

“WHEN YOU GET TO THE TOP OF A MOUNTAIN, KEEP CLIMBING”: JACK  
KEROUAC’S PATH TO ENLIGHTENMENT IN THE DHARMA BUMS

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## ABSTRACT

In his novel The Dharma Bums, Jack Kerouac recounts his journey across the American landscape in the mid-1950s. The emerging corporate, materialistic, consumer driven society that America was becoming didn't offer individuals like Kerouac and his fellow Beats many avenues for their spiritual pursuits. Using literature as their main instrument, the Beat movement focused on a shift in individual and social consciousness and spiritual freedom. The Dharma Bums illustrates this desire for a new social consciousness, as well as focusing on the journey of an individual toward enlightenment.

On his path to enlightenment, Kerouac, as Ray Smith, lives the life of a vagabond, riding the rails, hitchhiking, and abandoning all reliance on material possessions. This intentional marginalization relies on adopting a Buddhist influenced lifestyle, the guidance of Japhy Ryder (Gary Snyder), and a transcendent return to the natural world. This study follows the path of Ray Smith, examining the methods and measures of an individual in pursuit of an understanding of existence and knowledge of the self.

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## DEDICATION

To the memory of Bertram Taro Groves, the mischievous angel on my shoulder.

## INTRODUCTION

America in the 1950s was undergoing significant change. World War II had ended in 1945, the Korean Conflict in 1953, and a new era of industrialization, corporate development, and consumerism was emerging in the American landscape. In the preface to his study The Fifties, David Halberstam states, “The fifties were captured in black and white, mostly by still photographers” (ix). With respect to the white-collar middle and upper classes, this statement reflects the placid and relatively bland order of the decade. Paraphrasing author and historian William Manchester in their book Generations, Neil Howe and William Strauss use the phrase “Silent Generation” to label the individuals coming of age in the 1950s, describing them as “withdrawn, cautious, unimaginative, indifferent, unadventurous and silent” (71). The rise of job opportunities with big companies and the lure of a home in the suburbs led to conformity among the white collar middle and upper classes of American society. Soldiers returned from fields of conflict in foreign lands anxious for a life of comfort and security. College graduates gave themselves to large companies as materialism and a desire to be part of the growing middle-class seemed more appealing than a life of romantic and idealistic pursuits. Despite the looming danger of the Cold War and the turbulence of the Civil Rights Movement, Americans rejoiced in the passing of the Second World War and the Depression. The population of the U.S. was looking to the future with hope and optimism. Young married couples settled into their newly constructed homes and began to realize their dreams of raising a family.

Many individuals were opposed to, and disturbed by, this social structure in America. James Dean, as Jim Stark in Rebel Without a Cause, and Jack Kerouac, in such

influential works as On the Road and The Subterraneans, were representative of this emerging social skepticism. John Clellon Holmes and Allen Ginsberg, in their respective works Go And Howl, offer further insight into this counter-culture movement, which included Kerouac, that challenged and rejected the social, political, and cultural constraints that hindered the achievement of their “beatific”<sup>1</sup> desires. Kerouac and his fellow Beat writers found themselves face to face with Allen Ginsberg’s “Moloch” – the metaphorical embodiment of the industrial, materialistic, and militaristic state that America was becoming in the 1950s.<sup>2</sup> The incessant, meaningless, and distracting rhetoric of the emerging corporate and materialistic state found incarnation in the voice of “Moloch,” preaching industry, consumerism, and conformity. The philosophy of the Beats held an Orwellian sentiment that placed them outside the society that attempted to smother them ideologically.

Ann Charters describes the Beat movement as “both historical and political, based on the tumultuous changes of their times” (xvi). The Beats envisioned and embodied an alternative lifestyle and formed their own type of revolution. In his study “Cold War Correspondents: Ginsberg, Kerouac, Cassady, and the Political Economy of the Beats,” Oliver Harris writes that “the postwar period inaugurated a *totalization* (sic) of economy and communication” (175). To answer this, the Beats used their greatest strength: literature. Kerouac, Ginsberg and the other Beats invested their energy in writing during the early Cold War years, “when their social marginality was also economic and cultural”

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<sup>1</sup> In Catholicism, “Beatification” is a recognition by the church of a dead person's accession to Heaven. A “beatific vision” is the direct perception of God enjoyed by those who are in Heaven, imparting supreme happiness and blessedness. For this study, I use the term “beatific” as a combination of the Catholic belief, Eugene Burdick’s descriptions of the Beats as “Christ-like” figures (555), and the desire of the Beats to transcend their social environments on their journeys toward enlightenment (this includes adopting foreign cultures and philosophies, and , for some, drug use).

<sup>2</sup> Moloch, in Allen Ginsberg’s long poem Howl, was the name given to the emerging corporate and industrial entity present in 1950s America.

(Harris 175). In the literature and correspondence of the Beats, a “dissident counternarrative” (Harris 171) was born. The Beats were chiefly concerned with the “sharpening of self-knowledge ... [and] the cultivation of the self” (Burdick 554). This is evident in their devotion to an alternative lifestyle which included studies of Buddhism and Eastern religion and philosophies, their work as writers and poets, and their tendencies to adopt vagabond and marginalized lifestyles. The true Beat figures consciously disaffiliated themselves from society and its constraints. These individuals spoke for a “generation of crazy, illuminated hipster[s] ... down and out, but full of intense conviction” (Burdick 554). The Beats felt that Western civilization had led to “the dehumanization of modern man with the inhuman growth of institutions, the pressures for external conformity, and a collective refusal to examine the self” (Harris 175). The lure of the white picket fence, the ivory colored Maytag appliances, and the nine to five workdays did not apply to this small group of individuals. These individuals wanted to reshape society; they wanted to lead a crusade with their philosophical pursuits and discoveries.

Eugene Burdick sees these men as “Christ-like figures [...] gentle, beatific Christ[s]” (555), who were filled with the ideas of changing the minds of the population, and therefore changing the mental landscape of America. However, these “Christ-like figures” each had an overwhelming number of demons to battle. To call these men “Christ-like” may be an attempt to romanticize individuals in a decidedly romantic movement. These men were fallible; they had their vices, their flaws, and their internal struggles; thus, “Christ-like” may not be the best phrase to describe them. Jack Kerouac battled alcoholism his entire life; Allen Ginsberg, an openly avowed homosexual, spent



time in psychiatric hospitals and was expelled from Columbia University; William S. Burroughs, a self-proclaimed junkie, fatally shot his wife Joan in an obviously failed attempt at staging the William Tell legend. However, the Beat movement was a spiritual, almost religious, revolution led by a group of men “coming of age into a Cold War age without spiritual values” (Charters xx), who were restless to find, understand, and explain their existence. As individuals, these men may fall short of Christ, but their movement is indeed “Christ-like” in its attempts to lead the masses toward a new social consciousness. This theme of fallible creatures struggling with internal demons and external distractions is evident in most Beat literature.

Jack Kerouac’s novel The Dharma Bums captures a significant moment in the history of the Beat movement. John E. Hart describes the importance of the novel as a rebellion against “a post-war world where social and political authority had become deficient and even despised” (54). It transmits a program of change and “personal and social transformations posited by the Beats in the years of their ascendancy” (Woods 9). It is impossible to summarize or explain a movement in one work, but The Dharma Bums contains many themes of the Beat revolution. It was a non-violent resistance to emerging ideologies which, in Kerouac’s view, stripped America of individuality and creativity. Kerouac’s protagonist, Ray Smith, is a writer who seeks refuge from the corporate and materialistic American lifestyle that evolved after WWII. So, as an individual uninterested in this emerging culture, he makes an escape and takes to the open road. This escape includes abandoning old religious beliefs-as seen in Ray’s peaked interest in Buddhism-and embarking on a personal, spiritual journey, while leaving behind the “Leave it to Beaver” lifestyle that he feels will soon engulf the American population.

