

# Gary Snyder



## Mountains and Rivers Without End



poem

*Mountains and Rivers Without End*



*Note: The scroll is meant to be viewed from the right to the left.*















*Mountains and Rivers Without End*



*Gary Snyder*

*Mountains  
and Rivers  
Without  
End*

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COUNTERPOINT  
BERKELEY

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The author gratefully acknowledges permission to reprint previously published material. A publication record appears on page 167.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA IS AVAILABLE.

ISBN (10) 1-58243-407-7

ISBN (13) 978-1-58243-407-0

Endpapers: *Streams and Mountains Without End* (early twelfth century), China, Northern Sung Dynasty, courtesy of The Cleveland Museum of Art

Frontispiece: Detail from *Streams and Mountains Without End*

Drawing of Kokop'ele on page 81: Gary Snyder

Image of Tārā on page 114: Courtesy of Gary Snyder

Design and electronic production by David Bullen

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2117 Fourth Street

Suite D

Berkeley, CA 94710

[www.counterpointpress.com](http://www.counterpointpress.com)

Distributed by Publishers Group West

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*This book is for*

*Gen,*

*Kai,*

*Mika,*

*Kyung-jin*



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The notion of Emptiness engenders Compassion.

Milarepa

An ancient Buddha said “A painted rice cake does not satisfy hunger.” Dogen comments:

“There are few who have even seen this ‘painting of a rice cake’ and none of them has thoroughly understood it.

“The paints for painting rice cakes are the same as those used for painting mountains and waters.

“If you say the painting is not real, then the material phenomenal world is not real, the Dharma is not real.

“Unsurpassed enlightenment is a painting. The entire phenomenal universe and the empty sky are nothing but a painting.

“Since this is so, there is no remedy for satisfying hunger other than a painted rice cake. Without painted hunger you never become a true person.”

Dōgen, “Painting of a Rice Cake”



*Mountains and Rivers Without End*



*I*



## *Endless Streams and Mountains*

*Cb'i Shan Wu Chin*

Clearing the mind and sliding in  
to that created space,  
a web of waters streaming over rocks,  
air misty but not raining,  
seeing this land from a boat on a lake  
or a broad slow river,  
coasting by.

The path comes down along a lowland stream  
slips behind boulders and leafy hardwoods,  
reappears in a pine grove,

no farms around, just tidy cottages and shelters,  
gateways, rest stops, roofed but unwall'd work space,  
—a warm damp climate;

a trail of climbing stairsteps forks upstream.  
Big ranges lurk behind these rugged little outcrops—  
these spits of low ground rocky uplifts  
layered pinnacles aslant,  
flurries of brushy cliffs receding,  
far back and high above, vague peaks.  
A man hunched over, sitting on a log  
another stands above him, lifts a staff,  
a third, with a roll of mats or a lute, looks on;  
a bit offshore two people in a boat.

The trail goes far inland,  
somewhere back around a bay,



lost in distant foothill slopes  
    & back again  
at a village on the beach, and someone's fishing.

Rider and walker cross a bridge  
above a frothy braided torrent  
that descends from a flurry of roofs like flowers  
    temples tucked between cliffs,  
    a side trail goes there;

a jumble of cliffs above,  
ridge tops edged with bushes,  
valley fog below a hazy canyon.

A man with a shoulder load leans into the grade.  
Another horse and a hiker,  
the trail goes up along cascading streambed  
no bridge in sight—  
comes back through chinquapin or  
liquidambar; another group of travelers.  
Trail's end at the edge of an inlet  
below a heavy set of dark rock hills.  
Two moored boats with basket roofing,  
    a boatman in the bow looks  
    lost in thought.

Hills beyond rivers, willows in a swamp,  
a gentle valley reaching far inland.

The watching boat has floated off the page.

•

At the end of the painting the scroll continues on with seals and poems. It tells a further tale:

“—Wang Wen-wei saw this at the mayor’s house in Ho-tung town, year 1205. Wrote at the end of it,

‘The Fashioner of Things  
has no original intentions  
Mountains and rivers  
are spirit, condensed.’

‘... Who has come up with  
these miraculous forests and springs?  
Pale ink  
on fine white silk.’

Later that month someone named Li Hui added,

‘... Most people can get along with the noise of dogs  
and chickens;  
Everybody cheerful in these peaceful times.  
But I—why are my tastes so odd?  
I love the company of streams and boulders.’

T’ien Hsieh of Wei-lo, no date, next wrote,

‘... The water holds up the mountains,  
The mountains go down in the water ...’

In 1332 Chih-shun adds,

‘... This is truly a painting worth careful keeping.  
And it has poem-colophons from the Sung and the

Chin dynasties. That it survived dangers of fire and war makes it even rarer.'

In the mid-seventeenth century one Wang To had a look at it:

'My brother's relative by marriage, Wên-sun, is learned and has good taste. He writes good prose and poetry. My brother brought over this painting of his to show me . . .'

The great Ch'ing dynasty collector Liang Ch'ing-piao owned it, but didn't write on it or cover it with seals. From him it went into the Imperial collection down to the early twentieth century. Chang Ta-ch'ien sold it in 1949. Now it's at the Cleveland Art Museum, which sits on a rise that looks out toward the waters of Lake Erie.

•

Step back and gaze again at the land:  
it rises and subsides—

ravines and cliffs like waves of blowing leaves—  
stamp the foot, walk with it, clap! turn,  
the creeks come in, ah!  
strained through boulders,  
mountains walking on the water,  
water ripples every hill.

—I walk out of the museum—low gray clouds over the lake—  
chill March breeze.

•

Old ghost ranges, sunken rivers, come again  
stand by the wall and tell their tale,  
walk the path, sit the rains,  
grind the ink, wet the brush, unroll the  
broad white space:

lead out and tip  
the moist black line.

*Walking on walking,  
under foot earth turns.*

*Streams and mountains never stay the same.*

*Note: A hand scroll by this name showed up in Shansi province, central China, in the thirteenth century. Even then the painter was unknown, "a person of the Sung Dynasty." Now it's on Turtle Island. Unroll the scroll to the left, a section at a time, as you let the right side roll back in. Place by place unfurls.*

## *Old Bones*

Out there walking round, looking out for food,  
a rootstock, a birdcall, a seed that you can crack  
plucking, digging, snaring, snagging,  
    barely getting by,

no food out there on dusty slopes of scree—  
carry some—look for some,  
go for a hungry dream.  
Deer bone, Dall sheep,  
    bones hunger home.

Out there somewhere  
a shrine for the old ones,  
the dust of the old bones,  
    old songs and tales.

What we ate—who ate what—  
    how we all prevailed.

## *Night Highway 99*

*Only the very poor, or eccentric, can surround themselves with shapes of elegance (soon to be demolished) in which they are forced by poverty to move with leisurely grace. We remain alert so as not to get run down, but it turns out you only have to hop a few feet to one side and the whole huge machinery rolls by, not seeing you at all.*

*Lew Welch*

We're on our way

man  
out of town  
go hitching down  
that highway 99

Too cold and rainy to go out on the Sound  
Sitting in Ferndale drinking coffee  
Baxter in black, been to a funeral  
Raymond in Bellingham—Helena Hotel—  
Can't go to Mexico with that weak heart  
Well you boys can go south. I stay here.  
Fix up a shack—get a part-time job—  
    (he disappeared later  
    maybe found in the river)  
In Ferndale & Bellingham  
Went out on trail crews  
Glacier and Marblemount  
There we part.

Tiny men with mustaches  
driving ox teams  
deep in the cedar groves

wet brush, tin pants, snoose—

Split-shake roof barns  
over berry fields  
white birch chicken coop

Put up in Dick Meigs cabin  
out behind the house—  
Coffeecan, PA tin, rags, dirty cups,  
Kindling fell behind the stove, miceshit,  
old magazines,

winter's coming in the mountains  
shut down the show  
the punks go back to school  
and the rest hit the road—

strawberries picked, shakeblanks split  
fires all out and the packstrings brought  
down to the valleys:  
set loose to graze.

Gray wharves and hacksaw gothic homes  
Shingle mills and stump farms

overgrown.

•

Fifty weary Indians  
Sleep in the bus station  
Strawberry pickers speaking Kwakiutl  
turn at Burlington for Skagit & Ross Dam

Mt. Vernon

under apple trees by the river  
banks of junked cars

BC Riders give hitchhikers rides

“The sheriff’s posse stood in double rows  
flogged the naked Wobblies down  
with stalks of Devil’s Club  
& run them out of town”

Everett

While shingle weavers lost their fingers  
in the tricky feed and take  
of double saws.

Dried, shrimp

smoked, salmon

—before the war old Salish gentleman came  
& sold us kids rich hard-smoked Chinook  
from his flatbed model T

Lake City,

Seattle

waste of trees & topsoil, beast, herb,  
edible roots, Indian field-farms & white men  
dances washed, leached, burnt out  
minds blunt, ug! talk twisted

a night of the long poem  
and the mined guitar  
“Forming the new society  
within the shell of the old”

mess of tincan camps and littered roads.



The Highway passes straight through every town  
at Matsons washing bluejeans  
hills and saltwater

ack, the woodsmoke in my brain

(high Olympics—can't go there again)

East Marginal Way the hitchhike zone  
Boeing down across Duwamish slough  
and angle out & on.

•

Night rain wet concrete headlights blind

Tacoma

salt air / bulk cargo / steam cycle / AIR REDUCTION

eating peanuts I don't give a damn  
if anybody ever stops I'll walk  
to San Francisco what the hell

“that's where you going?  
why you got that pack?”

“well man I just don't feel right  
without something on my back”

& this character in milkman overalls  
“I have to come out here  
every once in a while, there's a guy  
blows me here”

way out of town.

Stayed in Olympia with Dick Meigs  
—this was a different year & he had moved—  
sleep on a cot in the back yard  
half the night watch shooting stars

These guys got babies now  
drink beer, come back from wars,  
“I’d like to save up all my money  
get a big new car, go down to Reno

& latch onto one of those rich girls—  
I’d fix their little ass”—nineteen yr old  
North Dakota boy fixing to get married next month.

To Centralia in a purple Ford.

Carstruck dead doe  
by the Skookumchuck river

Fat man in a Chevrolet  
wants to go back to L.A.                    “too damned poor now”

Airbrakes on the log trucks hiss and whine  
stand in the dark by the stoplight  
big fat cars tool by  
drink coffee, drink more coffee  
brush teeth back of Shell

hot shoes  
stay on the rightside of that  
yellow line

Mary's Corner, turn for Mt. Rainier  
—once caught a ride at night for Portland here.  
Five Mexicans ask me “chip in on the gas.”  
I never was more broke & down.

Got fired that day by the USA  
(the District Ranger up at Packwood  
thought the Wobblies had been dead for  
forty years  
but the FBI smelled treason  
—my red beard)

That Waco Texas boy  
took A.G. and me through miles of snow  
had a chest of logger gear  
at the home of an Indian girl  
in Kelso hadn't seen since fifty-four

Toledo, Castle Rock, free way four lane  
no stoplights and no crossings, only cars,  
& people walking, old hitchhikers  
break the laws. How do I know . . .  
the state cop  
told me so.

Come a dozen times into  
Portland  
on the bum or  
hasty lover  
late at night.

•



Slept under juniper in the Siskiyou  
a sleeping bag, a foot of snow  
black rolled umbrella  
ice slick asphalt

Yreka

Caught a ride the only car come by  
at seven in the morning  
chewing froze salami  
riding with a passed-out L.A. whore  
glove compartment full of booze,  
the driver a rider,  
nobody cowboy,  
sometime hood,  
Like me picked up to drive,  
& drive the blues away.  
We drank to Portland  
and we treated that girl good.  
I split my last two bucks with him in town  
went out to Carol & Billy's in the woods.

Foggy morning in Newport  
housetrailers  
under the fir.

•

An old book on Japan at the Goodwill  
unfurled umbrella in the sailing snow  
sat back in black wood  
barber college  
chair, a shave

On Second Street in Portland.

What elegance. What a life.  
Bust my belly with a quart of  
buttermilk  
& five dry heels of French bread  
from the market cheap  
clean shaved, dry feet,

We're on our way

man  
out of town

Go hitching down that

highway 99.

•

Oil pump broken, motor burning out

Salem

Ex-logger selling skidder cable

wants to get to San Francisco,  
fed and drunk

Eugene

Guy just back from Alaska—don't like  
the States now—too much law

Sutherlin

A woman with a kid & two bales of hay

Roseburg

Sawmill worker, young guy thinking of  
going to Eureka for redwood logging  
later in the year

Dillard

Two Assembly of God Pentecostal boys from  
a holy-roller high school. One had  
spoken in tongues

Canyonville

(LASME Lost Angeles–Seattle Motor Express)  
place on highway 20  
LITTLE ELK  
badger & badger

South of Yoncalla burn the engine  
run out of oil (a different car)  
(Six great highways; so far only one)

Jumpoff Joe Creek &  
a man carrying nothing, walking sort of  
stiff-legged along, blue jeans & denim jacket  
wrinkled face, just north of  
Louse Creek

—Abandon really means it  
the network womb stretched loose all  
things slip through

Dreaming on a bench under newspapers  
I woke covered with rhododendron blooms  
alone in a State Park in Oregon.

•

“I had a girl in Oakland who worked  
for a doctor, she was a nurse, she let him  
eat her. She died of tuberculosis

& I drove back that night to Portland  
nonstop, crying all the way”

Grants Pass

“I picked up a young mother with two  
children once, their house had just burned down”

“I picked up an Italian tree-surgeon  
in Port Angeles once, he had all his  
saws and tools all screwed & bolted on  
a beat-up bike.”

Oxyoke, Wolf Creek, a guy  
Coming off a five-day binge to  
An ex-bartender from Lebanon to  
Man & wife on a drinking spree, to

Phoenix  
Redding  
Anderson

Snow on the pines & firs around Lake Shasta  
—Chinese scene of winter hills and trees  
us “little travelers” in the bitter cold  
six-lane highway slash & D-9 Cats—  
bridge building                      squat earth-movers  
—yellow bugs

I speak for hawks. Creating  
“Shasta” as I go—

The road that’s followed goes forever;  
in half a minute crossed and left behind.

Out of the snow and into red-dirt plains  
blossoming plums

Each time you go that road it gets more straight  
curves across the mountain lost in fill



towns you had to slow down all four lane  
Azalea, Myrtle Creek

watch out for deer.

At Project City Indian hitcher  
Standing under single tarpole lamp  
nobody stopped  
we walked four miles  
to an oak fire left by the road crew,  
shivered the night away.

•

Going to San Francisco  
Yeah San Francisco  
Yeah we came from Seattle  
Even farther north  
Yeah we been working in the mountains  
in the spring  
in the autumn  
I always go this highway 99—

“I was working in a mill three weeks there  
then it burned down & the guy didn’t even  
pay us off—but I can do anything—  
I’ll go to San Francisco—tend bar—”

Sixteen speeds forward windows open  
Stopped at the edge of Willows for a bite  
grass shoots on the edge of  
drained rice plains  
—where are the Sierras—

•  
standing in the night    in the world-end winds  
by the overpass bridge  
    junction US 40    and highway 99

trucks, trucks,    roll by  
kicking up dust    dead flowers

level, dry,  
Highway 99 turns west.  
    Miles gone, speed still  
    pass through lower hills  
    heat dying  
    toward Vallejo  
    gray on the salt baywater  
        brown grass ridges  
            buckbrush blue.

