

The Journey from Worldly Absurdism to Spirituality in Jack Kerouac *The Dharma Bums*

This research examines the mode of Worldly Absurdism to Spirituality in Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums*. This research explores the difficulty of selfhood as it affects to individual identity and subjectivity in American culture and consciousness. In the novel the main character Ray Smith, East Coast beat writer gaining national attention, travels to Berkeley, California and lives with Alvah Goldbook, an East Coast beat poet at the beginning of his career. Ray meets the younger Japhy Ryder, a student of Zen Buddhism and outdoors enthusiast.

The novel *The Dharma Bums* which explicitly took up Buddhism as the path to the transcendent realms represented as the ultimate goal of the journeys. The Buddhism discussed in this novel is of the sort of experimenting from a disparate group of nonconformists. The novel describes celebrations, drinking and a kind of unplanned mountain climbing expedition. The novel's protagonist is famously based on the serious scholar, Zen Buddhist, translator and poet Gary Snyder as Japhy Ryder. Snyder has been at pains to point out that he is in reality quite a bit different from the character portrayed in the book.

The novel describes, appealing and tolerant religious and lifestyle alternative to the standard American Protestant work ethic. For those with a serious interest in this religion, it was the first step in a long road of learning and practice. This novel was published in 1958. Nine years later came the Summer of Love in San Francisco, the city that is a key setting in Kerouac's novel, and the apogee of the intertwining of spirituality and self-indulgence.

The novel is revealing that of those in the Beat Generation who sought transcendence primarily through intoxication foundered on the rocks of mental illness, substance addiction and an early demise. Kerouac drinks heavily throughout the novel

and though Snyder as Japhy Ryder could be said to appreciate the bacchanalia which is a primary theme of the book, his work is always foremost in his orientation to life. Kerouac lacked this self-discipline, despite his very real dedication to his art. His alcoholism is quite evident in the novel.

This novel by Beat Generation author Jack Kerouac is basis for the novel's semi-fictional accounts are events occurring years after the events of *On the Road*. The main characters are the narrator Ray Smith, based on Kerouac, and Japhy Ryder, based on the poet and essayist Gary Snyder, who was instrumental in Kerouac's introduction to Buddhism in the mid-1950s. The novel also concerns duality in Kerouac's life and ideals, examining the relationship of the outdoors, mountaineering, hiking, and hitchhiking through the west US with his "city life" of jazz clubs, poetry readings, and drunken parties. The protagonist's search for a "Buddhist" context to his experiences recurs throughout the story.

The character Japhy drives Ray Smith's story, whose desire for simplicity and Zen Buddhism influenced Kerouac on the eve of the sudden and unpredicted success of *On the Road*. The action shifts between the events of Smith and Ryder's "city life," such as three-day parties and enactments of the Buddhist "Yab-Yum" rituals, to the sublime and peaceful imagery where Kerouac seeks a type of transcendence. The novel concludes with a change in narrative style, with Kerouac working alone as a fire lookout on Desolation Peak, in what would soon be declared North Cascades National Park. His summer on Desolation Peak was desperately lonely.

The aim of this research is to analytically examines the context behind Kerouac's writing to identify why Buddhism, in particular Zen, appealed to him and others in America. Buddhism provided the Beats with an escape, the ascetic lifestyle providing a way out of the conformity of a consumer society. The inspiration for the

main character Japhy Ryder in the novel, thought about Buddhism. Kerouac's individual Buddhist studies and his understanding of key Buddhist terms can be overlooked. The interpretation of Buddhism is significant to consider when discussing Kerouac's religion, for though he never abandoned his childhood religious faith as a Catholic, Kerouac utilizes Buddhist thought to further his understanding of the 'self' and of 'ultimate reality'.

Ray and Japhy forge a strong friendship based on mutual experiences and a shared love for Buddhist philosophy, poetry and the simple life. The two men, joined by Henry Morley, an eccentric librarian, go on a mountain climbing adventure. While the experienced hiker Japhy easily reaches the summit, the neophyte climber Ray clings to a ledge a hundred feet from the summit, too terrified to move. The two then return to Berkeley and have several experiences, supported by a wide circle of friends, sharing everything from ideas to girlfriends. Ray returns to his mother's home for Christmas, hitchhiking and riding trains, hobo-style, across the United States of America. He spends several weeks in the North Carolina woods surrounding his mother's house in contemplation and meditation, seeking and finding enlightenment. Newly interested in primitive nature experiences, Ray also accepts a summer job as a fire lookout in the Cascade Mountains, a job opportunity first suggested by Japhy.

After spending a few months doing nothing at his mother's house, Ray once again hitchhikes and bums across the United States. This time, he takes a Southern route and makes a brief stop in Mexico where he discovers the allure of cheap sex, alcohol and marijuana is no longer as intriguing as a simple night of clarity alone in the clean and clear desert of Texas. Ray arrives in Berkeley and lives with Japhy in a tiny shack in an area bordered by wilderness. The two men resume their friendship and spend many hours discussing poetry, Buddhism, philosophy, Christianity, women

and wine. Ray has made substantive progress on his path to enlightenment and no longer looks to Japhy as a philosophical instructor. He sees him instead as a fellow traveler on the path of life. The two men, joined by a wide circle of friends, have several adventures and share many experiences.

After several wild and tumultuous parties, Japhy sails away to Japan to study, and Ray hitchhikes, walks and hikes north to Washington State, where he spends several weeks isolated on the top of Desolation Peak, working as a fire lookout. His time alone becomes an incredible personal experience full of happiness and enlightenment.

