

Landscape, Migration, and Identity-Construction: Spiritual Quest via the Zen Path in Jack Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* and *On the Road*

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ABSTRACT

The 1950s was a period of political cold war and a time of suspicion when the weariness about war, moral deviance and economic depression weighed down the traditional values. Kerouac wins his celebrity by publishing a series of novels with the main characters troubled by their environment, economical parsimony and disengaged human relationship. Desolation angels, shrouded monks and dharma bums are their pseudo names; road and nomadism are the essence of their identity. Along the road, Kerouac's path-finders, obsessed with wanderlust, experience and identify with the marginality, become pilgrims when they penetrate into the core of human existence. They are on the land of America, but they have the sensation of being homesick. Exploring aimlessly and restlessly, Kerouac's characters eventually find the elements of the world although multi-layered, multi-dimensioned, yet they still belong to each other. This recognition of the extraordinary in the ordinary, starting from migration, is based on appreciation of landscape and nature. This paper will begin with the concept of migration, its intertwining of the landscape and then proceed to the discussion of Kerouac's path of dharma in his most representative road narratives.

KEY WORDS

Kerouac, migration, *The Dharma Bums*, *On the Road*, Zen



Jack Kerouac, one of the leading members of the Beat Generation of the 1950s, impressed his readers with his melancholic sentiment, elegant style, and the themes of migration and exile. Kerouac, together with Allen Ginsburg, William S. Burroughs and the other writers of the group voice their criticism about the American society's lionization of them and the rigid, homogeneous civilization of their time. Their highly subjective literature exposes their self-alienation, and despair, their passionate embodiment of exhilaration or the migration between centers and margins or on borderlands. In Kerouac's fictional and non-fictional writings especially, the recurrent motifs such as mutability of life, crossing on the borderlands and the discontent about life manifest the yearnings of the American lost generation. However, throughout all the descriptions of the desperation and suffering of his characters, there is always a tough quality of the American spirit bespeaking the possibility of redemption and rejoicing of modern life through religion, especially Zen Buddhism. Kerouac confesses in several interviews that he was influenced by Mahayana.¹ The 1950s is a period of political cold war and a time of turmoil when the weariness about war, moral deviance and economic depression weighs down the traditional American values. Kerouac wins his celebrity by publishing a series of novels with his main characters troubled by their environment, economical problems and disengaged human relationships. Most of these characters are haunted by their ties to the world; wandering and homelessness are their common traits. Desolation angels, shrouded monks and dharma bums are the pseudo names found in Kerouac; road and nomadism are the essence of their identity. Along the road, Kerouac's path-finders, obsessed with

wanderlust, experience and identify with marginality, become pilgrims when they penetrate into the core of human existence. They are on the land of America, but they have the sensation of being homesick. Exploring aimlessly and restlessly, Kerouac's characters eventually find the elements of the world although multi-layered, multi-dimensioned in essence, yet belonging to each other. This recognition of the extraordinary in the ordinary, starting from migration, is based on appreciation of landscape and nature. This paper will begin with the concept of migration, its intertwining of the landscape and then proceed to the discussion of Kerouac's path of dharma in his most representative road narratives.

Kerouac spent two months on Desolation Peak as a fire lookout in the Cascade Mountains in western Washington State.² For most of his life, he traveled just as his *Sal Paradise* has put it, "we lean forward to the next crazy venture beneath the skies" (156). Sometimes, Kerouac's characters are like the sensitive artists portrayed by James Joyce, and sometimes his characters are like the figures appearing in Graham Greene, entangled in flight and pursuit. For more than three years, Kerouac immersed himself in Buddhist scriptures and his writings such as *Mexican City Blues*, *Desolation Angels*, *The Dharma Bums* and *On the Road* all demonstrate migration motif and spiritual quest for Buddhism. Helping his characters transcend from migration and sense of dislocation, Mahayana Buddhist ecstasy offers them consolation for disappointment, suffering and loss and provides them the means to transform from mortal hopelessness to being at ease with the flux of time (*The Dharma Bums* 181).

