

The Beat Generation

The Beats were a criticism of American complacency under the Ike-Nixon regime, an expression of new forms of prose, and poetry and an exploration of consciousness, which joined the dissent of existing Bohemias [...] to produce a distinct style of literature and living, based on disaffiliation, poverty, anarchic individualism and communal living. A relaxation of 'square' (puritan, middle-class, respectable) attitudes towards sex, drugs, religion and art became the opposing uniformity of 'beat' -Eric Monstram: The Penguin Companion to Literature

The “Beat Generation” is viewed as an influential cultural revolution or a literary movement that emerged in the late 1940’s in the aftermath of World War II. The Beat movement was made up of a broad geographical range, from New York City to San Francisco. At first the majority of the “beats” lived in Greenwich Village, New York. They usually hung out together in coffeehouses, jazz bars, and in Washington Square Park, sharing ideas, creating works of art -especially poetry, listening to music and having wild parties. The poetry and novels they wrote were always about their own life experiences and hence biographical. The autobiographical fiction novels of Jack Kerouac and his fellow Beat writers show that without a specific philosophy, the Beat Generation sought to redefine the American Dream and reject middle class values through the pursuit of kicks and escape from convention.

Over View

In the Beat Book edited by Ann Waldman, the origin of the phrase is traced back to Jack Kerouac’s conversation with John Clellon Holmes in 1948:

They were discussing the nature of generations, recollecting the glamour of the Lost Generation, and Kerouac said, "Ah, this is nothing but a beat generation." They talked about whether it was a "found generation" (as Kerouac sometimes called it), an "angelic generation", or some other epithet. But Kerouac waved away the question and said beat generation - not meaning to name the generation, but to unname it.

Jack Clellon Holmes later published an article in The New York Times Magazine titled "This is the Beat Generation" In this article, Holmes reports of a young Californian girl who had been arrested for drug use but Holmes portrays an adorable picture of a girl who could only be viewed as criminal through "an enormous effort of righteousness". Referring to the girl's face on the magazine cover, he says "Its only complaint seemed to be: 'why don't people leave us alone?'" Holmes deduces that this was the face of a Beat Generation and in this way; the Beat Generation is given face and the idea of personal freedom, to do as one desired without social constraints, is presented as the main goal of the Beats. Knowing that the "Beat Generation" is unknown to the readers, as it does not exist beyond an idea, Holmes offers a very fascinating explanation of what it means to be "beat":

More than mere weariness, it implies the feeling of having been used, of being raw. It involves a sort of nakedness of mind, and, ultimately, of soul; a feeling of being reduced to the bedrock of consciousness. In short, it means being undramatically pushed up against the wall of oneself. A man is beat whenever he goes for broke and wagers the sum of his resources on a single number; and the young generation has done that continually from early youth.

This explanation of who is “beat” clearly portrays that those who are “beat” have been wronged by society and by implication, that the Beats do not find a place in the prized American Dream. Excluded, the Beats will not let the American dream slip away without a fight, even if that fight amounts to nothing in the end. Instead of becoming disillusioned and desolate, the Beats redefine the American Dream by pursuing a rather parallel a dream, an American dream in which pleasure replaces “material wealth” and social conventions were reduced to “individual conventions”. With the fear of death being imminent, the Beats live “one day at a time” and perhaps this is the greatest blow the original American Dream. J.C Shakespeare speaking at NYU's Loeb Auditorium in 1990s affirms the notion of the Beat fear of imminent death and the decision to take life as it comes, he quotes Ginsberg, Kerouac’s temporary and founder member of the literary circle that became the Beat Generation; "most younger people have that view that we're going down the drain," and Ginsberg continues to add that, "Anything we can do to ease the massive suffering, whether we're going to flourish or going to our graves -- either way, the necessary care, tenderness and effort to ease other people's pain is always worthwhile as a compass in any situation." This mood sets a background which will shape the Beats’ attitude to life and the social conventions that shape it.

Bradley J. Stiles writes in his book Emerson's Contemporaries and Kerouac's Crowd: A Problem of Self-location that in an interview shortly before his death, Ginsberg concurred that the “Beats lacked a specific philosophy, they shared ‘an ethos’ of themes and preoccupations representing a move towards spiritual liberation”. From the horse’s mouth we can see that what brought the Beats together were not common ideologies but rather a common ethos that did not find a place in American society. They sought inspiration from the lost generation but as Holmes again observes when he compares the Beat generation to the Lost Generation of the 1930s, while the

“Lost Generation” was preoccupied with loss of faith, the Beat Generation was more and more preoccupied with the need for faith, and not just a religious kind of faith but rather a global faith in humanity and nature; a faith that sought to bring the two back to harmony as was originally meant to be humans became engrossed in pursuing selfish goals of wealth accumulation.

Disenfranchised, the Beats tried to bend social conventions and go after individualistic aspirations, sometimes with great recklessness. Keith Perkins (Ref, characterizes the Beat Generation as being preoccupied with, among other things; spiritual liberation, sexual revolution, liberation of the word from censorship, demystification of the laws against marijuana and other drugs, evolution of rhythm and blues, spread of ecological consciousness, respect for land, opposition to military-industrial machine civilization and respect for indigenous people’s cultures. With such global concerns, it is no surprise that the Beats did not find a philosophy that could address all these concerns. Characterization as such, it becomes arguable if the beats were really against middle class values in entirety, and if they were, what options did they offer? Setting their preoccupations aside, it is important to note that the Beats did not seek to confront society in a head on collision fashion, instead in a rather faddish fashion, they went after kicks and personal pleasures as each found fit. There is no better place to best understand the Beats than from the avatar of the movement’s own primal stories of the people who were later called Beats. Therefore, for the purposes of this essay, Kerouac’s novels, On the Road and The Dharma Bums will be the basis of analysis to show that while the Beats had no philosophy, they tried to redefine the American Dream by escaping convention and having kicks.

The American Dream

The question of what the American Dream is, is not an easy one to answer and yet one understands of the American Dream dictates how one will try to live in the United States, a land of immigrants who flocked the country in search of greener pastures. John Winthrop aboard the Mayflower ship envisioned a religious a religious paradise, a “City upon a Hill” to light the whole world. In comparison, Martin Luther King thought the American Dream is achieving racial equality where “ my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character” (Martin Luther, I Have a Dream). Martin Luther argued that his dream was rooted in the American Dream. Despite the varying ideas of what the American Dream means to different people, one thing that is prevalent in all versions of the ‘dream’ is the quest for money.

