TRANSPACIFIC TRANSCENDENCE: THE BUDDHIST POETICS OF JACK KEROUAC, GARY SNYDER, AND PHILIP WHALEN

BY

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Abstract

"Transpacific Transcendence: The Buddhist Poetics of Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder, and Philip Whalen," directed by Joseph Harrington, examines the influence of East Asian literature and philosophy on post-World War II American poetry. Kerouac's "Desolation Blues," Snyder's "On Vulture Peak," and Whalen's "The Slop Barrel" were all written one year after the famous Six Gallery reading in San Francisco where Allen Ginsberg shocked the literary establishment with *Howl*, and one year before the belated publication of Kerouac's *On the Road*, both of which changed the face of postwar American literature. These authors, along with other experimental writers on both coasts, were searching for a larger geographic and temporal connection to help them break through tightening social, artistic, and spiritual strictures of postwar America. The East-West cross-fermentation which developed after the war provided these poets with an inroad for post-Modernist textual and philosophical experimentation set against a backdrop of Cold War anxieties, urban sprawl, gray flannel suits, and ultra-conservative poetics. All three poets grappled with some of the key texts of Mahāyāna Buddhism, such as the *Lankāvatāra*, *Heart* and *Vimalakīrti* sūtras, *The Gateless Gate*, as well as incorporated Chinese *shih* and Japanese *haiku* forms. In "On Vulture Peak," Snyder creates a unique poetic sūtra form by incorporating *shih* and his own brand of Japanese Rinzai *kōan* interviews, taking on the role of Zen master to Kerouac's questioning Dharma Bum to explore issues of impermanence, interconnectedness, and emptiness. Likewise, in Whalen's "The Slop Barrel," the poet struggles with these concepts, particularly the idea that we mistake the aggregates of attachment that collectively make up our personality (the Five *Skandhas*) for the notion of a unique, permanent ego-self. And in "Desolation Blues," Kerouac comes face-to-face with the four perverted views (the *Viparyasas*) one thinks into existence as a way of establishing the reality of the mundane world. Kerouac's spiritual quest was doomed from the outset, though, because so much of his project as a writer centered on trying to totalize his life, something much of his fiction and poetry argues against: selfhood. In working towards a unique postwar transpacific ontology centered around notions of interconnectedness and (no)self, these poets radically changed the face of American literature and culture under the specter of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, influencing poets, musicians, and artists for generations to come.

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Introduction: "East'll meet West anyway."

"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 back country and hitchhiking and bringing the world down to everybody" (Japhy Ryder, *The Dharma Bums* 155).

I.

In a 1959 essay titled "The Visionary Painting of Morris Graves," Kenneth Rexroth suggested that "[p]eople in the rest of the United States and in Europe have difficulty in adjusting to the fact that the West Coast of America faces the Far East, culturally as well as geographically" (47). Indeed, this unique geographical-cultural setting later became known as part of the larger Pacific Rim. Rexroth points out that West Coasters, with their museums housing substantial collections of Japanese, Chinese, and Indian art, numerous large metropolitan Asian populations, and Buddhist temples, are more likely to travel across the Pacific than they are to the East Coast and on to Europe. The desire to travel to Asian countries was not limited to people on the West Coast though, as a January 1955 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly* attests with its cover reproduction of a painting by Hiroshige announcing the issue's "78 extra pages on Japan Today." The supplement was part of the magazine's series designed to "bring readers in the United States a representative sampling of the literary and artistic achievements of other cultures and other countries" (98). The majority of the articles were written by Japanese artists, professors, and politicians, including Japan's postwar Prime Minister, Shigeru Yoshida. As historically and culturally relevant as these articles themselves are,

of equal interest are the two travel agency advertisements appearing much earlier in the magazine. One enticingly reads: "Exotic picture-book land . . . this is Japan . . . Where the ancient ways of the Orient enchant the Western visitor . . . excellent transportation . . . modern hotels . . . wonderful souvenirs . . . renowned hospitality" (19). The other ad suggests that "there's only one way to see the Orient and return 'home' at the end of each day!" In other words (and in smaller print), "Explore and sightsee ashore. Enjoy a 'country club' vacation at sea" by returning to your "American hotel in port" (13). While it is difficult to assess what effect these and other imperialist-framed depiction of the Far East had on postwar American artists, poets, and those truly interested in Buddhism, one thing is certain; by the mid 1950s Japan was once again billed as the exotic Oriental Other. What changed after the war was that the enchanting "Orient" was now, at least temporarily, under the control of the not so exotic US government, which surely made transpacific travel that much more comfortable for the "Western visitor." The "Perspectives on Japan" supplement of *The Atlantic*, while not at all aimed at people like West Coast poets Gary Snyder and Philip Whalen, coupled with Rexroth's astute commentary on the West Coast-Far East connection, provides us with hints into what otherwise seems like a rather perplexing question: Why this turn away from the nuclear menace at home towards the very country we bombed just ten years before? Why this turn to a country whose imperialist program was as equally divisive as those of America and much of Europe? And why did postwar poets like Snyder, Whalen, and Kerouac not only embrace Buddhist philosophies and practices, but also absorb ancient Chinese and Japanese poetic forms and themes into their own work?

The previous generation of poets--those James Breslin calls the second generation of twentieth century American poets (Lowell, Rich, James Merrill, W.S. Merwin, Richard Wilbur)--were all too aware that they were obscured by the imposing shadow of Modernist experimentation.[1] For them, unlike the "New American Poets" (to borrow from the title of Donald Allen's 1960 landmark anthology), there was no place to return but to pre-modernist academic formalisms of previous centuries as a way to (re)new their own poetry in the wake of their immediate predecessors. The New American Poets, though, rebelled against what they saw as the outmoded traditionalism of the staid academic formalists. Snyder addresses this aspect of his contemporaries in '"Notes on the Beat Generation' and 'The New Wind,'" which appeared in the Japanese journal *Chuo-koron* in 1960 while he was living in Kyoto:

> The most striking thing is their detachment from the official literary world, be it publishing and commercial magazines or the literature departments of universities. . . . Many of them consider universities to be instituted for professional liars and call them 'fog factories'. . . . They are different from their immediate predecessors in this detachment . . , in the fact that they have rejected the academic and neoformalist poetry of the late thirties and forties. . . . (13-14)

Whalen also addressed this moment of artistic crisis in his 1972 interview with Yves Pellec: "At that time the regular poetical Establishment, Robert Lowell and company . . . were thought of in the public mind as respectable poets and so forth were writing grammatical poetry which rhymed and lay on the page very stiff and quiet. We were trying to write in the way we spoke and in the way people around us were speaking" (60-

61). Lawrence Ferlinghetti called this "street poetry" in his 1958 *Chicago Review* "Note on Poetry in San Francisco"; it was "quite different from the 'poetry about poetry,' the poetry of technique, the poetry for poets and professors which has dominated the quarterlies and anthologies in this country for some time. . . ." Street poetry, conversely, "amounts to getting the poet out of the inner esthetic sanctum where he has too long been contemplating his complicated navel" (4). Indeed, one of the common complaints about the Beat writers is that they seemed to have been "opposed in principle to a clear sense of anything," which was reflected in their rejection of "the form, style, and attitudes of previous generations."[2] What many postwar critics failed to recognize is that many of these poets were in fact gesturing towards an older, more distant East Asian tradition in the face of the current social, economic, and artistic repressions instituted by not only postwar politicians, but condoned by white middle class society at large.

In 1957 Rexroth wrote that the younger poets were "interested in Far Eastern art and religion; some even call themselves Buddhists. Politically they are all strong disbelievers in State, war, and the values of commercial civilization" (53).[3] They were not just turning towards East Asia for inspiration, they were also turning away from their own country--away from McCarthyism, racism, complacency, television quiz shows, sprawling Levittowns, thermonuclear detonations, and fallout shelters. In turning away from contemporary American society and towards East Asia, they were also turning back in time to their literary forefathers, the Transcendentalists, who had a century earlier looked to Hindu texts for inspiration and direction. Emerson and Thoreau emphasized individual freedom, as many of the Beats and San Francisco poets would do a century later; they also shared the belief and practice of living close to nature, the dignity of

manual labor, spiritual living, self-reliance, democracy, and individualism, and they relied on their intuition and conscience to help mold their philosophies and poetics. While the Transcendentalists grappled with Indian philosophies, the poets in this study went a step further by adopting not only the philosophical ideas they were reading in texts like *The Diamond Sūtra*, *The Gateless Gate*, and D. T. Suzuki's essays on Zen, they also incorporated the East Asian poetic forms (Chinese *shih*, Japanese *haiku*, and Zen *kōans*) they were reading and studying at the time, directly into their own uniquely East-West contemplative poetry. China and Japan, then, provided a new way of thinking about issues of identity, being, and interconnectedness in a postwar world that had seemingly gone mad. Rather than asking the epistemological questions of their modernist forefathers (Who am I? How can I interpret this world?), they asked decentered postmodern questions that crossed not only political boarders, but also temporal and spiritual ones: Which world is this? Which of my selves do I interpret them with? What I explore here, then, are these interconnections, these points of contact where poetics and Buddhist philosophy meet.