Migration signifies physical and geographical movement out of different reasons. Cultural migrancy, however, suggests "unhomeliness" as termed by Bhabha (1994) while Edward Said refers to the term as exiled, unhoused intelligentsia that lies between home and the worlds (261). Unhomeness and exile are involved with diaspora. According to Sheffer, although the term diaspora is used by many to designate the Jewish community living outside of Palestine or the modern state of Israel, in reality it alludes to the dispersal of any previously homogenous population (15–19). Thus, it is a perennial,

recurrent, and universal phenomenon that precedes and transcends Jewish history. Those migrants who maintain their distinctive identities and connections with their homelands while residing permanently in host societies constitute themselves into ethno-national diasporas. "Nomadism" is a way of life that exists outside of the organizational "State." The nomadic way of life is characterized by movement across space which exists in sharp contrast to the rigid and static boundaries of the State. Deleuze and Guattari explain:

The nomad has a territory; he follows customary paths; he goes from one point to another; he is not ignorant of points (water points, dwelling points, assembly points, etc.). But the question is what in nomad life is a principle and what is only a consequence. To begin with, although the points determine paths, they are strictly subordinated to the paths they determine, the reverse happens with the sedentary. The water point is reached only in order to be left behind; every point is a relay and exists only as a relay. A path is always between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own. The life of the nomad becomes the *intermezzo*. (380)

The nomad, therefore, is a way of being in the middle or between points. It is characterized by movement and change, and is unfettered by systems of organization. The goal of the nomad is only to continue to move within the "*intermezzo*".

Kerouac's characters, however, are more mysterious than the nomads. Although they love to be unfettered by systems of organizations, they have no goals and they are urged by some reasons to move on. Kerouac's characters migrate, seemingly detached from the social systems but they tend to develop the knowledge of land and nature, especially that of the immediate environment and the bioregion that encircle it. However, along the road they tend to construct an identity that is different from their original selves. Kerouac's characters' concern extends to landscape, plants, mountains, rivers and especially humans. However, his characters are always willingly or

unwillingly set on the road. Commenting on his concern of the road, Kerouac wrote: "We follow the turn of the road and it leads on. Where? To actuality; ourselves, others and God" (quoted in Stephenson 35). *On the Road*, an autobiographical novel published in 1950, represents a restless young man named Salvation Paradise, who heeds a "new call" and sets out obsessively to adventure and to explore the American continent. His life is the road. As his name suggests, Paradise is on his way pursuing his authentic being. He understands that as a writer, he always needs new experiences, but the important reason for him to follow the wanderer Dean Moriarty is that Dean reminds of his long-lost brother. He claims that "I had my home to go to, my place to lay my head down and figure the losses and figure the gain that I knew was in there somewhere too" (106–07). Throughout the whole narrative, he went to New York, Chicago, went around Lake Michigan. He went to see Denver, went across the prairie of Iowa, passed through the city New Orleans, and he reached the border of Mexico. He met Terry on the bus, a young woman separated from her husband and then he worked part-time as a cotton picker with Terry and stayed with Terry's family. In towns and cities occasionally, Sal "hit the bars" with his friends where boys grabbed girls, and waitresses were basically whores (54–55). Kerouac portrays very carefully the layered images of the living world of the lower class. His characters are to experience, to negate and to acknowledge numerous layers of meanings in the world. Beneath the cityscape, there were the patterns of the bustling lives of working people and those who seem to let go of their bondage and try to live freely. The freedom of the physical life in Kerouac as work suggests the unregulated spirit or the Dionysian ecstasy that might turn out to be nightmares (Theodo 34). Sal Paradise complains if he had money he would not be on the road. However, in his archetypal journey, the deficiency of American values and newly established American capitalism are represented as destructive elements in American society. Sal Paradise, similar to the characters that are found in bildungsroman, then learns to go beyond the superficial meanings of life. His journey weaves together with the economic, historical, and cultural background of the United States of the 1950s. His journey, however, will culminate

in newfound wisdom. This wisdom is to be found in the sphere of “formlessness” and the archetypal searching path. As it is represented in *On the Road*, wind breeze, night skies and fluttering clouds are linked with pure enjoyment. His geological observations have provided some insight for him. The touch of the earth on the cotton field makes the path seeker Sal Paradise more intimate with the real life that is involved with the common people instead of the struggle for fame or power. In the intermezzo of his migration, he stopped temporarily to meet Terry’s family, whose means of survival is picking cotton. The wage for picking cotton is only a dollar and a half; that is just enough to buy groceries. However, among the cotton trees, Sal thanks God because his girl friend Terry brought back his soul. His fingers bleed and his back aches, and he prays to God for a better break in life because he saw too many little people without means to support their lives (96–97). For a person who migrates, any relationship seems futile and transitory. Some people that Sal meets on the road want to have regular jobs and want to go home, including the kid who was hitchhiking from Alabama to Oregon (164). Sal can never settle down. When he was delirious from a lack of food for two days, he had a vision that his heart-broken mother complains about his drunkenness and disgrace (173). Home seems to be a place far away. Home that stands for traditional value seems intangible. Sal borrows five dollars borrowed from Dean, who suggests going to Tucson, and on the Indian Reservation, Dean exchanged his watch with a little girl for a stone, or probably only for her smile. On the road, Sal learns to receive and to extend kindness. He believes that people in poverty still have the power to give. Once in awhile, he is awakened on the road to see the mystery of landscapes and of human lives. Sometimes, he has visions going to heaven. As he says,