Hérons in the tideflats  
    have no thought for  
States of Cars

—I'm sick of car exhaust

    City  
        gleaming far away  
we make it into town tonight  
get clean and drink some wine—

SAN FRANCISCO

NO  
body

gives a shit  
man  
who you are  
or what's your car  
there  
IS no 99

## *Three Worlds, Three Realms, Six Roads*

### *Things to Do Around Seattle*

Hear phone poles hum  
Catch garter snakes. Make lizard tails fall off;  
Biking to Lake Washington, catch muddy little fish.  
Peeling old bark off madrone to see the clean red new bark  
Cleaning fir pitch off your hands  
Reading books in the back of the University District Goodwill.  
Swim in Puget Sound below the railroad tracks  
Dig clams  
Ride the Kalakala to Bremerton  
See Mt. Constance from the water tower up by the art museum  
Fudgsicles in Woodland Park zoo, the eagle and the camel  
The mummy Eskimo baby in the University Anthropology  
museum.  
Hung up deep sea canoes, red cedar log.  
Eating old-style oatmeal mush cooked in a double boiler  
or cracked-wheat cereal with dates.  
Sway in the wind in the top of the cedar in the middle of the  
swamp  
Walk through the swamp and over the ridge to the pine woods,  
Picking wild blackberries all around the stumps.  
Peeling cascara  
Feeding chickens  
Feeling Penelope's udder, one teat small.  
Oregon grape and salal.

### *Things to Do Around Portland*

Go walk along the Sandy when the smelt run  
Drink buttermilk at the Buttermilk Corner  
Walk over Hawthorne Bridge the car tires sing

Take the trolley out to Sellwood when cherries are in bloom  
Hiking the woods below Council Crest, a tree house high in a  
    Douglas fir near the medical school.  
Bird watching and plant hunting on Sauvies Island in May  
Vine maple leaves in the slopes above St. John's Bridge in autumn  
Wading the Columbia out to sandbars  
Himalayan blackberries tangle at the base of steel high-tension  
    Bonneville transmission tower—your fingers stained  
Get married in Vancouver without the three-day wait.  
Cash paychecks at the Pastime  
Beer in Ericson's, hamburgers at Tic Tock.  
Led down narrow corridors of Court House, City Hall, the  
    newspapers, the radios, the jail.  
Parking in the Park blocks  
Sunburned skiing  
Shivering at the ocean  
Standing in the rain

*Things to Do Around a Lookout*

Wrap up in a blanket in cold weather and just read.  
Practice writing Chinese characters with a brush  
Paint pictures of the mountains  
Put out salt for deer  
Bake coffee cake and biscuit in the iron oven  
Hours off hunting twisty firewood, packing it all back up and  
    chopping.  
Rice out for the ptarmigan and the conies  
Mark well sunrise and sunset—drink lapsang soochong.  
Rolling smokes  
The flower book and the bird book and the star book  
Old Reader's Digests left behind  
Bullshitting on the radio with a distant pinnacle like you hid in  
    clouds

Drawing little sexy sketches of bare girls  
Reading maps, checking on the weather, airing out musty Forest  
Service sleeping bags and blankets  
Oil the saws, sharpen axes,  
Learn the names of all the peaks you see and which is highest—  
    there are hundreds—  
Learn by heart the drainages between  
Go find a shallow pool of snowmelt on a good day, bathe in the  
    lukewarm water  
Take off in foggy weather and go climbing all alone  
The rock book—strata, dip, and strike  
Get ready for the snow, get ready  
To go down.

*Things to Do Around San Francisco*

Catch eels in the rocks below the Palace of the Legion of Honor.  
Four in the morning—congee at Sam Wo.  
Walk up and down Market, upstairs playing pool,  
Turn on at Aquatic park—seagulls steal bait sardine  
Going clear out to Oh's to buy bulghur.  
Howard Street Goodwill  
Not paying traffic tickets; stopping the phone.  
Merry-go-round at the beach, the walk up to the cliff house,  
    sea lions and tourists—the old washed-out road that goes  
    on—  
Play chess at Mechanics'  
Dress up and go looking for work  
Seek out the Wu-t'ung trees in the park arboretum.  
Suck in the sea air and hold it—miles of white walls—  
    sunset shoots back from somebody's window high in the  
    Piedmont hills  
Get drunk all the time. Go someplace and score.  
Walk in and walk out of the Asp

Hike up Tam  
Keep quitting and starting at Berkeley  
Watch the pike in the Steinhart Aquarium: he doesn't move.  
Sleeping with strangers  
Keeping up on the news  
Chanting sutras after sitting  
Practicing yr frailing on guitar  
Get dropped off in the fog in the night  
Fall in love twenty times  
Get divorced  
Keep moving—move out to the Sunset  
Get lost—or  
Get found

*Things to Do Around a Ship at Sea*

Go out with a small flashlight and a star chart on a clear night  
and check out the full size of Eridanus.  
Sunbathe on a cot on the boatdeck  
Go forward and talk with the lookout, away from the engines, the  
silence and shudder  
Watch running lights pass in the night.  
Dolphins and sharks.  
Phosphorescing creatures alongside the shipside, burning spots in  
the wake.  
Stag, Argosy, Playboy, and Time.  
Do pushups.  
Make coffee in the galley, telling jokes.  
Type letters to his girlfriend in Naples for the twelve-to-four  
Oiler  
Sew up jeans.  
Practise tying knots and whipping  
Watch the Chief Cook singing blues  
Tell big story lies

Grow a beard  
Learn to weld and run a lathe  
Study for the Firemans Oilers and Watertenders exam  
Tropic- and sea-bird watching  
Types of ships  
Listening to hours of words and lifetimes—fuck and shit—  
Figuring out the revolution  
Hammer pipes and flanges  
Paint a picture on a bulkhead with leftover paints  
Dream of girls, about yr girlfriend, writing letters, wanting  
    children,  
Making plans

*Things to Do Around Kyoto*

Lie on the mats and sweat in summer,  
Shiver in winter, sit and soak like a foetus in the bath.  
Paikaru and gyoza at Min Min with Marxist students full of  
    China  
Look for country pothooks at the Nijo junk store  
Get dry bad red wine to drink like a regular foreigner, from  
    Maki's  
Trudging around with visitors to gardens

Pluck weeds out of the moss. Plant morning glories  
Walk down back alleys listening to looms  
Watching the flocks of sparrows whirling over trees on winter  
    sunsets  
Get up at four in the morning to go meet with the Old Man.  
Sitting in deep samadhi on a hurting knee.  
Get buttered up by bar girls, pay too much  
Motorcycle oil change down on Gojo  
Warm up your chilly wife, her big old feet.



Trying to get a key made  
Trying to find brown bread  
Hunting rooms for Americans  
Having a big meeting, speaking several tongues.

Lose your way in the bamboo brush on Hiei-zan in winter  
Step on a bug by mistake  
Quiet weeks and weeks, walking and reading, talking and  
weeding  
Passing the hand around a rough cool pot  
Throwing away the things you'll never need  
Stripping down  
Going home.

## *Jackrabbit*

Jackrabbit,  
black-tailed Hare  
by the side of the road,  
hop, stop.

Great ears shining,  
you know me  
a little. A lot more than I  
know you.

## *The Elwha River*

I was a girl waiting by the roadside for my boyfriend to come in his car. I was pregnant. I should have been going to high school. I walked up the road when he didn't come, over a bridge: I saw a sleeping man. I came to the Elwha River—the grade school—classes—I went and sat down with the children. The teacher was young and sad-looking, homely; she assigned us an essay: “What I Just Did.” I wrote,

“I was waiting for my boyfriend by the Elwha River bridge: the bridge was redwood, a fresh bridge with inner bark still clinging on some logs—it smelled good. There was someone sleeping under redwood trees. He had a box of flies by his head and he was on the ground. The Elwha River bridge is by a meadow; there's a rocky bar there where the river forks . . .”

thinking this would please the teacher. We handed all the papers in, and got them back—mine was C minus. The children then went home. The teacher came to me and said “I just don't like you.” —“Why?”  
—“Because I used to be a man.”

The Elwha River, I explained, is a real river, and different from the river I described. Where I had just walked was real, but I wrote a dream river—actually the Elwha doesn't fork at that point.

As I write this now I must remind myself that there is another Elwha, the actual Olympic peninsula river, which is not the river I took pains to recollect as real in the dream.

There are no redwoods north of southern  
Curry County, Oregon.

## *Bubbs Creek Haircut*

High ceilinged and the double mirrors, the  
calendar a splendid alpine scene—scab barber—  
in stained white barber gown, alone, sat down, old man  
a summer fog gray San Francisco day  
I walked right in. On Howard Street  
haircut a dollar twenty-five.

Just clip it close as it will go.

“Now why you want your hair cut back like that.”

—Well I’m going to the Sierras for a while

Bubbs Creek and on across to upper Kern.

He wriggled clippers

“Well I been up there, I built the cabin

up at Cedar Grove. In nineteen five.”

Old haircut smell.

Next door, Goodwill

where I came out.

A search for sweater and a stroll

in the board & concrete room of

unfixed junk downstairs—

all emblems of the past—too close—

heaped up in chilly dust and bare-bulb glare

of tables, wheelchairs, battered trunks & lamps

& pots that boiled up coffee nineteen ten, things

swimming on their own & finally freed

from human need. Or?

Waiting a final flicker of desire

to tote them out once more. Some freakish use.

The Master of the limbo drag-legged watches

making prices

to the people seldom buy.

The sag-asst rocker has to make it now. Alone.

A few days later drove with Locke  
down San Joaquin, us barefoot in the heat  
stopping for beer and melon on the way  
the Giant Orange,  
rubber shreds of cast truck retreads on the pebble  
shoulder, highway 99.

Sierras marked by cumulus in the east.  
Car coughing in the groves, six thousand feet  
down to Kings River Canyon; camped at Cedar Grove.

Hard granite canyon walls that  
leave no scree.

Once tried a haircut at the Barber College too—  
sat half an hour before they told me

white men use the other side.

Goodwill, St. Vincent de Paul,

Salvation Army up the coast

for mackinaws and boots and heavy socks

—Seattle has the best for logger gear

once found a pair of good tricouni boots

at the under-the-public market store,

Mark Tobey's scene,

torn down I hear—

and Filson jacket with a birdblood stain.

A.G. and me got winter clothes for almost nothing

at Lake Union, telling the old gal

we was on our way

to work the winter out up in B.C.

hitchhiking home the

green hat got a ride (of that more later).

Hiking up Bubbs Creek saw the trail crew tent  
in a scraggly grove of creekside lodgepole pine  
talked to the guy, he says

“If you see McCool on the other trail crew over there  
tell him Moorehead says to go to hell.”

Late snow that summer. Crossing the scarred bare  
shed of Forester Pass

the winding rock-braced switchbacks  
dive in snowbanks, we climb on where  
pack trains have to dig or wait.

A half-iced-over lake, twelve thousand feet  
its sterile boulder bank

but filled with leaping trout:

reflections wobble in the  
mingling circles always spreading out  
the crazy web of wavelets makes sense  
seen from high above.

A deva world of sorts—it’s high

—a view that few men see, a point

bare sunlight  
on the spaces

empty sky

molding to fit the shape of what ice left  
of fire-thrust, or of tilted, twisted, faulted  
cast-out from this lava belly globe.

The boulder in my mind’s eye is a chair.

... why was the man drag-legged?

King of Hell

or is it a paradise of sorts, thus freed  
from acting out the function some

creator / carpenter  
thrust on a thing to think he made, himself,  
an object always “chair”?  
Sinister ritual histories.  
Is the Mountain God a gimp?  
The halting metrics and the ritual limp,  
Good Will?

Daughter of mountains, stooped  
moon breast Parvati

mountain thunder speaks  
hair tingling static as the lightning lashes  
is neither word of love nor wisdom;  
though this be danger: hence thee fear.

Some flowing girl  
whose slippery dance  
en trances Shiva  
—the valley spirit / Anahita,  
Sarasvati,  
dark and female gate of all the world  
water that cuts back quartzflake sand  
soft is the dance that melts the  
mat-haired mountain sitter  
to leap in fire  
& make of sand a tree  
of tree a board, of board (ideas!)  
somebody’s rocking chair.  
A room of empty sun of peaks and ridges  
beautiful spirits  
rocking lotus throne  
a universe of junk, all left alone.





(on Whitney hair on end  
hail stinging bare legs in the blast of wind  
but yodel off the summit echoes clean)

all this comes after:

purity of the mountains and goodwills.  
The diamond drill of racing icemelt waters  
and bumming trucks & watching

buildings raze  
the garbage acres burning at the Bay  
the girl who was the skid-row  
cripple's daughter—

out of the memory of smoking pine  
the lotion and the spittoon glitter rises  
chair turns and in the double mirror waver  
the old man cranks me down and cracks a chuckle

“Your Bubbs Creek haircut, boy.”

## *Boat of a Million Years*

The boat of a million years,  
    boat of morning,  
sails between the sycamores of turquoise,

Dawn white Dutch freighter  
in the Red Sea—with a red stack—  
heads past our tanker, out toward Ras Tanura,  
    sun already fries my shoulder blades, I  
    kneel on ragged steel decks chipping paint.  
Gray old T-2 tanker and a  
    white Dutch freighter,

    boat of the sun,  
the abt-fish, the yut-fish,  
    play in the waves before it,

salty Red Sea  
    dolphins rip sunlight  
streak in, swirl and tangle  
    under the forward-arching wave roll  
of the cleaving bow

    Teilhard said “seize the tiller of the planet” he was  
joking,

We are led by dolphins toward morning.

## *The Blue Sky*

“Eastward from here,  
beyond Buddha-worlds ten times as  
numerous as the sands of the Ganges  
there is a world called

PURE AS LAPIS LAZULI

its Buddha is called Master of Healing,  
AZURE RADIANCE TATHAGATA”

it would take you twelve thousand summer vacations  
driving a car due east all day every day  
to reach the edge of the Lapis Lazuli realm of  
Medicine Old Man Buddha—  
East. Old Man Realm  
East across the sea, yellow sand land  
Coyote old man land  
Silver, and stone blue

•

*Blue*      blāew, bright      flāuus      flamen, brāhman

*Sky.*      skȳ      scūwo      “shadow”  
Sanskrit skutās      “covered”  
skewed (pied)  
skewbald (. . . “Stewball”)  
skybald / Piebald  
Horse with lightning feet, a mane like  
distant rain, the Turquoise horse,  
a black star for an eye  
white shell teeth  
Pony that feeds on the pollen of flowers  
may he  
make thee whole.

Heal. hail whole (khailaz . . . kail . . .koil I. E. r)

*The Spell of the Master of Healing*

Namo bhagavate bhaishajyagura-vaidurya-  
prabharajaya tathagata arhate samyak  
sambuddhaya tadyatha *om* bhaishajye  
bhaishajye bhaishajya samudgate  
svāhā.

“I honour the Lord, the Master of Healing,  
shining like lapis lazuli, the king, the  
Tathagata, the Saint, the perfectly enlightened  
one, saying *OM TO THE HEALING*  
*TO THE HEALING TO THE HEALER*  
*HAIL!*  
svāhā.

•

Shades of blue through the day

T'u chüeh a border tribe near China  
Türc  
*Turquoise:* a hydrous phosphate of aluminum  
a little copper  
a little iron—

Whole, Whole, Make Whole!  
Blue Land Flaming Stone—  
Man  
Eastward—  
sodium, aluminum, calcium, sulfur.

•

In the reign of the Emperor Nimmyō  
when Ono-no-Komachi the strange girl poet  
was seventeen, she set out looking for her father  
who had become a Buddhist Wanderer. She took ill  
on her journey, and sick in bed one night saw

## AZURE RADIANCE THUS-COME MEDICINE MASTER

in a dream. He told her she would find a hot springs  
on the bank of the Azuma river in the Bandai mountains  
that would cure her; and she'd meet her father there.