Whalen, who is generally not considered a political poet, suggests in the preface of *Decompressions* (1978) that Chinese and Japanese style poetry--itself generally not considered political in its content--is in fact very much so: "I have a hunch that if I write a really good poem today about the weather, about a flower or any other apparently 'irrelevant' (I suppose the proper word, no, is 'nonrelevant,' if we are to be understood) subject, that the revolution will be hastened considerably more than if I composed a pamphlet attacking the government and the capitalist system" (*Collected* 839). Indeed, one of the most striking aspects of the poetry they were absorbing at the time is that it

clarifies and cuts through to the present moment of human experience, as opposed to the overwrought artifice of the postwar American poetry being published in the literary journals in the late 1940s and 50s. What Whalen said of Zen holds true for the poetry itself:

> Zen seemed to cut away many extravagances and get down to the point of emancipation and energy and cutting loose from all your emotional problems. Everything that used to hang you up goes away or at least you can deal with it in some other way. There is also the problem of right now: what are you doing right this minute and how do you get through that and how can you make it alive, vivid, solid? (59)

In turning away from the anthropocentric Western poetic (and philosophical) tradition, Whalen and friends worked to create a poetic discourse amenable to the immediacy of their own time and place, which at the same time was not constrained by the topicality of more overtly political poetry. That is, their work was certainly politically and culturally motivated, but unlike some poets of the thirties and forties, they were able to move past the immediate political scene to get at a deeper, ever-present immediacy much like the poetry of ancient China and Japan, something even Rexroth's poetry seldom achieved due to much of its politico-anarchist undergirding.

Robinson Jeffers, another California poet who had a profound impact on Snyder and Whalen's West Coast poetics, called for a similar type of poetry--in the vein of Emerson and Whitman--in his 1948 essay "Poetry, Gongorism, and a Thousand Years." The poet to come, as if speaking directly to Snyder, "would be natural and direct. He would have something new and important to say. . . . He would be seeking to express the

spirit of his time (as well as all times) . . . . [For him], detachment is necessary to understanding" (*Selected* 724-725). Jeffers's Inhumanism, though, is a far cry from the Buddhist notions of interdependence and emptiness that Snyder, Kerouac, and Whalen would embrace. In the "Preface" to *The Double Axe and Other Poems* (1947), Jeffers defines Inhumanism as a philosophy

> based on a recognition of the astonishing beauty of things and their living wholeness, and on a rational acceptance of the fact that mankind is neither central nor important in the universe; our vices and blazing crimes are as insignificant as our happiness. . . . The attitude is neither misanthropic nor pessimist nor irreligious . . . it involves a certain detachment. (*Selected* 719)

Snyder, who had been discussing Jeffers in correspondence with Whalen since 1954, wrote his friend on November 8, 1956 from Japan, saying, "Jeffers just says learn to love more than yourself or your species, & once outside of those cages, you can love yourself & your species as you will but from a clear vantage, within the whole structure of things."[4] Whalen responded from Berkeley five days later, saying, "Your analysis of RJ is quite correct except he wants not only a 'clear vantage' but also 'detachment' . . . even from love: his shot is that to suffer willingly is the greatest . . . on account you smarten up thereby . . . god crucifies himself to learn &c."[5] Jeffers (and Kerouac and Rexroth to an extent)--even when writing about the same "astonishing beauty" of the Pacific Coast--has a different outlook than Snyder and Whalen; Jeffers, though his concept of Inhumanism would seem akin to Buddhism, is too present as a metaphor-making ego subject. Nature, for Jeffers--even though he was keyed into the cyclicality and transience

of existence--was often, as it was for Emerson, a reflection on the human-God condition. Jeffers, especially in his longer poems, seems to have been overly concerned with the current, or the always-on-the-verge-of fall of modern humankind--a concern with, to borrow a phrase of William Everson, "Man-Fate."[6] Whalen and Snyder, on the other hand, were not concerned with writing epic allegories about the sad state of humanity; rather, their poems (including the longer ones), though they grapple with weighty philosophical issues, are concerned with the here and now of the present moment--a here and now that does not attempt to read humanity onto the natural world. Kerouac's greatest struggle during his Buddhist period, as I discuss in Chapter Four, was with the immediacy of the present moment, as is evidenced in much of his poetry and novels, such as *The Dharma Bums* and *Desolation Blues*.

II.

Thus the Transcendentalist's earlier interest in things Asian reemerged in the twentieth century, at the very moment America was becoming a leader of the global economy, not least of all via the Pacific Rim. It was also just after the Chinese Revolution, Korean War, ensuing Cold War, and consequent “rehabilitation” of the recently-defeated enemy, Japan. As such, Americans were more profoundly aware of East Asia in general and Japan in particular. The story of Asians in American began just over one hundred years before America's war with Japan. There were only a handful of Chinese in the country when gold was discovered north of San Francisco at Sutter's Mill in 1848, but four years later the gold rush had attracted twenty thousand Chinese to California. By 1860, one in every ten Californians was Chinese. There were eight temples

in San Francisco's China Town by 1875, and at the close of the century there were over four hundred temples along the Western seaboard (Fields 70-73). Another large Buddhist population was brought within the borders in 1898 when America annexed Hawaii. According to Rick Fields, only seventy Japanese were listed as residing on the mainland in the 1870 census. Twenty years later the number had risen to 2,039. "Nearly all were young, male and single--by all accounts an adventurous, hard-drinking group who found work in lumber camps, rail roads, canneries and farms. Most Americans did not bother to distinguish them from the Chinese," Field says, "but those who did began to say that the Chinese had been less troublesome. The Japanese seemed arrogant and overly sensitive" (81). The Japanese seemed more intent on adopting American customs; they studied English and dressed in Western clothing. They were "content to leave Buddhism back in Japan. . ." (81). Even so, when Japan brought war to American shores in 1941, 112,000 Japanese Americans were stripped of their rights as citizens, often violently; they were rounded up in Washington, Oregon, and California and shipped to inland relocation camps where they rode out the duration of the war, having lost most everything.[7]

Though the history of Buddhism in America is generally agreed to have begun nearly fifty years after the arrival of Chinese immigrants in California with Sōyen Shaku's attendance at the World Parliament of Religions at the Chicago's World's Fair in 1893, it was not until after the Second World War that Zen Buddhism took root in American soil through the help of writers like Robert Aitken, Alan Watts, Shunryu Suzuki, and the earlier translations and writings of D. T. Suzuki and Dwight Goddard. Sōyen Shaku returned to America in 1905 as a guest of Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Russell of San Francisco. Upon his return to Japan the following year, he chose three of his most

esteemed disciples, D. T. Suzuki among them, to sail to the US to promote Zen. Suzuki's translations and books on Zen have had a profound influence on several generations of Americans, including Snyder (and thus Whalen and Kerouac), who picked up a paperback copy of Suzuki's *Essays on Zen Buddhism* in a San Francisco bookstore in 1951 on his way to graduate school in Indiana. Suzuki was also instrumental in the work and philosophies of East Coast poet-composters John Cage and Jackson Mac Low, both of whom attended his lectures at Columbia University in the early 1950s. As Whalen said of his and Snyder's initial readings of Zen during his 1999 interview with David Meltzer, "[W]e started reading the essays in *Zen Buddhism*. That converted me, I think, pretty much to the idea that Buddhism, and certainly Zen, was a much more free and unbent kind of operation" (343). Thirty years earlier, Snyder had this to say about Suzuki's influence in his 1969 *Wind Bell* essay titled "On Rinzai Masters and Western Students":

> In Europe and America he has influenced everything--psychology, music, aesthetics, architecture, landscape design. . . . He has been the catalyst of some real social change, in attitudes toward the self, towards effort, towards involvement, in attitudes on the nature of creativity, on the value of verbalization and articulation as against the intuitive approach. (qtd. in Prebish 9)

Another important influence in American Zen was the founding in New York of the Buddhist Society of America in 1930 by Shigetso Sasaki, whose wife, Ruth Fuller Sasaki, later arranged a scholarship for Snyder to study Rinzai Zen in Kyoto in 1956, where he worked as the secretary to Sasaki's translation group at the First Zen Institute of America (the new name, as of 1945, of the Buddhist Society of America). One of the driving

forces behind American Zen--on the West Coast in particular--was Alan Watts, a British-born student of Christianity and Buddhism, who had met Suzuki at age twenty-one in London in 1936. Watts married Ruth Fuller Everett's (later Sasaki) daughter and moved to New York. In 1951, after a five-year stint as an Episcopal priest, he moved to San Francisco where he was on the faculty of the American Academy of Asian studies before leaving to pursue his career as a writer. According to his *The Way of Zen* (1957), the time was right in America for a spiritual awakening:

> [O]ur very history has seriously undermined the common-sense assumptions which are at the roots of our social conventions and institutions. Familiar concepts of space, time, and motion, of nature and natural law, of history and social change, and of human personality itself have dissolved, and we find ourselves adrift without landmarks in a universe which more and more resembles the Buddhist principle of the 'Great Void.' The various wisdoms of the West, religious, philosophical, and scientific, do not offer much guidance to the art of living in such a universe, and we find the prospect of making our way in so trackless an ocean of relativity rather frightening. For we are used to absolutes, to firm principles and laws to which we can cling for spiritual and psychological security. (vii-viii)

The post-atomic bomb age brought us face-to-face with the very real potential destruction of the world; "This is why," Watts says, "there is so much interest in a culturally productive way of life which . . . has felt thoroughly at home in 'the void,' and which not only feels no terror for it but rather a positive delight" (vii-viii). One product of this

bomb-induced recognition of the "Great Void" was the marked increase in the number of Asian studies courses taught at American universities, which attracted returning service men like Whalen attending college on the GI Bill (Prebish 20). Though Watts eventually became friends with Snyder and Whalen, it was Shunryu Suzuki, another Japanese Zen practitioner, whose arrival in San Francisco in 1959 had the most profound and lasting effect on the West Coast Buddhist community. Suzuki, along with several of his American student, founded the San Francisco Zen Center in 1962, where Whalen eventually became a student of Richard Baker a decade later. In 1987 Whalen received dharma transmission from Baker at the latter's Dharma sangha in Santa Fe.

III.

