1975

End of the continent, the paradox of spontaneity in two novels by Jack Kerouac

Robert E. Welch

Iowa State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation

Welch, Robert E., "End of the continent, the paradox of spontaneity in two novels by Jack Kerouac" (1975). retrospective Theses and Dissertations. 16184.
https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd/16184

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Iowa State University Capstones, Theses and Dissertations at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Retrospective Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
End of the continent: The paradox of spontaneity in two novels by Jack Kerouac

by

Robert Edward Welch

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of The Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: English

Signatures have been redacted for privacy

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa

1975
There is a line in Jack Kerouac's *On The Road*. It is innocuous by itself. It is uttered by Sal Paradise, referring to being in San Francisco. The line is "Whoo, Frisco nights, the end of the continent and the end of doubt, all dull doubt and tomfoolery, good-by" (p. 166). It is one of the many examples available of Sal's exuberance as he goes through his "life on the road" (p. 5). But in the line is a paradox which makes up so much of Sal's and Ray's (of The Dharma Bums) personality. The line celebrates the end of a journey and suggests that now would be a good time to become permanent, that San Francisco contains all that Sal might want. But we know this is not true and that Sal and Dean continue to criss-cross the country and eventually go down to Mexico together.

Contradictions are a major component of Kerouac's work in *On The Road* and in *The Dharma Bums*. Why does Sal, who is seeking a more satisfying life in his freedom with Dean, keep returning home to the restrictions of living with his aunt? Why does Sal acknowledge Dean as his brother several times, yet reject him at the end of the novel? Why does Sal keep following Dean across the continent, if he does—as he says he does—really want to marry and to settle down? And why does Ray, who is content in his own Buddhist beliefs, begin to follow Japhy's Zen Buddhism? Why does Ray try to mix Western
Christianity and materialism with Buddhism? And finally, why are Sal and Ray so infatuated with Dean and Japhy that they change their plans in life, follow the two younger men's example, yet eventually put aside their example? These contradictions are really paradoxes, seeming contradictions, for they can be understood by a close reading of each book. The paradoxes all revolve around one theme: the main character's search for values which will give him a satisfying way to live.

In both books the search for satisfying values to live by is, itself, the central concern. The search leads Sal and Ray to the idea of spontaneity. Sal is drawn to it by his infatuation with Dean's way of living, and Ray is drawn to it by his interest in Buddhist meditation and his infatuation with Japhy.

Kerouac himself identified two kinds of beats, the "hot" and the "cool." These two forms of beat are based on the two forms of spontaneity, "hot" and "cool." Sal tries on the value of "hot" spontaneity. He takes Dean as his model and tries to make spontaneity part of his way of living. Ray takes on the value of "cool" spontaneity. He puts his life into the meditative life of a Buddhist, and takes Japhy as his model.

In On The Road, the method of the search takes the form of a master-disciple relationship between Sal and Dean. Dean is the master, the man who lives spontaneously; Sal is the
disciple, eager to learn. Early in the book, Sal says, "The only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time" (p. 9). Dean takes Sal with him on many trips across the country, even traveling across the continent to pick Sal up for another adventure. The two men share breakneck drives across the country during which they have marathon talk sessions. They pursue sex and enjoy jazz. Through all this, Dean is initiating Sal into spontaneity. (Dean at one point calls this spontaneity "IT".) This is the "hot" form of spontaneity, the "crazy, talkative shining eyed nut, trying to make it."4

In The Dharma Bums, another master-disciple relationship is established. Again it is between the main character, here called Ray, and a younger man, Japhy Ryder. (Dean was also younger than Sal.) Japhy introduces the city boy, Ray, to the mountains and the woods. Here, the journeys used as the vehicle of initiation and instruction are not fast car trips, but rather solitary walks in the wilds and mountain climbs. Japhy teaches Ray about how to climb, about the purity of these kinds of trips (having the right kinds of food and equipment, keeping the emphasis on individual participation with nature, yet also using the walk to get into the soul of your fellow traveler). Ray acknowledges that Japhy changed his direction in life, he says that Japhy "did eventually
stick something in my crystal head that made me change my plans in life" (p. 130). With Japhy, Ray finds the "cool" form of spontaneity, "the bearded laconic sage." One of Ray's descriptions of Japhy, as he enters Japhy's spare, ascetic little home is this: "I . . . looked in and saw him . . . sitting crosslegged . . . with his spectacles on, making him look old and scholarly and wise" (p. 17).

But in both novels, within each form of spontaneity, there is a discrepancy between Sal's and Ray's wanting to be spontaneous and their eventual putting aside of spontaneity.

Both Sal and Ray truly want to be spontaneous; Sal in the "hot" fashion of Dean, and Ray in the "cool" manner of Japhy. Spontaneity is the value they want to replace values they feel are dead. Yet, each man puts aside the spontaneity he originally desired. Sal becomes increasingly dissatisfied with Dean and the way he lives. His dissatisfaction peaks when Dean abandons him for a third time in Mexico City (after having abandoned him earlier in San Francisco and in Denver). At the end of the novel, when Dean comes from San Francisco to bring Sal and Laura back, Sal asks why he came so soon, and sends Dean back alone. Sal has decided to put his future in his relationship with Laura, and not in Dean's spontaneity. Ray first becomes dissatisfied with Japhy when he mentions that he does not want to hear any more of Ray's "word descriptions." Japhy says he wants to be "enlightened by action"
(p. 133). Ray had just achieved an enlightenment for himself and was eager to share it with Japhy. They later make up, Japhy admitting that Ray is right, but Ray says he will not tell any more of his "words" to Japhy. The two men continue a close friendship, but Ray increasingly withdraws from his uncritical infatuation with Japhy. He can't understand why Japhy objects so strongly to some involvement with materialism—like Ray's mother at her kitchen with its appliances—which Ray says show a good heart, and why Japhy rejects Christ automatically for Buddha. Aren't they really the same God under different names, says Ray. At the end of the novel, after his idyll as a fire lookout—the perfect place for satori according to Japhy—Ray is eager to rejoin the material world.

Each character is truly in pursuit of spontaneity. The desire for it is genuine. Yet each eventually withdraws from it. This seems to be a contradiction. Why do they stop pursuing it, if their interest is genuine? They stop because they retain values which do not permit them to attain spontaneity.

The values which both Sal and Ray retain are: 1) work, 2) a structured home (which relieves them of responsibility for the home and themselves) and 3) order. The last two values are held to facilitate the value placed on work. These values are not shown explicitly by the events of the novels, but they are held by both men. They provide the underlying
motivation, for each story is told by a man who is a writer first, above all things, and who sets down in the stories the events of his life for his readers. Naturally enough, then, work is the most important value for both Sal and Ray. The other two values, home and order, are held because they are necessary to the work of these two writers. The values of work, a structured home and order are satisfying to Sal and Ray. It is the other external values of the society as a whole which they can not accept or are not comfortable with. They can not accept the materialism, consumerism and meaningless productivity at the expense of the development of the individual self in the society.

