the late 1780s until his death in 1850. Many of his writings came from his time spent in the Lake District of western England. In an early poem, Wordsworth describes nature as a vital source of wisdom and flourishing: “Come, hear the woodland linnet, / How sweet his music; on my life / There’s more wisdom in it...One impulse from a vernal wood / May teach you more of man; / Of moral evil and of good, / Than all the sages can” (ll. 9-12, 21-24). While Wordsworth’s relationship with nature and how humans learn from it changed and became more nuanced over his lifetime, these lines effectively show his regard for nature in the face of a culture which saw it as little more than a scenic or agricultural resource.

Snyder is an American poet who began writing in the 1940s and continues to write poetry. Much of his poetry is based on his experiences in the Pacific Northwest and California, where he lives now, though his writings are also inspired by a several-year stay in and around Japan. Snyder similarly finds himself surrounded by an unfeeling culture, which he states in his prose collection, *Practice of the Wild*: “Civilizations east and west have long been on a collision course with wild nature, and now the developed nations in particular have the witless power to destroy not only individual creatures but whole species, whole processes of the earth” (6). He clearly senses the reckless attitude of the culture around him. Snyder’s focus is, as this text portrays, the immediate health and

maintenance of the natural world. There is more urgency in Snyder's context than in Wordsworth's, though both poets indicate that their respective cultures disregard nature and argue for an alternate point of view.

Secondly, both authors take on the role of professor of truth in response to an unfeeling or unsensing world. They profess truth to those who have lost an aspect of their humanity in their treatment of nature. Ecocritic Paige Tovey connects the prophetic aspect of shamanism to Wordsworth's understanding of himself as prophet-poet and argues that "Both Wordsworth and Snyder also recognize a need in society for a poet to serve as prophet and seer" (Tovey 72). This role is therefore social but not integrative as a full member of society, where the poet speaks on behalf of nature and in defense of the integrity of human nature. In a famous passage of Wordsworth's largely autobiographical poem, *The Prelude*, Wordsworth states his belief in his role as poet-prophet; "to the open fields I told / A prophecy: poetic numbers / Spontaneously, and clothed in priestly robes / My spirit, thus singled out, as it might seem / For holy services" (l.59-63).¹ Wordsworth must, after connecting with nature in a fundamentally unique and powerful way, bring his experiences to his readership so as to help them restore their perceptual deficiencies so that they then treat nature in a morally respectful way. Similarly, critics like Geary Hobson and Tim Dean identify Snyder as a "white shaman," one who tries to connect humanity and non-human nature.² While he never explicitly self-identifies as a white

¹ In comparing Wendell Berry and William Wordsworth, Howard Hinkel states as poets-prophets of Nature, they "speak not only for the land, but also for the people who live in it" (52). D.J. Moores argues that Wordsworth's mission "is to be a poet-prophet and to cosmically awaken his readers from their religio-aesthetic slumber (107).

² Geary Hobson states that many poets who followed Snyder in the 1970s called themselves white shamans: "The 'white shaman' fad seems to have begun inadvertently with Gary Snyder in his "Shaman Songs" sections of *Myths and Texts*" (qtd. in Dean 71). Snyder was thus seen as a white shaman at the

shaman, he does state that the poet's role is "close to the ancient function of the shaman" (*TRW* 5-6). Snyder also emphasizes a function of poetry which is to "tune us in to *mother* nature and *human* nature so that we live *in time*, in our societies in a way and on a path in which all things can come to fruition equally, and together in harmony" (*EHH* 73, emphasis original). A poet thus acts as a voice for the nonhuman so as to unite humanity and nature together. Snyder quickly adds that "the out-of-time function of poetry is to return us to our own true original nature at this instant forever" (*EHH* 73). Thus the poet reminds humans of the truth of their interconnectedness with nature while maintaining a connection to the people in their community. For Snyder, this means that he must help people treat nature in a morally respectful way and later restore a lost sense of their humanity. In spite of Snyder's hesitancy to call himself a shaman, both he and Wordsworth see themselves as one who defended and communicated the desires, needs, and wisdom of nature to other humans.

Both poets describe a similar set of moral precepts that should guide their communities' interactions with nature. I explore how these poets present this moral law by analyzing poems which feature managed arboreal spaces. Managed arboreal spaces

time of his early poetry and by critics today. According to Tim Dean, in spite of some critics of Snyder's cultural appropriation, that Snyder "began experimenting with shamanism as a model for poetry early in the 1950s, over a decade before white shamanism fashion emerged, and he's pursued this poetic mode for almost half a century, long after it ceased to be in vogue" (71). Dean further supports Snyder's use of other culture's mythology by arguing that literature cannot be limited to "an autobiographical function" because "nobody would be able to write authoritatively about temporally distant cultures" (72). Ling Chung argues that "Snyder has integrated myth and ritual theory, in particular as embodied in American-Indian and Asian shamanism, into his system of thought and into his personal belief...he carries his belief in ritualistic acts into both his personal life and community activities and acts as a shaman himself" (59-60). Paige Tovey agrees that "One of the principal ideas in Snyder's poetic and political philosophy is the role of the poet as shaman" who "acts as a mediator between man and nature" (72-73). Though a risky venture to argue that the poet is the shaman, I agree with Dean that use of other's mythology, when done responsibly, can provide a new lens to understand the poet's role. I do not find it to be cultural appropriation since his discussion of shamanistic poetry never abandons Native American culture and mythology.

are forest-based landscapes, groves, and croppings of trees located in the natural environment which have been, or are being managed, or guided, by human action, whether for human use or for their own sake. I select the term ‘managed’ for two reasons. First, it suggests direct contact between the manager and the managed. Those who interact with these spaces are not delegating others to do so, or rather, not in responsible human interactions with nature. Second, there is a vision for the long-term health and flourishing of the natural space, as part of a larger community of living beings. Therefore, terms such as ‘directed,’ ‘controlled,’ implied either too little contact with nature or too much human control over nature’s survival. In these managed spaces, humans take on the responsibility to care for nature on a regular basis, such as farming, ranching, or practice immoral forms of management, like abusive logging. These spaces are important for these authors because they are instances of conflict between human and nature. They are either instances of integration towards a more complete human-nature community or instances of division which complicate efforts for both to live peaceably with each other. While their moral law and environmental vision lacks the philosophical underpinnings of certain religious systems, it offers a way to judge what is good and bad in the absence of a strictly theological framework.

Introduction to Terms

The term “nature,” according to Raymond Williams, is “the material world itself, taken as including or not including human beings” (219). The ecocritical project tries to break down this monolithic category into everything that can be perceived by the human senses, though even Williams acknowledges that whether or not humans qualify as part

of nature is questionable. Critics like Greg Garrard note that the term ‘nature’ is not neutral and has been used by dominant social groups to advance their own agendas (10).³ However, he also argues that using new terms does not change the reality that nature is a material fact (Garrard 10). Broadly speaking, the project of ecocriticism is to study and understand the relationships between humans and nature, particularly in terms of the representation of nature in literature. It also includes the impact of these representations on a society’s conceptions of nature and how that society treats nature as a result. While “nature” carries many political, social, cultural, and religious associations with it, I will use “nature” in the first chapter of the thesis because Wordsworth uses it consistently throughout his works.

In Wordsworth’s 18th century British context, nature was a particularly loaded term. Most of these discourses privilege some form of anthropocentrism, whether objectifying nature as an industrial resource or claiming it for the purposes of all-too-human political concerns. Even in the more positive understandings, such as lauding nature for being God’s creation, it was still considered something separate from “humanity,” something to which “as Rousseau influentially argued, ‘we should return’” and was even seen, “more controversially, as the physical aspect of the godhead” (Rigby 63). It is therefore important to acknowledge that Wordsworth does not use the term “nature” in the modern ecological sense, which admits no separation between humans and their ecosystems. While Wordsworth admits that a separation exists, he does not

³ Garrard cites Lawrence Buell who states that the distinction between humanity and nature, part of “a myth of mutual constructionism” with the “physical environment (both natural and human-built) shaping in some measure the cultures that in some measure continually refashion it” (*Endangered World* 6).

agree with nor support it. Wordsworth also argues that there is also a spiritual entity in nature. He argues that this spiritual force guides humans to a better knowledge of themselves and of God. Wordsworth also posits that nature has inherent value reflected by the wisdom, truth, and beauty it makes manifest. While critics like Scott Hess interpret this stance as a celebration of what nature provides humanity, it does not mean that nature lacks value outside of its interaction with humanity.⁴ For Wordsworth, it is up to humans to seek nature so as to find its inherent value, while that value always resides in nature, regardless of our attitudes and actions.

For Wordsworth, though the human relationship with nature in the rural environment changed rapidly, in the context of 18th century British urbanism and industrialization, “nature” as an idea was not threatened in the same way that it was in Snyder’s context (Garrard 43). As a result, Wordsworth approaches nature with less urgent concern for the entire planet’s survival than does Snyder. Snyder uses the term “nature” to describe both the non-human natural environment and the earth as a whole, humanity included. Influenced by his studies of Zen Buddhism, Snyder also writes that, in addition to the physical world, nature functions as a kind of agency describing it as “the creative and regulative physical power which is conceived of as operating in the material world and as the immediate cause of all its phenomena” (*POW* 8). He concludes that “Science and some sorts of mysticism rightly propose that *everything* is natural. By these lights there is nothing unnatural about New York City, or toxic wastes, or atomic energy, and nothing—by definition—that we do or experience is unnatural” (*POW* 8). In

⁴ As I will elaborate in chapter two, Hess writes that Wordsworth “frames” nature in admiration of its beauty and ultimately removes himself from a sincere relationship with nature (22).

his explanation, he states that all things are natural, similar to the idea that nature is everything that occurs in the universe. Snyder's primary way to differentiate between urban environments and non-urban environments, and desirable and harmful management choices, is his use of the term "wild." He uses the term to mean "self-organizing, self-informing, playful, surprising, impermanent, insubstantial, independent" and "fertility" (*POW* 10, 90). Wild environments are all encompassing and self-contained. Urban environments are therefore not wild because they are "exclusive in the matter of who and what they give shelter to, and so intolerant of other creatures" (*POW* 12). Hence "nature" communicates the interconnectedness he believes exists between everything, a belief which stems from his "perception...that everything was alive (the basic perception of animism" (*TRW* 17). The terms "wild" and "wilderness" thus help Snyder communicate criticisms of the dichotomous understanding inherent to anthropocentrism.

Anthropocentrism, in the context of human-nature interactions, is the view that humans have a higher intrinsic or moral value than nature (Hayward). It can also mean a general prioritization of human concerns over the claims that nature makes for itself. Critics of anthropocentrism argue that the primary danger of this view is that it reduces nature to little more than a tool or resource or pretty scene. According to J. Baird Callicott, environmental critic, anthropocentrism supports a value system in which all non-human living beings are "valuable only to the extent that they are means or instrument which may serve human beings" ("Non-anthropocentric Value" 299). It can thus justify the destruction of natural environments because one could argue that such a choice serves humanity's best interests. Certain strains of anthropocentrism, such as conservationism, purport that all natural resources, such as clean air and water, should be

conserved for future human use. While the preservation of nature occurs, it does so only to satisfy future human needs. There are other interpretations of anthropocentrism which suggest that a discussion of the intrinsic value of the non-human is not practical and argue that a dichotomy between instrumental worth and intrinsic worth is ethically questionable.⁵ Val Plumwood responds to these views by arguing that an instrumental view of nature is always dangerous, for the reasons mentioned above, though states a complete rejection of instrumentalism is not necessary (124). I will use the term “anthropocentrism” to refer to an understanding of nature that is inherently inferior to humanity which results in humans prioritizing their needs over those of nature.

In contrast, “geocentrism” posits that all elements and members of a biotic community have equal value.⁶ Consequentially, there is intrinsic value in nature, outside of its relationship with humanity, and humans are not a special species to be lifted above others. However, Callicott argues that geocentric ethics involves a degree of prudential analysis of the consequences of human-nature interactions (“Conceptual Foundations” 212, 214). Humans are equally valuable members of the geocentric community, and so we should also consider our own needs among others’ (208). Along with the poets’ study, I argue that a geocentric ethic can be achieved in a mutually sustaining human-nature community for as David Joplin argues, geocentrism holds that “man and nature are spiritually equals” (18). As a result, humans need to approach their own decision-making

⁵ Anthony Weston argues that “the search for intrinsic value in nature devalues all other non-intrinsic values to the opposite status of ‘merely instrumental’” (112).

⁶ “Geocentrism” is also referred to as “ecocentrism” or “biocentrism.” It is infrequently called “gaiacentrism.”

process by treating the claims of nature, in as many cases as possible, as equally valid as their own claims.⁷ In this thesis I will use “geocentric” to describe the human-nature communities that both Wordsworth and Snyder envision in their works. In these communities, both humans and nature are equally valuable and depend upon each other for survival. Humans need the resources in nature and manage nature so it can survive and flourish. Humans and nature thus both make up a geocentric community.

Wordsworth's Historical and Literary Contexts

During the period in which Wordsworth was poetically active, the late 18th and early-to-mid 19th centuries, England underwent the Industrial Revolution, a period of intense mechanical, scientific, and intellectual change, technological growth, and rapid economic growth. Romantic writers, including Wordsworth, often wrote against the plight of the urban poor as a negative side effect of England's rapid industrialization and raw capitalism (Moore and Strachan 46-49). In particular, Wordsworth opposed the agrarian reform acts which reconfigured hundreds of small farms into larger plots, leaving farm-based families homeless. The dispossessed were then led to the city which contributed to mass urbanization (Maunder 198-199). Wordsworth detested the loss of this country-based lifestyle and its close relationship with the natural environment and

⁷ However, there remains contention about the balance between these two views, between rejecting geocentrism and encouraging human extinction for nature's sake. For example, the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement argues that humans are the root cause of the primary issues facing the biosphere (Knight). In order to defend the ability of thousands of other species of plants and animals to survive, the VHEMT argues that humans must die off eventually and allow the planet to flourish (Knight). Despite these difficulties, these terms remain highly useful in discussing how both poets approach the claims of humans, the claims of nature, and their reconciliation of them both.

nature (Mahoney 66-67). The rural workers left behind and the newly arrived uneducated urbanites remained poor, whose cases Wordsworth took up as victims of industrialism.

Lastly, Wordsworth decried the social and cultural conditions created by industrialism for promoting an atmosphere which inhibited people's ability to interact with each other and with nature. Along with rapid economic growth and England's commercial capitalism, contributed to a utilitarian view of the world, people, and nature (Ferber 99). Wordsworth also criticized the urban environment for stunting people's sensory perception and imagination. Wordsworth, in the 1800 and 1802 Prefaces to the *Lyrical Ballads*, decried the "increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident," a thirst carried out by sensationalist news and superficial forms of entertainment: "to this tendency of life and manners the literature and theatrical exhibitions of this country have conformed themselves (599). This lack of perception prevented people from interacting with other people and with nature the way he perceived they should. While industrialism provided several benefits for English society, Wordsworth and the Romantics wrote against what they perceived to be harmful effects.

While writers like Wordsworth never called themselves "Romantics," the broad, loosely-collected movement nevertheless was a project which rebelled against "both aristocratic and bourgeois social and political norms in favor of values more individual, inward, and emotional" (Ferber 11). In response to the limitations of a neoclassical and strict Enlightenment-influenced aesthetic, Romantic artists sought to emphasize imagination as a more inclusive faculty than reason. They valued the poet and poetry as key nodes of interaction with nature and the divine. A primary focus of Romanticism was

the reconfiguration of how humans interacted with nature to emphasize nature's inherent value and purity, which was often tainted by human action. Wordsworth argues that nature leads humanity in an understanding of itself and of morality (McKusick 209, Bryan L. Moore 88). Even further, he describes a spiritual, though somewhat vague, God-like presence in nature. While Wordsworth never clearly states whether nature itself is divine or there is a divine presence that acts through it, nature leads humans into moral understanding and higher truth.⁸ I argue in chapter two of this thesis that Wordsworth believes that there is a spiritual presence or figure in nature, particularly in his depiction of managed arboreal spaces.

Wordsworth's view of ideal interactions between human and nature is based on respecting the life of nature and not interfering with nature's ability to survive unless it is necessary for human survival. This geocentric respect for the life of nature extends the morally respectful treatment found in a moral human community to include the non-human, usually figured as a family. While this extension might appear anthropocentric, it ultimately elevates nature to the level of a human community that attains an equal status between humans and non-humans. This extended community obliterates differences in inherent value between humans and nature.

⁸ His contemporary and friend, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, argued clearly for the latter, that God acts through nature. Coleridge's view is clearly seen in his poem "Frost at Midnight," where in looking at the surrounding natural scene, states that "so shalt thou see and hear / The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible / Of that eternal language, which thy God / Utters, who from eternity doth teach / Himself in all, and all things in himself. / Great universal Teacher! he shall mould / Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask" (ll. 58-64).

