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### Examining Jack Kerouac's Role in the Beat Generation: Exploring Place in On The Road and The Dharma Bums

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EXAMINING JACK KEROUAC'S ROLE IN THE BEAT GENERATION:  
EXPLORING PLACE IN *ON THE ROAD* AND *THE DHARMA BUMS*

by

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A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
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## ABSTRACT

This examination of two of Jack Kerouac's roman-à-clefs, *On the Road* (1957) and *The Dharma Bums* (1958), illuminates characteristics of Kerouac's personality and writing that are often ignored by current criticism. I will attempt to enhance current Kerouac scholarship by further analyzing the physical and spiritual journeys that Kerouac's personas experience in these novels, contrasting Kerouac's personas' development with that of his Beat Generation companions. Despite his admiration for Dean Moriarty (Neal Cassady) and Japhy Ryder (Gary Snyder), Kerouac does not present these individuals as American heroes. Indeed, Kerouac's cynical narration suggests that these Beat characters cannot offer him the means through which to find enlightenment. I will highlight the significance of place in these two novels, emphasizing Kerouac's disillusionment with his fellow Beat thinkers. Kerouac's desire to distance himself from the moniker of "King of the Beats" stems from the failure of the Beat Movement ever to exist fully. Despite the failure of his vision to come to fruition, Kerouac's literature holds value outside of his connection with the Beat Generation. While Jack Kerouac may not have been the King of the Beats in the manner that he had envisioned, I argue that he may prove to be the voice that is needed for a future generation.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### KEROAUC: A BEAT OF HIS OWN

By comparing the different philosophical visions between Jack Kerouac and other key figures (namely Neal Cassady, Allen Ginsberg, and Gary Snyder) of the counterculture movement of the mid-twentieth century, I will examine Jack Kerouac's role as the "King of the Beats." As depicted in much of Kerouac's prose, many Beat figures are in search of truth and meaning, abstractions that they seek to discover through indulging their physical appetites. I will present the argument that Kerouac is drawn to other Beat figures because he believes these people to be kindred spirits, which draws on scholarship of the Beat Generation's search for meaning, desire for movement, and passion for experimentation. What separates this work from existing studies is its investigation into how, despite his quest for spiritual meaning, Kerouac is in fact isolated from other Beats. Through close examination of Kerouac's disillusionment with fame, his spiritual connection with nature, and his skepticism of the motivations and lack of awareness of his contemporaries, readers will come to understand the need to re-evaluate Kerouac's role within the generation that claims him as its king. An examination of two of Kerouac's most famous roman-à-clefs, *On the Road* (1957) and *The Dharma Bums* (1958), illuminates characteristics of Kerouac's personality and writing that are often

ignored by current criticism. While Kerouac's influence on members of the Beat Movement is undeniable, few critics acknowledge the inconsistencies that exist between the philosophical visions (particularly their ideas regarding the significance of a search to find "meaning") of Kerouac and other Beat and counterculture participants. Close examination of critical themes in *On the Road* and *The Dharma Bums* highlights the distance that exists between Kerouac and artists within the Beat Movement and other similar movements that follow, namely the Hippie Generation.

Analyzing Kerouac's recounting of his adventures in *On the Road* and *The Dharma Bums* exposes his unique perspective within the Beat Generation and emphasizes the intricacies of Kerouac's vision for finding meaning in post-WWII American culture. By studying the aforementioned novels, I will argue that Kerouac should be set apart from his contemporaries within the Beat Generation, given that the rest of the counterculture movement never fully embraced Kerouac's spiritual vision. Exploring the relationship between Kerouac and other Beat figures by examining themes of self-awareness, experimentation, movement, and skepticism, as well as various symbols and motifs, highlights how these literary devices illuminate the primary difference between the ideologies and practices of Kerouac and other Beat members: their respective ideas of the journey of enlightenment.

Much scholarship on Kerouac has focused on the significance of movement (via the road) within the Beat Generation. The need to symbolically distance oneself from the stoicism of Post-WWII societal conventions through the physical journey on the road is discussed by numerous Beat scholars. Tara Chittenden asserts that "[t]he American road trip has become a staple in popular culture as a literal and metaphorical quest for a sense

of self, meaning, and search for the American Dream” (86). This quest for meaning through rejecting convention is explored by numerous critics, including Karen E H. Skinazi in “Through Roots and Routes: *On the Road*’s Portrayal of an Outsider’s Journey into the Meaning of America,” and Michael Amundsen’s “*On the Road*: Jack Kerouac’s Epic Autoethnography.” Enhancing the concept of the Beat road trip, some criticism elaborates upon the search for enlightenment by emphasizing the Beat’s desire to embrace Eastern philosophies. Scholars of Kerouac in particular focus on the influences of Catholicism and Buddhism in Kerouac’s life and writing. Articles such as “Beat Buddhism and American Freedom” and “Gary Snyder, Han Shan, and Jack Kerouac” explore Kerouac’s vision of merging Eastern and Western philosophies as a means of attaining spiritual enlightenment.

Current criticism emphasizes the significance of Kerouac’s adventures with Beat characters such as Neal Cassady and Gary Snyder. Kerouac’s significance within the Beat Movement and his influence on the following counterculture movements are obvious, and as is displayed in his prose, he shares several characteristics with other key artists of these generations such as Neal Cassady’s persona in *On the Road* and Gary Snyder’s fictionalized characterization in *The Dharma Bums*. Detailing the critical roles that Kerouac and Cassady play in *On the Road*, Karen Skinazi asserts that “[t]hough autobiographical in nature, *On the Road* focuses as much on an outsider—an unheroic character, a passenger on the road to the America Dream, as on the insider—a heroic figure [. . .] Dean Moriarty” (860). While Skinazi emphasizes the importance of Kerouac as an outsider, this assertion fails to capture the significance of Kerouac’s ability to be simultaneously participant, observer, and outsider of the Beat Generation. Rather than

simply being an observer of the heart of the Beat Generation (Neal Cassady) in *On the Road*, Sal (Kerouac) is a chronicler of his own journey of discovery—a quest in which his understanding of himself, Dean, and his vision of America develops and changes as the novel progresses. I will also utilize Kerouac biographies by Ann Charters and Joyce Johnson to highlight the connections between Kerouac’s life and his fictionalized narratives of his experiences.

While Kerouac displays a distinct Beat appetite for excitement and a desire to distance himself from the stoicism of mid-twentieth-century American ideology, these novels also show that he possesses qualities that are often not elaborated upon by current scholarship. Many works of criticism on these two novels emphasize Kerouac’s seeming idolization of Dean Moriarty and Japhy Ryder, yet they fail to look past Kerouac’s admiration for these characters to see his ultimate disappointment with their inability to embody his vision for the next generation. This thesis will attempt to enhance current Kerouac scholarship by further analyzing the physical and spiritual journeys that Kerouac’s personas experience through *On the Road* and *The Dharma Bums*, contrasting Kerouac’s personas’ development with that of his Beat companions.

Readers of Kerouac must first understand the similarities between Kerouac and his Beat contemporaries before they can appreciate how Kerouac’s philosophies diverge from those of his Beat friends. Understanding Sal’s portrayal of Dean in *On the Road* requires readers to first recognize the characteristics that Dean shares with the post-WWII counterculture movement. For Sal, the appeal of Dean Moriarty stems from Dean’s seeming embodiment of what future generations of America should look and act like. As depicted by Sal, the desire for the Beats to distance themselves from the order and

rigidity of American society and establish an existence of chaotic, experimental expression is captured in the frantic characterization of Dean Moriarty. In like manner, Ray's (Kerouac's persona in *The Dharma Bums*) admiration for Japhy Ryder (Snyder) stems from his desire to be in the presence of such a vibrant representation of this new generation. Ray feels that, when he is in the company of Japhy and Alvah (Ginsberg), he is experiencing the beginning of his envisioned America. Ray passionately describes his dream of America, declaring that there is a need for "a world full of rucksack wanderers, Dharma Bums refusing to subscribe to the general demand that they consume production and therefore have to work for the privilege of consuming . . ." (Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums* 97). Thus, Ray's quest seems to differ from Sal's quest in *On the Road*. Rather than search for meaning on street corners and Beat cafés, satiating oneself with physical appetites of urban life, Ray embraces the calm vastness of the wilderness, looking inward for this elusive "truth."

In *On the Road*, examining the importance of place will be crucial to understanding the similarities and differences between Sal's view of Beat movement and experimentation and the views of Dean and Carlo (Ginsberg). Accompanied by various Beat members, Sal believes that he can discover the ingredients necessary for his vision of America on the road, in the jazz clubs, and at various other locales in urban settings. Contrasting Sal's energized, urban quest in the earlier parts of the novel with his connection with nature and the influences of spirituality in the latter sections helps display the significance of Kerouac's changing attitudes from *On the Road* to *The Dharma Bums*.

A divide exists between Kerouac's vision for the generation and the reality of the movement. Kerouac attempts to undertake a new quest, a spiritual quest, for enlightenment in his adventures in *The Dharma Bums*. Emphasis will be placed on the influences of Catholicism and Buddhism in Kerouac's vision for his own life and time and the path of future American generations. Kerouac's journey up the mountain with Japhy Ryder (Gary Snyder) is a symbolic representation of Kerouac's isolation from Japhy's search for meaning. In order to highlight the significance of religious/spiritual influences on Kerouac's vision, the importance of place must also be explored in *The Dharma Bums*. The wilderness, the hiking trails, and the mountain tops are all environments in which Ray experiences moments of transcendence in his quest. Through Sal and Ray's respective journeys, Kerouac shows a recognition of the failures of other Beat figures wholly to embrace Kerouac's vision. However, after analyzing Sal's journey in *On the Road* and Ray's journey in *The Dharma Bums*, Kerouac's own shortcomings will become apparent.

Despite his awareness of the philosophical flaws of his contemporaries, Kerouac's inability to overcome his dependence on alcohol, his newfound fame, and his depression results with him being unable to achieve the legacy that he had hoped to create. Kerouac's impact on the counterculture movement is undeniable, yet the dream and reality fail to smoothly integrate. Through exploration of the influence of Kerouac's writing on the generation, the disparity between Kerouac's vision for the next generation and the ideologies of such movements as the Hippie Generation is evident. Despite Kerouac's own failures at achieving an enlightened America, his writings still hold value. Numerous creative artists and thinkers have been inspired by Kerouac's works and have

embraced his vision without attempting to emulate him. The value of Kerouac's legacy lies not in a desire to re-create his Beat legacy for a new generation, but rather, it stems from a need to be open-minded, always ready to discover truth and beauty both in one's self and in the world. Kerouac seems to call for a balance to be maintained—a merging of the physical and spiritual. Thus, I argue that Kerouac should be viewed as an unintentional catalyst for the Beat Movement rather than as King of the Beats.

