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## The path which goes beyond: *Danger on Peaks* responds to suffering

Julia Martin

Now well into his eighties, Gary Snyder continues to pursue lifetime habits of engagement and detachment in which the activities of literary work, spiritual practice, environmental activism, and family life are mutually informing. This leads, in the poetry, to an instructive response to personal suffering and to the suffering embodied in our present eco-social dilemmas. When asked in the 1996 *Paris Review* interview why, for all his environmental involvements, his writing is “surprisingly without disasters,” Snyder countered that “there are several poems that have very bad news in them” (Snyder and Weinberger 335). But then he went on to critique the efficacy of promoting “doom scenarios” and to describe the inclination of his own interventions in terms of humor and love:

the condition of our social and ecological life is so serious that we'd better have a sense of humor. That it's too serious just to be angry and despairing [...] The first step, I think, and that's why it's in my poetry, is to make us love the world rather than to make us fear for the end of the world. (Snyder and Weinberger 335)

In the twenty years since this interview was recorded, Snyder's poetry and prose has faced personal, ecological, and social pain increasingly directly, but it continues to foreground lightness and tenderness. This makes for a form of engagement that involves two main strategies that recall the Buddha's first and fourth Noble Truths: the Truth of Suffering and Truth of the Path. First, there is an ongoing and unflinching representation of the unarguable pain of global and personal suffering, both human and nonhuman. Simultaneously, the work articulates the reality of the path that goes beyond suffering, what the final poem from *Danger on Peaks* (2005) identifies as “great wisdom of the path that goes beyond” (107). This path is a way of healing, understood through a lifetime of Buddhist (and, more specifically, Rinzai Zen) practice that is informed by bioregional activism and radical politics.

The astonishing poem “Go Now,” about his wife Carole's death (from *This Present Moment* [2015]), offers what is surely Snyder's hardest, most acute, and most direct response to suffering yet, but it is *Danger on Peaks* that presents the most extended and consistent engagement with the pervasiveness of eco-social and personal pain. The first section faces Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the last is a response to the annihilation of the Buddhas of Bamiyan and the destruction of the World Trade Center. Here, and in poems



















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