Gary Snyder's Historical & Literary Context

While writing in a very different time and place than Wordsworth, Gary Snyder's environmental concerns also formed as a response to social, political, and technological advances that threatened the biosphere. Gary Snyder became poetically active in the mid-1950s, after the Second World War. American society, affected by a booming economy, developed a strong sense of materialism against which Snyder wrote. He felt that life was more than competing with everyone else for a bigger house and a nicer car. Importantly, poets like Snyder argued that this commercialism and rapid economic growth negatively impacted how Americans thought about and treated the natural environment. Snyder wrote against the damage to the environment, particularly negative logging practices that occurred in California for decades.

Another important setting for Snyder's work is the atomic era. American society, like none other before the Second World War, had used a nuclear weapon in war and thus had to address the possibility of complete and utter annihilation of all life on the planet through atomic warfare. Cold War tensions between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) made atomic warfare a constant fear in the minds of Americans. As a result, American media and popular culture villainized Communists and Socialists, especially during the McCarthy hearings. The dichotomous understanding of the geo-political world created several divides that Gary Snyder critiqued including us and them, humanity and nature.

Gary Snyder was a part of two interconnected poetic movements during the early stages of his career, the San Francisco Renaissance and the Beats. The San Francisco Renaissance gathered its personality and focus from the city of San Francisco. The

movement had roots in the Second World War period but did not reach popular poetic expression until October 7, 1955 when Snyder, Allen Ginsburg, Jack Kerouac, and others held a public poetry reading, including the famous first reading of Ginsberg's *Howl* (French 1). Many of the poets of the movement wrote about what the significance of living in California and in the American West. Living in the West, for these writers, implies "a radical political tradition, nontraditional religious practices, or extreme psychological states" (Davidson 11). Snyder's fascination with Zen Buddhism and Japanese and Native American cultures perfectly embodies this focus.

The environmentally conscious poets, primarily Snyder, Philip Whalen, and Michael McClure, centered on the ecological reality of living with the land and connecting with the historical and religious past of the spaces they inhabit. However, several other members of the movement, like Kerouac and Jack Spicer, focused more on the city of San Francisco itself as the source of life and vitality (Davidson 13). The movement tried to bring poetry down to the level at which anyone could, conceivably, connect the earth on the one hand and the street on the other (Davidson 13). These poets, many of them poor or blue-collar workers, wanted to bring poetry to the public which was performed in their public readings. Snyder, however, failed to remain active during the movement's critical years because he left for Japan in 1952. He influenced many of the movement's members but failed to stay plugged into the San Francisco scene.

The Beats were a generation of authors and artists in the 1950s and 1960s that wrote against the mainstream culture of commercialism, rigid Puritanism, and as Warren French states, a rejection of experiential conformity, calling for "a transcendental

openness to experience” (xix).⁹ The movement consisted of and built off of the San Francisco Renaissance and included New York writers like Ted Joans, Seymour Krim, and Diana Di Prima (though Ginsberg was from New York and Jack Kerouac from Massachusetts originally). The Beats, however, were not received well in New York, and made a contentious splash in Chicago.¹⁰ Due either to the Beats’ mixed reception or affinities with an earlier style and ethos, Snyder generally prefers to be associated with the San Francisco Renaissance over being labelled as Beat (Hayes 48). His return from his time in Japan led to his writing several volumes of ecopoetry, well after the close of the San Francisco Renaissance and largely in increasing isolation from the Beat communities.

One of Snyder’s greatest influences on his writing and ecological thought is his research into Zen Buddhism. During his eight year stay in Japan, he studied under a Zen Buddhist master and became a Buddhist priest. His experiences and research helped form his belief that “all beings—human and non-human—were bound together in a sacred web” (Phillips 13). According to Joan Tan, this belief stems from Snyder’s adoption of the *Tiantai* teaching of “inanimate beings being endowed with the Buddha Nature” and the *Huayan* metaphorical teaching of “‘Indra’s net,’ a parable illustrating

⁹ Admittedly, there is contention about whether or not to include those called “beatniks” in with the Beats, for some writers interpret the “beatniks” as derivative, unproductive, and often not even artists (xx). French takes this idea from critic Thomas Parkinson who argued against the beatniks, arguing they were barely artists (xx).

¹⁰ Journals like the *Hudson Review* actively fought the influence of the Beats, labelled as “hopelessly vulgar” (French 31). While the Beats were initially received well and representatively in Chicago for a time through the *Chicago Review*, an issue of Beat literature was suppressed which sparked a battle between city conservatives (supported by the mass media) and “literary journals’ attempts to call attention to the beats’ creative efforts to shock American society into recognizing its shortcomings” (French 40).

interdependence and interpenetration” (15). This interconnectedness of all life is one of the most prevalent themes in all of his poetry, finding expression in nearly all of his works. As a result of this interconnectedness of all life, humans must do what they can to live harmoniously with all creatures.

Snyder also studies Native American cultures, specifically the West Coast tribes such as the Anasazi, Sioux, Pueblo, Shoshonean, and other Southwestern and Northwestern tribes. He ultimately argues that their relationship with nature is better than the one that Westerners have with nature (Jungels 31, 29). This is often expressed through Snyder’s use of a Native American myth figure, the trickster Coyote from tribes like the “Shoshonean and others (Salishan peoples in the Montanas)...and the California Indians,” (“Incredible Survival” 67). Coyote crosses boundaries between good/bad, male/female, and human/nature as a mediator between them (Shackleton 229). Snyder uses this figure as a way to represent the hostility of Western (specifically American) culture against the interests and welfare of the natural environment.

Concluding Thoughts

In the following chapter, I will examine Wordsworth’s representation of primarily family-owned arboreal spaces as well as Wordsworth’s churchyard poem “Yew-Trees,” to understand his proposed ideal management of arboreal spaces and the moral support for such management. In chapter three I will analyze Snyder’s representations of how contemporary American society fails to positively manage arboreal spaces, specifically in the context of West Coast logging practices. While Snyder offers more moments of

critique than examples of positive management, I will analyze the few, key moments where he presents humans as a positive shaping pressure in the ecosystemic web.

The language of geocentrism and anthropocentrism, along with their conflicting ethics, help frame discussions of human-nature interactions in a way which makes the poetry I analyze helpful in our context today. We live in a world where arboreal spaces are under threat. Understanding Wordsworth's and Snyder's representations of human management of arboreal spaces can help us imagine what responsible management should look like.

CHAPTER TWO

The Case for a Moral Law in William Wordsworth's Nature

Wordsworth's View of Nature, the Divine, and the Moral Law

In the works of William Wordsworth, there is a spiritual entity in nature which guides humans to a better knowledge of their relationship with the natural world. However, Wordsworth remains notoriously ambiguous, vacillating between positions that nature is divine and stating that nature is not divine in and of itself and merely hosts a divine spirit. Nevertheless, this tension gives nature inherent value, outside of whatever knowledge, wisdom, or truth humans gain from it. His poetry explores how human speakers come into contact with that divinity in nature and learn to live in accord with it. Nature is sometimes the judge and agential source of the moral law while at other times it is a subject under the law. The moral law can be enforced by, stems from, and applies to nature. In order to describe human-nature communities which follow the moral law, and the human attitude which makes them possible, I will use the term "geocentric." A geocentric attitude understands humanity and nature as living beings of equal status. As it relates to communities, geocentric communities are instances in which humans live in, with, or around nature and do not prioritize human needs over those of nature. Instead, they consider both, more or less equally.

Wordsworth describes a geocentric moral law that achieves his ideal relationship between humans and nature: an extension of human community to include all non-human life. The moral law equally binds both humans and nature to an ethic of mutual respect

and care. This respect is a human consideration for, and defense of, nature's ability to survive that also includes the human management of natural spaces for sustainable living. Thus a human can, as in the poem "Nutting," take the nuts from a grove, but cannot destroy the branches themselves and thus damage the trees' ability to flourish. While Wordsworth spends little time detailing what nature must do or not do for humans, he does imply that nature does, in fact, reciprocate the consideration that humans give nature by providing emotional and moral support that combats human despair.

I explore this dynamic in Wordsworth's verse by examining managed arboreal spaces. There are locations where humans take responsibility for nature through actions such as farming or ranching. Human management of these arboreal spaces are unique instances in which humans actively participate in the daily life of members of nature. These interactions are the perfect places to think about nature because humans actively care for it. Instead of enacting a split between nature and culture, which makes nature susceptible to marginalization, these managed spaces mix the two together into one whole. That mixture is praised when the moral law is followed.

This chapter will analyze three poems that feature managed arboreal spaces. I will first analyze the poem "Nutting" to prove the existence of a moral law in Wordsworth's poetry. The poem centers on a nutting grove, an arboreal space that a boy and his family manage for its nuts. The boy exemplifies poor management by his pointless abuse of it. The boy commits a morally bad action for which he is judged, though whether it is by nature or the divine spirit in nature, Wordsworth does not specify. The poem argues that humans are expected to follow a moral law that dictates how they should and should not treat nature. Second, I will analyze "Yew-Trees" which features a churchyard with some

of the oldest living trees in the world. Human management of this space entail a legacy of involving it in the community and life of humanity over generations. The trees are symbols of immortality for those left alive, as many yew trees are planted at other churchyards for the same reason. Humans thus plant some of the yew trees and maintain them, ensuring the ability of nature to survive and including nature as part of human community. The trees connect humanity to the past and the lives of the dead. Lastly, I will use *Home at Grasmere* to depict the results of humans following the moral law and properly managing an arboreal space. This poem explores Wordsworth's sense of home in the Lake District and the people with whom he resides. Wordsworth provides a key instance in which human management of a sheep fold in the vale of Grasmere follows the moral law. Management brings humans and nature together in a geocentric, familial community. These three poems show how human management of arboreal spaces is a way for humans to bring about these geocentric communities.

Literature Review of Wordsworth's Attitude towards Nature

Several critics have written about Wordsworth's attitude towards nature and generally agree with one of two views; he is either anthropocentric or geocentric. Those who argue of the former believe that Wordsworth is an anthropocentrist who cares only about what humans get from nature, such as knowledge about humanity and the pleasure of aesthetic beauty. Those of the second view see Wordsworth as a geocentric poet who cares for nature and appreciates its inherent value. Wisdom, insight and aesthetic beauty reflect that value, but do not determine it.

Scott Hess argues that Wordsworth is anthropocentric because Wordsworth's speakers step back and observe nature as a work of art rather than engaging with nature as an equal being. This 'framing' of nature removes both himself and all other humans from a sincere, geocentric relationship with nature (Hess 22). He uses the moments of transcendence that are present in Wordsworth's poetry as evidence that Wordsworth loses the landscape itself. A moment of Wordsworthian insight is "a flash of imagination that obliterates the landscape in the experience of transcendental imagination. Wordsworth's imagination in these moments does not so much harmonize with as consume nature" (Hess 39). He interprets Wordsworth as an egocentric, (and thus anthropocentric) pure transcendentalist who completely pulls away from the physical reality of a geocentric relationship with nature. Hess further concludes that this transcendental, anthropocentric view of nature creates isolated museums of nature, "for the formation of both individual identity and high-aesthetic, middle-class national culture" (164). As a result, only a small group of people can engage with nature on its own terms, eliminating the possibility of a geocentric relationship. He accuses Wordsworth of believing that anything which threatens human management of nature for its aesthetic value alone needs to be removed.

Other critics interpret Wordsworth as a poet concerned with creating geocentric communities between humans and nature. Karl Kroeber, in his interpretation of *Home at Grasmere*, sees Grasmere as an example of a geocentric community; "Because man and nature can so interpenetrate in the vale, its 'true Community' must comprise 'human and brute' and plant and topographic fact as well...The vale is a complete world in itself" (134). Jonathan Bate argues that Wordsworth's retreat to the Lake District is an attempt to live more completely in reality and harmony with nature, not a transcendental escape

from physical reality. His poetry is “an attempt to enable mankind the better to live in the material world by entering into harmony with the environment” (*Romantic Ecology* 40). Instead of Wordsworth setting the Lake District apart, Wordsworth urges his readers to acknowledge nature’s inherent value and power. Doing so will help them understand nature so as to live with it better. He ultimately urges a geocentric attitude which respects nature’s inherent value (Eidson 8).

Hess derives much of his criticism from Wordsworth’s protest of the building of a specific railroad in the Lake District in 1844. Hess argues that Wordsworth protested the railroad to exclude the rising middle class from interacting with nature (123). Gill argues that Wordsworth was concerned with the damage that the railroad would cause to nature and with the inability of tourists to appreciate nature; “their incursion of the railway and the development that would follow would only destroy the beauty and the peace the tourists were coming to enjoy. Second, people only benefit from what they see with a tutored eye...it cannot be gained by being pitched on a brief excursion into completely foreign terrain” (413). First, Wordsworth’s concern was not just for the aesthetics of the land, as Hess argues, but also for the land itself. Sending many people through the region would destroy the peace and beauty of the region, disturbing the creatures and other non-human life in the area. Second, his poetry is an attempt to help people have the “tutored eye” necessary to benefit from nature (Gill 413). He is not trying to create an elitist club but spread an honest appreciation for nature.

I argue that Wordsworth’s moments of transcendentalism are not pure and that his speakers do not remove themselves from nature’s physical reality. Literary critic Seth Reno argues that Wordsworth’s moments of sublimity does not achieve true

transcendence. These moments of transcendence draw Wordsworth out of his own subjective mind and into a truer understanding of nature. Wordsworth's meditations on nature physically produce the sensation of being enraptured by an object: "Wordsworth's mood parallels the erasure of subject/object, an erasure we now know has a neurological basis" (Reno 41). His transcendence never forces him to lose focus on the object. Instead, "Through meditation on physiological affect, Wordsworth achieves a 'mood,' or state of being, in which love subsumes his subjectivity" (Reno 41). Yet this loss of subjectivity is not complete because he never loses focus on the object. This supports a reading of Wordsworth extending human community to nature because he physically extends his senses to include nature.

Overview of Wordsworth's Understanding of Morality and Religion

Wordsworth's moral interpretations and beliefs were heavily influenced by (and heavily influenced) the Romantic response to Enlightenment values. Wordsworth wrote during the late 18th century and early 19th century. During this time, many Enlightenment values had just come under attack from the libertarian ideals of the French Revolution. For example, Romantics never rejected reason outright but many feared the Enlightenment obsession with reason because it limited imagination and diminished the value of sensory perception. While the Reign of Terror resulted in a conservative backlash in England, Wordsworth believed for years in the ideals of the Revolution, if not in the French expression of those ideals (Gill 53).

Objective values remained the primary understanding of morality, which is the understanding that there is a right and wrong way of behaving and understanding the

universe. The Revolution did not question this objective morality as a whole, but merely how to apply those ideas of right and wrong to situations which threatened their society. The Revolution also refused to rely on a Church-based, religious basis for determining right or wrong. However, England relied heavily on the relationship between the Church and State to apply ideas of right and wrong to threatening situations. As a younger man, before he became devoted to the ideals of the French Revolution, he considered how far the established Church, towards which he was supposed to be looking for a career, was the repository of Truth and a force for social good” (Gill 54). Within the next few years he considered the church and rejected its truth claims.

Wordsworth’s belief in the ideals of the French Revolution made him skeptical of most social institutions and the church in particular. For decades after the Revolution turned into the bloody Reign of Terror, Wordsworth still refused to accept the Anglican Church as the institution from which truth comes and rejected the specific doctrines and ritualistic elements of Christianity (Gill 344). When he wrote most of his most iconic poetry, therefore, he did not imbue it with an English understanding of absolute morality stemming from the church and Christianity, though he was cognizant of it. Instead, Wordsworth’s poetry reveals a search for and belief in an external moral truth found in nature. It was not until 1822, when Wordsworth was fifty-two years old, that he joined the Anglican Church (Gill 344). As he aged, he came to believe that church was a social institution that had power to protect society from anarchy and prevent “social retrogression” (Gill 344).

Argument for the Existence of a Moral Law in Wordsworth

While critics recognize the moral importance of much of his poetry, none recognize his explorations into morality as building up to a strict moral law. Wordsworth scholar Adam Potkay, argues that nature draws humanity into a relationship with it without “saying, as in a requirement ethic, ‘thou shalt not,’ and without clearly rising to unconditional laws (e.g., do not steal). Rather they suggest, within specific contexts, certain hypothetical imperatives, when to let be, when to respect the endeavors for self-preservative instincts of other beings (127). However, Potkay does not take it far enough. Respecting the instincts of other beings is itself an ethical imperative of the strict moral type for which I argue. Wordsworth’s ethical imperatives assume a notion of what is good and bad, communicating expectations for behavior which constitute morality in the process. Through the specific contexts that Potkay mentions, humans and nature reach an understanding of a practical moral ethic. Potkay’s “hypothetical” statements remain unclear when not applied as a practical ethic. Wordsworth’s poems do not deal with hypothetical statements but with a practical example of someone breaking a geocentric moral ethic by mistreating a managed arboreal space.