This research is concerned with the abundance of several absurdist elements in Jack Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums*. Kerouac's book describes a year or so in the life of Ray Smith a poet and self-professed Dharma Bum as he searches for the meaning of life by following the Buddhist Way. In this search for the spiritual meaning of life, he happens to lose some of the most valuable moments and meaningfulness of life. Ray falls out with his friend Japhy and other poets in San Francisco getting drunk, going to poet evenings and generally having a wild Bohemian time.

The Dharma Bums tells the story of Ray Smith and his adventures as a traveller, mountaineer, and aspiring Buddha. Between meditation and revels, Ray, who is demonstrated off of Kerouac himself, finds committed friendship and meaning in the wide world. The novel opens with Ray Smith meeting an old bum while traveling on a cargo train in California. Inspired, he calls the man a "Dharma Bum" and then begins to recount a series of adventures that he has undergone with other such free-spirited people.

Ray and his friend Alvah Goldbook share a small cottage in Berkeley, and Japhy lives down the street in an even more humble dwelling. He proves to be a

serious and meditative Buddhist scholar as well as a party animal who shares alcohol and women with his friends. Ray, Japhy, and gossiping enthusiast Henry Morley soon set off to climb the discouraging Matterhorn Peak in California's Sawtooth Ridge. There Ray enjoys the simple pleasures of creating spontaneous hiking to bold new locations with good friends. At times, he feels confident and alive. Upon descending to reality, however, Ray experiences the suicide of one of his friends.

This is one of the factors that contribute to his decision to leave his cottage and climb cross-country to his family in North Carolina, his properties put firmly in a bag on his back. Despite Ray's care for humanity, he finds that he is often misunderstood. His relatives grow annoyed with his joblessness and rejection to work or participate in family affairs. They do not understand his developing understanding of the world as neutrally meaningless.

Ultimately, Ray leaves his family to return to live with Japhy, who is living his admirably simple life in the shack of one of their friends, Sean Monahan. Monahan's economic is also the site of enormous parties, which Ray and Japhy participate. Together, they inform away from a party held in preparation for Japhy's upcoming departure to a Japan priory and climb to the seaside before sadly parting from each other. Ray, following Japhy's advice, decides to work as a fire lookout on lonely Desolation Peak in the Cascade Range. Ray's experience on there is overwhelmingly positive and enlightening. He begins to feel that he truly understands things as they are before he descends the mountain to face the world again.

Carolyn See notices the meditative dimension of Kerouac's *The Dharma Bum*. Religion, culture, political context and life-affirming point of view are some of the subjects on which the first person narrator offers her view. Carolyn See projects her view in the following lines:

The Dharma Bums is a meditation on how our individual memories inevitably slip away, either into oblivion or into that dull collective consciousness we call history. But southerners have the nerve to be fascinated by the events that occurred in their own country that year, the public history that overlaps, vividly, with their personal memories. (15)

Jewishness in the counter cultural context is problematical. Though meditative dimension gains an upper hand in the narrative, other elements are equally important. Though they are secondary to the meditative side of the narrative, the importance of other dimension cannot be neglected.

Blaze Marpet is one of the celebrated writers of Jack Kerouac. He takes Kerouac as the prominent writer who explore ethos of Buddhist doctrine to the utter amazement of his contemporaries. Regarding this nuance of Kerouac, Marpet makes the following remarks:

He was one of the premier patriarchs of American Buddhism. Because Kerouac was both a prominent figure in American popular culture and a Buddhist teacher, he created a massive platform with which he could teach and popularize his Buddhism. Often, scholars and American Buddhists acknowledge the works of Kerouac, but fail to examine his Buddhist texts. In order to understand the spread of Buddhism in the twentieth century, it is essential to understand Jack Kerouac's Buddhist teachings. (76)

This is shown through an analysis of Kerouac's Buddhist works and current scholarship. His role as a Buddhist teacher aims at fostering the religious inclusivity and non-sectarianism in his Buddhist teachings.

Kerouac's prose is vividly conversant with postmodern strategies. His thematic, linguistic and structural concerns interact with contemporary theory.

Eftychia Mikelli makes the following remark on the thematic content of *The Dharma*

Bum:

Tracing the Kerouacian narrator's problematization of the search for meaning in an accelerating culture, it examines his prose in a post-war context of uncertainty and ambiguity. In active dialogue with his contemporary America, Kerouac addresses and often challenges the dominant cultural practices of his time. Foregrounding the conflicts of his era, he anticipates subsequent social developments and philosophical debates, gesturing towards and at times capturing a postmodern sensibility. (15)

Kerouac offers a vision of Buddhism grounded in the teachings of the Buddha and the more ordinary workings of Buddhist lay communities. The Beat Buddhists celebrated by Jackson are misguided in their spiritual pursuits and often failed to engage Buddhist teachings on anything more than a superficial level.

In Emily Capo's words Kerouac's current allure bears witness to his work's ability to engage in dialogue with contemporary contexts. She looks at Kerouac's work from contemporary theoretical standpoints, aiming to advance fresh insights into aspects of Kerouac's prose. Capo makes the following disclosure regarding this side of Kerouac's oeuvre:

Kerouac writes at a transitional point, as American culture is struggling to come to terms with the changes precipitated by the technological revolution, the recognition of the baby boom, the extraordinary surge of black culture, a climate of improvisation in art and mores. Kerouac's prose negotiates such processes in innovative ways that anticipate and often herald discourses that would be more fully shaped in later decades. (3)

Capo examines current representations of Kerouac and the Beats. An overview of the developments of the Beat image over the years provides useful insights into the historical and cultural transformations. Such a representation has conditioned the Beat phenomenon. *Dharma Bums* is a classic example of this phenomenon. It better illuminates how and why Kerouac's work remains relevant for contemporary audiences.