Spontaneity, or what the beats as a whole and Kerouac in particular meant by spontaneity, was seen by Sal and Ray as a means to undo the meaninglessness of consumer America, and as a means to restore to the individuals what society exacted from them as members of society. What spontaneity is is never really defined. It is allied with primitivism. Norman Podhoretz in his article "The Know-Nothing Bohemians" sees primitivism as a key part of the beat writers.

The plain truth is that the primitivism of the Beat Generation serves first of all as a cover for an anti-intellectualism so bitter that it makes the ordinary American's hatred of eggheads seem positively benigh.7

Earlier in the same essay Podhoretz distinguishes between the bohemianism of earlier times, such as the bohemianism of the
"lost generation", and the bohemianism of the beats.

It is hostile to civilization; it worships primitivism, instinct, energy, "blood." To the extent it has intellectual interests at all, they run to mystical doctrines, irrationalist philosophies, and left-wing Reichianism.

*****

Their predilection for bop language is a way of demonstrating solidarity with the primitive vitality and spontaneity they find in jazz. 8

I think Podhoretz is correct here in identifying primitivism as a basic component of the beats as a whole, and I think it applies to Kerouac in particular. One only needs to think about Sal talking about the migrant workers he lived with when he was with Terry, and of the poor Mexicans he saw along the road on the trip to Mexico City, or of Sal talking about being white and wishing he were black, to realize Kerouac's own concern with the primitive.

Spontaneity's alliance to primitivism is established chiefly through the beat man's idealization of the life of peoples they think are closer to the primitive state. For Kerouac, this includes Negroes and Mexican-Americans, and especially the Mexican Indians Sal and Dean encounter on their trip through Mexico. Sal, in Denver and feeling himself "a white man disillusioned," wishes he were a Negro, so that he could escape his "white ambitions."

Wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough nights (p. 148).
Somehow, for Kerouac, the Negro, with his handicaps of racially limited education and opportunities, escapes the effect of a too-integral involvement with civilization and culture. For Kerouac, civilization and culture corrupt some basic good in man. Primitive peoples, by their reduced or nonparticipation in our culture and civilization, retain their primitive power: their spontaneity.

Spontaneity is the primitive's response to the world, and it has more value for the beats, and for Kerouac, than rational discourse and all the accumulations of ages past which we call culture, especially the rapidly growing consumer culture.

Primitive spontaneity is a visceral action and reaction to the demands of the world, specifically nature--primitive man needs to eat and to survive. He fights for his food, fights the weather, and fights animals or other primitive men who threaten him. For the beats, the ways that primitive man lives, the values he holds, because of operating on such an elemental level--action directly affecting survival (living or dying)--are more important. Somehow they are more real. At least, this is the way the beats view primitive man and his values.9

For the beats, though, spontaneity is a means to get back to the true values they feel the primitive man has. It is not an attempt to ape his life style--the beats were insistent on being up on certain of the higher forms of culture
e.g., poetry, jazz. The beats have no interest in living in squalor or having to fight for their existence. But they do seek to approach life much the way they see that the primitive man does. They seek to weigh the alternatives modern life offers them in terms of a simple formula—how does this enhance the basic survival of the self? Here the beats shift from the primitive's focus on survival of the physical self to survival of the psychological self.

It is here, in the stress on survival of the psychological self, that the beats place their high value on spontaneity. The return to an intuitive reaction to the demands of the world—a kind of visceral reaction of the mind and soul—increases the beat man's ability to maintain the survival of the psychological (meaning, for them, primarily, the emotional) self in the corrupting, complex world.

Modern society places a high value on maintaining itself. The individual is expected to orient himself to society, to give up parts of his self (that is, much of his individuality) if the society demands it, so society can continue to function. The beats see this as an assault on the emotional self and reject this orientation. Instead they try to force society to orient itself to them by denying society's overwhelming importance and values. Instead of dealing with the world in objective and chronological time, they shift to subjective, qualitative time. Bernard Duffey, in his article, "The Three
Kerouac's work shares with much other modern writing a relapse into the world of subjective and qualitative time. To "dig" in beat talk, is to allow something to fill one's time-consciousness. By this means, the whole world built on event, feeling, thought, and motive in time is replaced by a world in which all these are themselves time and are the only stuff of human apprehension and of life itself.\textsuperscript{10}

Spontaneity, or IT as "hot" spontaneity is called in \textit{On the Road}, is not ecstasy, but rather a matter of orientation to life and living. Each of us must orient ourselves to something larger than ourselves—the world. We must accommodate ourselves to it. The things which the world places value on we must place value on, or risk not being able to function in the world. We must see that we have food, shelter, clothing—the world owes us nothing. The man who is spontaneous does not orient himself to the world, but forces the world to orient itself to him. He does this by becoming so involved with what he is doing, be it playing the saxophone, talking, drinking, or taking drugs, that his concerns become solely what he is doing. His normal concerns of food, shelter and clothing fall away. For the period in which he is truly spontaneous, these and the other concerns of the world are not his. The world then is forced to take account of him, forced to orient itself to him and provide for him. The world here, in providing for him, does this through the society in which the spontaneous man finds himself. The man no longer orients himself to that society; that society (not quite as unfeeling
as the world as a whole) must orient itself to him and provide for him.

The truly spontaneous man is solely concerned with the survival of his emotional self. By drawing into himself, by forcing the world to orient itself to him, he is asserting his being. The beats' conception of primitive man was that, by his reduced involvement with the civilized world, the primitive man was capable of a more intimate relationship with his world, and hence, with himself as a facet or extension of the world. The beat counterpart to this calls for modern man to "dig" himself, to go into himself and replace the whole world built on "event, feeling, thought and motive," as Duffey puts it, with his own time. The jazz tenorman in On The Road provides a good illustration. Dean tries to explain to Sal what the IT is that the tenorman has.

He starts the first chorus, then lines up his ideas, people, yeah, yeah, but get it, and then he rises to his fate and has to blow equal to it. All of a sudden some where in the middle of the chorus he gets it—everybody looks up and knows; they listen; he picks it up and carries. Time stops. He's filling empty space with the substance of our lives, confessions of his bellybottom strain, remembrance of ideas, rehashes of old blowing. He has to blow across bridges and come back and do it with such infinite feeling soul-exploratory for the tune of the moment that everybody knows it's not the tune that counts but IT (p. 170).