•

“Enchantment as strange as  
the Blue up above”      my rose of San Antone

Tibetans believe that Goddesses have Lapis Lazuli hair.

*Azure.*      O. F. azur  
                Arabic lāzaward  
                Persian lāzward      “lapis lazuli”  
                —blue bead charms against the evil eye—

(*Hemp.* “. . . Cheremiss and Zyrjān word . . . these two languages  
being Finno-Ugric—  
a wandering culture word  
of wide diffusion.”)

Tim and Kim and Don and I were talking about  
what an awful authoritarian garb Doctors



huckleberry, cobalt  
medicine-bottle  
*blue.*

*Celestial*            arched cover . . . kam

*Heaven*                heman . . . kam

[*comrade:*    under the same sky / tent / curve]  
Kamarā, Avestan, a girdle kam,            a bent curved bow

Kāma, god of Lust        “Son of Maya”  
   “Bow of Flowers”

•

:Shakyamuni would then be the lord of the present  
world of sorrow; Bhaishajyaguru / Yao-shih Fo /  
Yakushi; “Old Man Medicine Buddha” the lord of the  
Lost Paradise.

Glory of morning,  
pearly gates,  
tltliltzin, the “heavenly bue.”

•

Thinking on Amitabha in the setting sun,  
his western paradise—  
impurities flow out away, to west,  
behind us, *rolling*

planet ball forward turns into the “east”  
is rising,  
azure,  
two thousand light years ahead

Great Medicine Master;  
land of blue.

The Blue Sky

The Blue Sky

The Blue Sky

is the land of

## OLD MAN MEDICINE BUDDHA

where the Eagle  
that Flies out of Sight

*flies.*





*II*



## *The Market*

San Francisco

Heart of the city  
                  down town  
the country side.

John Muir up before dawn  
packing pears in the best boxes  
                  beat out the others—to Market  
                  the Crystal Palace  
on the morning milk-run train.

Seattle

Me, milk bottles by bike  
Guernsey milk, six percent butterfat  
raw and left to rise natural  
                  ten cents a quart  
slipped on the ice turning  
                  in to a driveway  
                  and broke all nine bottles.  
When we had cows . . .  
                  a feathery hemlock out back  
                  by manure pile where  
                  one cow once  
                  lay with milk fever  
                  confusions & worries until the vet come  
we do this still dark in the morning—

•

To town on high thin-wheeled carts.  
 Squat on the boxtop stall.  
 Papayas banana sliced fish grated ginger  
 fruit for fish, meat for flowers  
     french bread for ladle  
         steamer, tea giant  
 rough glaze earthenware  
     — for brass shrine bowls.

Push through fish  
 bound pullets lay on their sides  
     wet slab  
 watch us with glimmering eye  
     slosh water.  
 A carrot, a lettuce, a ball of cooked noodle.  
     Beggars hang by the flower stall  
     give them all some.

Strong women. Dirt from the hills  
     in her nails  
 valley thatch houses  
     palmgroves for hedges  
 ricefield and thrasher  
     to white rice  
     dongs and piastre  
 to market, the  
     changes, how much  
     is our change:

•

Seventy-five feet hoed rows equals  
one hour explaining power steering  
equals two big crayfish =  
    all the buttermilk you can drink  
= twelve pounds cauliflower  
= five cartons greek olives = hitchhiking  
    from Ogden Utah to Burns Oregon  
= aspirin, iodine and bandages  
= a lay in Naples = beef  
= lamb ribs = Patna  
    long grain rice, eight pounds  
equals two kilogram soybeans = a boxwood  
    geisha comb  
equals the whole family at the movies  
equals whipping dirty clothes on rocks  
    three days some Indian river  
= piecing off beggars two weeks  
= bootlace and shoelace  
    equals one gross inflatable  
    plastic pillows  
= a large box of petit-fours, chou-crèmes,  
    mangoes, apples, custard apples, raspberries  
= picking three flats strawberries  
= a christmas tree = a taxi ride  
carrots, daikon, eggplant, green peppers  
oregano white goat cheese  
    = a fresh-eyed bonito, live clams  
a swordfish  
a salmon  
    a handful of silvery smelt in the pocket;

whiskey in cars    out late after dates  
old folks eating cake in secret  
breastmilk enough,  
    if the belly be fed—

& wash down    hose off aisles  
reach under fruit stands  
    green gross rack  
        meat scum on chop blocks  
            bloody butcher concrete floor  
old knives sharpened down to scalpels  
brown wrap paper rolls, stiff  
    push-broom back  
wet spilled food  
    when the market is closed  
        the cleanup comes  
            equals

a billygoat pushing through people  
stinking and grabbing a cabbage  
arrogant, tough,  
he took it— they let him—  
Kathmandu—the market

I gave a man seventy paise  
in return for a clay pot  
of curds  
was it worth it?  
How can I tell

•

They eat feces  
    in the dark  
    on stone floors  
one-legged monkeys, hopping cows  
    limping dogs    blind cats  
crunching garbage in the market  
    broken fingers  
    cabbage  
    head on the ground.

Who has young face  
    open pit eyes  
between the bullock carts and people  
    head pivot with the footsteps  
    passing by  
dark scrotum spilled on the street  
    penis laid by his thigh  
    torso  
turns with the sun.

I came to buy  
    a few bananas by the Ganges  
while waiting for my wife.



## *Journeys*

Genji caught a gray bird, fluttering. It was wounded, so I hit it with a coal shovel; it stiffened, got straight and symmetrical, and began to grow in size. I took the bird by the head with both hands and held it as it swelled, turning the head from side to side. The bird became a woman, and I was embracing her. We walked down a dim-lighted stairway holding hands, then walking more and more swiftly through an enormous maze, all underground. Occasionally we touched surface, and redescended. As we walked I held a map of our route in mind—but it became increasingly complex—and just when I was about to lose the picture, the woman transferred a piece of fresh-tasting apple from her mouth to mine. Then I woke.

•

Through deep forests to the coast,  
and stood on a white sandspit looking in:  
over lowland swamps and prairies  
where no one had ever been  
to a view of the Olympic Mountains in a chill clear wind.

•

We moved across dark stony ground to the great wall: hundreds of feet high. What was beyond it, cows?—then something began to lift up from behind.

I shot my arrows, shot arrows at it, but it came—  
until we turned and ran. “It’s too big to  
fight”—the rising thing a quarter mile across—  
it was the flaming pulsing sun. We fled and  
stumbled on the bright lit plain.

•

Where were we—  
A girl in a red skirt, high heels,  
going up the stairs before me in a made-over barn.  
Whitewash peeling, we lived together in the loft,  
on cool bare boards.  
—Lemme tell you something kid—  
    back in 1910.

•

Walking a dusty road through plowed-up fields  
at forest-fire time—the fir tree hills dry,  
smoke of the far fires blurred the air—  
& passed on into woods along a pond,  
beneath a big red cedar  
to a bank of blinding blue wildflowers  
and thick green grass on leveled ground  
of hillside where our old house used to stand.  
I saw the footings damp and tangled,  
and thought my father was in jail,  
and wondered why my mother never died,  
and thought I ought to bring my sister back.

•

High up in a yellow-gold  
dry range of mountains—  
brushy, rocky, cactussy hills  
slowly hiking down—finally can see below,  
a sea of clouds.

Lower down, always moving slowly over the  
dry ground descending, can see through the breaks  
in the clouds: flat land.

Damp green level rice fields, farm houses,  
at last to feel the heat and damp.

Descending to this humid, clouded level world:  
now I have come to the LOWLANDS.

•

Underground building chambers clogged with refuse  
discarded furniture, slag, old nails,  
rotting plaster, faint wisps, antique newspapers  
rattle in the winds that come forever down the hall;  
passing, climbing ladders, and on from door to door.  
One tiny light bulb left still burning

—now the last—

locked *inside* is hell.

Movies going, men milling round the posters

in shreds

the movie always running

—we all head in here somewhere;

—years just looking for the bathrooms

huge and filthy, with strange-shaped toilets full of shit.

Dried shit all around, smeared across the walls of the adjoining room,  
and a vast hat rack.

•

With Lew rode in a bus over the mountains—  
rutted roads along the coast of Washington  
through groves of redwood. Sitting in the  
back of an almost-empty bus,  
talking and riding through.  
Yellow leaves fluttering down. Passing  
through tiny towns at times. Damp cabins  
set in dark groves of trees.  
Beaches with estuaries and sandbars. I brought  
a woman here once long ago,  
but passed on through too quick.

•

We were following a long river into the mountains.  
Finally we rounded a ridge and could see deeper in—  
the farther peaks stony and barren, a few alpine trees.  
Ko-san and I stood on a point by a cliff, over a  
rock-walled canyon. Ko said, “Now we have come to  
where we die.” I asked him—what’s that up there,  
then—meaning the further mountains.  
“That’s the world after death.” I thought it looked  
just like the land we’d been traveling, and couldn’t  
see why we should have to die.  
Ko grabbed me and pulled me over the cliff—  
both of us falling. I hit and I was dead. I saw

my body for a while, then it was gone.

Ko was there too. We were at the bottom of the gorge.

We started drifting up the canyon. "This is the way to the back country."

## *Mā*

Hello Boy—

I was very glad to hear from you  
I know by the way you write and what you said  
That you was just ok.  
Yes I know you all have been busy working long hours.  
\$15.00 isn't bad at all.  
I never made but \$5.00 a day.  
I thought that was good.  
Try your damdest to hang on to a little of it  
So if you quit you will have a little to go on.  
Glad you are satisfied thats all you need.  
Guess you need good saws.  
I hope you can get them.  
They cost a lot too— gee those boots are high.  
They should wear real good.  
Sounds like you like it up there and like to work in the timber.  
I am glad.  
One thing don't be drinking too much cut down once in a while.  
Ray talked like Walter charged too much a week,  
Don't let him cheat you.

Food is getting higher every place.  
You buy a couple calves and I'll raise them for you  
I am going to raise some more this year.  
The little mare looks much better and she leads.  
So you cook.  
You don't mind that do you.  
Just so you had plenty to cook.  
Cooking always looked like it was easy for you.  
Do your best thats all you can do.

I been planting some more stuff.

After this month I'll quit.

Getting late to plant even now

But I want to see how it works out.

According to the Almanac it isn't too late.

We had a few corn.

Ruby didn't plant anything so she comes over and takes what  
she wants.

Vino did get in once, she got in by the dead tree.

Then I had to fix fence.

She hasn't been in since but sure watches my gates.

I am up here at Ray's place right now watering flowers and  
trees—they have a few garden stuff.

Few beans, squash, potatoes and couple hills of watermelon.

I told Ruby that Mel and Shafer were up they left last night.

They killed quite a few rabbits.

Mel dried the meat cut it in small pieces—tasted pretty good.

Zip ate some of it and liked it she said, said she was going to  
make some.

She has a .22—keeps it with her all the time.

My old .22 won't even shoot, just snaps.

Guess there is something wrong with it but I sure don't know  
anything about it.

But I can shoot.

I killed several rabbits in my garden.

We had a few funerals here lately.

First Pablo died then Gracie Quarto got word her boy was killed  
in Viet-Nam.

So the two were buried the same day.

Just lately 9th Sabrina died and was buried here.

There were quite a few from all over.  
Frank and his wife sang—that was nice.

Wish I was there to eat some of those wild berries.  
I can't see where you will find time to go pick them.  
If some one would pick them then you might make some jelly.

All our cattle are falling off.  
We had a thunder shower ruined the grass.  
A big fire at Antelope Wells, sure was smoky here.  
Said lightning started it.  
Pretty clear now so they must of put it out.  
Been hot here the last couple days.  
Rained all around us not a drop fell here.  
I am pretty busy since everyone here is gone watering things.

Will Stark told me to tell you he wanted you to go to Oklahoma  
with him.  
Said he wanted you to stay with him.  
He is going to start moving in September—taking a bull and  
horses first.  
He will have to make about 3 trips before his family goes.  
They are all going but the big boy.  
Will said you was real good when you were with them.  
Said I don't mind drinking but I can't stand a drunk.  
Mabie the work is hard.  
Nothing here same old thing  
People allways drinking then dieing.  
Don't seem to mind tho.

Well Boy I'll quit writing for now—write when you can.  
Be careful. Drink but don't get drunk. (huh).



Tell all hello—all said hello to you—  
Charley was telling me she got a letter from you.

By Boy  
as ever

Ma.

## *Instructions*

Fuel filler cap

—haven't I seen this before? The  
sunlight under the eaves, mottled  
shadow, on the knurled rim of  
dull silver metal.

Oil filler cap

bright yellow,  
horns like a snail  
—the oil's down there—  
amber, clean, it  
falls back to its pit.

Oil drain plug

so short, from in to out. Best  
let it drain when it is hot.

Engine switch

off, on. Off, on. Just  
two places. Forever,

or, not even one.

*Night Song of the Los Angeles Basin*

Owl  
calls,  
pollen dust blows  
Swirl of light strokes writhing  
knot-tying light paths,  
  
calligraphy of cars.

Los Angeles basin and hill slopes  
Checkered with streetways. Floral loops  
Of the freeway express and exchange.

Dragons of light in the dark  
sweep going both ways  
in the night city belly.  
The passage of light end to end and rebound,  
—ride drivers all heading somewhere—  
etch in their traces to night's eye-mind  
  
calligraphy of cars.

Vole paths. Mouse trails worn in  
On meadow grass;  
Winding pocket-gopher tunnels,  
Marmot lookout rocks.  
Houses with green watered gardens  
Slip under the ghost of the dry chaparral,

Ghost  
shrine to the L. A. River.  
The *jinja* that never was there

is there.

Where the river debouches  
the place of the moment  
of trembling and gathering and giving  
so that lizards clap hands there  
—just lizards  
come pray, saying  
“please give us health and long life.”

A hawk,  
a mouse.

Slash of calligraphy of freeways of cars.

Into the pools of the channelized river  
the Goddess in tall rain dress  
tosses a handful of meal.

Gold bellies roil  
mouth-bubbles, frenzy of feeding,  
the common ones, the bright-colored rare ones  
show up, they tangle and tumble,  
godlings ride by in Rolls Royce  
wide-eyed in brokers' halls  
lifted in hotels  
being presented to, platters  
of tidbit and wine,  
snatch of fame,

churn and roil,

meal gone the water subsides.

A mouse,  
a hawk.

The calligraphy of lights on the night  
freeways of Los Angeles

will long be remembered.

Owl  
calls;  
late-rising moon.

