

RIPRAP

*and*

COLD  
MOUNTAIN  
POEMS

*by*

GARY SNYDER

RIPRAP

*and*

COLD

MOUNTAIN

POEMS

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江苏工业学院图书馆  
藏书章



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Printed in the United States of America

Published in Canada by

HarperCollinsCanadaLtd

Fourth printing, 1996

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Snyder, Gary.

[Riprap]

Riprap; and, Cold Mountain poems/by

Gary Snyder.

p. cm.

I. Snyder, Gary. Cold Mountain

poems. 1990.

II. Title. III. Title: Riprap. IV. Title:

Cold Mountain poems.

[PS3569.N88R5 1990]

811'.54—dc20

90-7639

*Riprap* was first published by the Origin Press in 1959; "Cold Mountain Poems" were first published in *Evergreen Review*, no. 6, in 1958. The two appeared together for the first time in a volume published by the Four Seasons Foundation in 1969.

*This book is dedicated to:*

SPEED MCINTURFF

ED MCCULLOUGH

BLACKIE BURNS

JIM BAXTER

ROY RAYMONDS

ROY MARCHBANKS

SPUD MURPHY

JACK PERSCHKE

JOE DUPERONT

JACK HAYWOOD

STANLEY PORTER

CRAZY HORSE MASON

*In the woods & at sea.*

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MID-AUGUST AT SOURDOUGH  
MOUNTAIN LOOKOUT

Down valley a smoke haze  
Three days heat, after five days rain  
Pitch glows on the fir-cones  
Across rocks and meadows  
Swarms of new flies.

I cannot remember things I once read  
A few friends, but they are in cities.  
Drinking cold snow-water from a tin cup  
Looking down for miles  
Through high still air.



THE LATE SNOW & LUMBER STRIKE  
OF THE SUMMER OF FIFTY-FOUR

Whole towns shut down  
    hitching the Coast road, only gypos  
Running their beat trucks, no logs on  
Gave me rides. Loggers all gone fishing  
Chainsaws in a pool of cold oil  
On back porches of ten thousand  
Spoke shake houses, quiet in summer rain.  
Hitched north all of Washington  
Crossing and re-crossing the passes  
Blown like dust, no place to work.

Climbing the steep ridge below Shuksan  
    clumps of pine  
    float out the fog  
No place to think or work  
    drifting.

On Mt. Baker, alone  
In a gully of blazing snow:  
Cities down the long valleys west  
Thinking of work, but here,  
Burning in sun-glare  
Below a wet cliff, above a frozen lake,  
The whole Northwest on strike  
Black burners cold,  
The green-chain still,

I must turn and go back:  
    caught on a snowpeak  
    between heaven and earth  
And stand in lines in Seattle.  
Looking for work.

## PRAISE FOR SICK WOMEN

### I

The female is fertile, and discipline  
(contra naturam) only  
confuses her

Who has, head held sideways  
Arm out softly, touching,  
A difficult dance to do, but not in mind.

Hand on sleeve: she holds leaf turning  
in sunlight on spiderweb;  
Makes him flick like trout through shallows  
Builds into ducks and cold marshes  
Sucks out the quiet: bone rushes in  
Behind the cool pupil a knot grows  
Sudden roots sod him and solid him  
Rain falls from skull-roof mouth is awash  
with small creeks

Hair grows, tongue tenses out—and she

Quick turn of the head: back glancing, one hand  
Fingers smoothing the thigh, and he sees.

### 2

Apples will sour at your sight.  
Blossoms fail the bough,  
Soil turn bone-white: wet rice,  
Dry rice, die on the hillslope.

All women are wounded  
Who gather berries, dibble in mottled light,  
Turn white roots from humus, crack nuts on stone  
High upland with squinted eye  
or rest in cedar shade.

Are wounded  
In yurt or frame or mothers  
Shopping at the outskirts in fresh clothes.  
Whose sick eye bleeds the land,  
Fast it! thick throat shields from evil,  
you young girls

First caught with the gut-cramp  
Gather punk wood and sour leaf  
Keep out of our kitchen.  
Your garden plots, your bright fabrics,  
Clever ways to carry children  
Hide

a beauty like season or tide,  
sea cries

Sick women  
Dreaming of long-legged dancing in light  
No, our Mother Eve: slung on a shoulder  
Lugged off to hell.

kali/shakti

Where's hell then?  
In the moon.  
In the change of the moon:  
In a bark shack  
Crouched from sun, five days,  
Blood dripping through crusted thighs.