In this speech, Kerouac gives Dean the clearest expression available of what the IT is which Dean and Sal pursue, and also what spontaneity is and what it means. With spontaneity
it is not the tune that counts, or the means you use to reach the IT, but the IT which is all important. The IT is the spontaneous moment or experience. The IT reaffirms the survival of the emotional and psychological self. For Kerouac and the beats, this is the quality which will save man from the corrupting influence of modern American society. This quality, spontaneity, will ally them with the primitive, which for the beats is a good.

Dean is at his most spontaneous when he is talking. During this jazz scene Dean himself reaches the IT through his own talking. What is important is not what he is saying, but that by talking, by saying what he is saying, he is taking himself out of the world of "event, feeling", and "thought" and into the world of his own time. This world reaffirms his self.

Dean continually searches so that he may repeatedly encounter a new IT. For him, this necessitates his highway-blazing, lover-blazing life style. It also means a great deal of chaos as he shucks off his responsibilities (ironically, gained as he pursues spontaneity) and continues to attempt to reach IT. At the end, Dean's life is such a shambles that he can not reach IT anymore. Sal notes that Dean can not talk anymore. Talking was Dean's best, perhaps only, means to IT. Sal progressively shrinks from his pursuit of Dean's hot spontaneity as he sees the wreck of Dean's life strewn about
Dean--the three wives, the children--and the wreck which Dean becomes--at the novel's end unable to talk, only capable of hoping from foot to foot and mumbling phrases.

Recognizing that Sal and Ray are searching for new values to replace what they feel are dead values, and recognizing that both characters will not give up their belief in the values of work, home, and order, allows us to resolve many of the contradictions of On The Road and The Dharma Bums into the paradoxes that they are. Understanding the paradox of spontaneity also allows us to see the progression in the character type which Kerouac wrote about, the beat character who goes from "hot" to "cool." This progression dramatizes one of the major concerns of Kerouac the writer: the search for new values to replace dead or unsatisfying values, and to see the development of Kerouac the writer through his grappling with the paradox of spontaneity in his own work.

The two novels, while concerned with different characters, really form a sequence in the development of a particular type of character, a beat character as Kerouac would call him, as well as reflecting the development of the writer Kerouac himself, through the autobiographical element in both books. There is no one-to-one correspondence of Sal and Ray's personality. They are not the same character and I do not
intend to identify them as such. They are, however, similar, insofar as they are linked by shared values, by their ages, by their beat approach to life, and by their autobiographical reflection of the development of Kerouac himself. There is an unfilled gap between the two characters and two novels which does not allow us to see a continuous development of Sal into someone like Ray. There are chapters, or perhaps a whole book, missing between Sal's rejection of Dean and his "hot" spontaneity and Ray's acceptance of the Buddhist way of living. Aside from events in the two novels corresponding to the events in Kerouac's life, we have, to fill in the gap, Kerouac's own admission that he started out as a "hot" beat, but "cooled it" in Buddhist meditation.

Sal in On The Road begins the novel fresh from the "weary split-up" with his wife and "the feeling that everything was dead" (p. 5). He is looking for something which will restore life to his deadness. His life with his aunt, his campus activities, and even his work do not seem to hold much promise in his life, but he meets a young man who does seen to hold promise for him: Dean Moriarty. And so the search begins.

Sal reaches out for the value of spontaneity which he sees in the way Dean lives. He reaches out for it, but he cannot truly grasp it. He still retains his belief in the value of work, home and order. Ray of The Dharma Bums is a
further stage of the development of the character Sal. *On The Road* ends with Sal's final rejection of Dean's way of living and his values—-he has seen what it brings and how it denies him the values he wants. Ray has found something to replenish his gone belief. Based on the similarity of events in both books to Kerouac's own life, we can assume the gone belief is in something like Dean's spontaneity and "hot" spontaneous approach to life. Ray at one point refers to his "recent years of drinking and disappointment" (p. 62). Ray finds new meaning in a "cooler" form of spontaneity (or beatness): Buddhist meditation.

But Ray too becomes dissatisfied with his life of Buddhist meditation and tells his story from the perspective of having been through the events of the story (as Sal did) and now being "a little hypocritical about my lip-service and a little tired and cynical. Because now I am grown so old and neutral" (p. 6). But he goes on to tell how it was when,

> I really believed in the reality of charity and kindness and humility and zeal and neutral tranquillity and wisdom and ecstasy, and I believed that I was an oldtime bhikku in modern clothes wandering the world . . . in order to turn the wheel of the True Meaning, or Dharma, and gain merit for myself as a future Buddha (Awakener) and as a future Hero in Paradise (p. 6).

The experiences, then, though not fulfilling in the end, are an important part of the process of being a writer for Ray, as they were for Sal. The stories they tell are important to both men, as the events of Kerouac's life on which these
stories are modeled were important to him.

Kerouac's characters in both novels depict a continuum of spontaneous action, from Dean Moriarty who is all spontaneous, to Sal and Ray occupying a middle ground, who embrace spontaneity desperately in some scenes and with disgust in others, and to Japhy Ryder, who channels his urge for spontaneity into a Zen discipline. Kerouac, as can be seen through Sal, can't accept the consequences of total spontaneity (as seen in Dean); but through his novels On The Road and The Dharma Bums he explores the alternatives to total spontaneity that he sees possible. He gives a full and, at the beginning, sympathetic portrait of Dean and his approach. Sal and Ray depict the middle ground of men who try to be spontaneous and who still try to function in this society (as Dean rarely does). Sal tries the "hot" kind of spontaneity, but finds it unsatisfactory. In his rejection of Dean--more of Dean's approach to living than of Dean himself--and in his binding of his future in his plans with Laura, Sal gives up the "hot" form of spontaneity. Ray tries the "cool" form of spontaneity. Here the character seems to have more success. "Cool" spontaneity seems to be compatible with the values which he will not give up. Ray, at the end of the novel, seems content within himself. But all this is thrown into ambiguity by the comment at the book's outset, that all this took place when Ray really believed in charity, kindness and humility. Now,
as he begins to tell us his story he is tired, cynical, old and neutral.