The fertile ground which nourished the flowering of Zen after the war took root, for the purposes of this study, in 1948 when Snyder, Whalen, and Lew Welch met at Reed College in Oregon. Snyder had just graduated from high school and was attending Reed on scholarship as a student of anthropology, linguistics, and literature. Whalen, who was drafted in 1943, had been reading Stein, Joyce, Faulkner, Proust, Huxley and Thomas Wolfe while serving as a radio operator instructor before entering on the GI Bill two years prior to Snyder.[8] And Welch, who was twenty-four, was also attending on the GI Bill. It was their burgeoning friendship at Reed, one might say, that helped change the face of twentieth-century American poetry and Buddhism in the West. Although Whalen he had discovered Buddhism in his late teens through the work of A. P. Sinnett and Lin Yutang's *The Wisdom of China and India* (a book that also influenced Kerouac),[9] he says he was not familiar with Zen until "Gary discovered the writings of D. T. Suzuki in the

college library and began bringing them home" (Pellec 59). Another major influence on all three students was Lloyd Reynolds, who taught creative writing, calligraphy, and eighteenth-century English literature at Reed.

After graduation in 1951, Snyder hitched to Indiana University with a newly purchased paperback copy of Suzuki's *Essays on Zen Buddhism* in his rucksack, where he studied anthropology for a semester before deciding to buck the trend and leave academia and dedicate his life to becoming a non-academic poet much like the Chinese hermit-poets he so admired. Whalen in turn drifted around Southern California after graduation, working odd jobs, including one as a riveter for North American Aircraft. They found themselves living together once again in 1952 in an apartment on Montgomery Street in Berkeley when Snyder enrolled in the Oriental Languages department at UC Berkeley to study Chinese and Japanese language and poetry; he even took a course in *sumi*, East Asian brush work. Kerouac, as with many others of his generation, had discovered Hindu philosophy in the work of Thoreau. While reading *Walden* in a despondent state after writing *The Subterraneans* in 1953, he accidentally came across a library copy of Ashvaghosa's *The Life of Buddha*.[10] It was Dwight Goddard's *The Buddhist Bible*, though, that had the most lasting impact on his writing and practice. He found *The Buddhist Bible* at the San Jose library on a visit to the Neal and Carolyn Cassidy in October 1953. The book, which he pinched from the library, rarely left his side in the ensuing years. Goddard and Ashvaghosa were just what Kerouac needed at this time in his life, prompting him to begin his long and complex accumulation of Buddhist notes, quotes, poems, and fragments of stories, which would eventually be published as *Some of the Dharma* in 1995. Back on the other coast, Ginsberg had discovered Buddhism at the Fine

Arts room of the New York Public Library about six months before Kerouac in April of 1953. According to Barry Miles, Ginsberg immersed himself in what primary and secondary texts were available at the time--seventy books from the Columbia University library alone. Writing Neal Cassady that April from New York, Ginsberg suggested that "[y]ou begin to see the vastitude and intelligence of the yellow men, and you understand a lot of new eyeball kicks" by immersing yourself in East Asian landscape paintings (qtd. in *Allen Ginsberg: A Biography*, 153). It was this attraction in East Asian landscape painting that eventually led to one of the most important postwar American long poems, Snyder's *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, which, incidentally, was begun one month before he wrote "On Vulture Peak" in May of 1956. Snyder had first encountered Chinese landscape painting at the age of ten at the Seattle Art Museum; the next important link in the East-West chain for Snyder was the discovery of Ernest Fenollosa's *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, which in turn led him to Pound's Chinese translations.

In 1955 Snyder took a directed study on the Chinese Buddhist poet Han Shan with Professor Ch'en Shihihsiang at Berkeley. His Han Shan translations became *Cold Mountain Poems* and were first published in *Evergreen Review* # 6 in 1958. This is also the time of the famous Six Gallery reading of October 1955, shortly after Kerouac and Ginsberg temporarily relocated in San Francisco and befriended Snyder, Whalen, Rexroth, McClure, Lamantia, and many others. This episode in American literary history has been documented countless times in fiction, biography, and film; and so, I only mention it here in passing. Snyder and Whalen began attending Friday night study groups at the Jodo Shinshu Berkeley Buddhist Church, where they met Alan Watts, who

subsequently introduced Snyder to his mother-in-law, Ruth Fuller Sasaki. It was also at this time that Snyder discovered Reginald Horace Blyth's seminal four volume set of Japanese *Haiku*, published between 1949 and 1952.[11] With Blyth and Suzuki in the air, it was only natural that a place like the East-West House would open its doors in 1957. East-West, run by students from Watt's defunct American Academy of Asian Studies, was established to introduce Westerners to East Asian customs and beliefs. Whalen, Joanne Kyger, Albert Saijo, Lew Welch, and even Kerouac stayed there for a time. Two years later, Robert Aitken, a disciple of Nyogen Senzaki, who established the first Zen center in San Francisco in 1928, founded the Diamond Sangha in Honolulu. What brought these and other people together on the West Coast was what bonded Snyder and Whalen for their lifetime, and what also brought Kerouac into their world of simplicity, mountains, Buddhism, and Asian philosophy for a time--a drive to find a new way of existing in a world that, as Fat Man and Little Boy made evident, was as tenuous as the very notion of the ego-individuality that we struggle with each day. It was especially the poetry of mountain hermits like Han Shan and Li Po who attracted Kerouac, Whalen, and Snyder--poets who turned their backs on the elite worlds of governmental service and organized monasticism to forge their own brand of Taoist-Buddhist practice and poetry free of the dust of worldly attachments as the elemental sweep of the ten thousand things spontaneously unfolded around their hidden mountain dwellings.

IV.

Though the first recorded Chinese poetic text, the *Shih ching* or *Book of Odes*, dates as early as 1000 to 600 B.C., it is the rivers-and-mountains poetry of T'ao Ch'ien

(365-472) and Hsieh Ling-yun (385-433), along with the later T'ang Dynasty (618-906) poetry of Wang Wei (701-761), Li Po (701-762), Tu Fu (712-770), Han Shan (c. 7th -9th centuries), and Po Chu-i (772-846) that most influenced the American poets under consideration here. Between the rivers-and-mountains poetry of T'ao Ch'ien and Hsieh Ling-yun and that of the T'ang Dynasty, poetry--as with the second generation of twentieth-century American poets--was lifelessly conventional. With the T'ang, as with the New American Poets, poetry blossomed. During the interval of 300 years, Ch'an (Zen), a melding of Indian Buddhism and Chinese Taoism, came into maturity in China, prompting poets to use a much more distilled, imagistic language, opening up new depths and non-verbal insights. As Snyder has said, "Chinese poetry in translation helped us find a way toward a clear secular poetic statement. . . ."[12] This is the same poetry that helped inspire Pound's *Cathay*, which itself had a large impact on Snyder and Whalen. When we consider the return to formalism during and after World War II, it is easy to see why poets like Rexroth, Snyder, Whalen and Kerouac turned to a much earlier, foreign tradition. According to Burton Watson, Chinese poetry is essentially a humanistic (in a decentered way) and ecological tradition; one that is not didactic, but does hold "lessons" for the attentive reader; it is a tradition of restraint steeped in serenity, cyclicality, and freedom from mental and material attachments (1-14). Much Chinese poetry brings to verse everyday mundane occurrences of private and public life. As with Ferlinghetti's "street poetry," poets such as Tu Fu and Han Shan found beauty in the most pedestrian of experiences. Much of the Buddhist poetry of Rexroth--and subsequently Snyder, Kerouac and Whalen--is infused with the succinct lines and classic images and symbols of Chinese poetry: Clouds (passing thoughts and wandering monks), dust (insubstantial

worldly affairs), emptiness (nonbeing, original mind), flowering plum and cherry trees (perseverance in the face of hardship), idleness (profound serenity).

V.

Tu Fu's poetry left a profound influence on that of Rexroth, who in turn left his mark on the developing poetry of Snyder, who credits Rexroth with giving him the guts to incorporate East Asian poetry and philosophy into his own uniquely transpacific work. In November 1953 Snyder wrote Whalen, who was still living across the Bay while Snyder was attending Berkeley, to explain his findings on the poetry that he and Rexroth shared a mutual interest in: "Chinese poetry," he said, "is indeed more complex, obscure, allusive, than I ever dreamed. It is . . . tranquil, peaceful, sublime and full of charming & accurate observations of nature. But also has (especially Tu Fu) all the logical complexity & allusiveness of Donne, Eliot, etc. Simply fantastic."[13] Later that same month, Snyder enthusiastically told Whalen that "REXROTH is the one." "Get hold of The Dragon & the Unicorn at your neighborhood library right away & read it through," he demanded. "He has Jeffers, Williams, & (less) Pound in his blood, & he's HONEST & INTRANSIGENT in a way that makes the rest of this modern crowd look puke-sick."[14] Snyder was impressed with Rexroth's knowledge of Asian poetry and philosophy, Pacific Coast geography, astronomy, anthropology, ornithology, and Native American myth. Less than a month later, he wrote Whalen again telling him about a key friendship that was blossoming:

> I spent last Friday evening with the notable Mr. Rexroth. . . . & I prodded him every way I know how (which is a legion) & made him show me his

> MSS of Japanese and Chinese translations, and found out he has once worked out of Marblemount as a trail cook under the old ranger Thompson, so we had many things to talk of there, etc. etc. I am happy to report that R. is probably the best thing writing poetry in America at the moment. & not just poetry--he is on the verge of blasting the American intelligentsia on several scholarly levels, plus reviews, etc.[15]

These manuscripts, which were surely influential to Snyder's development, eventually made their way into print as *One Hundred Poems from the Japanese* (1955) and *One Hundred Poems from the Chinese* (1956). Prompted by his discussion with Rexroth, Snyder very presciently told Whalen in the same letter that "The Frontier-type Wobbly-Thoreau anarchism is in my blood, i.e. that's my own tradition, I was raised up in it. So put it with the Oriental historical depth, & I got a fulcrum to tip the whole damn civilization over with." More effusive praise blasted across the Bay the following month: "Bigod Rexroth is even better than I thought. . . . Why has he been so neglected? And even vilified? A future historian-of-ideas may be able to answer these questions."[16] To this day, Rexroth has still not been accepted by the academy and rarely even appears in American literature anthologies. Oddly, Rexroth (nor Kerouac) appears in Shambhala's *Beneath a Single Moon: Buddhism in Contemporary American Poetry* (1991), even though Snyder wrote the introduction and poems by both himself and Whalen are included.