Francis Ferguson carefully examines the use of direct speech in Kerouac's narrative. Ferguson opines that the repeated use of direct speech aims at creating an aura of broadmindedness. The narrative of *The Dharma Bums* has dialogic structure which offers profound scope for various interpretive possibilities. Ferguson elucidates the point further:

In *The Dharma Bums*, Kerouac uses direct and reported speech to create the background necessary for her own voice. He repeats and refashions the words of resistance that are the legacy of her own community, giving special attention to the words of love and support from her mother, her father and her husband. Self is crafted in dialogue with the voices of fellow slaves and the voices of the world that opposes it. (160)

The self that the narrator projects in this memoir is embedded in the very language she employs in the memoir. The subjectivity of the narrator is shaped by the language she is compelled to use. He has to consider many things to describe events with the expectation of fostering sense of resistance. The choice of direct speech is instrumental in highlighting the historical sense of urgency to launch resistance.

The meditative tone of the narrator after self-realization is the charming aura of *The Dharma Bums*. Sandra Buchanan examines the text in the light of how the

public self-consciousness of the hybrid person. Buchanan briefly gives expression to the following view in regard to this aspect:

While Kerouac's original language in *The Dharma Bums* is partially lost in translation from an oral to a written text, what remains is an authorial voice that fuses the public self-consciousness with the private self-consciousness of the narrator. The central focus of her narrative is hybridity as a lived historical reality. Ray Smith is as much the subject of *The Dharma Bums*. Smith is no neutral passive recorder but rather a creative active shaper of her life story.

(12)

Cultural intermingling is portrayed as a lived historical reality. To avoid the disinterestedness of readers of Smith's time, this historical reality is intensified. The strong and undaunted authorial voice exists side by side with the sympathetically motivated language.

Jason Boog is a critic who makes criticism on Kerouac's writings. Regarding Boog's formalistic dimension he comments:

Kerouac writes in a new style of English prose, while juxtaposes and merges distinctly American motifs and diction with such traditional Indian theme as love, death and the self. Kerouac's fiction frequently alludes to commercial brand names and cultural icons of the United States. His work has been noted for its surreal qualities, blending bizarre plots twists and unique narration. (19)

Boog's perspective on s Kerouac's writing suggests that Kerouac juxtaposes different ideas in his writings. His thematic concerns are related to love, death and self. The self has become much important in his writings. His surreal qualities also suggest that he somehow manages to blend magic and realism in his writings. The bizarre plot twists and unique narration suggests that his vibrant quality of his works.

Elizabeth A. Brown treats Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* as the rich tapestry. Various things are reconciled structurally so as to constitute a narrative whole. Brown's short and precise assumption regarding this memoir is reflected in the "*The Dharma Bums* is compelling, the writing is clear, and the entire book feels like an act of love and courage. Kerouac knows how to move through scenes, pack them with dialogue, focus on key details, and capture the juxtaposition of opposites that will fascinate us outsiders" (28). The narrator, Smith, is gifted with the versatile talent. He takes resort to sensuous imageries including the ironic and meditative tone. To bring into light elements of ambiguity, expository style is used. At other times, descriptive and narrative strategies are also used to tackle the issue.

Juliet Flower traces the relationship between human being and divine soul. She does not think that Kerouac is against the unrestrained use of machine in handling the discomforts and troubles of life. The following lines show her view regarding Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums*:

Kerouac was a gentle, courteous man with a soft southern English accent. Yet he had a vision of startling originality. His fiction, which explored our hidden obsessions with media, technologies, landscapes, gained him a solid international readership. Perhaps more than any other, Kerouac drew attention to the new - often powerfully subversive - ways that mainstream cultures appear to be undermined by the very tools and innovations that sustain them. This ambiguity is one of the driving forces of the mythologies that emerged in his work. (78)

Kerouac gained his reputation by treading new ground. While his early novels were located in or near climactic upheavals, even there the dominant landscapes are internal. He appeared more interested in dreams, myths, psychology, the personal and

social constructions of reality, than in technology per se. In his universe such elements are all inextricably intertwined; fiction and reality are not separate.

Jennifer Philips is the controversial critic of Jack Kerouac. She explores lots of incompatibilities in the novel, *The Dharma Bums*. She laments that Kerouac does not deliver any kind of commentary on Smith's deviant and anti-social activities. Philips describes how Patrick happens to commit such dreadful acts of annihilation. Philips's views are presented in the following lines:

The Dharma Bums is structured to be read on the explicit narrative level as the personal confession of the narrator Ray Smith, a young, and escapist. The novel traces numerous acts of violence which are narrated in the same cool and detached tone in which Smith catalogues the objects he owns and the designer labels his companions are wearing. What ties these random acts of violence together is the fact that all of Bateman's victims are "othered" by him either because of their financial status, their ethnic background, sexual preference, age or gender. (4)

Smith is infuriated by the traces of anti-Semitism, other businessmen's show of business card, vanity of women and sexual preferences of his friends. Even the normal reaction and responses of his friends create uncontrollable and stormy feelings in Smith. He is bent upon avenging them. He seeks to other them. The only way of 'othering' them is by murdering them mercilessly and summarily.

Although all these critics have examined *The Dharma Bums* from different perspectives, none of them concentrated upon the psychological effects of absurdist condition and tends like simulation and search for alternative sexuality in relation to the oppression of human beings by technology. The absurdist artistic perception brings closer to its domain the ridiculous and the awful. As a consequence characters

have to pay the heavy prices. Their mental integrity, normal psychic makeup, commitment to normative ideals of life gradually shatters due to the exploitation of escapist alternative.