The quest for wealth is an “inalienable” dream for the American society and can be traced back to the colonial days: Benjamin Franklin is credited as being foundational to roots of American values and character and he became one of the most popular and respected men of the enlightenment when he wrote “The Way to Wealth” in which he underscores the importance of hard work with what have become so famous quotes like “Early to Bed, and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise”. Putting off immediate pleasure and leisure, he assured his listeners, was the way to a mass the wealth which he was living testimony to.

Professor Matthew Warshauer in his article, “Who Wants to be a Millionaire: Changing Conceptions of the American Dream”, traces the origins of the money quest to the post American civil War era.

[Americans] experienced profound hardship in the changing economic landscape” and “they tales of Horatio Alger, whose characters overcame adversity through industry, perseverance, self-reliance, and self-discipline. The ubiquitous "rags to riches" legend became a cornerstone of American society; anyone could succeed and achieve wealth if they worked hard.

Warshauer further attributes the dramatic decline in the traditional work ethic corresponded to the rise of industry and the shift was exacerbated further in the aftermath of the Second World War as the consumer culture blossomed and Americans became preoccupied with material goods. Warshauer also quotes David Reisman who noted that “consumed by desires for status, material goods, and acceptance, Americans apparently had lost the sense of individuality, thrift, hard work, and craftsmanship that had characterized the nation.”

There appears a great rift between Benjamin Franklin’s hard work to wealth ideology and the 1950s’ approach to realizing the American Dream. As Professor Warshauer noted, while the shift in work ethics did not lessen the people’s desire to achieve the American dream, the dream became more of an entitlement than something to work hard for. This conception of the Rags to riches” overnight continues to pervade the American Dream and explains the popularity of modern television shows like “Big Brother”, “Pop Idol” or “Super Star”. It is under this background that Jack Kerouac wrote *On the Road*, a novel considered an avatar of the Beat Generation. Looking at how the characters in the novel, who are actually literary representations of real life characters given the fact the novel is almost entirely biographical, reveal that without a philosophy to follow, the Beat Generation attempted to redefine the already corrupted

American Dream by escaping conventions and pursuing kicks. But were these conventions? Below an analysis of what the American middle class values at the time will try to enlighten what these were.

Middle-Class values

The question of what middle class values are, is rather complicated as indicated by a poll which found that between 25-70 per cent of American regard themselves to be middle class. This would imply a very large segment holding these middle class values. “The middle class may be said to include the middle and upper levels of clerical workers, those engaged in technical and professional occupations, supervisors and managers, and such self-employed workers as small-scale shopkeepers, businessmen, and farmers.”(Encyclopedia Britannica) Meanwhile Barbara Ehrenreich, writing the Wikipedia, observes that most sociological definitions of middle class follow Max Weber, who defines the middle class as, “as consisting of professionals or business owners who share a culture of domesticity and sub-urbanity and a level of relative security against social crisis, in the form of socially desired skill or wealth.” This definition, like the one is the quoted earlier, emphasize profession and income, falling sort of perhaps one of the most common value associated by the middle class, consumption habits. Today, the term middle class is linked to “middle income” and a comfortable lifestyle and it is a reflection of its popular usage in the US after the end of the war. More and more people had access to education, prosperity and white collar jobs, keeping the American dream alive.

Sociologist, Klaus Eder, enlightens us more on the middle class aspirations in his book The New Politics of Class. He notes that the first concept of the middle class in 'good life'. He argues that the concept of good life is a religious notion based on the thinking that good life is led by good people. This will be important later when we try to evaluate the role of religion in the beat generation given that spirituality was such an important theme in Beat writing and life style. Eder's observation that religious notions of goodness have "survived neither in the lower, nor in the upper classes" (Eder, 181) also explains why the Beats kept away from Christianity but at the same time finding an alternative religion, further affirming that much as they were dissatisfied with the state of affairs and mainly the restrictive nature of societal values, they were incapable of delineating themselves fully from the back bone of the middle class.

Eder finds the second concept of the middle class being the consensual social relations which foster the idea of "an authentic life-form where people interact as equals and free persons". He under scores the importance of communication as a central feature of the middle class culture and asserts, as will later be seen, that counter cultures in general tend to subvert the communication feature by communicating through ritualized and specialized codes of communication. Ironically the beat generation pursued this very core value of the middle class by protesting the literary limitations through what Wechsler called the "vulgar rambling" (ibid).

Eder argues that it is possible that the various social movements might not lie strictly under the middle or working class, because they are concerned with non-class issues

which fall outside traditional class conflict which are always about the share of societal resources (182). This argument could be applicable to the Beat generation as they did not in principle fight middle class values and were neither interested in working class values but rather dealt with issues that might be classified as “non-class” related.

The Biography

The biography of Beat Generation writers is important to the understanding of not only Beat literature but the Beat Generation as a whole. This is because the writers mostly relayed their life experiences in entirety. If one traces the biography of the Beat generation writers, whose real lives are fictionalized in the novels; one notes that many of them actually had middle class roots. This should then explain why they were dissatisfied with the middle class values which they view as being restrictive and head in one direction-material prosperity. Perhaps at this moment it is paramount that we look at the biographical data of the major Beat writers.

Asher Liver wrote on a beat museum web page that Jack Kerouac was born Jean-Louis Kerouac, a French-Canadian child in working-class Lowell, Massachusetts and although his father had been quite a successful local businessman, he started experiencing financial difficulties when Kerouac was still young and this would suggest that Kerouac grew up in working class conditions. His father started gambling in the hopes that he would rescue the family from the economic abyss in which they found themselves but this only added insult to injury and only ended up sinking into alcoholism. It was the young and forward looking Kerouac who then planned to take on the mantle of salvaging his family from poverty by winning a football scholarship to college and entering the insurance business.