For just a moment I had reached the point of ecstasy that I always wanted to reach, which was the complete step across chronological time into timeless shadows, and wonderment in the bleakness of the mortal realm, and the sensation of death kicking at my heels to move on, with a phantom dogging its own heels. (173)

In his vision he sees innumerable lotus-lands falling open in the magic mothswarm of heaven, and he could hear an indescribable seething roar which wasn't in his ear but everywhere (173). *On the Road* in a sense is a modern pilgrim's progress; Sal gets stuck in the Slough of Despond before he is awakened to find the mystery and beauty of the landscapes that he encounters and appreciates. Dean tells Sal, "We'd dig the whole world with a car like this because, man, the road must eventually lead to the whole world" (231). Behind the near-madness and obsession with the road, there is tentative resignation from the real world and ultimate longing for steadiness. Towards the end of the novel, they reached the heights of the Sierra Madre Oriental, and they feel that it is the end of their journey and that they love to enjoy the sun in golden color and the air keen blue (299). Sal Paradise is a deviant, rejecting the values of the old world. Death, disease, and weariness characterize the old world in which he finds only mutability and suffering. If his name Paradise suggests rebirth or nirvana, *On the Road* bespeaks Sal's spiritual redemption. Critic Marco Abel has mentioned, Sal Paradise seems to inhabit an in-between space without pursuing a preordained end (35). Sal's journey, from his blind repetitions of his routes, to his questioning of multiple meanings of existence, turns out to be a meditation on the rhizome of the landscape that was embedded in the previously unknown continent. Sal Paradise is always on the move; he has been to towns and cities as a flaneur, and he has been to remote places like mountains and deserts as a wanderer. Each time he accumulates his journeys, he penetrates into the physical lives of the people he encounters. He has been to the wild places inhabited by the poor Native Americans, to the ghettos and camps of the blacks, and crosses the border into Mexico witnessing numerous people suffering from poverty. He is not without the sense of home but he is homeless, unable to be settled; the only place he can find a home is the place of his mother but she is not alive. Sal is caught in his diaspora although diaspora usually refers to the Jews who were forced to leave their homeland.

Colonialism was a radically diasporic movement, involving the temporary or permanent dispersion over the entire world (Ashcroft 69).

Here in Kerouac's character, every movement suggests departure and the struggle for survival. Perpetual leaving constitutes the desire for a home. Perpetual in-between-ness nurtures a wish to reinterpret the meaning of home, land and nature. Sal can feel how the Native Americans and the Mexicans on the borderland feel about their situation. Sal notices the cities and towns from the east coast to the west are all colonized or conquered by materialistic values. Sal experiences displaced cultural community on the road leading to different directions. Gregory Stephenson notes, the hero quest in Kerouac is a bildungsreise and the movements of the hero—separation, initiation and return—constitute a circular journey whose end is its own beginning (35). Along the road of his journey, however, Sal never feels lonely; Dean Moriarty is his double and a friend whose everlasting movement helps him to be disillusioned. Dean is an ambiguous figure; he is not settled with his girl friends and he is always in exile. Everyone around him is curious about the reason why he is so restless. Bull once asks, "No Dean, I want you to sit quiet a minute and tell me what you are doing crossing the country like this" (145). Dean just wipes away the question by replying that he will go back to school afterwards.

Throughout the whole novel there is the theme of assertion of liberty and equality for all, and the notion for liberation from suffering is the other side of his suggestion; the earthly world, however, is the essence of Buddhism, according to Sal. Sal quests for his identity, an identity linked with the world, and Sal's world, his travel and nomadic experience become a microcosm. Spiritual poverty manifests in all corners of life in America, but in the wilderness, nature, and landscape that intertwine with the humans there lies the dharma path (Giamao 178). W.J.T. Mitchell refers to the power of wilderness as something that "obliterates history while advancing the abyssal and immemorial as the trace of the sign" (309). The wilderness is not only a topos of the sublime but also an iconographic terrain that does not need human presence. *On the Road* paves the way for Kerouac's development of Buddhist enlightenment. In *Sal Paradise*, new identities are created in order to facilitate new social relations, practices and institutions. Indeed, no one belongs to a single identity, according to Chantal

Mouffe (86).

