

The Rucksack Revolution: the Beat Generation's Views of Nature

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This work was completed in hope for what this
astonishing blue rock could be.

This work is dedicated to the most precious Pearl
without whose unrelenting help, attention and patience
this would never have been written.

To the other family members who made this possible and
something I wanted to do,
I quote Edward Abbey,
"You know who you are, and so do I."

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INTRODUCING THE BEATS AND DEEP ECOLOGY

Ever since man became a numerous species he has affected his environment notably... The history of ecologic change is still so rudimentary that we know little about what really happened, or what the results were... I cannot discover that the questions have ever been asked, much less answered. Lynn White¹

"Deep Ecology" is not a philosophy in any proper academic sense, nor is it institutionalized as a religion or an ideology. Rather, what happens is that various persons come together in campaigns and direct actions. Arne Naess²

Humankind has irrevocably altered the natural world. When Bill McKibben forwarded this thesis in *The End of Nature* (1989) it was a novel idea. It is now gaining adherents as books concerning eating locally, driving less, and sustainable living are selling well. The strong sales of such books depict a growing interest amongst the general public in the topic of our relationship to nature perhaps because people are beginning to realize the gravity of the situation.³ New and worrisome statistics flood over North Americans everyday as newscasts and newspapers discuss "Climate Change," "Peak oil" and "Global Warming." As advocacy groups such as Greenpeace and The David Suzuki Foundation attempt to raise environmental awareness, governments of all stripes, pushed by Green parties and opinion polls, are discussing what the changes are and what is to be

¹ Lynn White Jr., "The roots of our ecological crisis," *Science*, no. 155 (1967).

² Arne Naess, "The Deep Ecological Movement. Some philosophical Aspects," in *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*, ed. George Sessions (London: Shambala, 1986), p.71.

³ Bill McKibben, *The end of nature* (New York: Random House, 1989). Alisa Dawn Smith and J. B. MacKinnon, *The 100-mile diet: a year of local eating* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2007). James Howard Kunstler, *The geography of nowhere: the rise and decline of America's man-made landscape* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), Bill McKibben, *Deep Economy: the wealth of communities and the durable future*, 1st ed. (New York: Times Books, 2007).

blamed for them while simultaneously creating plans of adaptation to their long term effects.

That people are presently seeking methods of living more sustainably is demonstrative of insecurity in our days. The environmental issues we face have, in part, been caused by the solutions to nuclear insecurity described by historian Elaine Tyler May in *Homeward Bound*.⁴ May explained the rise of the suburbs, “The self-contained home held out the promise of security in an insecure world.”⁵ The Beat Generation writers failed to find that promised security and, as such, sought out alternative ways of coping with an anxious world. The time has come for our society to change in order to preserve the earth and relieve our anxiety. A reconsideration of other cultures that have wrestled with the same question is a wise step. I forward the culture of the Beat Generation and its interpretations of humankind’s role within nature because their words can serve us to formulate a new cultural way of life in the face of the ecological issues presently confronting us. By treating them in their own terms, we can come to understand the alternative they offered and in doing so reintegrate them into the literature of environmental history. I will use this introduction to briefly describe environmental history, Deep Ecology and the Beat Generation to show how this thesis is relevant to three distinct fields of intellectual thought.

Environmental History

By the 1960s, pollution was on the rise and we were destroying our surroundings at ever-increasing rates. Since then, American historians have devoted a significant portion

⁴ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound American Families in the Cold War Era* (BasicBooks, 1988).

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.3.

of their energy to understanding humankind's interpretations of nature and its role within it. Historian Lynn White Jr. writing in 1966 came to the realization that human action had compounded into a destruction of the very things upon which we depend and recommended that we begin to consider this relationship more deeply.⁶ He sought to understand the cultural and intellectual assumptions that had allowed mankind to degrade the land and, in so doing, began what would become *environmental history*. He concluded that Christian ethics were to blame for much of the destruction. This outlook has remained central to environmental history.

White Jr. sought to promote action in response to his analysis of how mankind fouled its nest. He proposed a re-evaluation of the ideas of Saint Francis of Assisi who argued that animals could praise God and had souls.⁷ The argument was based on White's notion that Assisi promoted "An alternative Christian view."⁸ An assumption in this argument is the need for change in our ways and views and, by incorporating a Christian figure into the solution, he would be more effective than others who had previously sought to change our anthropocentric beliefs. The only attempt to initiate such change that White Jr. notes is the Beat Generation's effort to use Zen Buddhism to influence others. White Jr. argued that Americans would find it difficult to accept Zen because it employed unfamiliar concepts from foreign cultures. With this, White quickly

⁶ White Jr., "The roots of our ecological crisis." I begin with this work because it is among the earliest academic discussions of the topic at the time when the topic itself was becoming a major field of study. His discussion with its arguments regarding the level of pollution being its catalyst represented a new type of history. Many historians have since begun their work with the same premise, and many still do. It has been referred to by many other authors, and (I believe) defined the discussion regarding the role of the Beat Generation in ecological history and is therefore a reasonable starting point.

⁷ This may explain why the Catholic Church declared him the patron saint of ecologists in 1980.

⁸ White Jr., "The roots of our ecological crisis," p. 1206.

concluded his discussion of the Beat Generation. The weakness of this argument is that it fails to recognize the Beat Zen model as an American phenomenon, developed by typical educated Americans: a high school football star, some fire lookouts, a few trail workers, a logger, and a couple of wartime merchant marines.

In the 1970s, environmental history became an important field of study. With the oil crisis and mounting pollution problems in many cities, several adventurous scholars pursued the type of deeper studies White Jr. had called for. One of the distinguished historians to engage in the conversation was Roderick Nash who presided over what he believed to be the first university course on the subject by 1970.⁹ In developing the course, Nash faced considerable difficulties. He had to define the term *Environmental History*; “Environmental History would refer to the past contact of man with his total habitat,” was his early definition.¹⁰ The field would study cultural aspects of the relationship: “of course, I never intended to teach the history of the land in the manner of geologists. I would rather, attempt a history of attitude and action toward the land.”¹¹ When teaching the course he discussed the roles of religion, St. Francis of Assisi and native cultures (in the noble savage school) because they “grounded their religion in the concept of the community on earth of all living things.”¹² He also studied the extension of the ethical sphere from the individual, to family, to community and so on. The expansion of the moral community would become a chief concern within the philosophical branch of environmental thought. The course ended with the burgeoning

⁹ Roderick Nash, "American Environmental History: A New Teaching Frontier," *The Pacific Historical Review* 41, no. 3 (1972).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*: p.363.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*: p.366.

environmental movement of the day. Nash concurred with White Jr.'s claims of Christian culpability while helping to create future scholars in the field.

Nash remains a key environmental historian. His 1989 effort, *The Rights of Nature*, is widely considered a landmark attempt to realize a history of the enlargement of the ethical sphere to include animals, plants, and the biosphere itself. In this work, he focuses on a shift that he conceived of having occurred during the 1960s and 1970s. The argument attempted to place the expansion of ethics within the narrative of *liberalism* that had ended slavery in America. Similar to White Jr., he sought to find arguments containing terms familiar to Americans even playing on the pride felt by many regarding the end of slavery. He still maintained that there was a problem within Christian doctrine, but noted that churches were responding.¹³ The importance of eastern religions (such as Buddhism) in the evolution of the ideas was remarked upon. He referred to the Beat Generation writers, Jack Kerouac and Gary Snyder, as playing a role...but only assigned them the position of popularizing rebellious attitudes along with the likes of Marlon Brando and Elvis Presley. We shall see that this does not do them justice.

Donald Worster's *The Wealth of Nature* (1993) was another crucial work in the field.¹⁴ Central to the book is an argument that the New World was viewed as a fresh Garden of Eden that could everlastingly provide for humans whatever they desired. This argument again employs terminology that the average American reader would effortlessly be able to comprehend. The Beat Generation is not considered in the work.

¹³ This trend continues today. See <http://abcnews.go.com/Nightline/story?id=4424390> for a story regarding the sinfulness of littering.

¹⁴ Donald Worster, *The Wealth of Nature. Environmental History and the Ecological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

The liability of Christianity remains a powerful conclusion of the environmental historians. Cumulatively, historians of great distinction like Lynn White Jr., Roderick Nash and Donald Worster sought to comprehend the evolution of ecological thought. They have demonstrated a shift in the environmental perspective of Americans from solely anthropocentric concerns regarding agriculture and hunting to the more eco-centric Deep Ecology and the scientific notion, *The Gaia Hypothesis*. Many authors are quoted in this narrative from John Muir and Henry David Thoreau to Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, and Arne Naess. Such studies have proven enlightening, helping us to better understand the ecological visions found within our current Occidental society. A great deal has been written about the historical roots of environmental activism and the viewpoints people hold towards the environment. The Beat Generation and the 1950s more broadly are held to the periphery of the discussion, if discussed at all. I carve out a space for the Beats in the field by arguing that the philosophy of Deep Ecology, which is among the most significant thought-systems regarding the environment adhered to by environmental activists that was developed during the 1970s, had important precursors in the Beat Generation.

Deep Ecology

Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* (1949) was an important antecedent to Deep Ecology because it made the first steps toward a new environmental ethics in America despite the fact that there is little to suggest that the Beat writers and Arne Naess read it prior to the 1970s. Aldo Leopold summed up his Land Ethic: "In short, a land ethic changes the role of *Homo Sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members and also respect for

the community as such.”¹⁵ Central to Leopold’s view was the inherent worth of the land outside of its use to humans. The likeness between Beat ideas and Leopold’s thoughts will be pointed out and discussed for the purpose of demonstrating where they fit into the evolution of environmental lifestyles and ideas. They formed a link between Aldo Leopold and Rachel Carson.¹⁶ While they may not have impacted Carson or her readers, it is nevertheless important to realize that the environment was a real and significant concern amongst a subculture in America during this period. Furthermore, alternative ways of life and systems of grouping humans (pastoral rather than urban) were being sought out and considered. Such a realization can help us to better understand the context within which *Silent Spring* and the eruption of the environmental movement took place, rendering the phenomenon less surprising.

Norwegian philosopher, Arne Naess, coined the term *Deep Ecology* in his article, “The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movements” (1973).¹⁷ He argued that Shallow Ecology was an anthropocentric endeavor whereas Deep Ecology was an eco-centric worldview. His purpose was to promote deeper more careful consideration of the environment and our responsibilities within it. He articulated seven major characteristics of Deep Ecology’s vision. These points were elaborated upon and refined in his article, “The Deep Ecological Movement. Some philosophical aspects.”¹⁸ These principles were

¹⁵ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949), p.204.

¹⁶ Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962).

¹⁷ Arne Naess, “The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movements,” *Inquiry (Oslo)* 16 (1973).

¹⁸ Naess, “The Deep Ecological Movement. Some philosophical Aspects,” p.68.

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: inherent worth, intrinsic value, inherent

generally agreed upon amongst Deep Ecologists. There are other possible articulations of the positions but their meaning would need to remain fairly similar to these original eight. Naess's interpretation of Deep Ecology describes it as an ever-changing ever-adapting philosophy.¹⁹ This thesis will demonstrate how the Beat Generation may be understood to have expressed some of these thoughts during their heyday in the 1950s. This is important because the Beat Generation was the predecessor of the so-called hippie movement that swelled the ranks of environmental groups eventually leading to the growth of environmental awareness (Earth Day etc.) and the outlining of Deep Ecology itself.²⁰

value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.

2. Richness and diversity of life-forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
4. Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
5. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease.
6. Policies must therefore be changed. The changes in policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent worth) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to participate in the attempt to implement the necessary changes.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.67.

²⁰ Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Green Revolution. The American Environmental Movement 1962-1992*. (New York: Hill and Wang a division of Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1993). The statistics about membership for groups such as the Sierra Club are given in the introduction to this work. For works on the 1960s more broadly see; Alexander Bloom and Wini Breines, *"Takin' it to the streets" : a sixties reader*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford

Deep Ecology became a powerful force from the moment of its inception and has been considered a pivotal ideology for environmentalists. In 1984, Naess wrote “Deep Ecology and Lifestyle” to recognize some of the practical methods Deep Ecologists were using to live in accordance with their environmental views.²¹ These were broad in nature offering basic guidelines to follow in order to protect the ecosphere. The shortest version of them is that Deep Ecologists often seek to live at a much lower standard of living than the majority of North Americans while enjoying a much higher quality of living.²² For example, they questioned the need for clothes dryers if a person lived in the desert.²³ It will be left to the reader to grasp when an aspect of Beat culture or lifestyle overlaps with the twenty-five because the overlaps are evident and so not explicitly re-stated here in order to avoid burdensome repetition. These intersections will nevertheless provide further proof that, despite their inability to articulate Deep Ecology, the Beats followed something very comparable to it and promoted a similar way of life. Acknowledging their way of life can help us to better understand the postwar generation and its relationship to the environment. It can also help us to comprehend the explosion of the ranks of environmental activists and ecological concern amongst people that followed in the 1960s and 1970s.

University Press, 2003). See also, Timothy Miller, *The hippies and American values*, 1st ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991). For interesting reads.

²¹ Arne Naess, "Deep Ecology and Lifestyle" (paper presented at the The Paradox of Environmentalism, York University, 1984). Attached here, as Appendix A are the 25 most prescient points.

²² McKibben, *Deep Economy: the wealth of communities and the durable future*, p.41. McKibben cites a study suggesting that “Money consistently buys happiness right up to about 10 000\$ per capita income, and that after that point the correlation disappears.” The argument claims that at a certain point money no longer buys happiness. Perhaps Deep Ecologists and Beat authors realized this correlation early on.

²³ Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums* (New York: Penguin Books, 1958), p.158.

Beat Generation

By the *Beat Generation* I refer to the writers of the 1940s-early 1960s who associated with each other through collective public readings and their acceptance of being included in publications considered *Beat*. They were unmistakable in their seeking of a new vision for America and its literature, which rejected the critics and the formulaic standards they imposed. Poets and novelists traditionally associated with the Beat Generation include: Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Michael McClure, Gary Snyder, Peter Orlovsky, Denise Levertov, Lew Welch, Amiri Baraka, and many others.

The term *Beat Generation* has a variety of connotations and definitions. The word *beat* was originally used in this context by Herbert Huncke, a Times Square junky, who, huddled over the warmth of a cup of coffee in a cheap diner, exclaimed that he was beat. He meant broken, at the bottom looking up or a man willing to gamble everything he had because he had little and less choice. Shortly after this occasion, Jack Kerouac, who thought that Huncke's expression caught the reality of post-World War II life, in a conversation with New York writer John Clellon Holmes, claimed something akin to "Man I guess you really could say this is a Beat Generation." Kerouac claimed throughout his life that he meant spiritually beat. Or searching for something to believe in—in the post-World War II and Atomic explosions world—where some people required a new moral interpretation of the universe to cope with everyday life.

Clellon Holmes included this conversation with Kerouac in the first Beat work ever published, his novel, *Go* (1952).²⁴ Gilbert Millstein, a book reviewer for *The New York Times*, wrote highly of it and requested that Holmes write a short piece wherein he

²⁴ John Clellon Holmes, *Go* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1952).

would define the Beat Generation. Holmes wrote, "More than mere weariness, it [beat] implies the feeling of having been used, of being raw."²⁵ Those who felt ruined by the war would form the Beat Generation. Their rawness ran deep, "it involves a sort of nakedness of mind and, ultimately, of soul."²⁶ The Beat Generation early on defined itself by this rawness caused by war. *Go* sold poorly and, other than a flurry of letters to the *Times* regarding his article, the Beat Generation would have to wait for its fame to erupt.

In the mid-1950s, attention grew when several Beats read publicly for the first time at the now famous "Reading at the Six" and Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* was unleashed upon the world. Lawrence Ferlinghetti promptly published *Howl* through City Lights Bookstore and publishing house in San Francisco (it was the first of the popular pocket poets series). The poem spoke of a generation destroyed by madness. Unwholesome issues (for the time) such as drugs and homosexuality were raised in the poem, which was then put on trial for obscenity by the government. The proceedings concluded that the work contained "redeeming social importance." This trial garnered more attention for the Beats who had started to think of Beat as shorthand for beatific and saintly. Ginsberg and other writers attempted to keep the term Beat Generation in media articles in order, I believe, to brand themselves and improve their odds for success as a movement. Only a few of the writers of this group are read today.

There was a growing awareness of the movement following the trial, yet it was not until Jack Kerouac's coup de force, *On The Road* (1957), exploded onto the cultural scene (that had recently witnessed the rise of Elvis Presley and James Dean) that the

²⁵ Clellon Holmes, "This is the Beat Generation," *New York Times*, November 16th 1952.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

group received consistent attention. This interest was thanks in part to a gushing review by Millstein. At this point in time, the term Beat began to lose definition as the media and general readers sought to define it for their own purposes.²⁷ Kerouac and the other Beat writers thought they were about purity of soul, but their opponents would soon come out to attack them.

Herb Caen, a columnist for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, coined the familiar term *Beatnik* on April 2nd 1958. It was meant as a derogative term derived by adding the “nik” from the Russian Sputnik.²⁸ This began an unrelenting media attack.²⁹ It remains clear that most critics ostracized the Beats, but ironically this only increased their popularity amongst readers who had little faith in the established critics and sought to venture into more exciting and controversial works. The Beats were changing the face of literature while Charlie “Bird” Parker altered the musical world and Jackson Pollock reinvented the art of painting.

The issue I stress regarding the definition of the Beats is that they were temporally bound as a phenomenon. If the term is to have relevance and describe anything, the timeframe of the Beat Generation cannot precede 1944 when the initial members met each other in New York City and a second cluster started to coalesce on the West Coast. Their works cease to be Beat sometime in the early 1960s. I make this distinction because many authors from the generation publish later works that are no longer as creatively liberated in style nor written under similar circumstances of insecurity and

²⁷ The review is reprinted in Ann Charters, *Beat down to your soul: what was the Beat generation?* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), p.409.

²⁸ It may prove interesting to someday study the impact of this attempt to correlate a poetic literary movement with the race for space.

²⁹ See Norman Podhoretz, "The Know Nothing Bohemians," in *Beat Down to Your Soul*, ed. Ann Charters (New York: Penguin Books, 1958) for an extreme example.

psychological rawness that were key to the “Beatness” of their works. The intensity of memories about the war was diminishing as other events brought new ethical dilemmas to the forefront and what had been outrageous about them and their works was quickly becoming standard fare. Such later works were also produced with less interaction amongst the writers who had found their voices and places in the literary world. The Beat phenomenon during the late 1950s and early 1960s was the beacon of the counterculture. After this period, they were no longer the most significant indicators of the counterculture even though some were very involved in the hippie movement; in such cases, they were hippies as their works produced during that era must be called something other than Beat. My intention here is to study the Beats during the time of their greatest social significance.

The Beats have become notorious for a wide array of things such as getting naked on stage, Zen Buddhism, Tantric orgies, homosexuality, interracial relationships, drugs and alcohol, and many other “vices” of the time. An industry has grown around them as academics write books about the writers and their times and publishers print and reprint poems and books and compile letters, anthologies and films about them. During the summer and fall of 2007 as we witnessed the 50th anniversary of *On The Road* we also witnessed a fiftieth anniversary edition of the book, a printing of the original unedited scroll, and several books on Kerouac and the Beat Generation more broadly.

Most scholarship and public interest regarding the Beats still revolves around the Bacchanalian characteristics of the group or how literature gained both thematically and stylistically thanks to the Beats. Preston Whaley has commented on Beat scholarship; “the rigors of an agile cultural studies have in few instances been brought to bear on the

Beat movement [Because] the language of cultural studies can be arcane and jargon-laden to those who are interested in the Beats.”³⁰ In essence, the types of people attracted to the Beats are not likely to be attracted to academic research and those that are, are likely to be studying them for the same reasons that others mock them. In doing this, Beat scholars continue to render the Beats a simple rather than a complex example of American popular culture and degrade their value to students.

Despite the above, there has recently been an increase in studies seeking to understand other aspects that are no less vital to the Beat culture such as the role of religion in the works,³¹ the authors in whose footsteps they follow,³² and their time spent in nature.³³ They pursue a variety of avenues that have previously been largely ignored regarding the Beats and their efforts have expanded our understanding of the Beats and

³⁰Preston Whaley, *Blows Like a Horn: Beat Writing, Jazz, Style, and Markets in the transformation of U.S. Culture*. (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004), p.7-8. See Morris Dickstein, *Leopards in the Temple. The Transformation of American Fiction* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002) for a discussion regarding how the 1950s have been ignored by the trackers of American arts.

³¹ Ananda Prabha Barat, *Jack Kerouac's novels and Buddhist Thought* (Calcutta: Writers Workshop Publication, 1997) is a particularly insightful study of the Buddhism. See also Ben Giampo, *The Word and the way. Prose Artists as Spiritual Quester* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), which attempts to understand how Jack Kerouac understood religions to complement each other.

³² John Tytell, *Naked Angels the Lives & literature of the Beat Generation* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1976) sought in the 1970s to understand the literary place of the Beats. Graham Caveney, *SCREAMING WITH JOY the Life of Allen Ginsberg* (New York: Broadway Books, 2000) has more recently sought to understand the Beats in the contexts of American writers of auto-biography. Rod Phillips, “Forest Beatniks” and “Urban Thoreaus” Gary Snyder, Jack Kerouac, Lew Welch, and Michael McClure., ed. Yoshinobu Hakutani, vol. 22, *The Modern American Literature New Approaches* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), which principally argues that the Beats ought to be understood as Nature poets and considered within nature writing.

³³ Paul Maher Jr., *Kerouac. The Definitive Biography*. (Lanham, New York Toronto and Oxford: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2004) who along with, John Suiter, *Poets on the Peaks. Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen & Jack Kerouac in the North Cascades*. (Washington D.C. : Counterpoint, 2002) placed the Beats within nature in attempts to understand their works.

their role in American cultural history. Refreshing as these studies are, they are primarily a recent phenomenon and serve chiefly to suggest that further research could prove fruitful. This thesis seeks to add to this new more rigorous scholarship.

Like me, Phillips and Suiter both proposed studies of the Beats in nature. Their works note that there were important aspects of Beat culture that revolved around nature. Where they differ from this study, in the case of Suiter, is that he wrote more about what they ran away from than what they ran towards when seeking out nature. In Phillips' work, he suggests he will partake in a careful study of the role of nature in Beat literature. His effort argues a place for the Generation within nature writing by offering themes and images that the Beats added to the repertoire of acceptability in the traditionally conservative field of nature writing. He systematically explains lines found in the poetry by referring to the real life event described. Neither of these authors sought to recognize *how* the Beats understood nature nor *why*. Likely because their primary interests are in the field of English literature and not history, these works do not offer deep analysis of the potential *role* of the Beats in American environmental history.

The Plan

I rely on the letters and journals of the Beats to complement my reading of their published works to dissuade concerns that such an environmental interpretation of the Beats is based solely in modern times where such issues are a greater concern. These primary documents are less guarded and intricate clarifying the ideas. They also prove that the Beats were thinking of the environment and their role vis-à-vis it. This helps to render my interpretation of some of their poems and novels more plausible despite my

being an environmentalist. The discussion is broken down into three chapters covering: Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder, Michael McClure and Lew Welch.