## CHAPTER TWO

### ON THE ROAD AND IN THE CITY

By introducing Sal's desire for physical movement with the opening words of *On the Road*, Kerouac expresses the Beats' intrinsic need to distance themselves metaphorically from American societal convention. With his frenetic phrasing and passionate descriptions of the West, Sal immediately captures the wandering spirit of the Beat Generation. Sal reflects on his past adventures, remarking that "I had first met Dean not long after my wife and I split up. I had just gotten over a serious illness that I won't bother to talk about, except that it had something to do with the miserably weary split-up and my feeling that everything was dead" (Kerouac, *On the Road* 1). For Sal, this melancholy existence offers a slow death, and the way for Sal to create a new life seems to be available only through movement. Thus, Sal looks for meaning, an abstract concept, through physical means, and the vastness and diverseness of the West appears to hold the answers to obtaining the elusive serenity for which he yearns. Sal proclaims, "I'd often dreamed of going West to see the country, always vaguely planning and never taking off" (1). This desire of Sal's to embark on a physical journey in order to embark on a metaphorical journey is one that Kerouac and the Beats adamantly champion.

While artists and writers of post-WWI America, christened the Lost Generation, became disillusioned with the loss of tradition, concerning themselves with themes of despair, identity, isolation, and uncertainty, the post-WWII intellectual artists, the Beat Generation, thrived from rejecting tradition and seeking out the unknown. The Beats separated themselves both from the artists of the Lost Generation and the mainstream society of their own time period. Whereas people in mainstream post-WWII America appeared to be “closing themselves off from one another,” Jason Spangler notes that *On the Road* exemplifies the Beats’ distancing of themselves from this compulsion, arguing that “Sal and Dean wish to embrace their fellow-Americans and convince them that conformity and its ironic corollary, isolation, is not the answer” (317). Thus, movement and connectivity are important themes in Beat literature and are especially prominent in Kerouac’s works—*On the Road* in particular. For Sal Paradise, this movement requires direction, and the western side of the nation contains more significance than its physical location alone.

The West conjures up images of adventure and opportunity, and for the Beats who are determined to reject conventional American ideologies and values, the West is the proclaimed Promised Land for experimentation, creativity, and social freedom. In the nineteenth century, many Americans headed West to civilize the vast landscape. They desired to establish American values in an “uncivilized” area of the country. The West in the mid-twentieth century offered the Beats a place to escape traditional, civilized values. While the West offered many Americans opportunities for land and money in the nineteenth century, the Beats longed to discover their own type of prosperity. Michael Amundsen remarks that “[t]he worlds described by Jack Kerouac and his manner of

description were decidedly outside the cultural mainstream of his time” (33). Thus, Kerouac’s narrator, who is his own persona, allows readers a glimpse of the inner workings of the Beat Movement, and the magnetic appeal of undertaking a road trip to the West in search of meaning somehow feels personal for outsiders when described by Sal. Determined to begin his quest for enlightenment, Sal believes that he must seek out the marginalized individuals of America, and he concludes that he will find these individuals in various locales as he ventures westward. However, Sal does not fully see himself as belonging to this concept of the West and believes that he requires a companion on his quest, one who can act as both a guide and a muse. Sal, reflecting on his mindset during the early stages of his journey West, surmises that “Dean is the perfect guy for the road because he actually was born on the road, when his parents were passing through Salt Lake City in 1926, in a jalopy, on their way to Los Angeles” (1). Like this description of Dean’s birth, Dean himself is unpredictable, always in motion. For Sal, the jalopy and the locations are important details to mention because the unique spots/constructs within the various towns and cities across the American landscape are crucial to Sal’s quest. The places and people along the road that winds across the nation provide the energy—the heartbeat—of America. Skinazi emphasizes the role that Dean has in Sal’s personal quest, detailing that “[t]he novel is set up so that Sal’s world appears to begin with, end with, and be wholly contingent upon his relationship with Dean Moriarty” (97). Sal’s adoration of Dean’s genuineness and captivating personality causes him to see Dean as the embodiment of the holy quest that Sal yearns to begin. Therefore, for Sal, Dean Moriarty is, or appears to be at first, the perfect traveling companion on Sal’s quest to discover truth and meaning in the West.

Sal views Dean as the embodiment of the West; thus, Dean functions as Sal's inspiration for bringing the avant-garde culture to the forefront of American identity. In some ways, Dean, along with other charismatic figures like Carlo Marx, functions as the spirit of Sal's search for truth. Commenting on Dean's seeming embodiment of the West, Sal remarks that "[m]y first impression of Dean was of a young Gene Autry—trim, thin-hipped, blue-eyed, with a real Oklahoma accent—a sideburned hero of the snowy West" (Kerouac 2). Sal's first two encounters with Dean capture both Dean's restless energy and his unpredictability. When Sal first spends time with Dean and Dean's young wife, Marylou, the encounter appears frantic and somewhat confusing:

That night we all drank beer and pulled wrists and talked till dawn, and in the morning, while we sat around dumbly smoking butts from ashtrays in the gray light of a gloomy day, Dean got up nervously, paced around, thinking, and decided the thing to do was to have Marylou make breakfast and sweep the floor. "In other words we've got to get on the ball, darling, what I'm saying, otherwise it'll be fluctuating and lack of true knowledge or crystallization of our plans."

Then I went away. (2-3)

Sal associates Dean with characteristics such as frantic movement, spontaneity, charisma, and bravado; always loudly speaking and moving, Dean asserts himself as the main attraction in whatever space he occupies. While Dean appears to be the artistic inspiration for many Beat characters, Dean desires to be seen as a knowledgeable hip person. Dean's desire to be recognized as an intellectual results in his choice to befriend Sal; recounting his second encounter with Dean, Sal observes that "Dean had gotten a job in a parking lot, had a fight with Marylou . . . [s]o he had no place to live . . . , and one night while I

was studying there was a knock on the door, and there was Dean, bowing, shuffling obsequiously in the dark” (3). Sal recalls Dean’s inquiry: “Hel-lo, you remember me— Dean Moriarty? I’ve come to ask you to show me how to write” (3). Agreeing to the mentorship, Sal invites Dean to a bar where Sal notes Dean’s pretentious language: “and so on in that way, things I understood not a bit and he himself didn’t. In those days he really didn’t know what he was talking about; that is to say, he was a young jailkid all hung-up on the wonderful possibilities of becoming a real intellectual” (3). Despite Dean’s lack of a formal education, Sal finds Dean to be authentic and in touch with the people and attitudes of the burgeoning counterculture of the late 1940s.

Moreover, Sal’s desire to reject the rigidity of his university education makes Dean’s magnetic appeal all the more understandable. Affirming his need to form a bond with Dean, Sal confesses that “my life hanging around the campus had reached the completion of its cycle and was stultified” (6-7). Disillusioned with the East-Coast intellectual crowd, Sal finds in Dean a soul who is eager to experience all that America has to offer. Unlike “all [Sal’s] New York friends [who] were in the negative, nightmare position of putting down society and giving their tired bookish or political or psychoanalytical reasons,” Dean appears to flourish wherever he goes, satiating his hunger for both food and sex (7). Rather than those who overtly complain about the calamities of traditional American political, social, and economic ideologies but do not allow themselves the joys of experiencing the mystique of the vast American landscape, Dean lives life to the fullest, embracing the parts of American society that lie just beyond the veil of conventional American thought, wasting little time deliberating on its flaws.

Plagued with despair and depression, Sal feels an emotional need to have Dean with him as he ventures across the country. Sal, incapable of immersing himself fully among the livelier Beat figures, but still clearly one of the era's innovators, cannot partake in some of the most significant historic moments of the Beat Movement. Kerouac's hesitancy to participate fully within some of the most historic moments of the era manifests itself within Sal's outsider perspective when among the company of his Beat friends and acquaintances. Observing Dean and Carlo talking excitedly, Sal contemplates why he is drawn to his companions:

[T]hey danced down the streets like dingedodies, and I shambled after as I've been doing all my life after people who interest me, because the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue centerlight pop and everything goes "Awww!" (5).

Despite his apparent enjoyment of Dean and Carlo's frenetic energy and fragmented intellectual debates, Sal displays a rather mindful distance from the two as they engage in their boisterous dialogues. Sal acknowledges, "[t]heir energies met head-on, I was a lout compared, I couldn't keep up with them" (5). Sal contains a characteristic that is lacking in many of his Beat associates—self-awareness. Rather than insert himself in a place where he cannot fully exist, Sal follows behind Dean and Carlo as they trek blessedly down the street, unaware of any obstacles that may lay in their paths. For Sal, observing the world and those around him is critical for his goal of discovering some form of truth

and meaning in the West. Sal appreciates the dynamic ambiance created by their energetic discourse, yet Sal stands back, allowing himself to learn from a distance. Once again, Kerouac establishes the significance of place within Sal's quest. Conveying the parts of the conversation that he overhears, Sal relays that

Carlo told him of . . . Lee in Texas growing weed, Hassel on Riker's Island, Jane wandering on Times Square in a Benzedrine hallucination . . . and Dean told Carlo of unknown people in the West like Tommy Snark, the clubfooted poolhall rotation shark. . . He told him of . . . his boyhood buddies, his street buddies, his innumerable girls and sex-parties . . . his heroes, heroines, adventures. (5)

Every town, city, street corner, and dive bar holds value. Every individual, street bum, wino, prostitute, musician, pool player, and philosopher possess some ingredient of Sal's notion of the West. Tara Chittenden emphasizes the significance of Sal's desire to find meaning on the road, remarking that "[i]n travel writing, especially, individuals encountered are shaped by the assemblages and connections they form with other people and with the spaces around them" (93). Sal knows that in order to partake in the essence of the West, he must ingratiate himself with the diverse individuals who occupy the various stops along the road West. Like many of Kerouac's experiences that are mediated through his Beat friends, Sal's road trip, in the beginning of the novel, relies upon Dean's experience. Thus, Dean and his kindred souls across the American land offer Sal a respite from his depression and loneliness, providing him with inspiration for pursuing the pleasures of simply existing.

However, for Sal, Dean is not only an avenue for excitement, adventure, and physical movement, but also a threshold for gaining a foothold into achieving

enlightenment. When Sal reflects on his main reason for bringing Dean out West with him, Sal proclaims that “[s]omewhere along the line I knew there’d be girls, visions, everything; somewhere along the line the pearl would be handed to me” (7). Sal, longing for more than a lively traveling companion, yearns to find a balance between living for the present only and looking forward to the future. Sal expects to learn something new—some unexpected pearl of wisdom—from some eccentric, wandering stranger. Describing a moment with friends relishing the landscape in Denver, Sal ponders that “[w]e were on the roof of America and all we could do was yell, I guess—across the night, eastward over the Plains, where somewhere an old man with white hair was probably walking toward us with the Word, and would arrive any minute and make us silent” (50). Sal conjures up distinct images of a spiritual encounter. Sal, unlike Dean, does not simply desire to take from the land and those around him; Sal also wants to connect with the land and its people. Sal craves meaningful relationships with both people and place.