Following *On the Road*, *The Dharma Bums* (1958) is a story unfolded in linear time with a character trying to devote himself to his religious practices. If *On the Road* has a taste for Buddhism, *The Dharma Bums* proclaims the incorporation of Buddhism and Christianity in the life of the main character Smith. With the experience of spending a summer in isolation on the top of the Cascade Mountains as a fire lookout, Jack Kerouac uses the theme of migration to express another spiritual breakthrough: a *satori*, or sudden enlightenment. Tom Clark, Kerouac's biographer, says Kerouac began to study Buddhism in Asvaghosa's *Acts of the Buddha* when he was living in Richmond Hill in the winter of 1953 to 1954 (131). The narrator of this novel is Ray Smith, a religious wanderer or bhikku, Buddhist disciple. The alter ego of Ray Smith in this novel is Japhy Ryder who is not only Smith's frontier man but also a perspective provider whose spiritual value comes from his study of eastern philosophy. With Ryder as his fellow traveler or seeker, Smith is initiated into the escape away from the burden of the modern urban life and the appreciation of communion with nature. Japhy Ryder, according to critics, is modeled on Gary Snyder who practiced Zen under the guidance of Oda Sesso at Daitoku-ji, a Rinzai temple in Kyoto. Gary Snyder's understanding of Buddhism mainly draws from Mahayana, and in this book Kerouac takes himself as the disciple of Snyder. The notion that all dharmas are fundamentally nothing more than mere appearances is an echo found in both Snyder and Kerouac. Lew Welch, a good friend of Snyder and Kerouac refers to their migration as motivated by their poverty: "Only the very poor, or eccentric, can surround themselves with shapes of elegance in which they are forced by poverty to move with leisurely grace" (*GSP* F84). *The Dharma Bums* represents a migration that eventually evolves into a journey to appreciate a multitude of human lives and spirits. In the journey, Smith learns that in every life in the world there looms a presence, representing its beauty and serenity. Going to the top of the mountain means toil, sweat and pain. When Japhy suggests Smith to "dance" up to the mountains (50-55) instead of "walking" or "climbing" up the mountains, Kerouac obviously takes

“dance” as a metaphor that implies an attitude toward life. In Kerouac, dance implies harmony.

“Dance” is an important theme in Gary Snyder’s poetry. In his *Mountain and Rivers without End* that was published in 1996, almost forty years after the publication of *The Dharma Bums*, Gary Snyder adds his poem “The Dance” in his collection of poetry. Anthony Hunt in his illuminating book links “dance” to the essence of Shinto Buddhism. Hunt’s interpretation of the metaphor of dance refers to Joseph Campbell’s story about a Japanese priest who says the Shinto priests do not hold theology but they dance (Campbell xix). Hunt shares with Zimmer the interpretation that dance induces trance, ecstasy, the experience of the divine, the realization of one’s secret nature. In other words, “dance is an act of creation that is intended to bring about transformation” (238). Ritual dance, a significant part of Tibetan Buddhism, implies transcendence from self-entanglement to reach transformation of the self. Going to the mountains may suggest leisure activity, but going to the mountains in *The Dharma Bums* not only suggests physical migration but also the freedom to roam, to search and to feel free to resist. Breaking away from the city in Kerouac implies movement between space and time boundaries. The essence of the nomadic movement means being not constrained within closed identity boundaries; their histories are not known but obviously, his characters by detaching from the structures of the state machine, find themselves compatible with nature.

In *The Dharma Bums*, the mutability of life seems to be more keen and poignant because death and suffering fall upon his acquaintances. He has visions of the dead, and he meditates on the meanings of space. Snyder’s dharma path is based on spiritual communion with nature through physical discipline. Chopping wood, hiking in the mountains, and meditation with the timeless landscapes are the activities they do together. However, the higher they go up the mountains, the more Ray’s fear rises in him. He recalls nightmares about falling and the wind howling in movies about the “Shroud of Tibet” (82). Ray Smith imagines he is able to live a solitary life but is forced by his friend to take care of his girl friend Rosie. Ray remembers how he witnesses this

young woman fall down from the roof because of her paranoiac delusions of being pursued by someone horrible. Kerouac's Ray Smith is haunted by death before he reaches the wilderness to be overwhelmed by the generative forces of the vegetable/ animal realm. Dharma path means physical and spiritual discipline. While mountain climbing, the protagonist Smith feels frustrated and is not willing to move on; he complains to himself:

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)