## *Covers the Ground*

*"When California was wild, it was one sweet bee-garden . . ."*

*John Muir*

Down the Great Central Valley's  
blossoming almond orchard acres  
lines of tree trunks shoot a glance through  
as the rows flash by—

And the ground is covered with  
cement culverts standing on end,  
house-high & six feet wide  
culvert after culvert far as you can see  
covered with  
mobile homes, pint-size portable housing, johnny-on-the-spots,  
concrete freeway, overpass, underpass,  
exit floreals, entrance curtsies, railroad bridge,  
long straight miles of divider oleanders;  
scrappy ratty grass and thistle, tumbled barn, another age,

yards of tractors, combines lined up—  
new bright-painted units down at one end,  
old stuff broke and smashed down at the other,  
cypress tree spires, frizzy lonely palm tree,  
steep and gleaming  
fertilizer tank towers fine-line catwalk in the sky—

covered with walnut orchard acreage  
irrigated, pruned and trimmed;  
with palletted stacks of cement bricks  
waiting for yellow fork trucks;

quarter-acre stacks of wornout car tires,  
dust clouds blowing off the new plowed fields,  
taut-strung vineyards trimmed out even on the top,

cubic blocks of fresh fruit loading boxes,  
long aluminum automated chicken-feeder houses,  
    spring furz of green weed  
    comes on last fall's hard-baked ground,  
        beyond "Blue Diamond Almonds"  
come the rows of red-roofed houses  
& the tower that holds catfood  
with a red / white checkered sign

crows whuff over almond blossoms  
beehives sit tight between fruit tree ranks  
eucalyptus boughs shimmer in the wind—a pale blue hip-roof  
house      behind a weathered fence—  
crows in the almonds  
    trucks on the freeways,  
        Kenworth, Peterbilt, Mack,  
        rumble diesel depths,  
like boulders bumping in an outwash glacial river

drumming to a not-so-ancient text

*"The Great Central Plain of California  
was one smooth bed of honey-bloom  
    400 miles, your foot would press  
    a hundred flowers at every step  
it seemed one sheet of plant gold;*

*all the ground was covered  
with radiant corollas ankle-deep:*

*bahia, madia, madaria, burielia,  
chrysopsis, grindelia,  
wherever a bee might fly—*

us and our stuff just covering the ground.



## *The Flowing*

### *Headwaters*

Head doused under the bronze  
    dragon-mouth jet  
    from a cliff  
    spring—headwaters, Kamo  
    River back of Kyoto,  
    Cliff-wall statue of Fudo  
Blue-faced growling Fudo,

Lord of the Headwaters, making  
Rocks of water,  
Water out of rocks

•

### *Riverbed*

Down at the riverbed  
    singing a little tune.  
    tin cans, fork stick stuck up straight,  
    half the stones of an old black campfire ring,

The gypsy actors, rags and tatters,  
    wives all dancers,  
    and the children clowns,  
    come skipping down  
    hop on boulders,  
    clever—free—

Gravel scoop bed of the Kamo  
a digger rig set up on truck bed with  
revolving screen to winnow out the stones  
brushy willow—twists of sand

At Celilo all the Yakima  
Wasco, Wishram, Warmspring,  
catching salmon, talking,  
napping scattered through the rocks

Long sweep dip net held by a  
foam-drenched braced and leaning man  
on a rickety scaffold rigged to rocks

the whole Columbia River thunders  
beneath his one wet plank

the lift and plume  
of the water curling out and over,

Salmon arching in the standing spray.

•

### *Falls*

Over stone lip  
the creek leaps out as one  
divides in spray and streamers,  
lets it all go.

Above, back there, the snowfields  
rocked between granite ribs

turn spongy in the summer sun  
water slips out under  
mucky shallow flows  
enmeshed with roots of flower and moss and heather  
seeps through swampy meadows  
gathers to shimmer sandy shiny flats  
then soars off ledges—

Crash and thunder on the boulders at the base  
painless, playing,  
droplets regather  
seek the lowest,  
    and keep going down  
in gravelly beds.

There is no use, the water cycle tumbles round—

Sierra Nevada  
could lift the heart so high  
fault block uplift  
thrust of westward slipping crust—one way  
to raise and swing the clouds around—  
thus pine trees leapfrog up on sunlight  
trapped in cells of leaf—nutrient minerals called together  
like a magic song  
to lead a cedar log along, that hopes  
    to get to sea at last and be  
    a great canoe.

A soft breath, world-wide, of night and day,  
rising, falling,

The Great Mind passes by its own  
fine-honed thoughts,  
going each way.

Rainbow hanging steady  
only slightly wavering with the  
swing of the whole spill,  
    between the rising and the falling,  
    stands still.

I stand drenched in crashing spray and mist,  
and pray.

•

*Rivermouth*

Mouth  
you thick  
vomiting outward sighing prairie  
    muddy waters  
    gathering all and  
    issue it  
    end over end  
        away from land.

The faintest grade.  
Implacable, heavy, gentle,

—O pressing song  
    liquid butts and nibbles  
    between the fingers—in the thigh—  
    against the eye

curl round my testicles  
drawn crinkled skin  
and lazy swimming cock.

Once sky-clear and tickling through pineseeds  
humus, moss fern stone  
but NOW

the vast loosing  
of all that was found, sucked, held,  
born, drowned,

sunk sleepily in  
to the sea.

The root of me  
hardens and lifts to you,  
thick flowing river,

my skin shivers. I quit

making this poem.

## *The Black-tailed Hare*

A grizzled black-eyed jackrabbit showed me

irrigation ditches, open paved highway,  
white line

to the hill . . .

bell chill blue jewel sky  
banners,

banner clouds flying:

the mountains all gathered,  
juniper trees on their flanks,  
cone buds,

snug bark scale  
in thin powder snow  
over rock scabble, pricklers, boulders,

pinos and junipers  
singing.

The mountains singing

to gather the sky and the mist  
to bring it down snow-breath  
ice-banners—

and gather it water  
sent from the peaks  
flanks and folds  
down arroyos and ditches by highways the water

the people to use it, the  
mountains and juniper  
do it for us

said the rabbit.

## *With This Flesh*

*“Why should we cherish all sentient beings?*

*Because sentient beings*

*are the roots of the tree-of-awakening.*

*The Bodhisattvas and the Buddhas are the flowers and fruits.*

*Compassion is the water for the roots.”*

*Avatamsaka Sūtra*

### I A BEACH IN BAJA

“ . . . on the twenty-eighth day of September 1539, the very excellent Señor Francisco de Ulloa, lieutenant of the Governor and captain of the armada by grace of the most illustrious Señor Marques de Valle de Oaxaca, took possession of the bay of San Andres and the Bermeja Sea, that is on the coast of this new Spain toward the north, at thirty-three and a half degrees, for the said Marques de Valle in the name of the Emperor our King of Castile, at the present time and in reality,

placing a hand on the sword,  
saying, that if anyone contradicts this  
he is ready to defend it;  
cutting trees with his sword,  
uprooting grass,  
removing rocks from one place to another,  
and taking water from the sea;

all as a sign of possession.

. . . —I, Pedro Palenzia, notary public of this armada, write what happened before me.”



II SAN IGNACIO, *Cadacaaman*, “REED CREEK”

Señora Maria Leree is ninety-eight years old,  
rests in a dark cool room at full noon.  
A century-old grapevine covers the house. Casa Leree.  
“She still tries to tell me what to do”  
—her daughter Rebecca  
lived fifty-five years in Los Angeles,

Dagobert drives beer truck all day every day  
and some nights,  
from Guerrero Negro to San Ignacio.  
Says the salt works at Guerrero Negro  
sell most of their salt to Japan;

Rebecca plays a mandolin  
“I need some music down here.”  
Dagobert trucks beer to ranches  
all through central Baja  
over those rutted roads.  
“I have six kids in Guaymas. I  
get over to see them three days a month”

South of El Arco  
a hummingbird's nest with four eggs;  
four Mexican black hawks  
a caracara on the top of a cardón  
a bobcat crossing the truck track at twilight  
a wadi full of cheeping evening birds

Cats walk the fan-palm roof.  
Her two sons are painters.  
—“I am a poet.”  
“You came down here to Baja for

—inspiration? Poeta?”  
Yes, on these tracks. Rising early  
Dry leather. Deep wells.  
Where we breathe, we bow.

### III THE ARROYO

The bulls of Iberia—Europa loves the Father;  
India loves the big-eyed Mother Cow,

In the Thyssen Collection in Madrid there is a painting by Simon Vouet—*The Rape of Europa*—from about 1640. The white bull is resting on the ground, the woman sweetly on his back. A cheerful scene, two serving women, three cherubs, stand by to help this naked lady and the handsome eager bull. His round eyes looking up and back, flowers twined around his horns. The Goddess thinks there’s nothing she can’t handle? Leaving us with modern Europe and its states and wars.

The bony cows of Baja.  
Body of grass, forbs, brush, browse.  
Dried meat. Charqui “jerky”;  
(Little church up the arroyo,  
Leathery twisted ropy Christ  
figure racked to dry)  
Quechua *ch’arki*:  
dried to keep, good years and bad—  
With this flesh—

skinny cow scratching  
horny forehead on a mesquite limb—  
Sweet breath spiraling outward,

the MUSCLE jerky.

the SKIN shoes, saddles, sheaths  
the BONES buttons  
the FAT buckets of lard  
HORNS & HOOVES glue.  
Loose vulva, droopy udder;  
the MILK buttermilk babes

(the hoof of the cow is a trace of the grasslands  
—the print in the grass is the hoof of a cow)

Mother *Bos*  
in her green-grass body at  
Arroyo de Camanjue—arroyo of reeds—

(Five thousand native people lived here,  
temedegua, valiant people, Cochimi,  
old rancherias called  
*Aggvacaamanc*—creek of the hawks  
*Camané caamanc*—creek of the cardón cactus  
*Cabelulevit*—running water  
*Vaba cabel*—water of the camp  
*Cunitca cabel*—water of the large rocks  
*Cabelmet*—water and earth.  
*cadéu*: reed. *aggava*: hawk.)

A ragged white-bearded vaquero  
rides up the dust track, calls  
“A su servicio!” with elegance

Says, “Adiós!” “Go with God!”

with this meat I thee feed  
with this flesh I thee wed.

## *The Hump-backed Flute Player*

The hump-backed flute player

walks all over.

Sits on the boulders around the Great Basin

his hump is a pack.

Hsüan Tsang

went to India 629 AD

returned to China 645

with 657 sūtras, images, mandalas,

and fifty relics—

a curved frame pack with a parasol,

embroidery, carving,

incense censer swinging as he walked

the Pamir the Tarim Turfan

the Punjab the doab

of Ganga and Yamuna,

Sweetwater, Quileute, Hoh

Amur, Tanana, Mackenzie, Old Man,

Big Horn, Platte, the San Juan

he carried

“emptiness”

he carried

“mind only”

*vijñaptimātra*



The hump-backed flute player

Kokop'ele

His hump is a pack.

•

In Canyon de Chelly on the north wall up by a cave is the hump-backed flute player lying on his back, playing his flute. Across the flat sandy canyon wash, wading a stream and breaking through the ice, on the south wall, the pecked-out pictures of some mountain sheep with curling horns. They stood in the icy shadow of the south wall two hundred feet away; I sat with my shirt off in the sun facing south, with the hump-backed flute player just above my head. They whispered. I whispered. Back and forth across the canyon, clearly heard.

•

In the plains of Bihar, near Rajgir, are the ruins of Nalanda. The name Bihar comes from “vihara”—Buddhist temple—the Diamond Seat is in Bihar, and Vulture Peak—Tibetan pilgrims still come down to these plains. The six-foot-thick walls of Nalanda, the monks all scattered—books burned—banners tattered—statues shattered—by the Türks. Hsüan Tsang describes the high blue tiles, the delicate debates—Logicians of Emptiness—worshippers of Tārā, “Joy of Starlight,” naked breasted. She who saves.

•

Ghost bison, ghost bears, ghost bighorns, ghost lynx, ghost prong-horns, ghost panthers, ghost marmots, ghost owls: swirling and gathering, sweeping down, in the power of a dance and a song.

Then the white man will be gone.  
butterflies on slopes of grass and aspen—  
thunderheads the deep blue of Krishna

rise on rainbows  
and falling shining rain  
each drop—  
tiny people gliding slanting down:  
    a little buddha seated in each pearl—  
and join the million waving grass-seed-buddhas  
on the ground.

•

Ah, what am I carrying? What's this load?

    Who's that out there in the dust

    sleeping on the ground?

    With a black hat, and a feather stuck in his sleeve?

—It's old Jack Wilson,

    Wovoka, the prophet,

    Black Coyote saw the whole world

    In Wovoka's empty hat

    the bottomless sky

    the night of starlight, lying on our sides

    the ocean, slanting higher

    all manner of beings

    may swim in my sea

    echoing up conch spiral corridors

the mirror: countless ages back  
dressing or laughing  
what world today?

pearl crystal jewel  
taming and teaching  
the dragon in the spine

spiral, wheel,  
or breath of mind

—desert sheep with curly horns.  
The ringing in your ears

is the cricket in the stars.

•

Up in the mountains that edge the Great Basin

it was whispered to me  
by the oldest of trees.

By the Oldest of Beings  
the Oldest of Trees

Bristlecone Pine.

And all night long sung on  
by a young throng

of Pinyon Pine.

*III*





## *The Circumambulation of Mt. Tamalpais*

Walking up and around the long ridge of Tamalpais, “Bay Mountain,” circling and climbing—chanting—to show respect and to clarify the mind. Philip Whalen, Allen Ginsberg, and I learned this practice in Asia. So we opened a route around Tam. It takes a day.

### STAGE ONE

Muir Woods: the bed of Redwood Creek just where the Dipsea Trail crosses it. Even in the driest season of this year some running water. Mountains make springs.

Prajñāpāramitā-hridaya-sūtra  
Dhāranī for Removing Disasters  
Four Vows

Splash across the creek and head up the Dipsea Trail, the steep wooded slope and into meadows. Gold dry grass. Cows—a huge pissing, her ears out, looking around with large eyes and mottled nose. As we laugh. “—Excuse us for laughing at you.” Hazy day, butterflies tan as grass that sit on silver-weathered fenceposts, a gang of crows. “I can smell fried chicken” Allen says—only the simmering California laurel leaves. The trail winds crossed and intertwining with a dirt jeep road.

### TWO

A small twisted ancient interior live oak splitting a rock outcrop an hour up the trail.

Dhāranī for Removing Disasters  
The Heat Mantra

A tiny chörten before this tree.

Into the woods. Maze fence gate. Young Douglas fir, redwood, a new state of being. Sun on madrone: to the bare meadow knoll. (Last spring a bed of wild iris about here and this time too, a lazuli bunting.)

### THREE

A ring of outcropped rocks. A natural little dolmen-circle right where the Dipsea crests on the ridge. Looking down a canyon to the ocean—not so far.

Dhāranī for Removing Disasters  
Hari Om Namō Shiva

And on to Pan Toll, across the road, and up the Old Mine Trail. A doe and a fawn, silvery gray. More crows.

### FOUR

Rock springs. A trickle even now—

The Sarasvatī Mantra  
Dhāranī for Removing Disasters

—in the shade of a big oak spreading out the map on a picnic table. Then up the Benstein Trail to Rifle Camp, old food-cache boxes hanging from wires. A bit north, in the oak woods and rocks, a neat little saddhu hut built of dry natural bits of wood and parts of old crates; roofed with shakes and black plastic. A book called *Harmony* left there. Lunch by the stream, too tiny a trickle, we drink water from our bota. The food offerings are swiss cheese

sandwiches, swede bread with liverwurst, salami, jack cheese, olives, gomoku-no-moto from a can, grapes, panettone with apple-currant jelly and sweet butter, oranges, and soujouki—greek walnuts in grape-juice paste. All in the shade, at Rifle Camp.

#### FIVE

A notable serpentine outcropping, not far after Rifle Camp.

Om Shri Maitreya  
Dhāranī for Removing Disasters

#### SIX

Collier Spring—in a redwood grove—water trickling out a pipe.

Dhāranī of the Great Compassionate One

California nutmeg, golden chinquapin the fruit with burrs, the chaparral. Following the North Side Trail.

#### SEVEN

Inspiration Point.

Dhāranī for Removing Disasters  
Mantra for Tārā

Looking down on Lagunitas. The gleam of water storage in the brushy hills. All that smog—and Mt. St. Helena faintly in the north. The houses of San Anselmo and San Rafael, once large estates . . . “Peacock Gap Country Club”—Rocky brush climb up the North Ridge Trail.