## PIUTE CREEK

One granite ridge  
A tree, would be enough  
Or even a rock, a small creek,  
A bark shred in a pool.  
Hill beyond hill, folded and twisted  
Tough trees crammed  
In thin stone fractures  
A huge moon on it all, is too much.  
The mind wanders. A million  
Summers, night air still and the rocks  
Warm. Sky over endless mountains.  
All the junk that goes with being human  
Drops away, hard rock wavers  
Even the heavy present seems to fail  
This bubble of a heart.  
Words and books  
Like a small creek off a high ledge  
Gone in the dry air.

A clear, attentive mind  
Has no meaning but that  
Which sees is truly seen.  
No one loves rock, yet we are here.  
Night chills. A flick  
In the moonlight  
Slips into Juniper shadow:  
Back there unseen  
Cold proud eyes  
Of Cougar or Coyote  
Watch me rise and go.

## MILTON BY FIRELIGHT

*Piute Creek, August 1955*

"O hell, what do mine eyes  
with grief behold?"  
Working with an old  
Singlejack miner, who can sense  
The vein and cleavage  
In the very guts of rock, can  
Blast granite, build  
Switchbacks that last for years  
Under the beat of snow, thaw, mule-hooves.  
What use, Milton, a silly story  
Of our lost general parents,  
eaters of fruit?

The Indian, the chainsaw boy,  
And a string of six mules  
Came riding down to camp  
Hungry for tomatoes and green apples.  
Sleeping in saddle-blankets  
Under a bright night-sky  
Han River slantwise by morning.  
Jays squall  
Coffee boils

In ten thousand years the Sierras  
Will be dry and dead, home of the scorpion.  
Ice-scratched slabs and bent trees.  
No paradise, no fall,  
Only the weathering land  
The wheeling sky,  
Man, with his Satan

Scouring the chaos of the mind.  
Oh Hell!

Fire down  
Too dark to read, miles from a road  
The bell-mare clangs in the meadow  
That packed dirt for a fill-in  
Scrambling through loose rocks  
On an old trail  
All of a summer's day.

## ABOVE PATE VALLEY

We finished clearing the last  
Section of trail by noon,  
High on the ridge-side  
Two thousand feet above the creek  
Reached the pass, went on  
Beyond the white pine groves,  
Granite shoulders, to a small  
Green meadow watered by the snow,  
Edged with Aspen—sun  
Straight high and blazing  
But the air was cool.  
Ate a cold fried trout in the  
Trembling shadows. I spied  
A glitter, and found a flake  
Black volcanic glass—obsidian—  
By a flower. Hands and knees  
Pushing the Bear grass, thousands  
Of arrowhead leavings over a  
Hundred yards. Not one good  
Head, just razor flakes  
On a hill snowed all but summer,  
A land of fat summer deer,  
They came to camp. On their  
Own trails. I followed my own  
Trail here. Picked up the cold-drill,  
Pick, singlejack, and sack  
Of dynamite.  
Ten thousand years.



## WATER

Pressure of sun on the rockslide  
Whirled me in a dizzy hop-and-step descent,  
Pool of pebbles buzzed in a Juniper shadow,  
Tiny tongue of a this-year rattlesnake flicked,  
I leaped, laughing for little boulder-color coil—  
Pounded by heat raced down the slabs to the creek  
Deep tumbling under arching walls and stuck  
Whole head and shoulders in the water:  
Stretched full on cobble—ears roaring  
Eyes open aching from the cold and faced a trout.

## FOR A FAR-OUT FRIEND

Because I once beat you up  
Drunk, stung with weeks of torment  
And saw you no more,  
And you had calm talk for me today

I now suppose  
I was less sane than you,  
You hung on dago red,  
me hooked on books.  
You once ran naked toward me  
Knee deep in cold March surf  
On a tricky beach between two  
pounding seastacks—  
I saw you as a Hindu Deva-girl  
Light legs dancing in the waves,  
Breasts like dream-breasts  
Of sea, and child, and astral  
Venus-spurting milk.  
And traded our salt lips.

Visions of your body  
Kept me high for weeks, I even had  
a sort of trance for you  
A day in a dentist's chair.  
I found you again, gone stone,  
In Zimmer's book of Indian Art:  
Dancing in that life with  
Grace and love, with rings  
And a little golden belt, just above  
your naked snatch  
And I thought—more grace and love

In that wild Deva life where you belong  
Than in this dress-and-girdle life  
You'll ever give  
Or get.