The first chapter presents Jack Kerouac as more than a drunken bohemian poet. It analyzes the ecological thinking portrayed in his published works as well as his personal papers found in the New York City Public Library. The journals and letters clearly demonstrate a man trying to work his way through ecological and theological issues. It displays the Beat phenomenon as complex by considering Kerouac on his own terms. I maintain that Kerouac's worldview contained important philosophical views that may have played a role in the evolution of humanity's relationship to the natural world articulated. Much to his credit, Kerouac succeeded in the liaison between Catholicism and Buddhism as a framework for understanding the problem despite White's assessment that this could not be done. I find that we need to carefully reconsider the evolution of ecological thought from his time onwards to understand the extent to which White Jr.'s assessment has hindered our ability to appreciate how Oriental worldviews function within ecological thought-systems.

The second chapter focuses on how Gary Snyder, a noted American Deep Ecologist and environmental philosopher, was conceptualizing a similar understanding of how mankind had come to face its ecological crisis during the 1950s when he was firmly a member of the Beats. Focus will be placed on Snyder's forwarding some of the key concepts of Deep Ecology in the 1950s while living a simple life with little means. This way of life is an example of a viable alternative to our current one. The chapter concentrates on how ideas in his published works and personal papers from his Beat days, found in the archives at The University of California, Davis, rather than his later

more studied works in order to shed light upon his early reflections on mankind's relationship to nature. This allows us to appreciate what White Jr. was referring to regarding the Beats in his 1966 article. Whether or not Snyder's early ideas can easily be dismissed and removed from the study of the American relationship with nature will be questioned. My hope is that others further investigate the role of this important philosopher's early ideas in formulating Deep Ecology and the environmental movement as they are currently recognized.

Michael McClure and Lewis Welch are both studied in the final chapter. They are combined because Welch is an acute example of what McClure thought society would drive people to. The section studying Michael McClure is an attempt to comprehend his ecological vision. His published and unpublished works found in the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley are interwoven together in order to accomplish this. McClure's "mammal patriotism" shall be discussed in light of the growth of the Land Ethic with its notions of citizenship. McClure regularly wrote on the theme of society as depriving humans of the freedom they require. He is an interesting case because his conclusions were political rather than theological.

Lew Welch walked away from society in a literal way and thus depicts the extreme disability of some people to function properly within society and demonstrates the inner struggle defined by McClure. He can help us to understand why some people find it so demanding to function in Western everyday lives. His life can teach us the sad ending caused by the societal failure to establish itself in a more humane manner while hinting at what could have been different. His letters and works also serve to

demonstrate that the ecological ideas ran deep in the group and were regularly discussed amongst them.

Growing public awareness of the issues surrounding mankind's relationship to nature may have had a significant impact on the timing of the rise of Deep Ecology. That only Snyder's later work would be understood to have an important environmental message suggests as much. Perhaps readers could not yet grasp what the Beat Generation's *Rucksack Revolution* entailed. Alternatively, it could be because his later way of life offered the disaffected readers a sustainable and attainable standard of living that could help them to survive. Nevertheless, the ideas of many Beat Generation writers as found in their published works, their letters, and journals are rife with the questions raised by White Jr. in 1966 and still of concern to us today. Their lifestyles and ideas were analogous to those of Deep Ecologists who seem to offer one of the few reasonable paths for our future. We must return our gaze upon the Beat Generation in order to improve our perception of both the Beat Generation and the evolution of environmental ideas in America. Doing so might even help us to devise a culture that can avoid future environmental catastrophe.

Jack Kerouac: Citizen of Nature

"I dont want to be a drunken hero of the generation suffering everywhere with everyone—I want to be a quiet saint living in a shack in solitary meditation of universal mind." Jack Kerouac³⁴

"Christ you may have to wait for your true recognition of your true stature until latter day critics or philosophers begin analyzing your works and finding the germs of the real truth and explaining it to the public for you." Letter from Carolyn Cassady to Jack Kerouac³⁵

The "king of the Beats," the most famous Beat author of them all, was Jack Kerouac. Two days before he died, either of alcoholism or a severe beating he received at a bar or a combination of the two, he was to be found raging against his neighbour because the man had cut down a Georgia pine in his backyard. This tree was special to Kerouac; he liked to listen to the sounds it made at night as he viewed the stars from between its needles. He was so irate "because trees are holy."³⁶ He was very sensitive when it came to trees and from this little story we can see that he took them more seriously than most people. This is not surprising to those familiar with the story of the time Kerouac

³⁴ Jack Kerouac, Journal, The Jack Kerouac Papers, New York City Public Library, Berg Collection, Sub Series 2.1: Box 49.3, 1954, June 23,

³⁵ Ann Charters, ed., *Jack Kerouac. Selected Letters 1957-1969* (New York: Viking, 1999).

³⁶ Jim Christy, *The Long Slow Death of Jack Kerouac* (Cap-Saint-Ignace Quebec: ECW Press, 1998), p.89. The quote on the first page of the chapter is from Charters, ed., *Jack Kerouac. Selected Letters 1957-1969*, p.312.

“flicked out a hole in the ground. He dropped his pants and ‘fucked the earth.’”³⁷ But how are we to interpret such stories?

The discrepancy between these stories and the traditional understanding of the Beat Generation suggests that Jack Kerouac was a complex man whose art has been misunderstood ever since it began to garner attention. The quote above suggests concern that this confusion would negatively impact his legacy. In this chapter, we will come to understand one of the ignored ‘germs of real truth.’ Jack sought from a young age to better understand nature and his moral relationship to it. This would ultimately culminate with his attempt to steer American culture, or at least Beat Culture, towards Gary Snyder (Japhy Ryder in *The Dharma Bums*) who Kerouac viewed as a venerable model for the culture and one that was a radical foil to Neal Cassady (Dean Moriarty of *On The Road*). This model amounted to a worldview that fulfilled Aldo Leopold’s call for man to see himself as a citizen of nature rather than a conqueror. We will study links between Leopold and Jack Kerouac many of the ways he was similar to Leopold hold true if applied to his relationship to Naess. It is also worth noting that Jack Kerouac was the son of French Canadian Catholics and his interests in Buddhism, though temporary, demonstrate to us how a Christian can understand Buddhism as useful or pertinent with regards to the natural world.

Before delving in, it is worth explaining that the works of Jack Kerouac were very autobiographical in nature and they can be a powerful source for historians. One Kerouac scholar notes regarding the many biographies of Jack Kerouac “these books focus primarily on validating Kerouac’s fiction by demonstrating its basis in

³⁷ Maher Jr., *Kerouac. The Definitive Biography.*, p.159. Kerouac also recorded this episode in his journal.

autobiography.... The biographers are stuck on a rather crude criterion of verisimilitude, which causes them to miss the forest on account of the trees.”³⁸ He argues scholars waste time proving the autobiographical nature of Kerouac’s works. Rather than plot out Kerouac’s life by using the fiction, we will seek to understand how his life impacted the fiction and trace his evolving conception of how mankind was to relate to the world. Another writer, focusing on Allen Ginsberg, but writing more generally about Beat Generation writers, argued that they have an important role in the evolution of American autobiographical writing.³⁹ There is little doubt that the stories in the novels have fictive elements, names have been changed, at times cities have been changed in order to keep the anonymity of the people involved, but this in itself amounts to a compelling argument regarding the biographical nature of the books.

G.J. Apostolos, one of Kerouac’s lifelong friends, once spoke of Kerouac’s telling of a story about he and a girl who became the hero of *Maggie Cassidy* (1959). This work was a love story taken from Kerouac’s teenage years. As a grown man he went to meet her, to rekindle the spark in order to write more about it, but Apostolos claims “Jack and she just stared at each other. He didn’t say anything. He was frozen. There wasn’t anything between them. It was all in Jack’s mind, his imagination. There really wasn’t anything between them in the first place.”⁴⁰ His point is that Kerouac’s works are extremely personal, and even if they are not entirely accurate to the events described they are nonetheless his version of what transpired. He sought to be honest in his works,

³⁸ James T. Jones, *A Map of Mexico City Blues* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press., 1992), p.2.

³⁹ Caveney, *SCREAMING WITH JOY the Life of Allen Ginsberg*, p.6.

⁴⁰ Barry Gifford and Lawrence Lee, *Jack's Book. An oral biography of Jack Kerouac* (Edinburgh, Great Britain: Rebel Inc., 1999), p.17.

regularly told others to be so as well and thought that this was one of the crucial elements of the success of his writing. Ideas regarding the vulnerability of Jack and other Beat writers due to their honesty have been thrashed out at length using the analogy that they were naked in a spiritual sense as they revealed their inner selves totally and completely to their audiences and, at times during readings, in order to emphasize this exact point they were literally naked before their audiences.⁴¹ The fictional works will not be the only source of discussion, but they will be important to our understanding of his environmental ideas. His journals and letters will also be summoned upon in order to verify my reading of the novels, and to render the discussion more historical in nature.

Gerard

“Together we pray for the Mouse. ‘Dear Lord, take care of the little mouse’—‘Take care of the cat,’ we add to pray, since that’s where the Lord’ll have to do his work.” Jack Kerouac.⁴²

When Jack was only four his older brother Gerard Kerouac died at the age of nine. Jack’s book about his brother, *Visions of Gerard* (1958), depicts the child as a saintly male protagonist. He is presented as a hero to Jack and a person worthy of impersonation. There is little doubt that the life and death of his brother played a critical role in Jack’s life. Scholarship about the poignancy of Gerard’s influence is readily available, but little of it seeks to understand the meaning of this role. Jim Christy argues that Jack learned about religion in general from his brother and that the death and life of his brother “was, and would always remain, the most significant event in Jean-Louis’ life.”⁴³ Furthering this idea, Gifford and Lee noted “To Gabrielle [Jack’s mother] there

⁴¹ Tytell, *Naked Angels the Lives & literature of the Beat Generation*, p.4.

⁴² Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard* (New York: Penguin Books, 1958), p.15.

⁴³ Christy, *The Long Slow Death of Jack Kerouac*, p.13.

was no question that Gerard was a saint, and Jacky was told so again and again...Jack worshipped him and emulated him and was entirely bereft at his death.”⁴⁴ Many scholars agree that Kerouac’s mother played a considerable role in his life (he lived with her his entire life) and Jack was regularly disappointed at his inability to live up to comparisons. One final note regarding the influence of Gerard came from one of Jack’s longest standing friends, Philip Whalen; he claimed the stories in *Visions of Gerard* were nothing new to his friends because Jack was always telling them the stories.⁴⁵

The question remains, what did young Jack learn from Gerard’s life and death that influenced his understanding of the world? The answer can be found in a careful study of the book itself and in correlating passages in his letters and journal entries and later books where we can see the links between the lessons in the former and the morality and ideas represented in the latter. The book begins with Kerouac telling the reader how important Gerard was in his life:

For the first four years of my life, while he lived, I was no Ti Jean Duluo, I was Gerard, the world was his face, the flower of his face, the pale stooped disposition, the heartbreakingness and the holiness and his teachings of tenderness to me, and my mother constantly reminding me to pay attention to his goodness and advice.⁴⁶

Thus the reader becomes aware that the lessons expounded by Gerard are to be taken as a blueprint to moral living and that they were of immense importance to the younger brother.

Among the chief lessons of Saint Gerard was the relationship of people to animals. In one scene, Gerard explains to Jack that “God put these little things on earth to see if we want to hurt them—those who don’t do it who *can*, are for his Heaven—

⁴⁴ Lee, *Jack's Book. An oral biography of Jack Kerouac*, p.5.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.254.

⁴⁶ Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, p.2.

those who see they can hurt, and *do* hurt are not for his Heaven—See?”⁴⁷ The implication is that it is right and good not to do harm just because you can and it is wrong to do harm senselessly. Extending this idea to animals and weaker beings creates a rather comprehensive belief system that can control our actions towards nature. If it is wrong to harm those who are weaker merely because we are capable of it then part of the wrong is in our choice to utilize our advantages arbitrarily. Our notions of equality and citizenship are based on the rights of others but also on this moral principle. Little Jack was learning that we ought to treat animals as equals. They are to be given great respect in situations wherein we might degrade them, even if we could seemingly conquer them without a negative outcome to ourselves. To choose to conquer the natural world would be shameful vainglory on our part, much like slavery was. Kerouac had fond memories of the lesson, “Gerard, who warned me to be kind to the little animals and took me by the hand on forgotten little walks.”⁴⁸ That he was learning the lessons in a loving manner may explain why they were so well received by him and remained important.

An extension of the same idea about how animals ought to treat each other flowed from Gerard once as he berated the family cat for killing a mouse:

“*Méchante!* Bad girl! Dont [sic] you understand what you’ve done? When will you understand? We dont disturb little animals and little things! We leave them alone! We’ll never go to heaven if we go on eating each other and destroying each other like that all the time!—without thinking, without knowing!—wake up, foolish girl!—realize what you’ve done!—Be ashamed! Shame! Crazy face! Stop wiggling your ears! Understand what I’m telling you! It’s got to stop some fine day! There wont always be time!—Bad girl! Go on! Go in your corner! Think it over well!”⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.104.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.2.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.11.

In this, we see that even animals (such as people who are animals) ought to be held to certain standards. This may appear unreasonable, but the true power of this is that even cats have souls and need to be saved. That creatures other than humans could potentially be saved was an expansion of ethics. It meant that animals, in a moral sense, were just like us. If this were true, then they would be moral citizens by our side. This idea would prove very powerful to Jack during his Buddhist days. The second lesson is consideration to both animals and inanimate things, even rocks or plants (as Leopold suggested) could be important, not just animals. The third lesson is to ‘think it over well,’ ‘it’ being the relationship between different beings. We might expect such lessons to be harsh because they are such humbling ideas, but Jack claims:

“*Allo zig lain—ziglain—zighuu—*” he’d say to our cat, in a little high crazycatvoice and the cat’d look plain and blank back at him as though the cat language was the true one but also they understood the words to portend kindness and their eyes followed him as he moved around our gray house and suddenly they’d bless him unexpectedly by jumping on his lap at dusk.⁵⁰

Here we find the charming power of talking to animals, a gift that depicts a connectedness to nature that was essential. We also see that the cat is not angry with Gerard. This suggests that Gerard’s lessons were well received by those to whom he taught; and Jack, not the cat, was of course the foremost student.

Gerard, while a saint, was not beyond getting mad. When Gerard worries because the birds he fed at his windowsill do not come to him; he bemoans the fact that they think he will hurt them. Someone explains that their experiences with people tells them otherwise about humans. Gerard sagely replies, “Why? Why is everyone so mean? Didn’t God see to it that we—of all people—*people*—would be kind—to each other, to

⁵⁰Ibid., p.3.

animals.”⁵¹ In this passage, Gerard is mad at God for allowing people to be mean and mad at people for having consistently taken advantage of their power over the weaker animals. The resulting situation in which those people who are willing to fulfill their roles honorably, that is without harming the weaker creatures, have a hard time doing so because they are so rare is intolerable. In this passage, Gerard points out a critical and negative disconnect between men and nature while subtly noting that humans are animals.

Another story demonstrates the separation of man from nature. Once Gerard sought to save the life of a mouse that had been trapped in a mousetrap. He freed it and nursed it back to health. Jack noticed “The hungjawed dull faces of grown adults who had no words to praise or please little trying-angels like Gerard working to save the mouse from the trap—But just stared or gawped on jawpipes and were silly in their prime.”⁵² Children, Jack had understood, were closer to nature than adults. Growing up meant growing dim to the realities of our relationship with nature. It would become a lifelong belief of Kerouac’s that children, and later in life women, were closer to the earth than grown men. He certainly held the opinion that men had within them knowledge that they had lost but could retrieve. Reading the bible one day he notated in his journal: “Consider the lilies, said Jesus, meaning that what the babe knows in his joys, the wise with their words & logics cannot know—& in this I see shuddering bliss.”⁵³ The crucial idea is the presence of truths that words fail to express. The idea in Jack’s mind that there exists an innate knowledge and over time men lose the ability to

⁵¹Ibid., p.20.

⁵²Ibid., p.8.

⁵³Jack Kerouac, *Journal: Berkeley Way*, The Jack Kerouac Papers, New York City Public Library, Berg Collection, Sub Series 2.1: Box 56.4, 1957, June 26,

utilize it due to nurturing is similar to Snyder's notion that the evolution of the ego is the critical problem in the relationship. In watching this episode with Gerard and the adults, Jack noticed this truth at a very young age.

Another one of the lessons Gerard taught Jack was to pray for all the little creatures of the earth. This was not a normal practice at the time but it may have been derived from a focus in the family on the words of St. Francis or Assisi, although such a statement is only speculative. Kerouac claims to remember a deathbed prayer by Gerard:

Bless all living and dying things in
The endless past of the ethereal flower,
Bless all living and dying things in
The endless present of the ethereal flower,
Bless all the living and dying things in
The endless future of the ethereal flower, Amen.⁵⁴

Whether or not this prayer itself was recited by Gerard is not the point; it seems unlikely that he did because Jack wrote several prayers that were similar to this one during his Buddhist days and this prayer has an extremely Buddhist ring to it for it to have come from a nine year old Catholic saint. This in itself is interesting; that Kerouac saw no problem in conflating religions will be discussed below. Nevertheless, Jack claimed Gerard taught him to pray and care for the smaller, weaker creatures rather than conquer them. If attempting to bless them is considered conquering, then surely such conquest is too benign to be harmful. That the creatures had an important role to play in the moral standing of mankind and that they were worthy of blessings and prayers was an important lesson and Jack prayed for all sentient beings in both his Catholic and Buddhist days.

⁵⁴ Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, p.70.

A rudimentary understanding of the process of composting is demonstrated, in the words of their father, who explains, “The cat eats the mouse, the mouse eats the worm, the worm eats the cheese, the cheese turns and eats the man,” and “ ‘In any case, eat or be eaten—We eat now, later on the worms eat us.’ [Of which Jack notes] Truer words were not spoken from any vantage point on this packet of earth.”⁵⁵ This suggests that from a young age Kerouac had notions of the interconnectedness of everything in a scientific way. Ideas about food chains and ecology that are common today were new at the time.

The lessons of Gerard helped to formulate Kerouac’s ideas about the environment. In *Lonesome Traveler* (1960) he discussed an idea that was clearly related to those of Gerard; ecology resurfaces: “To chase after extinction in the old Nirvanic sense of Buddhism is ultimately silly, as the dead indicate in the silence of their blissful sleep in Mother Earth which is an Angel hanging in orbit in Heaven anyway.”⁵⁶ Here the earth itself could be a sacred being like the cat or the mouse the cat eats. This idea of the earth may be a predecessor to the Gaia Hypothesis. In this notion, we see an important environmental idea coming through Kerouac’s writing, the sacredness of the natural world and all its components.

In his daily journals, the novelist wrote many notes that can be said to have originated with his brother these notes demonstrate care for nature. For example, “I see the holiness of all-existing things;”⁵⁷ the sanctity was the potential for them to go to heaven like the cat. It is also the potential for man to reach heaven if he treats them right;

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.13 and p.14.

⁵⁶ Jack Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveler* (New York: Grove Press, 1960), p.132.

⁵⁷ ———, Journal. Dharma, The Jack Kerouac Papers, New York City Public Library, Berg Collection, Sub Series 2.11: Box 49.4, 1954, July 29,

their relationship is one of moral equals seeking to attain divine grace. Their definition require each other to be complete. That this was all being written as Kerouac was spending hours in Buddhist meditation exhibits an interchange of religions that is interesting because it denies White Jr.'s claim that such could not be conceived. Elsewhere he noted part of what he saw in Buddhism, "COMPASSIONATE SOLITUDE. The hermit of the trees, Buddha—then he walked to the Banares road alone—to spread the law... 'Compassion is the guide star' he said. 'Beg' 'Be humble.'"⁵⁸ This compassion is very similar to that taught by Catholic "Saint" Gerard. It is of little surprise that this aspect of Buddhism appealed to Jack. In this we see again that Jack related to animals and nature with eyes that saw a spiritual connection. In fact, the quote from the beginning of this chapter about being misrepresented depicts Kerouac as understanding his role as promoting this ideal of Gerard's if what he promotes was a "fight to instill peace & tenderness in the world."⁵⁹ If Kerouac thought his fight was one of instilling peace and tenderness, it seems likely the idea to do so was spawned in his mind as a Catholic boy of four years and was later complemented by Buddhism.

Despite the teaching of his brother, Jack came to believe that man had a special role in nature. "Men are creatures but they dont [sic] have to imitate the others—they alone (as far as I know on earth) should have the noblesse oblige and the tender sorrow to practice kindness all the time."⁶⁰ So while he would at times deviate from the ideas of

⁵⁸ ———, Journal. Dharma, The Jack Kerouac Papers, New York City Public Library, Berg Collection, Sub Series 2.11: Box 49.10, 1956, April 10,

⁵⁹ Charters, ed., *Jack Kerouac. Selected Letters 1957-1969*, p.121.

⁶⁰ Jack Kerouac, Journal. Dharma 10, The Jack Kerouac Papers, New York City Public Library, Berg Collection, Sub Series 2.11: Box 49.11, 1956, Kerouac, like the other Beats studied herein, often failed to offer exact dates in his journal entries however the journals

Gerard he still held them close. This is worth noting as I do not wish to give the impression that Jack was a thoughtless buffoon who spent his whole life easily believing everything his brother taught him. In reality, these lessons were his memories of the lessons as worked through by his mind over the course of a lifetime and in the writing of the book they are infused with Buddhism. His ecological-moral ideas evolved over time and he demonstrates them starting through the words of Gerard. I simply note that Gerard had a major influence on Jack and that the views of his older brother affected him in ways that helped to bring Jack's ideas about the role of man in nature and his relationship to animals closer to that of citizen than that of conqueror. Furthermore, his reflection upon these ideas, taught by a Catholic, were completed during his Buddhist years and so are an example of how the interplay between the two religions can amount to a more environmentally aware worldview.

The lessons from Gerard are very important in understanding Kerouac's relationship with nature. His young age during the lessons, his mother's lifelong insistence that Gerard was a saint and Jack ought to act as Gerard had, and the magnetic character of Gerard himself rendered him a significant influence upon Jack. The lessons learned are compassion for all creatures, kindness and tenderness to all creatures, the prospect of animals achieving grace, the earth as a whole to be considered as sacred, questions about the innate knowledge of man and early scientific notions of ecology and food chains. All of these will reappear in his published works, personal letters and private journals. While Buddhist, Kerouac held to the distinctly Catholic notion of being accountable to God. That this responsibility was based on the treatment of animals and

are given years and on occasion months. Such entries are also not paginated. The "10" in the title signifies that this was his tenth "dharma" journal.

inanimate objects and that the cat ought not to kill the mouse unless for food suggests the influence of Gerard. This duty depicts that different doctrines can reinforce each other rather than antagonize each other. These arguments were infrequently made at the time; few people indeed would have accepted the notion of animals with souls and moral roles. With Gerard, we are beginning to witness the complexity of Kerouac's worldview and to notice how it relates to *The Land Ethic*.