## EIGHT

Summit of Mt. Tamalpais. A ring of rock pinnacles around the lookout.

Prajñāpāramitā-hridaya-sūtra  
Dhāranī for Removing Disasters  
Dhāranī of the Great Compassionate One

Hari Krishna Mantra  
Om Shri Maitreya  
Hari Om Namō Shiva

All about the bay, such smog and sense of heat. May the whole planet not get like this.

Start the descent down the Throckmorton Hogback Trail. (Fern Canyon an alternative.)

## NINE

Parking lot of Mountain Home. Cars whiz by, sun glare from the west.

Dhāranī for Removing Disasters  
Gopala Mantra.

Then, across from the California Alpine Club, the Ocean View Trail goes down. Some yellow broom flowers still out. The long descending trail into shadowy giant redwood trees.

## TEN

The bed of Redwood Creek again.

Prajñāpāramitā-hridaya-sūtra

Dhāranī for Removing Disasters  
Hari Om Namō Shiva  
Hari Krishna Mantra  
Four Vows

—standing in our little circle, blowing the conch, shaking the staff  
rings, right in the parking lot.

## *The Canyon Wren*

I look up at the cliffs  
but we're swept on by downriver  
the rafts  
wobble and slide over roils of water  
boulders shimmer  
under the arching stream  
rock walls straight up on both sides.  
A hawk cuts across that narrow sky hit by sun,

we paddle forward, backstroke, turn,  
spinning through eddies and waves  
stairsteps of churning whitewater.  
Above the roar  
hear the song of a Canyon Wren.

A smooth stretch, drifting and resting.  
Hear it again, delicate downward song

ti ti ti tee tee tee

descending through ancient beds.  
A single female mallard flies upstream—

Shooting the Hundred-Pace Rapids  
Su Tung P'o saw, for a moment,  
it all stand still.

"I stare at the water:  
it moves with unspeakable slowness."

Dōgen, writing at midnight,  
"mountains flow

water is the palace of the dragon  
it does not flow away.”

We beach up at China Camp  
between piles of stone  
stacked there by black-haired miners,  
cook in the dark  
sleep all night long by the stream.

These songs that are here and gone,  
here and gone,  
to purify our ears.



*Arctic Midnight Twilight*  
*Cool North Breeze With Low Clouds*  
*Green Mountain Slopes, White Mountain Sheep*

*Dibée*

*Song*

Green mountain walls in blowing cloud  
white dots on far slopes, constellations,  
slowly changing not stars not rocks  
“by the midnight breezes strewn”  
cloud tatters, lavender arctic light  
on sedate wild sheep grazing  
tundra greens, held in the web of clan  
and kin by bleats and smells to the slow  
rotation of their Order living  
half in the sky—damp wind up from the  
whole north slope and a taste of the icepack—

the primus roaring now,  
here, have some tea.

A broad bench, slate surfacing  
six sheep break out of the gorge  
skyline brisk trot scamper

Pellet piles in moss  
a spiral horn in the grass  
long tundra sweeps and the rise of slopes  
to a peak of Doonerak,  
white sheep dots on the far green

One chases one, they run in circles  
three move away. One cuts a tangent.  
On the shade side canyon wall  
scree patch rock slides, serried stepped-up  
ledges, a host of sheep hang out.  
Sunshine across the valley, they choose  
the chilly shade. Perched on cliffs  
napping, scratching,  
insouciant white head droops  
over gulfs of air;

Low sun swings through the twenty-four hours  
never high, never gone, a soft slant light,  
miles of shadows, ever-dappling clouds,

a sheepskull forehead with its horn prongs  
sitting on a boulder—  
an offer of the flower of a  
million years of nibbling forbs

to the emptiness of intelligence,

sheep impermanence, sheep practice,  
sheep shapeshifting—vows of beings—  
Vajra Sheep teaching the Koyukuk waters  
suchness for each—

“The beat of her unseen feet”  
which the wild sheep hear  
at the roof of the planet, the warp  
of the longitudes gathered,  
rips in the wind-built tent

of sky-sea-earth cycles, eating the  
green of the twenty-four hours,  
breaking the cloud-flock flight  
with floods of rising, falling,  
warmer, cooler, air-mass swirls  
like the curls  
of Dall sheep horns. The “feet”  
of the onward paces of skulls and pellets —  
clouds sublimate to pure air  
blowing south through passes  
feeding the white dot Dall sheep — dew.

A sheep track followed by a wolf track  
south of the lake.

A ewe and lamb in the sunshine, the lamb  
tries to nurse, it's too old,  
she lies down.

In the scoured-out gullies  
thirty-one sheep.

Climbing Midnight Mountain sliding rock  
find a sheep trail goes just right:  
on the harder scree at the bases of faces,  
follow it out, over ledges, find their hidden  
sheltered beds.

Sweet rank smell makes the heart beat,  
dusty and big pebbles whisked out  
so it's softer, shaped,  
sheep dreaming place —

Sheep time.  
All over the world.

At rest in a sheep bed  
at the cliff-edge of life and death  
over endless mountains  
and streams like strips of the sky.

Up the knife ridge  
the trail crosses over and heads down a glacier,  
tracks fade in the snow.

Sheep gone, and only endless twilight mountains.  
Rest awhile among the rocks  
arise to descend to unbuild it again,

and hear the Koyukon riddle:

“It really snowed hard  
in opposite directions  
on my head

who am I?”

— *dibée*

a mountain sheep.

*Under the Hills Near the Morava River*

She lay there midst

Mammoth, reindeer, and wolf bones:

Diadem of fox teeth round her brow

Ocher under her hips

26,640 plus or minus 110 years before “now.”

Burnt reindeer-pelvis bone bits  
in her mouth,

Bones of two men lying by her,  
one each side.

*Walking the New York Bedrock  
Alive in the Sea of Information*

Maple, oak, poplar, ginkgo  
New leaves, “new green” on a rock ledge  
Of steep little uplift, tucked among trees  
Hot sun dapple—  
    wake up.

Roll over and slide down the rockface  
Walk away in the woods toward  
A squirrel, toward  
Rare people! Seen from a safe distance.  
A murmur of traffic approaching,  
Siren howls echoing  
Through the gridlock of structures,  
Vibrating with helicopters,  
    the bass tone  
        of a high jet.

Leap over the park stone wall  
Dressed fast and light,  
Slip into the migrating flow.

New York like a sea anemone  
Wide and waving in the Sea of Economy,  
Cadres of educated youth in chic costume  
Step out to the nightlife, good food, after work—  
In the chambers of prana-subtle power-pumping  
Heartbeat buildings fired  
Deep at the bottom, under the basement,  
Fired by old merchant marine  
Ex-fire-tenders gone now from sea

to the ships stood on end on the land:  
ex-seamen stand watch at the stationary boilers,  
give way to computers,  
That monitor heat and the power  
webs underground; in the air;  
In the Sea of Information.

Brisk flesh, keen-eyed, streams of people  
Curve round the sweep of street corners  
cardboard chunks tossed up in truckbed.  
Delicate jiggle, rouge on the nipple,  
kohl under the eye.

Time and Life buildings—sixty thousand people—  
Wind ripples the banners  
stiff shudder shakes limbs on the  
planted trees growing new green,

Glass, aluminum, aggregate gravel,  
Iron. Stainless steel.  
Hollow honeycomb brain-buildings owned by

Columbia University, the landlord of  
Anemone  
colony  
Alive, in the Sea of Information

“Claus the Wild man”  
Lived mostly with Indians,  
Was there as a witness when the old lady  
“Karacapacomont”  
Sold the last bit of Washington Heights, 1701

Down deep grates hear the watercourse,  
Rivers that never give up  
Trill under the roadbed, over the bedrock.  
A bird angles way off a brownstone  
Couloir that looks like a route.

Echo the hollowing darkness.  
Crisscrossing light threads  
Gleam squeals up the side streets,  
One growl shadow  
    in an egg of bright lights,  
Lick of black on the tongue.  
Echoes of sirens come down the walled canyons  
Foot lifts to the curb and the lights change—

And look up at the gods.  
Equitable god, Celanese god, noble line,  
Old Union Carbide god,  
Each catching shares of the squared blocked shadow  
Each swinging in sundial arc of the day  
    more than the sum of its parts.  
The Guggenheims, the Rockefellers, and the Fricks,  
Assembling the art of the world, the plate glass  
Window lets light in on “the water lilies”  
Like fish or planets, people,  
Move, pause, move through the rooms,  
White birch leaves shiver in breezes  
While guards watch the world,  
Helicopters making their long humming trips  
Trading pollen and nectar  
In the air  
    of the  
Sea of Economy,



Drop under the streetworld  
Steel squeal of stopping and starting  
Wind blows through black tunnels  
spiderwebs, fungus, lichen.

Gingko trees of Gondwanaland. Pictographs,  
Petroglyphs, cover the subways—  
Empty eye sockets of buildings just built  
Soulless, they still wait the ceremony  
that will make them too,  
new, Big  
city Gods,  
Provided with conduit, cable and plumbing,  
They will light up, breathe cool air,  
Breathe the minds of the workers who work there—  
The cloud of their knowing  
As they soar in the sky, in the air,  
Of the Sea  
Of Information,

Cut across alleys and duck beneath trucks.  
“Under Destruction”—trash chair at the curb—  
Stop to gaze on the large roman letters  
Of writing on papers that tell of Economy,

Skilsaw whine slips through the windows  
Empty room—no walls—such clear air in the cellar  
Dry brick, cooked clay, rusty house bodies  
Carbide blade Skilsaw cuts bricks. Squalls  
From the steps leading down to the subway.  
Blue-chested runner, a female, on car streets,  
Red lights block traffic but she like the  
Beam of a streetlight in the whine of the Skilsaw,  
She runs right through.

A cross street leads toward a river  
North goes to the woods  
South takes you fishing  
Peregrines nest at the thirty-fifth floor

Street people rolling their carts  
of whole households  
Or asleep wrapped in light blue blanket  
spring evening, at dusk, in a doorway,  
Eyeballing arêtes and buttresses rising above them,  
con domus, dominion,  
domus,  
condominate, condominium  
Towers, up there the  
Clean crisp white dress white skin  
women and men  
Who occupy sunnier niches,  
Higher up on the layered stratigraphy cliffs, get  
More photosynthesis, flow by more ostracods,  
get more sushi,  
Gather more flesh, have delightful  
Cascading laughs,

—Peregrine sails past the window  
Off the edge of the word-chain  
Harvesting concepts, theologies,  
Snapping up bites of the bits bred by  
Banking  
ideas and wild speculations  
On new information—  
and stoops in a blur on a pigeon,

As the street bottom-feeders with shopping carts  
Slowly check out the air for the fall of excess,

Of too much, flecks of extra,  
From the higher-up folks in the sky

As the fine dusk gleam  
Lights a whole glass side of  
Forty some stories

Soft liquid silver,

Beautiful buildings we float in, we feed in,

Foam, steel, gray

Alive in the Sea of Information.

*Haida Gwaii North Coast, Naikoon Beach,  
Hiellen River Raven Croaks*

Twelve ravens squawk, squork, corks  
over the dark tall spruce  
and down to the beach.  
Two eagles squabbling, twitter, meeting,  
bumping flying overhead

amber river waters  
dark from muskeg acids, irons,  
murk the stream of tide-wall eagre coming up  
over the sandspit, through the drumming surf,  
eagles, ravens, seagulls, over surf,  
Salal and cedar at the swelling river,

wheeling birds make comment:

on gray skies, big swells, storms,  
the end of summer, the fall run —  
humpy salmon waiting off the bar  
and when they start upstream —

comment  
on the flot and jet of sea crud  
and the downriver wash of inland  
hard-won forest natural trash  
from an older wildness, from a climax lowland,  
virgin system,

Mother  
Earth  
loves to love.

Love hard, playing, fighting,  
rough and rowdy love-rassling  
she can take it, she gives it,

kissing, pounding, laughing—

up from old growth mossy bottoms  
twa corbies rork and flutter

the old food  
the new food

tangled in fall flood streams.

*New Moon Tongue*

Faint new moon arc, curl,  
again in the west. Blue eve,  
deer-moving dusk.

Purple shade in a plant-realm—  
a million years of sniffs,  
licks, lip and  
reaching tongue.

## *An Offering for Tārā*

### I

*Have you seen my companion  
With her moon-like forehead  
Has she passed this way?*

Senge Chhu, the Indus River.  
Some land from Gondwana,

crossed the Tethys Sea  
and fetched up against Eurasia,  
ranges warping out—  
Indus, Sutlej, rivers even from before  
sat their seats  
as mountains rose around them million-yearred.

Now town of Leh.  
Tattered prayer flags on the house-roofs—  
built on a bajada, a  
glacier-flour and outwash gravel fan down from the hills,  
built up to be fields for the barley,  
all crisscrossed with ditches—

(Some questions rise:  
Glaciers, and how high must they be to catch snow and make year-round streams in a land of no rain?  
Where was the hearth of high altitude barley and when did it spread?  
Did these people move here to escape some tyrant, or because they were crazy and bold?)

Water from the icefields,  
“The long wide tongue of the Buddha” led into asides,  
divided down to little rock-edged channels—

wanders on the terraces,  
passes through barley plots  
apples and apricots, poplar stands:  
finds its way back to the gorge.

Wild sheep whose horns and skulls  
make a woven rooftop shrine,  
— hunters came for sheep before farmers or lamas,  
but now they move rocks.

Marpa had Milarepa build stone houses many times. People raising gravel outwash into walls and houses. Walls built within walls, terrace stepped above terrace—mixing mud, drying brick, moving rock: to build a *gompa* on some peak or cliff.

Alluvium carried up the slope  
shaped into *gompas*, temples,  
confidence, patience, good humor  
in the work of hands with the stone and grit of the world.

Tabletop mandalas made  
by the monks over weeks—  
*screak screek*, goes the rasp as the sand tube  
is played like a brush—sand colors,  
fine-ground minerals from  
cut-banks and outcroppings,  
pulverized rocks from the canyons,  
monk-artists making vision palaces,



maps of stages of the soul and all its pathways,  
out of mountain dust. For the  
*pūja*, the ritual, the offering, the meal,

Marpa purifying Milarepa,  
“Build it again!” Snapping  
snap-lines, setting levels, placing stones.

## II

*In the lofty sky  
Is the nest of a vulture  
May it remain unchanged.  
The unchanged bird,  
May you remain unchanged.*

Angdu’s parents were still out in the fields so we stepped into a half-built house up the hill, and were served both butter tea and black tea. A little Tārā shrine in a corner, a floor-sitters table and a small blue rug. Catty-corner on a torn-out tarp was something drying, twiggy bunches, caraway seed-heads,

We do the Tārā mantra for the shrine—

*Om tāre tuttāre ture swāhā tāre tāre tāre*  
*Om tāre tuttāre ture swāhā tāre tāre tāre*  
*Om tāre tuttāre ture swāhā tāre tāre tāre*

•

Tārā’s Vow

“Those who wish to attain supreme enlightenment  
in a man’s body are many . . .

therefore may I,  
*until this world is emptied out,*  
serve the needs of beings  
with my body of a woman.”

These steep eroding mountains,  
no place for lakes or meadows  
newest mountains,  
Baby Krishna Himalaya,  
snowy Storehouse Mountains,  
snow-basket Mountains,

Baby Himalaya loves butter,  
loves dirt,

baby mountains—Ancient Buddhas—  
naked Blue Samantabhadra,  
Kalachakra, Yamantaka,  
young eroding  
Himalaya,

alpine fields of blue sheep meadow  
blue sheep love the Himalayas—

each one thinks the Himalaya  
is hers alone.