When he joined Columbia University, his family moved to New York with him, with great hopes, but these hopes were soon shuttered when Kerouac argued with his football coach and subsequently lost the scholarship. Disillusioned, tried the military but was neither successful here and he ended up sailing with the Merchant Marine. Liver further notes that when Kerouac was not sailing, he hang around New York “with a crowd his parents did not approve of: depraved young Columbia students Allen Ginsberg and Lucien Carr, a strange but brilliant older downtown friend named William S. Burroughs, and a joyful street cowboy from Denver named Neal Cassady.”

Allen Ginsberg, another patriarch of the Beat generation, unlike Kerouac who had dropped out of university, was a high school teacher, published poet and a moderate Jewish Socialist. Ginsberg had had a troubled childhood with a paranoid mother and his confusion about lust for other boys his age. While at Columbia University Ginsberg formed a friendship with Kerouac, Burroughs and Cassady who were “delinquent young philosophers were equally obsessed with drugs, crime, sex and literature”. He was mainly a poet and his most famous being *Howl*, which we will refer to later.

Another important Beat Literature author was William Burroughs who is said not to have liked his St.Louis his upper-class Midwestern background which did not suit his tastes. Burroughs was “a bookworm with strong homoerotic urges, a fascination with guns and crime and a natural inclination to break every rule he could find, there seemed to be no way Burroughs could ever fit into normal society.” (ibid). After graduating from Harvard, he embarked on experimenting different life-styles with New York gangsters and

remained financially dependent on his family. He became a heroin addict intentionally and was later introduced to the Columbia university nonconformist group of Ginsberg and Kerouac. Burroughs wrote Junky about his heroine addiction and later Queer about his homosexuality and later became a farmer. After accidentally killing his girl friend Joan in a “William Tell act” show of craftsmanship, he fled to Mexico where he later became an underground celebrity after publishing Naked Lunch.

Beat Literature

The Beat literary group consisted of a small groups of friends and as Levi Aster in his article Beat Generation puts it, it „was small enough to have fit into a couple of cars (at times this nearly happened)“ and yet it came to represent the whole Beat generation as we know it today. In fact, the cultural phenomena was derived from Kerouac’s groundbreaking novel, On the Road, which like Ernest Hemmingway’s The Sun Also Rises represented the Lost Generation, or Kerouac’s contemporary, John Osborne’s Look Back in Anger represented the young angry men literary movement in Britain in the 1950s.

Ann Charters, in an Introduction to On the Road, notes that when the novel was first published, the reporters were interested in Kerouac explaining the meaning of „beat, a word he had heard about a decade earlier but had popularized through his writing. She also observes that when Kerouac distance himself from the „beat” culture, the reporters “put down their pencils when he told them he came from a French Canadian family; they turned a deaf ear when he said he loved America because it had opened its doors to his immigrant parents; they thought he was kidding when he tried to explain that he was not

“beat” but a strange solitary crazy catholic mystic,...“ Instead Kerouac claimed that he would not have been able to write as much as he did if he had not lived “a kind of monastic life” at home with his mother most of the time. This not only shows that at this time the idea of a beat culture was incomprehensible to most including the usually most informed, the media. Instead it shows that Jack Kerouac and his friends basically threw upon the public this life style that they had led as private individuals. Charters ultimately shows that Kerouac himself had not lived the “true beat” life not until after he published the book:

Kerouac was thirty five years old when *On the Road* was Published, and later it would seem he had spent the first part of his career trying to write the book and get it Published, and the rest of his life trying to live it down. One problem was that his portrait of Dean Moriarty in the novel was so exhilarating that reporters expected him to live up to its image, despite his insistence that he was the character „Sal Paradise“, who had shambled after dean in their cross-country trips

Beatniks were not viewed very favorably by the general public as would be expected for the „other“ but more stunning was the critics criticism of Beat Literature in such critical terms for its deviance from what was the normal form of literature. James Wechsler labels Kerouac’s writings as “vulgar ramblings on a latrine wall.” Norman Podhoretz in *Esquire* magazine called the “Beats”, “a movement of brute stupidity and know-nothingism that is trying to take over the country.” (Boynton)

In lieu of these harsh comments, the Beat movements answered back portraying that those who criticized them missed the whole point of the movement or were twisting the facts and Jack Kerouac could be no bitterer:

But yet, but yet, woe, woe unto those who think that the Beat Generation means crime, delinquency, immorality, amorality ... woe unto those who attack it on the grounds that they simply don't understand history and the yearning of human souls ... woe in fact unto those who those who make evil movies about the Beat Generation where innocent housewives are raped by beatniks! ... woe unto those who spit on the Beat Generation, the wind'll blow it back.

On the Road

On the Road is Jack Kerouac's second novel and the most famous beat novel and one that defined the new generation that Holmes, as seen above, termed as the "Beat Generation". It is thus a vital novel in understanding the Beat culture and how the various forms in which the Beats sought to redefine the American Dream through rejection of middle class values, escape from convention and the pursuit of kicks instead of material well being. The rise of the Beat Generation coincided with the rise of the "Angry Young Men", a literary movement in Britain in the 1950s. The later were angry at being excluded from the social mainstream and felt that they had no cause to fight for. On other hand, while the Beats were not exactly excluded, they too were dissatisfied with the direction into which their country was headed. As seen above, most of the members of the original beat

literary circle were of middle class origin and some of them well educated but yet each had a personal “problem” that made it hard for them to stay the course of the American Dream of the establishment, prompting them to craft their own “American Dream”.

Dean Moriarty, the fictional version of Jack Kerouac’s close friend and also beat writer, Neal Cassady, is the hero of the novel for his rebellious character. We learn that he has been in and out of jail several times and is a reckless womanizer who marries three wives in a span of four years and keeps dilly-dallying between them. This appears an effective way of rebelling against the Christian belief of monogamous marriages that should last “till death do us part”. Dean has thrown all caution to the wind and will not be deterred by social convention in his desire to satisfy insatiable lust. The narrator explains that “Dean just raced society, eager for bread and love; he didn’t care one way or another,” so long as he could “get that lil ole gal with that lil sumpin down there tween her legs...” (8) In another instance, Dean imagines “Now wouldn’t be fine if we could all get together and have a real going goofbang together with everybody sweet and fine, and agreeable, no hassles, no infant rise of protest or body woes mis-conceptalized or sumpin?” this gives us a picture of hassle free world that Dean dreams of, a new dream that greatly differs from the middle class value of chastity, and it at the same time offers great pleasure and it is meant to last a life time.