The Town and the City

"My goodness," she said to her husband, pointing to the high skyscrapers in downtown Brooklyn, "those buildings are so high they're going to fall someday. One good earthquake and it will all fall down." Jack Kerouac.⁶¹

The Town and The City (1950) was Jack Kerouac's first published novel. The book had modest success and convinced him that he could make a living as an author. It has been called an apprentice novel owing to its similarity to the work of Thomas Wolfe.⁶² Wolfe was one of the greatest influences on his writing style early in his career. *Town* demonstrated that Kerouac had knowledge of the traditional conventions of novel writing and the ability to wield them as he pleased. He would come to feel that the conventions were too strict and as such he later sought the jazz voice that would make him famous. Much like with jazz musician Ornette Coleman, it is important that Kerouac was not loose in his writing or breaking rules due to an inability to write in a more traditional manner, but rather he choose to do so to better convey his ideas and emotions. Reminiscent of other artists at the time, he was in part reacting to the confines of the Post-World War II Cold War American ethos.

⁶¹ ———, *The Town and the City* (New York: Harcourt Brace Javanovich, 1950), p.343.

⁶² Tytell, *Naked Angels the Lives & Literature of the Beat Generation*, p.149.

The book is about the large Martin family that begins by living in the country and ends by living in New York City. The family members go their separate ways during this transition. It is a tale of growing up and losing innocence and the struggles of a whole family. In it are three brothers that are based on different aspects of the novelist's real life understanding of himself. It is a classic book with boyhood scenes and a sprawling cast of characters. By the end, one of the brothers has met a cast of people in New York, the group that would become the Beat Generation. The village versus the urban debate is central to the book, as the title clearly suggests.⁶³ The conclusion of the debate is that the semi-rural town is the superior living arrangement for mankind.

The story commences with long flowing descriptions of the town. "These are the things that closely surround the mills and the business of Galloway, that make it a town rooted in earth in the ancient pulse of life and work and death, that make its people townspeople and not city people. [My underline]"⁶⁴ The surroundings referred to are a field, some rivers, wind, trees and animals. These are important indicators that Kerouac saw the town as rural. There is a connection between living in the rural areas and being connected to nature. This, according to Kerouac, is important because the connection that the townspeople feel allows them to be in tune with living, working and dying. This amounts to proper cyclical and meaningful life as he sees it; a cycle we will learn is only possible in the rural.

An example of the connection found in rural settings is the pace of life of the town and the mood of its people. The land defines the cycles it adheres to and the

⁶³ For a good discussion of American ambivalence about the city/country debate see Robert Beauregard, *Voices of Decline. The Postwar Fate of US Cities* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993).

⁶⁴ Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, p.5.

moods it lives through. “Living continues in Galloway [Lowell in the novel] like the seasons themselves, nearer to God’s earth by these weathers, through which life pulses processionally [sic] in moods and leaps and bounds, while the moods of the universe flank across the skies endlessly.”⁶⁵ The people existing in the rural areas are closer to nature, and closer to God. The life in the small town is depicted as a paradise. Their moods and troubles are natural, healthy, and good.

The people of the city, or at least the Martins when they move to it, find it a far less soul-sustaining environment. Rather than have moods and cycles in connection to the natural world they live in a world of concrete, “When the sky itself was a dishrag and the earth was covered with the rat-gray paving that city people lived on—he came home from his job, smoking and silent and trudging, his mind blank, his soul deadened, his heart breaking.”⁶⁶ The city sky offers pollution rather than celestial bodies and the ground is cold hard pavement that makes a man feel like a rat scurrying about rather than aromatic loamy roads that make the soul exultant. The result is that rather than a peaceful soul working, living and dying in a primitive cycle the soul is deadened and the heart is broken as he completes the distance between knowing babe and lost man.

The cities could drive people mad. In one scene, the Martin parents argue, ““That’s New York, Marge!” the father cried, suddenly angry. “The place drives everybody crazy after a while.””⁶⁷ No one could be safe in the city. Whereas in the town some people, likely predisposed, go mad, in the city the prediction is everyone

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.22.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.470.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.407.

will. The city does not offer people the balance, cycles and the moods of nature to keep them sane and so they find themselves rushing about like rats going out of their minds.

In the towns people, especially women, had an understanding of the land that appears to have been very close to Leopold's *Land Ethic*. Jack writes:

The women rock back and forth in the old creaking swing, reaching mechanically into the popcorn bowl, musing, contented, belonging to the wonderful darkness and the ripe June world, owning it, as no barging man of the house could ever hope to belong to any part of the earth or own an inch of it.⁶⁸

With this we see that the notion of land ownership and the utter conquering of nature were not ingrained in the countryside. While changing the land, people were still living with it and following its patterns according to Kerouac. Such a lifestyle kept some people contented and sane. This suggests a role or relationship of equality with the earth that is soul sustaining. This scene is impossible in the city where electric lights deny darkness and there are few swings and fewer porches, where time to sit and 'do nothing' is hard to come by. This suggests a shift in our perspective of the land; our relationship to it is turned on its head when we realize that we depend upon the land.

In the cities, where urbanites live against nature, there was no such balance. That they live unnaturally increases their levels of insanity. The women who enter them know that they live in a formation that is an aberration to nature:

The Martins of Galloway, uprooted by war, had moved to New York City. The mother, so excited by this adventure, knew inscrutably as the movers unloaded her furniture from a truck in the streets of Brooklyn that she and her family were not destined to stay in the city. [Her husband would die in the city] "My goodness," she said to her husband, pointing to the high skyscrapers in downtown Brooklyn, "those buildings are so high they're going to fall someday. One good earthquake and it will all fall down."⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.18.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.343.

The people of cities think they own the land and can do whatever they like with it and build whatever they please upon it. Kerouac has apocalyptic visions of how this will end. Man cannot live so out of touch from nature. Such efforts will end in disaster for the community of the city just as they end in madness on the individual level. Cities damn man, the soul dies at a young age, perhaps from the recognition of this. This rings of Snyder and especially Lew Welch's version of life in the city.⁷⁰

Kerouac was certain that the cities were not the places for men to lead good lives. In fact, at one juncture in the book Kerouac's mother proclaims as much: "'New York's all right,'" went on the mother. "It's all right for shows and stores and excitement and a lot of people, but when it comes to living the way people were *intended* to live, give me the country and the small town."⁷¹ People were not intended to live as they do in cities. The cities meant people, and shopping, the loss of the simplicities of life and the respect for the land. An elderly woman looks out upon the city and recalls lost simplicities:

Missouri in 1860 and the men and things of that time, remembering the first sawmills of Virginia, and cattle trail days, the early American time of great forests and wild plains. These places and raw simplicities had now gone into

⁷⁰ Perhaps the best description of city living as Beats saw it came from the pen of Lew Welch about his days as an "organization man": "My day starts with an alarm clock and nausea. Take medicine, drink orange juice, drink very sweet tea, stare at dry toast, butter it, choke it down. Retch while fixing cat food (high carp all ground up, oily). Retch while brushing teeth. Chew gum. Make it into the car and onto speedway with a thousand idiots who can't drive. Arrive at work, invariably late, invariably discovering some supposed crisis has occurred. Work consists of doing the urgent. A friend describes it: "pissing on small fires." All day long inferior people demand that I do things in far less time than it takes. I do it. Then they change it—it is not "better" it is only different. Then I have to do it all over again in even less time. It shouldn't have been done in the first place. Then onto the speedway where same idiots are now furious as I am. We try to kill each other for a half hour. Then home. Cocktail. Four or five more cocktails..." The souls of men crushed as they attempt to cope with work that does not satisfy despite "higher standards of living." Lew Welch, "To Gary from Lew," in *I Remain. The letters of Lew Welch & The correspondence of his friends. 1949-1960*, ed. Donald Allen (Bolin California: Grey Fox Press, 1957), p.107-8.

⁷¹ Kerouac, *The Town and the City*, p.413.

the night, far beyond the incomprehensible sprawl, the cancerous smoky suburbs, the street-demented scab and wreckage of New York City and its outflung Chicagos, Cincinnati, Milwaukee, Detroit, and Cleveland.⁷²

Nature was ruined; the plains and forests were destroyed. The hope of the old days was gone and now cities grew like cancer upon the land and in them men lived unhappy, broken hearted, soulless lives. That no part of the land was as wild as it seemed is a perception discussed more deeply in the chapter on Gary Snyder.

That cities are bad places for men and towns are good places has to do with the connection to nature of the inhabitants. It is much easier for people to be happy and fulfilled when they are close to the land, living in its cycles, its simplicities, and adhering to its moods. In the town man must respect nature, not own it; he must live with the land, not against it. These facts were important to Kerouac and they resonate with the ideas behind the Land Ethic as well as those of Gerard and Gary Snyder.

The Town and The City was very critical of cities. The towns Kerouac wrote of had largely disappeared prior to his lifetime and he did not have first hand experience of such towns, though he thought they were the best way to live. It is clear that early on he thought that cities were terrible for the souls of men. It is easy to see why when we consider the ethics taught by his mother suggested in the quotes above, and, importantly, Gerard, as to how man ought to behave towards the land and its creatures. The cities represent a critical disconnect between mankind and nature, an un-thought out subjugation of the land wherein man is the conqueror who debases both himself and the land.

Jack Kerouac always wanted to be in tune with nature and saw a great many benefits to achieving such a state of being, including the fact that man could only be

⁷² Ibid., p.431.

moral if he lived in this 'right' way. He understood nature as crucial to the soul, heart, mind and morality of man. He thought a great deal about how man was to relate to land and the importance of this question concluding with the beginnings of a lifestyle similar to *The Land Ethic*; such deep probing is of course one of the mainstays of Deep Ecology and that underlying all this thought is the argument that the Beats were Deep Ecologist without knowing it and without being recognized as such. Gerard had taught him many lessons, and *The Town and The City* is a demonstration of his early conclusions about how a man should live.

When Kerouac realized most men were to be found living in cities and the rural towns were disappearing he sought, like Snyder, to find alternatives to the city. He envisioned spending time as Thoreau once had, in a retreat away from society. A reader with knowledge of *The Town and The City* best understands why Kerouac took pleasure in this motif of a personal hermitage.

One of the brothers in *The Town and The City* (who represents an aspect of the author) is aware that he lives near where Henry David Thoreau lived and performed his *Walden* experiment. He considers the Concord River when he sees it; "From the top of the hill he could see her house down by the river, down by the silent slow-flowing Concord that Thoreau had known a hundred years ago."⁷³ The reference to Thoreau is not surprising. Many times in his life Kerouac referred to Thoreau as a role model. In the novel, he writes about some of his college time; "And Peter went on long solitary walks through the woods with his copy of Thoreau in his back pocket, he tramped contemplatively across birch fields and groves of pine, paused at the frosty brooks and

⁷³ Ibid., p.48.

saw sloping red light of Sunday dusk move across the blue snow.”⁷⁴ Thoreau had advocated a more simplistic life than most people were leading during his time. This message seemed good to Kerouac who considered living as Thoreau rather than going to college at the age of 18.⁷⁵ The reading of *Walden*, and walking in the woods both depict a man with time to spare for thought. Gerard had taught Jack that thinking about man’s place was useful and good Thoreau also advocated this. It is no surprise then that this is one of the advantages to growing up in a rural area. An ability to calmly ponder life’s great questions was very valuable from Kerouac’s perspective and *Walden* provided something of a model of how to accomplish this when one is forced to live in cancerous cities most of the time.

As early as 1943, Kerouac was writing to his friends about going off into the woods and leading the simple life.⁷⁶ This motif would resurface in his letters, journals and published novels with regularity. He found four major benefits to be had from retreats into simple solitary living close to nature and away from concrete; there man could achieve self-knowledge, he could obtain wisdom, he could pray for all living creatures where God lived and finally find a place where he could be clean and saved from the pressures of society. These thoughts open to us a window from which we can see how he understood the role of nature in helping man to discover his role in the universe and the desperation he would come to feel due to his fame. Importantly, it also

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.130.

⁷⁵ Edward Halsey Foster, *Understanding the Beats* (Columbus, South Carolina: South Carolina University Press, 1992), p.29.

⁷⁶ Ann Charters, ed., *Selected Letters. Jack Kerouac. 1940-1956* (New York: Viking, 1995), p.70. Letter to Edith Parker from Jack Kerouac, September 18th 1943.

explains to us where he thought he was telling people to go when he advocated the ‘rucksack revolution’ in his novel, *The Dharma Bums* that we will study below.

The hermitage, according to Kerouac, would lead to self-knowledge. This self-knowledge was of the animal instinct variety: “No man should go through life without once experiencing healthy [...] solitude in the wilderness finding himself [...]— Learning, for instance, to eat when he’s hungry and sleep when he’s sleepy.”⁷⁷ The hermitage was a place where a man could learn to listen to his inner animal, live in the way that man as animal was intended to live, following the cycles of hunger and rest. In Kerouac’s case a hermitage would be a good way to unleash these instincts. This is but a minor aspect of the potential benefits of spending time alone in nature.

While men are in nature they will come to understand their hopes better; as they will concentrate on their “mellow hopes of paradise (which comes to everybody anyway).”⁷⁸ That these mellow hopes of paradise (which refers to heaven) are to be had in solitude suggests that he saw nature as spiritually inspiring; here he is ascribing holy aspirations to men who partake in the venture. He argued that in solitude men will realize that they, and their surroundings, are holy and thus they gain knowledge of both themselves and the environments in which they live. This echoes Snyder’s ideas about what men would learn through such solitude.

Solitude has long been considered a powerful tool of self-discovery and holy visions. Kerouac notes, “They say, too, in ancient scripture:— “Wisdom can only be obtained from the viewpoint of solitude.””⁷⁹ This is why so many prophets, Amos and

⁷⁷ Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveler*, p.128.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.vi.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.118.

Moses among them, spent time in the wilds. Jesus himself spent forty days and forty nights in the wild, something Kerouac knew. I have suggested that the knowledge acquired in pilgrimages, retreats or monasteries is of a holy nature. That he intended to spend much of his time in solitude reading and studying scriptures verifies as much.⁸⁰ In solitude he would learn to “dig peace” and also to “be kind.”⁸¹ Peace comes from being kind and this was the message of young Gerard. That the hermitage would give him time and inspiration to become closer to understanding the ideals of Gerard and would make it easier for him to incorporate them into his daily life because in nature Gerard’s lessons were more obviously truths. That he had to do this he explained: “I intended to pray, too, as my only activity, pray for all living creatures; I saw it was the only decent activity left in the world.”⁸² This demonstrates a disheartened view of the society in which he was living and the possibilities it offered to its citizens.

In seeking to send people into solitary retreats Kerouac thought they would learn to be kind and peaceful. This is important because, as we shall see, he advocated that many people take the time to experience a hermitage in their life and now we understand, at least partially, what he thought this would teach them. It also helps us to understand how he viewed nature as a place of self-knowledge.

Thoreau’s actions amounted to a rejection of society in a moral or Jesus Christ-like rejection of social norms. In a letter to fellow Beat poet Allen Ginsberg, Kerouac wrote, “I’ll write books in the woods. Thoreau was right; Jesus was right. It’s all-wrong and I denounce it and it can go to hell. I don’t believe in this society; but I believe in

⁸⁰ Charters, ed., *Selected Letters. Jack Kerouac. 1940-1956*, p.530.

⁸¹ ———, ed., *Jack Kerouac. Selected Letters 1957-1969*, p.94. See also, Kerouac, *Journal. Dharma, The Jack Kerouac Papers, Sub Series 2.11: Box 49.10*,

⁸² Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*, p.105.

man.”⁸³ This rejection of social norms inherited from Thoreau, partly from his piece *Civil Disobedience*, is one Kerouac and the Beats are well known for. This Beat linking of Christ to the rejection of society has not been studied. It suggests that to reject society is a moral imperative. Kerouac noted, “Reading history makes me realize I should have stayed home—praising God in a dew, like Emily & Thoreau—Will do.”⁸⁴ This demonstrates how Jesus is to be linked to the ideas of the denunciation of society and the hermitage of Thoreau. The purpose is to reject social life in order to praise ‘God in a dew.’ Praising God involves prayer for all creatures as to Kerouac all aspects of nature are holy.⁸⁵

The Reference to ‘God in a Dew’ also helps us to understand what he thought he was doing when seeking out a hermitage and counseling others to walk this path. Envisioning a book to explain this idea, never completed, he explained; God ought to be found in a dew “because simpler than God in a Gothic Stone Temple.”⁸⁶ In simple retreats he thought man approached God in a more direct manner than in a Cathedral. To seek out hermitages was to seek out the places where God would be the most evident to man, allowing the two (man and God) to connect. Places where this was possible were the real home of man, according to him.⁸⁷ Kerouac conflated connecting with nature and connecting with God and hoped more people would do so.

⁸³ Charters, ed., *Selected Letters. Jack Kerouac. 1940-1956*, p. 193. Letter dated June 10 1949, Jack Kerouac to Allen Ginsberg.

⁸⁴ Jack Kerouac, Journal. Bila Kayf, The Jack Kerouac Papers, New York City Public Library, Berg Collection, Sub Series 2.1: Box 56.2, 1957, January 7,

⁸⁵ Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveler*, p.133. He notes: “one caterpillar, a thousand hairs of God.”

⁸⁶ Jack Kerouac, Diary, The Jack Kerouac Papers, New York City Public Library, Berg Collection, Sub Series 2.1: Box 56.3, 1957, March 31.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

What one should do in these holy places is a relatively traditional religious action: pray. Kerouac thought that in such places prayer was more possible because the feat of being in nature enhanced a man's sense of the spiritual world rendering prayer more earnest and thus it could have a greater impact or likelihood of being answered. He once wrote to John Clellon Holmes, "remember I told Time magazine I'd pray for a month if book sold to movies? In woods? This means simply sitting on the earth, under tree, stars, every night (in poncho cape in rain), and simply concentrating on God's compassion for all living creatures."⁸⁸ He thought that the place to go pray was nature, not cathedrals. This suggests an acceptance of nature as sacred as the house of God must be. It also tells us what the bhikkus sent to the woods were supposed to do once they got there.

Just what people were supposed to pray for was also defined. He explained to Philip Whalen the idea behind solitude was to "finish my own life be an old greybeard Jack Poet writing haiku & praying for deliverance of all living things to heaven, which if prayer is earnest and desire is true, is not only possible, but done."⁸⁹ This prayer is reminiscent of the ones taught by 'Saint' Gerard. It shows that he thought all beings were to be prayed for and thus were to be respected in their own right. They were, like us, to benefit from heaven since they were fellow moral citizens. Time in nature would facilitate humankind's ability to see that this was true. They would have the time to think it over carefully and come to see that the best action for them to take would be to pray for every living thing. When Kerouac sought to send people to the woods, when he wanted to turn them away from the drunken feasting parties that were associated with his

⁸⁸ Charters, ed., *Jack Kerouac. Selected Letters 1957-1969*, p.141.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.96.

name, he was conveying them to what he viewed as a holier place than a cathedral, a place for clearer thoughts than academic libraries or monasteries, a place of connection with nature and all its creatures where man could partake in ‘the only decent activity left in the world.’

He also saw the woods as a place of personal salvation where men could lick the wounds they received in urban society. The forest was a spiritual and physical hospital where he could overcome alcohol and other problems he faced when in the urban regions.⁹⁰ This would help him the few times he actually sought out such places. He wrote to his sister,

This summer in Big Sur ...I learned my old woods life again: making coffee on a woodfire, the fire quiet and glowing, the creek gurgling...suddenly in the peace of day and night and day and night of that I began to write again⁹¹

This depicts the therapeutic nature of ‘the woods life.’ It was a life that would allow him to continue writing. He did not spend enough time living this way. Instead, he would spend most of the 1960s getting drunk and leading an ever more sedentary lifestyle. He produced very little during this time that anyone currently reads.

In the late 1950s, he was aware of this and he wrote it to his friends. His letters to Gary Snyder, who was in Japan, became more panicked as the situation of dealing with his fame worsened. Snyder received a letter with sullen news and a negative outlook,

There are Swedish, Danish, Dutch, Spanish, French and etc. translations how can I keep up—everyday I get an invite to lecture somewhere—I’m going to get a cabin in the woods and a jeepster stationwagon this year or die [...] I’m fat, dejected, ashamed, bored, pestered & shot. I must get a cabin or die, but getting a car for me is such a horror—I dont like driving—Mebbe I can get a cabin reachable by bus & foot, in the Adirondacks.⁹²

⁹⁰ Jack Kerouac, *Journal*. Dharma, The Jack Kerouac Papers, New York City Public Library, Berg Collection, 1957, April 13,

⁹¹ Charters, ed., *Jack Kerouac. Selected Letters 1957-1969*, p.276.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p.234/5.

These two passages aptly depict the deterioration he was going through and what he thought the solution to his problem was. Snyder was in Japan and as such could not continue to perform his service of getting him out into the woods where he wanted to be but never had the vigor to go.

We now have a sense of what Kerouac thought people would learn if they left the cities and sought out quiet refuge. He predicted they would gain self-understanding and that this understanding would lead to them gaining knowledge about the universe and heaven helping them to understand their role in nature and the role of nature in their moral standing. It also demonstrates that Jack saw nature as holy. He saw being in nature as the best way to approach God and to live a moral life. You were to enter nature not as a conqueror of it, but as a humble soul coming face to face with god, to approach as a humble citizen, not as a victorious ruler over all. These ideas are not surprising to us who know all we do about Kerouac. Perhaps some might wish to argue that he was not very vocal about these ideas and so they have been ignored. I will argue that the above offers hints and clues to his understanding, but in *The Dharma Bums* he was explicit in his ideas about the Beat Generation and the role of nature in the moral standing of man.

Decline

"Later, I don't know whether it was in the late fifties or the early sixties, I asked Jack, 'Well, how do you like fame?' He said, 'It's like old newspapers blowing down Bleecker Street.'" 'Irene May'⁹³

"He is easily the purest person in the whole world and the world will kill him" Lewis Welch.⁹⁴

⁹³ Lee, *Jack's Book. An oral biography of Jack Kerouac*, p.292. 'Irene May' is a fictional named assigned to a woman by Kerouac in *The Subterraneans* who still prefers that her name not be released to the public and so does interviews etc. under the pen name.

Jack was a man unsuited to fame. Students of the Beat Generation rarely fail to discuss the rapid decline of Jack Kerouac.⁹⁵ I will not follow this practice here. Instead, I will suggest that Jack sought to deflect some of his fame and turn the Beat Generation into something other than the hedonist culture as it was being portrayed as by the media and youth of the time who had chosen Dean Moriarty as their leader. He sought to do this in his work called *The Dharma Bums*. In June 1958, he wrote to Whalen telling his friend that he wants to be in the mountains when *The Dharma Bums* is released. He claims to want out of the spotlight because its glare is too harsh for him; the mountains are where he expects to find some peace.⁹⁶ My contention is that Kerouac was attempting to abdicate his “throne” as “king of the Beats” due to his inability to deal with or appreciate fame. It was his final attempt at regaining control over his life before it was too late.