Accordingly, absurdism is a philosophical school of thought stating that the efforts of humanity to find inherent meaning will ultimately fail because the pure amount of information as well as the vast realm of the unknown makes total certainty impossible. As a philosophy, absurdism furthermore explores the fundamental nature of the Absurd and how individuals, once becoming conscious of the Absurd, should respond to it. The absurdist philosopher Albert Camus stated that individuals should embrace the absurd condition of human existence while also defiantly continuing to explore and search for meaning. The lines explain:

Absurdism furthermore explores the fundamental nature of the Absurd and how individuals, once becoming conscious of the Absurd, should respond to it. The absurdist philosopher Albert Camus stated that individuals should embrace the absurd condition of human existence while also defiantly continuing to explore and search for meaning. Absurdism as a belief system was born of the "European existentialist movement that ensued, specifically when Camus rejected certain aspects of that philosophical line of thought and published his essay "The Myth of Sisyphus". The aftermath of World War II provided the social environment that stimulated absurdist views and allowed for their popular development, especially in the devastated country of France" (Camus 34).

In *Dharma Bums* different eras in American culture, Spirituality, and Buddhism take on different shapes. It forms in relation to identity and subjectivity in the mid-twentieth century American consciousness. This novel explores the relationship

between selfhood and Buddhist spirituality, while it also illuminating key elements of both media and Spirituality that have an impact on identity and subjectivity.

Within this model, it presents popular media, including film and television, and spaces of containment, including suburban homes and business workplaces, as having limiting influences on selfhood; alternatively, he offers experimental art, such as bop jazz, spontaneous prose, haikus, and other Eastern art-forms, spaces of liberation, such as cars, trains, nature, and shacks, and Buddhist spirituality, as having potentially transformative influences on selfhood. In the beginning of the book, the narrator, Ray Smith, a fictionalized Jack Kerouac, describes his experience at the Six Gallery for “the night of the birth of the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance,” (9). He states that it was “like a jam session, and old Rheinhold Cacoethes the father of the Frisco poetry scene was wiping his tears in gladness (9)” because as the poets read, the audience yelled “Go! Go! Go! (9)” and everyone drank wine and talked amongst themselves.

Kerouac portrays this as a definitive moment of San Francisco literature because this event is exemplary of the “Anyway I followed the whole gang of howling poets to the reading at Gallery Six that night, which was, among other important things, the night of the birth of the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance (9),” in which poetry was read aloud in a non-academic, public venue, in which participants and audience members performed and convened as if it were a party or a celebration.

The Dharma Bums rebels against America is spoken of with aversion, the character Japhy Ryder believes he is born into America because of bad karma he says nobody has any fun or believes in anything, especially freedom:

You know when I was a little kid in Oregon I didn't feel that I was an American at all, with all that suburban ideal and sex repression and general dreary newspaper gray censorship of all our real human values but and when I discovered Buddhism and all I suddenly felt that I had lived in a previous lifetime innumerable ages ago and now because of faults and sins in that lifetime I was being degraded to a more grievous domain of existence and my karma was to be born in America where nobody has any fun or believes in anything, especially freedom. That's why I was always sympathetic to freedom movements, too, like anarchism in the Northwest, the old-time heroes of Everett Massacre and all. (18)

The move away from the values of American society is prominent throughout *The Dharma Bums* where both the narrator Ray Smith, and the novel's hero, Japhy Ryder, repeatedly express a rebellion against American values with all that suburban ideal and repression and general dreary newspaper gray censorship of all our real human values.

In the novel, Kerouac and his friends were feeling and improvising their way through life without a clear program or goal. Drinking and sex are still major themes of this novel. Their ethos, if it can be defined as such, is summed up by a euphoric Japhy Ryder:

“See the whole thing is 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, all that crap they didn't really want anyway such as refrigerators, TV sets, cars, and general junk you finally always see a week later in the garbage anyway, all of them imprisoned in a system of work, produce, consume, work, produce, consume, I see a vision of a great rucksack revolution thousands or even millions of

young Americans wandering around with rucksacks, going up to mountains to pray, making children laugh and old men glad, making young girls happy and old girls happier, all of 'em Zen Lunatics who go about writing poems that happen to appear in their heads for no reason and also by being kind and also by strange unexpected acts keep giving visions of eternal freedom to everybody and to all living creatures.” (73).

This is description of the hippie movement in which millions of young Americans dropped out of conventional modes of being in society and pursued lifestyles centered on communal living, music, drugs and sex. *The Dharma Bums* can be seen as a bridge between the bohemian 1950s and the counterculture of the 1960s.

The hippies rebelled against what had been traditionally considered work/life practices in the United States. Kerouac's style of Buddhism fed into the notion that the American work ethic was in some measure a slave ethic meant to tie people onto the treadmill of work for the sake of consumption instead of fulfillment. The line shows:

The real work of *The Dharma Bums*, “dharma” means work as well as truth from the Sanskrit, was creative, personal and spiritual. It was about finding meaningful potentials in individuals. These ideas were very appealing to the well-to-do youth of the 1960s who knew, having grown up in material comfort, that accumulating things wouldn't make them happy but experiences, especially sensual experiences, and personal development could. Many brands of Christianity as practiced in America frown upon sensual experience, even as sex is used in the US both to titillate in ubiquitous pornographies and to sell things. Buddhism provided a more balanced and healthy approach to sex than this schizophrenia. This was an important point in favor of the kind of Buddhism practiced in *The Dharma*

Bums which combined sensuality and spirituality, not the asceticism of some spiritual approaches. As Japhy tells Ray, “I distrust any kind of Buddhism or any kind of philosophy or social system that puts down sex” and that sexual freedom is “what I have always liked about Oriental religion.” (18)

Ray reflects on his meeting with the St. Theresa Bum and realizes that the man is doing what he is supposed to be doing. That is, he is a Dharma Bum, having realized and assumed his rightful place in the world. Ray then hitchhikes to San Francisco where he meets a man named Japhy Ryder on the street, and Ray and Japhy spend several hours in each other's company. Japhy is a backwoods boy from Eastern Oregon and grew up in a log cabin in the woods. He is five feet, seven inches tall, strong and wiry, with a bony face. He wears a goatee and has stained teeth. He has studied extensively in anthropology and Indian myth and speaks Chinese and Japanese. He is considered to be an Oriental scholar.

