

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
School of Philosophy
Department of English Language and Literature

**GARY SNYDER'S MYTHOPOETICS AND ITS EDUCATIONAL VALUE:
A DECONSTRUCTIONIST APPROACH**

Evdokia Papadopoulou-Kambisi

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
2001

Advisory Committee: Prof. Marios Byron Raizis (Supervisor), Prof. Liana Sakelliou-Schultz, Prof. Robert Crist

Abstract

This thesis examines the patterns of imagery and types of logic structuring the poetic universe of Gary Snyder. Up to this date criticism has hardly explored the precise interplay of logic and imagery, their allusions and impact upon the poetic text. Snyder's mythopoetics is a key feature in the intrinsic organisation of his poetry. The poet's reproduction of archetypal symbolism in the form of sovereign femininity, totemic animality and his animistic rendering of nature establish a primitive state of mind and posit the earth-tribe as one of the structuring poles of his mythical universe. The image of the Universal Stream, the Divine Weaver, the Bear/Muse, attest to Snyder's acceptance of matriarchy, whereas the images of Coyote, the Dying doe or the Bear-cubs evoke the totemic aspect of the animal founding, educating but also doubling the human race. Indeed, the earth tribe relies on the ancestors' spirit represented by the significant practices of the American Indian. Moreover, the poet assures the continuity of the tribe through the religious practices of the archaic rituals (Greek fertility rites), the Judeo-Christian apocalyptic tradition (Moses on Mount Sinai) and the Native American practices, indicating the "living tradition" as the constitutive bond of the tribe. Relying on tradition is for the poet a way to enlarge the self aiming at a new cosmogony. By using the principles of analogy, identity and substitution, the poet constitutes a poetic persona of universal proportions to reach the sky tribe/god as a tribal leader representing the earth. Furthermore, the poet manages to naturalise his invisible body possessing a leaf face, granite hands and mountain legs. Finally, Snyder speaks to the needs of the twenty-first century as a poet prophet who aims at a new cosmogony through the application of the principles of sustainability and compassion in the realm of the poetic composition. Thus, the images of the Grasshopper Man, the cliff by the lake as well as the mythical images of the Warrior and the Old Desert Sage represent the poet's effort toward some holistic experience transforming the earth, the social canvas, but also the earth's loving son who, by an initial substitution-his language- is turned into the earth's loving partner.