Potkay suggests that nature itself is the source of moral authority in Wordsworth. He reads the poem “Peter Bell” as evidence for nature’s authority. The poem deals with a cruel man who undergoes a transformation from moral depravity (beating his donkey) to respect for the donkey (praising it for being loyal to its former owner). After his moral development, Peter Bell “directs his final prayer not to God but to the ass...Through the ass’s intercession, nature makes his heart tender to the joys and sorrows of the world” (Potkay 64, 69). Nature, judging Peter’s actions, finds them to be wrong and evil and the

donkey corrects his thinking to find joy in what is good. The moral education of Peter Bell, for Potkay, means that morality itself is “partially immanent in nature” (126). However, Potkay is not necessarily correct in his interpretation. Though Peter may pray to the donkey, he also addresses God: "O God! I can endure no more!" (ll. 1305). Wordsworth again makes it difficult to know whether or not authority stems from the donkey, God, or a divine spirit in nature.

I argue that while ambiguous, Potkay misses another likely interpretation in Peter Bell. I readily agree that the donkey is the agent that teaches Peter about morality and the importance of joy. However, this is also seen in "Nutting," where the "silent trees" and "intruding sky" aid in the speaker's feelings of guilt and knowledge of wrong-doing (ll. 53). While they are the agents of moral understanding they are not the ultimate cause or source of it. Thus the authority nature has in "Nutting" is not ultimate, but intermediate. It can educate and guide but the spirit in nature is the ultimate moral authority. While Potkay might be right in his interpretation of "Peter Bell," he leaves out the possibility that Peter might not be praying to the donkey at all and that moral authority does not ultimately rest in nature itself. "Nutting" provides suggestions for the source of the moral authority behind the moral law but does not definitively state it.

Wordsworth portrays human interaction with nature in managed arboreal spaces that indicate the existence of a moral law. These interactions reveal a set of moral expectations that Wordsworth has for humans and nature. When taken together, these expectations form a moral law. This moral law binds and judges both humans and nature. These expectations, when taken together, are a moral law. First, the poem "Nutting," published in the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, will illustrate the existence of this law

and encompasses humans and nature. “Nutting” depicts actions which Wordsworth leads the reader to see as morally decrepit through the speaker’s self-revelation. Wordsworth also points the reader to an authority which enforces these behaviors, which implies a law or enforced set of expectations.

“Nutting” depicts a morally unacceptable action on the part of the young speaker. The boy aims to gather nuts from his family’s managed arboreal space, a grove of nutting trees. Yet before he gathers the nuts, he pauses to take in this beautiful scene. After several moments of this rapture, the poem suddenly turns and the boy destroys trees by dragging down and breaking their branches. The poem ends with the speaker reflecting on the consequences of his actions. Critics have interpreted this piece in terms of a threat to Wordsworth’s vision of a geocentric community. David Joplin interprets the guilt of the boy and the imperatives at the end of the poem as part of a larger understanding of humanity in general. He argues that the poem presents a threat to a geocentric way of interacting with nature, a relationship in which humans interact *well* with nature rather than giving up on it and avoiding it, “a sympathetic or participatory relationship” (23). Jonathan Bate further suggests that the poem serves as “a miniature allegory of man’s rape of nature” (“Toward Green Romanticism” 67). I agree with both of these critics that the poem discusses the real, physical relationship between humanity and nature. The boy’s actions can be interpreted not just as allegory but as a real example of human mismanagement of nature with real consequences from the source behind the moral law.

The boy’s destruction of the grove’s branches displays an anthropocentric attitude towards nature and irresponsible management of nature. That he goes with a “nutting-

crook in hand” indicates he collects nuts for his family, an innocent part of the relationship between humans and nature in a managed arboreal space (ll. 5). While he acknowledges the grove’s aesthetic value, he travels under branches and through bushes complaining that the area is “More ragged than need was!” (ll. 12). The boy’s approach to nature is problematic because he ignores nature’s ability to act outside of direct human will. The boy expects nature to be clean, clear, and under complete aesthetic control by humans. He uses a human standard to judge the status of nature, which is anthropocentric. In his defense, the boy and his family manage the grove for its nuts. They do not impair the grove’s ability to survive and they get nuts in return. However, the boy reaches beyond management to absolute control, even in his aesthetic complaint.

The boy’s poor management reaches a climax when the boy transitions from listening to nature to tearing it down so as to exercise domination. The description suddenly shifts from a peaceful wandering through the woods to his violent action against nature in line 41: “...Then up I rose, / And dragged to earth both branch and bough,” reflects the snapping of the branches (ll. 41-42). Both the poem and line 41 are snapped in half. As the first half of the poem primarily focuses on the speaker’s passive, receptive interaction with nature, the first half of line 41 peacefully ends the preceding thought from line 40. The second half of line 41 begins the boy’s attack of nature. The second half of the poem is marked by the boy’s aggression which becomes a sudden attack on nature’s members. However, nature retains agency in the face of the boy’s antagonism towards it. The lives of the trees were not taken by the boy. The trees gave up “their quiet being” carries the implication of suicide, rather than murder (ll. 46). While the boy is ultimately responsible for their deaths, his control over them remains out of his reach.

Even by killing them he cannot subdue their agency for they are no longer alive for him to control.

While it may seem like a sudden attack, the boy's actions follow from the first half of the poem. He arrives to the grove with "A nutting-crook in hand" but he never approaches the trees to gather nuts (ll. 7). Instead, he spends all of his time wandering through the wooded glade judging the grove for being "More ragged than need was" (ll. 14). He does not engage with the landscape through his sensory perceptions in any significant way nor does he complete the task he was assigned. When he finally finds a place where he could gather nuts, instead of approaching gathering the food for his family, he stood with wise restraint / Voluptuous, fearless of a rival" and "eyed / The banquet" (ll. 23-24, 24-25). The boy responds to the nuts with a lustful passion, and restrains them. But rather than redirect his energies to calmly gathering the nuts, he "sate / Among the flowers, and with the flowers I played" (ll. 25-26). The mention of restraint voluptuous sets the stage for the boy's later crime against the arboreal space: he has passions which drive him to act against nature. Ultimately, the boy has no interest in responsibly managing the arboreal space and its resources.

The language of the poem suggests that the boy loses his innocence in a distorted maturation process which results in his rape of the natural landscape. He approaches the "virgin" grove and commits a "merciless ravage" against it, leaving the victimized trees "sullied" by his actions (ll. 19, 43, 45). The forcefulness of the word 'ravage' and the connotations of destruction and violation, combined with the stained purity of the environment mirrors the imagery of sin. An action taken against innocence results in a

guilty stain. He realizes, too late, that managing the arboreal space entails a responsibility to not harm nature's ability to survive.

Wordsworth's placement of this language of rape in the context of a boy raises the idea of a sinful loss of innocence like the fall of humanity in Genesis. Yet that a boy commits an act compared to rape creates a very uncomfortable tension in the reader. (But that the boy is going nutting on his own suggests he is older than a small grade-school child.) The boy is both the representative of humanity in general before the sinful fall, he is also a product of his family and society which mold him in its image: with a lack of respect for the ability of nature to survive. Additionally, while language of "violence" or "crime" would also work well in this context, rape carries a stronger association of a deeply personal violation of a pure being. Wordsworth uses this uncomfortable tension between the youth of the boy and the horrifying nature of rape to draw out the unnaturalness of human violence against nature. Wordsworth implies that human management of nature is innocent when done respectfully. But when one breaks away from respect of nature's ability to live, one loses innocence comparable to that of the fall, where Adam and Eve broke God's law about eating forbidden fruit. They were forced to leave the Garden of Eden, which they were supposed to respectfully manage. In this way, the boy experiences a twisted, perverted maturation through his violent actions. Yet in contrast to Adam and Eve, the boy's sin was breaking branches, not eating forbidden fruit. The boy directly violated his role as manager of the arboreal space, abusing nature, which Adam and Eve never did. While the boy did not directly disobey the words of a god, the association of the boy's actions to rape suggest that his actions are as evil as, or more so than, disobeying God and eating forbidden fruit.

While the boy was given no direct verbal command in the poem, the speaker still feels guilt and regret at the end comparable to that of Adam and Eve: “I felt a sense of pain when I beheld / The silent trees, and saw the intruding sky” (ll. 50-51). The boy’s sense of pain stems from the sight of the destruction he caused. As a result, he empathizes with the pain of the trees, emotionally connecting with the trees in a way he had not done before. As a result of his actions and his new sense of empathy, he regrets his actions and warns a third party “Maiden” to “move along these shades / In gentleness of heart” (ll. 52-53). The boy encourages his companion to not follow in his footsteps and physically harm nature. Instead, he exhorts her to follow the expectation to adhere to a certain code of behavior. The speaker verbalizes what he learned, giving voice to the moral law he found that he was under, which the speaker makes clear at the end of the poem: “move along these shades / In gentleness of heart; with gentle hand / Touch—for there is a spirit in the woods” (ll. 52-54). The speaker recognizes that his actions were wrong because nature is not just his own possession. There is a spirit in the woods, so he reasons that he must treat nature gently for the spirit’s sake. The existence of the spirit in the woods makes his actions morally evil and makes his proposed gentle treatment morally good. Thus Wordsworth puts the expectations of a human managing an arboreal space into a moral imperative, grounded in the existence of a spiritual entity.

The guilt the boy feels leads the reader to an acknowledgment of something behind nature: “I felt a sense of pain when I beheld / The silent trees and the intruding sky” (ll. 50-51). Upon looking at the dead trees he senses pain in that he is responsible for the death of the trees. While it may seem ridiculous to call this sinful, Wordsworth uses the language of rape, to indicate that something is morally wrong. The “merciless” nature

of his actions imply he should have had mercy (ll. 43). Holding the boy up to a standard of behavior and applying actions which are readily accepted as morally decrepit allows us to interpret the poem in terms of a moral standard. Wordsworth guides us to a moral judgment of the boy's actions. If this is the case, then the moral judgment applies not just to the boy but to all of humanity. It is up to every human, therefore, to understand the boy's guilt and follow through with the imperatives at the poem's conclusion.

While nature guides the boy to a recognition of his responsibility and the boy feels guilty, Wordsworth remains characteristically ambiguous about the source of the moral law. Joplin connects the moral imperative not to nature itself but the Wordsworth's ambiguous divine spirit in nature from *Tintern Abbey*. The boy's "'sense of pain' teaches him 'there is a spirit in the woods'—the very same 'motion and spirit' of 'Tintern Abbey' that 'rolls through all things'" (Joplin 23). The imperatives follow the recognition of sin which the trees and "intruding" sky bring about (ll. 51). The boy's feelings arose when he looked at nature and not from his own cognitive process. Once he saw nature the boy understood that he did something morally evil. Thus nature is involved in making humans aware of the moral law.

There are two ways to interpret the justification of moral behavior in the final lines. First, it could be that humans should follow the imperatives out of respect for the divine spirit in nature as the source of the moral law. In this case, the moral imperatives stem from a third party moral source that humans cannot touch and cannot disagree. To disobey the spirit would be evil so one must not mistreat nature because the spirit says to do so. Value of the spirit is assumed to be inherent and humans must respect it. Nature is protected by this spirit and the spirit gives humans a moral tenet to follow as law. Nature

educates the boy, however, as to what this law is. Without it, the boy would never figure out what the moral tenets were. So nature is, in part, the judge of the moral law though the divine spirit in nature is the source of it. The second interpretation of these lines is that nature is a divine spirit. In this interpretation, nature is the source of value and teaches humans what the law is. The spirit referenced in the final line would be a judge of human morality for the line would read as a threat to not do anything the spirit would see.

Wordsworth, characteristically vague as to his true intentions, leaves both interpretations open. Both provide adequate reason to behave according to a set of moral standards since they both support an objective morality. Instead of humans deciding for the morality of their own actions, Wordsworth argues that there are external standards of good and evil to which humans must adhere. If it were not so, the boy would not be corrected and could justifiably reject the judgment and ignore his guilt. Ultimately, Wordsworth argues that humans must face a moral judge for their actions.

Tenets of the Moral Law

The poem “Yew-Trees” provides the moral law’s tenets, its source of authority, and a mental framework to follow it. First, the poem describes two tenets of the moral law as Wordsworth sees it: do not impair nature’s ability to survive and do not impair humanity’s ability to survive. The managed arboreal space in the poem provides a place for the interaction of the speaker (and the reader) with it. The interaction leads the reader to the two tenets of the moral law. Second, it provides key information that leads us to an understanding of a spirit beyond nature as the source of moral authority for the moral law. Third, the poem responds to the closing exhortations in “Nutting” by arguing that

humans should mentally and spiritually approach nature with hope and reverential respect.

The poem focuses on a managed arboreal space, a church cemetery in Lorton Vale. In the churchyard are yew trees which are among the oldest trees in the world, suspected to be over a thousand years old. These trees were often associated with death, funerals and the sacred. They were treated like temples. In pre-Christian England, they were symbols of the restorative power of nature for it would provide hope for the reincarnation of a soul in another body (“FAQ’s”). Some used yew trees themselves as a form of “worship of ‘yew-goddesses’ like Aphrodite or Artemis” (“Botanical: Yew” 159). After Christianity took over many of the cemeteries with these yew trees, the context changed to focus on resurrection upon the return of Christ, though certain worshipful elements of yew-goddesses were given a new Christian context, where the yew-goddesses became “veneration of the Virgin Mary and female saints” (“Botanical: Yew” 159). A 19th century review of the poem explicates the myths surrounding the yew tree which Wordsworth taps into; “The sacred funeral yew, well calculated to give solemnity to the village church-yard, and from its unchanging foliage and enduring nature, fit emblem of immortality, has ever been associated with religious observances” (“Review of New Books” 165).¹¹ Some ancient cultural traditions involve worship of yew trees (though most of these traditions do not stem from English tradition) while

¹¹ This source is part of a journal *The National Standard, and Journal of Literature, Science, Music, Theatricals, and the Fine Arts* which reviews new books, poems, and other media. This specific review comes from an 1833 release of the journal, providing a helpful example of how Wordsworth’s poetry was received at the time.

others saw yew trees as the source of reincarnation and the entire area of a sort of funerary temple (“Botanical Yew” 141-142).

Wordsworth explores this managed arboreal space because it is an instance in which humans take part in the daily life of nature. The yew trees in the poem carry associations of human responsibility for them. The yew-trees in England have been and are maintained out of respect for their symbolism of immortality and religious significance. In the early days of Christianity in England, some priests planted them for practical reasons (a windbreaker) and as a reminder of “the continuity of life” (“Botanical: Yew” 154). Wordsworth thus discusses how human protection of the trees affects the relationship of humanity and nature. He also explores this managed space because nature participates in rituals which help humans cope with mortality, funerals and funerary activities. This regular contact between the yew trees and the people who come to the cemetery (both those who maintain the trees and the funeral participants) reveal how humans and nature, according to Wordsworth, should interact. This is evidenced by Wordsworth’s portrayal of this managed space as a geocentric community. The interactions of humans and nature in this poem reveal the tenets of the moral law.

As the speaker approaches a group of yew trees in the cemetery, there is little action by the speaker, instead emphasizing the enduring nature of yew trees and the community of four real yew trees in Borrowdale. The poem reaches its climax when humanity (represented by certain epithets which describe the human experience) and nature join in a form of worship at the yew trees. The yew trees serve as a temple. Though there is a contrast between the renouncing of sin and the “joyous” celebration of the different aspects of human existence present at the funeral, worship occurs; “Fear and

trembling Hope, / Silence and foresight—Death the Skeleton / And Time the Shadow; [are] there to celebrate” (ll.26-28). The poem illustrates a worship of a divine spirit in nature which is the source of the moral law.

Critics have interpreted this poem in several different ways, often revolving around the interpretation of lines 26 through 28 quoted above. Several critics argue that the shades are aspects of humanity. Michael Riffaterre argues that the epithets are “Man's ghosts, or rather they are Man. The enumeration simply lists obsessive components of the human psyche” (251). Budick argues these shades are “epithets of the individual trapped and terminated in mortality, and the point of view of ‘multitude’ that may experience the yew tree as ‘trembling Hope’ *of* and *for* the vulnerable yet mutually supportive community” (225). Budick supports the interpretation that the approach of these various shades of human perception represents a conglomeration into a cohesive, single viewpoint of hope. Richard Gravil and David Robinson argue that humanity arrives for worship in a place where humans place their dead as a form of repentance and cleansing, “renouncing terrors, they have their thoughts composed to softness, aspiring perhaps to that ‘calm existence’” (Gravil and Robinson 29).