Japhy is well versed in Buddhism, plays the guitar, and loves the outdoors. This event marks the creation of a new type of poetry, which he compares to bop jazz; furthermore, his representation of the reading shows how he privileges experimental art and informal public. The following shows:

Then Japhy showed his sudden barroom humor with lines about Coyote bringing goodies. And his anarchistic ideas about how Americans don't know how to live, with lines about commuters being trapped in living rooms that come from poor trees felled by chainsaws (showing here, also, his background as a logger up north). His voice was deep and resonant and somehow brave, like the voice of old-time American heroes and orators. (10).

Here, Kerouac illuminates one of many spaces of limitation, the suburban living room, in which commuters are ultimately trapped within their homes, since they're living sedentary lives of excessive work, commuting, and excessive spending without

meaning or enjoyment. Smith describes the home that he shares with Goldbook as “a little rose-covered cottage in the backyard of a bigger house, which he seems to offer as a more transformative space compared to the suburban living room” (11).

The absurd refers to the conflict between the human tendency to seek inherent value and meaning in life and the human inability to find any. In this context absurd does not mean logically impossible, but rather humanly impossible. The universe and the human mind do not each separately cause the Absurd. The Absurd arises by the contradictory nature of the two existing simultaneously.

The Absurd refers to the conflict between the human tendency to seek inherent value and meaning in life and the human inability to find any in a purposeless, meaningless or chaotic and irrational universe. The universe and the human mind do not each separately cause the Absurd, but rather, the Absurd arises by the contradictory nature of the two existing simultaneously.

Absurdism involves conclusions that are uniquely distinct from these other schools of thought. All three arose from the human experience of anguish and confusion stemming from the Absurd: “the apparent meaninglessness in a world in which humans, nevertheless, is so compelled to find or create meaning” (Camus 7). Nihilists, on the contrary, contend that “it is futile to seek or to affirm meaning where none can be found” (Camus 34). Absurdists, following Camus’s formulation, hesitantly allow “the possibility for some meaning or value in life, but are neither as certain as existentialists are about the value of one’s own constructed meaning nor as nihilists are about the total inability to create meaning” (65). Absurdists following Camus also devalue or outright reject free will. They encourage merely that the individual live defiantly and authentically in spite of the psychological tension of the Absurd.

Here, it is clear how Kerouac not only explores Buddhist thought in *Dharma Bums*, but he reads, practices, and extensively engages with Buddhism in his life. He merely uses *Dharma Bums* as a vehicle to further understand his engagement with Buddhist spirituality, as posited by Haynes, Ray, Wilson, Bierowski, and Tonkinson. In this excerpt, Kerouac attempts to explain not only the concept of satori, or enlightenment, to Ginsberg, but also the “suchness” of things, and the concept of self and no-self. These concepts pervade not only Kerouac's private life, but also his writing. As Japhy and Smith continue to hike Matterhorn, Japhy explains:

The secret of this kind of climbing is like Zen. Don't think. Just dance along. It's the easiest thing in the world, actually easier than walking on flat ground which is monotonous. The cute little problems present themselves at each step and yet you never hesitate and you find yourself on some other boulder you picked out for no special reason at all, just like Zen (34).

Here, Japhy seems to posit that nature is a transformative space that encourages meditation, contemplation, and ultimately, learning. Japhy's lesson is that an individual should not overthink activities, especially activities as simple as walking. Rather than trying to over-think, plan, and control the situation, it is best to simply face the little problems as they present themselves.

Camus himself passionately worked to counter nihilism. Camus's own understanding of the world and every vision he had for its progress sets him apart from the general existentialist trend. Like Camus, Nietzsche thinks that life is devoid of intrinsic meaning. But he thought human beings could give it a kind of meaning by embracing illusion. The absurd hero takes no refuge in the illusions of art or religion. Yet neither does he despair in the face of absurdity. He does not just pack it all in. Instead, he openly embraces the absurdity of his condition. Sisyphus, condemned for

all eternity to push a boulder up a mountain only to have it roll to the bottom again and again, fully recognizes the futility and pointlessness of his task. But he willingly pushes the boulder up the mountain every time it rolls down.

Absurdism is a philosophical school of thought stating that “the efforts of humanity to find inherent meaning will ultimately fail because the sheer amount of information as well as the vast realm of the unknown make total certainty impossible” (Sartre 23). As a philosophy, absurdism furthermore explores the fundamental nature of the Absurd and how individuals should respond to it. The absurdist philosopher Albert Camus stated that individuals should embrace the absurd condition of human existence while also defiantly continuing to explore and search for meaning.

Camus sees this question of suicide as a natural response to an underlying premise, namely that life is absurd in a variety of ways. Both the presence and absence of life give rise to the condition. It is absurd to continually seek meaning in life when there is none. It is absurd to hope for some form of continued existence after death given that the latter results in human extinction. But Camus also thinks it absurd to try to know, understand, or explain the world. He sees the attempt to gain rational knowledge as futile. Camus pits himself against science and philosophy, dismissing the claims of all forms of rational analysis: “That universal reason, practical or ethical, that determinism, those categories that explain everything are enough to make a decent man laugh” (21).