The subject matter of the novel, like its predecessor On the Road, was “remote from the centralized concerns of most fiction readers of the late 1950s” (Woods 11). Both novels were centered on a character’s quest for freedom, the self, and a new life in post-WWII America. However, The Dharma Bums introduces the public to a major theme of Beat literature that is not widely recognized: nature. David Robertson sees The Dharma Bums as a novel in the “literary territory where author, land, and work dynamically interplay with each other” (213). The influence of nature on Kerouac in the novel is evident in his eloquent descriptions of nature set in the backdrop of a corporate and capitalist society. Echoing the American Transcendentalist movement of the nineteenth century, The Dharma Bums illustrates a “sweeping discontent with American ‘virtues’ of progress and power” (Tytell 4) as well as an escape from the city toward nature as the source of a new vision. Ray’s escape involves mountain climbing, camping in deserts, midnight meditations in rural woods, and a time of solitude atop Desolation peak in Washington State.

Kerouac’s journey, as Ray Smith, to enlightenment involves many aspects of discovery and understanding. It is a journey towards an understanding of all that is around him: his environment, his fellow men, and his ever-changing world. He is seeking to understand his existence in the emerging social landscape of America, as well as an understanding of the elusive Self. He asks the questions, “How many human beings have there been, in fact how many living creatures have there been, since before the less part of beginningless time?” (8) and, “what’s the difference in existence?” (136). As recounted in the novel, three pivotal sections involve his personal quest for enlightenment on the fringes of the emerging society of 1950s America. The first

important section focuses on Ray Smith's relationship with Japhy Ryder (Gary Snyder). The second section explores Ray Smith's stay with his mother in her Rocky Mount, North Carolina home. The third, and most important section, is Ray Smith's time alone atop Desolation Peak.

Japhy Ryder is The Dharma Bums' Dean Moriarty (Neal Cassady) from On the Road. In the same way that Sal Paradise (Jack Kerouac) follows and learns from Moriarty, Ray Smith situates himself as an apprentice under the guidance of Japhy Ryder. However, where David Halberstam describes Cassady as "powerfully attractive to both sexes," an individual who, "all sorts of men and women were in love with," (303) Japhy Ryder, although sexually charismatic in his own right, is a sage compared to Moriarty's swinger. And, in a society recently introduced to Hugh Hefner's Playboy in 1953, the idea of male bonds and relationships, as seen in these two novels and in the lifestyle of the Beats, was still taboo. These relationships, though uniquely different, are examples of "homosocial desire" as defined by gender studies theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. These two words, defined by themselves, have obvious meanings: homosocial meaning "social bonds between two persons of the same sex," (Sedgwick 1) and desire, according to Merriam-Webster, meaning "a wish, craving or longing for something, sometimes related to sexual relations." In the patriarchal society of the 1950s, these relationships were considered abhorrent, but to the Beats they were necessary and part of their lifestyle.<sup>3</sup> The bonds these men forged, whether it was Ginsberg's desire for Cassady, and their subsequent sexual relations, or Burroughs' bisexual tendencies (and Kerouac's hidden, and denied and refuted bisexuality) these relationships forged the identities of

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<sup>3</sup> In 1950s mainstream American society, this phrase takes on a new meaning defined by the cultural characteristics of "intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuals" (Sedgwick 3).

these individuals in a search for their own existence in a society apt to dismiss the orientation of such a search. This outward journey into society begins as an inward journey into the self. Like Whitman in “Song of Myself,” these individuals feel the need to search inward to develop an understanding of their existence. However, this search inward is aided by the realization that they are part of a movement.

Kerouac and Snyder’s relationship had its foundation in nature and Buddhism. Gary Snyder spent his childhood in the wilderness of Oregon and Washington State. He later distanced himself from society, spending most of his time in his small cottage outside of Berkeley, California or immersing himself in Asian studies. Gary Snyder introduced Jack Kerouac to the transcendent power of nature, and also educated him in his studies of Buddhism. Kenneth Rexroth, quoted by Rod Phillips, praised Snyder, stating, “Long before ecology became a world-wide fad, Snyder [was] talking about an ecological esthetic, a blending of American Indian and Far Eastern philosophies of cooperation with, rather than conquest of, nature” (3). To Snyder, America was a land of “rivers and mountains without end” and represented an opportunity for human growth distanced from the overwhelming urban development of the cities.

In the novel, Japhy is younger than Ray, and he is well educated in the philosophy of Zen Buddhism. Buddhism offered the Beats a spiritual path which allowed them to transcend the conditions of 1950s America. In contrast to the “empty and homogenized American Christianity of Norman Vincent Peale and Billy Graham, Buddhism offered the opportunity for a deep and genuine spiritual existence” (Phillips 13). With Snyder’s encouragement and influence, Kerouac went on to publish Buddhist centered texts such as The Scripture of the Golden Eternity and Some of the Dharma, the latter of which

chronicled his experiences with Buddhism (Haynes 155). His experiences early on with Japhy spark Ray's interest in nature and Eastern philosophies and entice him to accept a position as a fire lookout in the Cascade Mountain Range. This is Ray's introduction to a world distinctly different from the mainstream society of America in the 1950s.

In the second phase of his journey, Ray Smith returns "home" to his mother's house in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. Jack Kerouac lived with his mother for most of his life. In Rocky Mount Ray spends several months doing, in his mother's opinion, absolutely nothing. However, for Ray, the time spent meditating in the woods is beneficial and necessary to his quest. Ray's philosophical solitude in nature, as well as his love for it, is beginning to evolve. He screams into the night, "I let out a big Hoo, one o' clock in the morning, the dogs leaped up and exulted. I felt like yelling it to the stars" (143), a spontaneous outburst that illustrates his realization that Buddhism and nature will play an integral role in this journey. However, this behavior continues to irritate his mother, as well as other family members and the local inhabitants of the town who view Ray as a strange alien in their more down to earth rural community. Once again, feeling alone and on the outside, Ray's path eventually leads him to Desolation Peak.

Like Japhy Ryder before him, Ray Smith accepts a job as a fire lookout atop Desolation Peak. This position, to Ray, is more meaningful for the solitude it will give him, rather than the responsibilities that the job entails. He appreciates his solitude (even abstaining from the routine of radio chatter with other lookouts), and the learning experience it will provide. It is here that he is able to reflect on his experiences, much like Siddhartha at the end of Hermann Hesse's novel, and recognize the balance of the spiritual and physical worlds to gain an understanding of himself and the Dharma of the

world. His newfound enlightenment allows him to not only be a spectator of nature, but also to participate in its beauty – an experience which sometimes leads him to tears of joy.

The effects of society and culture upon an individual can be psychological and physical, conscious and unconscious, obvious and veiled. The Beats felt the walls closing in around them as American society threatened “the innocent freedom to feel and do as one spontaneously wished” (Hipkiss 10) without the constraints of a government or an emerging social culture. Smith’s literary and philosophic vision is one of beauty, transcendence, and desperation. It is also a vision that is obstructed. Barry Miles states that Kerouac’s voyage stemmed from a desire to show that “conspicuous consumerism, the giant cars, split-level homes and suburban conformism of the fifties were not the way to happiness” (xviii). He proposed an alternative lifestyle to American conformity and “preached personal freedom” (xv). As seen in the hippie culture of the sixties, many followed the outline he set forth in his novels. This led future generations to “rediscover his work and [take] The Dharma Bums as one of their inspirational texts” (Miles xviii).

It is important to note the extremes that an individual will go to in order to achieve inner peace and a life that is acceptable to them, though on terms unacceptable to mainstream society. My study focuses on an individual’s quest for spiritual enlightenment and understanding of the self, while drawing attention to the transcendent voyage back to the natural world. It will seek to explain and illustrate the struggle of an individual, Ray Smith, in a society – one in which materialism, consumerism, and corporate emergence are foregrounded – that preaches conformity and a new American dream.

## THE FIRST STEPS

*“Strong and content I travel the open road”*

(Walt Whitman, “Song of the Open Road”)

Legs crossed in the position of a Buddhist monk “contemplat[ing] the clouds,” Ray Smith (Jack Kerouac), the “wandering hipster...rebell[ing] against the world” (Hart 53), lays peacefully in a gondola heading north along the California coast. John E. Hart describes Ray Smith as a man who has set out to “turn the wheel of Dharma that brings the true awakening; the path that he follows” (54). He is a lost individual “suffocated by the conventions of a new, contemporary America” (Leer 7) and burdened by the corporate, white-collar state that America was becoming in the 1950s. So, with his newfound Buddhist faith and vagabond lifestyle, he leaves his home on the east coast for the promise of a fulfilling journey out west. Ray is a man on a quest, struggling to find his way across, and within, the American landscape. And, in doing so in the autumn of 1955, Ray Smith deliberately and consciously chooses a life that alienates him from mainstream society.