Luc Sante in a NewYork Times review of On the Road traces the writing of the novel, at its publication; Kerouac made scandalous revelation that he had written the novel in three

weeks. He notes that the novel was originally written as a biography but had to go through subsequent redrafting to suit conventional novel formatting before it could be published. More importantly, “The biggest immediate difference between the first draft and the finished product, though, is that while we know “On the Road” as a novel — the great novel of the Beat Generation — the scroll is essentially nonfiction, a memoir that uses real names and is far less self-consciously literary...” This brings us back to the reality that in Beat literature it is hard to separate art from real life. The Literary censorship of the time is highlighted

In On the Road Kerouac attempts to give a philosophy to the Beat movement through Dean Moriarty; while in jail, Dean writes to Chad asking questions about Nietzsche. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Friedrich Nietzsche was a:

German philosopher of the late 19th century who challenged the foundations of Christianity and traditional morality. He believed in life, creativity, health, and the realities of the world we live in, rather than those situated in a world beyond. Central to his philosophy is the idea of “life-affirmation,” which involves an honest questioning of all doctrines that drain life's energies, however socially prevalent those views might be.

This would seem like a plausible philosophy of the Beat generation yet Sal Paradise the narrator seems to belittle it when he says, “I was tremendously interested in the letters because they so naively and sweetly asked Chad to teach him all about Nietzsche and all the wonderful intellectual things that Chad knew”(1). In such a dismissive style, Kerouac drops the idea of having a philosophy for the Beat Generation but that said, it appears that the life style and even Dean’s name “Moriarty”(which sound like ‘morality’ yet he is the opposite of it) point to

Nietzsche's existentialist philosophy of opposing traditional morality. Though Dean speaks formally in long ruminations, he is not an intellectual and their attempt at being intellectuals flops and leaves both Sal and Dean resigned and throughout the novel, they do not attempt again to be "real intellectuals".

In a move to run away from convention and redefine not only morals but also the American dream, Sal, Dean and others prefer to go west. The West symbolizes a virgin territory unencumbered by civilization or middle class values; a place where "raw America washes up" in the Mississippi River. Sal feels he is another being when he crosses the line that divides the West from the East. When he wakes up in the west, Sal forgets who is; "I didn't know who I was for fifteen seconds" (15). To him, the dividing line is a division between "...the east of my youth and the West of my future..." Every thing in the west is described with superlatives from 'the best ride' of his life to "the prettiest girls in the world." As he goes West, even Sal's staple dish of apple pie and ice cream is getting bigger and better and all the people from the truck drivers who give rides to the fellow hitchhikers like Eddie, are the grandest he has ever met. The west is so unlike the East and it allures them for its being freer and more adventurous. "We tried everything. We buzzed the travel bureau, but no one was going west that night. The travel bureau is where you go for share-the- gas rides, legal in the West" (162) and it is here, in the west, that one can find a hotel where one can stay on credit. Sal and his friends observe that even the cops here are "much better than the rats in Virginia" (165). It is not just the geographical west that Sal and his friends find appealing, even the people from the west appear to be distinguishable if one met them elsewhere. Sal's friend Tom Saybrook, who he describes as a "generous and amenable fellow" who once in a while has "fits of depression and rushes off without saying a word to

anyone”, finds himself overjoyed in the company of Sal’s friends from the west and asks, “Sal, where did you find these absolutely wonderful people?” and the answer is simple; “I found them in the West” (124).

The appeal of the west does not last long however and soon the trek back towards the Eastwards begins. There are already hints that the idealistic visions of the West are facades of a disillusionary and bleak future. Carlo’s poem “Denver Doldrums” puts it all clear that the west is not as glamorous as Sal has been led to believe; the depressive, listless, dull mood is captured in the poem’s title. Dean who has been looking for his father appears to have seen him yet he does not even want to talk about it and when Carlo asks him if it was his father that he saw, he barely answers “yes, yes” and veers away from the subject and Sal’s interjection that “That last thing is what you can’t get, Carlo. Nobody can get to the last thing. We keep on living in hopes of catching it once for all” (48) suggests a fear of the final result to a long search. Sal also observes his own change; ‘... a few days ago I’d come to Denver like a bum; now I was racked up sharp in a suit, with a beautiful well-dressed blonde on my arm, bowing to dignitaries and chatting in the lobby...’ It appears that the west is appealing but ultimately “home sweet home” remains the place to be. It is true of the Beat Generation, that without a clear cut goal in mind, they keep chasing a shadow and while they know what they are running away from, they do not know what they are running after, what matters most is that along this road to nowhere, they enjoy kicks. The uncertainty and unsettledness as much as it is loggerheads with the establishment’s middle class values, is what is appealing about the new American dream

Before leaving the West to go back to the East, Sal finds himself bored in Frisco and his efforts to hook up with a girl are futile despite trying “everything in the books”. He is even surprised at his reaction; “whenever a queer approached me in the bar john, I took out a gun and said ‘Eh? Eh? What’s that you say?’”(73) He never quite understood why he did it and he attributes it to the loneliness of San Francisco but also adds that “the time was coming for me to leave Frisco or I’d go crazy”. This shows how deep rooted the social convention about sex is, so that even those who are trying to reject it are at times unconsciously turning back to convention by fiercely rejecting others’ sexual orientation even though Sal says he has been of company of homosexuals before. It also shows how diverse the Beats are, they do not have to all behave the same way and have similar beliefs, all that unites them is a desire to be left to do as their please. Sal keeps running away and his incessant being on the road, viewed from this perspective, becomes a necessity for his survival.