Having left the constantly talking Morley behind, Ray and Japhy continue to hike, and after several hours, they fall into silence broken only by an occasional haiku. Japhy leads Ray about thirty yards as they climb up the mountain trail. They climb up out from verdant slopes to a field of boulders. Japhy explains that they will follow ducks, small piles of rocks left by previous hikers - including Japhy - to mark

the trail through the boulders. Japhy moves over the boulders easily while Ray experiments until he finds a method of hiking that suits him. Ray wonders if they are approaching the top of the mountain, and Japhy tells him they have a long way to go.

This also resonates with Japhy's previous lesson on haiku, in which he encourages Smith to not over-think his observations, but rather simply observe his surroundings. Both of Japhy's lessons resonate with Suzuki's denunciation of rationalization and dualistic logic, as well as the basic Buddhist principles of mindfulness and speculation. Japhy goes on:

To me a mountain is a Buddha. Think of the patience, hundreds of thousands of years just sitting there being perfectly silent and like praying for all living creatures in that silence and just waiting for us to stop all our fretting and fooling. This is the beginning and the end of the world right here. Look at all those patient Buddha looking at us saying nothing. (35)

Again, the wilderness of the mountains is a space that encourages insight, enlightenment, and therefore, transformation. The "lesson" of the mountains is one of patience, silence, stillness, and insight into the vast abyss of time. Japhy and Ray continue to hike and eventually reach an escarpment where the boulder field ends. Ray sits down, takes off his socks.

In "The Absurd," Nagel argues that neither of these concerns makes life absurd. This is obvious because even if we were immortal or large enough to fill the universe, this would not change the fact that our lives might be absurd. Another argument appeals to the fact that everything ends in death, and from this infers that there is no final purpose. The life is absurd because nothing we do now will matter in the distant future. But Nagel points out that the corollary of this is that nothing in the distant future matters now. The following line represents that:

To convey the absurdity of our lives often has to do with space or time: we are tiny specks in the infinite vastness of the universe; our lives are mere instants even on a geological time scale, let alone a cosmic one; we will all be dead any minute. But of course none of these evident facts can be what makes life absurd, if it is absurd. (717)

Furthermore, even if what we do now does matter in a distant future, how does that prevent our present actions from being absurd? In other words, if our present actions are absurd then their mattering in the distant future can hardly give them meaning. Thus the real question is whether things matter now—since no appeals to the distant future seem to help us answer that question.

After eating a man's breakfast, Ray, Japhy and their friend Morley set out for the wild mountains of the Sierra Nevada, tramping on trails and drinking from water places used by wild animals, Indians and trappers before them. The more they walk, the less they talk, as if words had become an unnecessary supplement to animal instincts, to the point that "there's just no need to talk, as if we were animals and just communicated by silent telepathy" (46).

The following day, Japhy takes Ray for a climb up Matterhorn Peak, a long, tough hike which brings him close to total exhaustion, his efforts eventually earning him "the title of Tiger," as if he had been transformed into the "proud animal" of primitive times in the process: "I really felt proud. I was a Tiger," Ray remarks, adding that he "will be a lion next time we get up here" (65). On top of Matterhorn, Japhy lets out a "triumphant mountain-conquering Buddha Mountain Smashing song of joy," a call of the wild of sorts which forces his admiration in masculine terms: "I had to hand it to him, the guts, the endurance, the sweat" (63). On his way down, Ray then follows traces of a deer trail, alone in the woods looking for tracks and

excrement, as if his animal instincts and primitive senses had been aroused by his coming into contact with the wildlife around him:

At one point I looked and saw crazy Japhy who'd climbed for fun to the top of a snow slope and skied right down to the bottom, about a hundred yards, on his boots and the final few yards on his back, yippeeing and glad. Not only that but he'd taken off his pants again and wrapped them around his neck. This pants bit of his was simply he said for comfort, which is true, besides nobody around to see him anyway, though I figured that when he went mountain climbing with girls it didn't make any difference to him. (65-66)

The flight into the wild enables Kerouac's narrator to deterritorialize the prevailing model of masculinity—that of the domesticated white-collar worker, merging as he does with the wildlife that surrounds him as he slowly progresses into the animal realm. Simultaneously, he reterritorializes a heroic masculine identity, that of the adventurous frontiersmen, sometimes suggesting a regression into animality and the conquest of a virgin land. In this respect, Kerouac's outdoors stories are not unlike those found in men's adventure magazines and their quest for real masculinity in the most remote, wild and uninhabited areas in the world.

Another instance of absurdist themes in Kierkegaard's work is found in *The Sickness Unto Death*, which is signed by the pseudonym *Anti-Climacus*. In his examination of the forms of despair, Kierkegaard examines the type of despair known as defiance. Kierkegaard describes how such a man would endure such a defiance and identifies the three major traits of the Absurd Man, later discussed by Albert Camus a rejection of escaping existence, a rejection of help from a higher power, and acceptance of his absurd condition:

... in spite of or in defiance of the whole of existence he wills to be himself with it, to take it along, almost defying his torment. For to hope in the possibility of help, not to speak of help by virtue of the absurd, that for God all things are possible—no, that he will not do. And as for seeking help from any other—no, that he will not do for all the world; rather than seek help he would prefer to be himself—with all the tortures of hell, if so it must be. (2)

According to Kierkegaard in his autobiography *The Point of View of My Work as an Author*, most of his pseudonymous writings are not necessarily reflective of his own opinions. Nevertheless, his work anticipated many absurdist themes and provided its theoretical background. According to Absurdism, humans historically attempt to find meaning in their lives. For some, traditionally, this search follows one of two paths: either concluding that life is meaningless and that what we have is the here-and-now; or filling the void with a purpose set forth by a higher power, often a belief in God or a religion. Kierkegaard believed that there is no human-comprehensible purpose of God, making faith in God absurd.