Other critics, however, disagree that there is hope and unity in the poem’s worship. Robert Rehder argues that the worship of the community is done “by the poet rather than by the six abstract entities” and postulates that the poem is not concerned with “reporting action or actuality” (99). This would suggest that the community does not unite through a communal act of worship but is a projection of the speaker. He also argues that the poem itself doubts if the shapes exist (99). However, he only considers one interpretation of the line, “May meet at noontide” (ll. 26). While it could suggest that

they may not meet, it could also mean they “may” meet at another time like midnight. Additionally, the poem provides no other indication that they would not meet, spending the next several lines describing their worship. The very application of the term “worship” suggests a recurring action, as worship is a repeated activity, not a once-in-a-lifetime accomplishment. While I agree with Rehder that the speaker (or the voice which acts as a speaker) worships, the epithets, as representations of humanity, worship as well. The community thus joins together in solidarity through worship, exemplifying a geocentric community.

The contrast between the positive management of the trees in the cemetery and the violent abuse of yew trees elsewhere leads the reader to the tenets of the moral law. Wordsworth compares these specific trees with the yew trees used in England and on the European Continent during the Hundred Years’ War. He writes that the yew tree of Lorton Vale, is “Not loathe to furnish weapons for the Bands / Of Umfraville or Percy...or those that crossed the sea / And drew their sounding bows at Azincour, / Perhaps at earlier Crecy, or Poitiers” (ll. 4-5, 6-8). Harold R. Hartzell notes that the English armies destroyed many yew trees so as to make weapons like the longbow (28). Gravil and Robinson note that battles of the Hundred Years’ War also destroyed “sacred groves in Anglesey (Mona) and Massilia (Marseilles)” which were made up of yew trees (27). Budick notes that this type of irresponsible management of arboreal spaces is immoral. The poem’s references to the English victories in the war (of Azincour, Crecy, and Poitiers) “can hardly be [an] unambiguous cause for celebration. They are present here as one element of a total-disinterested recognition of nature’s forces” (225). Budick

focuses on how the destruction of the trees is total and is part of humanity's ignorance of nature.

The poem argues that humans should not disrespect nature by harming its members and impairing its ability to survive. Using the yew trees for war clearly impairs the ability of these members of nature to survive. The poem argues for this form of respect by stating that nature is inherently valuable, just like humans. The poem emphasizes this equal status in two ways. First, the poem emphasizes that the tree's aesthetic qualities reveal that there is inherent value in nature; "This solitary Tree!—a living thing / Produced too slowly ever to decay; / Of form and aspect too magnificent / To be destroyed" (ll. 10-14). The beauty, majesty, and shape of the tree reveal to the speaker that it has inherent value. To be clear, Wordsworth is not saying that the tree's majesty makes it valuable. The majesty is simply a reflection of its inherent value. Its inherent value stems from that it has lived and grown for so many years and still lives. Nature is placed in the same group of inherently valuable beings as humans.

Secondly, the poem emphasizes nature's equal status with humans by calling the tree a "living thing" (ll. 10). In this way, Wordsworth advocates for its equality with humans for we too are living things. Potkay further analyzes Wordsworth's use of the term "thing," and argues that when Wordsworth uses the term, he means more than just the physical reality of the object being described. For Wordsworth, "things are things without objects, things anterior to and in excess of subject/object dualities" (Potkay 71). The tree, Potkay argues, is more than just the object being viewed by the subject. It has inherent value that informs its physical reality and shares equal status with humanity. The reader understands that when Wordsworth uses "thing," it argues for the inherent value of

whatever is described by that term. The tree is upheld as a symbol of the union of humans, nature, and the speaker since all three are “things.” The descriptor “living” also ensures that we, as readers, remember the tree’s inherent value and existence outside of its relationship with humanity and the speaker. Using the phrase “living thing” thus extends human community to nature.

Therefore, human acts that harm nature are the same as acts which harm humanity. This extension of equal consideration for nature promotes a geocentric understanding of human-nature interactions in managed spaces. If humans did not respectfully manage the trees in this cemetery, they would be impairing the ability of nature to survive, the life of an equal. It is therefore bad, in a moral sense, to impair the ability of nature to survive. The poem argues that this is the same as killing other humans, which is morally bad.

Second, the poem reveals the tenet that humans should not harm other humans. In addition to protection of the trees, the speaker ensures that war will not break out here against other humans for the trees are “Not loth to furnish weapons for the Bands” (ll. 4). Trees of this type were abused for the sake of war in the medieval era. The speaker references the three major English victories of Crecy, Poitiers, and Agincourt, battles of the Hundred Years’ War (Brooks and Warren 275). These references suggest that human abuse of nature does not preclude human success in war. The English use of trees to make their shields and bows makes one think about the source of the French army’s weapons: their own yew trees. If this is so, nature is destroyed to kill those who also destroy nature. One might think there is a perverse sense of justice in at least some members of nature-destroyers dying. However, there is no celebration in the poem for it,

even though the battles mentioned were all English victories. The poem blames nationalistic war for both destroying the trees and for destroying human life. The “gloom profound” of the yew trees suggests they mourn not only the threat of human mismanagement to their lives but also human destruction of other humans (ll. 9). The poem presents war as that which destroys both humans and nature, not a glorious conquest or expression of power and influence. Therefore, the moral law prohibits humans harming other humans because in doing so, humans harm nature by abusing its resources and no longer respecting the ability of nature to survive.

While this may seem intuitive that one ought not to harm other humans, the poem states this from a position of moral authority which raises the statement from an implicit statement of what is good to a moral imperative, that it is *necessary* for humans to do so. The peaceful approach to the funeral at the cemetery indicates a desire for peace and even forgiveness. Gravid and Robinson write that as humanity approach the trees, they are “renouncing terrors.” (29). During this remorseful approach, “they have their thoughts composed to softness, aspiring perhaps to that ‘calm existence’” (Gravid and Robinson 29). Instead of waiting for their fate or continuing to war with other humans, they acknowledge their guilt about killing humans which admits of an external moral authority.

Since human management of the trees in the church yard respects the ability of nature to survive, a geocentric community arises. The trees are an integral part of the cemetery so that the humans who bury their dead there are reminded of hope for eternity by the trees’ associations with immortality. As a result, the trees are protected by the humans who bury their dead there. The ability of the trees to survive will not be

threatened by human action. The result is a community in which it is possible for humans and nature to join in worship: “With altars undisturbed of mossy stone, / United worship” (ll. 30-31). Nature responds to respectful human management by providing a place of worship. Nature supplies the “boughs, as if for festal purpose, decked / With unrejoicing berries, ghostly Shapes / May meet” (ll. 23-25). The description of the berries as decoration implies that nature consciously acted to prepare the place for worship. The “sable roof” also provides shelter (ll. 23). Humanity does not make the vale according to its needs but approaches it ready-made, as it were. Nature thus actively provides a place of worship where humans and nature can share in community.

The second major aspect of the poem is its evidence for the divine spirit in nature as the source of moral authority behind the moral law. The act of worship itself centers on humanity and nature lying to “listen to the mountain flood” (ll. 32). They join together in worship, not of the trees themselves, but of some other object. While Riffaterre argues this is an unknown object, I contend that they worship the divine spirit in nature who acts through the waterfalls in the caves (Riffaterre 250). The poem does not divinize nature itself but points to something beyond it. If we carry out the implications for the grove of trees as temple, then the temple is a holy place but not the object worshipped. It rather hosts worship and also joins in with it.

The community’s worship consists of sitting “in mute repose” so as “To lie, and listen to the mountain flood” (ll. 31, 32). Wordsworth emphasizes the act of listening silently twice, both through stating that all are “mute” and through the earlier mention of the arrival of “Silence” for the worshipful funeral (ll. 31, 26). This silence encourages a more attentive ear to nature, though nature itself joins in with worship. Assuming nature

does not worship itself, then worship is of something else that can be accessed through attention to nature. While the poem itself does not lead the reader to the exact same divine spirit in nature that is present in poems like *Tintern Abbey*, adding context from these other poems make it more than likely that it is the same divine spirit which acts through nature.

Worship, in this poem, is a way to interact with the divine spirit's presence because one finds it in the course of nature acting and moving. Combined with the "altars undisturbed of mossy stone," the stage is set for humans to listen to the caves speaking, the natural process of water moving around the earth (ll. 30). The last two lines also encourage the reader to listen. Wordsworth begins line 32 with an enjambment "To lie" (emphasized by the comma after "lie") so as to slow down the reader. Then Wordsworth contrasts the "mountain flood," which one might imagine is a violent torrent, with the mere "Murmuring" that the river actually speaks (ll. 32, 33). The river's nearly silent speech is barely audible and almost unintelligible. The two 'm's are not hard or plosive consonants, fricatives, or affricatives. They only release a small amount of air out of the mouth, especially since each 'm' is followed by 'ur,' which results in a tonally low, quiet sound. The sound of the word reflects its meaning. The sharp contrast creates a mental vacuum in which one almost hears the moving water. At the very least, it effectively slows the reader down enough to listen to nature. We are invited to worship and seek nature so as to find the divine spirit in nature. Worship of a divine spirit in nature admits that it is a source of moral authority as it encourages the acknowledgement of a spiritual superiority in something outside of humanity.

Lastly, the poem describes the mental and emotional attitude that humans need in order to create a geocentric community with nature. One must approach nature with hope for a geocentric community. The ghostly shades particularize the worship and support a reading of a practical moral law, not a theoretical doctrine. I agree with Budick that hope is a key element of the human approach of the yew trees, where “trembling Hope” is “*of and for* the vulnerable yet mutually supportive community” (225). If one does not hope, the yew trees’ symbolism is lost and become nothing more than a tree standing next to graves.

In addition to hope, one must approach nature with reverence or one risks abusing nature, like in the poem “Nutting.” Someone might, without reason, or for lack of a reverential attitude, harm the trees. Therefore, the ultimate impetus behind the moral law is to create and sustain community between humans and nature. The result is a peace for a nature weary of abuse and a humanity weary of self-annihilation. To maintain that peace and carry out the moral law’s imperatives, humans must accept a hope for community and manage nature with reverential respect. This managed arboreal space provides the environment for and is itself part of a geocentric community. The worship at the trees and the self-contained community of the Four Brothers reflect the unity of humanity and nature.¹² The Four Brothers, a group of four separate trees connected to

¹² This poem also acts as a response to the disquieting voices in Coleridge’s *Kubla Khan*. As noted by Gravid and Robinson, “‘Yew Trees’ naturalizes ‘Kubla Khan’...its dreamer nonetheless aspires to inspire daemonic dread. Wordsworth’s reply, a decade in the making, is both more and less exotic, geographically closer but culturally more remote and less bookish. It is also, despite Lorton’s martial associations, war-weary” (Gravid and Robinson 29). While Gravid and Robinson correctly note that Wordsworth replies, they miss the vast difference between the voices heard. While *Kubla Khan* presents a natural distress deep in the earth, Wordsworth finds a moral authority in the murmuring voices of the water beneath the land. Thus peace, rest, and spiritual unity are exemplified by what is deep inside the earth, not a latent desire for war and conflict. The community found by humans and nature quiet and still those voices.

make one larger organism, embodies the acceptance of several different members into one unified community. The familial connection between these trees further suggests that the human-nature community created is a family. Regardless of how one feels about certain members of one's family, there is the expectation to not only prevent harm from coming to its members but also to actively help them. While the moral law is clearly meant to prevent harm, there is an additional suggestion from Wordsworth in this familial image that in order to fulfill the moral law, humans must actively choose to help nature in its management as one would help a family member like a sibling.

Purpose of the Moral Law

The image of humanity and nature as a family is, for Wordsworth, encapsulates the end goal and purpose of the moral law. According to Wordsworth, following the moral law creates a familial community between humans and nature. The poem, *Home at Grasmere*, in further exploring the moral law, envisions the fulfillment of the moral law. First, the poem confirms the source of moral authority behind the moral law as the divine spirit in nature and describes its role. Second, it reveals that the geocentric community writes the moral law. Third, it articulates the purpose behind the vision of a moral law that equally encompasses humanity and nature: the creation and maintenance of geocentric communities focalized around human management of arboreal spaces. The purpose behind the moral law is to create a peaceful community that protects the interests and way of life of both humans and nature. The poem describes the speaker's journey through Grasmere. The speaker begins the poem with images of unity and family to describe how he and his companion (usually interpreted as William and Dorothy

Wordsworth) belong to the community of Grasmere. Yet as the poem progresses, the Wordsworth's walks through the region reveal scenes of poverty and strife, as well as a human-nature community that endured the death of a human community member. These scenes change the tone of the poem from an anthropocentric assertion of the Wordsworth's own belonging to a geocentric empathy towards other humans and nature. The poem ends with the speaker's explanation of what nature taught him, his understanding of himself as a poet, and his assertion to someday write *The Recluse*, a claim which was never fully realized.

First, the poem discusses the role and jurisdiction of the divine spirit in nature's moral authority. Kurt Fosso connects the need for a perceptual guide with the need for a moral guide by emphasizing affective sensation. Wordsworth's study of Erasmus Darwin's *Zoonomia* leads Fosso to argue "*Zoonomia* opened a way for Wordsworth to explore a radically physiological as well as emotional, at bottom affective, basis for becoming moral through the capacities of one's own shared animal 'being'" (83). For Fosso, the internal sensations provide the feeling and emotions that lead one on to morality. This is related to Wordsworth's view of good poetry, which he articulates in the 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," though he adds that good poetry is produced "by a man who being possessed of more than usually organic sensibility had also thought long and deeply" (175). Emotion plays a critical role in the creation of poetry for Wordsworth in addition to an intellectual meditation upon those feelings. It is consistent, therefore, that Wordsworth's morality stem from a sympathy with nature based in physical affection, such as joy. Undoubtedly, Wordsworth values sympathy as a way to prompt moral acts. I agree with Fosso's

conclusion that recognizing and respecting the value of nature leads to community: “Such morality is based in feeling what the other feels but also in finding and recognizing the commonality of sentience and seeing the other’s felt needs as good” (93). When one understands the unifying aspects of perception, one can truly begin to empathize with nature and ultimately share in sentience.

Yet Wordsworth is at times unclear whether or not humans need a perceptual and moral guide to treat nature as equal. On one hand, Wordsworth claims that humans both need and do not need help in controlling their perceptions, arguing that “The unappropriated bliss hath found / An owner, and that owner I am he. / The Lord of this enjoyment is on Earth / And in my breast” (ll. 85-88). There is, it seems, no need for a perceptual guide since the speaker is in complete control of his perceptions and sentiments. He not only owns his sensations, he claims to be the origin and sole controller of them. There is no deity that can interfere with his sensations. This precludes the possibility of a perceptual guide to lead him in anyway.

On the other hand, the poem ultimately reinforces the need for an external moral and perceptual authority outside of the mind of man. By the end of the poem, the speaker recognizes that while the human mind is incredibly powerful, it cannot sustain its perceptions or guide its morality on its own. The ideal vision is, as per Fosso, participatory community and society, not an isolated subject. Like “Nutting,” Wordsworth calls upon an external and overarching spiritual entity upon which his sense of self can rely: “then Great God, / Thou who art breath and being, way and guide, / And power and understanding, may my life / Express the image of a better time” (ll. 1043-1046). Clearly, the spirit that exists in nature provides perceptual guidance for

Wordsworth's speaker. The spirit in nature provides guidance for a mind that the speaker earlier asserted was supreme and "Lord." While much of the poem reads as an anthropocentric celebration of the individual mind's capabilities, Wordsworth ultimately finds it wanting in terms of moral authority and perceptual understanding.

Additionally, describing a God as "guide" recalls *Tintern Abbey* and the spirit which is "*In nature* and the language of the sense, / The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse, / The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul / Of all my moral being" (ll. 109-112 italics mine). Like in *Tintern Abbey*, the speaker in *Home at Grasmere* asks for moral guidance from the divine spirit in nature, depicting an intimately dependent relationship. Wordsworth's "mind of man" lacks an adequate perceptual knowledge and moral framework, a far cry from the anthropocentric assertions of individuality and independence at the beginning of the poem. Ultimately, the divine spirit in nature is the source of moral authority and guides humans to better understand the moral law.

However, I will qualify Wordsworth's description of God, arguing that Wordsworth, at this time in his work, did not recognize the Judeo-Christian God as the perceptual/moral guide. While recognizing a spirit inhabiting nature, he refused to accept any specific religious deity, whether pantheistic or Semitic; "Jehovah, with his thunder, and the quire...I pass them unalarmed" (ll. 982, 984). The word 'unalarmed' asserts that all of the shouting, the anger, and the sheer power of Jehovah does not frighten the speaker into submitting his mental faculty to the Christian God. Like he does in *Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth instead calls upon a vaguely described spiritual being to be his perceptual and moral guide, while staunchly avoiding the language of a specific religious God.