On The Road begins with Sal's placing of the events in their proper time perspective: "With the coming of Dean Moriarty began the part of my life you could call my life on the road" (p. 9). Sal's beginning of his life on the road, a traditional metaphor for a journey into the self exploring both the self and its relationship with the world in which it lives, marks the end of an unsatisfactory period in his life, a period which made him an apt candidate for the promise which both spontaneity and Dean seem to embody for him. He had just gotten over a serious illness, which he says he will not go into and which "had something to do with the miserably weary split-up [with his wife] and my feeling that everything was dead" (p. 5). Early in the opening pages he says "Somewhere along the line I knew there'd be girls, visions, everything; somewhere along the line the pearl would be handed to me" (p. 11). Sal is leaving on his first trip west because his "life around the campus had reached the completion of its cycle and was stultified" (p. 10), because he is a writer and wants new experiences and because he sees in Dean a "long-lost brother" (p. 10). Sal says of his urge to leave despite his aunt's warnings of trouble, "I could hear a new call and see a new horizon" (p. 11).
Sal is definitely looking for something. That something is a way to live, a way that is satisfying and a way that will serve him as a writer. Dean represented a promise to Sal. He represented something of what Sal had lost in his life. He says Dean reminded him of some long lost brother, and then clarifies this by saying that Dean made him remember his boyhood in the dye-dumps, swimming holes and riversides of Patterson and Passaic. In Dean's "excited way of speaking I heard again the voices of old companions and brothers under the bridge, among the motorcycles, along the wash-lined neighborhood and drowsy doorsteps of afternoon where boys played guitars while their older brothers worked in the mills. All my other current friends were 'intellectuals,'" (p. 10). Dean reminded him of the richness and simpleness of his life as a boy, a life which had value--at least as Sal remembers it. The juxtaposition here of all his childhood memories with their simple pleasures with the line: "All my other current friends were 'intellectuals,'" demonstrates Sal's unstated belief that the values associated with his current life (the split-up, his life on campus) are meretricious.

Dean is the promise for Sal of spontaneity, of living simply and fully--a life with value for the self--like the Mexican poor they later encounter. Dean was someone and his way of living was something which promised to take away the claptrap of life, things like the split-up with his wife and
"the feeling that everything was dead." In Dean's way of living, life was simple, full and was life.

What Sal is looking for in Dean is Dean's way of living. Dean characterizes that living when he answers Sal's question about what IT is, referring to the jazz tenorman. IT is when "time stops" (p. 170). IT is "filling empty space with the substance of our lives" (p. 170). IT provides the affirmation of the emotional and psychological self which Sal needs.

But, as I have already mentioned, Sal really doesn't achieve the affirmation of his emotional and psychological self through Dean's kind of spontaneity. Two incidents, early in the novel, show the ambivalence Sal feels toward "hot" spontaneity. The first is when Sal and Remi are working as guards at the barracks. Sal is confronted with his impulse to be spontaneous and his unrelinquished desire to have order. The older cops on duty run a tight barracks, everything is by the book. These men enjoy busting a drunk or beating up on a man. Sal doesn't. He'd rather try to reason with the offender to keep order and quiet; Sal even takes a drink with them. His approach is this: 'Listen,' I said, 'I don't want to come around bothering you fellows, but I'll lose my job if you make too much noise'" (p. 55). The old cop tells him he can't compromise on his job, otherwise the men will take advantage. Law and order must be upheld. Sal replies, "I didn't know what to say; he was right" (p. 57). Sal can see
the cop's position—he knows you can't compromise to keep order, but he also can't be harsh and unyielding. He is under the influence of Dean—noise and chaos can produce true moments of value. He admitted previously he wasn't meant to be a cop. Sal, in his mind, takes a middle position. Following his statement that the cop was right he says: "But all I wanted to do was sneak out into the night and disappear somewhere, and go and find out what everybody was doing all over the country" (p. 57). Sal would rather be an observer and nonparticipant.

The second incident showing his ambivalence occurs when he is with Terry, Ricky and Ponzo. This occurs near the end of his "idyll" with Terry during which Sal basked in the beauty of the word mañana, "a lovely word and one that probably means heaven" (p. 79). Sal has been playing at husband and father, living a relatively carefree existence of providing food for each day by his earnings from the day's cotton picking. He feels he has found his life's work, picking cotton, "kneeling and hiding in that earth" (p. 81). He refers to himself and the Mexicans at one point as "we Mexicans", and says that the Okies in the area thought he was a "Mexican, of course; and in a way I am" (p. 82). Here again, Sal is identifying himself with something he feels is good: the primitive—in his eyes—Mexicans. His "idyll" comes to end when he realizes that it is getting colder—it's October and winter is coming on—that
he can't support Terry and Johnny, and that he "could feel the pull of my own life calling me back" (p. 83). Terry goes back to her family at Sal's insistence, thus relieving him of the burden of supporting her. Sal stays down the road from her home in a farmer's barn. Before Terry's father and mother get home Sal sees the inside of their four-room shack. Sal can't imagine how the whole family managed to live in there.

But Sal is on the outside of Terry's real life, as he is on the outside of really being responsible for Terry and Johnny, just as he is on the outside of her parents' home listening in on the activities of the family later in the day. Ray is lying in a grape row, hiding, listening. He says, "I hid in the grapevines, digging it all. I felt like a million dollars; I was adventuring in the crazy American night" (p. 84). The next day, after making love with Terry in the night, he leaves Terry--both of them saying they'll meet in New York, but knowing that they will not see each other again. And so Sal, after living in a tent with his family, his "baby and my baby boy" (p. 79), leaves them with the comment, "well, lackadaddy, I was on the road again" (p. 85).

Sal is pulled back from his search for spontaneity by his recognition of the need for order in the barracks incident--although he cannot surrender himself fully to it--and in the Mexican-American incident. Though he is living what he himself calls a kind of primitive's ideal, he leaves his simple life to
return to the road, and this time not to the promise of more spontaneity, but a return home. En route Sal says, "Gad, I was sick of life" (p. 89). Finally he is home, and there was "my half-finished manuscript . . . on the desk. It was October, home and work again" (p. 90).

But Sal leaves again with Dean. This time it is a year later. "But now the bug was on me again, and the bug's name was Dean Moriarty and I was off on another spur around the road" (p. 96). Dean had changed. "The madness of Dean had bloomed into a weird flower" (p. 94). "This was the new and complete Dean, grown to maturity" (p. 95).

I said to myself, My God, he's changed. Fury spat out of his eyes when he told of things he hated; great glows of joy replaced this when he suddenly got happy; every muscle twitched to live and go. "Oh, man, the things I could tell you," he said, poking me, "Oh, man, we must absolutely find the time" (p. 95).

Later Sal says "He had become absolutely mad in his movements; he seemed to be doing everything at the same time" (p. 95). And this is the bug which is on Sal; this is Dean's promise of spontaneity which Sal hasn't experienced yet.

But even before this trip has really begun, before they get to New York with his aunt's furniture, Sal is voicing his ambivalent feelings about what he is doing. Dean holds the promise for him, but Sal isn't sure he wants it.