Upon Japhy's melancholy departure, Ray again hits the road, hitchhiking in the direction of real wilderness in the North Cascades. With him for the duration of the sixty-five day period of isolation, he takes only one book, the collection of texts in *The Buddhist Bible*. Japhy promised him a blissful opportunity for spiritual advancement based on his own previous stays as fire lookout, but for Ray the experience is mixed:

There were days that were hot and miserable with locusts of plagues of insects, winged ants, heat, no air, no clouds, I couldn't understand how the top of a mountain in the North could be so hot. But night would come and with it the mountain moon and the lake would be moon landed and I'd go out and sit

in the grass and meditate facing west let the mind beware, that though the flesh be bugged, the circumstances of existence are pretty glorious. (238)

In an archetypal account of mountaintop epiphany, the last three chapters of the novel build toward a climactic revelation suddenly a green and rose rainbow shafted right down into Starvation Ridge. It hooped into Lightning Creek, rain and snow fell simultaneous. I went outside and suddenly my shadow was ringed by the rainbow as I walked on the hilltop, a lovely-haloed mystery making me want to pray. "O Ray, the career of your life is like a raindrop in the illimitable ocean which is eternal awakener hood" (241).

There are at least two different ways of thinking about cultural identity. The first position defines cultural identity in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective one true self. It is hiding inside the many others. It is more superficial or artificially imposed selves. They are people with a shared history and ancestry. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning. Regarding the inner exposition of cultural identity, Hall makes the following remarks:

This inner expropriation of cultural identity cripples and deforms. If its silences are not resisted, they produce individuals without an anchor, without horizon, colorless, stateless, and rootless - a race of angels. Nevertheless, this idea of otherness as an inner compulsion changes our conception of cultural identity. In this perspective, cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture. (1)

It is not some universal and transcendental spirit inside us on which history has made no fundamental mark. It is not once-and-for-all. It is not a fixed origin to which we

can make some final and absolute return. It is not a mere phantasm either. It is something - not a mere trick of the imagination. It has its histories. Histories have their real, material and symbolic effects.

Japhy Ryder, “the big hero of the West Coast” (23), exemplifies this freedom from domesticity and will thus serve as the narrator’s mentor in this initiation to his new life in the woods. Ray Smith compares him to the wildest male characters in American popular fiction, “real grave like Buck Jones, eyes to the distant horizons, like Natty Bumppo, cautioning me about snapping twigs” (43). Japhy, the narrator informs us, is “from the beginning a woods boy, an axman, farmer, interested in animals and Indian lore” (6). If the protagonist of *On the Road*, Dean Moriarty, was “the perfect guy for the road, for he was born on the road” (7), Japhy Ryder is the perfect man for the wild, “a tough little adventurer of trails and mountains” (53). He grew up among animals in the wild forests of the Northwest, is well versed in ornithology and knows many first-hand stories about animal encounters by real outdoorsmen. Everything in him evokes animality: his goatee, his slanted green eyes, his natural instincts in the wild, “the vigorous long steps he takes” (40). The way he takes off his clothes to walk naked as a jaybird or jumps from rock to rock like a mountain goat.

The past continues to speak to readers. But it no longer addresses us as a simple, factual past. Since our relation to it is always-already after the break. It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which

has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental law of origin.

Concerning three aspects of identity, Hall argues:

There are three very different conceptions of identity. They are Enlightenment subject, sociological subject, and post-modern subject. The Enlightenment subject was based on a conception of the human person as a fully centered, unified individual, endowed with the capacities of reason, consciousness, and action, whose center consisted of an inner core which first emerged when the subject was born, and unfolded with it, while remaining essentially the same - continuous or identical with itself - throughout the individual's existence. (31)

The essential center of the self was a person's identity. The notion of the sociological subject reflected the growing complexity of the modern world and the awareness that this inner core of the subject was not autonomous and self-sufficient, but was formed in relation to significant others, who mediated to the subject the values, meanings, and symbols - the culture - of the worlds he/she inhabited.

While a top Matterhorn, Smith expresses his desire to pursue a journey in which All over the West, and the mountains in the East and the desert, I'll tramp with a rucksack and make it the pure way. While many would expect Smith to live in a monastery to practice Buddhism, he insists on a New American Buddhism which co-exists with contemporary American culture. Over the course of the novel, he travels to San Francisco, across the country to see his family in the mountains of North Carolina, back to Corte Madera to live with Japhy in a shack, and then up to the Northwest to serve a summer as a mountain lookout atop Desolation Peak in the Cascade Mountains. Regardless of the location, Kerouac continues to explore the influences of media, Spirituality, and Buddhism on selfhood:

And what gouty millionaire could get up this rock anyhow? It took us all day to climb." And I promised myself that I would begin a new life. "All over the West, and the mountains in the East, and the desert, I'll tramp with a rucksack and make it the pure way." I went to sleep after burying my nose under the sleeping bag and woke up around dawn shivering, the ground cold had seeped through the poncho and through the bag and my ribs were up against a damper damp than the damp of a cold bed. My breath was coming out in steams. I rolled over to the other ribs and slept more: my dreams were pure cold dreams like ice water, happy dreams, no nightmares. (40)

Ray and Japhy make a huge fire at camp, cook dinner, eat and then wash dishes. They talk about language and meaning. Japhy claims to have learned many significant things about language from Ray. Later, Japhy uses a star map and looks at the stars. Japhy is very giving throughout the night and makes sure that Ray receives more than half of the food. He also positions Ray closer to the fire. They drift off to sleep as Ray muses about his past life of drinking and disappointment. He feels his life has been largely wasted and considers Japhy's life to be on a good path. Ray sleeps well, and in the morning they have more tea. Eventually, they hear Morley's yodeling and go to the edge of the escarpment where they see him, about two miles off.

The core perspective of this thesis is that Hall's theory of cultural identity is derived from the 'theory of articulation' and the 'constructionist theory of representation', which are the two main constitutions of his theoretical system.