Second, the poem illustrates that the geocentric community co-authors ways of applying the moral law in their public communities;

Society is here
A true community—a genuine frame
Of many into one incorporate.
'That' must be looked for here: paternal sway,
One household, under God, for high and low,
One family and one mansion; to themselves
Appropriate, and divided from the world,
As if it were a cave, a multitude
Human and brute, possessors undisturbed
Of this Recess---their legislative Hall,
Their Temple, and their glorious Dwelling-place (ll. 818-828).

Wordsworth provides several images of unity among the members of the geocentric community. The images of family, government, and believers are used to indicate the coming together of many members into one body. There is no division among the body, for all are “under God,” both “high and low” (ll. 822). Socio-economic divides among humans are erased and both humans and non-human nature possess this physical space. There is no inherent hierarchy among living beings in this place.

It is significant that Wordsworth applies the metaphor of government to this community when he calls Grasmere “their legislative Hall” (ll. 827). Grasmere is a place where humans and nature co-write the laws which govern how they interact. This ethical code binds all members equally, suggesting an ability of nature to act against humanity with equal agency. While Wordsworth does not expand upon this thought, the legislative image implies that there could be penalties for breaking these laws. While this is not a judicial hall or courthouse, laws are written to protect society by creating a universal standard to which everyone is accountable. This would mean that the moral law is an ethical imperative based on an external judge. Since nature is included in the image of the

legislative hall, it is thus under the same law as humans. This image again contributes to the unity and equal status of humans and nature in a geocentric community.

Wordsworth punctuates the terms “Household, “Temple,” and for similar reasons that he capitalizes “Hall” in legislative hall. It associates certain expectations of behavior with the human-nature community. These three terms emphasize an equality of status among humans and nature by following an agreed-upon set of rules and expectations. Familial expectations inherently involve respect and reverence for the parental figures while not harming one’s siblings. In the context of a temple, one respects the fellow worshippers of the same deity. Thus *Home at Grasmere* illustrates Wordsworth’s ideal vision of human-nature community as a geocentric community of equal beings following the same rules.¹³ Humans and nature create the rules together yet the source and judge of them is the divine spirit in nature.

Third, the speaker illustrates that following the moral law through respectful management of arboreal spaces creates his ideal geocentric community. For example, a married couple plants a grove of trees to protect their sheep, “For a convenient shelter which in storm / Their sheep might draw to” (ll. 615-616). The humans built up the grove, so as to provide for their herd. While another type of shelter is not necessarily wasteful or disrespectful to nature, planting a grove is an act of addition which encourages the life of nature, rather than taking away from it. Taking care of the herd

¹³ Sarah Weiger illustrates this mutuality by arguing for a sense of ‘play’ in Wordsworth’s depictions of human-nature interactions. She interprets a scene in Book 1 of *The Prelude* where Wordsworth, as a boy, skates along a frozen pond by himself after leaving his friends behind; “his sudden decision to leave the game of his friends is a way of indulging a different form of play. It is this play, the one that cuts sideways across the world, engaging its temporary, phenomenal communications, that figures Wordsworth’s oblique participation in a world of becoming” (121). This sense of play unites both humans and nature in a quick and easy reaching across the boundary, extending community to include the boy and the natural environment, as all receive joy from it.

constitutes respectful management of nature for it does not hinder the ability of the herd to survive. While the herd is maintained for wool and meat, the herd, as a whole, thrives. In acting out the moral law, and respecting the herd sheep and the grove, human community is extended to include nature and create a geocentric community in which the interests of all are protected and advanced.

The bond between the couple and the grove is analogous to that of a family of three, where the planted grove is a child. As the parents age, the grove begins to flourish as a child does as it ages, a contrast which Wordsworth emphasizes by repeating the word 'flourish' for both parents and the grove suggesting a direct transfer of energy. As the old woman suffers in her isolation from her husband's death, Wordsworth provides consolation that her efforts were not wasted because of the planted grove. Not only will her story remain alive through the life of the grove itself, the grove shares the life and story of her husband with her. Whenever she visits it, she can interact with that which knew him. This is not a paradisiacal image. It is an ideal in the face of isolation, arguing that with nature, one is never truly alone. The speaker desires to spread the memories and lives of the "Matron" and her deceased husband but admits it is "a task above my skill" (ll. 643). As a family's history is passed from parent to child, the connection between the grove and the couple suggest it will be passed down to the grove. Even the speaker's misgivings do not prevent him from spreading the story of the grove and the couple to us, the readers.

Wordsworth presents a moral law that places humans under the moral expectation to protect the ability of nature to survive. The moral law encourages humans to sympathize with nature in a geocentric community. The moral authority that drives the

moral law stems from a vaguely described God-like spirit which does not reign supreme over all aspects of the human will but guides its perceptions to follow the moral law. However, the two primary imperatives of the law are not written by this spirit. As the image from *Home at Grasmere* indicates, humans and nature agree upon the applications of the moral imperatives in a form of self-government. Ultimately, the moral law, as Wordsworth interprets it, creates geocentric communities in which humans and nature provide for the interest of the other.

CHAPTER THREE

Managed Arboreal Spaces in Gary Snyder's Nature

Author Background and Religious Environmental Influence

Gary Snyder is an active American poet who began publishing poetry and prose pieces in the 1950s. A recurring issue of concern in his work is human-nature interactions, specifically the negative impact of American consumption on nature. He links this environmental crisis to American materialism and a general antagonism towards native cultures, like the West Coast Native American tribes. Like Wordsworth, Snyder finds himself surrounded by a culture that disregards the well-being of nature. Snyder similarly explores ways of rectifying this moral breach. As in the works of Wordsworth, managed arboreal spaces feature in Snyder's poetry. They serve as a stage for understanding both ideal and dangerous human interactions with nature. However, Snyder's explorations of managed arboreal spaces differs from those of Wordsworth. For Snyder, nature is in more danger from humanity than in Wordsworth's poetry. Snyder's understanding of management can also involve harming a part of nature when it can benefit nature's long-term survival. Snyder's depiction of managed arboreal spaces, like Wordsworth's depiction, reveals the existence of a set of moral expectations, a moral law that governs human actions, including those that impact nature.

However, Snyder's geocentric perspective of what nature is, its inherent value, and its relationship to humanity differs from those of Wordsworth. Unlike Wordsworth, who describes nature as the non-human physical environment inhabited by a spiritual

being, Snyder defines nature as “the physical universe and all its properties” (*POW* 9). Everything that occurs and exists in the material world is, by definition, natural. Rather than using “nature” as a keyword, Snyder avoids nature/culture binaries through the use of two holistic terms: “wild” and “wilderness.” Snyder describes wild as wholeness, self-completeness, and expressiveness (*POW* 9-10). Wild is uncontrolled and self-maintaining, like the body’s uncontrollable impulses in response to certain stimuli or certain ecosystems which operate entirely outside of human influence (*POW* 10). The wilderness is a “*place* where the wild potential is fully expressed, a diversity of living and nonliving beings flourishing according to their own sorts of order” (*POW* 12). Wilderness is inherently inclusive of all various living beings and does not inhibit the ability of different living beings to exist in it.

While both Snyder’s and Wordsworth’s geocentric perspectives respect the inherent value of organic systems, Snyder’s respects nature’s value in a more expansive way than Wordsworth. While Wordsworth argued that nature’s beauty and knowledge are proof of its inherent value, Snyder does not require beauty and knowledge to serve as proof. For Snyder, nature’s value comes from the fact that it is alive. As a result, “there is no hierarchy of qualities in life-that the life of a stone or a weed is as completely beautiful and authentic, wise and valuable as the life of, say, an Einstein” (*Real Work* 17). Life is inherently valuable regardless of its state of being or ability to conform to human cultural standards of beauty or worth. In Snyder’s worldview, his reasoning applies to all human and non-human life.

Snyder’s perspective of the wild material world, heavily influenced by his studies of Buddhism, also entails an interconnectedness among all living things which is not part

of Wordsworth's understanding. Snyder sees all living beings as members of an interconnected web. I agree with Joan Tan who argues that Snyder's belief in life's interconnectedness is his resolution between competing contentions of *Tiantai* Buddhism and *Huayan* (Hua-yen) Buddhism. For Tan, Snyder uses the *Tiantai* teaching of "inanimate beings being endowed with the Buddha Nature" and the *Huayan* metaphorical teaching of "Indra's net", a parable illustrating interdependence and interpenetration" to create a system where human and non-human nature are part of a global organic system (15). As a result of this belief, Snyder does not believe in an inherent disconnectedness between humans and the rest of creation. Critics like Lenka Szczerba argue that "Snyder's view of nature as an interconnected web...opposes the traditional view of nature as Other" (62).¹⁴ Instead of a culture-nature dualism, Snyder argues for a single web-like entity made up of all living things. Snyder's lack of distinction is seen through "nature" dropping of his vocabulary (though he uses it at times to communicate his ideas to people who still retain the distinction). I will reflect this lack of distinction in this chapter by referring to non-human nature with terms such as "biotic community," "ecosystemic web," "organic system," and particular elements of the landscape, like a specific bush, tree, rock, or animal.

Snyder's understanding of humanity's relationship with nature, influenced by his study of Native American culture and folklore, involves more human dependence on the

¹⁴ Ayako Takahashi interprets Snyder's understanding of nature as "a radical form of 'de-humanism.' This view represents the complete transition from a human-centered to an all-creature-centered—including non-human—nature" (315). Robin Chen-Hsing Tsai argues that, in opposition to the Western rhetoric of domination which "leads to nature-culture dualism," Snyder argues that all living beings, human and non-human, are part of one large system, or web (154). Josh Michael Hayes qualifies statements like that of Tsai and Takahashi by stating that "Snyder's poetry reflects the unity of a person and a place yet also respects the difference" (52).

biotic community than Wordsworth's understanding. While Wordsworth's geocentric perspective posits that humans should respect nature's ability to survive, Snyder goes further to argue that losing a respectful relationship between humans the ecosystemic community results in the loss of human self-knowledge. According to Snyder, humans rely on a respectful relationship with the organic community to understand what it means to be human. Snyder draws from traditional Native American ways of life and folklore from West Coast tribes like the Anasazi, Sioux, Pueblo, Shoshonean, and other Southwestern and Northwestern tribes (Jungels 31, 29). However, the majority of his works do not explicitly mention or focus on a specific tribe. Instead, Snyder refers to these tribes as simply "Native American tribes" or "Indians." Influenced by these tribes' intimate relationship with the organic community with which they live, Snyder argues that their relationship is better than the one that Westerners have with the biotic web.

Snyder reflects the danger that Westerners pose to the biotic environment and their own understanding of humanity through his use of the mythological figure Coyote. Coyote is a trickster figure who originates from "Nations west of the plains," like the Salish, Pueblo, Kalapuya, Paiute, Alsea, Maidu, and Sioux from South Dakota (Jungels 57-59; de Angulo 233; Ramsey 284; Lemming 83).¹⁵ Snyder specifically states that the myth comes from the "Shoshonean and others (Salishan peoples in the Montanas)...and the California Indians" ("Incredible Survival" 67). Coyote is one of many such figures in Native American lore like "Nanabush (Ojibway), Weesageechak (Cree), Hare

¹⁵ I specifically mention the Salish peoples because Jungels mentions the Salish in relation to the Coyote myth in Snyder's early works. I include the Pueblo because they were included in de Angulo's book "which Snyder was familiar with" (Pickett 37). The rest of the tribes are confirmed to have some form of Coyote myth, though it is unknown whether or not Snyder specifically drew from these tribes.

(Winnebago) and so on” (Shackleton 229). At times he aids the Creator God in creation but he also is a fool in that he cannot often control his amorous or physical appetites. Coyote crosses boundaries, like socio-cultural boundaries between good/bad or male/female; “some Coyote tales, for example, tell of him posing as a woman and marrying a man” (Shackleton 229). One of the boundaries he often crosses is between humanity and non-human nature because he serves as a mediator between them. As an outsider, Snyder places Coyote in desert areas, or on the periphery of rural settlements inhabited by Westerners. For the Native American tribes, Coyote represents “the Native American way of channeling archetypal force in the wilderness into human culture, with which humans live in a sense of continuity of humans and nature” (Akamine 83). Snyder’s retains that association and adds another association. Coyote also stands for “something in ourselves, which is creative unpredictable, contradictory, trickster human nature” (“Incredible Survival” 75). In the context of these two associations, Snyder often depicts Western aggression against Coyote. Snyder communicates two messages to the reader. First, the ability of humanity to responsibly connect with the ecosystemic web is threatened by Western aggression against it. When Coyote is injured or lost, the relationship between humanity and the ecosystemic community is at risk. Second, a key aspect of human nature itself is threatened by Western aggression. Therefore, Snyder’s use of Coyote represents the status of humanity’s relationship with the biosystemic environment.

Snyder’s ideal relationship between humans and the global ecosystemic community is responsible human management of the biotic community stemming from a respect for all organic life being “self-so-complete” (Takahashi 324). For Snyder, the

term “self-so-complete” relates to his understanding of “wild” and its associations with the biotic environment’s self-sufficiency. Snyder argues that humans must acknowledge the biotic community’s self-sufficiency and respect its inherent value: humans do not add value to its members. As a result, humans must not abuse the environmental landscape from which they take what they need to survive. If a human takes berries from a bush or burns brush for firewood, humans must protect the plant’s long-term interests and not take more than they need. Snyder is ultimately skeptical that humans can realize this ideal community but retains hope that it is possible in the future.

Snyder’s poetry adds three new dimensions to the study of managed arboreal spaces. First, Snyder’s historical context led him to characterize managed arboreal spaces as under imminent threat. Snyder’s historical context was a consumerist, industrialized American society which was depleting American natural resources like oil, coal, and lumber through the use of morally questionable extraction processes, like strip-mining and clear cutting. Snyder reflects human danger to the organic environment by introducing specifically human elements which try to destroy the arboreal space, sometimes successfully. While Wordsworth’s poetry argues that humans should respect nature, his work does not reflect an impending sense of environmental apocalypse, as does Snyder. With Snyder, human management of arboreal spaces shifts to an urgent call for humans to save the planet from destruction. Second, Snyder argues that, at times, one must sacrifice part of the arboreal space in order to preserve the wider organic community for a long period of time. For example, he argues that burning the brush in a forest that will prevent larger fires in the future is an essential part of human management of the forest. Sacrificial management of the arboreal space is, at times, more responsible

because it ensures the long-term survival of the entire community. Third, Snyder at times recognizes the need of humanity to use natural resources in order to survive, yet at other times he seems to imply that any use of natural resources is evil. Rather than resolve this tension, Snyder offers a generalized imperative to use what is necessary and no more.

I argue that Gary Snyder's expectations for human environmental management form a set of moral imperatives that he calls the law of nature. Snyder's law of nature guides the global ecosystemic web's operation and is a law that humans have the ability to break. The specifics of the law of nature stem from Snyder's interpretation of the Buddhist First Precept. Snyder states that "In regards to Buddhism and Zen, the First Precept 'Cause no unnecessary harm' is implicitly ecological-since it extends to all Beings" ("Professor Gary Snyder's email").¹⁶ The law of nature includes this First Precept to cause no unnecessary harm. Snyder adds that humans must actively defend the organic system from the immoral actions of other humans. If human individuals or corporations destroy members of the biotic web, humans are called to stop them. While he never explicitly states how to do so, the First Precept states that violent action is not justifiable.

Snyder emphasizes a specific application of the law of nature which is to only consume the resources of the ecosystemic web for one's ability to live. Consuming in a responsible way, that which one needs and no more, ensures that energy is exchanged between living beings and not wasted. Tan correctly interprets Snyder's interpretation of human consumption of the biotic community's resources; "living depends upon eating

¹⁶ This email is addressed to Joan Tan and is found in her book *Han Shan, Chan Buddhism, and Gary Snyder's Eco-poetic Way*, 262.

each other,” because it is a “constant exchange of energy” (Tan 164). Therefore, since humans and the biotic environment rely upon each other for survival, humans must not overconsume the resources of the biotic community or they will endanger the ability of the ecosystemic web to survive. So, when the law of nature is followed and humans consume resources responsibly, humans and non-human living beings form a peaceful biotic community. The law of nature, for Snyder, creates geocentric and inclusive biotic communities founded in the inherent connectivity and reliance of all beings on each other to survive.