Moreover, Sal’s desire to continue to use his present experiences with people and places to build upon his vision for the future contrasts Sal and Dean. Sal recounts a road trip to Virginia a few years after meeting Dean, recalling Dean’s boastful claim: “I can go anywhere in America and get what I want because it’s the same in every corner, I know the people, I know what they do. We give and take and go in the incredibly complicated sweetness zigzagging every side” (112). To Sal, Dean seems to own the land; however, Dean is much more acquainted with taking than with giving. Dean is consumed by his primal instincts. He must always be on the move, ready to quench his thirst for excitement at the cost of whomever he encounters. Chittenden asserts that “[t]he way in which Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty move through space, the encounters they have . . .

transforms these street corner communities from observable and exotic ‘Others’ to a dynamic folding together of human connection” (93). While Chittenden’s analysis of significance of place and the characters who occupy these locales is astute, this observation proves to be truer to Sal’s experiences than to Dean’s. Although Dean is in perpetual motion, meeting new people wherever he roams, Dean fails to gain any true sense of compassion or decency from these moments. Recollecting one of Dean’s rants as he enters Carlo’s apartment one night, Sal captures Dean’s careless wandering spirit. Dean abruptly states, “I’m going to divorce Marylou and marry Camille and go live with her in San Francisco. But this is only after you and I, dear Carlo, go to Texas, dig Old Bull Lee, that gone cat I’ve never met and both of you’ve told me so much about, and then I’ll go to San Fran” (42-43). Always eager to experience new individuals in new locations, Dean shows little concern for the people he hurts along the way. While Sal is more considerate and more aware than Dean, he often, especially in his younger days, romanticizes Dean’s flawed nature; when discussing Dean’s criminal history, Sal excuses it, proclaiming that “his ‘criminality’ was not something that sulked and sneered; it was a wild yea-saying overburst of American joy; it was Western, the west wind, and ode from the Plains, something new, long prophesied, long a-coming (he only stole cars for joy rides)” (7). Once again, Sal attributes Dean to the unknown, the West. Despite his shortcomings, Dean provides Sal with the opportunity to appreciate the exuberance and newness of life that can be found by traversing the roads of America.

While Sal’s journey throughout the novel is motivated by abstract concepts—achieving enlightenment or uncovering some hidden truth—Sal is burdened by the uncertainty of this type of philosophy. Acknowledging the difficulties with searching to

discover an idea that is not concrete, Kerouac captures Sal's internal struggle with Dean's inability to articulate the allusive "IT" for which Dean seems to be living. Describing a night at their friend Rollo Greb's house in Long Island where Rollo is overcome by a moment of joyous madness, Sal recalls Dean's idolization of Rollo, declaring "[t]hat Rollo Greb is the greatest, most wonderful of all. That's what I was trying to tell you—that's what I want to be. I want to be like him. He's never hung-up . . . Man, he's the end! You see, if you go like him all the time you'll finally get it" (118). Confused at Dean's emphasis of the word "it," Sal questions, "[g]et what?" (118). Dean's response is characteristic of the divide between Sal and Dean's philosophies; Dean passionately answers, proclaiming "IT! IT! I'll tell you—now no time, we have no time now" (118). Dean, content with satisfying his lust for physical and emotional pleasure, lacks any real purpose or direction. Erik R. Mortenson, in his article "Beating Time: Configurations of Temporality in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*," asserts that "Dean is frenetically living in the moment, trying to stay within the ever-unfolding of the 'now' . . . For Dean, this idea of life in the present is concomitant with the idea that there is an underlying order that makes worry superfluous" (56). Dean lives for the pleasure he gets from the present. His relationships and his constant movement from one place to another appear only to serve his own personal need for satisfaction.

While Sal shares an appreciation for Dean's genuine passion for existence, Sal is skeptical of moving through life without direction and without an understanding of both the self and the surrounding world. However, Sal's desperation to view Dean in a heroic fashion leads him to justify Dean's flaws in this particular moment. Contemplating Dean's confusing rant, comparing Rollo's possession of "IT" to jazz musician George

Shearing's possession of "IT," Sal comments that "[i]t was a rainy night. It was the myth of the rainy night. Dean was popeyed with awe. This madness would lead nowhere. I didn't know what was happening to me, and I suddenly realized that it was only the tea that we were smoking" (119). When contemplating the futility of Dean's and other characters' outlooks on life, Sal often associates words such as "mad" and "crazy" to describe their shortsighted attitudes and behaviors. Sal is in pursuit of learning as he travels from one stop to the next, meeting various people as he goes; Sal wants to find meaning. Skinazi highlights Kerouac's emphasis on the journey as the means to discover newness, proclaiming that "*On the Road*, ultimately, reveals Kerouac's love of possibility" (100). Continuing down the road is vital for Sal; he does not want to miss any opportunity for discovering something new.

Sal hopes to experience a form of transcendence—an existence where he moves beyond his own limitations and the limitations of his society and reaches a level of understanding that has previously been hidden from him. However, Sal sees no concrete, end destination, yet he still wants to believe that he has a purpose. He must keep searching, learning from every person and place along the journey. Many of Sal's friends do not seem to share Sal's outlook on searching for truth and meaning. Sharing a discussion between himself, Dean, and Carlo one night at Carlo's apartment, Sal recalls his observation of Dean and Carlo's fragmented, enlivened debates, and Sal's ability to observe from the perspective of an outsider while still interjecting as a participant of the group is prominently shown in this moment (43). In response to Dean and Carlo's confusing banter over what "the last thing" is, Sal interjects that "[n]obody can get to that last thing. We keep on living in hopes of catching it once and for all" (43). Sal, secure in

his determination to embark on his journey, is not naïve enough to believe that he will find some all-encompassing answer at the end of the road. For Sal, the road offers him opportunities to keep progressing. Responding to Carlo's argument that this mindset is "romantic posh," and Dean's assertion that "old Sal won't tell," Sal clarifies his mindset, declaring that "[i]t isn't that I won't tell . . . I just don't know what you're both driving at or trying to get at. I know it's too much for anybody" (43). Sal cannot fathom the mindless maelstrom being deliberated upon by Dean and Carlo. They are unable to articulate their meaning to Sal because they lack true purpose. Aware of the turmoil that can stem from their perspective, Sal concludes that "[i]f you keep this up you'll both go crazy, but let me know what happens as you go along" (45). Sal's acknowledgement of the dangers of Dean's philosophies does not hinder Sal from admiring Dean's magnetism. While Sal recognizes that Dean is directionless and oftentimes not a person with whom he can share a meaningful connection, Sal pushes aside these thoughts, deciding to follow Dean despite his doubts about Dean's nature.

With the goal of exploring the unknown, several of the characters experiment with drugs and sex to satisfy their curiosities—in many cases, paying no heed to the consequences of their choices. Both Sal and Dean partake of drugs and sexual acts in several instances; however, their perspectives on their experiences with drugs and sex vary. Noticing Dean's rather indiscriminate view of sex when he first meets Dean, Sal notes his surroundings as he enters a New York apartment, observing that

Dean came to the door in his shorts. Marylou was jumping off the couch; Dean had dispatched the occupant of the apartment to the kitchen, probably to make

coffee, while he proceeded with his love-problems, for to him, sex was the one and only holy and important thing in life (2).

Dean never hesitates to satisfy his physical desires. Dean travels across America, engaging in affairs with any woman, or in some cases, any man, who might interest him. Sal displays the carelessness that Dean expresses during his numerous affairs; he discusses how Dean might spend a morning with Camille (his second wife), then he may spend an evening with Marylou (38). Sal recognizes Dean's apathy in regard to the detrimental effects Dean's philandering has on the women in his life, remarking that "Camille gave birth to Dean's second baby . . . another matter of months and Inez had a baby. With one illegitimate child in the West somewhere, Dean then had four little ones and not a cent, and was all troubles and ecstasy and speed as ever" (235). Dean does not consider the feelings of others in his sexual pursuits; he only seeks to satisfy his lust at any place and at any time he deems it necessary for his own happiness. Dean's use of drugs is much the same. The numerous scenes of drug use in the novel are an important aspect of Beat culture—one that often seems to hinder Kerouac's purpose of becoming enlightened. Amundsen observes that "[d]rug and alcohol abuse [and] criminality . . . plagued the Beat Generation as perhaps no other literary movement in American history" (38). Dean's many flirtations with illegal substances depict the dangers of the era, emphasizing the perils that can result from living only for one's self. Dean, showing no real sense of remorse, shares with Sal a memory of a time when he hurt his hand after hitting Marylou during a drug-induced state where he repeatedly banged his head against a wall (174). Dean's reliance on drugs and sex for happiness are similar to Sal's; however, Sal rarely seems fulfilled by quenching his desires for physical satisfaction.

Sal indulges himself with physical pleasures, namely through means of sex and alcohol, but these indulgences are not able to bring him contentment. Throughout Sal's tale of his road life adventures, Sal has a dependence upon being around other people who are mad, willing to experiment with what life on the road and on the city street corners offer him. In an attempt to combat his inner struggles with despair, Sal succumbs to his desire for alcohol—one of his most personal demons. Describing an interaction with his friend Remi in San Francisco, Sal gets so drunk that he ruins a dinner with Remi and Remi's stepfather. Looking back at his drunkenness in this moment, Sal admits that "[e]verything was falling apart . . . [h]ere I was at the end of America—no more land—and now there was nowhere to go but back" (70-71). The West does not hold all of the answers for Sal as he had previously thought. While he has gained knowledge traveling from city to city on his road trip, Sal starts to realize that he might have missed some aspect of truth along the road from the East to the West. His various carousing companions and the temptations that he encounters in urban settings do not offer much in the way of progressing his journey of enlightenment.