Rock stuff always folding  
turned back in again, re-folded,  
wrapping, twisting in and out like dough.

“Black as bees are the plaits of your hair”

### III

The great Indus river's running  
just there by the wall.

(The far shore  
wild salmon spawning  
in old mine-tailing gravels down the Yuba)

Led to the kohlrabi, peas and potatoes,  
gold-dry barley,  
come songbirds,  
a village with flat-roofed houses  
and a flag in the breeze  
always murmuring,

Space of joy  
in the life of the moment  
*Om, Mind, in Phenomena, Hum*

The crooked sickle topples alfalfa,  
and the sheaves are packed on their backs  
husband and wife walk singing  
song bounced between voices  
down the stone-paved walk  
to the storehouse and stables,

*and give some away.*

Up in the stone towers and walkways,  
apartments and chambers,  
wide-ranging cloud chaos  
silvery Senge Chhu curving below

fields by the river, white dot houses  
barley laid drying.

Conch blows from the rooftop  
monks in maroon  
chant, grin and glance,  
and a boy who plays leader  
makes all the bows,  
Tārā, cross-legged, head tilted smiling,  
hands shaping “the giving”  
red body, gold body, green,

a puja, a potluck  
for the whole Himalayan plateau,  
—drop of chang on the tongue,  
barley dough pinch,  
salt tea and sliced apple—  
In the temple built above the Indus  
demons trample,  
intestines tangling, men and women dancing screwing  
head of a horse, a bull, all  
painted on shadowy walls in the  
Buddha hall in the sky.

•

*(Tārā's love magic*

From the boy's heart a red beam of light goes out through his right ear, enters the nock of his arrow, comes out the arrowhead, and shines straight to his loved one's vagina—menstrual blood trickles down, he enters her mind, she becomes full of desire.)

•

Cross-legged,  
we sit on the wood floor taking  
puja, the offering for Tārā,  
old monks and a boy bring food  
to the music of shawms.  
Ibex, antelope, argali sheep, golden eagle,  
over mountains and valley,  
(summer sleeping on the rooftops,  
Indo-Tibetan army unit  
camps beside the airport  
jeeps clatter up the hill toward Leh)

*space of joy  
in the heart of the moment  
prayer spins in the crankcase,*

Baby Himalaya  
loves butter, loves a little taste of dirt,  
loves the herdgirls, loves the ibex,

Tārā lady of the stars:

grimy-handed cutting barley,  
leading water,  
moving stones.

*On the lofty mountain  
Is the nest of a hawk;  
On the lofty rock,  
The nest of a white hawk;*

*The unchanged bird,  
May you remain unchanged.*



*The Bear Mother*

She veils herself

to speak of eating salmon

Teases me with

“What do you know of my ways”

And kisses me through the mountain.

Through and under its layers, its

gullies, its folds;

Her mouth full of blueberries,

We share.

## *Macaques in the Sky*

Walking the trail with Wang Ch'ing-hua, Red Pine, Lo Ch'ing,  
and Carole from Nanren Lake, we see a clear spot in the jungle  
canopy of leaves—a high point arch of heavy limbs, a lookout on  
the forest slope—

A mother monkey sits and nurses,

A couple perching side by side,

A face peeks from another leaf screen, pink cheeks,  
shining eyes,

An old male, silver belly, furrowed face,  
laid back in a crotch

harsh little cough-calls echo

faces among the leaves,  
being ears and eyes of trees  
soft hands and haunches pressed on boughs and vines

Then—*wha!*—she leaps out in the air  
the baby dangling from her belly,

they float there,

—she fetches up along another limb—  
and settles in.

*Her*  
*arching like the Milky Way,*  
*mother of the heavens,*  
*crossing realm to realm*  
*full of stars*

*as we hang on beneath with all we have*

*enjoy her flight.*  
*Drink her light.*

Rhesus macaque.





*IV*



## *Old Woodrat's Stinky House*

*The whole universe is an ocean of dazzling light*

*On it dance the waves of life and death.*

*a service for the spirits of the dead*

•

Coyote and Earthmaker whirling about in the world winds  
found a meadowlark nest floating and drifting; stretched it to  
cover the waters and made us an earth—

Us critters hanging out together  
something like three billion years.

Three hundred something million years  
the solar system swings around  
with all the Milky Way—

Ice ages come one hundred fifty million years apart  
last about ten million  
then warmer days return—

A venerable desert woodrat nest of twigs and shreds  
plastered down with ambered urine  
a family house in use eight thousand years,  
    & four thousand years of using writing equals  
the life of a bristlecone pine—

A spoken language works  
for about five centuries,  
lifespan of a douglas fir;  
big floods, big fires, every couple hundred years,  
a human life lasts eighty,  
a generation twenty.

Hot summers every eight or ten,  
four seasons every year  
twenty-eight days for the moon  
day / night the twenty-four hours

& a song might last four minutes,

a breath is a breath.

•

all this in 5,086 coyote scats:

Pocket gopher, elk, elk-calf, deer, field mouse,  
snowshoe hare, ground squirrel, jackrabbit, deer mouse,  
pine squirrel, beaver.

Jumping mouse, chipmunk, woodrat, pika.

House cat, flying squirrel. Duck, jay, owl, grebe,  
fish, snake, grasshopper, cricket, grass.

Pine nuts, rose seeds, mushrooms, paper, rag, twine, orange peel,  
matches, rubber, tinfoil, shoestring, paint rag, two pieces of a  
shirt—

—The Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem—

—And around the Great Basin

people eating cattail pollen,  
bullrush seeds, raw baby birds,  
cooked ducks and geese,

antelope, squirrel, beetles, chub, and suckers—  
ten thousand years of living

—thousands of paleo human droppings in the  
Lovelock Cave—

Great tall woodrat heaps. Shale flakes, beads, sheep scats,  
flaked points, thorns,

piled up for centuries  
placed under overhangs—caves in cliffs—  
at the bottom, antique fecal pellets;  
orange-yellow urine-amber.  
Shreds of every bush that grew eight thousand years ago;  
another rain, another name.

Cottontail boy said “Woodrat makes me puke!  
Shitting on his grandmother’s blankets—  
stinking everything up—pissing on everything—  
yucky old woodrat!  
Makes his whole house stink!”

—Coyote says “You people should stay put here,  
learn your place,  
do good things. Me, I’m traveling on.”

*Raven's Beak River*  
*At the End*

Doab of the Tatshenshini River and the Alsek Lake, a long spit of gravel, one clear day after days on the river in the rain, the glowing sandy slopes of Castilleja blooms & little fox tracks in the moose-print swales, & giant scoops of dirt took out by bears around the lupine roots, at early light a rim of snowy mountains and the ice fields slanting back for miles, I find my way

To the boulders  
    on the gravel in the flowers  
At the end of the glacier  
    two ravens  
Sitting on a boulder  
    carried by the glacier  
Left on the gravel  
    resting in the flowers  
At the end of the ice age  
    show me the way  
To a place to sit  
    in a hollow on a boulder  
Looking east, looking south  
    ear in the river  
Running just behind me  
    nose in the grasses  
Vetch roots scooped out  
    by the bears in the gravels  
Looking up the ice slopes  
    ice plains, rock-fall  
Brush-line, dirt-sweeps

on the ancient river  
Blue queen floating in  
ice lake, ice throne, end of a glacier  
Looking north  
up the dancing river  
Where it turns into a glacier  
under stairsteps of ice falls  
Green streaks of alder  
climb the mountain knuckles  
Interlaced with snowfields  
foamy water falling  
Salmon weaving river  
bear flower blue sky singer  
As the raven leaves her boulder  
flying over flowers  
Raven-sitting high spot  
eyes on the snowpeaks,  
Nose of morning  
raindrops in the sunshine  
Skin of sunlight  
skin of chilly gravel  
Mind in the mountains, mind of tumbling water,  
mind running rivers,  
Mind of sifting  
flowers in the gravels  
At the end of the ice age  
we are the bears, we are the ravens,  
We are the salmon  
in the gravel  
At the end of an ice age



Growing on the gravels  
at the end of a glacier  
Flying off alone  
flying off alone  
flying off alone

Off alone

## *Earrings Dangling and Miles of Desert*

Sagebrush (*Artemisia*), is of the sunflower family (*Asteraceae*). (Sage [*Salvia*] is in the family of mint.) The Great Basin sagebrush, our biggest artemisia, *Artemisia tridentata*, grows throughout the arid west. Sagebrush often lives with rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus*), salt-bush (*Atriplex*), and greasewood (*Sarcobatus*). As a foursome they typify one of the largest plant communities in North America.

—brushy, bushy, stringybark cobwebby tangle  
multi-stemmed, forking,  
twiglets jut sidewise, a scatter of silky tiny leaves,  
dry twigs stick up straight;  
a lizard scooting in the frizzy dust—

It is eaten by sagebrush voles, pygmy rabbits, sage grouse, and pronghorn (which can browse it: the plant contains an oil that inhibits microbes in the rumen of cows so that they cannot digest it. Sheep can eat a little. Elk eat it and belch a lot). It is a home to mourning doves, night hawks, sage thrashers, shrikes, and sage sparrows.

The bark has been used by humans for tens of thousands of years. The shreddy fiber makes bags, nets, shawls, and sandals. It is used by ranchers and Indians alike for firewood. The leaves are burned as a purifying incense or a mosquito-repellant smoke. It is used as a tea for stomach disorders by the Hopi, who call it *wi:kwapi*. The edible seeds are gathered by the Cahuilla, who also make an herbal tea from it. They call it *wikwat*. Another smaller artemisia, *Artemisia californica*, is used by the Cahuilla for a women's tonic.

Sagebrush: in northern Paiute called *sawabi*, in southern Paiute *sangwabi*.

Artemisia,  
who lives across the ranges,  
stretching for miles,  
    she's always there:  
with saltbush and greasewood, with rabbitbrush  
and all the little grasses.  
Her blue-gray-green—

In Europe, plants of the sagebrush group are known as wormwood. The wormwood *absinthium* gives the flick of danger to the drink absinthe—"sagebrush of the glaciers," said Rimbaud. Pernod is the same drink minus wormwood. Tarragon's a wormwood—

Artemisia is worldwide—thirty species in Japan alone. It's the mugwort and moxa of China. Wormwood is sacred to Artemis. Narrow leaves glow silver in her moonlight—

"She loves to hunt  
in the shadows of mountains  
and in the wind"—

*Artem* in Greek meant "to dangle" or "earring."  
(Well-connected, "articulate," art. . . .)

Her blue-gray-green  
stretching out there  
sagebrush flats reach to the edge  
bend away—  
emptiness far as the mind can see—

Raincloud maidens come walking  
lightning-streak silver,  
gray skirts sweeping and trailing—

*Hail, Artemisia,  
aromatic in the rain,  
I will think of you in my other poems.*

*Cross-Legg'd*

*for Carole*

Cross-legg'd under the low tent roof,  
dim light, dinner done,

drinking tea. We live  
in dry old west

lift shirts bare skin  
lean touch lips—

old touches.  
Love made, poems, makyngs,

always new, same stuff  
life after life,

as though Milarepa  
four times built a tower of stone

like each time was the first.  
Our love is mixed with

rocks and streams,  
a heartbeat, a breath, a gaze

makes place in the dizzy eddy.  
Living this old clear way

—a sizzle of ash and embers.  
Scratchy breeze on the tent fly

one sip tea, hunch on bones,  
we two be here what comes.

## *Afloat*

Floating in a tiny boat  
lightly on the water, rock with every ripple,

another skin that slides along the water  
hung by sea and sky

green mountains turn to clouds  
and slip slow by

two-mile saltwater channel  
sucks and coils with the tide,

kayak like a cricket husk—  
    like an empty spider egg case,  
like dried kelp fronds,  
like a dry cast skin of a snake,  
like froth on the lip of a wave,

trembles on the membrane  
paddling forward, paddling backward

crossing at an angle to the  
roiling shallow bars

the mountain slides, the moon slides,  
the waters churn together,  
the near bank races onward,

twin kayak paddles turn and glint like wings  
casting spume,

there is no place we are  
but maybe here

sky and water stitched together  
with the oystercatchers screaming steady flight  
the kittiwakes deliberate beat of wing  
the murre bob up from underworlds  
the seals heads dip back to it  
the terns erratic dive and splash  
the ravens tweet and croak and gurgle in the far-off  
outflow alders;

wind ripples westward, the tide goes east,  
we paddle east southeast  
the world a rush of wings and waters,

up the slopes the mountain glacier  
looses icemelt over gravel in a soft far roar  
that joins the inlet-basin world of cries and whistles

(and all this realm was under icefields ten miles long,  
when my grandfather drove his team  
to pick berries at Port Orchard)

the glaciers shift and murmur like the tides  
under the constant cross-current  
steady drum of bird wings  
full of purpose, some direction,  
all for what  
in the stroke  
in the swirl of the float



we are two souls in one body,  
two sets of wings, our paddles swing  
where land meets water meets the sky,

where judges and speechmakers, actresses and carpenters,  
drop their masks and go on as they were,  
as  
petrels, geese, oystercatchers, murrelets,  
and small fish fry,

in the tide-suck dark draft sea,  
floating in the weaving

of clouds, ice, tides, calls  
—only to be here!

The tiny skin boat.

## *The Dance*

*“Against its will, energy is doing something productive, like the devil in medieval history. The principle is that nature does something against its own will and, by self-entanglement, produces beauty.”*

*Otto Rössler*

Izanami  
gave birth to rocks, trees, rivers, mountains, grass  
and last, a blazing child  
so burned she died.

In the land of darkness  
a mass of pollution.

Ah wash her clear stream

—skinny little girl with *big* ears  
we have passed through  
passed through, flesh out of flesh.

•

“Shining Heavens,” Goddess of the Sun,  
her brother flung  
mud and shit and a half-skinned pony through  
the palace,  
so she entered a cave—shut it up with a rock—  
made the world dark.

•

Ame-no-uzume, “Outrageous Heavenly Woman,” wrapped  
the numinous club-moss of Mt. Kagu round her hips, made

a headband from the leaves of nishikigi, bound bamboo grass for her wristlets, and put a sounding-board down before the cave where the Sun Goddess stayed.

She danced and she stamped til it echoed around, she danced like a goddess possessed, pulled out her nipples, pushed her sash down til she showed herself down below, and the Plain of High Heaven shook with the laughs and the cheers and the whistles of thousands of gods who were gathered to watch.

Jean Herbert

•

The whole river. Clear back to each creeklet  
rock-rimmed,

    all one basin drawing in the threads  
pacing down dry riverbeds the dance,  
    *mai*, stomping, stepping on the gravelly bar  
step, stop, stamp of the foot. Glide and turn,

    headwaters, mountains,  
        breathing icy bliss

diamond-glittered bitty snowcreek  
eating the inorganic granite down.

Trees once cooled the air, and clouds, ah, ghost of  
water  
springs gone dry. Hills of Yugoslavia clearcut  
    for the Roman fleet  
— don't think all that topsoil's gone  
    it only waits.

—slept on river sidebars  
drank from muddy streams  
grains cooked in rock-flour glacier water,  
—dirt left on boulders  
for a sandy heap of years,

and creeks meander                    just because they swing.

*Stamp* of the masked dancer  
pacing tangled channels  
putting salt and gold dust in the sea.