Snyder also argues that the law of nature is no longer self-evident for Western consumers. Critic Won-Chung Kim argues that Snyder’s imperatives to protect the global ecosystemic web stem are “self-evident truth,” like that “to respect other life forms” (19). However, Snyder’s poetry makes it clear that these imperatives are no longer self-evident to people because of the unhealthy Western social atmosphere. Specifically, Snyder deplores Westerners’ lack of self-sufficiency, which he calls “infantilization,” or “the lack of self-reliance, personal hardiness—self-sufficiency” or “the alienation people experience in their lives and work” (*Real Work* 103). For Snyder, this lack of self-reliance and separation of one’s work from one’s self-knowledge leads to systemic abuse of the organic community through widespread, excessive consumption of the community’s resources. Due to the interference of an unhealthy social atmosphere, Snyder doubts whether or not Westerners can fully satisfy the law of nature because they no longer intuit the law of nature on their own. His poetry is, in part, an effort to re-educate us about our modest place as members in the global ecosystemic web. He tries to change our perspectives so that we voluntarily change our methods of consumption of

food, water, and high-energy resources to methods which respect the web's ability to survive.

I will analyze the poems "Front Lines," "The Call of the Wild," "Control Burn," and "To Ghost Lake" because they feature arboreal spaces that humanity attempts to manage. In these poems, forest regions in the Pacific Northwest and West Coast of the United States are either improperly managed by groups like logging companies or ignorant residents or properly managed by Native Americans. I will also analyze Snyder's presentation of a region of trees managed by the federal government in the aftermath of the eruption of Mount Saint Helens, as well as a pasture region in California. These managed arboreal spaces are zones where humans participate in the daily life of the ecosystemic web by handling the web's resources. These interactions are effective explorations of Snyder's understanding of the ideal relationship between humans and ecosystemic communities, the problems that face these communities, and how to overcome them.

Humans, in these poems, fail to respect the managed arboreal spaces each time they interact with members of the biotic community or forget to interact with the managed space at all, which the speaker juxtaposes with good management. "Front Lines" depicts the slow, daily destruction of an arboreal space which is an inversion of ideal management of an arboreal space. Snyder's language has moral overtones, particularly his use of the metaphors of murder and rape. The poem also exhorts readers to defend the biotic community's ability to survive, which defines Snyder's vision of the law of nature. I will then analyze "The Call of the Wild" because the poem features several instances of failures to properly manage arboreal spaces. This poem disapproves

of several anthropocentric approaches to human management, such a rancher killing the coyotes native to a meadow area, inhabitants allowing loggers to destroy large areas of a forest, and the American government using deadly insecticides on large forest regions. The poem also describes the resultant alienation of humanity from wilderness. I will then analyze “Control Burn,” which describes ideal human management of an arboreal space based on the law of nature, which is Snyder’s term for the moral law to defend the ecosystemic environment and not impair its ability to survive. In describing Snyder’s ideal, the poem argues that humans should manage spaces in order to maintain sustainable biodiversity. Humans should manage with an eye to the overall survival of the space, not narrowly focused on the life of one given plant. The poem, in looking to ancient Native American habitation of the arboreal space, clearly states that humans no longer manage the space well. This mismanagement endangers the ecosystemic web’s ability to survive. However, when humans respectfully manage arboreal spaces, they live as part of a larger geocentric community that also provides them with food and shelter. Lastly, I will use the poem “To Ghost Lake” to argue that Snyder has a timid hope that humans can provide respectful management of arboreal spaces which can help the biotic community flourish beyond what the community itself could do. Instead of relying on previous forms of human management, Snyder’s vision for the future, in this poem, rests on contemporary management of the arboreal region surrounding Mount Saint Helens.

Snyder’s Geocentric Ethics and Managed Arboreal Spaces

I argue that the poem “Front Lines” from *Turtle Island*, a collection entitled the “name given to this continent by Native American mythology,” presents Snyder’s

geocentric ethical vision through an extended critique of logging practices on the West Coast (Hayes 56). The poem is set in a North American forest on the West Coast of the United States in the 1970s. Unspecified land developers, escorted by American jet fighters, and a host of bulldozers push further into a forest. The bulldozers try to climb a hill looking over a gorge, destroying all of the trees as they go. All of the humans, aside from the speaker, are collectively referred to as the “pulse at the rot of the heart / In the sick fat veins of Amerika” (ll. 15-16). Instead of condemning a specific company, the speaker argues that all of American society is culpable. This stance places the speaker as a member of the threatened biotic community, an objective stance emphasized by the use of a ‘k’ rather than a ‘c’ in America which is phonetically identical but orthographically incorrect. It also mocks a form of jingoistic American rhetoric, though instead of evoking feelings of energetic patriotism, Snyder describes American society as sick and decaying like a corpse. An unspecified and distant logging company, likely hired by the land developers, send bulldozers which attempt to clear much of the trees and bushes, though Snyder does not specify whether it is for commercial purposes or for residential areas. The speaker uses metaphors of rape and assault to describe the actions of the bulldozers. The speaker ends the poem exhorting the reader to oppose the greed-fed violence of American culture.

The critic Charles Altieri argues that Snyder’s moral vision present in *Turtle Island* is not comprehensive and lacks depth: “The use of moral contrasts gives us an image of integrity that gains its value in large part from what it is not, rather than from what it can produce...we do not see any real engagement in understanding or solving the problems of others” (774). Admittedly, some of the poems in the collection like “Front

Lines” do not provide alternatives to what Snyder interprets as morally decrepit behavior. However, the purpose of these pieces is not to provide a complex system of alternative forms of treatment. Rather, the point is to indicate that there is a moral standard which humans must follow. As Hayes posits, Snyder’s major moral imperative is that we must protect other creatures from human violence (56). First, Altieri fails to acknowledge that a broadly stated moral imperative is a necessary preface to any specific, locally applied action. Snyder provides an objective measure against which one can judge any proposed alternative action. Without such a standard, there would be no way to consistently determine an appropriate alternative action to defend the ecosystemic web. Second, having a broadly stated moral imperative provides justification for people to alter their behavior. Westerners should stop certain practices of land development because it does not respect the trees’ ability to survive, which is a moral evil. Without images of what that moral evil looks like, it becomes easier to dismiss Snyder’s other exhortations. Instead of allowing people to put their claims over the claims of the ecosystemic environment, Snyder presents battered landscapes to foreground the harm we cause to the biotic community. Snyder thus forces the readers to judge their own actions, find them immoral, and begin looking for alternatives. Third, Snyder provides alternatives in other poems like “Control Burn,” which typically encourage people to use Native American or other ancient techniques for management of the biotic web. But before Snyder can effectively communicate these alternatives, he needs to show people why they are morally necessary.

Snyder uses the metaphor of rape to describe and condemn West Coast practices of logging and land development. The aggressive land developers assert their dominance

over the organic landscape by ordering it to obey them; “Landseekers, lookers, they say / To the land, / Spread your legs” (ll. 11-13). Snyder sets the command “Spread your legs” as its own line, separated both from the subject and the prepositional phrase (ll. 13). The line emphasizes an instrumental treatment of the biotic landscapes. To the land developers, the biotic landscape is a place to obtain resources, not an equal member of the global ecosystemic web. The command’s isolation from the two previous lines force the reader spend more time with the line and reinforce the association between the instrumental treatment of the biotic landscape which results in the loss of trees, bushes, and other members of the ecosystemic community, and rape.

Snyder’s separation of the representatives from the “Realty Company” into two groups allows him to associate moral failure with two attitudes of logging and land development: greed and disinterestedness (ll. 10). First, Snyder criticizes the greed of the landseekers who are willing to sacrifice the dignity of the biotic landscape for the sake of making money off of land development. Instead of responsibly taking what humans need and no more, they plan to demolish the rest of the arboreal space for the monetary interests of the vague Realty Company. Second, Snyder criticizes the “lookers,” likely land surveyors, who, according to Snyder, have no purpose there except to submit arboreal space to the management of the “landseekers.” The lookers simply look at the arboreal space, an act too superficial to engage with the biotic community on any level. Instead of physically managing the arboreal space’s ability to survive, the lookers behold it at a distance as an object to acquire rather than a living organism. Interestingly, Snyder does not use the word “watch,” which implies an attentiveness and care to detail that “look” does not communicate. So too do they then weakly “say” for the land to submit

(ll.11). There is no passion, focus, or attentiveness in their looking or in their assertions of authority. The lookers reflect an attitude of disinterestedness which leads to lazy management of the arboreal space. For Snyder, both groups are culpable in the rape of the biotic environment.

The speaker emphasizes the distance between the land developers and the arboreal space: “Landseekers, lookers, they say / To the land, / Spread your legs” (ll. 11-13). First, Snyder sets apart the prepositional phrase, “To the land,” as its own line (ll. 12). The landseekers and lookers are members of separate worlds as they are members of separate lines. Rather than join the arboreal space with respectful, physical management, they urge the arboreal space to conform to their acquisitive desires. The preposition “To” also emphasizes the lack of dialogue between the two entities. The land seekers and lookers speak *to* rather than converse *with* the arboreal space. That the humans do not converse with the arboreal space reflects emotional-psychological distance between them. Snyder also criticizes members of the logging company for detaching themselves from the process of tearing down the trees. The bulldozer operators are in the hire of “a man / From town,” who is not present at the scene (ll. 22-23). Snyder spends a full line to demonstrate the dangerous, literal remove that the businessman has from the environment he destroys. He is physically detached from the arboreal space and does not have to see the carnage of the bulldozers’ actions. The man from town has no stake in limiting the collateral damage of the bulldozers. His form of management is irresponsible and disrespectful of the ability of the biotic web to survive. Yet his physical absence does not pardon him; the bulldozers slip and slide “on top of / The skinned-up bodies of still-live bushes / In the pay of a man / From town” (ll. 20-23). Snyder criticizes the logging

practices of the humans in the poem because they lead to physical and emotional distance between humans and the biotic environment which threaten arboreal spaces. The bulldozers emblemizes and enacts this distance: it is a tool of violence wielded by a corporation that keeps itself always at a safe remove.

Snyder also condemns the uncontrollable violence of West Coast logging practices by contrasting human-biotic environment soundscapes. Sonic palates of the machine-based human labor contrast with the organic movement of air in the forest. In the second stanza, there is a momentary pause in the logging process, before the landseekers arrive, where the “trees breathe” (ll. 8). The line sonically captures this organic inhalation in the assonant stretch of the “e” sound of both words. Yet the following stanzas feature aggressive sounds which contrast with the gentle biotic soundscape. A “chainsaw growls” and a bulldozer is “grinding and slobbering / Sideslipping and belching” (ll. 16-17). These noises are invasive, aggressive and cast the machine as both dangerous predator and a disgusting, even drunken body. The chainsaw which destroys the trees growls at the arboreal space, signaling that the logging is not yet completed. The growl invites the reader to imagine the chainsaw, though only a tool, as a violent animal, barely restrained by a human guide. The bulldozer is also violently out of control “sideslipping” down the side of the hill, unable to fully control itself (ll. 19). The line continues the alliteration from the previous line, “slobbering” which, like the chainsaw, is animalistic. The alliteration carries the reader quickly along the lines as the bulldozer slides across the hill, though because it slips to the “side,” the reader senses a loss of control. The affricate ‘ch’ of belch suddenly halts the reader, which is also disorienting. The confusion created by these lines communicates the reckless nature of

the violent attack on the environmental landscape. During all of the slipping and sliding, the bulldozer grinds against the landscape, harming the biotic community.

The jets contribute to the soundscape by contrasting the previous sounds with harsher sounds that communicate a more militant atmosphere. The sound of the jets points to a desire for an excessive use of force against the ecosystemic community. The statement that “the jets crack sound overhead,” immediately follows the command by the landseekers to the land to “Spread your legs” (ll. 14, 13). Given the poems’ publication toward the end of the Vietnam War as well as the title of the poem, “the jets” suggest military fighters which are not necessary to the logging operation. The “crack” of sound features two hard ‘c’ sounds which Snyder uses to slow the reader down and imagine the presence of jets flying over the arboreal space, turning the forest into a war zone. Though not necessary, in any way, to the logging process, the jets are present to support the destruction of the biotic community and make sure the process proceeds unhindered; “The jets crack sound overhead, it’s OK here” (ll. 14). Snyder draws out the nonsensical nature of the jets’ presence by the landseekers assessment that “it’s OK here,” an ironically laconic statement in the face of brutal violence (ll. 14). The sharp contrast in sound, the calm soundscape of the biotic environment and the harsh growls of the human-led logging operation, in combination with the sonic invasion of tools of war, creates an atmosphere in which the aggressive landseekers choke out the delicate breath of the forest.

Snyder uses the metaphor of war to criticize the effect of violent logging practices on the ecosystemic web. The title “Front Lines” sets up the reader to interpret the violence in the poem as part of a war. The battle that the humans wage against this

specific arboreal space is the forefront of the American war effort against the ecosystemic environment. The bulldozers struggle, “Sideslipping and belching on top of / The skinned bodies of still-live bushes” (ll. 20-21). This imagery associates the bulldozer’s actions with violent war tactics and torture, a cruel form of management. The land developers do nothing to prevent collateral damage nor help the biotic members that they skin alive. Moreover, the speaker communicates a utilitarian understanding of the biotic community by describing the bushes as “still-live,” a present-tense verb adaption of “still-life,” a term associated with carefully arranged art pieces (ll. 21). Ironically, the still-aliveness of the maimed bushes turn this aesthetic tradition, one that arguably also robs plants of their agency, into a vision of horror. Ecocritic Lars Nordström notes that, in Snyder’s work, there are inhabitants and exploiters, where the latter “is characterized by his interest in rapid resource extraction, ruthless violence against natives or competitors who are in the way of his enterprise” (135). The human managers are exploitative rather than respectful, extracting the resources they need with no care for the collateral damage that is caused. Snyder calls the reader’s attention to the reality of West Coast logging practices and his vivid imagery of war underlines the immorality of the industry’s incursions.

The poem ultimately states that humans ought to protect it as a member of an equal community by reframing the language of war as a call to action: “here we must draw / Our line” (ll. 27-28). Through the use of “we,” these lines exhort the reader to join Snyder in defending the rest of the forest. These lines set up a dynamic contrast between a third-person description of the aggressor’s actions and a first-person view of their actions. Instead of remaining outside of all the events, Snyder’s final lines draw the reader into direct confrontation with the aggressors. The enjambment and capitalization

of “our” in the final line places the reader in a situation in which they feel compelled to protect “our” community. However, the poem does not state how to do so, nor does it provide examples of positive human management of arboreal spaces. One must look to other pieces in Snyder’s works for more subtle presentations of sustainable human environmental action.

The Law of Nature and Positive Management

Snyder uses North American traditions, specifically the Coyote figure, as a new mythic resource for imagining the ethical imperative to defend the global ecosystemic web against human encroachment. Coyote is a mythological trickster figure from several Native American tribes, especially in tribes west of the Great Plains, like the Shoshonean. However, Snyder’s poetry does not mention any specific tribe in relation to Coyote (likely because it Coyote is a common myth among several tribes). Like other trickster figures, Coyote crosses socio-cultural between good/bad or male/female; “some Coyote tales, for example, tell of him posing as a woman and marrying a man” (Shackleton 229). He also crosses between humanity and the non-human biotic web and serves as a mediator between them. Snyder uses him to serve as this mediator. Piotr Zazula argues that Snyder uses Coyote as a symbol of the wilderness both in the non-human organic environment and the capacity for wilderness within humanity; “Without wild nature’s example out there humans would not have been able to come up with the concept of being ‘natural’ within. In this sense the Coyote is not intrinsically within us, it is only potentially there and it takes a real coyote to make us aware of that” (Zazula 262-3). I agree that, for Snyder, we must be made aware of our inner wildness. However, being

made aware by a coyote of our potentiality for wildness does not help us realize it. For Snyder, Coyote helps us actualize the potentiality of which the real coyote makes us aware.

The poem consists of several vignettes of different forms of human management of arboreal spaces which do not respect the ability of the biotic community to survive. The first scene depicts a rancher who hears the Coyote, the trickster mythological figure of Native American lore, in the field he “ranchd and mined and logged,” and hires a “Government / Trapper” to get rid of him (ll. 3, 8-9). The second scene describes a group of people who try to live in an arboreal space. Yet instead of managing it in a partnership, they huddle in a geodesic dome, isolated from the wilderness, which also turns away Coyote. These people have no wish to harm the biotic community also sell trees to a logger out of ignorance and repulsion. They sold the trees because the loggers told them that “Trees are full of bugs” (ll. 38). The last scene describes the war that the American government wages on the wilderness and the entire earth, which threatens the life of Coyote. The poem ends with the speaker doubting if Coyote will always be able to survive within us, the readers.

