人間と食物連鎖：賢治とスナイダーに見る〈食〉の表象

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Where Am I in This Food Chain? Humanity and the Wild in Gary Snyder and Kenji Miyazawa

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山　里　勝　己

人間はなぜ他者の生命を食べるのか？ あるいは食べる主体は人間だけであって、野生の他者は食べられる存在でしかないのか。このような問いに答えようとして、宮沢賢治は 1924 年に「注文の多い料理店」を書いた。1956 年、ゲーリー・スナイダーは日本に向かう太平洋上で、食物連鎖上の自らの位置について問いを発し、日本滞在中にこのような存在論に対する解を発見しようと思索を重ねた。本稿では、両者を比較しながら、食物連鎖と人間、人間にとっての野生の意味、そしてアジアから発信するエコクリティシズムの可能性について論じる。

I

Commenting on Gary Snyder's early synthesis of Buddhism and North American indigenous cultures, John Elder states: "The synthesis in his own life and art between the two ancient cultures is itself a basis for hope: North American vision, like the Dharma, may be transmitted and developed in cultural contexts different from its origins" (p. 45). I concur with this remark, and I want to delineate how this cross-cultural vision, "a basis for hope," unfolds itself in Snyder's poetry and prose.

My interests also include other elements that Snyder brings into this cross-cultural space. Consequently, I am less interested in merely identifying East Asian perspectives in Snyder's works (although this issue is unavoidable and only informed discussions of details guarantee valid textual assessment) than in how East Asian elements contribute to creating a cross-culturality, which ultimately constitutes the core of his vision for a sustainable planetary future. In other words, it is the process of the formation of this cross-culturality and its function in Snyder's work as it is used to subvert and dismantle the received assumptions concerning the human and the nonhuman that is of main interest in

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this paper. Part of this process manifests itself when we compare Snyder with his East Asian counterpart, Kenji Miyazawa, a Japanese poet and pioneer in environmental thinking.

Gary Snyder translated eighteen poems by the Japanese poet Kenji Miyazawa (1896–1933) into English and included them in *The Back Country* in a section entitled "Miyazawa Kenji." Comparisons of the works of Miyazawa and Snyder offer very interesting insights into humanity in terms of food and eating. Gary Snyder asked, "Where am I in this food chain?" as he crossed the Pacific in 1956 on his way to Kyoto, Japan (*Earth House Hold* 1). This is one of the key questions that he tried to answer during his sojourn in Japan (1956–1968). Hideo Isogai, a Japanese critic, points out that the question why living things have to eat other living things to maintain their lives was the greatest question to be answered for Miyazawa. Isogai points out that this is a Buddhist question and that the question permeates many stories by Miyazawa.

In this paper, I would like to compare and contrast Miyazawa and Snyder in terms of food and eating. Miyazawa's story that I want to analyze is "A Restaurant with Many Orders," and I will compare this story with Snyder's poem entitled "Song of the Taste," a poem written during the last days of his stay in Japan.

Before comparing these two writers in detail, I would like to explain briefly how Snyder came to know Miyazawa. Snyder first heard of the Japanese poet in Berkeley in the early 1950s from Jane Imamura, wife of the head priest of the Berkeley Buddhist Church. Snyder was studying Chinese and Japanese at UC Berkeley at that time. She showed him a translation of "Unbeaten by Rain," probably Miyazawa's most widely known poem. Almost any Japanese can recite the first lines of the poem: "Unbeaten by rain / Unbeaten by wind / Having a strong body unbeaten by snow or summer heat . . . " (my translation). Snyder thought it remarkable and very different from the other, more European-inspired modern Japanese poetry he had read. When he arrived in Kyoto, in the mid-1950s, he picked up a volume of stories by Miyazawa that had been translated into English. He came to realize that Miyazawa had written a lot more than just "Unbeaten by Rain."

In the early 1960s, Snyder was offered a small grant to translate Japanese literature into English. He asked Burton Watson, an American scholar of Chinese history living in Japan, to recommend a Japanese poet to translate. Watson recommended that he translate Miyazawa. Snyder was already familiar with Miyazawa, and this seemed a very natural idea to him. In 1962, he worked with a Japanese named Hirotsugu Inoue, who was a graduate of Kyoto University. They worked together for several months, and Snyder revised and polished the work into translations as we now see them in *The Back Country*.

II

Miyazawa's story, "A Restaurant with Many Orders," is a story of two hunters wearing European hunting clothes. They go into the woods with guns and two dogs and a guide. Somehow, the hunters get lost in the woods, and they cannot shoot anything. They

become hungry and look for a restaurant in the woods. Strangely enough, they find a restaurant in the woods. The restaurant is called "Wildcat House."