"I want to marry a girl," I told them [Dean, Marylou and Ed Dunkel], "so I can rest my soul with her till we both get old. This can't go on all the time—all this franticness and jumping around. We've got to go someplace, find something" (p. 97).
Sal knows he can't take this franticness; he knows he needs a home and someone to care for him. Sal recognizes ambivalence in himself and says later, "I like too many things and get all confused and hung-up running from one falling star to another till I drop" (p. 104).

Dean tells Sal how a man can achieve spontaneity while they are watching Rollo Greb, a jazz musician. Dean says of Greb,

That's what I want to be. I want to be like him. He's never hung-up, he goes every direction, he lets it all out, he knows time, he has nothing to do but rock back and forth (p. 106).

And he tells Sal,

You see, if you go like him all the time you'll finally get it (p. 106).

Sal asks get what and Dean replies, "IT! IT!" (p. 106). But Sal knows that what he sees in the jazz of Rollo Greb and of George Shearing ("before he became cool and commercial") wasn't for him. "This madness would lead nowhere" (p. 107).

Sal continues,

I didn't know what was happening to me, and I suddenly realized it was only the tea [marijuana] that we were smoking; Dean had bought some in New York. It made me think that everything was about to arrive—the moment when you know all and everything is decided forever (p. 107).

Sal goes on and says that he went home, leaving everyone, and rested. His aunt reminds him he is wasting his time with Dean. Sal says that what he wanted was to take one more magnificent trip to the West Coast and then get back in time for the
spring semester in school. Here he is ranking the trip as a
diversion before he gets back to school (and work). Again Sal
tries to keep himself in the position of observer. "I only
went along for the ride, and to see what Dean was going to do"
(p. 107). A bit later he adds, "I didn't want to interfere, I
just wanted to follow" (p. 110), referring to Dean's affairs
with Marylou. Dean had just tried to have Sal make it with
Marylou with Dean watching, but Sal couldn't and begged off.
But Sal's comment also characterizes his involvement with
spontaneity—all he really wanted to do was watch Dean try to
be spontaneous. He realized he himself could not achieve it.

Dean abandons Sal when they get to San Francisco and
leaves him with no money. Marylou calls Dean a bastard and
Sal agrees. Sal says of Dean, "I lost faith in him that year"
(p. 142).

The only time Sal comes close to having the IT is when
he and Dean are in the car with the other riders from the
travel bureau. Dean describes what IT is to Sal and they both
begin to talk frantically of their childhood and past lives.
Dean monopolizes the talking, but Sal interjects when he can
to finish his own thoughts within a parenthesis to what Dean
was saying. Sal says of their session with IT,

Dean and I both swayed to the rhythm and the IT of
our final excited joy in talking and living to the
blank tranced end of all innumerable riotous angelic
particulars that had been lurking in our souls all
our lives (p. 172).
Their talk-session continues and Sal has this concluding comment, Dean "was poking me furiously in the ribs to understand. I tried my wildest best" (p. 172). This is as close as Sal comes, and it is only in the presence of Dean and under the delirious influence of Dean that he gets this close.

They arrive in Denver and Sal seems content with his life at this point, "We had longer ways to go. But no matter, the road is life" (p. 175). But Dean and he quickly get into an argument where Sal spills out all that he had held secretly against his own brother, directing it at Dean. It began with a reference to Sal's age by Dean. Sal claims he's not getting old, that he's not much older than Dean.

Sal and Dean make up, and Sal attributes his anger to the "filth" he "was discovering in the depths of my own impure psychologies" (p. 176). But Sal is really uneasy because the reference to age reminds him that he is getting older and the life he is now leading--the one which was to replace the dead life he had had--is not giving him what he wants. Sal says he knew Dean was telling the truth when Dean said he was crying, but "I didn't want to bother with the truth" (p. 176).

The two men go from here to a night of beer drinking in which Dean begins to steal car after car. Dean is pursuing his "hot" spontaneity. Sal is less and less willing to go along with Dean and his spontaneity. For Sal, "everything was collapsing" (p. 182). Sal says he "ain't gonna have nothing
to do with stolen cars" (p. 183). Sal is being pulled more and more away from Dean and his spontaneity. Yet he continues to cling to Dean. Later on he identifies Dean as his brother twice to other people.

When Dean and Sal are once again in New York they trade visions of how the two of them will end up. Dean says they will end like bums together, searching through alleys, looking in cans to see. Sal responds questioningly, "You mean we'll end up old bums?" (p. 205). But Sal's idea of how he'd like to see them end up is different. He sees them living on the same block, raising their children together. This is Sal's hope. And it fits convincingly in with the picture of Sal that is emerging: he can not leave behind the values he holds dear--work, a structured home, and order. He says that when their children look at the snapshots they had taken in San Francisco with Camille and Dean's daughter that their children will think they lived "smooth, well-ordered, stabilized-within-the photo lives" (p. 208), but they would never realize "the raggedy madness and riot of our actual lives, our actual night, the hell of it, the senseless emptiness" (p. 208). Sal's attitude is clear. The "hot" spontaneity was never for him. He has tried to live it and has seen what it produces: senseless emptiness and hell. It is not for him.
But Sal is not through with his life on the road yet. For the first time in his life he leaves Dean in New York while he goes west to Denver. He explains his actions this way: "Whenever spring comes to New York I can't stand the suggestions of the land that come blowing over the river from New Jersey and so I got to go" (p. 204). Sal goes to Denver and there plans a trip to Mexico with Stan Shepherd. Dean rushes out to Denver and joins their expedition to Mexico. Sal has a vision of Dean as a frightful Angel pursuing him "like the shrouded Traveler" (p. 212). But Sal says "I'm always ready to follow Dean" (p. 214).

The novel concludes rapidly with the trip to Mexico. Dean feels that the trip through Mexico will finally take he and Sal to IT. Sal feels that Mexico is the magic land at the end of the road. Dean thinks he is in heaven. And Sal notes that Dean has finally found people like himself—the poor Mexicans. Sal thinks that driving through Mexico is "like driving across the world and into the places where we would finally learn ourselves among the Fellahin Indians of the world, the essential strain of the basic, primitive, wailing humanity" (p. 229).

But when they get to Mexico City Dean gets his divorce and heads back to resume his frantic life with his wives (this time with Inez), leaving Sal sick with dysentery. After Sal recovers he finally casts off the demon of Dean and "hot"
spontaneity. "When I got better I realized what a rat he was, but then I had to understand the impossible complexity of his life, how he had to leave me there, sick, to get on with his wives and woes" (p. 249). Sal finally is able to see Dean and the attraction of "hot" spontaneity as it is, and is able to see that it is not for him.