The poem’s assertion of humanity’s moral fallibility centers on the effect of poor human management of arboreal spaces which threaten the life of Coyote. M. Bennet Smith, contemporary poetry critic, argues that the humans in the poem threaten “a relationship with the land, with animals, with other people, and with ourselves” (48). The relationship between the different members of the biotic landscape, symbolized by Coyote, is threatened by the actions of humanity. Humanity threaten to damage, or even eliminate the relationship entirely. Although the children listen to the “coyote,” the man

calls a government trapper to kill the coyote: “He will call the Government / Trapper / who uses iron leg-traps on Coyotes” (ll. 10-12). The ranch owner cannot tolerate the existence of certain members of the organic system, let alone interaction with those members. So he calls a member of the government to kill the animal, though the “iron leg-traps” brutally will not kill the coyote immediately; it will have to suffer pain and a mangled leg before being shot. The iron trap, like the bulldozer, becomes too a symbol of a land management that severs the connectedness of humans and the broader ecosystem.

The stakes of poor human management of biotic communities are higher for Snyder as they are for Wordsworth; “Unless humans can learn to establish relationships and to rediscover the ancient stories, understandings, and ways of the people that Coyote represents, those ideas will die, and their loss represents a misunderstanding of what it means even to be human” (Smith 48). Coyote represents the knowledge, traditions, and way of life of the Native American people of the region and thus his death also symbolizes the possible loss of that geocentric wisdom. Snyder’s depiction of Coyote in the poem emphasizes the importance of the relationship between the vaguely defined Native Americans and the ecosystemic web. Snyder encourages the readers to seek out what Coyote means in order to repair relationship between humanity and the global ecosystemic web. Otherwise, Snyder argues, humanity will lose the knowledge of how to interact, respectfully, with the biotic community and lose part of what it means to be a human being.

However, the poem does not detail what the way of Coyote means for geocentric, human management of arboreal spaces. Instead, Snyder provides examples of how *not* to manage biotic communities. He critiques several examples of anthropocentric human

management which oppose the moral ideal of geocentric human interaction with the organic system. The speaker in the second scene criticizes misguided people who try to enter into a daily relationship with the biotic community by living in the woods. Their willingness to exchange their principles of living in the biotic environment for profit constitutes poor management of their arboreal space. While the speaker accords ownership of the trees to them, “their virgin cedar trees,” they do not take responsibility for protecting the grove (ll. 30). Rather they sell their trees to the logger due to a comedic revulsion against bugs. The virginity of the trees is also significant. First, Snyder later uses this term, “Virgin Forest,” in his prose work, *Practice of the Wild*, in regards to “the primeval forest of the West Coast—in its densest and most concentrate incarnation” (127). The arboreal space in the poem used to be like the ancient virgin forests, untouched by man. Second, “virgin” implies that the inhabitants were supposed to protect their purity and that the logger will rape the natural landscape by logging the trees (ll. 30). Rather than defend the arboreal space from the threat of aggressors, the geodesic dome community quickly gives up their commitment to manage the arboreal space. Timothy Gray, a Snyder critic, writes that these inhabitants are “spiritualists changing swamis and gurus on a swim have been less than steadfast in their commitment to Eastern religious practices. As a result, they have forsaken the cooperative vision necessary for a sustainable life in the postfrontier West” (279). The difficult lifestyle of protecting the innocence of the cedar trees proves too much for this group, so they sell out to an abusive system of consumerism in exchange for a hermetically sealed lifestyle away from the messy trees. The specific mention of cedar trees is likely a reference to one of the species of Cedars on the West Coast like the “Western Red Cedar” of the Pacific Northwest

(*POW* 128). The specific species of tree makes the actions of the inhabitants more concrete and less theoretical. The inhabitants do not give up “trees,” in general, but a specific group of cedars. The cedars were “the tallest trees in miles,” a quality which represents the value that those trees brought to the ecosystemic community. This specificity helps the reader criticize the inhabitants for not only permitting the destruction of the trees but also threatening the biodiversity of the region mentioned in the poem. The inhabitants both abandon management of the arboreal region in exchange for money and allow logging to threaten the biodiversity of the region.

Snyder further criticizes the inhabitants’ management in his depiction of their home. Snyder says that they live in “oil heated / Geodesic domes, that / Were stuck like warts / In the woods” (ll. 21-24). The homes are unhealthy growths in the organic landscape which reflect the inhabitants’ lack of integration with the non-human landscape. Snyder implies that this is not a truly sustainable manner of living. Rather than live in isolation in the midst of the wilderness, one must engage with the ecosystemic web by caring for it and actively protecting it from that which threatens its ability to survive. While the inhabitants ostensibly refuse to harm the biotic environment, they heat their homes with oil, a fossil fuel. Snyder, in his essay “Four Changes” in *Turtle Island*, argues that “Man’s careless use of ‘resources’ and his total dependence on certain substances such as fossil fuels...are having harmful effects on all the other members of the life-network” (169). Snyder argues that the excessive use of fossil fuels because of the harmful effects that this level of use has on other members of the global ecosystemic web. Management needs to respect the ability of all of the ecosystemic community to survive and this respect needs to include protection against indirect threats to any specific

managed space. However, Snyder does not provide an alternative for the inhabitants by criticizing the use of oil and the use of wood. He condemns both resources for different reasons, indicating to the reader that Snyder cannot here provide an alternative.

Snyder also disapproves of the lust for control in the inhabitants' management of the arboreal space. Because the inhabitants are ignorant of the lack of order in the biotic community, they do whatever they can to rationally control their interactions with the ecosystemic web. Hence they "shut away" Coyote who was singing "the call / of the wild" (ll. 31, 33-34). The inhabitants controlled Coyote by putting him somewhere where they could not hear his wild song that threatens their orderly, controlled way of life. Locking Coyote up represent attempts to avoid the uncontrollable wild. Even their dreams are of "blissful sexless highs," a strangely dispassionate, non-bodily fantasy. Snyder describes the high as "sexless" because it lacks passion, energy, or visceral delight (ll. 25). According to American literature critic Rod Phillips, Snyder's understanding of sexuality expresses "the desire for an intimacy, for a oneness with the natural world" (34). Sexuality and physical intimacy is an apt analogy for the type of a-rational and passionate way of life that Snyder imagines in "wild" biotic communities. The inhabitants' dreams of "sexless bliss" therefore reflect their desire for controlled interactions with the biotic landscape. The inhabitants prefer a peaceful high in an isolated dome to a physical, active engagement with the arboreal space. Snyder argues that their desire for control leads them to avoid the physical reality and agency of the ecosystemic web and the uncontrollable nature of certain aspects of the arboreal space.

Snyder also decries the ignorance of the geodesic dome inhabitants about the arboreal space they manage. The inhabitants of the geodesic domes are convinced by a

logger that “Trees are full of bugs” (ll. 38). Instead of responding with a richer understanding of the interaction of insects and trees, or differentiating between harmful and helpful insects, the inhabitants believe the loggers. Snyder elsewhere argues against the ignorance of Western society about the ecosystemic web, “there is an almost self-congratulatory *ignorance* of the natural world that is pervasive in Euro-American business, political, and religious circles. Nature is orderly. That which appears to be chaotic in nature is only a more complex kind of order” (*POW* 93). The inhabitants believed that bugs should stay outside of trees, in an orderly fashion, and so gave up when they broke from their orderly understanding of the biotic community. For Snyder, the global ecosystemic web is wild and disorderly and criticizes the inhabitants of the geodesic domes for being ignorant of the ecosystemic web they live in. Snyder argues that one must study one’s environment in order to manage it well. Their ignorance contributed to their abandonment of the arboreal space and contributes to their culpability.

Snyder ends the poem with little hope for reconciliation and a geocentric community in the future. Unlike Wordsworth, who ends the poem “Nutting” with a recognition of a spirit or understanding of the biotic community’s inherent value, here the poem ends with a declaration of Coyote’s mortality. At the end of the final scene where Americans wage literal war against the earth, the speaker states “there’ll be / no place / A Coyote could hide / *envoy* / I would like to say / Coyote is forever / Inside you. / But it’s not true” (ll. 62-69). The ability of humanity to interact with the wild ecosystemic web and create geocentric communities is threatened by America’s “war against earth” (ll. 61). Americans “bomb and they bomb/ Day after day, across the planet” (ll.49-50).

Snyder states that the war is against other humans as against the earth itself. This poem was published in 1974, near the conclusion of the Vietnam War. During the war, the American military used several forms of herbicides and biological weapons to destroy forested areas and crops (Sills 102). In addition to the destruction of portions of the Asian ecosystem, the poem expands the destructive habits of American society to the entire globe. Life itself is threatened by American military aggression and societal habits. The message or “*envoy*” that Snyder directs to us as readers is that the Coyote will not live forever because of the actions of American society against the earth as a whole, exemplified in the poor management of arboreal spaces as seen in earlier vignettes. Because Coyote is threatened, the ability of humanity to connect to our inner wildness is also in danger. Without Coyote as mediator, humans may permanently lose the ability to be wild. This poem creates a sense of urgency for readers to act out the moral law by protecting the ability of arboreal spaces and biotic communities to survive through positive forms of management. However, the poem does not provide any positive examples of management, leaving the reader wondering how to ideally manage arboreal spaces.

Ideal Human Management of Arboreal Spaces and the Source of the Moral Law

The poem “Control Burn” from *Turtle Island* exemplifies Snyder’s ideal vision of geocentric, human management of arboreal spaces. The poem takes place in a North American forest on the West Coast of the United States. The speaker begins by reflecting on how the Native American tribes of the region used to take care of the forest when they lived there. The speaker argues that they made small fires made up of brush, manzanita

bushes, and other forms of underbrush so as to keep the tall trees clear of underbrush. The trees could grow then without hindrance. The poem shifts after the first stanza to the speaker's present situation where no one takes care of the forest. The speaker states that he would like to have a "control burn" of the underbrush so as to protect the forest from a massive forest fire. The speaker adds an aside that "(manzanita seeds will only open / after a fire passes over / or once passed through a bear)" (ll. 25-27). While the bushes would ultimately grow again only to be burned, the speaker presents the opening of the seeds positively. Having this small fire will restore the law of nature and the land to what it was like under the Native American rule. These tribes managed the regions for both their own sake, in order to eat the berries, which also ensured that the biotic community would continue to live. Snyder's ideal human management entails a respect for the biotic community's ability to survive acted out through proactive works which ensure the biotic community's lasting health.

Snyder criticizes modern human management of these arboreal spaces because "manzanita...crowds up under the new trees / mixed up with logging slash / and a fire can wipe out all" (ll. 12, 14-16). Humans do not manage the space so as to reduce overgrowth and thus contemporary human management and logging leaves the arboreal space susceptible to complete destruction. According to the speaker, the Native American tribes used to "burn out the brush every year. / in the woods, up the gorges, / keeping the oak and pine stands / tall and clear" (ll. 4-7). The tribes regularly attended to the needs of the arboreal space and managed them so as to ensure they would not be susceptible to mass destruction and death. They protected one of their food supplies and respected the ecosystemic web's ability to survive at the same time through controlled burns.

Snyder views good human management, like that of the Native Americans, as part of the order of interactions between humans and the biotic community. Hence the speaker wants to restore “a sense of helpful order, / with respect for laws / of nature, / to help my land / with a burn. a hot clean / burn” (ll. 19-23). Snyder’s speaker wants to manage the arboreal space by doing what seems counterintuitive. However, the speaker already demonstrated in the first stanza that this small-scale burn ultimately protects the forest from a large, raging forest fire. Because such a small-scale fire to clear the underbrush would not cause a massive fire it would be “clean,” that would burn quickly and die out (ll. 22). Not only would the fire protect the land, it would also help grow more manzanita trees. The fire is not reckless or uncontrolled like the bulldozers. Immediately following these lines, the speaker informs the reader that “manzanita seeds will only open / after a fire passes over / or once passed through a bear” (ll. 24-26). The fire will open up the seeds and provide opportunities for more manzanita bushes to grow later. Susan E. Meyer, a research ecologist, confirms that “most species of manzanita grow only after fire” (268). Burning the brush will not only protect the forest as a whole but will also help it grow, allowing new life to develop. Thus human fire management is the primary way to reproduce manzanita.

Snyder also argues that the Native American form of sacrificial management is ideal because it returns the forest to a past, idyllic state. The brush burn is ideal because it would return the forest to what it was like “when it belonged to the Indians” (ll. 30). This idyllic state curbed dangerous situations from threatening the arboreal space and required routine action on behalf of the humans in order to continually prevent the brush from building up. For Snyder, both the land and the land manager conform to the ideal.

Humans sacrifice the brush so as to ensure the forest's survival and the arboreal space is able to survive without the threat of a large forest fire. The Klickitat, from south-central Washington, burned brush in this way, in order to preserve the resources of the "prairie habitats" (Norton et. al 67). Other tribes along the West Coast and Northwest United States held fires "in valley grasslands and adjacent dry forests" (Barrett and Arno 58). While difficult to determine what specific tribe, Snyder points to a common practice among Native American tribes of the region. This form of fire management follows the law of nature and return the arboreal space to an ideal former state.

Snyder expects humans to manage the arboreal space by maintaining the ability of the ecosystemic web to survive. In doing so humans will satisfy the law of nature. The speaker of the poem, unlike the speaker in "Front Lines," provides a vision for the future and hopes to apply methods from the Native Americans to the contemporary American context, as ecocritic Lars Nordström notes. The controlled burn that Snyder's speaker suggests would "reestablish an aspect of the past once again in the future" (Nordström 138). Nordström argues that the control burn would help humans better understand the geocentric relationship that the Native Americans had with the biotic community and apply that to current and future human management. The poem thus provides direction by looking back to the past for how humans can manage arboreal spaces in a way which provides for human needs while respecting the biotic community's ability to survive. Unlike Wordsworth, Snyder's vision of the moral law requires positive action in defense of the biotic community as well as a negative exhortation to not harm the biotic community, resulting in a moral law which is more defined and more difficult to satisfy. Because Snyder describes more dire threats to the global ecosystemic web than

Wordsworth does, humans need to do more to protect the ability of the ecosystemic web to survive. Snyder also rejects several forms of human management of arboreal spaces throughout his poetry. Routine, sacrificial management of arboreal spaces is a way to satisfy Snyder's law of nature, though it is not the only way. Therefore, Snyder's moral law is more difficult to satisfy than Wordsworth's moral law.

Mixed Hope for the Future

"To Ghost Lake," a prose poem, presents the practical result of Snyder's ideal human management of arboreal spaces: the arboreal space develops better and healthier than it would otherwise. The poem discusses the aftermath of the Mount Saint Helen's volcanic eruption on the surrounding region. The speaker, Snyder, describes his journey throughout the region around Mount Saint Helens, driving around Cowlitz Valley, eating at a diner, and spending the night at a campground near the Cispus River. The next stanza features his walk around the Cispus River and driving to Mount Saint Helens. He stops at what he calls the Blast Zone, the area where the volcano's blast knocked down every tree and laid everything flat. He walks from the Blast Zone through the progressively more dense wooded areas until he reaches the untouched forests which stretch further away from the crater. The speaker notes that right next to the crater, there is no regrowth and is like a desert. He leaves the mountain and drives to the Green River valley where, after noting an arrow was shot into a tree, comments on the difference between an "ecological zone" and a "planted zone" (pp. 17). The ecological zone is part of the Volcanic Monument which was unmanaged and the planted zone was a forest that was logged and then replanted with more trees which grew thicker and taller than the ecological zone.

The speaker then reflects on the night he spends camped overnight on a ridgetop. Then he introduces a new character, Fred, and notes that they talk about definitions of old, restored, new, and original. The speaker tells Fred about his time in Japan but notes that when they discuss “forests, eruptions, and the balance of economy and ecology,” he “only listens” (pp. 18). Snyder adds five verse lines about what he sees in the early morning like the sun and the crater summit of Mount Saint Helens. The speaker ends the poem approaching Ghost Lake. He adds a stanza of verse in which he notes the dust on his feet, the sounds of his shoes and ends the poem by stating he remembers what it was like in the same region when he worked for the Forest Service, before the explosion, when the area around the Lake, and he, were “both green” (pp.18).

Snyder argues that if people follow the moral law to its end, the global biotic community grows and develops in a healthy way which improves its ability to survive. Paige Tovey argues that “In the case of the Mount Saint Helens eruption, Snyder finds opportunity to observe both natural and human-aided rejuvenation of the land, as the Green River valley provides a boundary between managed and unmanaged land in the blast zone” of the volcano’s eruption (180). Snyder argues that human management of arboreal spaces, when it follows the moral law, can help the trees grow beyond what they, by itself, could do: “In the natural succession blast zone the conifers are rising—not quite tall enough to shade out down logs and flowers but clearly flourishing. But over in the ‘planted’ zone it’s striking to see how much taller and denser the growing plantation is” (pp. 17). The land, Snyder argues, which flourishes on its own, does better when humans manage the space. The loggers cleared away the dead trees so as to allow for more trees to grow. Logging, in this context, is not a purely evil method of killing all of the biotic

environment. Instead, it is a way that humans help the biotic environment regrow decades after the volcano's eruption. While many of Snyder's other poems in *Turtle Island* feature humanity as a menace and threat to the ability of the ecosystemic web to survive, "To Ghost Lake" lacks this interpretation of humanity. The primary human presence is that of healing. For Snyder, impact of human arboreal management reveals the "possibility of humanity's own strength and ability to help along the land's restoration" (Tovey 180). Human management of arboreal spaces, which follows the law of nature, can help restore the biotic community to the way it was before, under the management of the Native Americans, like in "Control Burn."