The Dharma Bums

“*The world ain’t so bad, when you got Japhies, I thought, and felt glad*” Jack Kerouac⁹⁷

In 1958, seeking to ride the wave of popularity caused by Kerouac’s *On The Road* Harcourt Brace published Jack Kerouac’s novel *The Dharma Bums*. The book offered a wholesale revision of what Beat culture would represent. It described recent events as opposed to *Road*, which had taken six years to find a publisher. The new novel contained a worldview regarding the environment and man’s moral position in relation to it. The result is a didactic piece of writing preaching a new way of life, a counter-culture of religion and wilderness that attempted to regain ownership of the movement by

⁹⁴ Lew Welch, Dear Gary, February 1 1960, Gary Snyder Papers, Special Collections, University of California, Davis Library. Box II 198:79.

⁹⁵ Christy, *The Long Slow Death of Jack Kerouac*, Is as the title suggests a particularly apt version of this.

⁹⁶ Charters, ed., *Jack Kerouac. Selected Letters 1957-1969*, p.128.

⁹⁷ Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*, p.71.

reiterating what he thought the Beat Generation was about. Predictably, the way of living described in the book did not prosper as well as the hedonist one. However, the idea was present in Kerouac's mind and he sought to plant it in the mind of his readers. The result is that a lot of people read the book and were at the very least introduced to the ideas contained therein. Jim Christy notes, "I find it interesting that *The Dharma Bums* is the favorite book of people whose worldview coincides with the ideas rampant in the Sixties."⁹⁸ That he sought to redefine the Beat ethos to convince others of its value and that its value was grasped by the hippies who later read it, clearly demonstrates that something was happening in the environmental and social views of Americans during the 1950s. That people read the book meant that the ideas were encountered by a segment of the population prior to Rachel Carson. The ideas Jack forwarded come as no surprise to those who understand Jack's thoughts of hermitage, simplicity, the lessons of Gerard and his opinion of cities.

The Dharma Bums features Ray Smith (Kerouac) and Japhy Ryder (Gary Snyder) and discusses their adventures together. In it, they witness the now epic '6 Gallery Reading,⁹⁹ they climb mountains together, take part in Buddhist rituals, teach each other and learn about Buddhism and poetry. When Japhy is to go to Japan to further his studies, Ray accepts a job as a fire lookout on Mount Desolation. There he spends his time reading sutras and praying. While on the mountain, he decides he has a message to teach people; he descends at the end of the season and writes the novel. In Jack's words:

The hero is young Japhy Ryder, poet, mountaineer, logger, Oriental scholar and dedicated Zen Buddhist, who teaches his freight-hopping friend Ray Smith the Way of the Dharma Bums and leads him up the mountain where common errors

⁹⁸ Christy, *The Long Slow Death of Jack Kerouac*, p.88.

⁹⁹ Whaley, *Blows Like a Horn: Beat Writing, Jazz, Style, and Markets in the transformation of U.S. Culture.*, p.16.

of this world are left far below and a new sense of pure material kinship is established with earth and sky... Japhy and Ray adventure in the mountains and on the trails, and then they come swinging down to the city of San Francisco to teach what they have learned, but the city will not listen. 'Yabyum' orgies, suicide, jazz, wild parties, hitch hiking, love affairs, fury and ignorance result but the Truth Bums always return to the solitude and peaceful lesson of the wilderness.¹⁰⁰

The book is highly instructive, offering Ryder as a new cultural hero and clearly rejecting some of the 'essential' aspects of the Beat Generation as regularly described. The 'errors of this world' are cities and the happenings within them, as we know from our discussion above. Offering a revolution and angrily denouncing the television-ridden society of the 1950s, the book is meant as a vision and a prescription of how men ought to live. We shall study how Kerouac utilizes Japhy Ryder and why he thought he was a suitable guide during the difficult cold war 1950s and just what was entailed in the 'Rucksack Revolution.' In doing this, we shall come to understand how this book and the ideas of Gary Snyder amount to a call to live by something very similar to *The Land Ethic*. We have already seen how some of the pertinent aspects of the lifestyle proposed were long held by Kerouac to be right and good. My hope is that we will see a pattern develop. We will be able to make links to the discussion thus far and come to understand how the worldview promoted in the novel is similar to the worldview of Jack Kerouac as discussed above rather than the worldview of Dean Moriarty. Simultaneously, we should notice a growing resemblance between the views of Kerouac and Snyder.

That Kerouac chose Snyder as the hero of the book is explicable. Japhy Ryder grew up in a rural Oregon setting: a place that, as we know from *The Town and The City*, Kerouac thought could breed men of good intentions, critical thought and moral righteousness. He is presented as a character that understands, thanks to this upbringing,

¹⁰⁰ Charters, ed., *Jack Kerouac. Selected Letters 1957-1969*, p.137-8.

“our real human values.”¹⁰¹ This establishes Ryder as an authority on how to live a proper life. For instance, Japhy is open about nudity partly because his whole family dressed and undressed together in front of the fire in their cabin because everywhere else was too cold to change.¹⁰² Nudity was a moral issue and by living in the woods, rooted to the earth and allowing the cycles of nature to dictate behaviour as Kerouac argued was soul sustaining in *Town*, Japhy came to conclusions that were different than city people. Kerouac trusted such earth-based ideas on moral issues. Japhy was the outdoorsy thoughtful man-of-the-earth that Kerouac held on a pedestal in his mind as depicted in *Town* and it is no surprise that in him the author found a new hero for the Beat generation.

Japhy was used to demonstrate a lifestyle that differed greatly from that of Dean Moriarty. It was a lifestyle differing from the norm of the day in America during the 1950s as well as the Beat lifestyle as it was generally understood. It was a lifestyle that Kerouac had faith in thanks partly to his understanding of where Japhy came from. It was also a lifestyle that correlated well with many of the ideas he held close to his heart, but failed in his life to act upon. Japhy would be a driving force in Kerouac’s moral life as long as he was in America. The main tenets of this way of life were to seek out hermitage-type circumstances whenever possible; to live in a very simple manner, to pray for all living creatures, taking the time to think carefully about things, learning about the environment in which you live, accepting the holiness of nature and its creatures and learning about the old folklore ways of living (the ways derived by people who had no conception of cities or living in total isolation). Most of these ideas have

¹⁰¹ Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*, p. 31.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.38.

already been discussed. In *The Dharma Bums*, they are presented as the way to live through the character of Japhy Ryder.

Before considering Japhy as a model for living we ought to consider how Kerouac uses Japhy as a purifying agent for the Beat culture because in doing this he sought to re-conceptualize how people ought to understand the actions of the Beats. Ryder is in fact so pure that when he swears in a poem at the 'Gallery 6 reading' Jack claims, "fuck being a dirty word that comes out clean."¹⁰³ In this, we see the sanitizing effect Japhy can have on the impure. In noting this, Kerouac uses Ryder as a means to change the perception of the Beats as a bunch of heathens. He seeks to explain nudity in a more wholesome nature based manner. The openness is the result of being close to the cycles of nature and the resulting heat patterns, thus nudity can be natural despite social constraints. Japhy and his Buddhist Yabum sessions also render sex pure when several men rotate in a sexual game with a woman called Princess. This game is explained as pure and natural. Princess herself is glorified by this act that she understands as her role in Buddhism and notes that the session makes her feel that "I'm the old mother of earth. I'm a Bodhisatva."¹⁰⁴ In this role, Princess becomes the mystical mother of all in tune with the earth. In this sense, Jack uses Japhy to explain to people that sex is natural and that people are supposed to do it.

The wild alcohol-fuelled parties that were so derided are also made to seem pure through the actions of Ryder. Jack tells his readers about the parties:

But there was a wisdom in it all, as you'll see if you take a walk some night on a suburban street and pass house after house on both sides of the street each with the lamplight of the living room, shining golden, and inside the little blue square of the television, each living family riveting its attention on probably one show;

¹⁰³ Ibid., p.14.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p.30.

nobody talking; silence in the yards; dogs barking at you because you pass on human feet instead of on wheels.¹⁰⁵

With his pure forest background, Snyder serves Kerouac in his attempt to find ways to explain the more assailed aspects of Beat living. We have seen why this background made Ryder the perfect person for Kerouac to do this with. The author was happy to know that people such as Japhy could still exist in America despite the annihilation of the rural.

Japhy not only grew up in the simplicities of the rural, but also sought to continue them wherever he lived. He lived in a simple hut “about twelve by twelve, with nothing in it but typical Japhy appurtenances that showed his belief in the simple monastic life—no chairs at all...just straw mats [...] In fact if a thief should have broken in there the only things of real value were the books.”¹⁰⁶ The furniture, bookcases, table, etc. were all orange crates. The space was small and simple (reminiscent of *Tvergastein*).¹⁰⁷ To live like this was a great contrast to those who sought to purchase their own little house with a yard and fill it with items such as televisions and laundry dryers. This simplistic living arrangement is a mode of hermitage in that it is small and offers few distractions. Kerouac wanted to build himself a small hut 15 feet by 15 feet and 8 feet high with a single removable window.¹⁰⁸ The similarity of size and implied simplicity is marked and we know that this arrangement of a quiet and peaceful type of home is to help man get closer to God and himself. That to live in simplicity is holy according to Kerouac has been established. To live a rustic rural life or as close to such

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p.104.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.18.

¹⁰⁷ Naess's eco-philosophy Ecosophy *T* is named for this remote cabin.

¹⁰⁸ Kerouac, *Diary*, The Jack Kerouac Papers, Sub Series 2.1: Box 56.3,

as possible was in his eyes the key to moral living and this is one aspect of the lifestyle he promoted through Japhy.

In the novel, Jack Kerouac offered his readers a new dress code; one that gets out of the useless turtlenecks and berets and into practical work clothes. In doing this, he subtly offered his readers a change of lifestyle. Kerouac writes about the night of the '6 gallery' reading. The poets are all sitting around at a bar prior to the event,

As they stood and sat around I saw that he was the only one who didn't look like a poet, though poet he was indeed [here he describes the costume of the normal poets] But Japhy was in rough workingman's' clothes he'd bought secondhand in Goodwill stores to serve him on mountain climbs and hikes and for sitting in the open at night, for campfires, for hitch hiking... He wore mountain climbing boots...in which he clomped around over the sawdust floor of the bar like an oldtime lumberjack¹⁰⁹

With this description we receive a new Beat "uniform." He argued that a person did not need be attired in useless clothing to be a poet. Suggesting rather you could wear clothing that helps you be prepared to head to the mountains in an instant. To wear such clothes insinuates you leave the city, hitchhike, enjoy outdoor fires, and lead an outdoorsy lifestyle. Instead of coffee houses you were to write by a fire, even if it is true that Jack opened a million coffee bars as William S. Burroughs famously claimed. This lifestyle was meant to be a more soul sustaining one than both the norm for the time and the Dean Moriarty version of the Beat.

Wearing the clothes meant going to the forests, the house of God as Kerouac would have it. Ryder regularly visits the woods for pleasure. At one point while hiking, Ray asks Japhy if he hikes often and he is told, "For weeks on end just like John Muir, climb around all by myself...just walking around naked singing, and cook my supper

¹⁰⁹ ———, *The Dharma Bums*, p.11.

and laugh.”¹¹⁰ With this, the reader learns that to go to the woods regularly is to be part of the lifestyle. In the event that the reader was uncertain about this, Kerouac becomes more didactic on the issue. Japhy tells Ray, “There’s nothing wrong with you Ray, your only trouble is you never learned to get out to spots like this.”¹¹¹ While we have established that Jack *thought* about doing all these things, we have never seen him *do* any. Japhy gets Ray out and doing what he had always wanted to do. This may be what makes Snyder unique among Beats; the ability to spur people into action. Kerouac notes, “I realized I had indeed learned from Japhy how to cast off the evils of the world and the city and find my true pure soul, just as long as I had a decent pack on my back.”¹¹² With this, we come to see that he learned from Japhy how to fulfill his lifestyle goals, how to lead the life he thought was moral, outside of cities. Japhy taught Jack and his readers how to lead a proper life, how to act on what Jack already knew to be the best goals of man.

Japhy does more than just go to the woods from time to time. He leads a life that encompasses many of the lessons of Gerard. The most important of these virtues is kindness to animals. Japhy does no harm to them. We see his compassion for animals in many scenes. In one, we see both the compassion of Gerard for animals and the understanding that animals are worthy of prayers. “Across the valley a mournful mule heehawed in one of the most tremendously heartbroken cries I’ve ever heard. “When that mule weeps like that,” says Japhy, “I feel like praying for sentient beings.” Then for

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p.68.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p.69.

¹¹² Ibid., p.156.

a while he meditated.”¹¹³ Kerouac also prays for the sentient beings while with Japhy. In fact, in one of Kerouac’s prayers we see almost the exact prayer we read in *Visions of Gerard*, “I bless you, all living things, I bless you in the endless past, I bless you in the endless present, I bless you in the endless future, amen.”¹¹⁴ This prayer demonstrates the moral standing of the sentient creatures of the earth. They are to be prayed for because they too can be saved. This was an explicit extension of the ethical sphere. In his prayers for animals and his approving of Jack’s prayers, Japhy fulfils notions of citizenship and also helps Kerouac live up to the prerogatives set out by his saintly older brother.

As the title of the book suggests, Buddhism is important to the worldview of the men in the book. The book touches upon the notion of reincarnation. Japhy and Ray sit in a bar on their way up to the mountain they are to climb. Japhy discusses the fact that he is leaving to study in Japan:

But that don’t mean I don’t love America, by God, though I hate these damn hunters [the conversation takes place at a mountain bar on their way up to the Matterhorn hike the day before hunting season opened], all they wanta do is level a gun at a helpless sentient being and murder it, for every sentient being or living creature these actual pricks kill they will be reborn a thousand times to suffer.¹¹⁵

In this, we recognize Japhy’s sympathy for animals resurfacing. We also see an explicit statement about the role animals have to play in the moral standing of man. The threat in this passage derived from the Buddhist concept of *samsara* amounts to an agreement with the ideas forwarded by Gerard. That how we treat animals has a great deal to do with our ability to reach Christian heaven or Buddhist nirvana was true to Jack young and old as we have seen. Here he uses the mouth of Japhy to proclaim it. The way we are

¹¹³ Ibid., p.169.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p.123.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p.45.

to treat animals given their role in our moral standing is clear; we are to be kind to them, not conquer them. *The Land Ethic* is at work here.

Kerouac did not look kindly upon the society he saw around him. In his work, he offered stark depictions of the social order of the 1950s. We have seen in *Town* that he was generally negative regarding urban living. In *Dharma Bums*, we witness his aversion to what we would today describe as suburban living. This is described

Colleges being nothing but grooming schools for the middle-class non-identity which usually finds its perfect expression on the outskirts of the campus in rows of well-to-do houses with lawns and television sets in each living room with everybody looking at the same thing and thinking the same thing at the same time while the Japhies of the world go prowling in the wilderness to hear the voice crying in the wilderness, to find the ecstasy of the stars, to find the dark mysterious secret of the origin of faceless wonderless crapulous civilization.¹¹⁶

This passage depicts people as thoughtless (Gerard would shudder at the realization that this description was close to the truth). The people in the passage are notable in their lack of life and in their failure to visit wilderness both physically and mentally; they are contrasted by the image of Japhy lopping down the road in his big hiking boots. It was the television culture that the Beats were reacting to. The proposed rucksack revolution with its dharma bums would offer a dramatic counter-culture option for his readers.

The rucksack revolution involved following the way of life mentioned above. It would, if followed, be the lifestyle of people living in harmony with the sentient beings and the land rather than as conquerors. Japhy tells Ray “Think what a great world revolution will take place when East meets West finally, and it’ll be guys like us that can start the thing. Think of millions of guys all over the world with rucksacks on their backs tramping around the backcountry and hitchhiking and bringing the word down to

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p.39.

everybody.”¹¹⁷ This passage depicts the extent to which the idea of hermitage was crucial. The idea that nature was a place to learn about how man ought to live was at the forefront of the idea of the revolution. The bums must all take the time to visit the mountains and then come down with the word, the word being a form of successful bi-cultural bi-religious eco-centric worldview.

The vision of Japhy is more complete than the previous passage suggests. He explains what the bums will be rejecting and what they are to do in the mountains, as we know they are to turn to prayer. Japhy declares:

Whitman, know what he says, *cheer up slaves, and horrify foreign despots*, he means that’s the attitude for the Bard, the Zen Lunacy bard of old desert paths, see the whole thing is a world full of rucksack wanderers, Dharma Bums refusing to subscribe to the general demand that they consume production and therefore have to work for the privilege of consuming, all that crap they didn’t really want anyway such as refrigerators, TV sets, cars...all of them imprisoned in a system of work, produce consume work produce consume, I see a vision of a great rucksack revolution thousands or even millions of young Americans wandering around with rucksacks going up to the mountains to pray...[p98] freedom to everybody and all to all living creatures.¹¹⁸

The alternative offered is, in fact, still a cycle. It is the cycle of nature that the author finds so purifying and holy, the cycle in which nudity can make moral sense. The bums are to leave the soul polluting cities behind, seek out *god in a dew* and pray for all the sentient creatures. They need not be Buddhists. In fact, the first Dharma Bum Ray Smith meets is a Catholic.¹¹⁹ This is perfectly all right with Kerouac. The point, according to Kerouac’s understanding of the world, was not the specific religion, but the lifestyle of freedom, thought, prayer and understanding. With this, we learn that Kerouac explicitly thought that Christianity did not foreclose the ability of the individual to live a good life

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p.203.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p.97.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p.9.

in conjunction with nature. Furthermore, we witness a person who may be, like Kerouac himself, a demonstration of this interplay at work, living as a Christian Saint/Buddhist Bodhisattva in humble relations with the earth.

This was the vision of Jack Kerouac for the Beat generation. It is this vision that has been ignored to the point that men like Podhoretz make their claims and few deny them. The dharma bum lifestyle was not legal in the United States. Kerouac was constantly harassed even for acting out this peaceful worldview. He described this in a letter to Gary Snyder, "Enroute here, thru Riverbottom California, the cops told me it was against the law to sleep outdoors and tried to route me, but I sneaked like a fugitive."¹²⁰ This is also described, perhaps as a warning, in the novel itself, "I saw many cop cruising cars and they were looking at me suspiciously: sleek, well-paid cops in brand-new cars with all that expensive radio equipment to see that no bhikku slept in his grove tonight."¹²¹ This depicts the grey Cold War restrictive society Kerouac saw him as rejecting and thought others would like to rebuff. His project would not be an easy one. Convincing people to risk their necks in order to leave their material possessions behind and pray sounds rather Christ-like and improbable.

The promotion of this lifestyle, while still an illegal one, is a very different view of Jack Kerouac's agenda than the view most people have come to hold of him. It is easy to understand why Kerouac wanted to find a figure to write about who could help him to forward his ideas of peace and holiness with our surroundings. It is also easy to understand why Gary Snyder was his hero of choice. The two were early thinkers of a new American culture concerned with the environment and its relationship to mankind.

¹²⁰ Charters, ed., *Selected Letters. Jack Kerouac. 1940-1956*, p.538.

¹²¹ Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*, p.121.

Japhy exhibits a way of living that allows for critical time to think about things and while forwarding the need to learn about the lore that can help us to lead moral lives. He offers a lifestyle in harmony with nature, with the inner self, with the mind as Kerouac's mother had said 'proper living.' The rucksack revolution amounts to calling for people to get out of 'the boxes to hold the biped in' and start to live as they ought to...out of cities, with careful thoughts, in simple hermitage type homes, praying for all sentient beings and harming no one or anything. This picture is very different from the more traditional interpretation of Jack Kerouac. It should be clear how this view helps us to understand the role he can play in the study of American ideas about nature, man's relationship to it and his role within it. During the 1950s, Kerouac thought about these issues and promoted a lifestyle that can help us to understand the rise of environmentalism in the 1960s. At the very least, it demonstrates that there were people concerned with the question of man's relationship to nature during the 1950s and that this ought to be studied if we are to understand the evolution of American ideas about the environment. The revolution is the blueprint for a cultural revolution that preaches a lifestyle that is rather similar to *The Land Ethic* and *Deep Ecology* and the ideas that are behind it are akin to those of a young Gary Snyder. Kerouac was explicit that people ought to learn from Japhy and act like him, mimic him at times and follow his lead. That he promoted this character as a hero is in tune with what we have learned about his thoughts regarding how man ought to live. We turn our attention now to the early ideas of Gary Snyder, the historical Japhy Ryder, an important Beat writer himself who was concerned with such issues.

Gary Snyder: Before *Turtle Island*

*My own generation is completely cowardly: there is need for poetry that cuts and slashes, that points to the existence of a non-human Nature in this world, that can talk about contemplation without falling into the rose-water and incense-burners. Gary Snyder.*¹²²

Since the 1970s, he has frequently been described as the 'Laureate of Deep Ecology.'
Wikipedia on Gary Snyder.¹²³

Many poets have witnessed the incredible destruction of the earth around them and felt compelled to write about it. They have been very sensitive to this issue and foreseen terrible consequences to our actions. In *The Wasteland* by T.S. Eliot, Gary Snyder found a vision of an earth where, "The river sweats/ oil and tar/ The barge drift/ With the turning tide."¹²⁴ The American poet and philosopher Gary Snyder, who grew up on a farm in Oregon followed in this tradition. As he grew older he became interested in Native American culture. He then studied anthropology at Reed College. This was followed with graduate work in anthropology at Indiana University; a pursuit he never completed, turning instead to translating Buddhist texts at the University of California at Berkeley. This led him to spend nine years on and off in lay monasteries in Japan. He

¹²² Gary Snyder, To Kenneth Rexroth, 1954, Gary Snyder Papers, Special Collections, University of California, Davis Library Box II 2:66.

¹²³ Wikipedia, "Gary Snyder," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gary_Snyder.

¹²⁴ T S Eliot, *The Wasteland and other poems* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1930), p.39.

won many poetry awards throughout his career.¹²⁵ As a Pulitzer Prize winning poet for the environmental compilation *Turtle Island* (1973), Snyder's reputation as an important and influential environmentalist is well known.

It may be true of Snyder that "his growing recognition as a spokesperson for environmental concerns solidified with the publication of *Turtle Island*,"¹²⁶ and that "for environmental activists in the early 1970s, he emerged as an articulate spokesman for the lands, waters, and wildlife that provide the West Coast with its natural beauty and rugged character."¹²⁷ But the ideas that these claims recognize were long in formulation and slow to be appreciated. During the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, Snyder was analyzing the state of nature in America as well as his relationship to it. His investigation concluded with ideas very similar to those of White Jr.'s regarding the culpability of Christian doctrine as a cause of environmental disaster.