The concept of space in Kerouac is involved with the development of mentality, and the journey through space does not indicate one path superior to the other. Some paths lead off into the wild, and some follow the trail paved by the pioneers. However, the wildness that Japhy in *The Dharma Bums* leads him to pass through directs him to see the more spectacular and the more auspicious. The elements in the universe are to be deciphered. Eventually he meditates, "I sleep tight and long and pray under the stars for the Lord to bring me to Buddhahood after my Buddhawork is done" (122). However, what is Buddhahood and what is Buddhawork? He finds a resolution:

Everything is possible. I am God, I am Buddha, I am imperfect Ray Smith, all at the same time, I am empty space. I am all things. I have all the time in the world from life to life to do what is to do, to do what is done, to do what the timeless is doing, infinitely perfect within, why cry, why worry, perfect like mind essence and the minds of banana peels. (122)

Just as Japhy has said, the secret of mountain climbing is like the Zen path: "Just dance along" (65). Climbing the mountain drives them apart from the crowds, casting off the evils of the world, leaving behind marijuana. The intense silence of the mountain, the nothingness and

purity of nature urge him to define the beauty of the landscape and the living creatures in it. At this moment, Ray Smith tries to link Christianity with Buddhism--it is the love that both teach. Ray narrates, "As we crossed the Colorado-Utah border I saw God in the sky in the form of huge sun-burning clouds above the desert" (181). Ray's last challenge is the Desolation Peak where he stayed during August when alpine trees shudder and the wind is blowing hard with sleet (230). Although Nicosia seems to suggest that Kerouac's resort to Buddhism stems from his wish to escape the desperate existence, suffering and mutability (457-77), James T. Jones claims that the impact of the first of the Buddhist Four Noble Truths (*Catvāri āryasatyāni*—suffering, its cause, its ending, the way thereto—is counterbalance to Kerouac's writing though the need for compassion (108). However, the principle beyond the teachings of Christianity that Ray learns is the way to eradicate his ego, a typical tenet of Buddhist teaching. Kerouac entitles his novel *The Dharma Bums*, the wandering pilgrims. The speaker for Buddhism is Japhy who explains for Ray the meanings of Dharma. Basically, Dharma is truth law, nature and concept. The essence of Dharma is to eradicate the concept or mind in "self" (Giamo 181-89). Ordinary people tend to be affected by the external details and blame the outside world for the rises of emotions. However, when emotions are removed, and fetishism can be controlled, suffering, happiness, and external object of desire therefore do not cling to the mind. Calm and peace in mind thus help create samsara. The ultimate Dharma as understood by Buddhists is to learn not to be overpowered by external phenomena, but Dharma to Kerouac does involve compassion and empathy. In "The Foundations of Ecology in Zen Buddhism", Ven Sunyana Graef explicates, the real essence of dharma is a life of simplicity, conservation, and self-restraint. In other words, the object of Zen training is to learn how to live in the here and now --to take this instant just as it is. The practice of Zen demands consummate attention to the task at hand: full awareness and total involvement at every moment (44), according to Graef:

We ordinarily view everything through this faculty, we divide our

environment into that which we perceive as being either internal or external. In so doing, we invent a “me” bounded by “my” sensations, “my” thoughts, “my” needs, “my” desires. This “me,” called in Buddhism the ego-I, so dominates the personality that it eventually becomes an omnipresent dictator, affecting not only oneself but one’s associates as well. Despite our blind belief in the verity of this small self or ego, in truth it does not exist. The practice of Zen points out a way to free oneself from the clench of ego by delineating clearly the nature of the essential self. Once we discover the unreality of the ego-I, we no longer relate to the world from an individual, self-centered perspective, but rather from a universal perspective. (85)

Towards the end of *The Dharma Bums*, the pilgrim on the mountain peak shares the environment with chipmunks, the flying birds as well as the twisted gnarly trees “that seemed to grow right out of the midair rock” (243). As he hikes down from the mountain, the pilgrim/narrator thanks the mountain and the mountain trails for what he has enjoyed. He does not wait for the answer because “the mountain would understand” (244). His poetic voice has combined with the murmur of the insects and flowing waters; his spirit and elements of the world merge into one dynamic burst of energy. Migration does bring dislocation. By respecting all forms of life and extending compassion to all, Kerouac’s wandering pilgrim is on his way to Zen Buddhism.