Sal returns to New York and meets Laura and they agree to love each other madly and plan to migrate to San Francisco. They have six weeks to get ready for the move. Dean says in a letter that he is coming out from San Francisco to get them and personally select the truck for them to buy. Laura and Sal make plans to begin saving the needed money. Gone is the impulse and then the frantic dash across the country. Now it is planning and careful execution. But Dean arrives suddenly, way ahead of time. He no longer can talk, only hop from foot to foot and laugh and babble out phrases. Sal asks why did he come so soon. Sal refuses to upset his plans and Dean returns to San Francisco alone.

Sal has settled his future with Laura and has given up the search for "hot" spontaneity. He never really experienced it; he saw what it did to Dean's life; he knew it was not what he wanted in his life; he could not accept it.

The Dharma Bums begins with Ray's telling the reader about hopping a freight car when he met a little old bum who carried a prayer by Saint Teresa. Proper time perspective is
important again, for Ray tells us that this happened in the
days when he was devout and practicing his religious devotions
to perfection. Again we have the older narrator telling about
himself as a younger man. But Ray, the younger Ray of the
novel, is not dissatisfied with his life. He is not searching
for new values to replace dead values. He is searching for
fulfillment, for satori (enlightenment), within his version of
Buddhism. This search, and Japhy's magnetism, lead Ray to
try on Japhy's Zen Buddhism, with Japhy as master and Ray as
eager disciple. Within Japhy's Zen Buddhism is "cool"
spontaneity, "the bearded laconic sage."

In The Dharma Bums Ray does not move from dissatisfaction
to an attempt at "cool" spontaneity, to a realization that he
can not reach it, to a rejection of spontaneity. Ray moves
from acceptance of Buddhism in the beginning to an attempt to
follow Japhy's Zen Buddhism--starting with the climbing of
the Matterhorn and ending with the fifty-five day stay on
Desolation--to a final acceptance of his own Buddhism and a
realization that Japhy's Zen is not for him. Within his final
acceptance of his own Buddhism, Ray learns to love both the
world and God. He progresses from his interest in All life is
suffering to compassion for all living things, to loving the
world and God. He no longer wants to retire from the world
and go off and meditate. Instead, he wants to keep himself in
the world and show others the true Dharma by his example.
The reader's acceptance of this is tempered by his knowledge--from the older Ray's admission--that Ray is now dissatisfied with what he found in Buddhism; he is now tired and cynical.

My terms search and spontaneity, still apply, but they need to be seen within the above context. The search is for fulfillment within an accepted set of values, thus Ray is not looking for new values. Spontaneity here is "cool" spontaneity. "Cool" spontaneity is grounded in discipline; through his discipline the self is enabled to maintain itself by its communion with the basic important values in life--seen as the primitive for Kerouac and the beats. The self can sort through the chaff of consumerism and the blue square of t.v. and seek out the wheat of goodness in men and alignment with the Dharma. For Japhy, discipline means rigid adherence to the proper way to pack a rucksack, to hike, to camp, to climb. It means working rigorously at reading or translating. For Ray, discipline is not so rigorous. For him it means working within the confines of a given structure as long as it furthers progress towards the final goal: survival of the emotional self and alignment with the Dharma. Ray and Japhy disagree over discipline, and this is illustrated best by Ray's insistence on the value of wine and drinking to get drunk--such as the incident where he and Japhy are to attend a lecture and discussion at Berkeley--and Japhy's insistence
that such things as drinking merely becloud the mind. In the university incident, Japhy stomps off in disgust with Ray; Ray tries not to pass out so he can prove something to Japhy; and Japhy returns drunk saying Ray was right all along. Discipline for Japhy is pursuing Zen, and acknowledging only Buddha; discipline for Ray is trying to equate Buddha with Christ, since they both tried to teach the same things: compassion for all living creatures.

At the outset of *The Dharma Bums* Ray's acceptance of Buddhism is implied and his happiness in it is stated. He starts his story by telling about the little St. Teresa bum he met on the freight train who "solidified all my beliefs" (p. 7). Ray is content with his life. He is sitting on the beach only a few miles from his destination and he thinks, "Happy. Just in my swim shorts, barefooted, wild-haired, in the red fire dark, singing, swigging wine, spitting, jumping, running--that's the way to live" (p. 8). He hadn't met Japhy Ryder yet, "the number one Dharma Bum of them all" (p. 10), but he was about to. Although he hadn't as yet heard anything about Dharma Bums, Ray thought he was a perfect Dharma Bum himself at this time and considered himself a religious wanderer. Ray is quite impressed with Japhy when he first meets him. Japhy's rugged but practical clothing, his accomplishments as a poet and translator, his being the "only one who didn't look like a poet" (p. 11) the night of
the poetry reading, all filled Ray with respect and admiration for Japhy.

As the two men talk they discover they share many ideas, particularly about Buddhism. Ray makes it clear to Japhy that he is content in his own brand of Buddhism and doesn't need Japhy's Zen. Ray mentions how knowledgeable Japhy is on Tibetan, Chinese, Mahayana, Hinayana, Japanese and even Burmese Buddhism, "But I warned him at once I didn't give a goddamn about the mythology and all the names and national flavors of Buddhism, but was just interested in the first of Sakamuni's four noble truths, All life is suffering. And to an extent interested in the third, The suppression of suffering can be achieved" (p. 12). Japhy a bit later starts to confront Ray with a Zen koan. Instead of attempting to answer the koan Ray says,

"I'd say that was a lot of silly Zen Buddhism."
This took Japhy back a bit. "Lissen Japhy," I said, "I'm not a Zen Buddhist, I'm a serious Buddhist, I'm an old-fashioned dreamy Hinayana coward of later Mahayanism," and so forth into the night, my contention being that Zen Buddhism didn't concentrate on kindness so much as on confusing the intellect to make it perceive the illusion of all sources of things (p. 13).

Ray and Japhy continue to talk and Ray is impressed with Japhy's answers. "But I can't recreate the exact (will try) brilliance of all Japhy's answers and come-backs and come-ons with which he had me on pins and needles all the time and did eventually stick something in my crystal head that made me
change my plans in life" (p. 13).

Ray is being won over by Japhy and is being taught by him. Japhy is the master, Ray the disciple. Japhy taught him about Han Shan, about yabyum which released Ray from his enforced celibacy and ideas about lust as the indirect cause of suffering and death, about the proper foods for mountain climbing, the proper kinds of equipment, the Zen secret of dancing over boulders, about tea, and about the perfection of charity. All of this teaching had its effect on Ray. Ray says,

"This poor kid ten years younger than I am is making me look like a fool forgetting all the ideals and joys I knew before, in my recent years of drinking and disappointment, what does he care if he hasn't got any money: he doesn't need any money, all he needs is his rucksack with those little plastic bags of dried food and a good pair of shoes and off he goes and enjoys the privileges of a millionaire in surroundings like this. And what gouty millionaire could get up this rock anyhow? It took us all day to climb." And I promised myself that I would begin a new life. "All over the West, and the mountains in the East, and the desert. I'll tramp with a rucksack and make it the pure way" (p. 62).