Snyder carefully observed the wreckage of a land laid to waste so that each family could own a television, a car and a small house. Having grown up in the woods he appears to have been distressed by the destruction caused by logging and other practices that were increasing in efficiency thanks to powerful new technologies developed during his lifetime. His poems, while normally upbeat and certainly stubbornly refusing to

¹²⁵ "He has received an American Academy of Arts and Letters award, the Bollingen Prize, a Guggenheim Foundation fellowship, the Bess Hokin Prize and the Levinson Prize from Poetry, the Robert Kirsch Lifetime Achievement Award from the Los Angeles Times, and the Shelley Memorial Award. Snyder was elected a Chancellor of The Academy of American Poets in 2003. He is a professor of English at the University of California, Davis." <http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/167> accessed March 4, 2008.

¹²⁶ Patrick D. Murphy, "Preface," in *Critical Essays on Gary Snyder*, ed. Patrick D. Murphy (Boston Massachusetts: G. K Hall & Co., 1991), p.4.

¹²⁷ Timothy Gray, *Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim. Creating counter-cultural community*. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006), p. xi.

succumb to the supposed inevitability of destruction caused by man, at times show the fragile sadness he felt as he surveyed the land. The cultural filter through which he viewed this depletion depicts beliefs similar to what would become Deep Ecology's "big eight." From the 1940s to the 1960s he analyzed the situation and was concerned about the same crisis that he and other celebrated Deep Ecologists would later make famous. In this analysis, he went beyond the traditional lamentation for nature normally found in the works of nature poets. He did so by seeking philosophical answers and deriving a system to manage them in one's own life.

He spent his adult life writing with the purpose of familiarizing his readers with his analysis and his everyday life. That his words were only understood in these terms later may have to do with the ability of his readers to understand the concepts thanks to an evolving intellectual landscape in America and abroad that was becoming accustomed to such environmental ideas. Potentially the growing acceptance of his alternative way of living as reasonable and successful lead people to listen more carefully to what he had to say. It may also be owing to improved clarity of vision on Snyder's part or the attainment of a mature and controlled writing style. In this chapter, we will seek to understand his early analysis of the question of humankind's role in nature, his substitute for city living, and then his writing as activism. The goal is to understand how he presaged Deep Ecology, and also the way he attempted to promote a more eco-centric worldview and lifestyle as a solution to some of the rising problems.

His Analysis

In one of his earliest collections of verse Snyder wrote about a destroyed earth in a passage that mirrors the one found in *The Wasteland*; "Logs turn in the river/ sand

scorches the feet.../ Soft oysters rot now, between tides / the flats stink.¹²⁸ The lines depict an understanding of the outcome of humankind's actions similar to Lynn White Jr., who in his 1966 article claimed that mankind had fouled its nest. Rather than a man-made barge, Snyder looks to a fragile creature (the soft oysters) and thus opens up the impact of our actions on animals rather than humans. In transferring the focus from the barge to the oyster Snyder calls our attention to the land and its creatures and in doing so emphasizes the non-human parts of the landscape. *Myths and Texts* (1960) is full of lines dealing with these issues. In the work, he seeks to offer answers, "The ancient forests of China logged / and the hills slipped into the Yellow Sea...San Francisco 2x4s / were the woods around Seattle.../ All America hung on a hook / & burned by men, in their own praise."¹²⁹ Here, early in his career, the poet suggests that he values the land for itself rather than for what it can provide humans. The Seattle trees were the ones he grew up playing in and he must have held these especially close to his heart. An essential aspect of this poem is that the supposed gains reaped by the destruction were not worth the price. This theme is familiar to all who study Snyder. It is important because it leaves the reader unclear as to what would have to have been the result in order for the destruction to prove fruitful.¹³⁰ This suggests Snyder could not conceive of anything worthy of the type and extent of the damage. In this Snyder places a large value on the land in and of itself.

Snyder noticed increasing destruction as he hiked and climbed over the land and

¹²⁸ Gary Snyder, *Myths and Texts* (New York: New Directions 1960), p.19.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.3-4.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.12. Snyder has a ghost logger walking through the land and claim "What bothers me is all those stumps: / What did they do with the wood?" The question is not answered. The reader knows it went to build houses to "hold the biped in" as Snyder put it in his poem *The Berry Feast* that he read at the Six Gallery Reading.

worried that the devastation never ceased, not even in winter, when the trees were “snapped by diesel... In the frozen grass / smoking boulders / ground by steel tracks.”¹³¹ The same poem explains why the continuous nature of the damage was significant, “Yellowjackets swarm and circle / above the crushed dead log, their home.”¹³² The homes of birds were being ruined in order to make homes for humans. The reason Snyder tells us that the logging is performed in winter is that there will not be enough supplies for the birds to rebuild and so they will freeze to death. This careless destruction involves ignoring the role of trees as homes and ignoring the presence of other animals as members of our community. The realization that trees are homes to fellow creatures rather than resources for mankind is a profound shift in perspective that requires us to treat them in a radically different manner.

The 1950s earth was not yet as degraded as 2008’s and notions of *climate change* and *global warming* were not yet household terms. Snyder realized that it would be hard for people to understand that much of the landscape they knew was tarnished. He explained this problem “when I take my girl who's never seen America up the coast / she'll think she sees a wilderness / not feel the swift collapse of trees & Indians & streams.”¹³³ He made a point to show people that the land was not as wild as it seemed at first glance. This is part of the perception shift involved in Deep Ecology and environmentalism. Making people realize that a place like Central Park, or a second growth forest were not the same as the uncultivated lands found by the original settlers was not easy. Such passages reveal how Snyder read the impact of man on the land

¹³¹ Ibid., p.10.

¹³² Ibid., p.10.

¹³³ ———, Journal, Gary Snyder Papers, Special Collections, University of California, Davis Library, Box I 1:4, 1957.

regarding the beginning as further in the past, the present to include more than human considerations, and the future to be more distant and broad than the average person.

Two poems in *The Backcountry* (1968) capture the idea of non-vital human needs leading to excessive destruction of our habitat. The first, *Berry Feast*, which he read at the 6 Gallery (1955) notes:

The chainsaw falls for boards of pine,
Suburban bedrooms, block on block
Will waver with this grain and knot,
The maddening shapes will start and fade
Each morning when commuters wake—
Joined boards hung on frames,
a box to catch the biped in.¹³⁴

This section of the poem answers the question as to what they did with the wood; they built suburban homes with maddening shapes. In other words, they wasted it. In this Snyder rejects the notion that the land is present only for our purposes and that we are to use all its wealth for whatever we want.

Cities as an affront to the senses was a central theme early in Snyder's career. This theme is in the poem *Marin-an*. Here the poet describes the actions of the animals near him, a dog, some crows, local creatures going about their age-old activities then he spots a pack of *Homo Sapiens*:

a soft continuous roar
comes out of the far valley
of the six-lane highway—thousands
and thousands of cars
driving men to work.¹³⁵

As animals in the poem carry out their primitive routines the humans are in their cars

¹³⁴ ———, *The Back Country* (New York: New Directions, 1968), p.4. The poems from this compilation referred to herein were written between 1955-1964 and as such represent early thoughts despite the date of publication.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.8.

being driven someplace. Humans differ by being transported by means not powered by themselves, to a place where they will work all day to afford the things that they do not need but want and purchase at terrible environmental and ethical prices they do not realize. The cities ruin the environment, lead humans into unnatural positions, and are detrimental to our place in the cosmos. In its combination of consideration for the land, the animals and the humans as animals with needs this analysis differed from the norm for the time.

Destruction wrought by the city is part of what drove Snyder to seek to understand what cultural premises this situation was based upon. How had mankind come to live this way and what could be done to improve things? He knew things needed to change; he saw the trees and creatures as part of the community within which he lived. He had a responsibility towards them and sought to understand the mentality that allowed them to be under permanent siege so that humans could achieve the detrimental (even to humans as Welch suggests) cities and suburbs. Snyder may have intuitively known White's answer of Christianity to be true. He had the impression from a young age that there were problems in how Christian doctrine related to nature. He discussed this in an interview on the role of religion in his life:

My first response to Western thought and Christianity was qualified by my feeling for nature and for the American Indian. I was never able to accept Christianity as a child because the two or three times I went to Sunday school I raised the question about the future of animals and was told animals didn't have souls. I wasn't able to accept that—on a common sense basis. I felt that living creatures constituted some kind of a community or unity, which was my own natural mystical experience. So I lost interest in religion and spent a lot of time in the woods.¹³⁶

Here we find an admission that like Naess and White Jr. Snyder found Christianity

¹³⁶ Snyder quoted in: Dom Aelred Graham., *Conversations: Christian and Buddhist Encounter in Japan* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1968), p.59.

lacking. The notion of expanding the scope of the ethical community to which humans belong seems to have been intuitive to Snyder. To claim animals have souls is to assert that they are, like humans, on a spiritual journey. This must lead us to consider them as spiritual equals and thus as worthy of consideration. Our actions towards them and theirs towards us must take on a new meaning in this view. Snyder noted in the same interview “there is the difference that the Hindu-Buddhist tradition says that the killing of all creatures is to be avoided, whereas I understand the Judaeo-Christian [sic] ethic to be concerned with the killing of human beings.”¹³⁷ The consideration of animals and our moral position regarding them was important to Snyder and something he had thought deeply about for a long time. He turned to Oriental religion and Native American culture in his attempts to understand his relationship with them because Christianity did not offer a suitable code of ethics to young Snyder.

Buddhism has grown in prominence in America since the 1950s and played an important role in the changing spiritual and ethical norms of America. Men like Alan Watts have spent their lives trying to grow the religion on this continent.¹³⁸ Over the course of Snyder’s life he has witnessed the success of these efforts. The religion has long been a very important aspect of Snyder’s spiritual life; he spent nine years in Japan studying it as a lay monk. John Suiter argues that the work of D.T Suzuki (the likely first Buddhist text Gary came into close contact with) talks about egalitarianism and the

¹³⁷ Ibid., p.80.

¹³⁸ See: Rick Fields, *How the swans came to the lake : a narrative history of Buddhism in America*, 3rd ed. (Boston, Mass.: Shambhala Publications, 1992). See also Charles S. Prebish, *Luminous passage: the practice and study of Buddhism in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) for a discussion of Buddhism in America.

respect for all things and that this affected Snyder.¹³⁹ He found Buddhism explained something he instinctively knew to be true. Bob Steuding discussed this noting the “first vow of Zen about praying and saving all living beings...In this statement the reader can see an awareness that everything in a sense, is alive. There is a strong nonhumanistic bias to Zen... Zen, as suggested above, is in many ways ecological in outlook and orientation.”¹⁴⁰ Understanding Buddhism in this light can help us to understand how Snyder found it to be an appropriate religion for people valuing animals and the landscape.

The notion that animals have souls, and thus are to be prayed for and considered as parts of our ethical world is a major turn towards eco-centrism in environmental history. Buddhism worked well with Snyder’s ideas regarding this. With Snyder we encounter an early “Western” adherent to the view that the ethical sphere ought to be widened to include all sentient beings. In turning to Buddhism, White Jr. found the Beat to have made a mistake. It seems more likely that in turning to Buddhism they were simply seeking out a religion that could accommodate their understanding of their relationship to animals. The placing of humans within the natural world, the rendering of humans into animals who share a common community and common space with other creatures were principles Snyder maintained as an American youth.

Snyder innately grasped that man is intrinsically part of his habitat, and that any definition of him must include the relationship he holds to nature and any definition of his ecosystem must include him within it; while they are not the same they cannot be

¹³⁹ Suiter, *Poets on the Peaks. Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen & Jack Kerouac in the North Cascades.*, p.22.

¹⁴⁰ Bob Steuding, *Gary Snyder* (Boston Massachusetts: Twayne Publishers, 1976), p.55-6.

defined separately without the relationship itself being articulated. In Christianity he found a religion that failed to recognize this vital relationship. He thought Christianity was closely tied to environmental devastation because as a moral system it protected only humans whereas other religions, such as Buddhism, sought to protect all living beings. At times he could get quite ornery regarding the Christians whom he found guilty. In *Myths and Texts* he openly attacked them for this, “Them Xtians out to save souls and grab land / They’d steal Christ off the cross / If he wasn’t nailed on,”¹⁴¹ demonstrating the personal ego-driven greed he thought was to blame for the state of the world and its forests.

As we have seen, environmental historians have often posed the same question and have come to similar conclusions regarding the role of Christianity and individuality and greed as historical reasons for the levels of destruction wrought by humans upon the land. Snyder seems to have concluded this very early on. His conclusion is not exactly the same as environmental historians who largely subscribe to the notion that Christians behave as they do because the earth was given to them by God. Rather he thought that the religion protects people, not animals, and that it differentiated the mind and thus us from nature in doing this. The final aspect of “But ye shall destroy their altars” discussed earlier is “in their own praise.” This signifies that their egos told them that they were worth the destruction, simply because they could do it and explains how the destruction had been justified. In his journal he noted “The rape of the world. Destructiveness of Western civilization. Those insane Spaniards in Central America —abstract meaning of gold & religion only, the nature, wildlife, Indian life, Mississippi, Grand Canyon, didn’t

¹⁴¹ Snyder, *Myths and Texts*, p.12.

move them. Vicious Europe.”¹⁴² He saw the issue as being particularly “Western” in origin. In 1953, while sitting on Sourdough Mountain as a fire lookout thinking about this, he concluded that “the West made a grievous error in classing the mind as something separate from the senses.”¹⁴³ His diary entries from this time suggest that he derived this from the decline of the land that had taken place under “western” peoples. The split of the ego of man from the body of man caused by Christian notions of the individual (and the abstract thinking involved in this that devalues the real world) is what resulted in the destruction of man’s habitat.

Part of the gloom surrounding this ego/body split is that we are in fact animals. Just like the ones around us, we function within an environment, depend upon it and the creatures within it. Snyder wanted men to return to their inner selves and start to re-understand themselves as animals. Snyder wrote that when a deer comes and licks a human “the deer come for salt, not affection.”¹⁴⁴ Elsewhere he noted that “The usefulness of hair on the legs= mosquitoes & deerflies.”¹⁴⁵ Timothy Gray offers a strong interpretation of Snyder when he writes, “*Myths and Texts* shows the Pacific Rim to be a region of traveling creatures, of which humans are but one species.”¹⁴⁶ He believed our failure to remember that we are bodily animals was among the principal reasons for the destruction of our lands. In *Myths and Texts* we find: “Men who hire men to cut groves /

¹⁴² Gary Snyder, Journal, Gary Snyder Papers, Special Collections, University of California, Davis Library, Box I 1:3, 1957.

¹⁴³ ———, Sourdough Mountain Journal, Gary Snyder Papers, Special Collections, University of California, Davis Library, Box I 1:1, 1953.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. See also Gary Snyder, Journal, Gary Snyder Papers, Special Collections, University of California, Davis Library, Box I 1:2, 1957, where he wrote that humans follow trails that are good for them in the same manner as deer and other animals follow their own.

¹⁴⁶ Gray, *Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim. Creating counter-cultural community.*, p.39.

Kill snakes, build cities, pave fields, / believe in god, but can't believe their own / senses."¹⁴⁷ The failure to listen to our senses combined with an over-willingness to listen to our intellect has lead us to kill the animals, and pave the fields. This idea that mankind had lost its connection to the land and its constituents by losing its connection to its animal characteristics was central to Snyder's conclusions regarding how we allowed ourselves to foul our nest. He argued that people needed to rekindle their awareness of other creatures and their inherent worth in order to have a less destructive culture and more fulfilling life.

That we were once connected both spiritually and physically to the earth Snyder knew to be true partly thanks to his studies of Native lore, in which he was firmly of the noble savage view. It has been noted that,

The world view of primitive man, close to the "world, in its nakedness, which is fundamental for all of us—birth, love, death; the sheer fact of being alive" (*Earth House Hold*, 118), engenders, in its attention to the round of birth and death, great carefulness and reverence toward life. That care and reverence are lost when the awareness of these relationships is shattered.¹⁴⁸

Evidently the relationship was broken and lost. We have seen that Snyder had ideas as to how humans had severed the link.

Seeking to offer a way for people to rekindle this connection was central to Snyder's goals from early on and continued to be so throughout his career. He hoped that his poetry alone could accomplish this.¹⁴⁹ In fact, he claimed that, "as a poet I hold the most archaic values on earth. They go back to the Upper Paleolithic: the fertility of

¹⁴⁷ Snyder, *Myths and Texts*, p.16.

¹⁴⁸ Wm. Scott McLean, *The real work: interviews and talks 1964-1979, Gary Snyder* (New York: New Directions Press, 1980), p. xiv.

¹⁴⁹ McLean, *The real work: interviews and talks 1964-1979, Gary Snyder*, p.19. Snyder claimed, "Like stopping a person momentarily in their tracks with a poem they have happened to look at accidentally and they forget that they were to catch, a bus somewhere and they look around and think: My God, I'm living in the world!"

the soil, the magic of animals, the Power-Vision in solitude...,"¹⁵⁰ giving us a good idea of how he envisioned his role as a poet. However, he knew that his poetry would not always be enough to help people reconnect. As such he offered people another way to renew the connection,

Marijuana focuses the senses. The sensations it produces are in some curious way spiritual, and also natural. Even in the less profound LSD experiences, everyone reports that they have for the first time seen the clouds, felt the wind, been aware of the birds, that they have had this sense of the living quality of their cat or their dog, the consciousness of the intelligence in the eyes of the animal, that the old ancient powers of earth and sky become real.¹⁵¹

Snyder also discussed simple sober and legal ways in which people demonstrated that they were disconnected and offered ways to rectify this. He once spoke of "peak bagging,"

I and the circle I climbed with were extremely critical of what we saw as the hostile, jock-Occidental mind-set that thought to climb a mountain was to conquer it. I'm not quite sure where we got that from, other than from our own sort of respect and pantheist affection for the mountains.¹⁵²

To have a simple affection for the land allows us to climb it and feel united with it and thus feel pleasure rather than attempt to conquer it and feel a cheap version of victors' gratification. . This is another subtle shift in perception that could improve our relationship with nature. Other issues included food and pets,

I think these concerns are basic to everyone, but most don't think about them, aren't aware of them. They buy vegetables in the supermarket, but don't think about the soil these grow in; they keep pets, but don't look into an animal's eyes and see an intelligence there, a sensibility; they are driven into solitude, into their own personality, by the stresses of our cultures, but don't look for new strength there.¹⁵³

This extends the thesis that society and cities have forced us into ever more abstract

¹⁵⁰ Snyder, *Myths and Texts*, p.viii.

¹⁵¹ Graham., *Conversations: Christian and Buddhist Encounter in Japan*, p.69.

¹⁵² Interview quoted in Suiter, *Poets on the Peaks. Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen & Jack Kerouac in the North Cascades.*, p.35.

¹⁵³ McLean, *The real work: interviews and talks 1964-1979*, Gary Snyder, p.3.

individuality much to our disadvantage and fail to offer us new strength. It also shows simple ways to regain our connection and understanding of the land. To pay attention to where our food is from (a notion of recurring popularity in this new century and in the last), to look at our pets as friends, family, and living creatures rather than property are all ways in which we can begin to rekindle the lost bond with nature and ultimately ourselves as fellow creatures that live upon the land and depend upon it. This could potentially assist humans in their attempts to find a healthier (both for us and the land) manner to structure society.

In his journal in 1960, Snyder defined love, “Love...is a leaning toward communion. A freedom from the prison of the self /ego—a going-out toward lovely mountains, or a star constellation; a tenderness toward a cat; a thought for a bush; a sense of unity with/a car, a communion /a girl; a chat with a friend.”¹⁵⁴ To love something we must get beyond our ego, we must become truly one with the other. If we can get beyond our egos and actually love other creatures and living beings it is hard to imagine people could treat them as they had. The split of humans from their bodies through the ego has, in his interpretation, lead to many of the environmental issues faced by the world.

Snyder noted that he did not think his ideas were singular, perhaps because he found validation of them in Buddhism. Regardless, he noted,

I don't lay claim to any great enlightenment experience or anything like that, but I have had very moving, profound perception a few times that everything was alive (the basic perception of animism) and that on one level there is no hierarchy of qualities in life—that the life of a stone or a weed is as completely beautiful and authentic, wise and valuable as the life of say, an Einstein.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Gary Snyder, Journal, Gary Snyder Papers, Special Collections, University of California, Davis Library, Box I 1:9, 1960.

¹⁵⁵ Graham., *Conversations: Christian and Buddhist Encounter in Japan*, p.17.

This idea, that there is no hierarchy of animals repositions men to the nothing-special category. They are to be, even at their most valuable (the purpose of the Einstein mention), of no more significance than a stone. In this sense, Snyder was “thinking like a mountain.” In doing so, Snyder extended beyond the Buddhist claims for sentient beings and extended rights and value to non-sentient beings such as pebbles. In doing this, he was following in the footsteps of American Aldo Leopold.

That Snyder claimed to have thought this way as a youngster and consistently worked this equality of species into his poems, such as comparing men, cats, and other creatures as equals suggests that he was deeply concerned with nature from a young age. His analysis of the state of the earth and mankind’s relationship was distinctly eco-centric. Environmental historians would likely agree that the shift occurring was very important in the evolution of environmental philosophy and that to discover it at this early stage in America could be very useful in our understanding of it. That this analysis was possible in 1950s and 1960s America may be of use to researchers seeking to understand the cultural context within which such critical analysis and philosophical debate can take place. It is also useful for those who wish to better understand the Beat perspective on America and nature as well as those seeking to understand how Snyder read the land early on in order to play such a pivotal role in environmentalism later in his life. The last important feature of this analysis is the slow molding of Buddhism to fit into an American ecological vision.

An Ecological Way To Live

In response to his thinking about these issues and his analysis of them, Snyder carefully constructed a way of life that would not compromise his ideals by furthering the

disconnection of man and nature and its negative ecological impact. Like Henry David Thoreau, Snyder needed an alternative to regular society. Thoreau wrote, “A township where one primitive forest waves above while another primitive forest rots below—such a town is fitted to raise not only corn and potatoes, but poets and philosophers for the coming ages. In such a soil grew Hoper and Confucius and the rest.”¹⁵⁶ Snyder surely identified with Thoreau’s description as it described his situation and offered him the role of poet-philosopher, something Snyder became as he aged.

Snyder’s lifestyle changed over time, but remains essentially static in the belief system and worldview it represents. It is important to note because it offers legitimacy to his writings as he followed what he proclaimed. The reality was (and is still today) in order to live in communion with the environment we would have to lead much simpler lives. A stricter diet, less waste and less use of oil would all be required. While at Reed College he had so little money he lived in Spartan conditions. He made the most of it,

Gary acted as sometimes manager [of the house] in return for the privilege of living in the basement between the furnace and the laundry tub: an area about eight by ten feet. A casement window provided a view of the heavens and a steady stream of water whenever it rained. Typically, Gary defined the leaks as a waterfall and running brook, which he channeled across the basement floor to serve a miniature Japanese Garden. This ‘Zen retreat’... somehow evoked the aura of a sheik of Araby.¹⁵⁷

A high quality of life despite a low standard of living defines the lifestyle he led during college. To live simply did not mean to live badly; his college days demonstrated this.