Jack Kerouac viewed life as long suffering and he tried to read Thoreau but it did not help him find a resolution. Then he was introduced to *The Life of Buddha* and was touched by *The Surangama Sutra*; he recognized the “truth of suffering, the truth of the extinction and the truth of path that leads to the elimination of suffering” (Miles 195–6). Although Kerouac was often suggested to stick to Catholicism by his family, his writings in the 1960s such as *Tristessa* (1960), and *Visions of Gerard* (1963) manifest the truth of Buddhist philosophy as it is represented in *On the Road* and *The Dharma Bums*. The theme of migration still haunts his later publications and “tristessa”, meaning sadness in Spanish, is viewed from the perspective of Kerouac’s

narrator Dulouz. Tristessa, a morphine addict and prostitute, is sexually exploited as the novel evolves itself. Although the narrator tries to become her savior and tries to convince her that sexual communion is not against the teachings from nature, everything seems to be hopeless, and in Tristessa there is ignorance which is the cause of illusion and her arbitrary conceptions. The impermanent life as a theme intertwined with the migration motif is recurrent in the more ambitious narrative *Visions of Gerard*. Purification is a natural result of taming the mind, but the extraneous impurities easily lead one astray. "The born to die" motif is a concept that shocks through Gerard, whose image is based on Kerouac's own elder brother. According to the legend of Sakyamuni (the Buddha), the emperor and his wife kept the prince Sakyamuni from all images of suffering until one day Sakyamuni sees through the false images of the earthy life. He decided to leave his home and seek enlightenment after encountering the "four sights" —a sick person, an old person, a corpse, and a world renouncer. The first three phenomena epitomize the sufferings to which ordinary beings are subject, and the last stage indicates that one can transcend the sufferings through meditation and religious practice. The most difficult situation for everyone to deal with is death, and that suggests the final cessation of all our hopes and dreams, our successes and failures, our loves, hates, worries, and attachment to the world (Powers 162–238). Kerouac creates a similar experience in Gerard although in his novel Gerard becomes a young man who senses the tortures of humans in an old man who carries his garbage cart walking through the long cold night. Gerard's vision emphasizes the life as only a dream and he realizes that the stilling of desire is equivalent to mercy and compassion. In his vision he sees himself dying and his younger brother Ti Jean is going to be awakened by the fact that death is a phenomenon that and nirvana is present in the daily life (111).

Awareness of death prompts the Buddha to perceive the ultimate futility of worldly concerns and pleasures. Many of Kerouac's characters are devoted to transitory pleasures and material objects, and they are depicted as foolishly believing that wealth, power, friends, and family will bring lasting happiness. However, the calling from eternity

is apprehended only by those who show real compassion and love, and in Kerouac, it is Gerard who is on the right path. Although Gerard's brother Ti Jean is still young, unable to follow Buddhist teachings nor understand the most important Buddhist tenet that form is emptiness, he perceives that his brother Gerard's love for someone else is appreciated. *The Diamond Sutra*, represented as diamond wisdom, permeates most of Kerouac's writings. The concept that "All phenomenal appearances are not ultimate reality but rather illusions, projections of one's mind" (*Shambhala Dictionary*) is all his worldly characters need to learn. The path to enlightenment is observed in *Tristessa* and *Vision of Gerard* minor works of Kerouac; however, the processes of knowing the truth, the void or emptiness, last through his major writings. Giacomo finds in Sal Paradise an ultimate escape and the progress of samsara, which means the born, created, shaped and differentiated (178). To Giacomo, the characters in Kerouac are all bound up with suffering and feeling of an impending mortality (175). For Jones, some of Kerouac's characters by living each moment fully represent the practice of compassion (111). Both critics acknowledge the limitation of the boundaries of the ego in Kerouac's characters; in a sense, non-assertion and neglecting the self mean true transcendence.

Kerouac's archetypal shrouded traveler seems always pathetic. He was tired and weary, finding his bed on a bench in Harrisburg and he endured loneliness on Desolation Peak for more than fifty days. He was abandoned once by his respected fellow traveler Dean, when he was without food or money, growing delirious with hunger, picking up butts from the street. Desolation is a way of life but physical desolation in this narrative leads to the understanding of the ephemeral life. Like Coleridge's old mariner coming back to retell his journey, Kerouac recounts his actual experience penetrating into the human life in his journal *Desolation Angels* and other writings. Giacomo notes Kerouac's place of Desolation can be anywhere,

Desolation abides in both uninhabited and inhabited places, both on the pinnacle and within the human honeycomb [because] the mind is not at peace. In fact, it shreds into incoherency...as if

locked in the stage of the dialectic of the negative: no persisting personal self; no material world; only the transient associations of the senses . . . the conflict between noumenal and phenomenal realms of existence. (193)

Kerouac, as a representative of the people on the road, questions the essence of American life that is occupied by eating, sleeping, keeping a shelter, in the name of "Modern" needs such as automobiles, washing machines, expensive cloths, up-to-date furniture and cultural excitements like TV and movies." (*Some of the Dharma* 35) Kerouac identifies himself with a seer "who understands the world and understands beyond the world" (*Some of the Dharma* 29). In his everlasting search, although he confesses his mother's happiness is the only thing that really matters (46) and he keeps reflecting upon Catholic teachings, Kerouac confesses that the purpose of solitude is to find "True Mind" (126). True Mind helps ease the worries caused by entanglement of the worldly matters. As Master Chin Kung reminds, the Buddha teaches that the perfect wisdom and virtue are innate to all beings, so that cultivating "innocence" becomes the important part of self-discipline (175). In other words, by remaining unmoved by surroundings and being compassionate as a child, one attains real freedom.