The opening passage of Jack Kerouac’s The Dharma Bums is a prescient preface to the recurring themes of the novel. It serves as an introduction into a world possibly unlike one the reader has physically experienced. It is a passage which “unites inner and outer journeys” (Woods 11) and positions Ray Smith as a man who feels it necessary to intentionally marginalize himself from 1950s American society. This opening also invites us to join Ray on his spiritual journey: the gondola representing movement, and Ray’s contemplation of the sky above representing spirituality. Therefore, as we lay in our gondola, only able to see the future take shape above us, we are thrown into this

adventure with Ray Smith with no knowledge of his reasons or desires for this journey. We can only gather information as the rail car speeds forward in literary spontaneity and exposes us to the life of an individual which appears to have no structure, but does seem to have a destination: spiritual enlightenment and an understanding of existence.

The beginning of the passage, “Hopping a freight out of Los Angeles at high noon one day in late September 1955” (3), represents the vagabond lifestyle Ray has adopted. Equivalent to an underground society, riding the rails was a mode of transportation for the poor and homeless, the vagabonds and lost souls of the American landscape. Ray is also escaping, though; running away from a society that is embracing a corporate and materialistic culture, typified by Los Angeles - a city which Smith later describes as “a regular hell”(137). Los Angeles represents the everything that Ray feels he needs to abandon in order to achieve his goal of spiritual enlightenment. More specifically, it represents the new corporate America, full of materialistic greed and social congestion. It is an “industrial jungle” (117) that embodies the social and cultural changes facing Ray in the 1950s.

It is ironic that the time of departure from Los Angeles is high noon. Kerouac’s novel shares many similarities with the Gary Cooper film of the same name, the most important being an individual who finds himself in a struggle against seemingly insurmountable forces. Cooper’s Will Kane has the Miller Gang to face, and Kerouac’s Ray Smith has the emerging society of 1950s America. Unlike Will Kane though, Ray Smith is not alone.



Committed to this vagabond lifestyle of riding trains, poor and unworldly Ray Smith meets a man he later comes to name the St. Theresa bum.<sup>4</sup> The St. Theresa bum is a fellow road traveler whom he meets “somewhere near Camarillo where Charlie Parker’d been mad and nursed back to normal health” (3). The term “bum” ascribed to Ray’s new acquaintance differs from the traditional connotation of the word. Ray Smith’s “bum” is not a sidewalk vagrant of Times Square begging for nickels and dimes in a manner that only leads the pedestrian philanthropist to speculate that he will spend the newfound fortune for dissolute ends; he is actually the opposite. The term “bum,” to Ray Smith, is a term of admiration. Ray’s St. Theresa bum, as a physical specimen, represents a direct antithesis of the stereotypical male in 1950s culture: “he is the kind of thin quiet little bum nobody pays much attention to even on Skid Row, let alone Main Street” (6). In theatres across the country, movie-goers were witness to the “true” American male embodied on the screen by John Wayne and Alan Ladd. While the St. Theresa bum was neither Hondo nor Shane, to Smith he embodied a state of being that he desired and aspired to; that of a Dharma Bum, a man who accepted, gratefully, his place in life.

Ray’s encounter with the St. Theresa bum is also an important aspect of the novel in terms of Ray’s self-education. More specifically, Ray’s encounter with the St. Theresa bum reveals where Ray is at this moment of his spiritual life. The narrative of this first chapter shows intertwining references to Catholicism and Buddhism; it is laced with Buddhist sutras, eloquent descriptions of nature, as well as Catholic ideals represented in speech and action. Ray labels himself a “religious wanderer” and a “bhikku” (6) – a

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<sup>4</sup> Ray gives the bum this name because he carries with him a slip of paper containing a prayer by Saint Teresa.

follower of Buddhism dedicated to live a simple, meditative life on his path to Nirvana. And, as the image of Ray on the gondola symbolizes his new dedication to Buddhism, his interactions and boastful orations advertise his newfound spiritual commitment. He is determined to move forward with an alternative lifestyle based on Buddhism, a marginalized religion in 1950s America. The fault of a novice perhaps, Ray is very eager, in self-congratulatory fashion, to speak about his religious convictions in a manner, whatever his enthusiasm, that is not representative of a true bhikku. The St. Theresa bum, the teacher in this exchange, is described as being “modest about his religion” (5), which is a true characteristic of a Buddhist disciple. But, Ray at this point is still in the early stage of his spiritual development, though given his free-lanced, unconventional lifestyle, it may seem that he is already well-positioned on the path to enlightenment.

The meeting with the St. Theresa bum further represents a religious conflict within Ray. His name evokes the religion of Catholicism, St. Theresa being an important figure in the Catholic Church,<sup>5</sup> and his surname “bum” evokes the notion of a Dharma Bum. The bread and wine the two men exchange are suggestive of Christ and communion, as well as charity, both a Christian and Buddhist concept. This Christian action is then described in juxtaposition with a line from the Diamond Sutra, a Mahayana Buddhist sutra: “Practice charity without holding in mind any conception of charity, for charity is just a word after all” (5). As the train moves farther north, the wind howls and grows cold, and Ray and his new friend do everything they can to stay warm. Ray begins

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<sup>5</sup> It is most likely, due to the time of the novel’s publication, that St. Teresa is a reference to St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein, 1891-1942). Like Ray Smith, St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, born a Jew and baptized a Catholic in 1922, immersed herself in a religion she was not born into in order to achieve enlightenment.

to “huddle and meditate on the warmth, the actual warmth of God” (6) while the St. Theresa bum just sits there, in place, like a monk. Ray goes on to say of his religious progression, “I was very devout in those days and was practicing my religious devotions almost to perfection” (5). Religious practice and understanding is an important theme throughout this novel, most notably, in the life of Ray Smith. He is a novice, yet an eager Buddhist; he is attracted to Buddhism as an escape from the void that the outside world has become to him.

While the St. Theresa bum is a true Dharma Bum, and Ray is only on the path to becoming one, they are still closely connected kindred spirits: they are where they are, doing what they are doing, because there is no other path for them. The difference is that Ray is a novice, an individual in the beginning stage of his enlightenment and his adopted alternative lifestyle. The St. Theresa bum is a learned individual and has achieved the enlightenment that Ray aspires to. He represents the spiritual understanding and devotion Ray hopes to achieve.

## EDUCATION

*“The direction in which education starts a man  
will determine his future”*

(Plato, The Republic)

After his arrival in San Francisco, Ray Smith finds himself in the midst of a culture that is resistant to the emerging society of 1950s America. In the City by the Bay, Ray is introduced to a group of poets and writers who represent the embodiment of an alternative lifestyle. After many nights of philosophical discussions centering around Buddhism and the new America of the 1950s, the legendary Gallery Six reading which marked the inaugural reading of Allen Ginsberg’s Howl, and parties lasting into the early hours of the morning, Ray Smith embarks on both a literal and an allegorical climb of Matterhorn Peak. The climb represents the first stage in Ray Smith’s development: his education under his mentor Japhy Ryder (Gary Snyder).

“Well, you boys goin huntin this mornin ?” asks the lady behind the counter at the backcountry breakfast shack. “No’m,” begins Japhy, “just climbing Matterhorn,” to which the lady replies, “Matterhorn, why I wouldn’t do that if somebody paid me a thousand dollars!” (51). Ray Smith and Japhy Ryder expect that reply. In the same way that mainstream society shrugged off the Beat movement, dismissing it as a fad, the lady who wouldn’t climb Matterhorn for a thousand dollars shrugs off the climbers. And, to further alienate them as they approach the trail, Ray notices that the hunters in the area look at them as “hopeless eccentrics” (47). After all, they are the outcasts, aliens among a society that will always question their actions and, to a lesser degree, their motives. In the social metropolis that they see growing around them, the “why” is always less

important than the “what.” The “what” is superficial; the “why” is subterranean; it takes some excavating to discover. In this context, most individuals don’t know how to use a shovel, or simply don’t want to. And, in a land where the materialistic virus was infecting more and more individuals, Smith and Ryder feel that they have found an antidote. The world around them has become consumer driven, corporate, and industrialized. To achieve their goals, however, Ray Smith and Japhy Ryder cling to idealistic and transcendent philosophies, embracing the natural world and a revolutionary, alternative lifestyle.

