

Poems selected from the work of Gary Snyder

From *Turtle Island*, 1974

ANASAZI

Anasazi,
Anasazi,

tucked up in clefts in the cliffs
growing strict fields of corn and beans
sinking keeper and deeper in earth
up to your hips in gods
 your head all turned to eagle-down
 & lightning for knees and elbows
your eyes full of pollen

 the smell of bats.
 the flavor of sandstone
 grit on the tongue.

al the foot of ladders in the dark.

trickling streams in hidden canyons
under the cold rolling desert

corn-basket wide-eyed
 red baby
 rock lip home,

Anasazi

I WENT INTO THE MAVERICK BAR

I went into the Maverick Bar
In Farmington, New Mexico.
And drank double shots of bourbon
 backed by beer.
My long hair was tucked up under a cap
I'd left the earring in the car.

Two cowboys did horseplay
 by the pool tables,

A waitress asked us
 where are you from?
a country-and-western ban begin to play
“We don’t smoke Marijuana in Muskokie”
And with the next song,
 a couple began to dance.

They held each other like in High School dances
 in the fifties;
I recalled when I worked in the woods
 and the bars of Madras, Oregon.
That short-haired joy and roughness—
 America—your stupidity.
I could almost love you again.

We left—onto the freeway shoulders—
 under the tough old stars—

In the shadow of bluffs
 I came back to myself,
To the real work, to
 “What is to be done.”

TWO FAWNS THAT DIDN’T SEE THE LIGHT THIS SPRING

A friend in a tipi in the
Northern Rockies went out
hunting white tail with a
.22 and crept up on a few
day-bedded, sleeping, shot
what he thought was a buck.
“It was a doe, and she was
carrying a fawn.”
He cured the meat without
salt; sliced it following the
grain.

A friend in the Northern Sierra
hit a doe with her car. It
walked out calmly in the lights,
“And when we butchered her
there was a fawn—about so long—
so tiny—but all formed and right.
It had spots. And the little
hooves were soft and white.”

“ONE SHOULD NOT TALK TO A SKILLED HUNTER ABOUT WHAT IS FORBIDDEN BY
THE BUDDHA”

—Hsiang-yen

A gray fox, female, none pounds three ounces.
39 5/8” long with tail.
Peeling skin back (Kai
reminded us to chant the *Shingyo* first)
cold pelt, crinkle; and musky smell
mixed with dead-body odor starting.

Stomach content; a whole ground squirrel well chewed
plus one lizard foot
and somewhere from inside the ground squirrel
a bit of aluminum foil.

The secret,
and the secret hidden deep in that.

O WATERS

O waters
wash us, me,
under the wrinkled granite
straight up slab,

and sitting by camp in the pine shade
Nanao sleeping,
mountains humming and crumbling
snowfields melting
soil
building on tiny ledges
for wild onions and the flowers

Blue
Polemonium

great
earth
sangha

Digression: Poems selected from Nanao Sakaki's *Break the Mirror*

SHARPENING A KNIFE

Nanao, keep your knife clean
Nanao, keep your mind clean

Sea breeze is bad for a knife they say
Sea breeze is good for a mind they say

Sea breeze not bad for a knife
Sharpen your knife, that's all

Sea breeze neither bad no good
The ocean is a whetstone for mind

A clean knife mind
A clean mind ocean
Nanao, sleep well tonight
Blossoming crinum lily as a shelter
The coral sand beach as a bed
The Southern Cross as a pillow.

ALL OVER THE WORLD

London tower of nightmare.

New York mental hospital.

Tokyo slave market.

Los Angeles ghost town.

Kalamazoo, Michigan

one of the first American cities to close streets
for a pedestrian shopping mall.

Taos, New Mexico

construction of
a giant supermarket commences.

Taos Mountain

an idiot
sits on a lotus flower
all day long
in a tipi.

From *Axe Handles*, 1983

REMOVING THE PLATE OF THE PUMP HYDRAULIC SYSTEM OF THE BACKHOE
--for Burt Hybart

Through mud, fouled nuts, black grime
it opens, a gleam of spotless steel
 machined-fit perfect
swirl of intake and output
 relentless clarity
 at the heart
 of work.

Digression: From ZEN AND THE ART OF MOTORCYCLE MAINTENANCE

“The Buddha, the Godhead, resides quite as comfortably in the circuits of a digital computer or the gears of a cycle transmission as he does at the top of a mountain or in the petals of a flower. To think otherwise is to demean the Buddha—which is to demean oneself.”

From *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, 1996

“WE WASH OUR BOWLS IN THIS WATER”

“The 1.5 billion cubic kilometers of water on the earth are split by photosynthesis and reconstituted by respiration once every two million years or so.”

A day on the ragged North Pacific coast get soaked by whipping mist, rainsqualls tumbling, mountain mirror ponds, snowfield slush, rock-wash creeks, earfuls of falls, swords of ridge-edge snowflakes, swift gravelly rivers, tidewater crumbly glaciers, high hanging glaciers, shore-side mud pools, icebergs, streams looping through the tideflats, spume of brine, distant soft rain drooping from a cloud,

sea lions lazing under the surface of the sea—

*We wash our bowls in this water
It has a flavor of ambrosial dew—*

*

Beaching the raft, stagger out and shake off wetness like a bear,
stand on the sandbar, rest from the river being

upwellings, sideswirls, backswirls
curl-overs, outripples, eddies, chops and swells
wash-overs, shallows confluence turbulence wash-seam
wavelets, riffles, saying

“A hydraulic’s a cross between a wave and a hole,
—you get a weir effect.

Pillow-rock’s a total fold-back over a hole,
it shows spit on the top of the wave

a haystack’s a series of waves at the bottom of a tight
channel
there’s a tongue of the rapids—the slick tongue—the “v”—

some holes are ‘keepers,’ they won’t let you through;
eddies, backflows, we say ‘eddies are your friends.’

Current differential, it can suck you down
vertical boils are straight-up eddies spinning,
herringbone waves curl under and come back.

Well, let’s get going, get back to the rafts.”

Swing the big oars,
head into a storm.

*We offer it to all demons and spirits
May all be filled and satisfied
Om makula sai svaha!*

*

Su Tung-p’o sat out one whole night by a creek on the slopes of
Mt. Lu. Next morning he showed this poem to his teacher:

The stream with its sounds is a long broad tongue
The looming mountain is a wide-awake body
Throughout the night song after song
How can I speak at dawn.

Old Master Chang-tsung approved him. Two centuries later
Dogen said,

“Sounds of streams and shapes of mountains.
The sounds never stop and the shapes never cease.

Was it Su who woke
or was it the mountains and streams?

Billions of beings see the morning star
and all become Buddhas!
If *you*, who are valley streams and looming
mountains,
can't throw some light on the nature of ridges and rivers,

who can?"

From *Danger on Peaks*, 2004

DOCTOR COYOTE WHEN HE HAD A PROBLEM

Doctor Coyote when he had a problem
took a dump. On the grass asked his turds where they lay
what to do? They gave him good advice.

He'd say "that's just what I thought too"
And do it. And go his way.