



The Back Country

Gary Snyder

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This collection is made up of four sections: "Far West"—poems of the Western mountain country where, as a young man, Gary Snyder worked as a logger and forest ranger; "Far East"—poems written between 1956 and 1964 in Japan where he studied Zen at the monastery in Kyoto; "Kali"—poems inspired by a visit to India and his reading of Indian religious texts, particularly those of Shivaism and Tibetan Buddhism; and "Back"—poems done on his return to this country in 1964 which look again at our West with the eyes of India and Japan. The book concludes with a group of translations of the Japanese poet Miyazawa Kenji (1896-1933), with whose work Snyder feels a close affinity. The title, *The Back Country*, has three major associations; wilderness, the "backward" countries, and the "back country" of the mind with its levels of being in the unconscious.

The Back Country Details

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Author : Gary Snyder

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From Reader Review *The Back Country* for online ebook

Chris LaMay-West says

I've always loved Gary Snyder's poetry for the mix of subject matter- equal parts Buddhist philosophy, environmentalism, love of the outdoors of the U.S. West and Asian travelogue. All of this is in excellent display in this volume of work from the late 50s and early 60s, which is organized in sections covering poems written in the West while working on logging and trail crews, in Japan while studying Buddhism, traveling through India, and the back in the U.S.. There's also a section of translations Snyder did of Japanese poet Miyazawa Kenji, who's long been a favorite of mine. I was a little skeptical of this add-on, but it actually fits very well thematically.

Hans Ostrom says

I've read almost all of Snyder's books (poetry and nonfiction), and this book of poems is my favorite.

Rob Woodard says

I've just reread this after many years and I have to say it's probably my least favorite of Snyder's poetry volumes. There's a lot of good stuff here, but there's also a kitchen sink feel to this--like he just threw in everything he had at the time. This means there's some lesser stuff here, which causes the book to wander a bit. Also there's some ego coming thru in these poems that usually doesn't mar his work. Worthwhile for Snyder's fans but not the best starting point for the curious.

Annie says

There are bits of passages and thoughts with which I connected, but for the most part, I found this collection of poetry exhausting to read.

I liked "Hitch Haiku" from the first section and a number of poems from the second section entitled "Far East." The poem entitled "Some Views Concerning the Proposed Site of a National Park" was darkly amusing, but it is a bit long, and I am not in the mood to type the entire thing out here.

His shorter poems appeal to me the most:

ASLEEP ON THE TRAIN

Briefcase, tight garter
over the knees
peep of fat little thighs
roll and lean with the fall of the train

eyes
shut, mouth open, so young women
tire with the rest tired workers.
jerk with the speedup and slow

go-ahead signals flash by
the Special Express
has only one stop

where they wake from their trance
to themselves.

Erik says

Gary Snider is one of the most amazing people I have never met. He was born at the right time, but never quite fit in with his contemporaries. However, he still managed to carve a niche in the world of poetry and become one of the most important people of his generation. Gary Snyder has out-survived nearly all of the people who initially championed him. He made a name for himself on all sides of the globe, and he continues to inspire people to this day. I was a very young when I first discovered "The Back Country," but I have held on to that same copy I bought many years ago. It has traveled with me all over the globe, and will probably lay on my night stand until my dying day.

Imagist, New Romantic, Free Verse, Naturalist, Zen Poet... Whatever you wish to call him; Snyder's words truly are the written embodiment of peace, love, and understanding. Even if you choose to not read any of Snyder's poetry, just be sure to check out Kerouac's "The Dharma Bums." It's all about Gary, and is considered to be the major catalyst that ignited the entire '60s generation.

Kai says

this mother fucking book....*rolls eyes all the way back into head*

Sabrina says

Who would have guessed I liked poems about trees, coyotes, travelling, dropping in on friends, slowing down, making bread, accomplishing a hard day's work? The poems in here that others would find crude or ignoble and patriarchal I find wrapped in sadness.