Rexroth, a veteran Modernist in the vein of Williams, Pound, and Stein--though his populist beliefs had more in common with the early Carl Sandburg of *Chicago Poems* (1919)--is best known for his association with the San Francisco Renaissance and Beat

poets, some of whom, like Snyder and Kenneth Patchen, he was to publically disassociate himself with. In Rexroth's mature work, beginning with *In What Hour* (1940), though perhaps more so with what William Everson called his masterpiece--*The Phoenix and the Tortoise* (1944)--we see a poet of national importance already established over a decade before he became known as the paterfamilias of the West Coast avant-garde poetry scene. As a co-founder of the San Francisco Poetry Center with Ruth Witt-Diamont in 1953, Rexroth was integral in fostering the original Berkeley Renaissance with younger poets Jack Spicer, Robert Duncan, James Broughton, Philip Lamantia and others, eventually including Snyder and Whalen. Rexroth moved to San Francisco with his first wife from Chicago in 1927 (Lawrence Ferlinghetti would arrive 24 years later with his wife). Rexroth (and Ferlinghetti for that matter) was an avant-garde painter, translator, poet, critic, reviewer, and much more. His West Coast poetics combines a connection to place and time, nature, colloquial language, and a clear, precise description which generally lacks metaphor. His best poems, like those of Tu Fu and Snyder, grapple with timeless universals through a closeness to the present moment of the here and now, creating an unimposing (though at times intellectually rigorous) organicism that has much in common--at least thematically--with Whitman. His form and content fly in the face of his more academically-minded colleagues like Yvor Winters and Allen Tate, which is one of the reasons he was not accepted as anything more than a regionalist on that *other* coast.

Rexroth's themes of love, nature, war, and metaphysics--as with those of Tu Fu and Whitman--are inextricably entwined with his day-to-day experiences, giving his poetry a concrete directness and personal-unto-universal sensibility that Jeffers's more metaphorically and metaphysically dire poetry lacks. One of the main things Rexroth

learned from Tu Fu--and we certainly see this taken to the extreme in Whalen--was how to, as David Hinton says, shift "between thematic concerns while combining discontinuous moods, tones, images, perspectives, etc. . . . Another strategy Tu Fu invented to increase the complexity of his poems was the lyric sequence: a series of lyrics not just grouped together, but closely interwoven to form a single long and complex poem" (viii-ix). Rexroth's *The Phoenix and the Tortoise* (1944) and *The Dragon & the Unicorn* (1952) can be read as lyric sequences, and one certainly sees the influence of Tu Fu in the way he moves from personal to the historical to the philosophical by juxtaposing them with corresponding images of the natural world. Compare, for example, Rexroth's translation of Tu Fu's "Travelling Northward" with a selection from *The Phoenix and the Tortoise*.

Tu Fu:

> Screech owls moan in the yellowing
> Mulberry trees. Field mice scurry,
> Preparing their holes for winter.
> Midnight, we cross an old battlefield.
> The moonlight shines cold on white bones. (*One Hundred Poems* 10)

Rexroth:

> Softly and singly an owl
> Cries in my sleep. I awake and turn
> My head, but there is only the moon
> Sinking in the early dawn.
> Owls do not cry over the ocean.

The night patrol planes return

Opaque against the transparent moon. (*Collected* 256-257)

The similarities are striking: from the compact line lengths, the caesura, the connection each narrator has to his immediate environment, and the specter of wartime loss. Rexroth, as he does in so much of his poetry, also juxtaposes these natural images with the philosophical and the personal. Snyder and Whalen do likewise in poems like "Milton by Firelight," *Myths & Texts*, and "Sourdough Mountain Lookout" and "The Slop Barrel."

Though Rexroth had an undeniable influence on the work of Snyder and Whalen (and Kerouac's respect), there are marked differences between his work and theirs. In short, Snyder and Whalen took what they could use from Rexroth--and there was quite a bit--but they achieved a more profound level of Buddhist understanding in much of their poetry, a product surely stemming from their more curious interest in the philosophy and practice. And although Rexroth would be much chagrined, I would also suggest that Kerouac's Buddhist poetics share much in common with the elder poet's. Rexroth's "Empty Mirror," one of his most successful early Buddhist poems, provides a good case in point. Snyder, as he mentioned to Whalen in the letter quoted above, had read the poem in *The Dragon & the Unicorn* in 1953 at the latest. The title of the poem is an allusion to a well-known episode in Hui-neng's *The Platform Sūtra*, one of the classics of Zen literature, alongside *The Heart Sūtra*, *The Gateless Gate*, and *The Blue Cliff Records*, all of which will be discussed in the chapters that follow. Hui-neng (638-713), often considered the father of Zen, was the Sixth Patriarch of the Southern School in China. Rexroth's title alludes to the poems written by Shen-hsiu and Hui-neng on the corridor wall of the monastery on Mount Huang-mei in response to the Fifth Patriarch's (Hung-

jen) call for his successor to be chosen through a dharma writing contest. Shen-hsiu, the somewhat disconcerted head monk, wrote the following verse on the wall:

> The body is a bodhi tree
>
> the mind is like a standing mirror
>
> always try to keep it clean
>
> don't let it gather dust. (Red Pine 6)

Hui-neng, who was just a lowly, illiterate kitchen helper in the monastery, responded in kind:

> Bodhi doesn't have any trees
>
> this mirror doesn't have a stand
>
> our buddha nature is forever pure
>
> where do you get this dust? (8)

In short, Hui-neng's poem expressed a far deeper understanding than the learned head monk's poem, which was much more didactic. As Red Pine says in his commentary accompanying his translation of *The Platform Sūtra*, "The only truth worth knowing is the truth of our own mind. But there is our mind, and then there is the mind we have been trained to believe is our mind. The one gives birth to wisdom, the other to delusion. Shen-hsiu offers a poem rooted in the dialectics of delusion, while Hui-neng responds with a poem born from the emptiness of wisdom" (107). Thus Hui-neng, who was not even vying for the position, received Dharma transmission and became the Sixth Patriarch of Zen Buddhism.

This delusion of self is the topic of Rexroth's poem. In its entirety, "Empty Mirror" reads:

As long as we are lost

In the world of purpose

We are not free. I sit

In my ten foot square hut,

The birds sing. The bees hum.

The leaves sway. The water

Murmurs over the rocks.

The canyon shuts me in.

If I moved, Bashō's frog

Would splash in the pool.

All summer long and gold

Laurel leaves fell through space.

Today I was aware

Of a maple leaf floating

On the pool. In the night

I stare into the fire.

Once I saw fire cities,

Towns, palaces, wars,

Heroic adventures,

In the campfires of youth.

Now I see only fire.

My breath moves quietly.

The stars move overhead.

In the clear darkness

Only a small red glow

Is left in the ashes.

On the table lies a cast

Snake skin and an uncut stone. (*Collected* 321).

The "world of purpose" is referred to by Buddhists as *samsāra* (Skt.), or the realm of birth, death, and rebirth. "As long as we are lost" in our delusions of ego and permanence, according to Buddhist philosophy, we are doomed to untold births and rebirths in what Kerouac referred to as "[t]he wheel of the quivering meat / conception" in the "211th Chorus" of *Mexico City Blues*; thus, as Rexroth says, "[w]e are not free."[17] Kerouac also addressed *samsāra* the following year throughout "Desolation Blues." In the "1st Chorus," for example, he tells us, seated outside his own "ten foot square hut" atop Desolation Peak, that "we walk around clung / To earth / Like beetles with big brains / Ignorant of where we are, how / What, & upsidedown like fools. . . ." (*Book of Blues* 117). Rexroth's "ten foot square hut," like Kerouac's, alludes to the 2nd century C.E. *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*. Vimalakīrti, who is discussed in Chapter Two, was a Buddhist layman whom both Snyder and Whalen also allude to in their own poetry--Snyder's "On Vulture Peak" and Whalen's "Absolute Reality Co.: Two Views" (1964)."[18] In fact, the first stanza of Snyder's "On Vulture Peak" was surely influenced by this and an earlier Rexroth poem titled "Hojoki," which Snyder mentioned in his January 12, 1954 letter to Whalen.[19] Snyder mentions Vimalakīrti two months later in a letter to Whalen when describing his newly rented Berkeley shack that Kerouac immortalized in *The Dharma Bums*: "My room is small for human beings, but like Vimalakīrti's ten-foot-square-hut, it

will accommodate ten thousand Bodhisattvas."[20] In Rexroth's hut, "The birds sing. / The bees hum," etc. It is interesting that Rexroth chooses to use the article "The" for each of the five natural "things" he mentions, as if, as an ego-observer, he is pointing from this thing to that.[21] The turning point--the representation of Buddhist awakening--comes mid way through the poem. Though "Laurel leaves fell through space" "[a]ll summer," it is "[t]oday" that he becomes "aware" of "a maple leaf floating / On the Pool." He does not say that he "sees" a leaf; rather, he is "aware" of it. "In the night / I stare into the fire," he tells us. When he was younger, he read "cities / Towns / palaces," etc. into the fire. That is, he projects himself onto nature in much the same way Kerouac does throughout "Desolation Blues." Now, though, he moves towards seeing the fire divested of his own delusions of selfhood. I say "moves towards" because he still sees himself as an ego-I.