Snyder spent several summers employed as a forest service fire lookout. His time there was peaceful and he wrote many poems during his stay atop a mountain in a tiny hut, reading sutras and watching for forest fires. Snyder enjoyed the minimalist lifestyle

¹⁵⁶ Henry David Thoreau, "Walking," in *The Portable Thoreau*, ed. Carl Bode (New York: Penguin Books, 1861), p.613.

¹⁵⁷ Gray, *Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim. Creating counter-cultural community.*, p.53.

of the mountains, returning every summer until he was blacklisted for early communist affiliations, which resulted in his losing the job.¹⁵⁸ Snyder valued his solitary moments on the mountains because his time there helped him to understand the land in a more holistic manner. Some of his time on the mountains is described in *Lookout's Journal* published in his "Earth House Hold" compilation (1969).¹⁵⁹ The journal opens with Blackie Burns, an old experienced woodsman telling Snyder "28 years ago you could find a good place to fish. / GREEDY & SELFISH NO RESPECT FOR THE / LAND / tin cans, beer bottles, dirty dishes / a shit within a foot of the bed."¹⁶⁰ Part of what Snyder would learn while a lookout was a deeper respect for the mountains and a greater awareness of the responsibilities of humans who trampled upon them. He also may have learned the extent to which there were other people who thought like him.

Snyder was learning to respect the incredible endurance and diversity of nature while he hiked around Crater Mountain, elevation 8049 feet, noting "Even here, cold foggy rocky place, there's life—4 ptarmigan by the A-frame, cony by the trail to the snowbank."¹⁶¹ The recognition of life is the first step in coming to appreciate its diversity as valuable. Snyder's choice of lifestyle and employment were offering him the chance to learn some very important lessons.

While on the mountain, he began to grapple with some of the difficulties of nature writing. "If one wished to write poetry of nature, where an audience? Must come from the very conflict of an attempt to articulate the vision poetry & nature in our

¹⁵⁸ The United States Forest Service, Dear Gary Snyder, 1954, Gary Snyder Papers, Special Collections, University of California, Davis Library, Box II 189:74. March 8th 1954

¹⁵⁹ Gary Snyder, *Earth House Hold* (New York: New Directions Press, 1969), p. 1-24.

¹⁶⁰ Snyder, *The Back Country*, p.1.

¹⁶¹ ———, *Earth House Hold*, p.3.

time.”¹⁶² He was aware that he had an important vision of nature; he was distraught at how to convey it. This is an important point because it would take many years for a full articulation that the reading public would understand, but here, in 1952, Snyder was struggling with how to get the vision across.

The time he spent on the mountains living in simplicity was similar to Arne Naess’s time at his home in the mountains, *Tvergastein*; a small hut where Naess spent a great deal of time thinking and writing, producing some of the most important Deep Ecology tracts ever written. Snyder’s living in the mountains for summers served to reinforce his ecological beliefs; there his lifestyle was simple, but his quality of life was high.

His way of life did not change dramatically as he gained acclaim and financial success. He spent years living in Spartan conditions as a lay Zen monk in Japan. He then began to have money: rather than purchase a large home in a suburb with a lawn, Snyder founded Kitkitdizze, which became a sustainable community where he built a house using local materials and selectively logged the local forest. Kitkitdizze was built during the period of time for which Snyder has gained his renown as an important environmentalist. My purpose in describing it is to suggest that the ideas behind it were present long before it became a reality.

His poems calling for solitude, his call for more simplicity, and demands that there be less waste all come to life in this project. The land for the project was bought while he was still a lay monk in the early 1960s. The demands of Kitkitdizze were immense with constant work to be done to maintain the area in a manner that could be

¹⁶² Ibid., p.4.

continued long into the future by his family were challenging but he plied away at it. In his earliest published poetry we find a poem beginning “Now I’ll also tell what food/ we lived on then.”¹⁶³ What follows is a very simple list of food that could be found or easily grown in the local ecosystem. This is *economic botany*, which involved learning the features of the land around you and what it could provide. By learning about our local areas we could attempt to reconnect with the land and improve its health and our spiritual well being by finding meaning and sustenance in our lives.

Part of *economic botany* is appreciating value where others fail to. Poem 6 of the *Myths & Texts* is about the landmark year 1914, but it is not about war, it is about blackberries.¹⁶⁴ A family has a large plot of land; it was logged many years before and left to rot. Surprisingly berries grow all over the land. When this happens, the family invites their friends to spend a weekend picking and the people reap the benefits of the uncultivated land. Near the end of the poem, we learn that berries no longer grow on this particular plot of land. This event teaches the reader that they can benefit in very tangible ways if they pay closer attention to nature, that the land provides by itself for the creatures upon it if they are attentive to it. The poem also suggests that despite the damage done to the earth, like logging, there is hope. The earth can become productive again if we allow it to.

Following these ideas from his early days, at his home he sought to grow as much food as possible in order to reduce transportation costs on the environment as well as improve the sustainability of the food production. In doing this, Snyder rejected a life of easy comfort for a more wholesome life, a lower standard of living, because he had to

¹⁶³ _____, *Myths and Texts*, p.31.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.8.

work so much harder for his food and received rather limited outcomes, but a higher quality of life because he felt in tune with his environment knew his relationship to it and could eat his meals with ideas of communion in his pleased mind.

The notion of eating-as-communion is a powerful theme in the work of Snyder. In *Myths and Texts*, he advocates a sustainable hunt, acknowledging that men need to eat and that we will have an impact on the earth. “Buddha fed himself to tigers/.../a mountain-lion/ Once trailed me four miles/ At night and no gun / It was awful. I didn’t want to be ate / maybe we’ll change”¹⁶⁵ Elsewhere Snyder noted, “Every meal is a communion.”¹⁶⁶ Communion is an intimate sharing or exchanging. In the eyes of Snyder, to eat each other was to share. Whether we ate animals or they ate us, this was part of the interdependent relationship that was crucial to the definition of either the man or his habitat. This idea places humans firmly into the ecosystems within which they live. It shows their role as fellow citizens rather than conquerors of their surroundings. As Steuding noted, “hunting makes clear man’s place in the food web.”¹⁶⁷ What is not touched upon is that at the time this was written, such thoughts may not have been common even if Kerouac thought so.

The influence of Zen may have had a role in this or at least it must have helped to sustain him in moments that he found himself wanting more or questioning his choices. Bob Steuding has written, “Like the Zen-influenced Chinese nature poets, Snyder is removed from the crowd. Living in isolation, the poet loses touch with cities, with the

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p.32.

¹⁶⁶ Gary Snyder, Journal, Gary Snyder Papers, Special Collections, University of California, Davis Library, Box I 1:8, 1959.

¹⁶⁷ Steuding, *Gary Snyder*, p.75.

crush of urban affairs, and even with his friends.”¹⁶⁸ Living in isolation as some of his heroes, like Cold Mountain poet, Han Shan had, he likely enjoyed the Buddhist confirmation of this aspect of the good life, as he understood it.

Snyder seems to have drawn power from his way of life. He deemed the hermit, the man in solitude, even if temporarily, as particularly well placed to be an authority on man’s role in the universe. In *Riprap* (1958), he promises to show the reader the path to a fulfilled life. He claims that we resemble rider-less horses but that the narrator can help us to grasp a new myth that will give us direction and meaning. Our guide is alone, staring off into endless miles of what Thoreau famously called the preservation of the world, “drinking cold snow-water from a tin cup / Looking down for miles / Through still air.”¹⁶⁹ A peaceful and pure setting in which man can reflect, gain an appreciation for his surroundings and find meaning in life. It is in solitude that Snyder found a reasonable direction for his life. Bob Steuding noted, “even a cursory reading of Snyder’s work reveals that the writings and the personal example of the hermit of Walden Pond were important to him.”¹⁷⁰ This may help us to understand how Snyder came to appreciate solitude as he did. The time he spent as a lookout may have confirmed previous ideas about this or served to teach him these ideas.

When Jack Kerouac was a fire lookout he sang and hollered and had a generally good time. When he described his experiences to Snyder he received the following response, “funny about singing. I used to shriek & whistle & sing all day, pure gladness. [When acting as a fire lookout] The closer you get to real MATTER rock air fire &

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p.47.

¹⁶⁹ Gary Snyder, *RipRap and Cold Mountain Poems* (Washington: Shoemaker & Hoard, 1958), p.3.

¹⁷⁰ Steuding, *Gary Snyder*, p.115-16.

wood, the more spiritual the world is.”¹⁷¹ That in solitude the earth could be understood, as a spiritually relevant object may have been an important lesson from his time as a lookout. Solitude can lead to understanding our surroundings from the vantage point of humble citizens rather than as conquerors. It can also help us to rationalize our environment in such a manner as to see that it has value and meaning regardless of the human activity happening there.

In his lifestyle choices, from an early age onwards, Snyder fostered a solitary and simplistic existence. In doing so, he promoted within himself a finely tuned understanding of nature and his relation to it. He displayed for all to see an alternative way of living. That this was true in his earliest days must be noted because the earlier we can identify such ways of life the better able we are to chart the evolution of the ideas in environmentalism. He once wrote to Jack Kerouac suggesting he needed to get a one-room shack with a fireplace and a wood fire Japanese bathtub in order to relax and deal with his growing fame.¹⁷² This attempting to convince others to live simply would be mimicked in the plans for a rucksack revolution in *The Dharma Bums*. It also introduces us to the fact that Snyder was an active advocate for changing American culture.

Why listen to Snyder?

Gary Snyder began writing poetry at 16 or 17 years of age. On a mountain climbing trip he was so “impressed by the experience of high mountains that I thought I ought to write a poem about this.”¹⁷³ From the very beginning Snyder wrote about nature because it

¹⁷¹ Gary Snyder, Dear Jack Kerouac, 1957, January 8 1957, The Jack Kerouac Papers, New York City Public Library, Berg Collection, New York. Box 72.10 Sub series 7.1,

¹⁷² ———, Dear Jack Kerouac, 1960, April 27 1960, The Jack Kerouac Papers, , New York City Public Library, Berg Collection, New York. Box 72.10 Sub series 7.1

¹⁷³ Don Swaim, *Interview With Gary Snyder* (1991).

was his muse. That Snyder constantly wrote with a purpose is clear, “Well, I look at most of my stuff as being on a myth-making order as opposed to a lyric order. Or a ritual and magic order as against a pure song order.”¹⁷⁴ Like many writers who had significant messages, his hope was that people would grasp the significance of his words. He thought he could help people, but humbly stated, “alas, without me for thousands of years the rose will blossom & the spring will bloom, but those who have secretly understood my heart—they will approach & visit the grave where I lie.”¹⁷⁵ Snyder is still living and teaching as I complete this thesis, but it seems very likely that when he does move on his grave will be an important site for many poets and environmentalists. That he is so well known for ecological ideas may have to do with his special standing as someone who “If he were put down in the most remote wilderness with only a pocket knife, he would emerge from it cheerfully within two weeks, full of fresh experience. And with no loss of weight.”¹⁷⁶ Or it might be on account of the beauty of his poetry or the humility with which he wrote about his subject, as someone that had partaken in the destruction and disconnection he so decried.

Snyder was reminiscent of the famous nature writer and thinker, Aldo Leopold. Leopold was a forestry manager trained in the preservation of nature for the sake of the lumber barons, recreationists and other such anthropocentric reasons. He had a level of credibility when writing about logging and forestry practices that kept him relatively free from personal attacks when his ideas seemed “socialist.” John Suiter has discussed how

¹⁷⁴McLean, *The real work: interviews and talks 1964-1979*, Gary Snyder, p.20.

¹⁷⁵ Snyder, Journal, Gary Snyder Papers, Special Collections, University of California, Davis Library, Box I 1:4,

¹⁷⁶ Thomas Parkinson, "The poetry of Gary Snyder," in *Critical Essays on Gary Snyder*, ed. Patrick D. Murphy (Boston Massachusetts: G. K. Hall & Co., 1968).

Snyder's work life did this for him. His experiences as a logger, woodsman, tanker etc. "would only strengthen his credibility on forest management issues, lending an edge of redneck practicality to his loftier ecological writings. Certainly no one would ever accuse a former chokersetter of being a tree hugger."¹⁷⁷ This may have something to do with why Snyder's way of life and his thoughts are still important. In many poems, he attempts to atone for his actions. But it is his personal history and involvement in forestry that allow his poems to have such clarity and understanding.

His experience also served him well by giving him a sympathetic vision of the people just doing their jobs. In one poem, he finds solace from work at home in a bath with a naked partner. Yet sadness permeates the poem because of the inevitable separation "I left, two hundred miles / hitching back to work."¹⁷⁸ This poem suggests understanding of the men who find themselves working like this out of need. In making the types of controversial claims that Snyder would and Leopold did, there was the potential for instant dismissal by people with no alternative employment or claims that he simply did not understand the difficulties faced by those involved in the industry. By having also taken part in logging and other such "real work," Snyder manages to avoid this situation. Thanks to his outdoorsy woodsman upbringing Snyder earned the respect of people who rarely have respect for poets who make the types of claims Snyder did. In fact, Snyder claims that a "veteran trail crew foreman (now historian) Jim Snyder told me how the book is now read by firelight in work camps in the backcountry."¹⁷⁹ In understanding him in this Leopold-like light, we can again see part of how his

¹⁷⁷ Suiter, *Poets on the Peaks. Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen & Jack Kerouac in the North Cascades.*, p.104.

¹⁷⁸ Snyder, *Myths and Texts*, p.11.

¹⁷⁹ ———, *RipRap and Cold Mountain Poems*, p.67.

prominence as an environmental voice was achieved.

Buddhism and its poets impacted Snyder's writing. He tended to write poems that appear very simple. The simplicity of some of his writing allows for stunning realizations, "In twenty snowy mountains / The only moving thing is you."¹⁸⁰ Such lines reiterate the solitude of man. Man is connected to his surroundings at all times, whether he knows it or not. Snyder focused, early on at least, on the spiritual or Buddhist aspects of this connection. Perhaps in response to Jack Kerouac's too easy version of this connectedness of everything Snyder noted, "'all is one' leads to sloppy thinking there are differences, or course. One is connected to the ground; the ground is connected with the sky at the horizon, trees stuck out of the earth, air rushes all around the tree, the bird rushes around in the air."¹⁸¹ The point being that we are connected but that does not annul our responsibilities. Keeping a level of individuality forces us to retain a level of responsibility for our actions. We may harm each other or ourselves if we allow our thought to be too sloppy. Snyder worried this might happen. This attempt to find a balance between ego-driven action that can in its worst form lead to greedy destruction and the alternative of an interconnectedness so deep that all responsibility fails and destruction results was a central concern Snyder actively warned of in his early days.

The links between Snyder's early ideas and the later Deep Ecological thought are obvious. In recognizing that Snyder was making such claims, living such a lifestyle and analyzing the situation in this manner twenty years before the Naess article outlining Deep Ecology, we can understand that whether he knew it or not Naess was describing

¹⁸⁰ ———, Journal, Gary Snyder Papers, Special Collections, University of California, Davis Library, Box I 1:2,

¹⁸¹ ———, Sourdough Mountain Journal, Gary Snyder Papers, Special Collections, University of California, Davis Library, Box I 1:1,

something already happening in America. This may help to explain why the philosophy gained the power and acclaim that it did in America even if the majority of readers at the time failed to recognize this aspect of the Beat phenomenon. It is useful to understand that there were people in America who made the turn away from anthropocentrism to eco-centrism during the 1950s. That they were already formulating more sustainable ways of living is also significant. By the 1970s, Naess was reacting much the same way as Snyder had in the 1950s to the changing landscape both physical (the deterioration of the habitat) and spiritual (the search for meaning beyond Christianity). Snyder's early thought adds complexity to the narrative of Deep Ecology, the environmental movement in America, and the Beat ethos. This complication may prove to be of great value to those seeking a deeper understanding of the three and the relationships between them. With Snyder and Kerouac we have witnessed the importance and presence of ecological ideas previously neglected within the Beat Generation. We turn now to the final chapter where we shall study Beat poet and playwright, Michael McClure, and his mammal patriotism, and Lew Welch who walked away from it all.

Michael McClure, Lew Welch, and the Need for FREEDOM

“GROOOHOOOOR GROOOOOOOR SHARAKTAR / GRAHR GROOOOOOR
GREEEER / SHROOOOOOLOWVEEEEEEEE” Michael McClure.¹⁸²

“I have done interesting things and known lots of women, taken mild drugs, have a feeling for animals and inanimate things. I call this animism.” Michael McClure.¹⁸³

“Trails go nowhere.
They end exactly
Where you stop”
Lew Welch¹⁸⁴

Poet and essayist, Michael McClure, was one of the five readers at the 6 Gallery Reading that launched the Beat movement into the public eye. At the event, he read *For the Death of 100 Whales*, a poem inspired by an article in *Time* magazine about the slaughter of 100 *Orcinus Orcas* that were rounded up in a brutal oceanic operation and executed near Iceland by bored American soldiers stationed there. *Time* reported:

This year the largest packs of killer whales in living memory terrorized the seas off Iceland. They destroyed thousands of dollars worth of fishing tackle, forced dozens of Icelanders out of work for lack of gear. Last week the Icelandic government appealed to the U.S., which has thousands of men stationed at a lonely NATO airbase on the subarctic island. Seventy-nine bored G.I.s responded with enthusiasm.

Armed with rifles and machine guns, one posse of Americans climbed into four small boats, put to sea and in one morning wiped out a pack of 100 killers. A newsman watched an even bigger skirmish off Grindavik and related: "First, the killers were rounded up into a tight formation with concentrated machine-gun fire, then moved out again, one by one, for the final blast which

¹⁸² Michael McClure, *Meat Science Essays* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1963), p.38-9.

¹⁸³ ———, Notebook, McClure (Michael) Papers: additions, Box 1.4, 1956, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

¹⁸⁴ Donald Allen, ed., *Lew Welch. RING OF BONE Collected Poems 1950-1971* (Bolinas: Grey Fox Press, 1973), p.48.

would kill them... It was all very tough on the whales, reported the newsman, but very good for American-Icelandic relations.¹⁸⁵

McClure envisioned the whales as "GIANT TADPOLES /... / Like sheep or Children."¹⁸⁶ Their innocence in his mind was palpable and undeniable. McClure cried "Goya! Goya!" because he could not capture in words the true horror of the scene by himself. He wished Goya could paint the scene and thus exhibit the genuine horror of the event. McClure was sensitive to the harm the bored soldiers had wrought in the name of fishermen and good relations. He grieved deeply over the deaths of the whales and the loss of innocence in the ocean where even whales could no longer be assured of safety from senseless massacre a loss that mimicked the loss of purity in a post-holocaust nuclear world. This poem and its reading at a crucial moment in Beat lore are, as we have seen, in keeping with the Beat ethos regarding the environment.

This chapter will study McClure's analysis of the intellectual and psychological climate of America that permitted the death of the whales to transpire. The story of the orcas, being a totem of the larger issue of the demolition of nature by man, was significant to the writing of McClure because it gave him an issue to delve deeply into. It also exhibits how McClure conceptualizes mankind as not suitable for cities due to their inner animals. His conclusions are similar to the fundamental claims of Deep Ecology and the *Land Ethic* notion that humans are but citizen-creatures of the earth. The chapter finds that his analysis led him to the understanding that the animal within each person needed to be freed in order to promote mammal patriotism. McClure thought that such

¹⁸⁵ Time, "Killing Killers," *Time*, Monday October 04 1954., Portions quoted in Michael McClure, *Scratching the Beat Surface: essays on new vision from Blake to Kerouac* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), p. 30. Also available at:

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,857557,00.html?promoid=googlep>

¹⁸⁶ Michael McClure, "For the Death of 100 Whales," in *Scratching the Beat Surface*, ed. Michael McClure (New York: Penguin books, 1954), p.31.

realization of our true selves would be made possible through the acceptance and recognition of the fact humans are of the genus *Homo Sapien* and that this is a noble thing to be.

This chapter concludes with a discussion of the legendary Lew Welch who once “walked away.” The purpose of the discussion is to note that ecological concerns were not the exclusive domain of the three Beat writers covered already, but were, something many Beats thought and wrote about. Welch is chosen because he demonstrates that the Beats worked together to find solutions to their questions and problems regarding how humans ought to live in this world.

Michael McClure thought little of the civilization that allowed men to destroy whales and nature for such arbitrary gains as his 1950s America did. Like other Beats, he was critical of the rigid norms of the 1950s. He thought deeply about the effects of society on men in order to understand how men came to act as he saw them behaving,

I say useless civilization because we do not exist as animals or plants but we have given up our potentialities of boundless life...a protozoan or falgelate is more in contact with its environment and makes more meaningful gestures than we do...Our civilization is useless to us because it divides us from pleasure, pain, hunger and joy. We have substituted intellectual pleasures and preservation of individuals for the feeling that we as animals have as our heritage. We can only have true deep-physiological feelings and emotions as individuals. We are immersed in the nets and webs of intellectuality and neurosis characteristic of our civilization.¹⁸⁷

This dense analysis of the situation is useful to grasping what McClure thought was wrong with civilization. He valued primal human instincts and sensations such as hunger, fear and sadness and found his society had to leave these feelings ignored and

¹⁸⁷ Michael McClure, Notebook, McClure (Michael) Papers: additions, Box 2.4, 1958, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

avoided in order to function.¹⁸⁸ He found this lack to be crucial in explaining why men behaved as viciously as they pleased out of boredom; a lack of emotions lead men to an insupportable monotony that could cause men to look for satisfaction in a wide array of places. In analyzing the situation this way, valuing aspects of man-as-animal, blaming the disconnection for the more perverse actions committed against nature, feeling these acts were against nature, and that such was significant render him a fascinating person for historians because even this sort of analysis and its underlying assumptions were not common amongst Americans in the 1950s. He was disgusted by actions and events that depicted mankind as unaware of its surroundings or its role within them. The whales incident was just one such deplorable event that he blamed on the loss of contact with the inner animal within each individual and a consequent lack of connection to our surroundings and our dependency on them.

In his journal, he wrote that most people were like sheep, having lost their animal instincts, and were left wanting only comfort and playing out their lives in meaningless manners like animals (in the negative sense) because comfort was so readily available.¹⁸⁹ This sentiment is also found in a letter to poet Charles Olson in which he noted, “We domesticated animals must be struck over the eyes or head by the grandeur of something to see it in a measure of clearness.”¹⁹⁰ The inability to appreciate the greatness of something could take the meaning out of life more broadly as people failed to appreciate

¹⁸⁸ In this assessment he is in tune with Aldo Leopold who quotes Thoreau’s dictum “In Wildness is the salvation of the world.” He thinks this quote explains that, “too much safety seems to yield only danger in the long run.” Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, p.133.