The hunters go into the restaurant and stand in front of a door, on which is written in gold: "We especially welcome fat people and young people." The hunters read the following sentence written on the second door: "Excuse us for any inconvenience. This is a restaurant with many orders." The hunters think that the restaurant entertains many customers and this is the reason for "many orders." They go into the next room, and a memo hanging from the door knob tells them to leave their shoes, guns, and any other things made of metal. The hunters accept these instructions because they think they cannot relax with guns and heavy things made of metal.

They go into the next room. They are now asked to take off their clothes and put "cream made of milk" and salt on their bodies. They are also asked to splash "perfume" on their bodies, and it smells of vinegar. The two men first think that it must be a peculiar way of this restaurant entertaining customers.

At this moment, however, they suddenly realize that they are being prepared to be eaten. They see two wild blue eyes staring at them from the keyhole. As Gary Snyder says, "The world is watching" (*Practice* p. 19), and the wild is staring at humanity as food to be caught and eaten as in this story. The voice behind the door tells them to come into the room because their boss is waiting for them with a knife and a napkin around his neck. The hunters realize that the "orders" are not given by them, but rather that they come from the other side, that is, the wild world of animals. The voices behind the door belong to the wildcats that live in the woods. The hunters realize then that "western restaurant" in the woods does not refer to a restaurant that serves western food but one that cooks customers in European ways and eats them up. They start shaking hard and cannot utter a word and just keep stuttering. In this moment of crisis, their dogs find them and chase the wildcats away and save their lives. As the *Pocket Oxford English Dictionary* (4th edition) states, "Cats are persecuted by dogs."

What the story implies, I think, is that humanity is also a part of the food chain, not a prestigious being towering high on top of all beings or eating every being from the end of the food chain. Humanity is also food inexorably locked in the food chain to be eaten by other beings. This is the insight that the hunters gain in their moment of crisis. Becoming someone else's food means instantaneous death, and that's why they start shaking and stuttering, feeling that death in the wild world is imminent. Humanity is helpless in this situation, and Miyazawa depicts the men in their naked state to show what it really means to be human in terms of the food chain. As the Japanese critic Takeshi Umehara points out, Miyazawa shows the limits of modern anthropocentrism in this story (p. 197).

III

Now I want to compare this story with Snyder's poem entitled "Song of the Taste." Snyder included this poem in *Regarding Wave*, published in 1970. This book mainly col-

Humans on "the snowy white dishes"

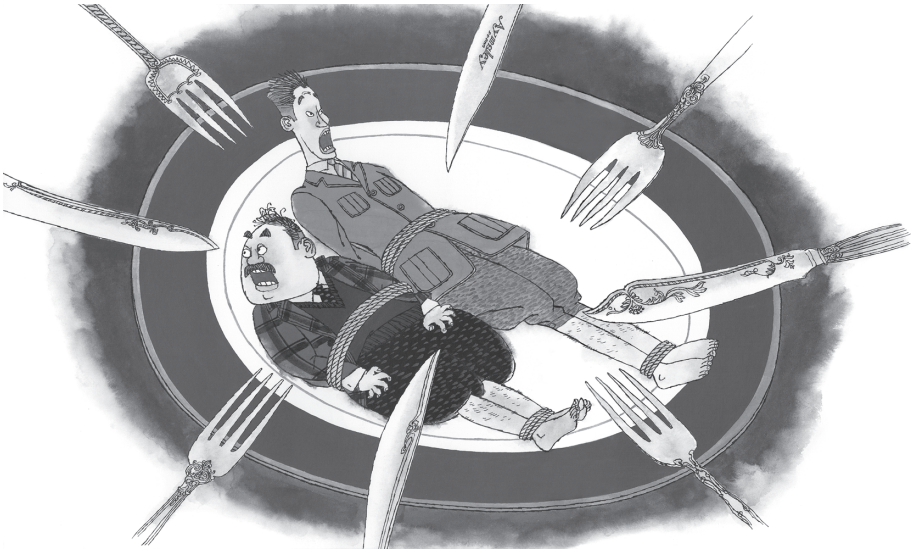

Illustration by Hiroaki Ikeda, *Chūmon no ōi ryōriten*. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1985.