Back on the road, Sal meets Terry on a bus and they strike a friendship. We see a rush of emotions; one moment Sal is feeling, “you could have all your peaches and Bettys and Marylous and Ritas and Camilles and Inezes in the world; this [Terry] was my girl and my kind of soulgirl...” (83) And the next moment he is convinced she is a hustler while she thinks he is a pimp. Having failed to find any job in San Francisco, they trek to Sabinal, Terry’s home town. Here they are joined by Ponzo, Terry’s son and Sal enjoys the new status of being a father laboring all day, picking cotton to support his family but soon finds this equally unsatisfying and he is back on the road escaping convention and pursuing kicks. Sal’s relationship with Terry, though passionate, is approached as a temporary bust of excitement, adventure and pleasure and

when he has to go, even though she feels a little sad, it is clear Terry is not going to whine about his leaving, instead all she asks for is, “We lay down one more time then you leave” (100)

Without effort, Sal gets over Terry and finds himself a new girl whom he even plans to marry, at least before Dean and company arrive in New York. Dean escapes from conventional responsibility of a married man by neglecting the responsibility of looking after his wife and baby daughter, going off to his road trips with friends is more appealing. Ed Dunkel has also meanwhile married Galatea in order to get her to sponsor their road trips and when this does not materialize, he dumps her in Tucson and joins the boys. Ed’s marriage for money disgraces the marriage institution which the middle class value as the foundation for family and prosperity. Sal too realizes he can not commit to Lucille because she disapproves of Dean and Ed because, as Sal acknowledges, she sensed the madness they put in him. When Lucille expresses her disapproval, Sal replies, “Ah, it’s alright, it’s just kicks. We only live once. We’re having a good time.”(125) Sal realizes that all odds are against a possible marriage with Lucille. For instance they do not have money for her to divorce her current husband and most importantly that realization that “Lucille would never understand me because I like too many things and get all confused and hung up running from one falling star to another till I drop” (125). This confession and self criticism shows clearly the lack of clarity of goals for Sal and indeed many of his colleagues.

Sal attempts to rationalize Dean’s stealing; “...his ‘criminality’ was not something that sulked and seered; it was wild yea-saying overburst of American joy; it was Western. The west wind, an ode from the Plains, something new, long prophesied, long a coming(he only stole cars for joy

rides)” (7). This sounds like an apologia not only for Dean’s stealing but for entire generation’s choosing to go against social conventions. Dean, unlike dangerous criminals out there, does not steal to aggrandize himself, he steals for fun. Kicks are the major motivations of the Beats; they will risk anything in the name of kicks. Dean is fined several times for reckless driving and over speeding and at times it costs them all their savings to pay the fines but yet, he can not resist the temptation for kicks. In another incident he reenacts what he calls bad driving, which the others should never do, by driving directly into a truck come ahead of them and then swerving just in time before they are hit, leaving the other road users in horror. Apparently, you can try anything for kicks.

As more proof that you can do anything for kicks, and just kicks’ sake, Dean instructs his fellow travelers, Sal and Marylou, “disburden yourselves of all that clothes-now what’s the sense of clothes” (161). Both comply and then “Marylou took out cold cream and applied it on us for kicks”. They enjoy the attention of drivers in high cabs who see the “golden beauty sitting naked with two naked men” (161). It is not just in the wilderness that Dean will flaunt his nakedness without caring; many times when his friends come to his house, he is in a state of half nakedness or completely stark naked. Sal is shocked by Dean’s nudity but does not protestor judge Dean, he only notices that “it might have been the president knocking for all he cared. He received the world in raw.” (182) would receiving the world “raw” imply that Dean wants to go back to the roots, to Adam and Eve in the Eden? Nudity is also freely flaunted at Beat parties with Dean leading the way. In conventional society, nudity is abhorred in not just in public but also in art so by flaunting their nakedness without caring; the Beats are asking to be left to do as they please with out the dictates of convention.

The Beats like to call themselves “bums” suggestive of “laziness” but it would be hard to say that Beat Generation’s interest in work is limited to survival because there are characters who work hard to earn a living. Dean works on the railroad and saves money to buy a car with his own savings (110) and yet Sal Paradise will shun work as long as he has a roof over his head and has food and drinks, work becomes a luxury that can be foregone. This contravenes Franklin’s Christian spirit of hard work ethics and the Biblical teaching that “He who does not work, neither shall he eat” (Thessalonians 3:10). Sal moves in with his friend Major shuns any kind of work because he has a free bed and Major buys food; his sole duty is to cook and wash up the dishes. In so doing Sal is trying to escape the conventions that demands one to work in order to eat. He goes on to enjoy the fruits of others hard labor and successes in the pursuit of the American dream. In Chad King’s house, while Chad and his mother go out to work, he enjoys himself in bed and thanks to Chad’s father who had hit the jackpot seventies when he invented a special air-conditioner. He had invented it when “he put an ordinary fan in a window frame and some how conducted water through coils in front of the whirling blades. The result was perfect-with in four feet of the fan-...” This story illustrates the fragility of the new American Dream that Professor Matthew Warshauer noted in the article referred to earlier. The differences in the approach to work between Dean and Sal point to the absence and perhaps the difficulty of formulating a philosophy for the Beat Generation; each had their own ideas and individuality was more paramount than ideological restrictions.

In an effort to evade convention of the middle class and its “American Dream”, the Beats turn to the marginalized whose life style they admire because it does not put pressure on them to

succeed and yet at the same time, these marginalized, normally minority groups seem to find pleasure and excitement more abundant than their white middle class peers. At one moment Sal wishes he were black; "...wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night." (180). This statement embodies the core ideology of the beats; since the ecstasy offered is not enough, they turn to drugs like benzene through which they can see the world in a different prism; they find joy and kicks in the road trips; and then turn to Jazz music. At this moment Sal would prefer to be anything but a "white man' disillusioned" and realizes that he has all along been pursuing white ambitions and it is for this reason that he "abandoned a good woman like Terry".

Dick Hebdige in Subculture, the Meaning of Style discusses how the young whites took on the black culture in the form of jazz, modified it, taking out the anger and agitation and making it more fitting for the club. Hebdige also adds that "None the less, the "beat" [and the hipster] began to improvise their own exclusive styles around a less compromised form of jazz: jazz of "pure abstraction" which "short-circuited the obvious" (49). Like the black youths, the beats were dissatisfied with society and its rigid moral expectations but they did not wish to be enraged and overtly threatening, instead they chose to pursue personal pleasure, in mostly peaceful and private ways. Hebdige further observes that "the Beat was originally some Ernest middle-class college boy like Kerouac, who was sifted by the cities and the culture he had inherited and who wanted to cut out for distance and exotic places, where he could live like the 'people', write, and smoke and meditate". This fact might explain why Sal, the narrator in On the Road, appears most

of the time to just jot down details of what transpires but without restraining himself from commenting, letting judgment be for “manana”- the Beat slang for the future.