•

Ame-no-uzume-no-mikoto bound up her sleeves with  
a cord of heavenly *hi-kage* vine, tied around her head  
head-band of the heavenly *ma-saki* vine, bound to-  
gether bundles of sasa leaves to hold in her hands, and  
overturning a bucket before the heavenly rock-cave  
door, stamped resoundingly upon it. Then she became  
divinely possessed, exposed her breasts, and pushed  
her skirt-band down to her genitals.

Allan Grapard

•

Laughter roared like thunder  
through the plains of heaven  
and the hidden  
Goddess of the Sun,  
Amaterasu,  
peeked out round the rock.

All the little faces of the gods gleamed  
white in the light!

*omoshiri.*

•

*Herbert*

*Grappard*

Around her head: nishikigi leaves masaki vines

In her hands: sasa

As wristlets: bamboo grass

sleeves tied w/: hi-kage vine

around her hips: club moss

•

Ame no uzume.

What did she wear?

What leaves in her hair?

How far did she push her skirt down?

## *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, earfulls of falls, sworls 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 the flavor of ambrosial dew—*

*Ga shi sempasui  
Nyoten kanro mi*

•

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!*

*Seyo kijin shu  
 Shitsuryô toku hôman  
 Om makura sai sorwaka*

•

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  
Dōgen 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?*”



## *The Mountain Spirit*

*Ceaseless wheel of lives  
ceaseless wheel of lives*

*red sandstone;  
gleaming dolomite*

*ceaseless wheel of lives*

*red sandstone and white dolomite.*

Driving all night south from Reno  
through cool-porched Bridgeport,  
past Mono Lake's pale glow,  
past tongues of obsidian flow stopped chill,  
and the angled granite face  
of the east Sierra front—

Ah. Here I am arrived in Bishop,  
Owens Valley, called Payahu Nadu not so long ago.

Ranger Station on main street,  
“I'm a traveler.  
I want to know the way  
to the White Mountains,  
& the bristlecone pines.”  
She gives me maps. “Here. The trail  
to the grove at timberline  
where the oldest living beings  
thrive on rock and air.”

“—Thank you for your help.”

I go to the pass, turn north,  
end of day, climbing high,  
find an opening where a  
steep dirt side road halts.  
A perch in the round dry hills,  
prickly pinyon pine boughs shade,  
a view to the Last Chance range,  
& make a camp.

Nearby, a rocky point.

    Climb it,  
passing a tidy scat-arrangement on a ledge,  
stand on a dark red sandstone strata outcrop at the edge.  
Plane after plane of desert ridges  
darkening eastward into blue-black haze.

A voice says

“You had a bit of fame once in the city  
for poems of mountains,  
    here it’s real.”

*What?*

“Yes. Like the lines

*Walking on walking  
under foot earth turns*

But what do you know of minerals and stone.  
For a creature to speak of all that scale of time—what for?

Still, I’d like to hear that poem.”

I answer back,  
“— Tonight is the night of the shooting stars,  
Mirfak the brilliant star of Perseus  
crosses the ridge at midnight

I'll read it then.”

Who am I talking to? I think,  
walk back to camp.

•

Evening breeze up from the flats  
from the valleys “Salt” and “Death”—  
Venus and the new moon sink in a deep blue glow  
behind the Palisades to the west,  
needle-clusters shirring in the wind—  
listen close, the sound gets better.

Mountain ranges violet haze back fading in the east  
puffs of sailing dark-lit cloud, a big owl's  
swift soft whip between the trees,  
unroll the bedding, stretch out blankets on the  
crunchy dry pine needles sun-warm  
resinous ground.

Formations dip and strike my sleep.

.....

—Approaching in a dream:

*“Bitter ghosts that kick their own skulls like a ball  
happy ghosts that stick a flower*

*into their old skull's empty eye—  
'good and evil'  
—that's another stupid dream—  
for streams and mountains  
clouds and glaciers,  
is there ever an escape?*

*Erosion always wearing down;  
shearing, thrusting, deep plates crumpling,  
  
still uplifting—ice-carved cirques  
dendritic endless fractal streambed riffs on hillsides  
  
—bitter ghosts that kick their own skulls like a ball  
what's it all for?"*

A meteor swift and streaking  
like a tossed white pebble  
arcing down the sky—

the Mountain Spirit stands there.

Old woman? white ragged hair?  
in the glint of Algol, Altair, Deneb,  
Sadr, Aldebaran—saying, "I came to hear—"

I can't say no: I speak

The Mountain Spirit

*Walking on walking,  
under foot earth turns*

*Streams and mountains never stay the same.*

*Walking on walking,  
under foot earth turns*

*Streams and mountains never stay the same.*

Into earth rock dives.

As the mountains lift and open  
underground out,  
dust over seashell, layers of ooze,  
display how it plays.

Buttresses fractured, looming,  
friction only, soon to fall, each face  
a heap of risks  
talus slopes below  
flakes weathered off the buried block,  
tricked off an old pluton,  
and settle somewhere, ever lower down —  
gives a glimpse  
of streaks and strains, warp and slide,  
abraded gritty mudwash glide  
where cliffs lean  
to the raven-necklace sky —

Calcium spiraling shells,  
no land plants then when  
sands and stones flush down the  
barren flanks of magma-swollen uplands  
slurry to the beach,  
ranges into rubble, old shores buried by debris  
a lapping trough of tide flats and lagoons  
lime-rich wave-wash soothing shales and silts  
a thousand miles of chest-deep reef  
seabottom riffled, wave-swirled, turned and tilled

by squiggly slime-swimmers many-armed,  
millions of tiny different tracks  
crisscrossing through the mud—

trilobite winding salt sludge,  
calcite ridges, diatom babies drifting home,  
swash of quartzzy sand  
three hundred million years  
be rolling on and then

ten million years ago an ocean floor  
glides like a snake beneath the continent crunching up  
old seabed till it's high as alps.  
Sandstone layers script of winding tracks  
and limestone shines like snow  
where ancient beings grow.

*“When the axe-strokes stop  
the silence grows deeper—”*

Peaks like Buddhas at the heights  
send waters streaming down  
to the deep center of the turning world.

And the Mountain Spirit always wandering  
hillsides fade like walls of cloud  
pebbles smoothed off sloshing in the sea

old woman mountain hears  
shifting sand  
tell the wind  
“nothingness is shapeliness”

*Mountains will be Buddhas then*

when—bristlecone needles are green!  
Scarlet penstemon  
flowers are red!

(Mountains feed the people too  
stories from the past  
of pine-nut gathering baskets quickly full  
of help at grinding, carrying, healing—)

Ghosts of lost landscapes  
herds and flocks,  
towns and clans,  
great teachers from all lands  
tucked in Wovoka's empty hat,  
stored in Baby Krishna's mouth,  
kneeling for tea  
in Vimalakīrti's one small room.

*Goose flocks*  
*crane flocks*  
*Lake Lahontan come again!*

*Walking on walking,*  
*under foot earth turns.*

•

The Mountain Spirit whispers back:  
“All art and song  
is sacred to the real.  
As such.”

Bristlecone pines live long

on the taste of carbonate,  
dolomite,

spiraled standing coiling  
dead wood with the living,  
four thousand years of mineral glimmer  
spaced out growing in the icy airy sky  
white bones under summer stars.

—The Mountain Spirit and me

like ripples of the Cambrian Sea

dance the pine tree

old arms, old limbs, twisting, twining

scatter cones across the ground

stamp the root-foot DOWN

and then she's gone.

*Ceaseless wheel of lives  
red sandstone and white dolomite.*

A few more shooting stars  
back to the bedroll, sleep till dawn.



## *Earth Verse*

Wide enough to keep you looking

Open enough to keep you moving

Dry enough to keep you honest

Prickly enough to make you tough

Green enough to go on living

Old enough to give you dreams

## *Finding the Space in the Heart*

I first saw it in the sixties,  
driving a Volkswagen camper  
with a fierce gay poet and a  
lovely but dangerous girl with a husky voice,

we came down from Canada  
on the dry east side of the ranges. Grand Coulee, Blue  
Mountains, lava flow caves,  
the Alvord desert—pronghorn ranges—  
and the glittering obsidian-paved  
dirt track toward Vya,  
seldom-seen roads late September and  
thick frost at dawn; then  
follow a canyon and suddenly open to  
silvery flats that curved over the edge

*O, ah! The  
awareness of emptiness  
brings forth a heart of compassion!*

We followed the rim of the playa  
to a bar where the roads end  
and over a pass into Pyramid Lake  
from the Smoke Creek side,  
by the ranches of wizards  
who follow the tipi path.  
The next day we reached San Francisco  
in a time when it seemed  
the world might head a new way.

And again, in the seventies, back from  
Montana, I recklessly pulled off the highway  
took a dirt track onto the flats,  
got stuck—scared the kids—slept the night,  
and the next day sucked free and went on.

Fifteen years passed. In the eighties  
With my lover I went where the roads end.  
Walked the hills for a day,  
looked out where it all drops away,  
discovered a path  
of carved stone inscriptions tucked into the sagebrush

“Stomp out greed”  
“The best things in life are not things”

words placed by an old desert sage.

Faint shorelines seen high on these slopes,  
long gone Lake Lahontan,  
cutthroat trout spirit in silt—  
Columbian Mammoth bones  
four hundred feet up on the wave-etched  
beach ledge; curly-horned  
desert sheep outlines pecked into the rock,

and turned the truck onto the playa  
heading for know-not,  
bone-gray dust boiling and billowing,  
mile after mile, trackless and featureless,  
let the car coast to a halt  
on the crazed cracked

flat hard face where  
winter snow spirals, and  
summer sun bakes like a kiln.  
Off nowhere, to be or not be,

all equal, far reaches, no bounds.  
Sound swallowed away,  
no waters, no mountains, no  
bush no grass and  
    because no grass  
no shade but your shadow.  
No flatness because no not-flatness.  
No loss, no gain. So—  
nothing in the way!  
— the ground is the sky  
the sky is the ground,  
no place between, just

wind-whip breeze,  
tent-mouth leeward,  
time being here.  
We meet heart to heart,  
leg hard-twined to leg,  
    with a kiss that goes to the bone.  
Dawn sun comes straight in the eye. The tooth  
of a far peak called King Lear.

Now in the nineties desert night  
    —my lover's my wife—  
old friends, old trucks, drawn around;  
great arcs of kids on bikes out there in darkness  
    no lights—just planet Venus glinting  
by the calyx crescent moon,

and tasting grasshoppers roasted in a pan.

They all somehow swarm down here—  
sons and daughters in the circle  
eating grasshoppers grimacing,

singing sūtras for the insects in the wilderness,

—the wideness, the  
foolish loving spaces

full of heart.

*Walking on walking,  
under foot earth turns*

*Streams and mountains never stay the same.*

The space goes on.  
But the wet black brush  
tip drawn to a point,  
lifts away.

*Marin-an 1956–Kitkitdizze 1996*

## The Making of *Mountains and Rivers Without End*

As a student at Reed College I had the good fortune to study with the brilliant polymath Lloyd Reynolds, who was—among many things—a remarkable calligrapher in the Renaissance Italic mode. It was from Lloyd I learned to appreciate the pen, whether reed, turkey feather, or carefully hand-ground alloy steel tip. One of Lloyd's students was Charles Leong, a Chinese-American veteran back from World War II and studying on the GI Bill. He was already an accomplished seal carver and brush calligrapher of Chinese; with Charlie as my guide, I learned to hold the brush as well as the pen.

I had been introduced to the high snow peaks of the Pacific Northwest when I was thirteen and had climbed a number of summits even before I was twenty: I was forever changed by that place of rock and sky. East Asian landscape paintings, seen at the Seattle Art Museum from the age of ten on, also presented such a space. While at Reed I stumbled onto Ernest Fenollosa's *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, which gave me further guidance into Asian art. Fenollosa also led me to the translations of Ezra Pound.

After a brief spell of graduate study in anthropological linguistics, I entered graduate school in Oriental languages at the University of California at Berkeley. I also signed up for a class in sumi—East Asian brush painting—in the art department. The instructor was an intense, diminutive Japanese man named Chiura Obata. Obata had us grinding ink seriously and working with an array of brushes; we learned by trying to match his fierce, swift strokes that made pine needles, bamboo stalks, eucalyptus leaves appear as if by magic on the white paper. He was a naturalized citizen who had been in an internment camp—I learned little else about him. Though I lacked talent, my practice with soot-black ink and brush tuned my eye for looking more closely at paintings. In museums and through books I became aware of how the energies of mist, white water, rock formations, air swirls—a chaotic universe where everything is in place—are so much a part of the East Asian painter's world. In one book I came upon a reference to a hand scroll (*shou-chuan*) called *Mountains and Rivers Without End*. The name stuck in my mind.

While at Berkeley I spent summers working in the mountains, in

National Parks or Forests. Two seasons on lookouts (Crater Mountain in 1952, Sourdough Mountain in 1953) in what was then the Mount Baker National Forest, not far south of the Canadian border, gave me full opportunity to watch the change of mood over vast landscapes, light moving with the day—the countless clouds, the towering cumulus, black thunderstorms rolling in with jagged lightning strikes. The prolonged stay in mountain huts also gave me my first opportunity to seriously sit cross-legged, in the practical and traditional posture of Buddhist meditation. Back in Berkeley, I became acquainted with the warm, relaxed, familial, and devotional Buddhism of traditional Asia in the atmosphere of the Berkeley Buddhist church, presided over by Reverend Kanmo Imamura and his gracious and tireless wife, Jane. Their Jodo-shin, or “Pure Land,” Buddhism is one of infinite generosity that had come to California with the Japanese immigrants of the early twentieth century. In Berkeley it was open to all. Jodo-shin and Zen are both in the Mahayana tradition; I soaked up Mahayana sūtras and traditional commentaries, Chinese and Japanese Ch’an texts, and Vajrayana writing through those years, taking delight in their scale of imagination and their fearless mytho-psychological explorations.

Thoughts of that time, along with a half year spent working as a logger in eastern Oregon, took shape in a poem sequence called *Myths and Texts*. This sequence was my first venture into the long poem and the challenge of interweaving physical life and inward realms. I studied Oriental languages and practiced Chinese calligraphy with the brush while finishing *Myths and Texts*. The final touches were done in a small abandoned cabin I found in Marin County, California, in early 1956.

My interest in Zen led me to the lectures of Alan Watts, founder of the Academy of Asian Studies in San Francisco, and we came to be friends on the basis of our shared taste for Italic calligraphy as much as our Buddhist interests. In the winter of 1955–56 a remarkable artist from Japan, Saburo Hasegawa, was in residence at the Academy of Asian Studies. I attended some of Hasegawa’s lectures. I never saw him wearing Western clothes: He was always in formal kimono and *bakama*. He spoke of East Asian landscape painting as a meditative exercise. I think he once said that the landscape paintings were for Zen as instructively and deeply Buddhist as the tankas and mandalas are for Tibetan Buddhism.

At some point Hasegawa heard that I had never tasted the ceremonial powdered green tea, and he delightedly invited me to his apartment. I still remember the day, April 8, 1956, because it was also the Buddha's birthday. He frothed up the tea with a bamboo whisk, we chatted, and he talked at length about the great Japanese Zen monk painter Sesshū. As I left that day I resolved to start another long poem that would be called *Mountains and Rivers Without End*.

One month later I headed west for the East on a Japanese passenger-freighter. In Kyoto I lived in the Rinzai Zen temple compound of Shokoku-ji. I immediately entered the local hilly forests, found the trails and shrines, and paid my respects to the local *kami*. In my small spare time I read geology and geomorphology. I came to see the yogic implications of "mountains" and "rivers" as the play between the tough spirit of willed self-discipline and the generous and loving spirit of concern for all beings: a dyad presented in Buddhist iconography as the wisdom-sword-wielding Manjushri, embodying transcendent insight, and his partner, Tārā, the embodiment of compassion, holding a lotus or a vase. I could imagine this dyad as paralleled in the dynamics of mountain uplift, subduction, erosion, and the planetary water cycle.