¹⁸⁹ Michael McClure, Notebook, McClure (Michael) Papers: additions, Box 1.3, 1956, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

¹⁹⁰ ———, 1959, From Michael McClure to Charles Olson, McClure (Michael) Papers: additions, Box 2.6, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

anything they saw, no matter how amazing. McClure was worried about what this domestication meant for mankind, “Surely a great mass of our sensibilities are lost today. I dont know if there is any way to know if new ones have replaced them or not.”¹⁹¹ The crux of the problem is it meant that men could be made blind to their dependence on the earth and its support systems without having replacement knowledge to protect them from themselves. As sheep need a trustworthy shepherd to ensure their safety, so too do domesticated men. McClure could find no such conscientious shepherd in the 1950s. In this absence, men needed to clear their senses of the domesticating influences of civilization and learn to pay attention to the animal within so as to return to a balance with nature where they would not irresponsibly spoil it. One influence that leads to the problem was regular paid employment, which made men feel depressed and small.¹⁹² By rejecting regular employment, he was agreeing with one of the important claims of the Beat Generation.

We all have inner animals. This is drawn from the idea that if we are whole beings we must have them, no matter how repressed or ignored they are. The lives of our inner beings are very difficult in civilization and this difficulty is embodied in events such as the needless killing of the whales. This is a dominant theme in *Huge Dreams*; “AND COLD TIRED EMPTY TO BE SO SPREAD IN AIR”¹⁹³ is a poem suggesting that consumer society is a cold hell where our souls never manage to finish burning. We are told that we hold “unwanted half desires,” and this half kills our souls. He concludes

¹⁹¹ ———, Notebook, McClure (Michael) Papers: additions, Box 1.6, 1957, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

¹⁹² ———, Notebook, McClure (Michael) Papers: additions, Box 1.1, 1956, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

¹⁹³ ———, *Huge Dreams* (New York: Penguin Poets, 1999), p.3.

a “Hot Hell/is freedom.” Or the ability to die of a mistake, to die completely, to live in an exhilarating manner is liberty that protects our spirits even if it ultimately kills us. Our society, McClure tells us, leaves us halfway there, neither dead nor alive, neither completely satisfied nor wholly un-satisfied. This is reminiscent of Leopold’s freedom-seeking canoe boys who ought to have the right to face death and challenge themselves at least once in their lives.¹⁹⁴ The idea that every time you “leap/at so many half-loves,” “part of you/still hangs there,” is that in our endless pursuit of commercially driven, complacent and safe half-happiness, we lose part of our souls, much to our detriment. This illustrates a decidedly negative view of consumer culture and its ramifications that is familiar to Deep Ecologists, supporters of Leopold’s Land Ethic, and Beat culture bohemian Buddhists.

McClure thought artists were in a special position to be able to spark mankind into a rekindling of the inner spirits because they do not sit in front of televisions but rather use their senses to the utmost. Effectively, he argued that he and other poets were behaving more animal-like in the sense of listening to the earth and using their bodies to their full potential. Similar to other Beats, he was aware of those who wrote before him and their heightened sensitivity to their surroundings. One day he noted to himself, after reading Denis Saurat, that many poets have rehashed about the earth, but there was a need to do so in a new way.¹⁹⁵ He did not elaborate at the time, but he was aware of a need to commence a new view of nature in poetry; perhaps he was dissatisfied with his early efforts such as the whales poem to create a new vision that readers could

¹⁹⁴ Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, p.113.

¹⁹⁵ McClure, Notebook, McClure (Michael) Papers: additions, Box 1.1, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

comprehend. He may also have been disappointed by his failure to paint the picture with words that he knew Goya could with oils. Such disappointment may have directed him to experiment with his animal poetics. Conceivably, his later note that, “I believe that there is poetry, song, in life and that it's lost in the cloud of confusions (psychic) and gestures,”¹⁹⁶ has to do with why poets were well positioned to show people a new way. They were presumably more in tune with this music than the average person. His poetry, in attempting to liberate the inner animal was really poetry of hope, of recognizing the beauty of all life.

He was aware that his view of man-as-animal was different from the majority of people in the 1950s. He noted that Yeats and Lawrence might have started to understand that man was an animal, but that for the majority to realize, “That man is that primal horror—an animal. What a wave of suicides would sweep intellectual man.”¹⁹⁷ He did not think that most people were ready for the message that he had. He made his readers aware of this in “Suicide and Death” (1963),

Men cannot face the discoveries of the new sciences without threat of insanity. The intense knowledge and vivid awareness that they are constructions of inert matter becoming life—that they are at one with the inert as well as the living—that they become life in buildings complexities of elements, acids, and molecules, enzymes and electric charges—that each particle of self is a divided real-life, or part-life, cohering into an infinity of responses and reactions that are totally free in a massive wave of life—and that all are finally creatures of Meat and Spirit, creates a fear of actual dissolution and meaninglessness.¹⁹⁸

He would, of course, nevertheless attempt to popularize his ideas through poetry and prose during the popular years of the Beat Generation. He felt compelled to try because

¹⁹⁶ Michael McClure, Notebook, McClure (Michael) Papers: additions, Box 1.2, 1957, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

¹⁹⁷ McClure, Notebook, McClure (Michael) Papers: additions, Box 1.1, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

¹⁹⁸ ———, *Meat Science Essays*, p.61.

the general insanity demonstrated by a passive public that could quietly accept “good relations at any cost” was not a positive outlook for the future, nor was the continuation of our domestication, which leads to such ruinous act as the death of 100 innocent orcas.

A key to understanding Michael McClure at this early point is that he found most of our preconceptions were the result of nurture rather than nature. He once wrote about a theory that the ancient Greeks saw more colors than the modern man does, “Whether this is so or not does not seem to be as important though as the personal discovery that we are sophisticated into seeing things in protypic [sic] relations to ourselves...”¹⁹⁹ Man had become disengaged, but could be reintegrated if only he sought to be; this is hope. This also implied that things were out of balance and that a critical disharmony was present. The implication of this was that we needed to find the lost harmony in order to maintain things as they ought to be.

The first realization along the path to this re-inhabitation must be, according to McClure, that the mind is not separate from the body and that all of our parts are equal. Arguing that,

All of our notions of the human body’s shape are wrong. We think it is a head joined on a torso and sprouting arms and legs and genitals and breasts, but we’re wrong. It is more unified than that. It’s all one total unity of protoplasm and our ideas of its appearance are too much a matter of habit,²⁰⁰

He demands that we begin to understand our bodies as a single being. The eastern yogic traditions reiterate this in their usage of breath that flows through the entire body while holding poses that involve the entire body. The importance of this to McClure is that we are animals and that we cannot continue to ignore our inner animals *ad infinitum* without

¹⁹⁹ ———, Notebook, McClure (Michael) Papers: additions, Box 2.4, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

²⁰⁰ ———, *Meat Science Essays*, p.36.

major and dire consequences. Our spirits are part of our bodies and rely on them. He hoped this reliance would lead readers to recognize that the bodies themselves relied upon the earth for sustenance and as such would change their actions. Like Snyder, McClure saw the relationships to the environment around us as central to defining mankind.

One of the ideas about how to overcome the blindness of society was a traditional Beat idea. He argued that, "Hallucination is part of our heritage (as animals) and we deny it to ourselves. Or rather it is denied us. By our worldly guides."²⁰¹ He tried to teach his readers what role drugs could play in shifting our perceptions if only the guides (read government) would allow this freedom. He wrote and published *Peyote Poem* (1959), which chronicled a hallucinatory experience fuelled by Peyote. He learned many things including "THERE ARE NO CATEGORIES!!!"²⁰² The refusal of categories is similar to the refusal to accept that there are hierarchies of life. His journal is littered with statements regarding this idea: "We are not a superior creature, we are an equal creature...We are not superior to any living form of life. [Regarding gut worms] "Factually we spring from them and are no more than them except quantitatively not qualitatively."²⁰³ This concept or rejection of the concept was expanded on his essay "Drug Notes" (1963), "Previously formed hierarchies called *levels of being*, made for convenience in mortal life, pass into nothingness."²⁰⁴ Furthermore, the drugs could allow

²⁰¹ Michael McClure, Notebook, McClure (Michael) Papers: additions, Box 2.6, 1958, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

²⁰² ———, *Hymns to St Geryon & Other Poems*, Cape Golliard Press London, 1969 ed. (San Francisco: The Auerhahn Press, 1959). No page numbers given in publication.

²⁰³ ———, Notebook, McClure (Michael) Papers: additions, Box 1.7, 1957, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

²⁰⁴ McClure, *Meat Science Essays*, p.49.

him to feel that he was an element of something much larger than himself and that while intoxicated he saw himself as part of the phenomena of the universe and he thought that was grand.²⁰⁵ Using drugs to come to understand humankind's role in nature could be the easiest manner to reconnect to nature if the drugs were legal and more readily available. The idea of a narcotics-fuelled society was not what McClure had in mind, rather this could function as an introduction of dramatic proportions for men along the path to releasing their animals. The vision held is that of men who identify with the world around them and begin to see themselves as modest components or citizens rather than conquerors of the land. In this, McClure was similar to both Aldo Leopold and Gary Snyder.

In "Phi Upsilon Kappa" the argument for more societal freedom with the purpose of freeing inner animals dominates a line of reasoning in defense of an increase in the use of the word *fuck*. He claimed, "The obscenity barrier is raised by censorships and fear. It is built by fear of the natural and the idea that nature is obscene."²⁰⁶ That *fuck* means sexual intercourse and so a natural event is part of this claim. In understanding the censorship in this manner, McClure exhibits a fine-tuned awareness of the methods used to domesticate humans in his analysis. The realization that the sound of the word itself is animalistic and good is provided, "Sing fuck. Shout FUCK. Say anything from deep within. Say FUCK! Say I FUCK! Say FUCK because it is a spirit mantra as is any word that moves and vibrates the chest like a roar."²⁰⁷ Roaring is an essentially animalistic action that we humans can do. Our ability to do it may suggest in itself that

²⁰⁵ Michael McClure, Notebook, McClure (Michael) Papers: additions, Box 1.11, 1957, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

²⁰⁶ McClure, *Meat Science Essays*, p.16.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.18.

we are animals; though machines can make all sorts of noises, they cannot roar like a living creature, cannot howl at the moon. McClure thought that by increasing freedom of speech and allowing ourselves to really use the sounds we can make we could return to an aspect of our animal heritage. We could release our inner animals and connect with the other creatures of the earth.

In “ODE TO JACKSON POLLOCK” we learn that Pollock, “Caught up in the struggle and leading it. / For the beauty of animal action / and freedom and full reward.”²⁰⁸ In rendering the act of painting a crucial aspect of the art form, Pollock had, in McClure’s estimation, meant that he was liberating his inner animal and accepting that he was in fact an animal and that the actions of his body were relevant to all that he did. McClure offered another manner in which people could come to terms with their animal selves. This notion was mirrored in McClure’s journals and some of his published writings about writing. He thought poems were an organic outgrowth of the poet, an extension of the body.²⁰⁹ In the creation of art people could, if they were careful, release their inner animals and come to understand themselves better. The actions of art could be focused on with the intended result of being in tune with one’s surroundings and animalness. This demonstrates a positive idea as to the potential of releasing the inner animal, art, culture itself, could be derived from the release.

A constant theme found in the early works is that being an animal is not bad, the evils are found in ignoring the animal aspects of living. The line “That hair is fur and nails are claws and eyes see out,” is found in several poems and letters written by

²⁰⁸ _____, *Huge Dreams*, p.4-5.

²⁰⁹ _____, Notebook, McClure (Michael) Papers: additions, Box 1.4, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

McClure during these early days. He explains, "I mean we are beasts and what we are is noble. That I see your face as a face of an animal. And we are trapped by forms and snares we invent and cast on all things.... there is no liberty until we kick down the walls. Til we beat on them as animals."²¹⁰ To see each other as animals is not negative; in fact it would be a positive because it could help humans to see our role and place within nature. In "Ode for soft voice" McClure tells his young bride, "And sometimes in the cool night I see, you are an animal/LIKE NO OTHER AND HAVE AS STRANGE A SCENT AS ANY /.../ And I do not ache until I scent you."²¹¹ Both are animals and the lovemaking they do or desire (the ache) is natural and good. In fact where, "The nerves are dead that feel no hunger or pain there's not triumph but failure," it would be a terrible disappointment for us to cease to view each other as animals and ignore our own animal instincts because, as noted above, such is detrimental to our psychological well-being and can lead to environmental disaster.

McClure saw us as animals, "The thing is without proportion. With proportion we are a bundle of guts seeking our food exactly as the wonderful sea worms do. There is no difference. I mean the world is full and we all adapt to a corner of it whether we are rotifers, crustaceans, chitons, arachnids, mammals."²¹² This was good he noted because "Our kinship is not to culture but to them. Culture is a blunted tool; it has caused us to renounce the beauty of life... Culture and the state remove us from the life

²¹⁰ ———, Notebook, McClure (Michael) Papers: additions, Box 2.4, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

²¹¹ ———, *Huge Dreams*, p.13.

²¹² ———, Notebook, McClure (Michael) Papers: additions, Box 1.7, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

of function. Culture is a substitute for life and kinship.”²¹³ He saw that in recognition of our status as animals a new culture could be formed. A new culture wherein people remember that they are animals and that they have an important role to play with nature and that the relationship is a two way street. Such a culture would not arrogantly and needlessly destroy its nest, taking innocent lives as it did so.

Mammal Patriotism wherein men realized they were mammals and learned to treat other mammals as though they were similar to us, was the starting point of a revolution McClure sought. One of the interesting aspects of this is that McClure has departed from the other Beats who sought religious explanations. Instead, he offers a distinctly scientific and political shift by redefining those who are citizens rather than those who have souls. He noted, “We feel close to all living creatures here...but we feel the most close and most joined with the warm blooded.”²¹⁴ He hoped that through writing and the tools he offered his readers they would, “become Mammals as we once were men.”²¹⁵ In his journal he noted, “My desire is to lead LEAD and fight my way out of this culture and this civilization. 1. My kinship with animals,”²¹⁶ and that he sought the, “Liberation of the Beast Spirit”²¹⁷ through poetry where ““A STATEMENT OF INDIVIDUALITY / AND ANIMAL NATURE & KINSHIP / AN AMBITION TO RAISE ANIMAL NATURE (OF MEN) TO A RECOGNITION / OF ITS NOBILITY,”

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ _____, *Meat Science Essays*, p.105.

²¹⁵ Ibid., p.106.

²¹⁶ _____, Notebook, McClure (Michael) Papers: additions, Box 2.6, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

²¹⁷ Michael McClure, Notebook, McClure (Michael) Papers: additions, Box 2.5, 1958, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

would be possible “THRU INDIVIDUAL REVOLUTIONARY STATEMENT.”²¹⁸

Such statements leave little debate as to the reliability of a reading of McClure’s earliest works as desiring a revolutionary perception shift to occur. In his own life he made a mammal patriot vow “I won’t eat flesh except for sea food. No more mammalian cannibalism,”²¹⁹ which can be understood to mimic later calls for minimizing the impact of humans on nature and respecting the rights of nature not to be destroyed unless such is absolutely necessary. While McClure clearly focused on mammals, it seems that in order to protect them we would need to protect their habitats and their prey and as such this argument of extending rights runs deeper than it appears to at first glance. He likely chose mammals as a starting point because more people could associate with them. In other words, he was being pragmatic, like White Jr. or Nash, because he was uncertain of how well the Buddhist argument would work on the majority.

He did not leave such statements hidden in his personal papers. He published “THE FLOWERS OF POLITICS, ONE” more than once.²²⁰ The poem states “THIS IS THE HUGE DREAM OF US THAT WE ARE / heroes that there is courage / in our blood! That we are live! / That we do not perpetrate the lie of vision / forced upon ourselves / by ourselves.” In this call, we see the reiteration of all the points already covered: that society has closed us in, that we must break out and realize that we are alive. That we breathe and “That hair is fur and nails are claws and eyes see out.”

²¹⁸ _____, Notebook, McClure (Michael) Papers: additions, Box 2.3, 1958, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

²¹⁹ _____, Notebook, McClure (Michael) Papers: additions, Box 2.9, 1959, The Bancroft Library, Berkeley California.

²²⁰ McClure, *Huge Dreams*, p.38.

In the early Beat works of Michael McClure, we can clearly see the idea that men are animals and not fit for living in a society designed the way his was (and ours is). This is followed by the deduction that if we are animals and can understand ourselves as such our connection with nature would change. McClure's analysis of the American psyche derived from the needless killing of 100 whales depicts a man who viewed the world in something similar to the lens of Gary Snyder and later Deep Ecologists valuing the lives of the creatures beyond their value to humans and decrying the fact that mankind was somehow disconnectedly living in disharmony with the land upon which it depended. At a time when most people thought they were in an era of endless prosperity and well-being this was a startling view to maintain, and several Beats held it nevertheless. His hopes for a new society, a freer civilization that grasped man-as-animal and thus lived in harmony with nature rather than as a conqueror fulfill both Leopold's call for a Land Ethic and envisions something similar to the Deep Ecology perspective.

Poet Lew Welch has been referred to several times already. His discussion of everyday life in the cities with their soul degrading jobs has proven to be a useful description. Welch became the stuff of legend at the *supposed* end of his life when in 1971 he walked into the Sierra Nevada foothills never to be seen again. *Supposed*, because, like Snyder, he had the survival skills required to live in the wild and thus may still be alive today.²²¹ He walked into the foothills with weaponry to support himself through hunting or with which to take his own life. His choice to disappear into the

²²¹ Allen, ed., *Lew Welch. RING OF BONE Collected Poems 1950-1971*, p.142.

woods was the ultimate rejection of society. Who was this man associated with the Beat Generation whose poetry became famous after he disappeared?²²²

There is no doubt Welch ought to be considered a Beat poet. He was a roommate of Gary Snyder's at Reed College in 1949 during this time, Welch grew to think that Snyder was "one of the finest people I have ever known"²²³ and they were lifelong friends and pen pals. Welch concluded early on that Snyder was an important poet who required a new language to articulate his message.²²⁴ Welch spent a great deal of time pondering poetics and came to conclusions similar to Jack Kerouac's spontaneous bop prosody. Welch claimed, "When I write my only concern is accuracy. I try to write accurately from the poise of mind which lets us see that things are exactly what they seem. I never worry about beauty, if it is accurate there is always beauty."²²⁵ In his theory of writing, he was similar to Kerouac, and in his acceptance that all things are beautiful, he reminds the reader of McClure's love of the gutworm. In searching for a new voice and glorifying the mundane, he was distinctly Beat.

Welch claimed in his collected works, "the principle characters are The Mountain, The City, and The Man who attempts to understand and live with them."²²⁶ His works were explicitly attempting to deal with the timeless question of how mankind is to deal

²²² He had taught at universities and had many poems published during his lifetime. At the time of his disappearance his collected poems were to be published shortly.

²²³ In a letter to his mother found in Donald Allen, ed., *I Remain. The Letter of Lew Welch & The Correspondence of his friends*. (Bolinas California: Grey Fox Press, 1980), p.1.

²²⁴ Welch wrote that, "I realize this is a great problem to you: the only urbane hill-man in the Kulture. But remember this: Pound really didn't get the point of those great big mountains, and you do. So make a language that talks about them better than his did." *Ibid.*, p.62.

²²⁵ Allen, ed., *Lew Welch. RING OF BONE Collected Poems 1950-1971*, p.4.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.3.

with nature and our desire to create dense populations. He regularly found that man would be hard pressed to live in either. The most humorous of his anti-urban rants is the poem “Chicago Poem.” In it, he describes the city,

In the mills and refineries of its south side Chicago
 passes its natural gas in flames
 Bouncing like bunsens from stacks a hundred feet high.
 The stench stabs at your eyeballs.
 The whole sky green and yellow backdrop for the skeleton
 steel of a bombed-out town...
 It's a place that lets you
 understand why the Bible is the way it is:
 Proud people cannot live here...
 In country like this there
 can be no God but Jaweh.²²⁷

A place where Jaweh, the vengeful god, is in power is a place where mankind is made to feel small. The world of Jaweh is the same as Kerouac's city where men scurry about rat-like. The desperation that lead him to walk away from society was not caused by financial poverty, but by spiritual destitution. In his work “I fly to Los Angeles,” he discussed being relatively successful and yet being tired and ruined by the troubles of the world.²²⁸ His anger was great “I rate my fury with the / bumblebee, banging at my windowpane.”²²⁹ As this anger grew, he became evermore bewildered by mankind's failure to comprehend that the cities were ruining them. He posed the question “Why do men look for lost cities / when lost groves grow / just over the next knoll and the / next, and next...”²³⁰ Clearly Welch found the urban situation with its secure nuclear family, regular paid employment, automobiles and luxuries intolerable. He hoped to leave it forever (and eventually did so).

²²⁷ Ibid., p.10.

²²⁸ Ibid., p.20.

²²⁹ Ibid., p.64.

²³⁰ Ibid., p.49.

Due to his anti-urban sentiments he did not want to be known as an urban poet. He told his readers, "Let them say: / "He seems to have lived in the mountains. / He traveled now and then. / When he appeared in cities / he was almost always drunk."²³¹ This could have been the engraving on his tombstone had he ever received one. The message exhibits his failure at city life; which drove him to drink and live poorly no matter how "well" he did. For him, like Kerouac, it was crucial to seek refuge from society. The two helped each other maintain this dream by regularly corresponding. Once they were to go on a trek together and Welch claimed,

If, on the other hand, we like it we stay, or we can go into the mountains elsewhere or live a while in Nat'l Parks. There are thousands in Oregon and all are pretty. But the main thing is to try to set up the old Benton mine, catch huge fish, live well, and sit right on the very skin of this beautiful planet—having sloughed off all of Mansworld for a little while.²³²

In this fantasy, the men found each other comforting. We have seen that Kerouac never really managed to accomplish this dream. Due to his end we know Welch was very serious and proactive regarding this. In a letter to Philip Whalen, he claimed to have hiked all over the woods and found many cabins that he could retire to and ranked them based on how well he could live at them.²³³ Like other Beats, he dreamed of seeking out a simple life, which rejected society and allowed him to lead a fulfilled life.

His impression was that as a poet he was well positioned to establish a rewarding lifestyle. He thought he was a poet because he was particularly "wild." "I sing what you'd know if you took time to hear, / I know what you'd learn if you had cause to care /

²³¹ Ibid., p.75.

²³² _____, ed., *I Remain. The Letter of Lew Welch & The Correspondence of his friends.*, p.185.

²³³ Ibid., p.156.

Envy my wildness if you will..."²³⁴ This suggests that Welch thought that he was more in tune with his inner animal and that was why he was a good poet. He wrote to his mother defending his choice to be a poet,

"I wish to marry, make babies, and make books and talk to people about other people, and talk and write about art—the only activity in which human beings are themselves. The creative life, and life is always creative, the very desires that move us are, if allowed to be fulfilled, creative, the creative life, then, is impossible in a world that thinks governments are important."²³⁵

Much like Kerouac, he thought that there were few activities left that humans could do that were rewarding. The release of the inner animal, as far as Welch was concerned, meant the fulfilling of our creative desires within. He needed to leave society to accomplish this because even the government was against such actions. He essentially saw poets as holding a special place within society, but a place that demanded that they leave civilization behind.