Failing to think about the future is coupled at the same time with a desire to remain young and assume no responsibilities. Sal gets very upset with Dean for warning that he is getting older and the tricks he keeps doing could harm his kidneys, Sal strongly rebukes Dean saying; “you’re always making cracks about my age. I’m no old fag like that fag; you don’t have to warn me about my kidneys” (213) Rebuked, Dean, for the first time shows that he is not the hardened tough criminal that we might expect him to be; he deserts his food and goes out to cry till Sal makes apologies; this reaction is disappointing to Sal who had hitherto thought his friend was the pillar of strength. Dean appears to cling on his childhood memories with his drunkard father whom he searches for in vain. In another sign of failing to “grow up” Dean fails to look after his wives and children. Growing up would mean assuming not only responsibilities but also endeavoring to live the American dream of material acquisition which is scary to both the young and old. Margaret Morganroth Gullette in her book Aged by Culture, discusses how the American Dream ages people through the expectance that “progress is supposed to remain a pursuable goal. Progress means that over time some people have acquired by some degree of what Anthony Giddens calls ‘ontological security’ (Gullette, 18) When Japhy, Morley and Ray climb the mountain, Ray feels he had “never had a happier moment ‘ in his life as he has when he walks down the mountain following the deer trail and feels like “when you’re a little boy and have spent a whole day rambling alone in the woods and fields...like little Indian boys must feel when they follow their striding fathers...like little Arab boys...like a little girl pulling her brother home on a sled and they’re both singing little ditties of their imagination...”. Little boys and girls

of whatever race always intrigue Ray as being the happiest beings without cares of the adult world and by imitating them, Ray feels elated; at least for a while he escapes from the world just as he always feels when alone. Child-like and solitary moments offer a new American Dream where one can be happy like a child.

In Resistance through Rituals, Youth Subcultures in Postwar Britain, edited by Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, subculture is defined as “subsets, small, more localized and differentiated structures within one or other of the larger cultural networks.” Though at the time of the Beat generation sociologists had yet labeled this subset of culture, it is clear that the beat generation were a subculture; they too were “in search of pleasure and excitement which some analysts have noted as a marked feature of the delinquent subculture of gangs in working class” (p13), only that this time majority of the gang members were of middle class origin.

The middle class origins of the Beatniks prove historian Marc Bloch’s assertion that “men are more the sons of their time than of their fathers” (Maalouf 101) The beatniks rose in the post war era, an era filled with fear of annihilation of the newly discovered atomic bombs that rocked Japan’s Hiroshima and Nagasaki and are evidently scared of the future. The Beat Generation is pessimistic about the future. Gilbert Millstein in “Books of the Times”, an article in the Newyork Times in 1957, argues that the “’Beat Generation’ was born disillusioned; it takes for granted the

imminence of war, the barrenness of politics and the hostility of the rest of society. It is not even impressed by (although it never pretends to scorn) material well-being (as distinguished from materialism). It does not know what refuge it is seeking, but it is seeking” From On the Road it can be seen that the beats would not care enrich themselves and in fact they were happy to earn pennies doing menial jobs, save all week and then blow up everything in a single day. Sal Paradise says Remi “liked to dress sharp, slightly on the collegiate side and go out with fancy blondes and spend a lot of money” (62). Millstein observes that though the Beats were not into money, they did not scorn money and would spend freely even when they earned it through sweat. This is a direct attack on the middle class value of saving up for the future to have “ontological security”. Instead the Beats work hard when they need to and then spend their earning just as fast. At their lowest points, they dream of becoming Hollywood stars though they never seem to make a proper move in this direction. Others like Remi will steal about anything from a bed to glossaries, all in the name of kicks and revenge against society “He yanked at everything loose. ‘Not a thing, I thought there’d be copper; I thought there’d be at least an old wrench or two” (73). Remi is full of mad schemes of stealing; he even tries to steal from his boss in the barracks where he is employed as a guard. He steals from those he is supposed to protect, and when Paradise admonishes him with “Goddamit, Remi, you’re always getting us into trouble. Why don’t you lay off? Why do you have to steal all the time?” (70), his excuse that somewhere in his childhood in France everything had been taken away from him and his step parents stuck him in schools and left him there.

The Dharma Bums

The Dharma Bums is Jack Kerouac's next novel after On the Road is widely believed to have been based upon events that occurred years after the events of On the Road but it should not be taken for a sequel of the former as it tells a quite different story albeit biographical to a large extent. The narrator Ray Smith is based on Kerouac himself and Japhy Ryder, based on the poet, essayist Gary Snyder, who was instrumental in Kerouac's introduction to Buddhism in the mid-1950s.

When the book was first published, reviewers thought The Dharma Bums spiritually crude and lacked seriousness. While On the Road tended towards an existentialist approach, The Dharma Bums was more inclined towards spirituality (Buddhism) but even then, it captures the development of the Beat Generation towards eastern philosophy and religion in particular. What connects the two ideologies is that both favor experiential realization as opposed to confirming to given theoretical paradigms. In turn the two work well with the Beat search for individual freedom which the "American dream" and American middle class values erode in an effort to reach fore stalled goals.

There are several definitions of "dharma" viewed from context of Jack Kerouac's novel; the word could mean the conformity to religious law, custom, duty, or one's own quality or character. An online dictionary defines a "bum" as an enthusiast of a specific sport or recreational activity, especially one who gives it priority over work or family. Therefore the title words suggest that Beats lack enthusiasm for work and as will be revealed later, in a rather ironical fashion the Beats are non conformist to the religious laws, custom or duty. In the Literary Kicks review, Levi Asher explains the meaning of being a dharma bum; "A Dharma

Bum is a bum because it is the right thing [for him] to be, because by being a bum [he] is fulfilling a spiritual duty greater than himself". In fact the Beats refute the idea of what the aboutdharma.org website calls looking "for happiness outside ourself and thinking that if we had the right house, the right car, the right job, and the right friends we would be truly happy". Having been frustrated by this idealistic American Dream, the Beats here will escape convention by shunning Christianity and embracing Buddhism if not for anything else, for the reason that through it they can still pursue their kicks.