Ray Smith’s vivid descriptions of his natural environment, (“the golden red sunlight [...] the snowcapped mountains glittering in the distance,” {51}) are just a prelude to the praise he will bestow upon nature. Nature, in this novel and in the collective consciousness of society, is seen as the polar opposite to the developing industrialist, corporate driven America of the 1950s. Nature complements Ray’s quest to isolate himself, providing the nurturing conditions of solitude and contemplative awareness. Reflecting on the St. Theresa bum after their time together, Ray Smith spent a night on a beach mesmerized by “Avolokitesvra’s ten-wondered universe of dark and diamonds” and, simply put, was “happy...barefooted, wild-haired...singing, swigging wine, spitting, jumping, running,” accepting that this life he has chosen is “the way to live. All alone and free” (7). This feeling of awe and wonder that Ray feels is due to his submission to the natural world around him. Ray then falls asleep under the stars and dreams of his past life. He dreams of New England and his mother and father, who in this dreamscape are with him on this journey; his mother with a pack on her back, and his father desperately “running after the ephemeral uncatchable train” (9), an allusion to lost

dreams and a chase never-ending. Perhaps his father's life served as an inspiration to Ray. However, rather than follow in his father's footsteps, his father's life inspires Ray to set out on his own path. This is similar to that of Herman Hesse's famous character Siddhartha, like Ray Smith, a character who is modeled after the author himself.

Siddhartha felt his life as a Brahmin's son-an elder Buddhist priest-and his future as a Brahmin himself were unfulfilling and ordinary. So, rather live as "good stupid sheep amongst a large herd" (Hesse 4), Siddhartha begins a journey very similar to Ray Smith's. These two men are individuals who leave one life behind in search of another. This new life, and the path leading to it, will give them the opportunity to find a deeper understanding of themselves and the world around them. After decades of struggles on his path and many hardships endured, Siddhartha meets the ferryman Vasuveda.

Vasuveda befriends Siddhartha and invites him to live by the river he calls home.

Vasuveda becomes Siddhartha's guide and his mentor in his search for enlightenment and understanding. Ray Smith, although well-educated, also needs a guide; he needs someone, like Vasuveda, with the experience and knowledge to direct him to his goal.

As they prepare to walk the trail that will lead them to the mountain paths, Ray exclaims, "Japhy I'm glad I met you. I'm gonna learn all about how to pack rucksacks and what to do and hide in these mountains when I'm sick of civilization" (51). Ray Smith first encountered Japhy Ryder, "the number one Dharma Bum of them all," (9) on the streets of San Francisco. He described him as "Oriental looking"(10) with a little goatee and slanted green eyes, and he goes on to say "he didn't look like a Bohemian at all, in fact he was far from being a Bohemian, a hanger-onner around the arts"(10). This statement reveals Ray's classification of Japhy as an individual, as well as a non-

conformist. Ray's initial assessment of Japhy is further confirmed when he enters Japhy's temple, his twelve by twelve shack "with nothing in it but typical Japhy appurtenances" (19). There are no chairs in the shack, just straw mats to sit on. Eastern literature ranging from haikus, translations, and Buddhist sutras occupy the bookshelves. His cottage represents the "simple, contemplative life, expressing the clarity, efficiency, and order that are rooted in the aesthetic and spiritual ideals of traditional Asian belief" (Giamo 181). Japhy is an individual who lives on the outskirts of society, both literally and figuratively.

Benedict Giamo labels Japhy the "constructive model" (183) for Ray's development as a bhikku, and while the St. Theresa bum represents the intangible aspects of Ray's ultimate goal of enlightenment, Japhy Rider represents his path and goal personified. Japhy's self-marginalization began many years before Ray's did. As a child growing up in a log cabin in Oregon, Japhy tells Ray, "I didn't feel that I was an American at all" (31). He spent his time with nature, studying animals, farming and educating himself in Indian (Native American) lore. His idealistic tendencies and sympathetic attraction to radical movements, such as anarchism, and his distrust of the "suburban ideal and sex repression and general dreary newspaper grey censorship of all our real human values" in an "America where nobody has any fun or believes in anything, especially freedom" (31), led him to discover and embrace Buddhism and the culture of the Far East.

Alvah Goodbook (modeled after Allen Ginsberg) calls Japhy "the great new hero of American culture" (29). Japhy's vision for the future – the rucksack revolution – is an America where Dharma Bums, who have suppressed the drive for material goods and

superficial pursuits, live an ascetic life, traveling with their rucksacks, mountain climbing, and connecting through a solitary union of personal knowledge and transcendental being. It is a society in which individuals, according to Japhy, don't subscribe to the demand that they "consume production and therefore have to work for the privilege of consuming" (97). However, this is a marginalized movement, clearly beyond the normative center of mainstream society. Also, Japhy's envisioned lifestyle requires a control of the self and of one's own mind. It begins as an idea or a state of mind, which, Japhy seems to hope, will organize itself into action once a sufficient number of minds are enlightened.

Japhy's Zen Buddhism involves the cultivation of a transcendent state of being and discovery of the self, which is achieved through a surrender to the world around him, culminating in a "submission to the universe, a universe in which man is totally free" (Leer 81). Japhy's form of idealism is built upon intuitive experiences and an appreciation of the natural world, which involves separating oneself from the distractions of society. Forging these ideologies at a young age, Japhy's social outlook was molded and consolidated by the time he met Ray Smith. Society might be wary of the individual who lives an existence like Japhy's, but Ray Smith is intrigued; he feels he has met the individual who will guide him to his ultimate goal. With his experience and knowledge, Japhy acts as mentor and guide to Ray on his Buddhist path. And, although younger, Ray sees in Japhy the lifestyle that he will need to adopt in order to achieve the desired culmination of his journey.

Although Ray is initially overwhelmed by Japhy and his devotion to an alternative lifestyle, the two men share many similarities – their devotion to Buddhism, a rejection of



the 1950s culture, and a love of literature. It is evident, though, that Ray and Japhy are, at this point in their relationship, at different points on their journey. Japhy lives a life immersed in Zen Buddhism and Eastern culture, whereas Ray is concerned mainly with two of the Four Noble Truths: the first, “all life is suffering,” and the third, “the suppression of suffering can be achieved” (7). Concerning Buddhism, Japhy is an idealist, while Ray is a pragmatist, at least for the present. With Japhy as his mentor, Ray will learn that he needs to commit fully to an alternative lifestyle in order to achieve his goals. Japhy is living the true existence of a bhikku, mind and soul, while Ray is looking to Buddhism for a tangible, attainable solution to support him on his path to enlightenment.

On his first visit to Japhy’s shack, Ray describes a peaceful scene where, upon opening the door, he sees Japhy cross-legged on a straw mat translating Han-Shan’s great poem, “Cold Mountain.” Han Shan, to Japhy, represents all the virtues of the bhikku existence. In Japhy’s words, “Han Shan was a Chinese scholar who got sick of the big city and the world and took off to hide in the mountains,” to which Ray replies, “Say, that sounds like you” (20). And now, under Japhy’s tutelage, Ray Smith’s current path also mirrors that of the Chinese poet Han Shan.

Whatever his enthusiasm for the climb up Matterhorn, Ray isn’t fully prepared. In a symbolic gesture, Japhy lends Ray some of his old mountain climbing gear – an obvious gesture of a teacher sharing knowledge with a student. As Japhy and Ray, joined by Japhy’s old friend Henry Morely, begin to take their first steps on the trail, their ascension up the mountain is essentially a symbolic journey transcending society: “the gnashing world [below], a picture of peace and good sense” (58). Commenting on a

picture of a mountain range, Japhy tells Ray “I like the real thing myself” (51). The comment isn’t as bland, or possibly shallow, as one may think. On the contrary, it is a testament to the power of nature and the experiences he has had since childhood, and the experience that Ray, for the first time, will soon enjoy.