However, Sal continues to look for this elusive meaning among the people and the places he visits, and his urgency leads him to continue succumbing to temptations. Sal's need to surround himself with eccentric characters and exciting venues stems from his deep-seated loneliness. Sex comes to mind often when Sal sees a woman, but he does not always try to fulfill those needs. Usually, Sal engages in sexual acts at the suggestions of one of his friends. Dean sets him up with women at various points along their travels together. Recalling one such encounter with a girl named Rita Bettencourt, Sal describes his discontentment with the sexual act, reflecting that "[s]he was a nice little girl, simple

and true, and tremendously frightened of sex. I told her it was beautiful. I wanted to prove this to her. I proved nothing. She sighed in the dark. ‘What do you want out of life?’ I asked, and I used to talk that way all the time with girls” (51). Sal’s honesty about his inability to perform well sexually and his desire to learn about Rita’s life goals show that Sal is always trying to distance himself from isolation. Upon leaving Rita’s house after he walks her home, Sal is inspired by his surroundings. Once again, Kerouac emphasizes the significance of place within Sal’s journeying, and the urban streets in Denver offer Sal a peaceful moment to reflect on his ideas of sex. After observing a group of homeless people in front of a church, Sal wishes that he could try again with Rita. Suggesting that purely physical associations with sex are problematic, Sal proclaims that “[b]oys and girls in America have such a sad time together; sophistication demands that they submit to sex immediately without proper preliminary talk. Not courting talk—real straight talk about souls, for life is holy and every moment is precious” (52). Longing for a deep human connection with another soul, Sal dreams about finding a life partner. On a road trip through several major East-Coast cities with Dean and Marylou, Sal wistfully ruminates on his loneliness and his future, declaring that “I want to marry a girl . . . so I can rest my soul with her till we both get old. This can’t go on all the time—all this franticness and jumping around. We’ve got to go someplace, find something” (108). At various points among his carousing across the great cities of America, Sal is drawn from the present moments by his yearning for a peaceful future. In these moments, Sal seems to realize that he and Dean are growing apart.

As the narrator, Sal periodically breaks from his tale to interject his present feelings about certain situations; Sal matter-of-factly mentions the distance that exists

between himself and Dean in the present. Describing his excitement upon first befriending Dean, Sal expresses his awareness of Dean's flaws as a reliable friend but explains that he emotionally needs Dean. Sal recalls that

[a]lthough my aunt warned me that he would get me into trouble, I could hear a new call and see a new horizon, and believe it at my young age; and a little bit of trouble or even Dean's eventual rejection of me as a buddy, putting me down, as he would later, on starving sidewalks and sickbeds—what did it matter? I was a young writer and I wanted to take off. (7)

Sal has an intrinsic need to be near exciting, energetic people who can help him focus on his quest instead of his depression. So, regardless of Dean's inconsistencies, Sal, during this time in his life, believes that Dean is crucial to Sal's ability to somehow discover some form of meaning. However, as Sal sets off on his trip West, he does so by himself, and during this time, Kerouac provides some insight into Sal's personal connection with the people and places he encounters along his journey.

Sal hopes to discover some type of truth or meaning that will help him and future generations of Americans overcome the political, social, and economic divides that exist in the nation, fulfilling the vision that Sal has of the country reaching all of its potential; while Sal struggles to reach this goal, he is able both to understand his own self and broaden his perception of the world through his various encounters with others. As Sal leaves for the West, his focus on place highlights the significance of Sal's inner battle between embracing the unknown and being skeptical of uncertainty. Detailing the importance of Sal's intimate connection with traveling and meeting new people, Chittenden writes that “[a]ll travel writing is in a sense autobiographical and Kerouac's

representation of himself in an unknown environment, interacting with strangers, is often played out as a quest that becomes personal” (89). This analysis proves to be especially true in *On the Road* because Kerouac is sharing his own personal road adventures with his readers. Sal offers readers insight into the lives of the Beat wanderings across America, and Sal’s intimate, personal thoughts help readers to connect with the spirit of the Beat Generation, specifically with the concept of living for the unknown. Sal’s passion for exploring the unknown is evident as he prepares for his road trip: “I’d been poring over maps of the United States in Paterson for months . . . savoring names like Platte and Cimarron and so on, and on the roadmap was one long red line called Route 6 that led from the tip of Cape Cod clear to Ely, Nevada, and there dipped down to Los Angeles” (9). Sal wants to experience what existing in these places feels like. Sal seems to believe that each place offers something new, some morsel of the truth he seeks so ardently. Despite Sal’s eagerness to reach the West Coast, he slips into moments of self-doubt, making both himself and readers question whether Sal’s discontentment can really be healed by undertaking this road trip, and when he does reach the West, his adventures lead him back to the bustle of New York City where his disillusionment with society forces him to wander.

Throughout Sal’s journey across America, he realizes he might need to look elsewhere to find his vision of a future, enlightened America, and he recognizes that he must distance himself from Dean—or, at least Dean’s lack of direction and purpose—in order to find this meaning for which all his adventures on the road stemmed. Chittenden argues that “Kerouac’s restlessness and sense of urgency to be on the road perhaps comes from a desire to escape the frenzied crowds of New York, particularly as he connects

their actions with . . . death” (97-98). Sal leaves New York because he wants to escape this idea of death, but he does not find solace in Dean and the cities in the West. Sal’s dissatisfaction with Dean’s companionship does not mean that Sal does not learn from his encounters with others. As shown through Kerouac’s spontaneous, passionate, and reflective writing style, Sal finds some modicum of meaning and truth everywhere he goes, but the greatest lesson he learns appears to be his ultimate realization that he cannot rely on Dean for guidance in his quest. While Sal still looks back with admiration at Dean’s charisma and restless energy, he is aware that Dean’s existence in the present prevents Dean from pursuing anything but physical satisfaction. Sal remembers Marylou sharing this information when she bemoans that “Dean will leave you out in the cold any time it’s in his interest” (159). Realizing that Dean exists in a perpetually maddened state, Sal understands that he must leave Dean behind if he is ever to move forward. In one such moment of Dean’s mad antics, Sal concludes that “[i]t was the end; I wanted to get out” (167). Sal comes to discover that he must leave behind Dean; as his last name (Moriarty) alludes, Dean is not necessarily the hero of this story—a role which most critics assign him.

Similar to Sal’s rejection of Dean as hero, Sal must also reject the temptations of urban surroundings. Some of Sal’s most astounding insights in his narrative are born from his epiphanies while in a natural setting. Sal aptly depicts his appreciation for nature throughout the novel. One of the most significant moments in which Kerouac shows Sal’s connection with the natural world is when Sal is kept awake one night by a cricket’s chirping as he lays in bed at a friend’s house in Denver. Sal captures an ambiance of tranquility and oneness with the world, detailing that “[a]t night in this part of the West

the stars . . . are big as roman candles and as lonely as the Prince of the Dharma who's lost his ancestral grove and journeys across the spaces between points in the handle of the Big Dipper, trying to find it again" (211). Of particular significance in this moment, Sal associates the night sky with spiritual imagery. As evidenced by his very name, Sal Paradise is an intrinsically spiritual being. Sal's descriptions of others often display his spiritual nature. He often describes Dean and other Beat people as saints, but he rarely refers to himself in this manner. However, one of the most important lessons that Sal learns in *On the Road* is the need to look beyond physical means for enlightenment. His quest must become spiritual. Kerouac's shifting philosophies are evident as the novel nears its conclusion. Pointing out Kerouac's transitioning views throughout the course of the travel narrative, Amundsen asserts that "much of Kerouac's writing expresses a spiritual quest and that the writer himself was living after the manner of a troubadour or a pilgrim is important to understanding the man and his mission as a writer" (35). Kerouac allows readers an inkling of the importance of his own awakening of mind and soul through Sal's re-examination of his concept of enlightenment. Sal realizes that he must look inward. Sal must examine the souls of himself and those around him. He must find a balance between the physical and spiritual—something which Dean's existence in the present keeps him from being able to achieve. Despite Sal's changing opinion of Dean, he shows no bitterness toward Dean. With Kerouac's final lines of the novel, Sal reflects on his life on the road, remarking that "nobody, nobody knows what's going to happen to anybody besides the forlorn rags of growing old, I think of Dean Moriarty, I even think of Old Dean Moriarty the father we never found, I think of Dean Moriarty" (293). Sal's experiences on the road with Dean, although not always what he has hoped for, teach him

to learn from his past, appreciate the present, and always look toward the future. Sal's journey now requires him to leave his idolization of Dean in his past. Kerouac poignantly captures the sentiment of leaving the old behind in search of new life with one of Sal's astute contemplations: "What is that feeling when you're driving away from people and they recede on the plain till you see their specks dispersing?—it's the too-huge world vaulting us, and it's good-by. But we lean forward to the next crazy venture beneath the skies" (146). Thus, Kerouac's persona in *On the Road* leaves behind the city, and a new persona in *The Dharma Bums* heads to the wilderness.

## CHAPTER THREE

### UP ON THE MOUNTAIN AND INTO THE WILDERNESS

Having rejected both the bustle of urban existence and his reliance on the influence of individuals like Neal Cassady, Kerouac turned his eyes toward a new path—one that required him to re-evaluate his priorities within his trek towards enlightenment. His disillusionment with conventional America was exacerbated by his dissatisfaction with the very people whom he hoped would bring about the change for which he longed. Sal's realization of Dean's directionless and unreliability by the end of *On the Road* urges Sal to recognize his disappointment with the futility of living for the present alone, and Kerouac captures the significance of this transition as Sal's epiphany throughout *On the Road* is shown in Ray Smith's point of view in *The Dharma Bums*. Ray Smith, *The Dharma Bum's* equivalent of Sal Paradise, scorns the crowded venues of urbanity in search of the wide-opened landscape of Western America. While Kerouac's focus on place in *On the Road* highlights Sal's need for movement, experimentation, and belonging, the claustrophobic, frenetic ambiance of the various locales in cities across America aggravate his dissatisfaction with the carpe diem, self-serving attitudes of his friends. Sal's reflections of his meditative experiences while in natural settings makes apparent the desire to escape his feelings of despair and loneliness. Kerouac's appreciation for the natural world appears sporadically throughout Sal's adventures, but

the significance of nature to Kerouac's quest for meaning is overtly manifested throughout Ray's rejection of the city and his subsequent self-exile into the wilderness.

While the place where Kerouac attempts to find meaning has changed, his need to keep pressing forward in his metaphorical quest is dependent upon physical movement; Sal's movement on the road turns into Ray's various excursions through the wilderness. Kerouac's dependence upon physical movement and his emphasis of the importance of place within his pursuit of meaning is captured within the first lines of *The Dharma Bums*:

Hopping a freight out of Los Angeles at high noon one day in late September 1955 I got on a gondola and lay down with my duffel bag under my head and my knees crossed and contemplated the clouds as we rolled north to Santa Barbara. It was a local and I intended to . . . catch either another local to San Obispo the next morning or the firstclass freight all the way to San Francisco at seven p.m. Somewhere near Camarillo . . . a thin old little bum climbed into my gondola as we headed into a siding. (*The Dharma Bums* 3-4)

Kerouac's frenetic writing style carries over from *On the Road*, highlighting the fact that, while he has recognized the limitations of the philosophies of many of his Beat companions, he still appreciates several aspects of Beat culture, namely the spontaneous movement and wandering, which are depicted passionately throughout Sal Paradise's adventures. Ray Smith's passion for Beat movement echoes Sal's. Along with his depiction of Ray's wandering spirit, Kerouac emphasizes, as he does in *On the Road*, the importance of awareness within his persona's adventures. The names of locations are significant because every destination, even prospective destinations, offers the potential

for broadening one's perception. New places might contain new ideas and new people. Sal names every location and diligently describes the appearances of and conversations with the individuals he meets along his road trip West. In like manner, Ray chronicles detailed depictions of the places and people he meets on his quest into the wilderness. Ray's traveling companion, the bum, is not a prominent character in the novel, yet Ray feels that their brief interaction is significant. The bum represents the possibilities for a future America where people are not encumbered by materialistic desires and where this freedom from capitalistic, conventional society allows them the opportunity to embark on their own quests for meaning. Kerouac highlights the importance of Ray's encounter with the bum as Ray admits that the bum "solidified all my beliefs by . . . talking and finally whipping out a tiny slip of paper which contained a prayer by Saint Teresa announcing that after her death she will return to the earth by showering it with roses from heaven, forever, for all living creatures" (5). Ray appreciates that the bum can enjoy his present existence while having faith in a meaningful future. Kerouac's recognition of the various strangers who have influenced his life is highlighted throughout his writings. As he displays in his roman à clef narratives, specific individuals have shown up during certain periods of his life to influence how he perceives himself and his environment.