However, Snyder balances this positive understanding of human management with a patience for the "ecological zone" to, at some point in the future, to grow: "Well, no surprise. Wild natural process takes time, and allows for the odd and unexpected. We still know far too little about it" (pp. 17). Snyder's hesitation seems to support the idea that the biotic environment is better off without any human activity. Indeed, Snyder states that true wild-ness lacks human organization of the organic environment (*POW* 10). However, the speaker argues that it is too early to judge whether or not human replanting of the arboreal space is superior to the natural succession of the "ecological zone." He argues that "wild natural process takes time" and suggests that at some point, something healthier or more beautiful will grow out of the "ecological zone" than the replanted arboreal space. Snyder thus withholds judging the entire human management project as an incredible display of human power, qualifying the achievement of human management of the arboreal space.

Snyder recalls the state of the ecosystemic web before the volcano's eruption, expressing a hope for it to grow in the future: "I worked in this lake in '49 / both green then" (ll. 10-11, pp. 18). Snyder's use of the word "green" applies two understandings to the poem. First, green is used in context of the health of the biotic community in 1949. Then, Snyder recollects, the biotic community had not yet suffered from the explosion and was thriving. In this interpretation of green, "To Ghost Lake" honors the parts of the ecosystemic web that were destroyed in the explosion. The second interpretation of green, in describing personal lack of experience or wisdom, sheds a different light on the explosion. The speaker no longer sees himself as green, or inexperienced, acknowledging the skills and experiences he has gained since 1949. This acknowledgement of that which he has learned, and that he is still alive, parallels the ecosystemic landscape's experience of enduring the volcanic blast. Now that the biotic community is no longer green, in terms of experience, it can potentially grow better than it did before the explosion. This second interpretation is reinforced by the resilience of some of the plant life that the speaker points out, which "stiffly shaking in the same old breeze" (ll. 2 pp. 17). While the plant shakes, it does so stiffly. There is a stubbornness in the plant's shaking in the wind that indicates a will to survive in spite of the past explosion. This tenacity to live suggests that the biotic community will ultimately thrive. There is therefore a hope for the biotic community to grow healthier and stronger as a result of the earthquake.

While the explosion is a natural event, Snyder also recognizes that the volcano destroyed wide swath of trees and flattened an entire region around the crater, called the "Blast Zone," destroying members of the biotic community (pp. 16). Snyder's hope for restoration through human management provides a direction and vision for the future

based on contemporary, real human management. He finds hope in the present to realize a vision which stems from his knowledge and experience of the past.

Snyder's poetry has moral imperatives to not impair the global biotic community's ability to survive and protect the community from harmful external factors. The moral imperatives form the law of nature whose basis is the Buddhist moral law of *karma*, which acknowledges that human actions can be morally judged. However, Snyder does not say whether morality is based on the consequences of human actions or the actions themselves. Snyder, like Wordsworth, raises the ecosystemic web to the level of humanity and argues that they are jointly connected as part of a geocentric community of living beings. Snyder argues that if humanity follows the law of nature, a geocentric community will physically exist. Snyder's vision for this community's actualization has roots in present human management of certain arboreal spaces. Snyder believes that humanity has the capability to permanently destroy certain arboreal spaces as well as the capability to restore and heal arboreal spaces through respectful management.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion: Responsible Management in Our Time

Between 2009 and 2010, my family built a house in the Post Oak Belt region of Texas. In searching out lots of land to buy, we decided to purchase a small portion of our neighbor's ranch, entirely covered with trees, and build our house there. In order to clear enough space for the project, we had to go through three processes. First, my three brothers and I had to clear a path through the brush to determine the limits of our plot of land. This process removed dozens of native yaupon bushes. Second, we had to clear enough space for a small guesthouse, which required both the removal of a few dozen yaupon bushes but smaller trees as well. The last process cleared land for the house's foundation, for which we hired a bulldozer operator to take down several large, old oak and elm trees. Was this the right thing to do? As stewards of the environment, how should my family build a sustainable biotic community on the land?

Wordsworth and Snyder function as felicitous conversation partners for thinking through specific questions of land management like these. Literature helps us think through these real, difficult environmental issues because, as ecocritic Greg Garrard writes, environmental problems "are the outcome of an interaction between ecological knowledge of nature and its cultural inflection" like environmental poetry (14). Lawrence Buell argues that "environmental crisis involves a crisis of the imagination," which means that we should focus on "finding better ways of imagining nature" (*Environmental Imagination* 2). As such, environmental problems are not simply scientific or ecological

in nature. Along with these ecocritics, I argue that we should use literature to address our personal and cultural difficulties with environmental issues. According to ecocritic Cheryll Glotfelty, ecocriticism is “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment,” and is geared towards answering environmental questions, for it “shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it” and thus “does not float above the material world in some aesthetic ether, but, rather, play as part in an immensely complex global system, in which energy, matter, *and ideas* interact” (xviii, xlx). Literature, particularly ecocentric literature, deals with nature’s physical reality and guides us into new ways of understanding nature which can positively impact how we imagine and, as a result, how we interact with the non-human world.

These two different authors, Wordsworth and Snyder, offer us useful tools to repair our environmental imagination. Wordsworth gives us a program for refining our acts of perceiving the natural world and Snyder erases the human/nature divide through his focus on wildness. Wordsworth helps us better understand the necessity of personal interaction with the natural environment in order to repair the perceptual damage that we, as humans, have suffered. He offers us a way to reorient our senses so that we can better understand both human nature and the green world around us. Snyder pushes his readers to understand the interconnectedness of all living beings. Nature, or the ecosystemic web, is inherently wild because it is entirely inclusive and self-sufficient, whereas human habitations like cities are inherently not wild because they are exclusive and harmfully extractive. As a result of our self-imposed separation from nature, we humans have lost our inner wildness. Snyder thus argues that we must engage in moral management before

we can reacquire a lost condition of wildness. Without this sense of wildness, we will continue to understand ourselves as humans as fundamentally separate from our world and remain divorced from a better, more ancient self-understanding. Taken together, these two poets turn us away from anthropocentrism to see ourselves as members of a wider community of living beings.

For Wordsworth, humans have lost their ability to use their perceptual senses to gain more than superficial pleasure or entertainment from nature thereby marking the loss of a key element of the human experience. Since his understanding of nature depends on a shifting vision of a divinized nature and a divine spirit *in* nature, his efforts to restore our perceptions necessitate consistent, significant interaction with this nature, in order to connect with the spiritual presence it manifests. However, Wordsworth only vaguely describes the type of human-nature interaction that is required to restore one's senses. Sensory restoration seems to be a product of contemplatively walking through the woods, reading and imitating the works of Wordsworth, the prophet-poet of nature, and getting older (that is, gaining more life experience or enduring hardship). Importantly, Wordsworth argues that humans must have refined perceptions and the help of the spiritual presence in nature in order to act morally. As Wordsworth states in *Tintern Abbey*, it is "In nature and the language of the sense" that he finds the "guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul / Of all my moral being" (ll. 109, 111-112). Wordsworth positions the spirit as embodiment of the life and interests of the natural environment. This divine presence in (or through) nature is thus the ground of Wordsworth's morality. The spiritual presence in nature thus plays a paramount role in the restoration of human perception and in the functional pursuit of the moral law.

For Snyder, humans have lost a former condition of their humanity: wildness. This loss of wildness stems from a false sense of hierarchy that humans have inculcated by separating themselves from nature. Critic Robert Harrison argues that Western civilization has historically supported a human/forest dualism. Harrison wonders why “the mythic forests of antiquity stand opposed to the city,” like in Virgil’s *Aeneid*, where the forests are described by Evander as both a source of origin and of hostility to Rome (2). Snyder criticizes Western civilization for perpetuating the problematic separation from nature emblemized by this ongoing antagonism to forests. Snyder specifically laments the loss of human-nature relationships that Native Americans had with the land before American expansion westward. He thus criticizes Westerners for placing their concerns above those of nature and excluding nature from urban communities, particularly in the massive urban sprawl seen in America and across the world. The historical exclusion of nature from the urban environment is antithetical to Snyder’s belief in the equality and interconnectedness of all living things. In order to correct the situation, Snyder argues that we must compassionately manage our forests *before* reacquiring the wildness we have lost. Snyder also posits that people, on their own can work to repair their relationship with the ecosystemic web though he is not optimistic about our ability to do so. Instead of relying on a spiritual presence to guide moral behavior, Snyder relies on humans to inform themselves as to contemporary environmental issues and to understand the consequences of a commercial, resource-devouring society. The poet-shaman’s role is to assist in this education. Once that relationship is repaired, then humans can regain their lost wildness. They will once again live self-sufficiently and inclusively with nature, as opposed to trying to separate

themselves from nature. Thus, the end result of Snyder's interpretation of moral treatment of arboreal spaces is the creation of a geocentric community in which humans ensure nature's survival as well as their own.

There is no agreed-upon way among environmentalists on how to proceed in human-nature interactions in our forests, our cities, and our biosphere. Managed arboreal spaces turn us towards questions of other places where humanity and nature come into dynamic contact, like the neglected zone of the city, where 80% of Americans reside ("Growth in Urban Population"). Contemporary forms of urban development pose many problems to the biotic community, as it currently eliminates "some trees and forests, it also increases population density, human activities, and urban infrastructure which can affect forests and their management" (*U.S. Forest Resource* 11). However, there is a great deal of contention in the United States as to how environmentalism should proceed in regards to city spaces.¹⁷ Some environmentalists, like Martin Lewis, argue that restoring the health of the environment does not necessitate a rejection of the urban environment nor technology-based management, instead urging humans to cling to "the path of technological progress" (251). Though, as Garrard notes, Lewis defends densely-populated urban spaces and not "suburban sprawl or exurban flight" for the purported environmental efficiency of larger cities (20).

However, as Eoin Cannon writes, there are environmentalist groups that are openly hostile to the city and argue that people should reject urban life and technology-

¹⁷ Other environmentalists, like Garrett Hardin, argue that there is no need for an encompassing environmental response. He proposes that "to keep the high-consumption energy-intensive urban-industrial system afloat, aid to underdeveloped countries must cease" and that "there is no alternative to increased management and control of Nature" (Devall and Sessions 53).

dependent living (62). These environmentalists agree with writers like economist Joan Martínez-Alier who say that “Cities are not environmentally sustainable: by definition, their territory is too densely populated with humans to be self-supporting” (50). In order to reduce the impact of urban spaces on natural environments, some environmentalists go so far as to argue that “the flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease” (Devall and Sessions 70). How humans are to reach this decrease in population is also up for debate. Some argue for reduced procreation rates to reduce the population while other movements like the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement urge humans to entirely halt human procreation to achieve a human population of zero people (Knight).

Wordsworth’s view of the city is a reconciliation of two attitudes, despair and possibility. He famously wrote in book seven of *The Prelude* against the city, criticizing the excessive noise, distractions, and fleeting entertainment for leading to the degradation of human sensory perception and imagination. Wordsworth calls London’s St. Bartholomew’s fair, “A work that’s finished to our hands, that lays, / If any spectacle on earth can do, / The whole creative powers of man asleep,” calling it “a hell / For eyes and ears” (VII.653-655, 659-660). As a result of Wordsworth’s belief in the connection of perception to moral behavior, there are subsequent complications for the ability of humans to act morally to other humans and nature in a loud, crowded urban environment.¹⁸ Wordsworth also reflects on the commercialization and trivialization of

¹⁸ Wordsworth’s speaker almost misses a poor beggar because of the city’s fast-paced life: “Amidst the moving pageant, ‘twas my chance / Abruptly to be smitten with the view / Of a blind beggar, who, with upright face, / Stood propped against a wall” and upon reading the sign upon his chest, the

nature in the city in the poem “Stargazers,” where a group of thrill-seeking city-dwellers pay a showman to look through his telescope at the night sky. Once they have spent their allotted amount of time, the customers walk away. Instead of dwelling closely with nature, these customers pay to look through a telescope to see the night sky as if it is merely a show. The speaker contrasts the anxious anticipation of each customer before they look through the telescope with their walk away from it, “as if dissatisfied” (ll. 32). Here, Wordsworth criticizes how humans interact with nature, not as an equal member of a community but as a commodity or as a form of public entertainment. Yet Wordsworth does not abandon hope for the integration of nature and humanity in the city. In the poem “Poor Susan,” a poor girl who walks through the streets of London and comes across a thrush. While listening to the thrush’s song she has a dream of her idyllic childhood in the country: “a single small cottage, a nest like a dove’s, / The only one dwelling on earth that she loves. / She looks, and her heart is in Heaven, but they fade” (ll. 11-13).¹⁹ While the reverie is momentary, a member of nature reaches down to her and gives her a moment of redemption amidst a life of urban poverty.

Snyder expresses no hope for humans and nature to exist together in the urban environment because humans provide no room for nature to act in the city. In the poem “Walking the New York Bedrock,” from the extended poem *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, Snyder illustrates how humans limit nature’s actions and impede its ability

speaker believes that “in this label was a type / Or emblem of the utmost that we know / Both of ourselves and of the universe” (VII.610-613, 618-620).

¹⁹ It is worth noting that Susan has been interpreted differently. David Simpson argues she is a poor girl forced into prostitution. (84). Adela Pinch argues she is simply a representation of the fantastical, “popular poetry of the day,” which she argues will “return to the realm of the social” as Susan does at the end of her reverie (17). I interpret Susan as a poor girl though she is not necessarily a prostitute.

to survive. For example, helicopters flying around the urban landscape are found “Trading pollen and nectar / In the air” (ll. 82-83). On one hand, there is pollen and nectar, which is representative of plants’ procreative process. In this sense, Snyder shows that the city is natural, according to his definition. But there is the obvious problem of a mechanized helicopter interfering with the job of bees or other insects to effectively fertilize plants. Ultimately, the plants will not be able to reproduce. The only movement that nature is allowed is to “shiver in breezes,” as trees are “planted” and fixed in the middle of the sterile cityscape (ll. 79, 41). Humans allow nature into the cityscape to the extent that they can control it, supporting an atmosphere of exclusivity, which contradicts Snyder’s understanding of wildness. Human action precludes the possibility of a human-nature community in the city. Snyder has no hope for an urban human-nature community. For us, as readers of Wordsworth and Snyder, it is important to recognize the dangers that the city poses to human perception and our ability to connect with nature. I do not think that living in the urban environment is inherently evil. I agree with Wordsworth that moral treatment of nature is possible in the city. However, this attitude must be tempered with a recognition that noise, movement, and a large number of people can facilitate barriers to peaceful interaction with the members of nature. Moving forward, I argue that the creation of green spaces in the city is necessary but not sufficient to addressing the issues that the poets present. It is also necessary to encourage and facilitate a way of life for those in the city which includes rest away from the city so as to develop mature sensory faculties.

So I return to the story of my family building a house in the woods. This seems to be the kind of answer both Wordsworth and Snyder would propose, that humans should

flee our urban centers to live with the land. But such a life raises new questions of management such as when my family cleared over a dozen oak and elm trees to make room for the house. Was this morally acceptable? This becomes more problematic when we consider that there were other places we could have built our house. The land we bought was near several tracts of land and open pastures that we could have purchased as well as plenty of apartments closer to town. We built our house where we did because the house would be in a “nice location.” As I researched and wrote my thesis, I wondered whether, like Wordsworth’s speaker in “Nutting,” my family unnecessarily removed a great deal of the biotic community that was present. Rather than try and participate in the life of the biotic community and perhaps regain some lost sense of perception, it seems to me like we imposed our own sense of order and structure on the arboreal space, like the land developers in “Front Lines.” Yet this arboreal space protected us from the infrequent, vicious winds and storms that come through the area, providing us with necessary shelter. I cannot unilaterally condemn my family for trying to find shelter. However, my research suggests that we prioritized our personal, aesthetic preferences over the ability of nature to survive when we decided where to build our shelter. If this is so, then the poetry of these two authors gives me a frame to interpret my family’s poor management of our arboreal space which would further serve as evidence for the value of poetry in assisting our environmental imagination. While I do not think that this poetry has the last word on determining the morality of our actions towards nature, I think that it can help us better enter into the life of nature and learn how to live with it.

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