Rexroth, like Snyder and Whalen, employs another key attribute of Chinese poetry in the poem above: parallelism. We see it most obviously towards the end of the poem: his "breath moves quietly" as "The stars move overhead." Further, "Only a small red [star-like] glow" is seen in "the clear darkness" of the ashes. The poem ends symbolically (and a bit heavy-handedly) with two images he chose to represent the narrator's supposed state of enlightenment: a castoff "Snake skin and an uncut stone." The snake skin is symbolic of both the Christian Garden (and his Catholicism), as well as his notions of selfhood; here, he sheds them. The uncut stone represents, like an uncarved block of wood, original mind as unmanipulated by the machinations of the delusion of self. It is, in other words, like the Way, in its natural state. What makes the selections by Whalen and Snyder below more successful Buddhist poems is that, like Shen-hsiu's poem above, Rexroth's is dogmatic (a trait he shared with Kerouac). Rexroth's poem is framed

at beginning and end with single-sentence lessons--good lessons, certainly, but blatant lessons nonetheless. In this sense, Snyder's "Mid-August at Sourdough Mountain Lookout" acts, as does Hui-neng's verse, as the perfect foil to his elder: a perfect foil, but, interestingly, it was written the summer before Snyder met Rexroth, while he was atop Sourdough Mountain in Washington.

In "Mid-August at Sourdough Mountain Lookout" Snyder, as is typical of Chinese poetry, uses short, self-contained lines, with the first stanza presenting nature imagery, while and the second stanza brings in Buddhist ideas. Following the conventions of *shih* form, Snyder employs both parallelism and single syntactic line units in the first of its two brief stanzas:

> Down valley a smoke haze
> Three days heat, after five days rain
> Pitch grows on the fir-cones
> Across rocks and meadows
> Swarms of new flies.

Unlike Rexroth, Snyder's narrator does not appear as an ego-presence until the second stanza, nor does he use "the" before every other thing he describes. The narrator does appear in the second stanza, but only fleetingly:

> I cannot remember things I once read
> A few friends, but they are in cities.
> Drinking cold snow-water from a tin cup
> Looking down for miles
> Through high still air. (*Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems* 3)

He is not longing for a return to the city (like Kerouac in "Desolation Blues"), nor is he romanticizing his past nor projecting into the future; he just *is*. The poet appears and then melds back into his surroundings as his ego again drops away. He is mirror-still, unconcerned with ego. In this brief two-stanza poem, Snyder has succeeded in capturing the Chinese rivers-and-mountains notion of *tzu-jan*, keying into the immediacy of the moment as it is occurring. He is not reading into his environment, he is objectively describing it through a deep and direct perception. Like Rexroth's poem and the T'ang poetic tradition (and William Carlos Williams's Imagism), Snyder's poem builds its effects with a sequence of vivid, natural juxtaposed images.

Whalen takes these traditions and makes them his own in his most anthologized poem, "Sourdough Mountain Lookout," which was written the same year as "The Slop Barrel." The poem, which opens with a dedication to Rexroth, is far too long and complex to address here; as such, I will briefly discuss the fourth stanza as it relates to the two poems above:

> Morning fog in the southern gorge
> Gleaming foam restoring the old sea-level
> The lakes in two lights green soap and indigo
> The high cirque-lake black half-open eye
> (*Collected* 40).

As in much East Asian poetry, each line presents us with an individual image that relates--though not necessarily explicitly--with the preceding and following lines. Notice too the parallelism: "fog"/"foam"; "gorge"/"old sea-level"; "lakes"/"cirque-lake"; "green"/"black." It should be mentioned that this is one of the few stanzas in "Sourdough

Mountain Lookout" in which the poet himself is not blatantly present as the ego-I in the form of either the one doing the thinking, the listening, the speaking, or the one quoting from other sources. That is, in the lines quoted here, as with the first stanza in Snyder's Sourdough poem, the ego-observer is an implied presence; he is not saying "I am seeing this, I am seeing that" as Rexroth's narrator does. Whalen's is like a finger pointing at the moon: we look at the moon, not the finger directing our gaze skyward.

These poems at first glance read very similarly, owing no doubt to the poets' mutual interests and the poems' physical settings. Snyder's "look out," though, is much more succinct than those of Rexroth and Whalen, as well as Kerouac's look out on Desolation Peak. Reginald Horace Blyth's *Haiku* provides us with a good definition to distinguish between these poems. Using George Moore's[22] version of "pure poetry," Blyth says in Volume I:

> [T]he world is reflected in the mind of the poet as in an undistorted mirror, the growth and life of the poet's mind being identical with that movement of things outside him. By some happy chance the apparent peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of the poet correspond exactly with the vagaries of the universe, and what he expresses as personal feeling within, is law without. . . . Pure poetry therefore appears to us super-personal, extra-personal, and so it is, for such a poet speaks not for himself, but for mankind. (63)

In Whalen and Snyder's poems we get a sense of the mind as "an undisturbed mirror" as they capture the experience of the mountain realm as a single overwhelming whole as undifferentiated from the viewing subject. Snyder, though, seems to have attained non-striving/spontaneous arriving, thus the more pared-down diction. Although the binary of

subject/object fades away to a lesser extent in Whalen's stanza with its present tense verbs ("Gleaming" and "restoring"), personification of nature ("half-open eye"), conjunctions ("sea-level," "cirque-lake," and "half-open"), adjectives ("green soap and indigo"), and the use of the article "the" four times--as if saying "that one over there" like Rexroth--all adding to a tone of "literariness" not found in Snyder's stanza.

V.

"Transpacific Transcendence" explores the influence of East Asian literature and philosophy on American poetry by engaging in a concentrated examination of three representative postwar Buddhist poems written during a watershed year in American poetry. Kerouac's "Desolation Blues," Snyder's "On Vulture Peak," and Whalen's "The Slop Barrel" were all written in 1956, one year after the famous Six Gallery reading in San Francisco where Allen Ginsberg shocked the literary establishment with *Howl*, and one year before the belated publication of Kerouac's *On the Road*. In discussing these poems, I will explore their West Coast Buddhist poetics via two different literary-historical trajectories--American and East Asian. The fact that these poems were all written during the high point of each writer's engagement with Buddhism--and during the height of their friendship--provides us with an interesting opportunity to delve deeply into not only the poems themselves, but also into the Buddhist and Taoist philosophy and Chinese and Japanese poetry they were enthusiastically reading and discussing on the eve of the Beat Generation's explosion on the national scene in 1957. Focusing on this unique literary-historical moment also enables us to explore--as a way of unpacking the poems themselves-- texts such the *Lankāvatāra* and *Heart* sūtras found in Dwight Goddard's *A Buddhist Bible* (1932/1938), D. T. Suzuki's *Manual of Zen Buddhism* (1935), R. H.

Blyth's four-volume *Haiku* (1949-1952), and Edward Conze's *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development* (1951). These texts, as representative of the postwar East-West ferment after the war, help us grapple with the philosophically complex Buddhist ideas the poems themselves engage, such as emptiness, the Four Delusions, the Five *Skandhas* (Skt.), the phenomenal world, and *nirvana* (Skt.).

This project not only fills an important gap in mid-twentieth century American literary scholarship on the San Francisco and Beat poets, it also explores important avenues that contemporary post-World War II literary criticism tends to avoid--namely, shedding our Western anthropocentricism for a more sustainable, ethical, and interconnected world view. Whalen, Snyder, and Kerouac (the latter at least temporarily) used the West Coast--the last frontier, if you will--as a jumping off point for further exploration of not only Buddhist poetry and philosophy, but also as a means of turning back to the Transcendentalists in much the same way Robinson Jeffers turned to ancient Greek drama as a staging ground for his longer epic California poems. Whalen, Snyder, and Kerouac, among others, were searching for a larger geographic and temporal connection to help them break through the restrictive confines of the tightening postwar social, artistic, and spiritual strictures.

As a way of further situating the historical moment, "Transpacific Transcendence" begins with a short chapter highlighting some of the criticism of the period that was leveled at the New American Poets. The literary discussion--if we can even call it that--was, like the McCarthyese which began in the late 1940s, one-sided, condescending, and damning. Following the rather unidirectional discourse of Chapter One, the remainder of the chapters opens up into a more multifaceted dialogue. In discussing Kerouac's

Buddhist poetics in Chapter Four, for example, I bring in Whalen's "Sourdough Mountain Lookout" and Snyder's "Piute Creek" as a way of distinguishing between the friends' approaches to and understanding of Buddhism. This strand of intertextuality leads me to suggest, for example, that Kerouac's spiritual quest was doomed from the start by his life-long / life-reflecting project of writing the Dulouz legend, itself a desire steeped in the delusion of permanence. In trying to get "IT" all down, Kerouac effectively worked to totalize his life, to define and frame something which much of his fiction and verse theoretically argues against--selfhood. Herein lies the distinguishing characteristic between Kerouac's poetics and those of Whalen and Snyder: Whalen's Buddhist poetics, in his own words, "is a picture or graph of a mind moving" ("Since You asked Me," *Collected* 153); Snyder's, on the other hand--in words similar to what he read in D.T. Suzuki's translation of *The Lankāvatāra Sūtra* in Goddard--posits that "A clear attentive mind / Has no meaning but that / Which sees is truly seen" ("Piute Creek," *R&CMP* 8).[23] Whalen's and Snyder's statements largely preclude notions of a stable, lasting self-existence. The crux for Kerouac was his desire to exist in "Nirvana Bliss," as he calls it. As Conze says, our "desire for an absolute Ease seems to be behind our constant endeavors to make ourselves at home in this world, and to attain the kind of foolproof happiness which is known as 'security'" (44).