Furthermore, Hall says:

The theory of articulation, which concentrates on the complex unity of the cultural instance, makes an observation on the relation between the different ideologies, the relation between the ideology and its subjects, and finally the

relations between the diverse subjects. Such connections are conceptualized not as 'necessary correspondence' or 'necessary un-correspondence', but as 'unnecessary correspondence. (3)

Hall suggests the constructionist theory of representation that culture is made up of systems of representation. Such systems of representation do not reflect previous meanings in the world. It does not present the intention of the subjects, but rather, construct meanings actively as the condition and instruments of signifying practice.

Hall explains the establishing process and properties of cultural identity with those two theories. According to Hall, cultural identity always requires the position of "a subject which a specific representation system provides, and with the addition of fantasy and desire, people articulate themselves with the position" (66). Identity, established only through this process, can be understood as a point which power cuts the infinite lay of meaning and produces temporary stop, or arbitrary closure. Hence, cultural identity cannot but have dual properties of the necessarily fictional and the fictional necessity. By making a cognition of such dual properties of cultural identity, Hall could argue against both the essentialist perspective of 'necessity' and the deconstructionist perspective of the 'fictional'.

Japhy counsels that there's nothing wrong with you Ray, your only trouble is you never learned to get out to spots like this. For weeks on end, just like John Muir, climb around all by myself following quartzite veins or making posies of flowers for my camp. Ray agrees to join Japhy and another friend on a back packing excursion to Matterhorn Peak in Yosemite National Park. During a rite of passage requiring him to confront cold, fatigue, discomfort, and danger on the ascent, he triumph over his fears and regains lost self-confidence. On the way down from the Peak, he achieves a kind of ecstasy:

I realized it's impossible to fall of mountains you fool and with a yodel of my own I suddenly got up and began running down the mountain after him doing exactly the same huge leaps, the same fantastic runs and jumps, and in the space of five minutes Japhy Ryder and I in my sneakers, driving the heels of my sneakers right into sand, rock, boulders, I didn't care anymore came leaping and yelling like mountain goats or I'd say like Chinese lunatics of a thousand years ago, enough to raise the hair on the head of the meditating Morely by the lake, who said he looked up and saw us flying down and couldn't believe it. (85)

Back in Sin City, San Francisco, Ray is disoriented by the squalor of Skid Row and the trauma of nearly witnessing the schizophrenic wife of Neal Cassady commit suicide by jumping off the roof. Eager to get back on the road, he hitches East for Christmas to visit his mother, sister and brother-in-law in their hillbilly trailer, regretting his night of carousing on the way in Ciudad Juarez. Sentimental delight at the family reunion is quickly succeeded by the desire to retreat—out of the living room with the TV and its attendant conversation, first onto the back porch in his sleeping bag, and then beyond, to an idyllic bower between two trees in the woods, where, accompanied by the family dog, he sits and meditates “completely relaxed and at peace with all the ephemeral world of dream and dreamer and the dreaming itself” (134).

Hall argues that our identities always have a specific 'positionality' within a representation, and are not self-sufficient but carry the 'ambivalence' which is from fictional separation from other identities, and also hold the 'mobility' which is open to the never-ending change and transformation in history. Hall relates such conceptions on cultural identity to the problem of cultural politics. To quote Hall again:

Cultural politics means signifying practice of articulating, dis-articulating and rearticulating moments of dominance, compromise, and resistance, happened among the different groups around societal hegemony. The object, subject, and methods of such cultural politics are given within the concepts of politics of identity, politics of articulation, and politics of representation. (68)

The politics of identity requires as the forms of new politics 'politics of self-reflexivity', 'politics of difference' and 'politics of contingency'. The 'politics of articulation' means trials to connect different people and groups with individuality in order to produce temporary unity for a hegemonic project.

Politics of identity and politics of articulation acquire specific strategies when connected with the concept of 'politics of representation' which presents the methodology of cultural politics. Stuart Hall regards new ethnicity, which is raised by new globalization process, as an example of alternative cultural identity. We can confirm the specific significance of Hall's concepts of cultural identity and cultural politics through examining ethnicity itself and the blackness as a version of ethnicity.

In this way, the novel Kerouac's *Dharma Bums* explore the influences of media, Spirituality, and Buddhism on selfhood, each text presents a distinct model for addressing the possibility for self-transformation or inherent self-limitation as encouraged by these influences. The novel presents popular media, including film, television, and advertising, and spaces of containment, including suburban homes and business workplaces, as having limiting effects on the self. Furthermore, it offers experimental art, spaces of emancipation, and Buddhism as having potentially transformative influences on selfhood. However, Kerouac's experimental art includes bop jazz, spontaneous prose, haikus, and other Eastern art-forms, spaces of liberation include roads, shacks, trains, and nature.

The Beat Generation has always been associated, and rightfully so, with themes connected to sexuality. Beat writers were, and still are, famous for advocating sexual liberation and free love, being open about their homosexuality when that was the case and much of their literary production is filled thoroughly with erotic experiences. All of this inevitably clashed, or merged, with the Buddhist faith that most of the Beats came in contact with, for different time spans and definitely with different results. The relationship between Buddhism and sexuality can be observed in Jack Kerouac's novel *The Dharma Bums*, published in 1958. The novel's protagonists are Ray Smith and Japhy Ryder, based on Kerouac himself and his dear friend and writer Gary Snyder, on a semi-fictional journey of self-discovery in the wild. The two have completely opposite approaches to sexuality: while Ryder has embraced it fully, Smith cannot find a way to conciliate it with his commitment to Buddhist faith. Throughout the book there are several hints of the duality that troubles Smith, and the difficulty he encounters in trying to reconcile his religious side.

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