Joana says

"We live
On the meeting of the sun and earth.
We live--we live--and all our lives

Have led to this, this city,
Which is soon the world, this
Hopelessness where love of man
Or hate of man could matter
None, love if you will or
Contemplate or write or teach
But know in your human marrow you
Who read, that all you tread
Is earthquake rot and matter mental
Trembling, freedom is a void,
Peace war religion revolution
Will not help."

Mat says

Very good collection of poems from Snyder. This book consists of five sections - 1) Far West (poems written when Snyder worked as a logger and on a trail crew in the Western mountain country of Oregon etc.); 2) Far East (poems written in Japan between 1956-1964 while he studied Zen Buddhism); 3) Kali (poems inspired by his trip to India where he met up with Ginsberg and Orlovsky and studied some famous Indian religious texts); 4) Back (poem written upon returning to the States but with new eyes having now lived in the East); and 5) Miyazawa Kenji (translations of poems written by this poet from Iwate Prefecture with whom Snyder says he shares a common poetic and aesthetic affinity).

I enjoyed the 'Far East' poems the best which makes sense considering that I live in Japan. I could relate to many of the experiences Snyder talked about in a first-hand manner. However, in other sections, I found some of Snyder's poems a little obscure, demanding of the reader a fairly high-level knowledge of various flora and fauna. I always feel like I have taken a zoology or botany class after reading one of his books. Just like one of his poetic role models, Ezra Pound, this book would be an even more enriching read if some notes or even pictures were supplied for the layperson wishing to understand these poems more deeply.

In my opinion, not Snyder's best book (for that make sure you read *Turtle Island*) but definitely one worth checking out.

Nicholas Massey says

Poetry for the spirituality and religion of nature and the natural self. A great outsiders reduction of normal life. You should read this book if only for a berry feast.

Samiam says

You took me there- and back, Gary.

Craig Werner says

Revisiting *The Back Country*, what struck me was the way it both reflects on his journey through the mid-60s and suggests directions that he would travel in the future. The book's divided into sections on his time logging, his travels to Japan and India, and his return to the U.S. where he was preparing to put down deep roots. There's also a collection of translations from Miyazawa Kenji, a Japanese poet whose affinities with Snyder are obvious. Not the place to start with Snyder if you don't know him; I'd probably go with *Turtle Island* or maybe *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems*. My favorites in *Back Country* are "Foxtail Pine," "For a Stone Girl at Sanchi," and "Through the Smoke Hole." Other recommendations: "The Spring," "A Walk," "For the Boy who Was Dodger Point Lookout," "Yase: September," "The Manichaeans," "Mother of the Buddha," and "To The Chinese Comrades."

Erik Akre says

Gary Snyder's work broadens the meaning of the word "wild." My thinking about the mountains, meditation, Zen, the Beat generation, bioregionalism, place, and poetry would not be the same without his writing. If I write poetry at all, it's because I've read his work.

In the *Back Country*, form is very *organic*. It's like an old gnarled tree or the shape of a boulder or a riverbed. It flows, "chaotically," it's order unknown, unperceived--even by him, ultimately? Rhyming seems to happen spontaneously and naturally, like spotting an elk on the slope, or coming across a bear in the forest. I love how he can seemingly infuse a sense of *wabi-sabi* in any aspect of life that might hint of the sacred. He crystallizes the wilderness in such diverse settings...

Shane says

Some great poetry paired with passages I didn't particularly care for. "Looking at Pictures to be put away" was a favorite:

Who was this girl
In her white night gown
Clutching a pair of jeans

On a foggy redwood deck.
She looks up at me tender,
Calm, surprised,

What will we remember
Bodies thick with food and lovers
After twenty years

Fantastic- reminds me of the feelings I get when I have looked back and wondered how those people who used to be so close to me are doing.

Mark says

Don't know why, but this didn't grab me as much as Turtle Island. I think I could benefit from a little research into his references, and maybe a slower read with fewer distractions. But that can be hard to come by.

Still, a solid collection with moments that certainly shined through for me with that sense of clarity available only viscerally.