The experience of migration and exile is a dominant feature of modern life, and the ways in which individuals come to terms with shifts in their cultural and political landscapes offer rich subjects for exploration and analysis. As it was mentioned earlier the word "diaspora" once referred exclusively to the repeated scattering of the Jews away from the kingdom of Judea. Today, "diaspora" has taken on a general meaning of the forced relocation of any people away from their homeland and into foreign lands. The difference between "diaspora" and "migration" lies in motivation: migration is willing, and diaspora is forced. The force can be either physical or economic. However, an important part of any diaspora is the discrimination against the diasporic group by the dominant social groups both in their homelands and the places where they resettle. While this

discrimination might moderate over time, it does not diminish the final, crucial aspect of a diaspora: the yearning to return and recreate the lost homeland. It is this yearning which lies at the center of the concept of “diaspora.”

James Baldwin claims, “American writers do not have a fixed society to describe. The only society they know is one in which nothing is fixed and in which the individual must fight for his identity” (175). Indeed, Kerouac’s most impressive dialogue revealing Buddhist teaching appears in Japhy Ryder. In Ryder Kerouac has merged the famous Buddhist disciple, Han San. In the poem “Up the Cold Mountain path”, he meditates,

The moss is slippery, though there’s been no rain
 The pine sings, but there’s no wind
 Who can leap up the World’s ties
 And sit with me among the white clouds?

Throughout his years of traveling and writing, Kerouac tries to find Buddhism as an agent of equilibrium in his life and to provide an impetus to become a poet. His characters like himself in real life are always searching for soul, a definite home that he belongs to. However, Kerouac’s voice is involved with experiences, and geographies, breaking down space and time. His characters go to wilderness, to visit the landscapes that were infrequently visited, and they tend to cross the boundaries of physical realms to be enlightened by the simplest truth found in nature. Kerouac’s nomadic figures do not belong to the designated territory and they do not find their identity in the living society, but the core of their concern is extended to the physical sufferings of the poor and the dialectical differences between the corrupted cities and the solitary path, the hopeless corruption and the helpless starvation in ghettos. Interpreting the poem “No-me” by Kerouac, Jones says,

Compassion involves not only the attempt to escape desire, but since the attempt depends on abolishing the arbitrary concept of the

self, compassion also involves the irony of asking salvation for a self that does not exist . . . He is not a hero, rather he is a bodhisattva to be invoked . . . (123).

Reading Kerouac needs an understanding of “dharma”, the concept which permeates throughout his writings of the 1950s. Gifford and Lee say, dharma in Kerouac means the self-regulating power of the universe (14). Therefore, the awareness of emptiness and mutability of life “renders a kind of equilibrium within and without, and the seeker who attains it gains a sense of resignation about the strife between good and evil in the world.” Jones therefore concludes the “resignation is the goal of the Buddhist search” (127).

Although Jack Kerouac’s tie with Buddhism is well known³, he confesses as he wrote to Robert Lax:

“I’m no saint, I’m sensual, I can’t resist wine, am liable to sneers & secret wraths & attachment to imaginary lures before my eyes—but I intend to ascend by stages & self-control to the Vow to help all sentient beings find enlightenment and holy escape from the sin and sin of life-body itself.” (*Letters*, 1940–1956, 447–48)

However, few could deny that the most powerful element found in Kerouac that draws him close to Buddhism is his appreciation of nature and the suffering of humans (Lott 178). In *The Dharma Bums*, for example, he found his heaven, his Promised Land on the cold and windy Desolation Peak and he feels the energy of a blade of grass that is anchored on a rock. Along the road leading to Dalhart of Texas, he found the land was all mesquite and waste. On the horizon was the moon but on the border of US and Mexico all kinds of “cabdrivers and border rats wandered around, looking for opportunities” (*On the Road* 279). He realizes, “It was the bottom and dregs of America where all the heavy villains sink, where disoriented people have to go to be near a specific elsewhere they can slip into unnoticed” (*On the Road* 273). When Sal sings,