The "pure way" or the Dharma now seems to include rucksacks, camping, and withdrawal from society—all of which Ray learned from Japhy.

But Ray is not in complete agreement with Japhy. They differ in two important ways, one, on their approach to discipline, and on Ray's emphasis on kindness and compassion. And it is on their differences over these two points that Ray realizes that Japhy's Zen is not for him and brings him, at the novel's end, to his acceptance of his own version of
As already mentioned, Japhy puts a high value on being properly prepared for their hiking trip and bringing the right kinds of food and equipment. Ray doesn't really care, partly because he doesn't realize all that is involved. He doesn't think Japhy is bringing enough food; he wants to bring wine; he is upset when Morley doesn't bring his sleeping bag—Ray responds, "But goddammit I was all ready to enjoy this so much" (p. 40)—and he's upset when Morley forgot to drain the crankcase and had to go back.

Ray is convinced of the value of drinking as a way of getting outside the cares of this world and into touch with the emotional and psychological self. Japhy is not. On the night when he and Japhy, Coughlin and Alvah get drunk and have their Zen Lunatic escapades Ray concludes, "But there was a wisdom in it all" (p. 83). The wisdom is that they are at least involved in the world and responding to it with part of themselves, rather than sitting in front of the "blue square" of t.v. watching one show after another, "nobody talking." And the Berkeley lecture already mentioned enlarges on this difference. This is the episode. Ray and Japhy are walking around to the Salvation Army and Goodwill stores when Ray gets the urge to get drunk.
I got the overwhelming urge to get drunk and feel good. I bought a poorboy of ruby port and uncapped it and dragged Japhy into an alley and we drank. "You better not drink too much", he said, "you know we gotta go to Berkeley after this and attend a lecture and discussion at the Buddhist Center."

"Aw I don't wanta go to no such thing, I just wanta drink in alleys."

"But they're expecting you, I read all your poems there last year." "I don't care. Look at that fog flying over the alley and look at this warm ruby red port, don't it make ya feel like singing in the wind?"

"No it doesn't. You know, Ray, Cacoethes says you drink too much."

"And him with his ulcer! Why do you think he has an ulcer? Because he drank too much himself. Do I have an ulcer? Not on your life! I drink for joy! If you don't like my drinking you can go to the lecture by yourself. I'll wait at Coughlin's cottage."

"But you'll miss all that, just for some old wine."

"There's wisdom in wine, goddam it! I yelled. "Have a shot!"

"No I won't!"

"Well then I'll drink it!" and I drained the bottle and we went back on Sixth Street where I immediately jumped back into the same store and bought another poorboy. I was feeling fine now. Japhy was sad and disappointed. "How do you expect to become a good bhikku or even a Bodhisattva Mahasattva always getting drunk like that?" (p. 149).

Japhy's attitude on drinking, and on the importance of discipline in achieving Buddhist goals is clear. You must strip away all encumbrances so you can reach satori. Discipline is one way to strip away the unwanted. Ray's attitude is also clear. Feeling is the most important thing. Satori comes when everything feels right. Another aspect of feeling right for Ray is feeling compassion for your fellow man.

This difference in their attitudes towards how to reach their own goals is also reflected in their disagreement over "action" and "words." Ray at one point in the book, when he
is living with his mother, sister and brother-in-law, reaches an enlightenment. When he finally meets Japhy again he is eager to tell him about his enlightenment but Japhy stops him. "I don't wanta hear all your word descriptions of words words words you made up all winter, man I wanta be enlightened by actions" (p. 133). Ray is hurt by this. They later make up, with Japhy admitting that Ray is right, but Ray's attitude changes towards Japhy, "I wasn't about to start advertising my 'words' out loud any more to Japhy" (p. 137). Even though Japhy later admitted he was wrong about Ray's words, Japhy's attitude about action is consistent with the way he lives and reflects his true feelings.

In the Berkeley lecture incident, Japhy also admits that Ray is right about drinking, saying that when he got there they all got drunk on saki and discussed prajna. "It was great" (p. 151). But, again, this is more Japhy's enthusiasm of the moment than a reflection of Japhy's true feelings.

Earlier, before the Berkeley incident and the argument over drinking, Ray is standing outside a kitchen window, peering in at his mother, whom he has not seen for a long time. Ray cites another of the differences between his approach to the Dharma and Japhy's. Japhy's approach allows him only a minimum involvement with materialism. He scorns materialism (except for his demand for the highest quality hiking equipment). Ray is not bothered by materialism, as he is not
bothered by getting drunk. Ray says of Japhy: "'Why is he so mad about white tiled sinks and 'kitchen machinery' he calls it? People have good hearts whether or not they live like Dharma Bums. Compassion is the heart of Buddhism'" (p. 105).

Following these three incidents is Japhy's farewell party. Afterwards Ray and Japhy take their last hike together before Japhy leaves for Japan. Then Japhy leaves for Japan and Ray leaves for his fifty-five days on Desolation Peak as a fire lookout. On Desolation Ray comes to love the world and to love God. Ray finally comes back to the Buddhism he began with, recognizing that Japhy's Zen is for Japhy and not for him.

Desolation, Desolation, I owe so much to Desolation, thank you [Japhy] forever for guiding me to the place where I learned all. Now comes the sadness of coming back to cities and I've grown two months older and there's all that humanity of bars and burlesque shows and gritty love, all upsidedown in the void God bless them.

*****

I said "God, I love you" and looked up to the sky and really meant it. "I have fallen in love with you, God. Take care of us all, one way or the other" (p. 191).

We can now see that the search for satisfying values is the major concern of On The Road and The Dharma Bums. We can also see that Kerouac viewed the idea of spontaneity, with its association with primitive values (as Kerouac and the beats viewed them), as one value that might be satisfying, and that
might restore the spirit in man which the American consumer society had exacted.

Kerouac, in his own life and in his fiction, found "hot" spontaneity unable, except momentarily and at great cost, to continuously supplant the dead feeling society produced in men. He found "cool" spontaneity more durable. While Japhy's version of "cool" spontaneity did not work for Kerouac himself or his character Ray, Kerouac did see it as probably viable for others, particularly those who could harbor a discipline like Japhy's. Ray's version of "cool" spontaneity was, for a while, successful in the novel, but with the older Ray's admission at the novel's opening that he is now old and cynical, the ultimate success of his "cool" spontaneity is cast into doubt.