Gaze from the wild

Illustration by Hiroaki Ikeda, *Chūmon no ōi ryōriten*. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1985.

lects his poems written at about the time when he was getting ready to return to the United States with his family after finishing his Buddhist studies in Kyoto. His ecological view of the world become increasingly foregrounded in his works in this period. I quote the whole poem below:

> Eating the living germs of grasses
> Eating the ova of large birds
>
> the fleshly sweetness packed
> around the sperms of swaying trees
>
> The muscles of the flanks and thighs of
> Soft-voiced cows
> the bounce in the lamb's leap
> the swish in the ox's tail
>
> Eating roots grown swoll
> Inside the soil
>
> Drawing on life of living
> clustered points of light spun
> out of space
> hidden in the grape.
> Eating each other's seed
> Eating
> ah, each other
>
> Kissing the lover in the mouth of bread:
> lip to lip (*Regarding Wave* p. 17)

The theme of this poem is eating, that is, energy exchange in the food chain. This, I think, is one of the first poems in which Snyder unhesitatingly foregrounds his ecological view of the world. This could well be Snyder's answer to the question why living things have to eat other living things.

Snyder, in this poem, does not specify the agent that engages in the act of eating. This means that the syntax of the poem enables the narrator of the poem to avoid naming the eater. This poetic syntax also implies a philosophical insight that not only humanity but also every being in this world can be the agent of the act of eating. The traditional, anthropocentric "I" cannot assert its superiority in the world depicted in this poem. As the narrator states, we eat each other, and we eat each other's seed.

This poem also nakedly specifies what we eat. We eat eggs, fruits, flanks and thighs of cows, grapes, carrots, potatoes, and burdock roots. We also take in energy hidden and stored in the bodies of a lamb or an ox. We eat "New York steak" or "fillet mignon" or "rib eye" at a steak house, but what we actually eat are muscles of an animal.

In such a world, humanity alone cannot be isolated and cannot stand apart from the cycle of energy exchange, that is, eating. Even so, Snyder's natural or wild world is different from that of the 19th century image of the world that, say, Tennyson depicts. Ten-

nyson laments in *In Memoriam* (1850) that humanity lives in a world in which the strong devour the weak, as he famously writes, "Nature, red in tooth and claw." The universe for Snyder is not as bleak as the one depicted by European and American Darwinists and literary naturalists of the 19th century.

As the last lines of the poem suggest, for Snyder, eating finally becomes a joyful ritual of the food web, an act of deep (even erotic) love, not the bloody taking of life but a ritual gift exchange such as we see in some Native American rituals. As I mentioned earlier, in "Japan First Time Around" (1956), Snyder had asked, "Just where am I in this food-chain?" and by 1969, the date of this poem, his cross-culturality—Buddhism blended with ecology—has yielded the answer that he offers the reader in this poem.

IV

In conclusion, I would like to say this: One of the ultimate questions to be asked and answered in our study of literature and the environment is what it means to be human. Miyazawa was asking this question in the 1920s, and Buddhism and ecology lay behind his quest for an answer to this question. Miyazawa clearly shows how an East Asian worldview can contribute to the on-going international quest for a new image of humanity.

Also, Snyder's approach to this issue is not unrelated to his deep immersion in Buddhism in Kyoto. The poem "Song of the Taste" is his graduation piece from his Japan years, so to speak. As Snyder and his Japanese colleague Gutetsu Kanetsuki point out in *The Wooden Fish*, "Eating is a sacrament in Zen training. No other aspect of ordinary human daily life is treated with quite such formality or reverence in the Sodo [Zen training hall]" (p. 25). That eating is a sacrament is also evidenced in the verses that Zen monks recite before meals:

> First, let us reflect on our own work, let
> us see whence this comes;
>
> Secondly, let us reflect how imperfect our
> virtue is, whether we deserve this offerings [*sic*]
>
> Thirdly, what is most essential is to hold
> our minds in control and be detached from
> the various faults, greed, etc.
>
> Fourthly, that this is taken as medicinal
> to keep our bodies in good health;
>
> Fifthly, in order to accomplish the task of
> enlightenment we accept this food. (*Wooden Fish* p. 30)

Such an attitude toward food and eating permeates Snyder's works, and it is clear how East Asian ideas about food and eating influenced his development as a poet.

Accordingly, I would like to finish this paper by calling for a continued effort to identify East Asian environmental ideas that can contribute to our effort to make this world sustainable and a better place for all beings.

Note

This is a slightly revised version of a keynote lecture delivered at the 2nd ASLE-Korea and ASLE-Japan Joint-Symposium on Literature and Environment entitled "Ecology, Consumption, and Otherness" held on Oct. 30-Nov. 1, 2010 at Sungkyunkwan University in Seoul, Korea.

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