It is also important to note that in The Dharma Bums, Kerouac also upholds the philosophical sediments that were started in On the Road; Ray Smith tries to persuade Alvah Goldbook that "its with your six senses that you are fooled into believing not only that you have six senses but that you contact an actual outside world with them" (28) Ray continues to argue in a way that reflects the ideologies of great scientist and philosopher Albert Einstein who argued that, "A knowledge of the existence of something we cannot penetrate, of the manifestations of the profoundest reason and the most radiant beauty - it is this knowledge and this emotion that constitute the truly religious attitude..."(Albert Einstein) Ray's argument is rooted in the Zen Buddhist philosophy yet at the same time expresses a great level of divergence that it stands to be discussed in its own right. Like other philosophers who argued that what we perceive as reality is an illusion and even man does not exist, Ray sees that "there is no me, no airplane, no princess, no nothing," (29) Yet like we have seen before, Kerouac does not seem keen to develop philosophical ideologies, a reflection that the Beat generation did not have a specific ideology to subscribe to, instead individual beliefs thrive in a harmonious style. One most important uniting factor is that they all seek peace in themselves and pleasure or kicks is what matters.

The hero of The Dharma Bums is Japhy Ryder who we soon find is very much similar to Dean Moriarty in On the Road and he carries the sexual liberty to a new level. Japhy invites a “sex mad and man mad” beautiful girl, whom he calls princess, for holly session of “yabyum”-a Tibetan practice of free love lunacy orgies. Ray, who has been trying to live truly Buddhist life style of self denial and restraint, especially in regard to sexual urge which he perceives to corrupt the mind, finds himself succumbing to the desires of the flesh, to use a Biblical allusion. After “yabyum”, Ray and Princess bathe together and it is determined - to everyone's delight - that this should be a weekly ritual. Goldbook argues that though he sometimes sees “a flash of illumination in what you [Ray] are trying to say but believe me. I get more of a satori out of princess than out of words” (29) Goldbook’s argument rhymes with Japhy who equally condemns America’s stringent constraints on sexuality and it also highlights that Philosophy and ideals are not attractive to Goldbook and indeed to many other Beats because they would rather have pleasure than formulate conventions of what ought and not ought to be done.

To this end the Beats are attracted to Buddhism but can not find mainstream Buddhism attractive; it is equally full of conventions from which are trying to escape. These differences are seen even in the most basic religious practices such as prayers; Ray blesses both friends and enemies and emphasizes equality in all beings-they are all Buddhas or Budhhas to be and thus all” empty, equally to be loved” (55). In more subversive ways, Japhy pursues his spirituality through communal sex; the princess is a well of spirituality from which all those who are thirsty can drink from; she is “the old mother of the earth... a Bodhisattva”(26) taking care of all her children. When one of the characters, Arthur Whane is asked what Buddhism is, his reply tells it all; “...to me, Buddhism is getting to know as many people as possible.”(154) this appears to ‘Buddhism’ to many other characters albeit in slightly different ways; To Japhy, Buddhism is

meeting many different “Bodhisattvas” and engaging in all sorts of sex orgies; to Ray, at least at some point, is self control, a belief that “pretty girls make graves” and that “lust was the direct cause of birth which was the direct cause of suffering” (25) a reference to his belief that a good Buddhist must resist the urges of the body. Of course sooner than later he appears to be converted by Japhy who “distrusts any kind of Buddhism or any kinda philosophy or social system that puts down sex” (26) Japhy’s kind of Buddhism appears to be more attractive wins over Ray who was trying to follow the original Buddhism. This new form of American Buddhism offers a new American Dream, a dream in which pleasure and kicks rule that day.

There is yet another reason why the Beats are attracted to Buddhism; Buddhism offers an antithesis of the old American Dream. Sharing the little one has even with strangers is more gratifying than amassing for tomorrow. Ray offers his meager bread and wine to a fellow Bum on the ride when he notices the old man's pitiful supply of sardines, remembering to “practice charity without holding in mind conceptions about charity, for charity after all is just a word” (6). Simplicity as opposed to glamour is also presented as more fulfilling as a more true form of happiness. Ray describes the run-down dwelling place he shares with Alvah Goldbook as ideal: “We had a perfect little kitchen with a gas stove, but no icebox, but no matter. We also had a perfect little bathroom with a tube and hot water, and one main room, covered with pillows and floor mats of straw...” (16) Japhy travels around on a pitiful English bicycle with his knapsack strapped to his back and “he used to the same at Reed College in Oregon” (22). This simplicity is a big contrast to what would have been expected to a man with a philosophy of Doctorate at that time, but it is the new American dream that the Beats are advocating, a new dream in which scholarship is for the search of knowledge and not for material benefits.

Like we have seen in On the Road, in The Dharma Bums too, there is an attempt at “intellectualism” but again it appears to be ridiculed. The intellectualism here also takes the philosophical dimension of existentialism with questions about the universe; “What does it mean that those trees and mountains out there are not magic but real?” Ray asks and the answer, simple: “It means that those trees and mountains out there are not magic but real.” Then, “why is the sky blue?”, again a simple answer, “Because the sky is blue” (144). The simplicity of the answer might indicate an inability for the Beats to be intellectual or (this is more probable) their lack of interest in being “real” intellectuals.

Fantasizing and day-dreaming, being high on drugs and alcohol are the other ways in which to create an alternative American dream. In this dream there is no anxiety of failure and there are no obstacles so one can be, in his/her mind, anything he wants to be. They have beiges in bars and recite half-nonsensical poetry and guitar-song filled with rhyme and Buddhist thought. Japhy wants to start a revolution of Zen Lunacy, which he feels is an ideal that the conformists of America should understand. Ray and Japhy make crazy fantasies; “We’ll have a floatin zendo for Buddy’s winesoaked boys to come and lay up in and learn to drink tea like Ray did, learn to meditate like you should Alvah, and I’ll be a head monk of a zendo with a big jar full of crickets” (79), free and unconstrained by the American political and judicial system. Even the reluctant Alvah, while somewhat skeptical of these ideas, eventually let’s go and also immerses himself in their dreams. Through fantasy and day-dreaming, they create a new dream in which all is possible and instead of pursuing material gains, spirituality and pleasure are what is at the for front here.