Kerouac's depiction of Sal and Ray's idolization of individuals—this need to see a philosophical vision embodied by another Beat figure—is mirrored in his own life. Sal's recognition that Dean's flaws keep him from achieving any growth in life, displayed in the ending of *On the Road*, echoes Kerouac's own realization of Neal Cassady's selfishness. Joyce Johnson discusses Neal's manipulative mindset, stating that "[h]e had discovered how you could con someone for love by turning yourself into

everything they desired—until the time when your own priorities demanded that you abruptly take back your gift” (232). While his idolization for Cassady had dimmed, Kerouac’s need for companionship was still an important aspect of his life. Many people influenced him, and these eclectic people continue to appear throughout his writing. For Ray Smith, the inspiration he needed for the continuation of his quest for enlightenment is embodied by Japhy Ryder who is inspired by Kerouac’s relationship with Gary Snyder. Kerouac uses Ray’s admiration for Japhy to display Kerouac’s reevaluating of his vision for a future America; as Sal realizes by the end of *On the Road*, one must create a balance between living for the present and the future, the physical and the spiritual. For Ray Smith, his revitalized quest requires him to pursue spiritual enlightenment, and his longing to enrich his life through a connection with Buddhism leads him to seek the advice of someone who can help him achieve this enlightenment—Japhy Ryder.

Ray’s Buddhist quest for meaning in the wilderness represents one of the most important aspects of Beat culture: the rejection of structured living for an impulsive, restless existence in search of truth. In “Dharma Bums: The Beat Generation and the Making of Countercultural Pilgrimage,” P. J. Johnston asserts that “[i]deally, the Beat lifestyle should be lived “on the road,” without foundation or center or roots, itinerant, involving spontaneous directionless travel in search of highs and epiphanies and one’s “original mind”” (175). Besides the “directionless” aspect, Kerouac supported this type of existence, and as he became disillusioned with many of his Beat companions who failed to fully live up to his ideal vision of a Beat lifestyle, Kerouac became drawn to Buddhism because it provided him with the potential for discovering some form of meaning that would allow him to kickstart his envisioned movement. P. J. Johnston remarks that after

gaining an interest in Eastern religions, Kerouac “would be engaged in a frantic, autodidactic investigation of Buddhism, living in retreat, meditating, composing sutras, and devouring nineteenth-century translations of Buddhist texts” (174). Thus, Kerouac’s investigation into Buddhism led him to implement Eastern philosophies into his metaphorical quest, resulting in his association with Gary Snyder. Through his excursions into nature with Snyder, Kerouac saw an avenue for spreading interest for the movement he desired would take place in American society. By creating “Buddhist religious experience” with the “wandering” spirit of the Beats, Kerouac saw his envisioned America unfolding; Ray Smith longs for the future Japhy foresees—one of “rucksack wanderers, Dharma Bums . . . thousands or even millions of young Americans wandering around with rucksacks, going up to mountains to pray, making children laugh and old men glad, . . . all of ‘em Zen Lunatics” (*The Dharma Bums* 97-98). Indeed, Ray’s vision for America appears to be an extension of Sal’s. Ray has taken on Sal’s rejection of consumerist, structured society, his embracement of frenetic movement, and his appreciation for learning from the people and places he encounters. In contrast, Ray has also subscribed to a life of moderation, as displayed by Ray’s desire to adhere to particular religious tenets.

With apt attention, Kerouac discusses the significance of place and the people who are congregated in these locations in order to highlight the personality traits and philosophical views that draw Ray and Japhy together. While at a bar in San Francisco, interesting referred to as “The Place,” some of Ray’s Beat friends ask Japhy where he met Ray. Japhy responds, “Oh, I always meet my Bodhisattvas in the street” (*The Dharma Bums* 10). Japhy’s response reminds readers of Ray’s ability to find meaning

through his awareness of place. Like Ray, Japhy is influenced by his awareness of his surroundings. This awareness allows him to be open to befriending strangers whom he encounters. Unlike Dean Moriarty, Japhy does not adopt a self-serving mentality when seeking the company of new people. In this regard, Japhy's personality echoes Ray's; both Ray and Japhy are curious to learn from the new people they encounter and form meaningful bonds with these individuals. Their mutual curiosity for forming new friendships leads them to discover their similar interests. When Ray, Japhy, and their fellow "howling poets" traverse from The Place to Gallery Six, Kerouac provides a fictionalized account of one of the most significant moments in the Beat Generation (13). Indeed, during this encounter, Alvah Goldbook, *The Dharma Bums*' persona of Ginsberg, reads from Wail (Howl), creating an atmosphere that contains qualities for which the Beat Generation is most known: artistic experimentation, excitement for the unknown, and desire for spontaneity and movement. Through Ray's perspective of this famous historic moment, Kerouac emphasizes the significance that Gary Snyder's Buddhist philosophies had on Kerouac's own beliefs. Kerouac places specific attention on the atmosphere of the room, spotlighting the contributions made by Japhy. While the other poets wear various types of workplace attire, Ray notes that "Japhy was in rough workingman's clothes he'd bought secondhand in Goodwill stores to serve him on mountain climbs and hikes and for sitting in the open at night" (11). Japhy's everyday, casual appearance contrasts with many of the other poets in the room. In addition to noting the lack of materialistic qualities in Japhy's clothing, Ray's description of Japhy's attire emphasizes Japhy's connection to nature. His clothes are functional; they help

him to adapt to the wilderness. Japhy's uniqueness is also evident in the manner in which he interacts with Ray.

Ray and Japhy's discussion during the Gallery Six reading displays Kerouac's emphasis on the differences and similarities in their respective Buddhist philosophies. Japhy appears to be drawn to Ray's genuine personality. Ray reveals Japhy's opinion of him, recalling that "[Japhy] claimed at once that I was a great 'Bodhisattva,' meaning . . . 'great wise angel,' and that I was ornamenting this world with my sincerity" (Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums* 12). As they engage in conversation, Ray discovers that they hold the same appreciation for a particular Buddhist figure, and they also realize that they have both studied "Sakyamuni's four noble truths" (12). While Ray and Japhy form a bond during this eventful occasion, Kerouac emphasizes Ray's particular interest in the first truth that "all life is suffering," contrasting Ray's somewhat selective Buddhist beliefs with Japhy's close adherence to Zen Buddhism (12). Ray's understanding of suffering is vital to his understanding of Buddhism. Ray Smith, like Sal Paradise, is aware of the suffering around him. While Ray acknowledges the negative effects that capitalist ideology has on marginalized individuals in America, Ray's own suffering stems from within himself. Thus, Ray's struggles with truly believing the third noble truth that "the suppression of suffering can be achieved" depicts Kerouac's own inner struggle with living a balanced lifestyle (12). Kerouac understands that he must be connected with the spiritual aspects of his surroundings and within himself, and he must be constant in his pursuit of truth and meaning. Ray's Buddhist philosophies are incorporated into his quest for enlightenment, and, within the confines of nature, Ray seeks to discover some form of meaning that will allow him to escape his own self-doubt.

While *The Dharma Bums* details events inspired by a time in Kerouac's life when he was encouraged to connect with nature and contemplate his understanding of spirituality, the novel also depicts Ray's on-going battle with loneliness and despair, displayed mostly through Kerouac's commentary on isolation, sexual liberties, and the influences of drugs and alcohol. While Kerouac captures the chaotic, frenetic atmosphere of the Gallery Six reading through Ray's astute recollection of the night's events, Kerouac only briefly explains his own role within the intellectual debates and boisterous carousing throughout the night. Noting Kerouac's refusal to read from his own works and his overall behavior during this famous occasion, Ann Charters explains that

Jack didn't want any part of the spotlight . . . Kerouac preferred drinking his bottle of wine on the sidelines, cheering on the poets as if he were a spectator at a jazz club. Even at the parties afterwards, where there was always lots of wine, marijuana and plenty of available girls, Kerouac rarely participated, drinking silently in a chair by the wall . . . Jack was a loner. (242)

As Charters' recollection of Kerouac's behavior shows, Kerouac occupies a peculiar space within Beat culture. While Kerouac sought out Beat locales and attached himself to people who freely flaunted their liberal views expressed through experimentation with sex and drugs, he usually isolated himself when present at a crowded, noisy type of gathering. Kerouac felt displaced from his companions who attained joy through the self-gratification of present living. When he could, Kerouac rejected public attention as well as the attention of his own social circle. Due to his disillusionment with the lack of direction and seriousness of many of his friends, Kerouac viewed himself as unique among his contemporaries. He was "dedicated to the idea of being different and

legendary, even among his closest friends” (Charters 243). Due to his awareness of the philosophical differences between himself and many of his Beat compatriots, Kerouac not only isolated himself from conventional society, but also from marginalized society as well. Despite his idolization of the frantic energy and magnetism of Cassady and his admiration for the dizzying, passionate intellect of Ginsberg, Kerouac recognized that their inability to maintain a balanced lifestyle, which he found to be necessary for enlightenment, required that he pursue his quest for meaning by searching for truth through his interaction with Gary Snyder. Kerouac desired to learn how to pursue spiritual enlightenment effectively from forming a more sincere connection with Snyder than he had been able to do with Cassady. While Kerouac and Snyder built their friendship on the foundations of their shared appreciation for nature and Buddhism, Kerouac saw in Snyder some of the same flaws that he found in Cassady. The complexities of their relationship are depicted in *The Dharma Bums* in the scenes where Ray describes the influences that sex and drugs have in both his relationship with Japhy and in his personal search for enlightenment.