Judging from the outcome of the two novels, there are two successful ways to restore meaning or value to our consumer-deadened lives. There is no suggestion, however, that these are the only two ways, or even the best ways. In On The Road Sal places his future in his relationship with Laura. But the relationship is only suggested and not developed. We really have no way of knowing if this will be another briefly intense, but ultimately short-lived affair, or if Sal is really committed to the union. Sal and Laura's assertion to love each other madly does not assure that the love will last. But the deliberateness of the relationship,
their planning and refusal to upset their plans—a first for Sal—gives the strong suggestion that this will be a lasting relationship. It is, at least, a mature relationship. We do not know if Sal has given up his search for satisfying values, or if he has found them in his relationship with Laura. We simply can not be sure. We do know that Sal has found that Dean's "hot" spontaneity will not give him a satisfying life.

The other successful way to approach living that Kerouac identifies in these two novels must be Japhy's "cool" spontaneity. The older Ray's cynicism and lip-service presents the younger Ray's "cool" spontaneity as ultimately unsatisfying. Only Japhy's approach, for those who have the discipline to follow it, is presented as successful.

We are left, then, with the following synthesis of both novels. Each novel is a characteristic expressions of the beat concern: restoring meaning and value to living by restoring value to the individual. For Kerouac, spontaneity holds a promise of restoring value; and in his exploration of what kind of spontaneity is most successful, Kerouac finds that for those with the necessary discipline, Japhy's "cool" spontaneity is best. For those who lack that discipline, like Ray, Ray's "cool" spontaneity is successful—but we are cautioned by the older Ray's remark that it may be, or is, ultimately unsatisfying.
The paradox of spontaneity in Kerouac's two novels remains a paradox. We can understand why both Sal and Ray eventually stop pursuing spontaneity, and in this way we have reduced the contradictions in the novels to paradox. But we can not resolve for Sal and Ray, just as Kerouac could not, the question of living a satisfying life through the value of spontaneity in our consumer society.
Footnotes


2 Two recent articles, one in 1973 and one in 1974, explore the central concerns of On The Road. For Carole G. Vopat, in her 1973 article "Jack Kerouac's On The Road: A Reconsideration", the central concern is Kerouac demonstrating his own criticism of the beat generation in his portrayal of the lives of Sal and Dean. She feels that Kerouac "makes it clear that Sal Paradise goes on the road to escape from life rather than to find it, that he runs from the intimacy and responsibility of more demanding human relationships, and from a more demanding human relationship with himself" (p. 385-86). She feels that Sal and his friends are not "seeking or celebrating self, but are rather fleeing from identity" (p. 388). "They run from self-definition, for to admit the complex existence of the self is to admit its contingencies: the claims of others, commitments to society, to oneself" (p. 388-89). And while Sal himself says he ought to be searching for a wife, Vopat believes he is really searching for a father, "For someone to shelter him from life and responsibility" (p. 391). Vopat argues that the "double vision" which Kerouac gives to Sal enables him to comment on, and to temper with reasoned hindsight, the enthusiasm of the younger Sal. Because Sal grows and develops in the novel, he is finally able to see that "Dean's frantic moving and going is not a romantic quest for adventure or truth but is instead a sad, lost circling for the past, for the home and the father he never had" (p. 401). For Vopat, then, the central concern of the novel is Sal's growth as a character and the criticism of the beat way of life by the older Sal as he tells the story of the younger Sal (this, according to Vopat, is Kerouac's "double vision").

For George Dardess, in his 1974 article "The Delicate Dynamics of Friendship: A Reconsideration of Kerouac's On The Road," the main concern of the novel is the friendship between Sal and Dean. The novel is for Dardess "a delicately constructed account of the relation" between Sal and Dean (p. 200-01). For Dardess "The men's relations are intimately connected to the direction and scope of their geographical movements. As their geographical range increases, so does the range and complexity of their relation" (p. 202).
Of these two articles, Vopat's is the better. She provides an in-depth, reasoned examination of *On The Road*. I agree with her on many points, and disagree with her on only a few. Dardess's article is superficial and disappointing in its approach, and wrongheaded in its assertion that the friendship is the major concern in the novel. It is an important concern, but not the major concern. The course of the friendship between Sal and Dean merely mirrors the development of Sal, from the man who Vopat feels is trying to escape from life to the man who sees his life on the road for what it was—escape—and who is now ready to settle down into adult responsibilities. For Vopat this is shown by Sal's rejection of Dean at the end of the novel; his refusal to leave for San Francisco before he, Sal, is ready, even though Dean has come all the way from San Francisco to New York to get him, to "rescue him once more from the world of age and obligation" (p. 406). For Vopat, Sal has finally accepted "feeling, responsibility, and roots—not in a place but in another person, Laura" (p. 406).

My own conception of the major concern of *On The Road* is similar to Vopat's, but is not identical. Sal's taking up with Dean is not merely escape, though it is that too. It is a search by Sal for something which will take away the feeling of the weary split-up and the feeling that everything was dead. Sal is immature, as Vopat suggests, but he takes up with Dean because of two motives. One is his infatuation with Dean, with the contrast between Dean's life and his own. This is the escapism Vopat sees. The other is induced by the deliberative part of Sal; the part which is the writer looking sincerely for new values to replace dead ones. It is this part which sees in Dean a promise, the promise of the value of spontaneity.


4 Ibid., p. 73.


Not all primitive societies have to fight for survival. But for the beats, primitive man's proximity to this struggle for physical survival invests their lives with a higher degree of affirmation of the self. This suggests a relatively unstructured society to the beats, but this view is not accurate. Primitive societies are highly structured, and the individual is required to give up parts of his self in order to belong. But it may be as the beats assert, that the primitive man retains more of his individual self, despite his compromises to live in a primitive, structured society. The primitive societies Sal encounters are those of the American Negro, the Mexican-American migrant worker and the Mexican Indians. None of these are fighting for physical survival, except on an economic level. The Mexican-American migrant worker is striving to retain a sense of identity, a sense of a whole self within his cultural origins, rather than being a culturally diluted non-white self.


It should be noted that Buddhism and Zen which Kerouac displays in his novels is not true Zen, though it presents itself as much. Kerouac's version of Zen, like many of the beat writers' versions "is a representative instance of the half-validity, half-travesty that comprises beat Zen," as Margaret Ashida points out in her article "Frogs and Frozen Zen" (p. 199-206).

Ashida, Margaret E. "Frogs and Frozen Zen." Prairie Schooner, 24 (1960), 199-206.