## HAY FOR THE HORSES

He had driven half the night  
From far down San Joaquin  
Through Mariposa, up the  
Dangerous mountain roads,  
And pulled in at eight a.m.  
With his big truckload of hay  
behind the barn.

With winch and ropes and hooks  
We stacked the bales up clean  
To splintery redwood rafters  
High in the dark, flecks of alfalfa  
Whirling through shingle-cracks of light,  
Itch of haydust in the  
sweaty shirt and shoes.

At lunchtime under Black oak  
Out in the hot corral,  
—The old mare nosing lunchpails,  
Grasshoppers crackling in the weeds—  
"I'm sixty-eight" he said,  
"I first bucked hay when I was seventeen.  
I thought, that day I started,  
I sure would hate to do this all my life.  
And dammit, that's just what  
I've gone and done."



## THIN ICE

Walking in February  
A warm day after a long freeze  
On an old logging road  
Below Sumas Mountain  
Cut a walking stick of alder,  
Looked down through clouds  
On wet fields of the Nooksack—  
And stepped on the ice  
Of a frozen pool across the road.  
It creaked  
The white air under  
Sprang away, long cracks  
Shot out in the black,  
My cleated mountain boots  
Slipped on the hard slick  
—like thin ice—the sudden  
Feel of an old phrase made real—  
Instant of frozen leaf,  
Icewater, and staff in hand.  
“Like walking on thin ice—”  
I yelled back to a friend,  
It broke and I dropped  
Eight inches in

## NOOKSACK VALLEY

*February 1956*

At the far end of a trip north  
In a berry-pickers cabin  
At the edge of a wide muddy field  
Stretching to the woods and cloudy mountains,  
Feeding the stove all afternoon with cedar,  
Watching the dark sky darken, a heron flap by,  
A huge setter pup nap on the dusty cot.  
High rotten stumps in the second-growth woods  
Flat scattered farms in the bends of the Nooksack  
River. Steelhead run now  
a week and I go back  
Down 99, through towns, to San Francisco  
and Japan.  
All America south and east,  
Twenty-five years in it brought to a trip-stop  
Mind-point, where I turn  
Caught more on this land—rock tree and man,  
Awake, than ever before, yet ready to leave.  
damned memories,  
Whole wasted theories, failures and worse success,  
Schools, girls, deals, try to get in  
To make this poem a froth, a pity,  
A dead fiddle for lost good jobs.  
the cedar walls  
Smell of our farm-house, half built in '35.  
Clouds sink down the hills  
Coffee is hot again. The dog  
Turns and turns about, stops and sleeps.

## ALL THROUGH THE RAINS

That mare stood in the field—  
A big pine tree and a shed,  
But she stayed in the open  
Ass to the wind, splash wet.  
I tried to catch her April  
For a bareback ride,  
She kicked and bolted  
Later grazing fresh shoots  
In the shade of the down  
Eucalyptus on the hill.

## MIGRATION OF BIRDS

April 1956

It started just now with a hummingbird  
Hovering over the porch two yards away  
then gone,  
It stopped me studying.  
I saw the redwood post  
Leaning in clod ground  
Tangled in a bush of yellow flowers  
Higher than my head, through which we push  
Every time we come inside—  
The shadow network of the sunshine  
Through its vines. White-crowned sparrows  
Make tremendous singings in the trees  
The rooster down the valley crows and crows.  
Jack Kerouac outside, behind my back  
Reads the *Diamond Sutra* in the sun.  
Yesterday I read *Migration of Birds*;  
The Golden Plover and the Arctic Tern.  
Today that big abstraction's at our door  
For juncos and the robins all have left,  
Broody scrabblers pick up bits of string  
And in this hazy day  
Of April summer heat  
Across the hill the seabirds  
Chase Spring north along the coast:  
Nesting in Alaska  
In six weeks.



## TŌJI

*Shingon temple, Kyoto*

Men asleep in their underwear  
Newspapers under their heads  
Under the eaves of Tōji,  
Kobo Daishi solid iron and ten feet tall  
Strides through, a pigeon on his hat.

Peering through chickenwire grates  
At dusty gold-leaf statues  
A cynical curving round-belly  
Cool Bodhisattva—maybe Avalokita—  
Bisexual and tried it all, weight on  
One leg, haloed in snake-hood gold  
Shines through the shadow  
An ancient hip smile  
Tingling of India and Tibet.