Not surprisingly, Welch like other Beat writers thought that a hermitage was crucial to gaining a sense of balance. To Whalen he noted, "Next summer I want to watch [for] blazes on Mt. Baker. Snyder says a letter from you will cinch the job, since you were liked by all. About January I will request a terse note about how reliable I am."²³⁶ Here we see another Beat not only seeking solitude but also looking to find it the same way the others had. This suggests that the Beats were working their way through such issues together, and having had an understanding of what each other needed and how they could go about getting it. Welch must have gotten the idea that a lookout would be a good answer for him from either Snyder or Kerouac with whom he was in

²³⁴ ———, ed., *Lew Welch. RING OF BONE Collected Poems 1950-1971*, p.28.

²³⁵ Letter to Mom found in; ———, ed., *I Remain. The Letter of Lew Welch & The Correspondence of his friends.*, p.15.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.147.

regular contact at the time. This fraternal advice highlights that the group was working closely together to solve the problem of how to cope with their insecure and unsatisfactory society.

Welch saw the earth itself as a friendly place with inherent value. This may have something to do with why he had such a difficult time attempting to fit the mold he was “supposed” to fill. His poetry is riddled with stanzas about the kindness of our planet, “All things considered, it’s a gentle and undemanding / planet, even here [Chicago] Far gentler / Here than any of a dozen other places. The trouble is / always and only with what we build on top of it.”²³⁷ Such lines begin to express what he thought, not just of the city, but the land upon which the city was built. Welch had a naïve vision of nature, possibly because he was able to survive in it, “Few things that grow here poison us. / Most of the animals are small. / Those big enough to kill us do it in a way / Easy to understand, easy to defend against. / The air here, is just what the blood needs. / We don’t use helmets or special suits.”²³⁸ Here we see that he understood the world in a way that would make congregating in cities unimaginably futile. Welch once told Snyder, “There were 3 of them [coyotes] From the sound of them you’d swear there had to be 20 or more. It is the best sound to sleep to. I never knew why, but it always made me feel peaceful to know they were out there. No pet, not even the biggest dog, was safe in that area,”²³⁹ suggesting he was not so naïve after all, but knew the dangers of the wild. Perhaps he viewed the hazards of the land in this manner because anything would have been less intimidating to his wild soul than the motorcar ridden urban living.

²³⁷ _____, ed., *Lew Welch. RING OF BONE Collected Poems 1950-1971*, p.11.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.63.

²³⁹ _____, ed., *I Remain. The Letter of Lew Welch & The Correspondence of his friends.*, p.125.

In a piece entitled “he begins to recount his adventures,” Welch continues in this same vein regarding the perfection of our little planet, discussing how it rotates about its axis and around the sun just so because its ratio of land to water and the positioning of it all is just perfect. In this piece, he went further by revealing that he viewed the earth as an organic whole, “I can’t remember seeing it any other way but whole, a big round rock wheeling about the heavens and comin’ on green to crack sidewalks, gentle and undemanding, as if I saw it first approaching it from somewhere else.”²⁴⁰ We again witness the idea of the earth as hospitable. What has been added here is the notion of the earth as a single organism. The idea appears similar to the Gaia hypothesis, the notion that all is one and connected. To understand the earth as a single whole is to grasp the importance of the interconnections of all that is on it and know the vulnerability of it. Welch conceived of the earth as a loving, benign and fragile partner.

These ideas explain why he was so dispirited by the urbanization that was taking place. “They’re tearing down all the Victorian Mansions and / building Freeways in Portland Oregon & everywhere.”²⁴¹ The car culture against which author Edward Abbey backlashes in his works was a horror to the untamed soul of Lew Welch. It is also worth noting that perhaps what had been built in the past was better than whatever was being built in the 1950s and 1960s. This is a Confucian idea. He felt himself to be “In a landscape of ruined buildings, / on a small green rock / wheeling about the heavens.”²⁴² Like Snyder, Welch looked upon the supposed prosperity of America and bit his thumb at it.

²⁴⁰ _____, ed., *Lew Welch. RING OF BONE Collected Poems 1950-1971*, p.164.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.60.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

Welch saw that there was something inherently immoral in the degradation of the earth. In a piece entitled “a farewell note to God, should he exist” he asserted,

I must hasten to say we have no argument on this score: it is a beautiful planet! Gentle, undemanding, nearly everything delights our eyes—despite the way we treat it: please, do not believe what my brothers have done is in any way reflectable on me. Often I look at rivers and do not seek to dam them. Often I look on trees and do not want to cut them down and grind them into wood pulp in order to make paper for newspaper Human Interest stories, or even my poems. I’ve destroyed any many poems, knowing they weren’t worth the acres of trees required for printing them.²⁴³

This passage denotes that Welch saw the planet as a wonderful gift. Furthermore, it explains what his culture was doing that Welch wanted to distance himself from in the eyes of any god that may have judged him. In contradiction of the Christian ethic that has largely commanded Western civilization’s relationship with nature, Welch valued the land beyond its potential for human exploitation. He maintained a viewpoint that extended the ethical sphere to include the delicate planet.

The ruin of the earth by people who failed to see its value distressed him deeply. As his description of everyday life suggests, he responded to his anxieties by turning to alcohol. He wrote to a fellow heavy drinker, Jack Kerouac, about a middle of the night realization, “drugged sleep and wake up with a fast heart and arms like soap) and the big satori thought hit me: “damn it, the sons of bitches have *won!*” Something clanked in me, like shutting the bolt of a riffle. It all seems so silly—punishing my pore ole liver just because I can’t bear to see the absurd bastards tear this planet and each other apart.”²⁴⁴ The answer was to stop watching and move to where the devastation was not so obvious.

²⁴³ Ibid., p.214.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., p.190.

Welch had to leave because he could neither understand nor accept the cultural precepts that permitted humankind to foul its nest. He asked of his fellows humans, “did it mean nothing to you Animal that turns this / Planet to a smokey rock?”²⁴⁵ He grappled with the question that all the Beats covered herein did: how had we come to thinking we could kill whales for “good relations” or destroy good loamy farmland to be able to live in polluted cities or clear-cut the forest in order to live in boxes that hurt the eyes? Welch seems to have had a more difficult time than the others in dealing with this. He saw the need for balance but did not know how we could achieve it.²⁴⁶ He concluded that, “most of our culture needs to be thrown away,”²⁴⁷ he meant all that hides the human soul and destroys the landscape needs to be left behind in favor of a more wholesome culture. The failure to create such a culture on a large scale eventually overwhelmed him.

Before giving up, Welch, like Kerouac and Snyder, found a level of solace in Buddhism (despite White Jr.’s assessment). He spent a winter as a semi-hermit in a small shack hoping to go “Shack Simple” as the locals called it. He claimed, “crazy as Han Shan as / Wittgenstein in his German hut, as / all others ever were and are / ... / who walked away from it, finally, / kicked the habit, finally of Self, of / man-hooked Man”²⁴⁸ He toyed with the idea of the man/ego split in the same manner as Snyder, but did not assign the blame for the destruction of the planet to the split. He once wrote a close friend that, “WE MUST GET OUT OF OUR HEADS (i.e. must not burrow *in*

²⁴⁵ _____, ed., *Lew Welch. RING OF BONE Collected Poems 1950-1971*, p.57.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.72.

²⁴⁷ _____, ed., *I Remain. The Letter of Lew Welch & The Correspondence of his friends.*, p.20.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.84.

there—poetry the record of various minds JOINING with whatever-is-out-there).²⁴⁹ He wrote to Snyder upon receiving a copy of the poem book *Riprap*, “thanks for the *Riprap* and I dig the inscription. It is *entirely* a matter of grinding up that self and throwing it away—it is entirely a disappointment, a re-taking, and not only scree, but huge bolders [sic] left where all was supposed to be clean.”²⁵⁰ Welch did not find the same level of comfort in Buddhism as the others did, but he did look to it for a solution to his discomfort.

Buddhism seems not to have satisfied his animal instincts. Welch saw himself and everyone else as an animal and blamed cities for the fact that most people failed to see this reality. “It is apparent that most men spend all of their time in the world of man. Their feet touch only pavement...Now, of course, they are also in the world that is not man—all their gestures are about this, or with this—but they are asleep to this.”²⁵¹ Welch saw their gestures as McClure saw them as dead giveaways that these humans were in fact animals. Welch acknowledged that he had a mane and that he loved to bask in the sun as an animal.²⁵² In his animalness, he sensed he needed more space than the cities could provide and as a spiritually conscious animal he required more psychic freedom than the cities could afford him. Like the others, he saw that by leaving society everyone could become more in tune with their true animal selves.

He came to the conclusion that simplifying life could help to free him and the others if they only realized that the need existed. He argued against motorboats, claiming

²⁴⁹ ———, ed., *I Remain. The Letter of Lew Welch & The Correspondence of his friends.*, p.207.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.181.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.195.

²⁵² ———, ed., *Lew Welch. RING OF BONE Collected Poems 1950-1971*, p.24 and p.30.

rowing was better;²⁵³ he also argued against motorized transportation more broadly, in the name of Thoreau and his advocacy of walking.²⁵⁴ Welch reminds us of Snyder when he writes to his mother that he was an adherent to a school of interior design that promoted living only with simple basics, an old door on four posts for a dining room table etc. and that he had decorated his apartment accordingly.²⁵⁵ Later in life he had a very basic hut near another hut that was communally used for Buddhist practices. The Buddhist hut was being closed by the fire department because it was so simple that it did not even have a toilet facility of any type and could not meet the minimal safety requirements. He worried they might force him out of his own hut which was even sparser than the first.²⁵⁶ In preparation for this eventuality, he packed his rucksack. It weighed 40 pounds and contained everything he owned and everything he thought he needed.

We have already seen how such ideas as leaving civilization for solitude and simplicity can enhance our appreciation of nature and relieve our pained souls. In Lew Welch's case we see man frantically seeking out such things precisely because he was too aware of his inner animal and it was too strong to be suppressed. He thought he could find answers in the same places the other Beats around him had. It seems likely that at least some of his thoughts and ideas about how to improve his situation were derived from the Beats already studied. This strengthens arguments previously made but it also shows the group as thinking together about nature and how we are to live with it.

²⁵³ ———, ed., *Lew Welch. RING OF BONE Collected Poems 1950-1971*, p.17.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.42.

²⁵⁵ ———, ed., *I Remain. The Letter of Lew Welch & The Correspondence of his friends.*, p.72.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.163-4.

Perhaps Welch's despair can be useful to anyone studying negative reactions to cities. There may be some truth to Welch's view that we are animals requiring space or McClure's that we need to free ourselves from the overly burdensome constraints of the soul. Certainly the life of Lew Welch can be a tool to those seeking to understand back-to-the-land movements. Welch's problems with society were extreme examples of the anxieties felt by his generation of writers. It is a sad truth that he failed to find solid solutions that would enable him to continue working. Nevertheless, his problems and ideas have deep meaning regarding how mankind has left the land in favor of cities and the affects this has had both on the land and the people. Both he and McClure pose important questions about the spirit and soul of humankind regarding the conditions under which they are capable of flourishing and those that ruin them irrevocably.

Final Words

This thesis is an attempt to reintegrate the Beat Generation into the narrative of important environmental ideas in America. It is partially an attempt at recovering them from what I believe to be overly simplified debates discussing far too few of their thoughts, works and lives. I deal with the Beats on their own terms, regarding one of their own topics discussed both in their publications and amongst themselves as friends sitting at cottages. The use of letters and journals allowed for a much deeper consideration of their thoughts, struggles and conclusions than only reading their published works would have allowed. Hopefully it is a refreshing view of a too regularly ridiculed generation that deserves better consideration from scholars seeking an understanding of the history of American culture. It should be enlightening as well for those who focus more deeply on the perceptual shift that pulls us away from anthropocentrism and towards eco-centrism and the effects resulting upon America and its landscape.

The Beat Generation can be understood to have articulated rough ideas and adhered to a lifestyle similar to Deep Ecology and its precepts before the philosophy was formally outlined. They followed in the footsteps of Aldo Leopold in supporting the idea that humans are but lowly and equal citizens of *nation earth* rather than built-in-the-image-of-God conquerors and owners of the land. They saw and accepted that the land had value beyond its potential to serve humans in all of their convoluted endeavors. This

understanding opens doors to a great deal of further studies about them on their own terms, especially if others seek out their archives (which were kept immaculately by them) and hold fast to the notion of trying to understand them as people struggling to find their place in the universe. In looking at their ecological perspective we can begin to deal with them as citizens of time more broadly than just as post-war children or pre-hippie hipsters who liked to drink, do drugs and have sex.

Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder, Michael McClure and Lew Welch are not the only Beat writers to have thought about the role of man in nature. Others such as Allen Ginsberg, Denise Levertov and Philip Whalen also meditated upon the issues.²⁵⁷ The choice of authors studied in this thesis was careful. In the case of Snyder his clear importance to later Deep Ecology suggested to me that his earliest ideas could be especially fruitful for those plotting out the development of important environmental ideals that he would come to champion. He is in essence the most evident person that sits at the intersection of the Beat Generation and ecological thinking. Furthermore, he is a familiar figure to environmental historians. In the case of Jack Kerouac, he wrote extensively about Snyder, was arguably the most famous Beat novelist, kept wonderfully clear archives, struggled his whole life with questions of morality and is my personal favorite novelist. Michael McClure was chosen because he was a playwright, essayist and poet who clearly articulated his ideas. His works are lucid in defining his goals and thoughts, most notably, that the answer could be found without forcing a new religion

²⁵⁷ Levertov even published a book of nature poems written during her 50-year career in 1997 because she was so frequently reading just her nature works to audiences it would be simpler to have them in a single book, and presumably her readers would appreciate the compilation as well. See, Denise Levertov, *The Life Around Us* (New York: New Directions, 1997).. Philip Whalen became a Zen priest and could have made a fascinating study in response to Lynn White Jr.

upon an ever more secular population. These three also had easily available archives for me to delve into in order to strengthen my reading of their publications and improve my comprehension of the terms they used and the ideas they tried to work their way through. Lew Welch was chosen because his story of walking away into the foothills demonstrates a serious and dramatic case of a human soul being distraught by society. His seeking of answers from his fellow Beat writers seemed to me to demonstrate the relevance of the discussion of the other three I chose to focus on because the dialogue on such topics literally became, for the Beats, a matter of life and death.

We all know Jack Kerouac loved his liquor to a fault. What we have come to learn is that he also loved his mother, his dead brother, trees, and the world around him. He loved to sit under the foliage and ponder the age-old question of how humans are to relate to the world around them. His older brother Gerard taught him lessons of humility in the face of nature as well as a concern for it and all the creatures it contained. Kerouac is an example of a man who managed to find a complex mishmash of Buddhism and Roman Catholicism that supported his ideas of animals as fellow travelers in an ethical world and thus trekked through a path beyond the ecological thinking of the majority of people alive during his time. This hodgepodge of religion and ideas should prove useful to environmental historians seeking to understand the new question we face. The question is no longer how we came to find ourselves in the pitiable condition we are in (we seem to largely agree on where we will lay this blame), but rather how we are going to get ourselves out of this? What type of culture, philosophy, or Weltanschauung can we possibly formulate based on the past that can serve us in the future? Kerouac promoted his answer to this question, it was ignored at the time and continues to be

neglected, but it may offer us much more than we have given it credit for. Such Oriental-Western ideas need to be studied more deeply.

We see how from his earliest experience in writing poetry Gary Snyder was concerned with the role of nature in the lives of humans. His thoughts evolved over time becoming more complex and also incorporated foreign worldviews such as Buddhism in order to create a coherent solution to the question. This led him to a lifelong adherence to a lifestyle akin to that promoted by Deep Ecologists. While he would eventually become among the most renowned and articulate members of the Deep Ecology movement we are able to witness these tendencies in the years prior to this fame and recognition. There is an opportunity to study the evolution of these ideas with a much more careful and refined focus. Perhaps such an effort could closely pursue the question of how ecological American Buddhist ideas metamorphosed into Deep Ecology and how these ideas can be framed to be comprehensible to “western minds.” Understanding how such ideas grow within a mind may help us to learn how to sow the seeds of change and foster such change on a broad level.

Playwright and poet Michael McClure ROARED whenever he could, that is to say whenever his inner animal required him to. He howled FUCK! with a passion rarely found amongst erudite poets and scholars. We have come to understand how this man, who played a central role in the Beat Generation, viewed himself as an animal and how he sought to promote this idea in others and what he thought would come from people realizing that they were animals. He serves to depict that the Deep Ecology and Citizenship ideas went further than the two key figures already discussed and how they can be achieved without using religious premises by employing political ones instead.

He demonstrates that the concern with nature was broad among Beat writers and that their yelling, swearing, drug use, and etc. were more complex than they at first appear. He also sought to find solutions for how we live. City life being so distressing and repressing to our animal spirits might be a key to the future. Finding ways to allow ourselves the types of freedoms we require may aid us in attempting to lead more meaningful and fulfilled lives without spending more money.

Lew Welch was a tragic victim of our inability to create a society that fosters our inner selves. He once noted that while Walt Whitman “could say it marvelous to see the muscled workers...the poets who followed him (who had to be those workers, at jobs) know that there ain’t no muscled workers, they’s only victims.”²⁵⁸ Welch did not complain about the working conditions in the same way that Charles Dickens had. He was destroyed by what “good” working conditions with “good” pay could do to the soul and mind of the animals that worked the jobs. In this we may find there is some truth. Perhaps if we could manage more soul-sustaining work for people some of the problems of society including excessive waste could be resolved. At the very least, he may help us to understand how to create an environment that people can tolerate without destroying all that is around us. Then again, maybe he simply depicts how hopeless such a goal is. Yet, we must hope because Welch himself often smiled and wrote many humorous poems that circumstances can improve if humans realize they are animals and they have needs beyond comfort.

The 1950s are generally not considered to have been of much consequence in environmental histories. Often we find a leap from the publication of Aldo Leopold’s *A*

²⁵⁸ Allen, ed., *Lew Welch. RING OF BONE Collected Poems 1950-1971*, p.5.

Sand County Almanac to Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. In a less presentist mindset, this thesis seeks to add to our knowledge of the ways in which things were happening in the 1950s that may have impacted later environmental phenomena. There is clearly a place for the 1950s within the evolution of such ideas; the question remains how exactly to place them within the narrative. Attempts to trace each of the authors' influences upon ecological thinking beyond the 1950s and early 1960s may prove very fruitful now that we can clearly see that they had a role to play. Further consideration should be given to the question of why the readers failed to understand this aspect of the Beat Generation. Or why Lew Welch resorted to walking away. Such questions could teach us a great deal about American cultural history.

For Beat scholars, this thesis demonstrates that the Beats were a complex Generation and that the terms of debate can leave behind the bacchanalian drug and alcohol culture in order to seek deeper understandings of the minds of these great writers. This could entail a deeper analysis of their understanding of the ideas of nature writers who wrote before them such as Henry David Thoreau. It could also involve tracing these writers ideas beyond their years of relevance by studying their later writings on an individual basis in order to appreciate their influences on later writers and environmental activists. That their critics may have misunderstood them at the time and that many people were dissuaded from reading them who would have taken a great deal out of their works is the price we have had to pay for our failure to recognize this strain of thought within the movement. It is clear that their works contain characteristics and ideas that differ dramatically from what the critics and, thus, fans argued were in them.

To attempt to better understand the Beats and their thoughts is to show a greater respect for them, which can help us to grasp the role they played in American culture.

The poet Robert Frost once wrote, “The woods are lovely, dark and deep, / But I have promises to keep / And miles to go before I sleep.” The Beats sought to keep their promises to themselves, their inner animals, their brothers, and the other sentient creatures of the earth with whom they knew they were sharing our fragile planet. They wrote reams of poetry and fiction in an effort to accomplish this goal. As we attempt to relieve our anxieties in the face of a changing natural world, it is up to us to walk the miles required to not just understand their message but to cull the lessons from it.

Appendix A

The following list represents 25 lifestyles characteristics found in Deep Ecology circles according to its primary philosopher Arne Naess. It is from Arne Naess's "Deep Ecology and Lifestyle" originally presented at The Paradox of Environmentalism, a symposium held May 2, 1983 at York University:²⁵⁹

1. Use of simple means. Avoidance of unnecessary means to reach a goal or end.
2. Propensity to prefer activities most directly serving values in themselves and having intrinsic value. Avoidance of activities which are merely auxiliary, having no intrinsic value, or being many stages away from fundamental goals.
3. Anticonsumerism and minimization of personal property. This negative attitude follows from points 1 and 2.
4. Endeavor to maintain and increase the sensitivity and appreciation of goods which there is enough for all to enjoy.
5. Absence or low degree of "novophilia"—the love of what is new merely because it is new. Cherishing old and well-worn things.
6. Efforts to dwell in situations of intrinsic value and to *act* rather than merely being busy.
7. Appreciation of ethnic and cultural differences among people, not feeling them as threats.
8. Concerns about the situation of the third and Fourth Worlds and the attempt to avoid a material standard of living too much different from and higher than the needy (global solidarity lifestyle).
9. Appreciation of lifestyles, which are universalizable, which are not blatantly impossible to sustain without injustice toward fellow humans or other species.
10. To go for depth and richness of experience rather than intensity.
11. To appreciate and choose, whenever possible, meaningful work rather than just making a living.
12. To lead a complex (not a complicated) life; trying to realize as many aspects of positive experiences as possible within each time-interval.
13. Cultivating life in community (*Gemeinschaft*) rather than in society (*Gesellschaft*).
14. Appreciation of, or participation in, primary production—small-scale agriculture, forestry, fishing.

²⁵⁹ Arne Naess, "Deep Ecology and Lifestyle," in *The Paradox of Environmentalism* (York University: York University Faculty of Environmental Studies, 1983), P.57-9.

15. Efforts to satisfy vital needs rather than desires. Resisting the urge to “go shopping” as a diversion or therapy. Reducing the sheer number of possessions, favoring the old, much-worn, but essentially well-kept things.
16. Attempts to live in nature rather than just *visiting* beautiful places, and avoidance of tourism (but occasionally making use of tourist facilities).
17. When vulnerable to nature, living “light and traceless.”
18. Tendency to appreciate all life-forms rather than merely those considered beautiful, remarkable, or narrowly useful.
19. Never use life-forms merely as means. Remain conscious of their intrinsic value and dignity even when using them as resources.
20. When there is a conflict between the interests of dogs and cats (and other pet animals) and wild species, a tendency to protect the latter.
21. Effort to protect local ecosystems, not only individual life-forms, feeling one’s own community as a part of ecosystems.
22. Not only to deplore excessive interference in nature as unnecessary, unreasonable, and disrespectful, but to condemn it as insolent, atrocious, outrageous, and criminal—without condemning the people responsible for the interference.
23. Try to act resolutely and without cowardice in conflicts, but to remain non-violent in words and deeds.
24. Participate in or support of non-violent direct action when other ways of action fail.
25. Vegetarianism, total or partial.

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