While Ray’s self-exile into the wilderness with Japhy is intended to provide a place where he can live a minimalist existence and discover truth within the boundaries of the natural world, Japhy and Ray’s respective weaknesses distract each other from fully undertaking a balanced lifestyle. One day while Ray and Alvah spend time writing and discussing poetry at their shared cabin, Japhy stops by with his female companion, Princess (27). During this encounter, Ray realizes that Japhy’s adherence to Buddhist truths does not limit him from satiating his hunger for physical pleasure. Japhy proves to be as liberal in his sexual pursuits as Dean is in *On the Road*. Ray associates lust with

suffering, and he has remained celibate for a year in order to clear his mind of pain (29). His desire to abstain from engaging in sexual activity displays Ray's sincerity in his pursuit of enlightenment. Despite Ray's desire to stay on a focused path, his lack of self-discipline is evident. The manner in which Ray lets others easily convince him to satisfy his physical desires echoes Kerouac's own struggles with establishing his autonomy while in the company of his friends. Ray often seeks solace within his physical encounters, yet these relationships rarely alleviate his loneliness. While Ray wants to engage in sexual activities to form close bonds, most of these encounters result in Ray feeling empty. By proclaiming that he is not being "taken in by no Princess," Ray absolves himself of the guilt of allowing himself to become distracted by his lust (35). Despite his attempts to maintain self-control, Ray sometimes strays from the determined, serene mindset needed for his quest for meaning. While he engages in sexual acts, usually at the urging of his friends, Ray's dependence upon alcohol to quench his loneliness also plays a role in distracting him from his quest at times.

Like Sal in *On the Road*, Ray not only battles his loneliness and despair through his seeking out of eclectic individuals, but also, to his own detriment, through his alcoholism. While Japhy distracts Ray by encouraging him to relieve his sexual frustrations, Ray distracts Japhy by encouraging him to drink excessively. When Ray and Alvah visit Japhy's cabin and bring along alcohol, Japhy's exuberant physical reaction causes Ray to state that "I had the feeling it was really a complaint against our breaking in on his studies and against wine itself which would get him drunk and make him miss his planned evening of reading" (25). Despite this initial, worrisome thought, Ray quickly realizes that Japhy only wants to join them in a drink. As the three of them spend the

night yelling nonsensically about poetry and heavily drinking, they succumb to the temptation of living in the present. Alcohol and drugs permeate Beat culture, oftentimes to the detriment of the Beat members' aspirations for enlightenment.

Many Beat participants often credit their inspiring and creative endeavors to their experimentation with drugs, alcohol, and sexual activities. Their disenchantment with traditional American values extended beyond politics and economics; the rigidity of social, moral values of post-WWII angered the Beats as well. For many of these figures, immersing themselves in a lifestyle where they could freely indulge themselves with these delectations allowed the members of the counterculture to champion their freedom from America's repressed culture. Kerouac, along with Cassady, Ginsberg, Burroughs, Snyder, and numerous other Beat members, freely participated in the free-sex and substance-using lifestyle of the era. Unlike many of his companions' motivations, Kerouac's association with this type of living, particularly with his excessive drinking, stemmed from his need to be surrounded by fascinating people who could provide him with a haven from his emotional tumult. As he does in *On the Road*, Kerouac includes extensive commentary on the Beats' association with riotous living through his narrator persona in *The Dharma Bums*. Ray Smith's narration of these types of moments displays Kerouac's subtle cynicism and melancholy feelings as he recounts these moments in his past.

Furthermore, the detailed narration from Ray's point of view allows readers to glimpse Ray's shortcomings even when Ray himself cannot see these flaws. Because he drinks as a means for repressing his loneliness and depression, Ray cannot admit that his heavy drinking is negatively affecting areas of his life. Challenging Ray to see the errors

of his drunkenness, Japhy asks, “[h]ow do you expect to become a good . . . Bodhisattva Mahasattva always getting drunk” (190). Ray’s angry defense of his drinking suggests that Ray is unable to view his drinking as a harmful activity because this would force him to investigate the reasons for his heavy drinking. Ray’s recalcitrant stance on the wisdom of his drinking displays his inner turmoil. Ray’s fear of death and his social isolationist tendencies are aspects of his existence which he would prefer to exile into the recesses of his mind. Ray’s battle with alcoholism mirrors Kerouac’s own struggles. Speaking of Kerouac’s time spent in San Francisco with Snyder, Ann Charters recalls that “Gary had begun to criticize Jack for the amount of wine he was drinking” (264). Charters goes on to recount how people who frequented the same parties as Kerouac viewed him: “Jack would enter a room to meet people, coming on strong to give himself social confidence, slapping them on the back clumsily like a high school football player and then subsiding quickly into a dim corner with his own gallon of wine” (264-265). Kerouac’s inability to feel comfortable around crowds is, in part, what drove him to seek isolation in the natural world, but his fear of death and his immense loneliness were too deeply entrenched within his being to simply vanish due to a change in scenery. Despite Kerouac’s use of the wilderness as a shield to block out his own fears and shortcomings, he was serious about his desire to learn from Snyder during their time together. Despite the distractions he faced both from his friends and from himself, Kerouac’s devotion to his quest was sincere when he and Snyder hiked up Matterhorn Peak, depicted vividly within Kerouac’s depiction of their adventures.

Kerouac’s description of Ray and Japhy’s experience climbing the mountain contains one of the most significant events in the novel because Ray learns a valuable

lesson that builds upon the lessons Sal learned during his road adventures with Dean. Having forsaken the commotion and crowds of the city, Ray yearns for the chance to have a transcendent experience. The mystery and chaos of nature offer him the place where this spiritual/philosophical awakening may occur, and Japhy provides the companionship Ray needs to continue his pursuit for enlightenment. In Japhy, Ray has found a kindred soul—one who shares his passion for movement and his appreciation for the spiritual wisdom of Buddhism, but Ray also appreciates that Japhy embodies the spirit of the counterculture movement. Kerouac captures Japhy's Beat aura beautifully as Ray observes the college campus when he and Japhy are gathering their camping equipment in preparation for their hike up Matterhorn Peak. Ray remarks on his displeasure for the college atmosphere:

Colleges being nothing but grooming schools for the middle-class non-identity which usually finds its perfect expression on the outskirts of the campus in rows of well-to-do houses with lawns and television sets in each living room with everybody looking at the same thing and thinking the same thing at the same time while the Japhies of the world go prowling in the wilderness to hear the voice crying in the wilderness, to find the ecstasy of the stars, to find the dark mysterious secret of the origin of faceless wonderless crapulous civilization. (39)

Japhy's distaste for materialist pursuits and his drive to seek out the unknown truths motivate Ray to evaluate his own place within the vastness of the American landscape. Ray's reference to the voice crying in the wilderness brings to mind the Biblical prophet Isaiah and John the Baptist; just as these biblical heroes proclaimed the arrival of the Messiah, so too does Ray long to search for a voice that proclaims the truth. Ray's exile

into the wilderness also brings to mind Christ's journey into the wilderness; perhaps, as Christ must confront the devil, Ray must confront his own demons. Unlike the Biblical prophets, Ray requires a guide to accompany him into the wilderness. Japhy offers Ray the means through which to continue his education. Kyle Garton-Gundling asserts that "Japhy's Buddhism models an exotic freedom of spontaneous action that is truer to the American revolutionary spirit than the conformity into which American 'freedom' has deteriorated" (214). Thus, within Japhy, Ray recognizes the qualities that will be needed if the longed-for rucksack revolution is ever to come to fruition. In pursuit of this vision for America, Ray is driven to always search for hidden truths, and these truths are not likely to be discovered in conventional locations through conventional means. In Ray's quest to be a part of the movement that ushers in a pilgrimage of people flocking from the center to the outskirts, Ray views the trek up the mountain as a type of initiation ceremony.

As Ray and Japhy, along with Japhy's friend Morley, commence hiking up the mountain to begin their climb of Matterhorn Peak, Ray displays the awareness and open-mindedness necessary for discovering truth. Every step in their mountain-climbing excursion is significant. Kerouac again emphasizes the potential for learning that can be found in any place and from any person. The hunters with whom they converse at the restaurant (where they stop to eat before their climb) seem surprised that Japhy and Ray are undertaking this quest only for the climb itself. Ray's observation of the hunters' confusion highlights the limited perception that is born from staying too close to the center. Even Morley's constant delays and distractions are noteworthy. With Morley's forgetfulness and continuous babbling, Kerouac seems to be highlighting the dangers of

getting too distracted. At first Ray allows Morley to annoy him. When Morley must turn back and tells them he will meet them later at the camp, Ray remarks to Japhy that “[Morley is] just satisfied to wander around and forget things” (57). Indeed, Kerouac reiterates his belief in the futility of directionless living. The journey is important, but what the destination might offer must always be present in one’s mind. After Morley leaves, Ray and Japhy continue their progression up the mountainside.

Along this path, Ray experiences the moment of transcendence for which he longed, but this moment comes only after Ray battles thoughts of fear and loneliness. Upon meeting up with Morley again, Ray and Japhy continue climbing. As Japhy bursts ahead of Ray, Ray’s fear washes over him. Ray recalls stopping at a ledge, observing that “I nudged my whole body inside the ledge just to hold me there tight, so the wind would not dislodge me” (83). Kerouac’s own self-doubt is seeping through Ray’s behavior in this moment. Kerouac feared that he might not ever discover any monumental truth despite his longing for meaning and his wandering spirit. As Ray clings to the ledge, Kerouac’s fear of retreating within the safety and comfort of his middle-class lifestyle is manifested. Ray bemoans his own weakness, crying “Oh what a life this is, why do we have to be born in the first place, and only so we can have our poor gentle flesh laid out to such impossible horrors as huge mountains and rock and empty space” (83). Indeed, the fear of the unknown affects Ray as much as it does the individuals who never stray from the surety of conventional thinking. Although Ray fears the unknown, he fears stagnancy more. To escape this fear, Ray learns from Japhy that movement is a necessary risk.

Moreover, Japhy's presence in this moment urges Ray to broaden his own perception. Ray, one of the most self-aware characters in the novel, must overcome his short-sightedness. He must break past the boundaries and limitations of his will and mind in order to facilitate his path to truth. During the beginning of the climb, Ray follows Japhy step-for-step. His realization that "it was better for me to just spontaneously pick my own boulders and make a ragged dance of my own" is crucial in his choice to leave behind his despair (64). Once Ray decides to choose his own steps up the mountain, his path clears before him. Kerouac emphasizes the power of Ray's moment of clarity. Ray describes this introspective moment as he chooses to continue the physical and metaphorical climb, declaring that "it happened in one insane second or so: I looked up and saw Japhy running down the mountain in huge twenty-foot leaps . . . bouncing . . . then taking another long . . . sail down the sides of the world and in that flash I realized it's impossible to fall off mountains you fool" (85). At the peak of the mountainside, Ray briefly shatters the wall of despair that he has erected in his mind. He has finally discovered an allusive truth—no specific place or individual person can hold all of the answers. Enlightenment must first start by looking inward. Although Ray has come to this realization in the wilderness, as Japhys assures him, "[i]t don't make a damn frigging difference whether you're in The Place or hiking up Matterhorn, it's all the same old void, boy" (55). Ray realizes that the city can offer him the same inspiration that the wilderness provides. Ray must take what he has learned on the mountain and apply it to all aspects of life.