Chapter Two explores Snyder's "On Vulture Peak," a poem written immediately after his departure in May of 1956 for Kyoto. Snyder is by far the most studied and written-about poet in this project; he is embraced by both students of Buddhism, environmentalists, and academics. We might say that "On Vulture Peak" is his Asian kick-off poem--written on the sail over--though he was certainly writing very

accomplished Buddhist-influenced poetry before he left for Japan. Snyder's primary focus throughout his *oeuvre* deals with Buddhist notions of interconnectedness in relation to one's identity and place in nature. His poetry synthesizes a seemingly disparate mix of Zen Buddhism, ancient Asian poetics, shamanism, the natural sciences, personal reflection, Native American tales, contemplation, ecological awareness, as well as the day-to-day, the imagism of Pound and Williams, the sense of place found in Thoreau, and the free forms of the Beats and the Black Mountain poets. His books are often organized not around themes or technical experiments, but rather around his personal experiences, what he terms the "real work"--the day-to-day work of being. "On Vulture Peak," first published in LeRoi Jones's *Yugen* 6 in 1960, has been all but set aside by Snyder scholars. I discuss it here for the first time alongside Kerouac's *Scripture of the Golden Eternity*, which Snyder suggested his friend compose while they were living together that fateful spring of '56 which Kerouac immortalized in *The Dharma Bums* two years later. One of the things that makes this four-page poem so interesting is that it succinctly condenses--in much the same way *The Heart Sūtra* does--so much Buddhist philosophy. As such, I argue that "On Vulture Peak" is itself a poetic sūtra--made up of ten *kōan*-like stanzas. Snyder's poem is heavily influenced by *The Vimalakīrti* and *The Lankāvatāra* sūtras, in much the same way Kerouac's "Desolation Blues" is influenced by *The Heart Sūtra*. This is not just any sūtra; Kerouac is the intended primaey recipient of the poem/teaching, as delivered by Snyder. An object lesson, if you will, for the friend Snyder left behind as he sailed for Japan.

Chapter Three focuses on Whalen's "The Slop Barrel: Slices of the Paideuma for All Sentient Beings," a four-page, six-section poem written between March and August

of 1956. Whalen's poetry revels in the mundane, the apolitical, while also maintaining a humorous, whimsical balance. This is not to say that his poems are easy; far from it. Whalen, like Williams, incorporated everyday American speech rhythms and snatches of things overheard and seen, which he catalogued in his pocket notebooks as did Kerouac, beginning with his time in the service. As his poetics developed, Whalen moved away from modernist concerns, towards a form more conducive to the times--urban sprawl, mass-produced-pre-packaged consumerism, Cold War anxieties, and his own burgeoning explorations with Buddhist poetry. Poetry called for a move away from tight imagism towards a more opened-up, free-flowing page, as earlier seen in the work of the Black Mountain poets. His writing is a postmodern bricolage of pre-written, cut-and-paste, rearranged moments of immediacy and reflection, making his poems complicated, yet alive. "The Slop Barrel," while at first glance appearing similar in structure to Charles Olson's breath-determined spacing and line-breaks, actually finds its experimentation in the formalism of Chinese and Japanese poetic forms such as *waka*, *haiku*, and *gāthā*. The poem, which is largely a poetic dialogue between two lovers in Berkeley, is also, like Whalen's better-known "Sourdough Mountain Lookout," an interior exploration of Mahāyāna Buddhist notions of impermanence, interdependence, and awakening. More specifically, throughout the poem we are privy to the poet's struggling with the idea that we mistake the Five *Skandhas*, or aggregates of attachment that collectively make up one's personality, for the self. The poet comes to recognize, as he moves from being trapped in the world of objects and concepts, to reaching the other shore of liberation, that suffering lies not in the *skandhas* themselves, but in his lack of understanding of emptiness.

And finally, Chapter Four explores these delusions--or as Conze calls them, the "perverted views" (*viparyāsa* Skt.)--in Kerouac's twelve-chorus "Desolation Blues," a naked soul-searching exploration of Kerouac's struggle with identity and impermanence atop Desolation Peak in Washington State during the summer of 1956. My reading of this series of linked choruses provides, next to James T. Jones's *A Map of Mexico City Blues* (1992), the most in-depth analysis of Kerouac's Buddhism to date. Kerouac wrote these poems at a key juncture during his Buddhist studies. By the time Kerouac hitched to Washington in mid-June for his stint as a fire lookout at the suggestion of Snyder, he had just come off of a string of important moments in his life: his fourth visit to Mexico in the fall of 1955, which spawned one of post-World War II America's most important long poems, *Mexico City Blues*; his subsequent involvement with Ginsberg and his new West Coast friends in Berkeley that culminated in the Six Gallery reading in October; his brief return trip to his sister's house in Rocky Mount, North Carolina during the winter of 1955/56, which afforded him the time he write *Visions of Gerard*, revise *Tristessa*, and complete *Some of the Dharma*, as well as spend a good deal of time in solitary meditation in his "Twin Tree Grove"; finally, late spring/early summer found him living with Snyder at Locke McCorkle's cabin in Marin-an. In short, this was his Dharma Bum period. In this chapter, I argue that "Desolation Blues," more than any other work by Kerouac, highlights his struggles with the Catholic/Buddhist divide that, interestingly, was the impetus of some of his best work. More specifically, in these twelve poems we see Kerouac grapple with the four perverted views which we think into being as a way of establishing the reality of the mundane world. These perverted views are briefly discussed in *The Heart Sūtra* and *The Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, two texts Kerouac was

intimately familiar with. In fact, all three poems addressed in this study incorporate both the content of *The Heart Sūtra*, as well as the gāthā that closes the short text. In the end, Kerouac comes to his own sort of awakened state, though one that does not necessarily coincide with Buddhist notions of enlightenment.

Chapter One
The Critics Critique

William Carlos Williams claimed that the publication of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* set American poetry back by twenty years; would it were so, thought many post-war critics (both conservative and liberal, professional and armchair), though had they had their way, they would have set the poetic clock back a century. As Alan Filreis argues in *Counter-revolution of the Word* (2008), "antimodernist anticommunist" critics of the late forties and fifties claimed that the radicalism of modernist poetry was detrimental to the safety of the country after World War II. Indeed, in many ways these critics equated modernism with communism. Robert Hillyer and Stanton Coblentz, for example, suggested that modernist poets had actually learned their trade through the subversive strategies of communism. What was needed after the overtly political poetry of the 1930s--though the experimentalism of the 1920s was even more insidious, according to these rightwing critics, due to its incomprehensibility--was a return to traditionalism; not an Eliotic traditionalism, nor even a Whitmanic traditionalism, but a nineteenth century traditionalism based on regular meter, form, content, and, where high modernism's radical experimentation was concerned, a return to realism. Even President Truman told White House reporters that "'the ability to make things look as they are is the first requisite of the artist" (qtd. in Filreis 169). What the antimodernist anticommunists wanted was the "restoration of truth and beauty . . . cultural fealty, civic instruction, and the revival of historical arguments" (215). Their rhetoric, based on McCarthyistic illogic, was steeped in red-baiting fears. Quoting from Hillyer, Filreis sums up their antimodernist platform as:

> a fear of the godlessness entailed in 'obscurity'; of the abandonment not just of 'positive' subject matter but, far worse, content altogether; of the disruption of the lyric line . . . ; of the rejection not just of natural description but of imagery itself . . . ; of the combination of difficulty and 'intellectual poetry' producing 'simply bad craftsmanship'; of the '*rhetorical* smoke screen created around abstract art'; and of the communist-modernist prohibition against any free and open 'discussion of [bad] tendencies in modern American poetry. (216)

This, then, is the poetic landscape which the New American Poets were writing in and against. It is no wonder that they shunned the academic critics and publishers of the East Coast, searching instead for a new anti-antimodernist model with which to build upon.

There was also plenty of harsh criticism aimed directly at postwar poets in the 1950s, for one could always count on some *Partisan Review* vitriol towards those new writers not seeking traditional academic literary status and acceptance through toeing the line of traditionalism. In a typical anti-Beat assessment from the period, Irving Howe's essay titled "Mass Society and Post-Modern Fiction" (1959) has this to say about the "young men in San Francisco":

> They are suffering from psychic and social disturbance: as far as that goes, they are right--there is much in American life to give one a pain. But they have no clear sense of why or how they are troubled, and some of them seem opposed in principle to a clear sense of anything. . . . These writers . . . illustrate the painful, though not inevitable, predicament of rebellion in

> a mass society: they are the other side of the American hollow. In their contempt for mind, they are at one with the middle class suburbia they think they scorn. In their incoherence of feeling and statement, they mirror the incoherent society that clings to them like a mocking shadow. . . . Feeling themselves lonely and estranged, they huddle together in gangs, create a Brook Farm of Know-Nothings, and send back ecstatic reports to the squares: Having a Wonderful Time, Having Wonderful Kicks! (434-435)

One of the things that *Partisan Review* critics like Howe and Norman Podhoretz failed to recognize--or perhaps they did recognize it and their contempt acted as a convenient mask--was their own complicity in the postwar milk-toast complacency. Podhoretz, in the most oft-sited anti-Beat essay from the period ("The Know-Nothing Bohemians" 1958) says that "the Beat Generation's worship of primitivism and spontaneity is more than a cover for hostility to intelligence; it arises from a pathetic poverty of feeling as well" (315). One of the problems with Podhoretz's essay is that he lacks the historical distance to back up his comparison between the "Bohemianism of the 1920's" and the "Bohemianism of the 1950's" (307). *On the Road* had only been out two years, *The Subterraneans* one (the two books tentatively under review here), so Podhoretz's own "sociological and historical" understanding (and acceptance) of his own day was too clouded, whereas the bohemians of the 1920's ["(Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Sinclair Lewis, Eliot, Pound)"] had already been largely canonized in academic circles, though Pound's pro-fascist, anti-American broadcasts in Italy and his subsequent Bollingen Prize in 1949 for *The Pisan Cantos*, meant that he was once again radioactive in the 1950s (307).