John E. Hart calls the climb a “primitive ritual” and a “return to primitive elements” (57). According to David Robertson, hiking, for Gary Snyder “is a way of furthering a political, social, and spiritual revolution,” and “an escape from a bondage to American capitalism” (219). Being up on the mountain, detached from society, provides Ray with the opportunity to enjoy a sensual world, while leaving the material world behind. Where they are going, Japhy says, “there won’t be one human being” (63). Since their initial meeting, Japhy has attempted to introduce Ray to the sensual world around him. It began with a night celebrating the hedonistic virtues of Buddhism. Ray, in one attempt to change his lifestyle, had sworn off women (“pretty girls make graves” {29}) and taken a vow of celibacy. However, when Japhy shows up at Alvah’s cottage with Princess, a self-proclaimed bodhisattva and “old mother of earth,” (31) and the Tibetan Buddhist ceremony of “yabyum” begins, Ray finds himself unable to deny his sexual urges. “Yabyum” to Japhy Ryder is a ritualistic orgy, and, as he assures Ray, it is an important step on the path to enlightenment. In the Buddhist faith, Yab-yum is an artistic symbol representing the union between male and female. Yab-yum represents the primitive and mystical union of wisdom and compassion. The union of the two figures is necessary to overcome the Buddhist Maya, the illusory nature of “perceived reality.”<sup>6</sup> For Ray, this hedonistic pleasure is just another avenue leading out of Anytown, U.S.A.;

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Berry, Buddhism (Pennsylvania: Anima, 1985), William LaFleur, Buddhism: A Cultural Perspective (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1988). All Buddhist scholarship is primarily taken from these two texts.

and now, on the mountain, Ray is invited to take in the sensual power of nature: the green grass, patches of pure snow, rippling creeks, the harmony of the wind and trees, and the rocks that stand like silent Buddhas (67).

On the trail, Ray notices a spot where “almost instantaneously, the grass ended and the boulders started” (64). Ray is entering challenging terrain; not only on the climb, but in his education. Seeing Ray is having a difficult time on the boulders and rocky trail, Japhy tells him the secret to climbing. He tells him it is “the easiest thing in the world, actually easier than walking on flat ground, which is monotonous.” The secret to this climb, Japhy says, is to think of it like the practice of Zen Buddhism and to not think at all when climbing, but “just dance” (64). Ray’s journey now tracks a dangerous, uncertain path, represented by the boulders and jagged rocks. Symbolized by the grass trail, he has left the typical trappings of life, and the suburban existence: “rows of well-to-do houses with lawns and television sets in each living room with everybody looking at the same thing and thinking the same thing at the same time” (39). While he is on the mountain he is able to look down on the world below him, as well as see the enveloping natural world around him – his new world.

William Carlos Woods posits that Ray and Japhy’s discourse during the Matterhorn climb is “strongly polarized: hip, happy saints who chant across cityscape and mountaintop vs. materialistic drones locked in fog to their television sets” (12). Juxtaposing a critique of society and praise for his new life in the wilderness, Ray Smith is developing a dichotomy of “me vs. them.” Following his mentor’s lead, Ray gives himself up to “an empathetic surrender to nature” (Leer 83). He meditates with Japhy, prays for his friends and all life on earth, and begins to philosophize about existence:

“Why do we have to be born in the first place” (86). He remains dedicated to the climb as he learns a valuable lesson from Japhy: “you can’t fall off a mountain” (86). The mountain symbolizes Ray’s personal journey towards enlightenment. Now on the path, as long as his dedication is sustained, he won’t stray from his course. And, although Ray becomes weary and afraid, he recalls an old Buddhist saying: “When you get to the top of a mountain, keep climbing” (84). Ray is beginning to realize that his journey will be a life long one. Intentional marginalization and adopting an alternative lifestyle are more than a passing fad or a quick solution to life’s problems, but require a sustained commitment. As they descend, Japhy and Ray let out great yodels of joy, and other triumphant sounds that “aren’t made to be heard by the people below” (86).

Rejuvenated and full of optimism, Ray Smith, a new man, returns to “that city of ignorance which is the modern city” (113), the city of vices and the city of obstructions. Incorporating his newfound knowledge in the world he abandoned presents a spiritual challenge in his quest for enlightenment, evident in his new attempts at “a rejection of what the senses perceived as ontological [the metaphysical study of reality]” (Giamao 186). With Japhy’s pearls of wisdom in mind, and the recent purchase of the symbolic mountain climbing gear, he must continue his ascent of the mountain contained within his Self and within his mind. He will soon come to the realization that there is a difference between the solitude and freedom of the mountain and the practice of this lifestyle in society.

## PROGRESS

*“The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man”*

(George Bernard Shaw, “Man and Superman”)

Before Ray departs for his mother’s home in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, he and Japhy have an encounter with a preacher. The preacher tells both men “there’s a new field a-waitin for ya, and be sure to live up to every one of your obligations” (114). This “new field” for Ray was opened before him on the gondola, was nurtured under the tutelage of Japhy Ryder, and now required a period of solitude and reflection. Thus, Ray now sets out alone on a “voyage into a refreshed and enlightened sense of self” (Williams 9). The responsibility is now on Ray’s shoulders. Japhy had held his student’s hand on the path, but now the student has to venture forth alone like a college graduate into the world of “adulthood.” And, like the college graduate who travels to South America or backpacks across Europe, Ray decides to take time and reflect on his education to this point. Ray Smith’s journey East is a symbolic trek in terms of his continuing education and progress. It represents a turn to the philosophy of the Far East and a reversal of the Western world’s orientation toward industry, consumerism, and material excess. At the same time, it more literally represents a trip home.

On the road back to North Carolina, Ray has time to himself to contemplate his new existence; that of a rucksack wanderer, a mirror image of Japhy. Such solitude is both necessary and challenging, for Ray finds that “everything was far away from the easy purity of being with Japhy Ryder in that high rock camp under the peaceful singing

stars” (120). Alone, and riding the rails, he is harassed by the police – something he hadn’t had to worry about in Japhy’s shack or climbing Matterhorn. However, he reassures himself that he is on the right path, “the road to heaven” (113) and “the only alternative to just sit[ting] with a hundred other patients in front of a nice television set in a madhouse” (121). The adjustment from Matterhorn to the road becomes very difficult for Ray as he finds himself surrounded by the obstructionist elements of a lifestyle he has left behind.

Burdened and weighed down by the difficulty of transitioning into his new life, Ray’s quest is reconfirmed by two individuals he meets on the road. In a train station, Ray encounters another sacred bum. This bum, an ex-marine from Paterson, New Jersey, is an “idealistic hobo” who carries with him a slip of paper with a saying from Digha Nikaya, an ancient Buddhist text. The ex-marine tells Ray that the lifestyle of a bum is the greatest in the world: “That’s all there is to it, that’s what I like to do, I’d rather hop freights around the country and cook my food out of tin cans over wood fires, than be rich and have a home or work. I’m satisfied” (118). This Jewish, ex-marine Dharma bum strengthens Ray’s spirit.

Later, after a short visit to Mexicali, Ray hitches a ride with Beaudry, a truck driver heading east. Once again, feeling tired and anxious to make it home to his mother’s house, Ray is praised for the life he is living and reassured that he is on the right path. Beaudry is fascinated with Ray, and tells him

Here I am killing myself driving this big rig back and forth from Ohio to L.A. and I make more money than you ever had in your whole life as a hobo, but you’re the one who enjoys life and not only that but you do it

without working or a whole lot of money. Now who's smart, you or me?

(128)

Beaudry's statement reveals the conflict that individuals face in a society with a prescribed structure and rules that make it difficult to truly be free. In George Orwell's 1984 the word "free," defined as "not restricted or controlled," doesn't exist in Newspeak. Beaudry's statement raises the question: "Does it exist in 1950s America?" When Beaudry and Ray separate, Beaudry returns to his home in Ohio; the home he can't enjoy because, in Ray's mind, he is not free. The obligation Beaudry has to his job, the job which pays for the house and puts food on the table for his wife and daughter, pulls him away from home for most of the year. Ray is living the life he wants, but he is still aware that he is a marginalized figure in America. Ray is consciously attempting to drown out social distractions, while accepting praise and reassurance from individuals such as the ex-marine bum and Beaudry. And, the more he can draw upon the encouragement from individuals like Beaudry, the closer he can get to his ultimate goal.

