

**Symposium on Wildness, Wilderness and the Creative Imagination**  
(2/20-22/05 – Iowa State University)

**4. Wildness and the Literary Imagination**

(Panel presentation and discussion with audience)

**Gary Snyder, poet and essayist**

- Language is wild; we learn it naturally and spontaneously; we master it before we go to school even though it's a system so complex that linguists still can adequately describe it
- Language is self-organizing; school/education teaches refinement and style
- Imagination is wild
- readings from *The Practice of the Wild*
- We've grown up in a western European culture in which 'nature' is defined as what it is not; what if we turn that around? – the wild world is the self-ordering world that adapts to disturbances; change is constant; humanity is just another disturbance
- The Chinese word for nature – self-maintaining
- Wild refers to a process; manufacturing is a process
- Wilderness is a place – earlier definition: a wasteland
- concern for biodiversity; loss of species is irreversible; other disturbances (like strip mining) can recover over time
- what is sustainable forestry? CA debate; needs to include animals in habitat
- moral/ethical view; under current administration he can now call himself a 'faith-based environmentalist'

**Linda Hogan, poet, essayist and novelist**

- as the wilderness outside disappears, the wilderness inside increases
- we're at a border and can't seem to find the bridge over; that's partly why we write/create... looking for that bridge; writers are the receivers, not the senders
- we live in a continuing genesis; our idea of what is wild is constantly changing; the sacred is what can be destroyed but not created
- study of indigenous cultures and other societies (including ants)- how much does it take to break the crucible of creation
- once we attempted to tame the wild
- her process of writing is a trying to re-member... to put back together using language what has been dismembered

- as native Americans we look at Muir and Thoreau and their writings about the environment, and then consider what was happening to our people at the same time; so also try to use language to make contracts and treaties with past

*How has your writing tamed or freed the wilderness in your life?*

LH - freeing; 'my writing takes me out of abstractions and into the world; it opens a road into the wild'

GS – 'Wild to me is self-ordering; I have no desire to tame the self-ordering impulses'

- you have to free up your language and imagination; quit censoring at many levels; listen to language in all levels and situations; make yourself available and things will come to you unbidden

- some people use their minds for specific desired results, example: accountant; but an artist can't be sure what the outcome will be; has to be open to what will come; have the 'good manners to allow it to come' – the etiquette of freedom and wild

*Question about deer and crow problem in urban areas: any ideas for solving?*

- Agriculture is the favoring of key cultivars

- Deer and crows are our neighbors; they share our watershed

- applying the terminology of a 'working landscape' then yes, deer and crows are a nuisance and should be approached with respect: don't waste the meat or hide

*How do we help children?*

GS – Stories keep children's imaginations alive; turn off the television; read and share the folktales and myths of many cultures

During his evening reading he also talked about the value of learning other languages; for example, how much he learned as a writer about writing poems after he learned enough Chinese and Japanese to be able not only to read their poems but also to translate them and study their structures; different from European/English.

During Linda Hogan's evening reading, she also mentioned a project she's working on to collect the different constellation stories told by various indigenous groups – they're planning a traveling exhibit and book.