Podhoretz continues: "The hipsters and hipster-lovers of the Beat Generation are rebels, all right, but not against anything so sociological and historical as the middle class or capitalism or even respectability" (315-316). Seriously? One wonders if Podhoretz would have reacted differently had he connected the middleclass discontentt highlighted in David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956), and Vance Packard's *The Status Seekers* (1959) with what the postwar poets were experiencing. Or if Howe saw Tony Randall in Martin Ritt's *No Down Payment* (1957), a movie of the burbs about alcoholism, marital infidelity, conformity, and social climbing. Podhoretz gets even better: "This is the revolt of the spiritually underprivileged and the crippled of soul--young men who can't think straight and so hate anyone who can . . . young men who are burdened unto death with the specially poignant sexual anxiety of America. . . ." (316). It sounds more like he is talking about the complacency of the Levittown gray flannel suiters whom Whyte, Riesman, Packard and Ritt took to task, rather than the Beats.

Rexroth summed up the average American's feelings towards these "hipsters" in his 1957 *New World Writing* essay "Disengagement: The Art of the Beat Generation":

> The youngest generation is in a state of revolt so absolute that its elders cannot even recognize it. The disaffiliation, alienation, and rejection of the young has, as far as their elders are concerned, moved out of the visible spectrum altogether. Critically invisible, modern revolt, like X-rays and radioactivity, is perceived only by its effects at more materialistic social levels, where it is called delinquency. (42)

Two years later, Paul O'Neil, a staff writer for *LIFE*, proved Rexroth's point with a vengeance. His article, "The Only Rebellion Around," which is often mentioned but rarely quoted to any extent, merits inclusion here. The only intelligent thing O'Neil said is that "Beatdom is a product of postwar disillusionment and restlessness" (119). Unfortunately, O'Neil did not expand on this observation; instead, he opens his article by comparing the Beats to "the hairiest, scrawniest and most discontented" "fruit flies" who, he claims, were profaning the bounty of postwar America, the "sweetest and most succulent casaba ever produced by the melon patch of civilization" (115). O'Neil continues:

> [The Beats] have raised their voices against virtually every aspect of current American society: Mom, Dad, Politics, Marriage, the Savings Bank, Organized Religion, Literary Elegance, Law, the Ivy League Suit and Higher Education, to say nothing of the Automatic Dishwasher, the Cellophane wrapped Soda Cracker, the Split-Level House and the clean, or peace-provoking, H-Bomb (115). . . . They are talkers, loafers, passive little con men, lonely eccentrics, mom-haters, cop-haters, exhibitionists with abused smiles and second mortgages on a bongo drum--writers who cannot write, painters who cannot paint, dancers with unfortunate malfunction of the fetlocks (119). . . . The bulk of Beat writers are undisciplined and slovenly amateurs who have deluded themselves into believing their lugubrious absurdities are art simply because they have rejected the form, style, and attitudes of previous generations and have seized upon obscenity as an expression of 'total personality.' (124)

The most interesting (and ironic) thing about O'Neil's article comes when we consider the very venue in which it appears. Preceding his article by seven pages is an article on the United States Marines, which opens with a photograph of a bunch of young, drunken, singing officers standing around a bar, ales in hand. It is the advertisements, though, which are most telling: Calvert, "The Whiskey with More Power to Please"; his and hers Cordomatic automatic cord reels--his with a light for the workshop or garage, hers with a clothesline for the laundry room; power mowers; designer dishes; the Puritron portable air freshener, which "gives her an odor-free, smoke-free, grease-free kitchen for only $39.95; and Milton Bradley's latest board games: Park and Shop, Easy Money, and Go to the Head of the Class, all being played by middle-class white kids.

Critics like Howe, Podhoretz, and O'Neil also failed to acknowledge that these poets were--through their anti-formalism, unguarded expression, emphasis on the personal as representative of the universal, and their anti-elitism--harkening back to America's foremost proponent of democracy, Walt Whitman. Also like Whitman, and later Williams, with whom most of the postwar writers had a closer affinity, they wrote from personal perception and imagination about everyday objects and occurrences; they emphasized--in a way Pound's Imagism never really mastered--everyday speech rhythms and vernacular, as well as the rhythms of jazz; and they left behind the staid traditionalism of the formal poetics that once again reared their ugly head after the modernist experiment waned. This last characteristic was surely the kicker for these anti-Beat critics, for academic verse always smacks of conformity, and, one might say of the 1950s, McCarthy-induced fear and paranoia. In short, the poets criticized in the *Partisan Review* and other conservative "liberal" publications like the *Hudson Review* were

operating in a line of artistic succession from America's most democratic and individualistic poets: the Transcendentalists, the modernists, the political poets of the 1930s, and the older poets of the West Coast.

Chapter Two
Gary Snyder's Surfside Sūtra: "On Vulture Peak," Jack Kerouac, and Mahāyāna Shūnyatā

"I have never gotten over . . . those inexplicable moments of mutual irritation we shared, which were dissipated like at Stinson Beach jumping down cliffs, and those sad nights discussing death. . . ." Jack Kerouac to Gary Snyder (May 24, 1957)[1]

There is something about "On Vulture Peak," a lesser-known poem written in 1956 which Gary Snyder enclosed along with the "Dullness in February: Japan" in a March 8, 1957 letter from Kyoto to friend and fellow poet Philip Whalen. Neither poem, according to the letter, was intended "to be considered final statements on anything, just ways of passing time."[2] The following fall Allen Ginsberg referred to the poem as a "drunk squiggling note from Vulture Peak"[3] (Morgan 25) when Snyder sent him a copy in 1958, and Snyder himself conveyed to me via email that "'On Vulture Peak' is a light-hearted poem and [should not be taken] too seriously"[4] Lighthearted perhaps, but Snyder has collected the poem in both *Left Out in the Rain: New Poems 1947-1985* (1986)[5] and *No Nature: New and Selected Poems* (1992) since its original publication in *Yugen* # 6 in 1960[6]. Although the poem, dated 1956 in *Yugen*, has received no critical attention from scholars, it certainly merits consideration in light of Snyder's other work from this period, as well in relation to the Buddhist ideas that were in the air in 1950s San Francisco (and New York to a lesser extent) in the works of Alan Watts, D.T. Suzuki, Kenneth Rexroth, Robert Aitken, John Cage, and the Beats. In fact, Snyder's poem should be read as a serious exploration of both Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy and ancient Chinese poetics.

The poem also carries particular significance in that it was written quite literally on the eve (the sail over) to Snyder's most rigorous daily Zen study and practice (as well as translation work) at the First Zen Institute of America in Kyoto. As Timothy Gray points out in *Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim*, Snyder ". . . gave little attention to his own writing during his stay in Japan. The poems Snyder did write in late 1956 and early 1957 are few in number, modest in scope, and uneven in quality" (129-130). True, but as I shall argue, it is precisely this "light-hearted[ness]" and seeming "uneven . . . quality" which in part makes "On Vulture Peak" a four-page powerhouse of Buddhist doctrine and Zen spontaneity. The poem's interest to Snyder scholarship, Buddhist studies, and post World War II American literature is also complemented by reading it along side Jack Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* (1958) and *Scripture of the Golden Eternity* (published 1960), the latter of which was written at Snyder's suggestion in the spring of 1956 while the two were briefly living together at Marin-an in Mill Valley, California, not long before the ensuing national fascination in the Beat Generation prompted by the publication of *On The Road* the following year.

What is so interesting about “On Vulture Peak” is that it so succinctly condenses so much Buddhist philosophy in a much more spontaneous and less didactic way than Kerouac managed in *Scripture*. Snyder's poem is itself a "scripture," or, more accurately, a poetic sūtra made up of ten *kōan*-like stanzas. It also shows the influences of classical Chinese *shih* form and that of T'ang Dynasty poet Tu Fu's (712-770) lyric sequences (712-770). To use the poet's own words about a work he published thirty-six years later, "On Vulture Peak" is "a sort of sūtra--an extended poetic, philosophic, and mythic narrative. . . ." ("An Offering for Tara" *MRWE* 158). The key difference between

Scripture and "On Vulture Peak" is one of fundamental Buddhist beliefs and practices. As Ray Smith (Kerouac) says in *The Dharma Bums*,

> "I'm not a Zen Buddhist, I'm a serious Buddhist, I'm an oldfashioned dreamy Hīnayāna coward of later Mahayanism" . . . my contention being that Zen Buddhism didn't concentrate on kindness so much as on confusing the intellect to make it perceive the illusion of all sources of things. "It's mean," I complained. "All those Zen Masters throwing young kids into the mud because they can't answer their silly word questions." (8-9)

Overlooking the fact that Hīnayāna--known by its practitioners as Theravāda Buddhism--was actually the precursor to Mahāyāna Buddhism, Kerouac's self-description is useful in framing the two poems in relation to form and content. The fundamental distinction between Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism is found in the respective practitioner's goals for achieving enlightenment. According to Burton Watson,

> [T]he aim of religious practice [for Theravāda Buddhists] was to achieve the state of arhat, one who has gained release from suffering and passed beyond the confines of the world. . . . In contrast to the state of arhat, [the Mahāyāna Buddhists] chose as their goal and ideal the figure of the bodhisattva, one who vows not only to achieve enlightenment for himself but to assist all others to do likewise. ("Introduction" *The Vimalakīrti Sūtra* 6)

Bodhisattvas elect to remain in the realm of birth, death, and rebirth (*samsāra* Skt.) out of compassion, allowing themselves to be reborn for the benefit of leading other sentient

beings to enlightenment. As Snyder said in a letter to Joanne Kyger on August 6, 1959 from Kyoto, "in Mahāyāna in particular the self-seeking idea is rejected, it is toward the BODHISATTVA who has seen nirvana & given it all away--for the benefit of others."[7] One gets the sense from reading Kerouac's *Scripture*, *Desolation Angels* (written 1956/ 1961), *Some of the Dharma* (written 1953-56), and the correspondence, that Kerouac's main reason for turning to Buddhism was for his own salvation rather than out of compassion for and the potential enlightenment of others.

