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The Great Clod: Notes And Memoirs On Nature And History In East Asia



Synopsis

For the full course of his remarkable career, Gary Snyder has continued his study of East Asian culture and philosophies. From the Ainu to the Mongols, from Hokkaido to Okinawa, from the landscapes of China to the backcountry of contemporary Japan, from the temples of Daitokoji to the Yellow River Valley, it is now clear how this work has influenced his poetry, his stance as an environmental and political activist, and his long practice of Zen. Growing up in the Pacific Northwest, Asia became a vocation for Snyder. While most American writers looked to the capitals of Europe for their inspiration, Snyder looked west to the East. American letters is profoundly indebted to this geographical choice. Long rumored to exist, *The Great Clod* collects several published in *The Coevolution Quarterly* almost forty years ago when Snyder briefly described this work as "The China Book," and several others, the majority, never before published in any form. "Summer in Hokkaido," "Wild in China," "Ink and Charcoal," "Wolf-Hair Brush," these essays turn from being memoirs of travel to prolonged considerations of art, culture, natural history and religion. It is filled with Snyder's remarkable insights and briskly beautiful descriptions.

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Customer Reviews

"His newest book of prose, *The Great Clod* is a series of essays on Asia's ecological history, combining culture and politics in a way that is, unsurprisingly, poetic and graceful. *The Great Clod* may be slim but its scope is immense. "The Japan Times"; Classical poetry, calligraphy, the best source of temple incense; all figure in the text, which has something of

the feel of a valediction. Elegant and thoughtful, with much to read between the lines in commentary on a long life's work. Students and admirers of Snyder will be enchanted and intrigued.â •

•Kirkus•Each essay furnishes a graceful, very conversational (sentence fragments and all), but keenly well-informed enticement to pursue its subject further. This kind of friendly, even compassionate, mode of instruction comes, of course, from the American arguably most responsible for spreading appreciation of East Asia among North Americans. If this little book should prove Snyderâ™s last word on East Asia, it is wonderfully enough.â •

•Booklist"Snyder is an elder statesman of the natural world and the tribal unions of poetry. He has a body of work as original as predecessors Williams Carlos Williams and Wallace Stevens."•The Bloomsbury Review"His greatest strength•a quiet and profound elegance, an ability to write a simple phrase that seems to have been echoing through human consciousness for three or four thousand years."•Lewis MacAdams, California Magazine"This poet's great gift has always been perfect visual clarity...and, needless to say, derives from Snyder's vision in the larger sense."•Paul Berman, Village Voice"What thoughtful beauty! How skillfully Gary Snyder interfuses the practical knowledge of an animal sense with story, language, and song. True teachers in American are now an endangered species. I learn so much from this good man's perception, humor, discipline, and love for this world."•James Hillman

Gary Snyder is the author of sixteen collections of poetry and prose. Since 1970 he has lived in the watershed of the South Yuba River in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada. Winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 1975 and a finalist for the National Book Award in 1992, he has been awarded the Bollingen Poetry Prize and the Robert Kirsch Lifetime Achievement Award.

While I respect Snyder greatly and have much interest in the subject of these essays, I was disappointed by this book. There were as stated by another reviewer some fine passages but much of the content was written in a fragmented manner as could be expected of notes Snyder had made for himself. A few themes interwove themselves throughout, the most interesting being the realization that East Asians -- for all their nature-oriented culture -- have acted much like the rest of humanity in abusing the Earth. The remaining themes involved urban growth out of a more original grounded society, geological aspects of China and Japan, and how these played into poetic and pictorial arts. I don't believe I'll find this book especially memorable.

Again Gary has given us a wonderful painting with words. Having been in some of the parts of

China recently that he writes about it was like taking my trip down the Yancey river again. I highly recommend this book to all. A poetic painting of a extraordinary place. Thank you sensei.

More thoughtful than an "Area Studies" course on China, Japan and Korea.

While some of this old, rest is new. Great on ecology. Gary Snyder fan

I first encountered Gary Snyder's writing in Sierra Magazine (Sept./Oct. 1989), where his his essay The Etiquette Of Freedom appeared in advance of its publication in The Practice of the Wild. I loved the essay and book; they had a formative impact on my thinking and how I began to apprehend the world. To me much of The Great Clod marks a return to the beauty and engagement of that earlier writing. I've followed almost everything Gary Snyder has produced in the intervening years, and this is some of his best, especially three consecutive chapters: Summer In Hokkaido; All He Sees Is Blue: Basic Far East; and The Great Clod: China And Nature. The sections on Hokkaido set forth lovely writing in sound and image. I felt transported, and had clear visions of the place. Previously unused (as far as I know), his comparison of Hokkaido to North America's Maine coast framed Japan's northernmost island in a way that was clear and literally lit up my mind. I read it late at night before going to sleep, and the images brought me wide awake. Much of what follows draws a good deal from the work of others, Edward H. Schafer and Mark Elvin, to name two, but Snyder has always been a master at accessing interesting information assembled by others to build something personal and unique with his reflections and ideas. I have always wished I could have taken a class with Gary Snyder, but his books are as close as I'll get, and they make for . This a superb addition to his body of work, valuable throughout and outstanding in several wonderful sections.

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