In Rocky Mount Ray spends several months doing, in his mother's opinion, absolutely nothing. However, for Ray, the time spent meditating in the woods is beneficial and necessary to his quest. He kneels in the clearing under the stars like a Buddhist monk in a temple. Ray's philosophical solitude in nature, as well as his love for it, is beginning to evolve. He screams into the night, "I let out a big Hoo, one o' clock in the morning, the dogs leaped up and exulted. I felt like yelling it to the stars" (143), a spontaneous outburst that illustrates the beginning of his realization that he is on his way to enlightenment and that nature and solitude will be an aid in this journey. In another symbolic gesture, he turns down the offer of a bedroom for a cot on the porch. His desire

to sleep outside, or close to it, adheres to the lifestyle he has now chosen. Ray, once he sets himself a routine, is now able to resume his Buddhist meditations in the woods behind his mother's home. Most of his time is spent outdoors, and in the company of dogs, especially his brother-in-law's dog, Bob, further illustrating his deliberate separation from human contact.

The first conflict Ray has is with the townspeople. 1950s Rocky Mount was as close to Andy Griffith's Mayberry as real life can get. "What do you do in those woods?" the townsfolk ask of Ray. When Ray replies that he studies, they question his age, saying he looks too old to be a college student. Typical of mainstream society at the time, the townsfolk of Rocky Mount have a definite diagram for life, and if anything seems out of place, then they feel the need to question it. Ray realizes this though, and he feels that these men "secretly wanted to go sleep in the woods, or just sit and do nothing in the woods, like I wasn't too ashamed to do" (138). However, Ray did encounter one old man who seemed to understand Ray's intentions in the woods. Ray says that the old man sounded like "he would like to try that if he had the time, or if he could get up enough nerve, and had a little rueful envy in his voice" (139). In many ways, this scene is allegorical of Ray's plight in American society. First, the questioning of Ray's activities in the woods represents the social pressure placed on an individual whose actions and behavior deviate from the accepted norm. On the other hand, the old man represents the individuals in society, though their numbers seem few in number, who can relate to Ray and his journey. Like Beaudry, the old man sees Ray's way of life as "a suggestion that there might be a life to live outside a drab routine of business, a life of wry adventure closer to their [society's] secret longings" (Woods 8). Ray is now



evolving into a Japhy figure. He embodies the Buddhist, vagabond, anti-social lifestyle that Japhy imparted to him as his teacher. And now, as a testament to his development, others, though few in number, are beginning to see Ray as not only an outsider, but a figure living a lifestyle that, although different from theirs, has a purpose.

Such a purpose is, however, lost on his family. Ray, at one point, imagines his mother lamenting, “Poor Raymond, why does he always have to hitchhike and worry me to death, why isn’t he like other men?” (132). In contrast to the euphoria Ray experiences through his meditations and his excitement when he receives a job for the coming summer as a fire lookout on Desolation Peak, his family is a source of the typical disdain he would continue to hear from the world around him. They doubted his lifestyle, everything from his actions to his beliefs to his appearance. His family would go for drives on Sundays, drives which Ray would decline, prompting them to ask, “What’s the matter with him anyway?” Happy and “nutty as a fruitcake” (142), Ray was still spending most of his time in the woods with Bob, the family dog. Bob, at one point became the focal point for an intense discussion between Ray and his family. His brother-in-law, furious with Ray to begin with, approached Ray about unchaining Bob. He told Ray he had too much money invested in the dog and that he wasn’t allowed to take him into the woods anymore. This scene is another allegorical chapter in Ray’s journey. This is one of the few times in the novel that we see Ray give in to his anger. He is generally a sanguine figure, especially at this point of his journey, but this argument over Bob the dog prompts him to lose all emotional restraint. He yells at his brother-in-law, “How would you like to be tied to a chain and cry all day like a dog?” (143). It is clear that Ray relates to the poor, shackled canine. For a long time, including the time

before he discovered Buddhism and met Japhy Ryder, Ray felt, and still does, restricted by the constraints of society. Bob represents Ray before, and during, his neophyte stages of bhikkhu development. Ray can remember a time, not long ago, when he felt shackled by the social influences around him. His brother-in-law represents the oppressive nature of society, as he attempts to force Ray to abandon his adopted lifestyle and conform to conventional social expectations.

## ENLIGHTENMENT?

*“Things don’t change, we change”*

(Henry David Thoreau, Walden)

“High” on the anticipation of spending the summer as a fire lookout on Desolation Peak, Ray heads west to meet with Japhy before he sets out for Desolation Peak and Japhy departs for Japan. Ray’s return to California is laden with a variety of problems. However, his newfound inner peace and understanding comfort him along the way. After a period of solitude and meditation in Rocky Mount, Ray once again finds himself at the mercy of the “real world.” Lost in downtown Greenville, South Carolina, Ray remarks, “I’m suddenly in hell again!” (150). He is lost in a downtown maze, representative, once again, of his difficulties in maintaining his evolving spirituality in the “real world.” Like his descent from Matterhorn and departure from Japhy, he finds himself alone and unable to fully apply the values of his new existence to the “real world.” He hitches a ride with a Southern drunkard who has immense difficulty staying on the road. “The hell with hitchhiking” (151), Ray exclaims, and he ditched the drunkard. He proceeds to ride a bus to El Paso. After these harsh experiences, Ray returns to nature and sleeps in the desert outside El Paso. And, with the realization that he was “completely alone and safe,” he enjoys “a beautiful night and the most beautiful sleep of my life” (153).

Shortly afterward, however, Ray strays from his path when he visits the “evil city” of Juarez, Mexico where he debauches himself in partying, drinking, and drug use. This time, though, he has the inner strength to resist the vices that had plagued him in the past and rectify his present course, for Ray’s Juarez experience leads him to reconfirm

the goal of his journey. He sees now, after seven months on this path, that the true source of enlightenment is necessarily grounded in solitude. He must commit to this lifestyle, and in future encounters he must “cast off the evils of the world and the city and find my true pure soul” (156). He flees Juarez (society) and once again returns to the desert (solitude) to meditate and pray. In the silence he is reminded of “something you’ve seemed to have forgotten in the stress of your days since birth” (156).

Ray leaves El Paso and heads west to be reunited with his teacher, Japhy Ryder. On the way, he hitches a ride from a traveling salesman who complains that, despite “the three hundred and sixty days out of the year that we get bright sunshine here in El Paso” (158), his wife had purchased a clothes dryer. The salesman’s attitude echoes the dissatisfaction that men like Ray and Japhy have with the consumer driven society of 1950s America. The dryer could be any home appliance, a television in particular, as it symbolizes the turn from the natural world to the suburban life commonly accepted in society at the time.

When Ray finally reaches Japhy’s shack behind Sean Monahan’s house, he is comforted by the “beautiful simplicity of Japhy’s way of living” (164). If a vagabond would ever call a place home, it would be here. During a conversation between the two friends, Ray relates his experiences back east and on the road to Japhy. Japhy, still the teacher, reminds Ray that enlightenment is achieved through actions, not words: “my Buddhism is activity” (175). In contrast to Japhy’s active Buddhist lifestyle, Ray is still adhering to his “do-nothing” (175) Buddhist practice. Watching Japhy rushing off down the hill, Ray “ambled and dreamed around” (176) on his own path. Ray is practicing meditation and prayer, but, to Japhy, it is more important to adopt the lifestyle in addition

to the philosophy. This further reveals the teacher-student dynamic between the two men, but it also shows that they are still “two, strange dissimilar marks on the same path” (176). However, their similarities are fully evident when they are among other people, particularly their friends who all share some aspect of their marginalized existence.