Conclusion

At this point it is important to make a sort of disclaimer: this analysis has made several general statements about the Beat Generation but all deductions are made in accordance with situations affirmed by the two books in question and the author and his literary circle friends whose lives and his own he writes about. Also important to note is that, as Kerouac himself was apt to note, a generation is not made by small nit group of people, it way much wider and therefore this analysis hardly analyzes a generation. A deeper analysis of the general Beat Generation would require more tools that were at my disposal; sociologists have also attempted to make research and comments about the movement and once in a while reference has been made to cultural studies but there is still a lot to be desired about the Beats.

The Beats did transform after sometime in the same faddish ways we have seen and they became what we know today as “hipsters” and these continue to weld a lot of influence of the young people not just in the United States but world over. The rucksack movement that Kerouac and his contemporaries dreamt about has already come to pass. Millions of young people across the world trek the surface, hitch hiking just like Kerouac and other Beats did in the 1950s. A number

of issues might be different of course in tune to the different times but the influence of the beats can not be underestimated.

It is also noticeable that in both novels there are lead heroes- Dean and Japhy, who seem to have their way while others are mainly followers and at times holding different views but not committed to making their opinions heard. The narrator in both novels, who is Jack Kerouac himself, is many times a passive observer, noting down what transpires and as has been already noted, Kerouac himself started living the “Beat lifestyle” after the publication of On the Road. Ed Dunkel in On the Road also follows Dean blindly and Ray sees everything as Japhy said it was. On the fire look out on the mountain, Ray realizes "...suddenly everything Japhy had ever told me about Seattle began to seep into me like cold rain, I could feel it and see it now, and not just think it. It was exactly like he'd said: wet, immense, timbered, mountainous, cold, exhilarating, challenging."(184) This might have been the string that pulled the Beats together but dependency on a few individuals for direction drags a movement that treasures individuality.

In Resistance through Rituals, Youth subcultures in Post war Britain, edited by Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, it is argued that youth subcultures are subsets of localized and differentiated structures with in a larger cultural network and that though differing significant ways in its focal concerns, a subculture shapes its peculiar ways and activities from which it is derived. For that reason it will share some common things with the “parent culture”. In the two novels, we have noted that as the Beats sought to redefine the American Dream by pursuing pleasure and excitement through evading convention, they modeled most of their activities on the parent company and many times had doubts about their own actions. Self criticism with in the movement was common, especially from the women who remained the “responsible” characters

who had look after the children they sheered with the men. The Beats were also aware that soon or later their fad would come to an end.

It should not go with out giving credit that is due to the Beat Generation for their fight to liberate the word. Like other arts, Literature had till then been equally subjected to undemocratic censorship that is not healthy for artistic expression and therefore it was worth while cause to fight for the freedom of expression which is also entailed in the American Dream. More so, they made poetry a popular art form by liberalizing, letting each poet use his own style and reenergizing the concept that poetry is a performed art, not to just be hidden away in books. Time has proved that while an artist might be ridiculed and underrated by one generation, the same artist might be considered a legend in later generations and though art is an imitation of life or vice versa, the creativity of writer should not be limited to the social scope of what is right or wrong, for culture is a living thing that changes over time and art plays a great role in this change. Beat Literatures is living testimony to art's great influence on how people live their lives; in a few years, the great "rucksack" revolution that the Beat patriarchs dreamt of, came to be a reality.

As much as the Beats pursued kicks and pleasure, like any other journey in life, theirs was not always an easy one. They walked long distances when they could not hitch a ride, endured all kinds of characters on the road, or face terrible weather on the mountains. Sometimes they would go without proper meals days and many times lived hand to mouth and often times did strenuous jobs for survival. That said, they managed to draw attention to noble causes like protecting the environment and respect for indigenous cultures.

The Beats did not rule out a return to “normalcy” and in The Dharma Bums, Kerouac offers a projection of what the Dharma bums would be if they decided to settle down, “If the Dharma Bums ever get lay brothers in America who live normal lives with wives and children and homes, they will be like Sean Monahan” Ray describes Monahan's lifestyle with admiration. He is a carpenter who lives a thrifty lifestyle with his free-spirited and resourceful housewife, Christine, and their two daughters. His house - which, like Japhy's, is filled with Oriental objects - is often the location of big communal potluck dinners followed by fireside folksong serenades.

The ending of the two novels, while not indicative of how the Beat Generation movement would end, suggest that the Beat life style is unsustainable and as much as they would like to offer an alternative to the American dream and run away from convention, they are unable to hid away from it. Ray finds that they are no longer very enthusiastic about parties as they were before. It appears they have out grown this stage and must find ways of getting into the next level. Even with all his three girl friends (Polly, Princess and Psyche) Japhy feels incomplete and the sight of his sister marrying a middle –class man makes him think “she should be marrying me”. He then sets off to his mission in Japan where he expects to return and be able to look after his mother. Already there is change in the air, everyone is going be on his/her own and there will be responsibilities to own up to.

Levi Asher's critique of the novel is right to the point. She notices that:

The ending is wonderfully ambiguous in terms of its meaning. Just what are we to think of Dean Moriarty? He is the most magnetic character in the book, but everybody in the book gets sick of him at one point or another, and even the narrator is forced to realize that he can't depend on Dean to stick with him when

he's sick and miserable in Mexico. We also see that the joyrides get a little less joyful as they progress. Is it possible that people really do need to grow up, that you can't ride on forever, going from adventure to the next? Luckily, this book doesn't even attempt to answer that question for us; it just lets us experience the sights and sounds along the way.

Asher's critique points to the fact that the life style the Beats was unsustainable in the long run and therefore soon or later it would have to come to an end, and come to an end it did but as we have already seen, its impact on society was vital just as the Bohemians before them. In later years several sub cultures like the punks, Ted boys, hippies and others emulated the Beats and found inspiration in their achievements .When maturity set in, many Beat members tried to go back to normalcy and while a few succeeded at normal life, others, including Kerouac himself, never recovered from the "beatness" and drunk their way to the grave

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