I began to attend Nō performances, and became an aficionado of Nō history and aesthetics. Over ten years I was able to attend a large number of plays, seeing some of them several times over. Nō is a gritty but totally refined high-culture art that is in the lineage of shamanistic performance, a drama that by means of voice and dance calls forth the spirit realms. I began to envision *Mountains and Rivers* through the dramatic strategies of Nō. The great play *Yamamba* ("Old Mountain Woman") especially fascinated me. But I never lost my sense of belonging to North America, and I kept nourishing the images and practices that kept me connected to a sense of the ancient, sacred Turtle Island landscape.

Most of the sixties I spent in Japan. One break was to work nine months on a tanker that went between Persian Gulf and mid-Pacific oil ports. The ocean rocked me. When I got back to Kyoto, Cid Corman was there and had started publishing *Origin*. Early sections of *Mountains and Rivers* appeared there. Others came out in James Koller's *Coyote's Journal*. A visit to the United States in 1964 got me back into the High Sierra, a refreshing return to the realm of rock and ice. In the course of that visit I



showed Donald Allen, the editor, translator, and publisher, what I had been up to. He brought out a small book of the sections to date, under the title *Six Sections from Mountains and Rivers Without End*.

Although my main reason for being in Kyoto was to do Zen Buddhist practice, I was also fortunate enough to make contact with Yamabushi, the Mountain Buddhists, and I was given a chance to see how walking the landscape can become both ritual and meditation. I did the five-day pilgrimage on the Omine ridge and established a tentative relationship with the archaic Buddhist mountain deity Fudo. This ancient exercise has one visualizing the hike from peak to valley floor as an inner linking of the womb and diamond mandala realms of Vajrayana Buddhism.

I was now studying under the Rōshi of Daitoku-ji and had moved into my own place, a ten-minute walk from the monastery. I shared the little house with a highly cultured, mature woman named Yaeko Hosaka Nakamura, a student of Nō singing. For more than five years I was soaked in the *utai* chants from *Yamamba* and other Nō plays. Her full, strong voice belted out the eerie melodies from her room upstairs. I even tried chanting with her, but soon gave up.

I got to see rare Japanese and Chinese scrolls in the richly endowed Buddhist temples of Kyoto, especially those of Daitoku-ji. Poems for *Mountains and Rivers* kept showing up at the rate of about one a year. I was writing other poems at the same time, but in a different and more lyrical mode.

In 1969 I returned to live on Turtle Island. More sections got written and they often appeared in Clayton Eshleman's *Caterpillar*. (Eshleman had been a number of years in Kyoto and it was there I first met him.) Later sections have appeared in his magazine *Sulfur*. I moved with my family to the Sierra Nevada and developed a farmstead in the pine-oak forest.

While giving readings and talks around the country through the seventies and eighties, I was able to visit most of the major collections of Chinese paintings in the United States. In Cleveland I saw the Sung Dynasty *Streams and Mountains Without End*, the one that is described here in the opening section. The curators at the Freer generously let me have two private viewings of Lu Yüan's Ch'ing scroll called *Mountains and Rivers Without End*—most likely the very one that first came to my atten-

tion. I roamed the Nelson Gallery in Kansas City, the Honolulu Academy of Arts, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts; and in Europe the British Museum and the Stockholm National Museum. I had always made good use of The Asian Art Museum of San Francisco. Finally I managed to get to the Palace Museum in Beijing and the huge Palace Museum in Taipei, where I was deeply moved to see calligraphy from the hand of Su Shih himself. Gazing at these many paintings was each time a mysteriously enlarging experience.

In the late seventies my thinking was invigorated by the translations from Dōgen's *Treasury of the True Law* just then beginning to come out. His *Mountains and Waters Sūtra* is a pearl of a text. It made me think more about rivers. What with mountaineering and seasonal labor I had plenty of firsthand experience with mountains, so now I studied waters, spinning and dashing down many a rapids in rowdy and convivial company. And, starting from when I returned to the Pacific coast, I gradually extended my range of walked-in landscapes. North to Alaska, as far as the Brooks Range and the Arctic Sea; south to the Southwestern U.S. and the length of Baja California. Overseas I spent time in the Central Australian Desert; traveled in the Himalayan nation of Ladakh; visited China; and made a brief visit to the wilder parts of Taiwan. I crossed the pass and went east into the Great Basin frequently. I went back into old High Sierra haunts and took some sweet and reflective treks.

At some point I became aware of the powerful light-filled watercolor paintings and color woodblocks of California mountain landscapes that had been done by my old teacher Chiura Obata. It turned out that he had explored and sketched the Sierra high country many times, beginning in the 1920s.

During the last twenty years my sense of the poem has also been enlarged by several other experiences: working/walking visits to major urban centers; working alongside my brilliant and cranky neighbors in the Sierra foothills; laboring hands-on at forest and ecosystem management chores; studies of landscape and forest ecology; the lessons of our local watershed, getting down to the details of its tiniest rivulets and hillocks; and the joys and teachings that come with family life—my wife Carole and my sons and daughters.

By the 1990s I was teaching part-time at the University of California at

Davis, 108 miles away in the broad Sacramento Valley. I turned my full attention to the thought of *Mountains and Rivers*. In April 1996, on the fortieth anniversary of my tea with Saburo Hasegawa, a few of us old mountain-Buddhist-poetry-green-avant-garde types got together again in San Francisco: to remember old comrades, to declare this project ended, and to drink a cup to “the supreme theme of art and song.” The T’ang poet Po Chü-i said, “I have long had the desire that my actions in this world and any problems caused by my crazy words and extravagant language [*kyōgen kigo*] will in times to come be transformed into a clarification of the Dharma, and be but another way to spread the Buddha’s teachings.” May it be so!

People used to say to me, with a knowing smile, “*Mountains and Rivers* is endless, isn’t it?” I never thought so. Landscapes are endless in their own degree, but I knew my time with this poem would eventually end. The form and the emptiness of the Great Basin showed me where to close it; and the boldness of my young people, who ate unlikely manna in the wilderness, how. This poem, which I have come to think of as a sort of sūtra—an extended poetic, philosophic, and mythic narrative of the female Buddha Tārā—is for them.

## Notes

### *Endless Streams and Mountains*

Colophons, reproduction of the handscroll, and commentary can be found in Sherman Lee and Wen Fong, *Streams and Mountains Without End* (1967). Most of the colophon/poem translations are my own.

The East Asian landscape paintings invite commentary. In a way the painting is not fully realized until several centuries of poems have been added.

A note on Chinese landscape paintings: There were very early scenes of hills and woods in China, on silk or plastered walls, but they were full of deer and other animals, or dream creatures, or people, or some combination. Paintings of large vistas did not appear until around the tenth century. This was after two and a half millennia of self-aware civilization in the basins of the Ho and Chiang. They are at their most vigorous from mid-Sung through the Yüan and early Ming—exactly when much of China was becoming deforested.

After the Yüan dynasty large-scale “Mountains and Waters” paintings became less important, and the painter’s eye moved closer; some call them “Rocks and Trees” paintings. Later paintings drew even closer to give us pictures of “Birds and Flowers,” *hua-niao*, precise and lovely, and superb sumi sketches of insects, gourds, melons, and leaves.

### *Old Bones*

This poem is for Paul Shepard.

### *Three Worlds, Three Realms, Six Roads*

The title derives from Buddhist terms. The “three worlds” are periods of time: past, present, and future. The “three realms,” *triloka*, describe the universe in terms of desire, form, and formlessness. The “six paths” are territories of psychological passage: the hells, the animals, the humans, delightful gods and goddesses, angry warrior-geniuses, and hungry ghosts.

### *Bubbs Creek Haircut*

This poem is for Locke McCorkle.

Shiva, the “Destroyer” of the Hindu trinity, is practicing in the mountains. His lover and yogic partner is Parvati.

### *The Blue Sky*

This section is an exploration of some of the lore of healing as found in Mahayana Buddhism and in Native North America. Bhaishajyaguru (Sanskrit)—the “Medicine Buddha”—is known in Japan as Yakushi Nyorai. He holds a tiny medicine bottle in the palm of one hand. Eons ago he made a vow to work for the welfare and healing of all sentient beings.

Another element is the ancient lore of the protective and healing powers of the color blue and of certain blue stones.

The character *k'ung*, used for the Buddhist term *shunyata* or “emptiness” in Chinese, also means “sky.” I was once told by a Native California elder that the diagnostic and healing hand of a “trembling-hand healer’s hand” was guided by an eagle so high up in the sky as to be out of sight.

### *The Hump-backed Flute Player*

Ancient rock art—petroglyphs—of a walking flute-playing figure, sometimes with a hump on his back, are found widely in the Southwest and into Mexico. These images are several thousand years old. There is a Hopi secret society that takes the Flute-player as its emblem. Some of the figures have an erect penis, and some have feelers on their heads that look like insect antennae.

It has been suggested that the hump is possibly a pack, and that the figure may represent Aztec or Toltec wandering traders, who once came up into the Southwest with trade items. In Peru even today you can see young men with a sort of sling-pack on their backs, carrying a load and playing the flute while walking.

Gary Paul Nabhan and I were reflecting on Kokop’ele a few years ago, and were entertained by the thought that it might be *seeds* that he was carrying! As a possible emblem of genetic diversity his work is not over: guardianship and preservation, not just of plants and animals, but of peoples and cultures as well.

Hsüan Tsang, the Buddhist scholar-pilgrim, brought back the famed “Heart Sutra”—the one-page condensation of the whole philosophy of

transcendent wisdom—in his pack. Once he had translated it into Chinese it was set in movable type—the first text to be printed this way, it is said.

Note: “White man” here is not a racial designation, but a name for a certain set of mind. When we all become born-again natives of Turtle Island, then the “white man” will be gone.

*The Circumambulation of Mt. Tamalpais*

This poem is for Philip Whalen and Allen Ginsberg.

Walking meditation, circumambulation, *pradakshina*, is one of the most ancient human spiritual exercises. On such walks one stops at notable spots to sing a song, or to chant invocations and praises, such as mantras, songs, or little sūtras.

*The Canyon Wren*

This poem is for James and Carol Katz.

The Stanislaus River comes out of the central Sierra. The twists and turns of the river, the layering, swirling stone cliffs of the gorges, are cut in nine-million-year-old latites. We ran the river to see its face once more before it went under the rising water of the New Mellones Dam. The song of the canyon wren stayed with us the whole time.

*Arctic Midnight Twilight . . .*

This poem is for Peter Coyote.

*Under the Hills Near the Morava River*

Excavations by Bohuslav Klima at the Dolni Vestonice site in the Pavlovské Kopce hills of southern Moravia (Czech Republic).

*Haida Gwai North Coast, Naikoon Beach*

This poem is for Sherman Paul.

*An Offering for Tārā*

Out of the upper Indus River watershed, on the Western Tibetan Plateau, around Ladakh and its main town of Leh.

Tārā, “She Who Brings Across,” is a female Buddha of both Compassion and Wisdom. She is one of the most revered figures in Buddhism, especially in Tibet, Mongolia, and Nepal.

*Old Woodrat's Stinky House*

Coyote diet from Adolph Murie, *Ecology of the Coyote in the Yellowstone* (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office *Conservation Bulletin* 4, 1940).

Human diet from David Perlman, “An Earthly Approach,” the research of Robert Heizer and students on six thousand ancient human droppings found in the Lovelock Cave north of Fallon, Nevada (*San Francisco Chronicle*, July 14, 1969).

Prehistory of woodrat nests in the Great Basin from Julio Betancourt, Thomas Van Devender, and Paul Martin, eds., *Packrat Middens* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990).

Cottontail boys and woodrat, part of a tale from William Shipley, ed., *The Maidu Myths and Tales of Hanc'ibjijim* (Berkeley: Heyday, 1991).

*Raven's Beak River*

This poem is for Edward Schafer.

*Earrings Dangling and Miles of Desert*

This poem is for Ursula Le Guin.

*The Dance*

Otto Rössler as cited in James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (1987), 142.

Jean Herbert's *Kojiki* translation from his *Shinto* (1967).

Allan Grapard's translation from the same episode in “Visions of Excess,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 18:1 (March 1991).

*We Wash Our Bowls in This Water*

This poem incorporates a Zen training-hall meal verse. Su Shih (Su Tung-p'ò) was the great eleventh-century Chinese poet and Zen adept. This was his “enlightenment poem.” The translation is my own. Dōgen gave a lecture on it to his students some two centuries later.

“Two million years”: Preston Cloud and Aharon Gibor, “Oxygen Cycle,” *Biosphere* (San Francisco: Scientific American Books/Freeman, 1970).

*The Mountain Spirit*

This poem somewhat follows the Nō play *Yamamba* (Old Mountain Woman), a play of the “supernatural being” class, written in the “aged style” of “quiet heart and distant eye.”

There are stands of bristlecone pine, *Pinus longaeva*, in the mountains at the western edge of the Great Basin that contain individual trees that are dated as more than four thousand years old. They are thought to be the oldest living beings.

Wovoka was the visionary founder of the Ghost Dance religion. He had a big hat that he sometimes let his followers peek inside: They said it contained all the wildlife and native homelands of the pre-white world.

Lord Krishna, when a baby, sometimes ate dirt. Once when his Mother tried to take a lump of dirt off his tongue, he playfully let her see the whole universe with its stars and planets, all in his mouth.

And a Zen story: When Huang-bo bid goodbye to Nan-ch'üan, who saw him off at the door, Nan-ch'üan held out Huang-bo's straw hat and said: “Your body is unusually big. Isn't your straw hat too small?” Huang-bo said “Although my hat is small the entire universe is in it.”

Vimalakīrti was an enlightened Buddhist layman from north India who fell sick. In the sūtra named for him an incredible number of beings of all categories from all over the various universes come at the same time to pay him a sick call. No matter how many keep arriving, they all fit into his one small room, “ten feet square.”

At various times over the recent periods of glacial advance there has been a vast inland sea, Lake Lahontan, covering much of the Great Basin. At the moment it is almost entirely dry.



## By Way of Thanks

I thank the fellow writers who helped me shape this poem's idea from earliest on: Philip Whalen, Allen Ginsberg, Michael McClure, Jack Kerouac, and Lew Welch.

And my Dharma Teachers: Isshū Miura Rōshi, Sessō Oda Rōshi, and So(ko) Morinaga Rōshi. Nine bows.

Hosts of poets and writers, scientists, scholars, craftspersons, rivers-and-mountain people, fields-and-orchards people, and streets-and-buildings people have befriended and instructed this work. They are too numerous to thank by name. My gratitude to you all.

Thanks to the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, the University of California at Davis (Research Grants), and the Foundation for Deep Ecology.

I am grateful for the readings and suggestions given the almost-finished manuscript by Peter Coyote, Alan Williamson, Scott McLean, Michael McClure, Jon Halper, David Padwa, and especially the witty and demanding Jim Dodge.

And thanks to Jack Shoemaker, friend of more than thirty years, advisor, publisher, and editor. I am indebted to his warmth, skill, and encouragement.

And finally, great thanks to my wife, lover, and partner, Carole Koda— at home in the world, at home at home, and a *dakini* of mountains and rivers.

## Publication Record

The author wishes to thank those who have published sections of this work.

- “Afloat”: *Grand Street* 45 (Spring 1993)  
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