Moreover, Ray's epiphany on the mountainside urges him to assert his independent thinking within particular areas of his life. In particular, Ray's appreciation

for maintaining balance in life extends to spirituality as well. Ray feels the need for merging the physical with the spiritual, but he also understands the importance of creating a balance between Western religion and Eastern spirituality. Kerouac's Catholic influences are evident within Ray's deliberation upon the beauty of Christianity. Japhy's dislike for Christianity is apparent when he downplays Ray's appreciation for a woman on the street who is preaching of Jesus. Ray chastises the inability for marginalized and traditional religious people to come to an understanding of the beauty and wisdom belonging to the others' faith. This divide has caused Ray to remain silent when among friends who are of different beliefs. While Kerouac is critical of traditional values, he condemns the narrow-mindedness of members of the counterculture too. Explaining his helplessness when talking to their friend who committed suicide, Rosie, Ray says "Japhy, there were things I wanted to tell Rosie and I felt suppressed by this schism we have about separating Buddhism from Christianity, East from West, what the hell difference does it make" (114). This frustration with Japhy's flippant dismissal of Christianity emphasizes Ray's growth. As Sal learns to recognize the flaws in Dean, Ray learns not to idolize Japhy. While he may learn from Japhy, Ray must continue to walk on his own. Ray's tolerance for the beliefs of others depicts Kerouac's own vision for an enlightened America. Ray longs to bring people together. He has gained knowledge and understanding during his time in the wilderness with Japhy; however, his vision for America is halted by more than the limitations of others. Ray faces another obstacle to the progression of his quest.

Despite both Ray's recognition that a balanced existence must be created and maintained and that none of his fellow Beat heroes are able to achieve this balance, Ray

cannot overcome his own shortcomings. Thus, he is unable to usher in his vision for the future generations of America. While his astute self-awareness and understanding of the world around him present him as an ideal leader for his envisioned future America, Ray's own demons keep him from fully reaching the enlightened state for which he spends most of his life pursuing. Although he has realized that place should not affect the manner in which he seeks after meaning, Ray thrives in the wilderness. It is during his climb up Matterhorn Peak, as well as throughout his stint on Desolation Peak as a fire lookout, where Ray transcends societal boundaries and is able to reach an ethereal understanding of the self and the world, but, unfortunately, Ray cannot overcome the impediments of society upon returning to the mayhem and chaos of reality. Early in Ray's narration of his adventures with Japhy, he clues readers into his ultimate failure at maintaining his balanced, enlightened existence. Ray reflects that "[s]ince then I've become a little tired and cynical. Because now I am grown so old and neutral" (5). The secrets which were imbued upon him by the solitude of the wilderness are forgotten as he re-enters society. The influences of Buddhism in his life are evident throughout this novel, but his admission of his dimming fervor for Buddhist practices displays Kerouac's disillusionment with his quest. As he leaves the wilderness, he becomes reacquainted with his loneliness and despair. Garton-Gundling muses that "Kerouac's Buddhism was a bright flame that burned out quickly" (216). This flame only seemed to burn when isolated from his noisy, city interactions with fellow Beat members. Only a short time passed from the moment of Kerouac's triumphant stand on Desolation Peak to when he discovered that *On the Road* was being published. With success came fame, and as he

journeyed from the mountain back to the city, Kerouac left behind both the wilderness and his vision for America.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### A VANISHING VISION AND

### A LEGACY OF TRUTH

As Kerouac returned from his self-exile in the wilderness, he re-entered the bustle of urban living. With his reintegration into everyday life, the weight of despair and loneliness that Kerouac had hoped to leave behind on the mountaintop once again overwhelmed him. Despite recognizing that place should not negatively affect his search for truth, Kerouac was unable to assimilate his wilderness experience within the chaos of urban living. In 1957, shortly after returning from his stay on Desolation Peak, *On the Road* was published. Kerouac's vision for America had a chance to be delivered to the American public. His hope was that his voice would stir the stagnant waters of conventional American thinking. Kerouac felt that his ideas about religion, social interactions, and nomadic living were important for finding meaning. This hope for the future soon diminished, for he realized that he himself could not participate fully in this envisioned America.

With the publication of *On the Road* came fame, and with fame came public criticism. In the years that followed, Kerouac published several works of prose and poetry; however, the critical perception of the majority of these works failed to bolster Kerouac's confidence. Kerouac desired to establish himself as one of the premiere writers of the era. By spreading his works to a wide market, Kerouac foresaw the younger

generation taking up his vision for the nation. His desire to influence millions of young Americans depended upon the popularity of his writing. Thus, he believed that positive reviews of his works were critical for the growth of his vision. His confidence faltered with poor reviews of his works *Mexico City Blues* and *Doctor Sax*. On reviewing *Mexico City Blues*, Kenneth Rexroth scornfully proclaimed that “[s]omeone once said of Mr. Kerouac that he was a Columbia freshman who went to a party in the Village twenty years ago and got lost. How true. The naive effrontery of this book is more pitiful than ridiculous” (qtd. in *Charters* 311). Thus, Kerouac’s despair deepened. Suddenly, acquaintances from the past seemed to reject him as both a person and a writer. Many revered authors overtly shunned Kerouac. Truman Capote famously insulted Kerouac, declaring that his writing style was not writing at all; “it’s typing” (qtd. in *Charters* 312). Kerouac longed for a respectable reputation as an author. He believed that the country was in need of a purpose. While he had not discovered the extent of this purpose, Kerouac felt that the Beat characteristics and philosophies that he portrays in his books were necessary for uniting conventional society with marginalized culture, yet his quest to raise the Beat lifestyle from obscurity and usher it into the forefront of American culture faced repeated obstacles.

Among these obstacles, the trend of many Americans moving from rural to urban areas was one of the most concerning impediments to Kerouac’s vision. One of the most appealing aspects of Beat figures such as Cassady and Snyder was their wandering spirit. In his article “Consumption, Addiction, Vision, Energy: Political Economies and Utopian Visions in the Writings of the Beat Generation,” Allan Johnston contemplates the significance of key Beat members’, namely Snyder’s, influence on Kerouac’s quest for

meaning. Discussing Kerouac's adventures in *The Dharma Bums*, Johnston muses that "Ryder introduces Ray Smith . . . to mountain climbing and backpacking, taking him away from consumer culture not through a frenetic pursuit of 'IT' but rather by returning him to the basis of all economic order in nature" (120). Thus, Kerouac desired for others to follow Snyder's lead, rejecting the materialistic pursuits of American capitalism. Kerouac was dismayed that his portrayal of the Beat Generation within his novels seemed to have little to no effect on society by the time the works were published. In fact, many Beats themselves failed to live up to Kerouac's expectations. Joyce Johnson comments on this conundrum, remarking that

just weeks before the publication of *On the Road*, Jack would write in his diary that what he really thought was that the Beat Generation had ceased to exist, as he had originally conceived it, after 1949, when the people who had inspired the idea began disappearing either into jails or into 'houses,' by which Jack meant domesticity and more settled lives. (302)

This particular diary entry is consistent with how late twentieth and early twenty-first century scholarship has examined the fading of Kerouac's vision. Most scholars attribute Kerouac's depression and subsequent regression into alcoholism to America's inability to separate itself from consumerism and conventional religious values, and, more specifically, Kerouac's own inability to fully immerse himself in the lifestyle he portrays in his writing.

Moreover, many Kerouac scholars, including Ann Charters and Joyce Johnson, connect Kerouac's disillusionment and alcoholism with Kerouac's eventual rejection of a strict adherence to Buddhism and his return to Catholicism. Kerouac's closest friends

noticed this transition as well. Ginsberg remarks that “[a]s Jack grew older, in despair and lacking the means to calm his mind and let go of the suffering, he tended more and more to grasp at the cross . . . He was undergoing crucifixion in the mortification of his body as he drank” (qtd. in Giamo 201). While he had experienced moments in his past, usually when isolated within nature, where he had learned to peacefully accept his fate, Kerouac never learned to extinguish fully his fears of death. Sal Paradise captures Kerouac’s deeply ingrained fear as he contemplates the meaning of a dream with Carlo Marx; Sal muses that

Something, someone, some spirit was pursuing all of us across the desert of life and was bound to catch us before we reached heaven. Naturally, now that I look back on it, this is only death: death will overtake us before heaven. The one thing that we yearn for in our living days, that makes us sigh and groan and undergo sweet nauseas of all kinds, is the remembrance of some lost bliss that . . . can only be reproduced (though we hate to admit it) in death. (*On the Road* 115)

That Sal’s fear of death is made clear to him through a dream is important; his subconscious mind is ever aware of his fears of dying. In this moment, Sal embodies Kerouac’s fear that he may not actually possess a purpose. In death, he might glimpse some truth that has alluded him in life. That death awaits him at the end of the quest creates his fear of having a purposeless life, of being insignificant. Thus, Kerouac seeks to escape through drinking and hiding in the midst of crowds. Kerouac’s despair and alcoholism, however, stem from more than just his loneliness, fears, and dissatisfaction with American materialist society. One of the main reasons that Kerouac’s Beat vision

for America never fully came to fruition can be discovered by examining Kerouac's unique awareness of both himself and the influential Beats who were his contemporaries.

As discussed in the *On the Road* and *The Dharma Bums* chapters, Kerouac is not idolizing Dean Moriarty and Japhy Rider. Through fictionalizing both his road trips across America with Neal Cassady and various Beats and his wilderness excursion with Gary Snyder, Kerouac is not presenting these individuals as American heroes who will lead the nation to enlightenment. Despite his constant praising of Dean's wanderlust, Carlo's (or Alvah's) genius, and Japhy's spiritual wisdom, Kerouac's reflective, cynical narration suggests that these Beat characters cannot offer him the means through which to find the illusive meaning for which he passionately yearns. Although he recognizes the benefits of experimentation, movement, and creative expression, Kerouac does not believe that Cassady, Ginsberg, and Snyder have the capacity for ushering in the new era he envisions. Dean Moriarty is not the hero of *On the Road*. Kerouac desired that Dean's portrayal in the novel would both inspire and serve as a warning. While Dean's wandering spirit and passion for living should be emulated, Dean's lack of purpose and selfishness are detrimental for any serious pursuit for meaning. In like manner, Japhy's minimalist lifestyle and his connection to Buddhism are necessary ingredients for Kerouac's dream of America, Japhy's complete rejection of conventional religion and his recklessness hinder the establishment of his longed-for rucksack revolution. Although Carlo/Alvah seems to possess the creativity and intelligence to influence the envisioned generation, his obsession with aligning himself with directionless individuals keeps him from fully embodying Kerouac's idealized Beat leader. Due in part to his inability to feel comfortable within crowds, his deeply engrained loneliness and fear, and his reliance on

alcohol to escape from the despair of reality, Kerouac himself could not usher in his ideal Beat movement. His attempt to serve as the Beat prophet ultimately failed because his vision had no chance of turning into reality. Thus, Kerouac's desire to distance himself from the moniker of "King of the Beats" appears to stem from the failure of the Beat Movement to ever fully exist, as well as the from effects of loneliness, fame, and his own fears.