On the third day of Japhy’s farewell party, he, prior to his departure for Japan, and Ray sneak away from the festivities to go hiking. This is an opportunity to be in nature again, one last time before both men depart on separate physical and spiritual journeys. Back in their element, they engage in mutual instruction and dream of a future as wandering teachers. In contrast to the superficial materialism of mainstream society, Japhy is inspired by nature:

The closer you get to real matter, rock air fire and wood, boy, the more spiritual the world is. All these people thinking they’re hardheaded materialistic, practical types, they don’t know shit about matter, their heads are full of dreamy ideas and notions. (206)

Japhy’s remarks reveal his disillusionment with, and rejection of, the corporate, materialistic world below them, and it further strengthens Japhy’s resolve, and, in turn, serves as yet another reassurance for Ray. The first sentence of the passage represents Japhy’s insistence on the importance of nature in an individual’s quest for enlightenment and discovery of the self. Nature is real; it is organic. The matter that he describes, “rock air fire and wood,” represent the four elements of nature and the aspects of existence that truly *matter*, in contrast to materialistic individuals clamoring to stake their claim in suburban America. The promise of a squared lot in the suburbs was the 1950s equivalent of forty acres and a mule, though the scale had been reduced to a fifth of an acre and a

golden retriever. It is ironic that Japhy would accuse these individuals of being dream-filled; that is what they would have said about him and his revolution. Still dreaming of his rucksack revolution, Japhy tells Ray,

You and I ain't out to bust anybody's skull, or cut someone's throat in an economic way, we've dedicated ourselves to prayer for all sentient beings and when we're strong enough we'll really be able to do it, too, like the old [Buddhist] saints. (211)

Japhy once again expresses his distaste for 1950s American society, as he criticizes the corporate workforce – the bankers and corporate associates who will do anything to claw their way up the ladder of success. He emphasizes the romantic nature of individuals like Ray, Princess, Henry Morley, and all of their friends. Though they are facing impending, and separate, journeys, Japhy feels that when they return from their respective trips they will each be in a position to enlighten others. Japhy further notes Ray's progress on his path to enlightenment. Despite some setbacks, Ray has made two cross country trips after his formative ascent of Matterhorn and his spiritual cleansing in the woods of Rocky Mount. Japhy is unrelenting in his dreams of a rucksack revolution. Like any revolutionary, he has a fervent devotion to the future he wants to see come to fruition. Ray has not reached Japhy's level at this point, but he is close. So close in fact, he is on his way to follow the same route Japhy had previously taken up the trail to Desolation Peak.

“Now, as though Japhy's finger were pointing me the way, I started north to my mountain,” Ray utters to himself as he says goodbye to Sean Monahan and his wife. He is beginning his trek north to Washington State. In a moment of melancholy reflection on

Japhy's departure to Japan, Ray seems to channel Japhy and his social criticisms. Grabbing a small bag of peanuts that Japhy left behind for him because it was an important part of a hike to have an adequate supply of food, Ray reflects,

Japhy was always dead serious about food, and I wished the whole world was dead serious about food instead of silly rockets and machines and explosives using everybody's food money to blow their heads off anyway.

(217)

In his attack on the Cold War and a nationalistic preoccupation with militarism, Ray clearly echoes Japhy's social criticism. On the road, Ray is "hiking like a Chinese saint" (218), and as he approaches the valley of the Cascades he rejoices, saying "I couldn't see them [the mountains] anymore, but now I was beginning to feel them" (226). His alignment with nature represents an attachment to the elemental world. It also symbolizes his success in finding the ability to remove himself from society in order to progress on his path to enlightenment. However, he has one final test before his journey is complete.

Ray's ascent up the path to Desolation Peak is analogous to his first climb up Matterhorn. The main difference, though, is Ray's success in reaching the summit by himself. On the Matterhorn climb, Ray watched from below as Japhy reached the summit. But, the summit is now his, as he resides in sole possession of the peak. His earlier failure to reach the allegorical, and literal, summit of Matterhorn is the result of his neophyte mountain climbing status, as well as his role as a student. Ray's initial failure, however, was a necessary part of his education and development. And now, due to the tutelage of Japhy, Ray has come full circle. Everything Ray passes he attributes to

Japhy: “And this is Japhy’s lake, and these are Japhy’s mountains” (229), and now it will all be his. On the first climb he was literally in Japhy’s boots, but now he is metaphorically in Japhy’s shoes: he has Japhy’s former job, stays in Japhy’s old cabin, and he now possesses Japhy's ability and wisdom.

John Tytell notes that the Transcendentalists played a vital role in the development of Jack Kerouac as a writer, most notably, “his aggressive idealism, his [...] distrust of machines and industry, his desire to return to the origins of man’s relations to the land” (4). As he was atop Matterhorn, Ray is initially fearful of his immediate surroundings atop Desolation Peak. The “Chinese cabin” he was to inhabit all summer was “too dark and dismal to like” (231). Moreover, Ray also realizes that he is now truly alone. He has finally achieved the complete and absolute solitude he had sought since that September day with the St. Theresa bum. On Matterhorn, he was accompanied by Japhy and Morley. In Rocky Mount he had to live around his family and the local townfolk. But now, solitude was his. In the section entitled “Solitude” in Walden, Thoreau rejoices in his relationship with nature: “I go and come with a strange liberty in Nature, a part of herself,” and, “all the elements are unusually congenial to me” (103). After his initial fear subsides, Ray, like Thoreau, immerses himself in the natural world around him. Benedict Giomo explains that this submission to nature is a breaking down of the “boundary between ego and world,” resulting in a “lightness of being” (189). Ray rejoices, “Lo, in the morning I woke up and it was beautiful blue sunshine sky and I went out in my alpine yard” (233). As a further indication of his transcendence of society, Ray looks down upon the “snow-covered rocks and virgin lakes and high timber,” and instead of seeing the world below, he sees the “sea of marshmallow clouds flat as a roof and



extending miles in every direction” (234). By surrendering to nature, Ray is able to further remove himself from the world he left behind. This is evident in his allusion to the fact that he can no longer see the world below him.

And now, feeling an ownership of his surroundings, he boasts, “It was all mine, not another pair of human eyes in the world were looking at this immense cycloramic universe of matter” (235). Thoreau shares this sentiment with Ray:

I have my horizon bounded by woods all to myself; a distant view of the railroad where it touches the pond on the one hand, and of the fence which skirts the woodland road on the other. But for the most part it is as solitary where I live as on the prairies. It is as much Asia or Africa as New England. I have, as it were, my own sun and moon and stars, and a little world all to myself. (104)

Both Thoreau and Ray Smith have a world to themselves, free from social constraint, laws, or other individuals to impede their progress. Thoreau describes the benefit of solitude, and he also states that he feels that such solitude is necessary for men to achieve solidarity of the mind as well as physical being. When confronted with the observation, “I should think you would feel lonesome down there,” Thoreau replies, “Why should I feel lonely?” and “What sort of space is that which separates a man from his fellows and makes him solitary?” (106). Of course, Thoreau is speaking metaphorically about mental, rather than physical space, or as Joy Ackerman explains, Thoreau is asserting that “people must live and work in the place most important to their various natures” (27). Ackerman makes the case for all individuals to search for some type of solitude in resolving such an issue. Such a search leads Japhy Ryder to reject and live outside of a

thriving corporate metropolis, both physically and mentally. If an individual's ideology conflicts with the prevailing social ideology, he or she should identify a place where he or she will be free to pursue their intellectual and philosophical endeavors.

In his conclusion to Walden, Thoreau stresses the importance of travel. However, once again speaking metaphorically, the travel he recommends is a mental voyage. He says, "The universe is wider than our views of it" (252), thus describing the "expanse" of the individual mind. He even goes so far as to say that the immense size of the nation of Russia is nothing when compared to the size and grandeur of the mind: "Every man is the lord of a realm which the earthly empire of the czar is but a petty state" (253).

Japhy stressed the importance of discovering one's self to Ray, and Thoreau likewise informs us to "obey the precept of the old philosopher and know thyself" (255), an allusion to Socrates. Ray Smith, having achieved solitude, and having achieved, in his words, "the vision of the freedom of eternity which was mine forever" (235), is eventually ready to return to the world which he left behind. Desolation Peak was a solitary and enlightening experience for Ray Smith. However, the question remains, has he achieved enlightenment? Ray feels his journey toward enlightenment has been completed, but, like the Buddhist sutra says, "When you get to the top of a mountain, keep climbing." Giamo states that Ray does, in fact, achieve "an aesthetic and idealized form of enlightenment [...] in which dualism is transcended and serenity prevails. There are no longer any profound answers, because there are no longer any searching questions" (190). Ray has achieved all he can in solitude, and now he must apply all he has learned in the society he left behind. It is possible to imagine that Ray's journey will never end. He is a new soul with a new mind navigating the world. And, although his

enlightenment is mental, he will now be faced with physical and social challenges in negotiating the disparity between his own values and the ever changing landscape of a corporate, materialistic, consumer-driven society.