Home in Missoula,
 Home in Truckee,
 Home in Opelousas,
 Ain't no home for me.
 Home in old Medora,
 Home in Wounded Knee,
 Home in Ogallala,
 Home I'll never be. (*On the Road* 255)

It seems that the traveler is trying to find the signified of "home" and it seems that the traveler has identified with the people who, on the border and reservation area, do not have real homes. Nature is the best healer, and silence in nature conveys to him the meaning of Oneness (Lott 180). Ray the narrator in *The Dharma Bums* meditates: "The roar of silences was like a wash of diamond of meditating on the mountain." (71) Thus Lott interprets, silence is animal; silence is water; silence is a gem; silence is a salve (180). According to Lott, with the description of silence, the representation of the image of water, the change of weather as contrasted to the chaotic towns and cities, Kerouac's narrator gradually cultivates a sense of peace, develops his communion with the great Nothingness, and treasures "the beauty emerging from experiencing his daily life mindfully" (181). Certainly, Kerouac's landscape writings convey less on real nature than nature as interpreted from the perspective of a Buddhist disciple. Silence, water, rocks, and even all beings in the real world represent the flux of life; however, there is nothing to cling to. The only thing representing the everlasting truth is communion with all the elements (Theodo 22).

Deshae E Lott is to the point when he says, Kerouac does not estrange himself from the horror of the wilderness and chaos but rather deeply connects to it because he realizes that the wilderness of the external landscape correlates with his own wild mind (181). As Ray the narrator goes about observing life on the pinnacle, he found the sound in his heart: "I called Han Shan in the mountains: there was no answer. I called Han Shan in the morning fog: silence, it said." (*The Dharma Bums* 242) Kerouac's attachment to Buddhism was commented as a

failed one⁴; however, no one denies that Jack Kerouac's novel *The Dharma Bums* pioneers the Zen Practice in America (Giarmo 179–81). In his classics of the Beat sensibility especially, Kerouac's alter ego silently bespeaks the essence of migration and the meaning of cultural space, experiencing the phenomenal as the form of ultimate reality.

NOTES

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¹ David Stanford, the editor of Kerouac's *Some of the Dharma* reminds us that Kerouac was fascinated by Buddhism and practiced Zen. The book *Some of the Dharma* is a collection of his notes on Buddhism, his letters, etc. Kerouac claims he was influenced by Buddhism. See *Some of the Dharma: Jack Kerouac, On the Road*. N.Y.: Penguin, 1997.

² Kerouac spent sixty-three days on Desolation Peak in North Cascade National Park.

³ Deshae E. Lott (169), Matt Theado (123–152), Philip Kapleau, Thomas Merton and Alan Watts all refer to Kerouac as related to Buddhist teachings or claim Kerouac to be a representative in the 1950s to the 1970s of American interest in Buddhism. See David Robertson, "Real Matter, Spiritual Mountain. Gary Snyder and Jack Kerouac on Mt. Tamalpais." *Western American Literature* 27.3 (1992): 209–226. Kerouac visits Kapleau's New York Zen Institute in 1953. See Philip Kapleau's *Three Pillars of Zen*. N.Y.: Anchor, 1989.

⁴ Zavrel takes Kerouac as a failed Buddhist. See Thomas Zavrel, "Romanticism or Realization? The Dangers of Kerouac's Mystic Ramblings in 'Dharma Bums.'" *Prometheus: Internet Bulletin for News, Arts, Politics and Science*. 88 (summer 2003) <http://www.meaus.com/prometheus88.htm> July 25, 2005. In an interview with Allen Ginsberg, Ginsberg mentions that Kerouac has always been pointed to as "degenerating", "failed", but he assures that Kerouac's publication is rich, reflecting the literature and culture of the 1960s. See "Ginsberg on Kerouac," *Gargoyale Magazine* 10 (1978): 5.

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地景、移動與認同建構： 克魯亞克《禪行者》與《行路》中禪的追尋

摘要

美國的一九五零年代是個動盪不安的年代，經濟蕭條迫使許多人流離失所，遷移、流動成為當時的社會現象。美國著名散文家克里亞克是此流動年代中的代表作家，然而，從失落、移轉至大自然的環境中，克里亞克了悟東方聖者之路在於萬物之生生不息，也在天地的土納和人事的包容；天地間自然的表象和不落言詮的真理成就了克里亞克的禪機，也映稱人世的渺小與卑微。本文探討克里亞克散文中呈現出的流動主題，也同時分析在奧秘的自然生態和困頓的環境，克里亞克領會到的禪者之路。

關鍵字：克里亞克、遷徙、禪、崩垮世代