Despite his failure to bring about the Beat movement, Kerouac's works have influenced various participants of the different counter-culture movements. Kerouac might not have achieved what he had set out to achieve. As he had feared, no all-encompassing truth ever made itself known to Kerouac, but the fleeting epiphanies he experienced and the small moments of truth that were revealed to him on dark street corners and isolated mountain peaks hold significance for many scholars and fans who picked up Kerouac's works during the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century. While some critics still viewed Kerouac's works as pretentious and chaotic nonsense, echoing earlier reviews of writers like Rexroth and Capote, many up-and-coming scholars and literature lovers found beauty and meaning in what Ginsberg refers to as Kerouac's "spontaneous bop prosody" (qtd. in Johnson 396). Indeed, while this description of Kerouac's writing is complimentary, Joyce Johnson notes that some people believe that his writing showed a lack of thought or effort. Arguing against this misconception, Johnson remarks on the careful precision of Kerouac's writing style:

Jack would follow transcontinental highways, cross rivers and deserts, and watch the sun go down in western skies. He would celebrate the energies and mystery of

his characters with the underlying sadness of knowing they are mortal and that time is passing . . . (396)

The sad, wizened voice with which Kerouac's personas narrate his works reveals the magnitude of his predicament of being both Beat participant and isolated observer of the action. Likewise, the contrasts that exist within his characters are vital for readers to understand the balanced existence that Kerouac finds crucial for discovering truth. The narrators in *On the Road* and *The Dharma Bums* also display paradoxical characteristics. Although the enigmatic qualities of Kerouac's characters may seem random and his plots appear to be almost nonexistent, Kerouac's novels hold value. Within the spontaneous travel narratives, perhaps readers can be inspired to undertake their own quests for meaning. Numerous people are inspired by Kerouac's drive to move, his openness to exposing himself to new people and new ideas, and his need to always find a purpose somewhere in the horizon ahead of him. However, the avant-garde nature of Kerouac's works sometimes can lead to misperceptions of his philosophies.

Consequently, many readers of Kerouac's works associate Kerouac with both the beatniks and the hippies, but this comparison is somewhat misleading. The image which the word beatnik usually evokes is an odd character who is somewhat ridiculous. When defining a beatnik, many people during the early 1960s might imagine a hip-speaking person who loves jazz and despises work, similar to Bob Denver's character, Maynard G. Krebs, in the sitcom *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*, yet this stereotypical portrayal of a beatnik lacks the intellectual pursuits of the Beats. Many ideas and values of the Beats get lost within the stereotypes portrayed by the mass media of the period. Likewise, the hippies' connections to the Beat Generation are more superficial than they are often

depicted. While drugs, sex, and music are the connecting threads that weave together these counter-culture movements, the significance of the quest for meaning is ignored due to mainstream society's depictions of hippies. Experimentation with drugs, the use of hipster language, and a passion for non-traditional music are qualities of both the Beats and the hippies, and Kerouac's influence is often attributed to beatnik and hippie trends. Buried beneath the popular portrayals within mainstream culture, the essence of Kerouac's vision lies hidden. The seize-the-day attitudes and self-gratification mindsets often associated with Beat lifestyle distract from the substance and beauty found within many of Kerouac's novels.

Although the era known as the Beat Generation did not fully encapsulate the vision that Kerouac had foreseen, many find some form of truth within the generation. Numerous artists and thinkers have been inspired by Kerouac's works. Rather than being lured in by the stereotypical depictions of Kerouac's works, many people have found inspiration in Kerouac by discovering their own truths. For example, the Beats have influenced the career of Bob Dylan. Although he found a sense of belonging in the works of the Beats (particularly within Kerouac's writing), Dylan does not attempt to emulate the Beats. Instead, he connects with some form of truth that he shares with the Beats; from this connection, Dylan has embarked upon his own quest through the platform of music. Dylan experiments with Kerouacean concepts of place and human connection, yet he weaves these elements into his own unique form of artistic creation. With a more mainstream platform than Kerouac or any of the Beats ever had, Dylan has created a legacy that has lasted from the 1960s through the early twenty-first century. Songs such as "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" and "Highway 61 Revisited" champion social

awareness. With the eclectic characters and visceral imagery throughout “Desolation Row,” Dylan highlights the need for broadened perception and forward movement. Many of the pictures he paints in these verses bring to mind Kerouac’s proclivity for learning from unlikely individuals. For example, Dylan’s comparison of Cinderella to Bette Davis mirrors Sal Paradise’s perception of the various friends and strangers he encounters throughout his journey on the road. Although Dylan seems to find a balance between Beat qualities and his own philosophies, he himself does not see many similarities between his artistic and philosophical visions and those of Kerouac’s. While Dylan admired the spontaneity and poetic quality of Kerouac’s writing, historian Sean Wilentz, in his article “Bob Dylan, The Beat Generation, and Allen Ginsberg’s America,” proclaims that Dylan “quickly outgrew the raw, aimless, ‘hungry for kicks’ hipsterism personified by Neal Cassady’s character, Dean Moriarty, in *On the Road*” (par 5). This declaration of *On the Road*’s directionless and immature message displays a failure to recognize that Dean is not Kerouac’s hero; Kerouac appears to want his readers to recognize the flaws of Dean’s lack of purpose despite Sal’s constant adulation for Dean. In fact, Dylan seems to capture some of the very elements of Kerouac’s vision that Kerouac himself was aware of but unable to capture. Despite his somewhat narrow interpretation of Kerouac’s message in *On the Road*, Dylan’s appreciation for Kerouac’s themes and ideas is evident within many of his songs’ lyrics and is particularly apparent within his friendship with Ginsberg. While probably the most significant, Dylan is not the only musical artist to experiment with Beat characteristics and Kerouacian visions through the mediation of a countercultural figure.

Similar to Dylan's connection with Beat concepts, the Grateful Dead play with Beat experimentation, movement, and drug use and incorporate their own ideas regarding adaptation and transformation into their songs and performances during the hippie era. Their entrance onto the music scene began with their appearances at Ken Kesey's Acid Tests parties. As Kesey himself is often viewed as the connecting thread between the Beat and hippie eras, the Grateful Dead's frequent performances at these parties display their significance as a segue from the 1950s counterculture to the late 1960s and onward. While much of the hippie culture deviates from Kerouac's vision, The Grateful Dead displays distinct ingredients which Kerouac found necessary for progressing toward enlightenment. Through their rejection of over-commercialization by maintaining an identity as a road band, the Grateful Dead display an understanding and appreciation of Beat movement, and their rejection of a strict adherence to specific set lists on tour echoes Beat experimentation. Their presence at the Human Be-In in January of 1967 attests to their definitive position as hippies, yet their awareness and sense of direction seem to be more Beat than hippie in nature. Although the members of the band appreciated Kerouac's works, they gained personal knowledge about the Beats through Kesey and Ginsberg. While Kerouac briefly encountered them along with Ginsberg through the orchestration of Kesey, the band members' affiliation with the hippie movement dissuaded Kerouac from becoming too involved with them (Slesinger 115). Kerouac had become so disillusioned with the culture of the 1960s that he had seemingly lost hope in the ability of the younger generation to further the progression of his quest. Slesinger points out the irony of the divide between Kerouac and the Grateful Dead and Kerouac's absence at the Human Be-In, observing that "as the member of the Beats who

was most influential in the formation of the popular counterculture, it was mostly Kerouac's depiction of the vision he had shared with Gary Snyder that was manifested at the Be-In" (115). Jerry Garcia, in particular, admired Kerouac's emphasis on spiritual enlightenment in many of his works. While most of the hippie era lacks the direction and self-awareness of Kerouac's vision, some of the Grateful Dead's song lyrics contain ideas that evoke Kerouac's emphasis on the importance of obtaining a balanced existence.

Slesinger highlights the connection between Kerouac and the band:

so the aggregate composition of the counterculture, inspired by Kerouac, came to be embodied in the Grateful Dead, the longest-lasting cultural phenomenon of the 1960s counterculture. Buddhism, at least in an abstracted, hybridized form, was one strand of that aggregate that Kerouac had bequeathed to the next generation of the counterculture, and to the Grateful Dead specifically. (115)

Thus, while Kerouac's vision for the future never fully came to light, many of the ingredients of this vision came to be relied upon by a select few within the generation who immediately followed the Beats. Beyond their reverence for Buddhist ideals, the Grateful Dead's experimentation with Beat movement and perception can be seen in many of their songs, notably in "Friend of the Devil." Their ability to merge elements of Kerouac's vision with aspects of hippie culture highlights the significance of Kerouac's legacy. Kerouac's influence on future generations is not limited to the medium of music. Many others in various creative fields have been moved in the same manner.

The power and beauty of Kerouac's words are just as important in the twenty-first century as they were in the mid-twentieth century. Some absolute, universal truth may not exist, but meaning may be discovered in any place and from any person. Sometimes

these truths might seem like contradictions, as shown in the words of Ray Smith as he reads poetry on Christmas Eve: “truth . . . is beyond the Tree of Buddha as well as the Cross of Jesus” (*The Dharma Bums* 137). Indeed, Kerouac envisioned a united America, at peace through achieving a balanced existence. The heroes whom he hoped would help bring about his vision were not fully up to the task of creating this future; Kerouac himself could not overcome his own flaws to usher in the imagined era. While this dream did not result in his desired outcome, Kerouac’s works can encourage many to uncover their own truths by learning to be at peace with their own contradictions. Cassady can be con-man and hero of the West; Snyder can be both mysterious spiritual guide and ordinary, searching pilgrim. Jack Kerouac can be both the reluctant King of the Beats and the visionary leader of a generation that never existed. By re-examining Kerouac’s vision in *On the Road* and *The Dharma Bums*, scholars and readers may learn the importance of always progressing forward in the journey for enlightenment. Wander and knowledge abound on the street corner and on the mountain peak. One can find truth from a hitchhiking bum or a poet in the wilderness. While Jack Kerouac may not have been the King of the Beats in the manner that he had envisioned, he may prove to be the voice that is needed for a future generation.

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