## CONCLUSION

The life of the marginalized figure has always been an intriguing and dramatic literary subject. For individuals such as Japhy Ryder and Ray Smith who intentionally set out on a path on the fringes of society, it is interesting to examine the causes and measures they take to achieve this social marginalization. Colin Wilson's The Outsider explores the psyche of the Outsider, his effect on society, and society's effect on him. Citing such literary examples as Hesse's Harry Haller, Camus' Mersault, and Dostoyevsky's "Insect Man," Wilson investigates the outsider's conflicts with society, including dislocation, transcendence, and introverted nihilism and despair. In Jon Krakauer's Into the Wild, protagonist Christopher McCandless, a graduate of Emory University, leaves behind a life of privilege and a future of wealth for an uncertain journey along the West coast and into the Alaska. Deliberately assuming the status of an "outsider," he gives away his savings to OXFAM, abandons his car, and leaves all material possessions behind. Several months later, his body is found in the Alaskan wilderness. Like Siddhartha and Ray Smith, Christopher, although in a different era, was an individual who chose a path of marginalization and solitude to achieve a goal of pure spiritual enlightenment. His story, though unfortunate, is an illustration of how far an individual will go in order to achieve an understanding of his or her existence.

David Halberstam calls the Beats "the pioneers of what would become the counterculture" (295) and, further, as "poets in a land of philistines, men seeking spiritual destinies rather than material ones" (296). The Beats did, in fact, initiate change in a society that oppressed their ideals and beliefs. The Dharma Bums dramatizes this struggle through the journey of Ray Smith. John E. Hart feels that the novel portrays

man's rebellion against social constraints, often exhibited through sex, drink, and drugs, and it reflects the unconscious and deeper longings that every generation has had to earn and perhaps relearn: the freedom and independence of self-achieved submission. (61)

The Beats adopted a tribal mentality meant to spark an uprising among the few, which in turn would lead to enlightenment for the masses. The counterculture developed by the Beats carried over into 1960s America, when a new culture emerged, that of the hippies of the 1960s. In summing up the Beat's influence on the future, David Halberstam writes, "Their [the Beats] success, above all, was a sure sign that the old order was changing. The walls were tumbling down" (307). The transcendent aspects of nature and the literary blend of urban life and nature evident in the work of the Beats was a radical development in 1950s American literature. As The Dharma Bums illustrates, this romantic vision of the Beats led had a significant influence on the counterculture of the 1960s, which involved many key aspects found in Beat literature: "pacifism, ecological concern, Eastern philosophy, the inner self" (Woods 13).

We can't be sure if Jack Kerouac, as Ray Smith, will succeed in the world he has returned to. At points along his journey he both overcame and succumbed to personal vices such as drinking and partying and, as Thoreau says, "Things don't change, we change" (259). Kerouac's mind and soul may be atop Desolation Peak, but he must now physically reenter the world he left behind: "the world in which I [Ray Smith] would return" (238). Social pressure and external influences will always challenge Ray, but now he has the knowledge and understanding to lead the type of life he set out to when he jumped on the gondola on that September day.

Jack Kerouac was, as David Halberstam labels him, a “divided man” (300). On one hand he was the “heroic prototype of the modern hipster nonconformist who lives on the road, unburdened by family and responsibility” and, on the other hand, “he was unable to shed the deeply rooted fears and prejudices of his childhood and his parents” (300). In the collection On the Bus, which chronicles the Acid trips of Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters aboard the bus “Furthur” (driven by Neal Cassady), there is a legendary meeting of Kesey and Kerouac in 1964. As Halberstam states, “the hippies saw Kerouac as the grandfather of their movement,” (302) and to Kesey and his followers, this was a chance to sit down with their idol. However, like many, and like the America Kerouac removed himself from, they were searching for Sal Paradise or Ray Smith, a fictional character who no longer existed. Instead, Kesey and his followers met Jean-Louis Lebris de Kerouac, the child born to Catholic French-Canadian parents in suburban Lowell, Massachusetts. Instead of a revolutionary, they met a conservative man who supported the government and the United States’ role in Vietnam. They met a drunken, surly, withdrawn individual, not the freewheeling, cross-country traveler seen in On the Road and The Dharma Bums.

In his life, Kerouac struggled with personal vices and philosophical dilemmas, as described in The Dharma Bums. He had difficulty with fame and ultimately destroyed himself with alcohol. The Dharma Bums represents Jack Kerouac’s efforts to situate himself in the landscape of America in the 1950s. Thus, we cannot overlook the significant importance of Kerouac’s “nature novel.” The novel also places Kerouac in the long line of American writers who search for meaning, whether it be enlightenment, an understanding of their place in society, or knowledge of the Self, in the natural world.

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"When you get to the top of a mountain, keep climbing." The saying made my hair stand on end; it had been such cute poetry sitting on Alvah's straw mats. Now it was enough to make my heart pound and my heart bleed for being born at all. "By God you're right, all those sedentary bums sitting around on pillows hearing the cry of the triumphant mountain smasher, they don't deserve it." It had been like when you're a little boy and have spent a whole day rambling alone in the woods and fields and on the dusk homeward walk you did it all with your eyes to the ground, scuffling, thinking, whistling, like little Indian boys must feel when they follow their striding fathers from Russian River to Shasta two hundred years ago. Now listen to me, when you have learned the Dharma of the Buddhas of old and yearned, to sit down with the truth, under a lonesome tree, in Yuma Arizony, or anywhere you be, don't thank me for telling, what was told me, this is the wheel a-turnin, this is the reason I be: Mind is the Maker, for, no reason at all, for all this creation, created to fall (98-99). The disciple experienced sudden enlightenment. "Simple shit," I said. "But supposing you're reborn in the lower hells and have hot redhot balls of iron shoved down your throat by devils" [Japhy said]. "[Hell is only] a dream cooked up by hysterical monks who didn't understand Buddha's peace under the Bo Tree or for that matter Chris's peace looking down on the heads of his tormentors and forgiving them." Jack Kerouac The Dharma Bums. Dedicated to Han Shan. Chapter 1. Hopping a freight out of Los Angeles at high noon one day in late September 1955 I got on a gondola and lay down with my duffel bag under my head and my knees crossed and contemplated the clouds as we rolled north to Santa Barbara. The little bum in the gondola solidified all my beliefs by warming up to the wine and talking and finally whipping out a tiny slip of paper which contained a prayer by Saint Teresa announcing that after her death she will return to the earth by showering it with roses from heaven, forever, for all living creatures. The Dharma Bums, Jack Kerouac. Gary Snyder was and still is the original Dharma Bum. "And that's what they mean by the saying, When you get to the top of a mountain keep climbing, Smith. "Dammit that yodel of triumph of yours was the most beautiful thing I ever heard in my life. I wish I had a tape recorder to take it down. "Those things aren't made to be heard by the people below," says Japhy dead serious. "By God you're right, all those sedentary bums sitting around on pillows hearing the cry of the triumphant mountain smasher, they don't deserve it. But when I looked up and saw you running down that mountain I suddenly understood everything. "Get everything you need to know about Enlightenment and Nature in The Dharma Bums. Analysis, related quotes, theme tracking. In the semi-autobiographical novel The Dharma Bums, Jack Kerouac recounts his travels around North America in 1955-1956, focusing particularly on his friendship with the eccentric Buddhist environmentalist Gary Snyder. At his publisher's request, Kerouac changed everyone's names in the book, so he calls Snyder Japhy Ryder and he refers to himself as Ray Smith. Even though Ray spends much of the book hitchhiking around and getting drunk, he is really on a dedicated quest for mental liberation and spiritual enlightenment. For instance, he had often heard the Buddhist proverb "When you get to the top of a mountain, keep climbing."