Loose-breasted young mother  
With her kids in the shade here  
Of old Temple tree,  
Nobody bothers you in Tōji;  
The streetcar clanks by outside.

## HIGASHI HONGWANJI

*Shinshu temple*

In a quiet dusty corner  
on the north porch  
Some farmers eating lunch on the steps.  
Up high behind a beam: a small  
carved wood panel  
Of leaves, twisting tree trunk,  
Ivy, and a sleek fine-haired Doe.  
a six-point Buck in front  
Head crooked back, watching her.  
The great tile roof sweeps up  
& floats a grey shale  
Mountain over the town.

## KYOTO: MARCH

A few light flakes of snow  
 Fall in the feeble sun;  
 Birds sing in the cold,  
 A warbler by the wall. The plum  
 Buds tight and chill soon bloom.  
 The moon begins first  
 Fourth, a faint slice west  
 At nightfall. Jupiter half-way  
 High at the end of night-  
 Meditation. The dove cry  
 Twangs like a bow.  
 At dawn Mt. Hiei dusted white  
 On top; in the clear air  
 Folds of all the gullied green  
 Hills around the town are sharp,  
 Breath stings. Beneath the roofs  
 Of frosty houses  
 Lovers part, from tangle warm  
 Of gentle bodies under quilt  
 And crack the icy water to the face  
 And wake and feed the children  
 And grandchildren that they love.

## A STONE GARDEN

### I

Japan a great stone garden in the sea.  
 Echoes of hoes and weeding,  
 Centuries of leading hill-creeks down  
 To ditch and pool in fragile knee-deep fields.  
 Stone-cutter's chisel and a whanging saw,  
 Leafy sunshine rustling on a man  
 Chipping a foot-square rough hinoki beam;  
 I thought I heard an axe chop in the woods  
 It broke the dream; and woke up dreaming  
 on a train.

It must have been a thousand years ago  
 In some old mountain sawmill of Japan.  
 A horde of excess poets and unwed girls  
 And I that night prowled Tokyo like a bear  
 Tracking the human future  
 Of intelligence and despair.

### 2

I recollect a girl I thought I knew.  
 Little black-haired bobcut children  
 Scatter water on the dusty morning street—  
 & walked a hundred nights in summer  
 Seeing in open doors and screens  
 The thousand postures of all human fond  
 Touches and gestures, glidings, nude,  
 The oldest and nakedest women more the sweet,  
 And saw there first old withered breasts  
 Without an inward wail of sorrow and dismay



Because impermanence and destructiveness of time  
 In truth means only, lovely women age—  
 But with the noble glance of I Am Loved  
 From children and from crones, time is destroyed.  
 The cities rise and fall and rise again  
 From storm and quake and fire and bomb,  
 The glittering smelly ricefields bloom,  
 And all that growing up and burning down  
 Hangs in the void a little knot of sound.

3

Thinking about a poem I'll never write.  
 With gut on wood and hide, and plucking thumb,  
 Grope and stutter for the words, invent a tune,  
 In any tongue, this moment one time true  
 Be wine or blood or rhythm drives it through—  
 A leap of words to things and there it stops.  
 Creating empty caves and tools in shops  
 And holy domes, and nothing you can name;  
 The long old chorus blowing underfoot  
 Makes high wild notes of mountains in the sea.  
 O Muse, a goddess gone astray  
 Who warms the cow and makes the wise man sane,  
 (& even madness gobbles demons down)  
 Then dance through jewelled trees & lotus crowns  
 For Narihira's lover, the crying plover,  
 For babies grown and childhood homes  
 And moving, moving, on through scenes and towns  
 Weep for the crowds of men  
 Like birds gone south forever.  
 The long-lost hawk of Yakamochi and Thoreau  
 Flits over yonder hill, the hand is bare,  
 The noise of living families fills the air.

4

What became of the child we never had—  
 Delight binds man to birth, to death,  
 —Let's gather in the home—for soon we part—  
 (The daughter is in school, the son's at work)  
 & silver fish-scales coat the hand, the board;  
 The charcoal glowing underneath the eaves,  
 Squatting and fanning til the rice is steamed,  
 All our friends and children come to eat.  
 This marriage never dies. Delight  
 Crushes it down and builds it all again  
 With flesh and wood and stone,  
 The woman there—she is not old or young.

Allowing such distinctions to the mind:  
 A formal garden made by fire and time.

*Red Sea*  
*December, 1957*