Another telling feature between *Scripture* (which Kerouac wrote in pencil to allow for revision)[8] and "On Vulture Peak" is the fact that *Scripture* is peppered throughout with name-dropping: Jesus, Avalokitesvara[9], Hui-neng[10], God (the latter repeated 13 times), whereas Snyder, who also incorporates numerous characters from diverse cultures, *alludes* to them rather than names them. Kerouac lays them all down; Snyder seemingly disseminates them willy-nilly, metaphorically suggesting that we destroy the boat once we reach the other shore. Snyder's liberal use of allusions, while certainly nothing new to twentieth century America poetry (i.e. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Pound's *Cantos*, both of which draw on the Asian tradition), have, in this instance, more in common with Chinese poetry and Rinzai *kōan* practice[11] than that of his modernist predecessors, Snyder does not simply refer to and assimilate "other" cultures, he--through *kōan*-like allusiveness--enacts Zen practice: poiesis through praxis. That is, the philosophy blooms forth into "On Vulture Peak" and on to the reader; the poem itself is practice realized; it is a finger pointing to the moon. As he told Whalen in a letter dated nine days before mailing the poem, Mahāyāna philosophy "never says what it means. It's not a question of trying to express the inexpressible, but a case of real upaya,[12] of

deliberately stating something else, even an opposite meaning, complete funning, with the sole purpose of making people think & arrive at real meaning themselves."[13] Likewise, Snyder was not one to castigate or proselytize as Kerouac was wont to do on occasion.[14] As Snyder says in *Jack's Book: An Oral Biography of Jack Kerouac*,

> I didn't then, and I don't now, think in terms of whether or not people are genuinely committed Buddhists or not. We're working with all these things, and it doesn't matter what words you give them, and if I thought that there was some point where I would say, "Jack, you're thinking too much about how the world's a bad place," that would be my sense of a corrective and his understanding of the Buddha-Dharma, but that wasn't in my interest, or anybody else's interest, to think: "Is this guy a real Buddhist or not a real Buddhist?" (Gifford and Lee 203)

The fundamental differences in their approaches to practice bears directly on the two poets' respective poetics. *Scripture* is about emptiness, it is told to us, whereas "On Vulture Peak" points the way through its free-flowing *Waste Land*-like associational cultural hopscotch. In the "Afterword" to *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems* (2004) Snyder says that "The idea of poetry of minimal surface texture, with its complexities hidden at the bottom of the pool, under the bank, a dark old lurking, no fancy flavor, is ancient. It is what is 'haunting' in the best of Scottish-English ballads and is at the heart of the Chinese *shi* (lyric) aesthetic. Du Fu said, 'The ideas of a poet should be noble and simple'" (66-67). Though it grapples with many of the same themes found in the more "finished" poems of *Riprap* (1959) and *Myths & Texts* (1960), "On Vulture Peak very aptly captures the Chinese sense of unfolding (*tzu-jan*) and spontaneity of experience

(*wu-wei* Chin.); its *kōan*-like content, "with its complexities hidden at the bottom of the pool," is a reflection if its spontaneous composition and thus a direct engagement in practice. The poem also captures the energy and excitement of the discussions the two poets had in California in a way not dissimilar to *The Dharma Bums*. According to Snyder,

> Our interchanges on Buddhism were on the playful and delightful level of exchanging the lore, exchanging what we knew about it, what he thought of Mahāyāna. He made up names. He would follow on the Mahāyāna Sūtra invention of lists, and he would invent more lists, like the names of all the past Buddhas, the names of all the future Buddhas, the names of all the other universes. He was great at that. . . . I introduced him to the texts that give the anecdotes of the dialogues and confrontations between T'ang Dynasty masters and disciples, and of course he was delighted by that. (Gifford and Lee 203)

Not only does "On Vulture Peak" draw readers into the excitement of these spirited conversations, it also manages to present readers, in a non-didactic way, with the essence of Mahāyāna philosophy and Zen spontaneity found in Rinzai *kōan* practice. Discussing *kōans* in "The Old Masters and the Old Women," Snyder says "They are not valued for the literary metaphor but for the challenge presented by the exercise of translating the metaphor into the life of the body, into insight and action. They help students bring symbols and abstractions back to earth" (*A Place in Space* 104-105). As such, we could say that reading "On Vulture Peak" as a sūtra composed of *kōan*-like sections "will not only integrate and stabilize, it will break open ways out of the accustomed habits of

perception and allow one to slip into different possibilities--some wise, some perhaps bizarre, but all of them equally real, and some holding promise of further new angles of insight" ("What Poetry Did in China" 92-93).

While in Kyoto, Snyder expressed an interest in an ancient, more performative form, one that helps shed further light on "On Vulture Peak." Snyder explained his exciting new discovery in the March 8th letter to Whalen containing "On Vulture Peak":

> I am fascinated by the kabuki & noh recitation technique--at kabuki one man half-sings half-chants the narrative (in a sort of poem form, alternating 7-5-7 syllable lines) with one of two samisen twangers & occasional wooden clackers & drum. At noh, a flute, a big drum & a little drum, sometimes clackers, are used. . . . I can imagine a very jolly creative sort of modern poetry-modern-dance music shot built around the reading of one long dramatic-type poem with musicians & possibly a dancer.[15]

Anthony Hunt, quoting the same letter above in *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning in Gary Snyder's* Mountains and Rivers Without End, very convincingly argues that Snyder is here talking about the underlying structure of what was to become his magnum opus nearly forty years later (38). Hunt also suggests that "the entire poem [*MRWE*] is seen as a sūtra" (59). While I do not disagree with Hunt's assessment, I would suggest that in "On Vulture Peak" we see the Buddhist seeds of what was to later become Snyder's "long dramatic-type poem."

Buddhist sūtras are didactic dialogues that are generally 1) between the Buddha and a disciple such as Subhuti[16] (as seen in *The Diamond Sūtra*)[17]; 2) a larger multi-person dialogue in which the Buddha discourses with an audience (often thousands of

disciples and laypersons); or, 3) in the case of *The Vimalakīrti Sūtra*[18] and Hui-neng's *Platform Sūtra*,[19] a discourse between a *bodhisattva* (Skt.) and other Buddhist disciples. The Vulture Peak of Snyder's sūtra is near the ancient city of Rajgiriha, and is where, as Snyder says in *Passage Through India*, "Buddha lived many years after his enlightenment" (54).[20] In fact, it was on Vulture Peak that many of the most influential Mahāyāna discourses were delivered, such as *The Śūraṅgama Sūtra, The Prajñā-Pāramitā Sūtra,* and *The Lotus Sūtra*. Sūtras generally open with a brief description of the setting, the occasion, a mention of those present, and occasionally a reference to the time of year. These brief introductions are conveyed through an unobtrusive first-person narrator--generally thought to be Ananda, a disciple of Buddha--before the often lengthy and complex setting forth of the core teachings of Buddhism (*dharma* Skt.). Once the brief introductions are completed, the *dharma* talks begin with a question posed by Buddha or one of the disciples. The teachings are often conveyed through the use of parables and allegories due to the fact that the teachings of the "Second Turning of the Wheel"--Mahāyāna Buddhism, as opposed to the earlier Hīnayāna Buddhism--are intended to be inclusive of all sentient beings, not just monks and nuns. Sūtras are generally divided into philosophically content-specific sections which are numbered or have headings.

Snyder's Vulture Peak sūtra is comprised of a non-numbered, twelve-line single-stanza introduction, followed by nine short numbered *kōan*-like stanzas running from three to nineteen lines. The sections of Snyder's poem work together, like the lyric sequence invented by Tu Fu--which David Hinton describes as "a series of lyrics not just grouped together, but closely interwoven to form a single long and complex poem" (ix)--

to create a closely-linked lyric sequence which brings together a diversity of cultural and philosophical ideas. The introductory stanza of "On Vulture Peak" is uncharacteristically written in rhyming iambic tetrameter couplets--uncharacteristic if we read the poem with an eye towards the Western tradition. End-rhyme and traditional meter are rarely used by Snyder, but when he does employ them, he does so very pointedly. In this case, the opening stanza--which acts as a précis of not only what is to come in the numbered sections, but also as a general introduction to Mahāyāna Buddhism--is modeled on classical Chinese *shih* form. This introductory stanza provides readers, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist alike, with a philosophic foothold for the *kōan*-like numbered stanzas which follow. According to Burton Watson, *shih*, which were originally written as song lyrics, often employ end rhyme, alliteration, parallelism, and onomatopoetic words which are descriptive of both sounds and actions. The end rhyme generally occurs in the even-numbered lines, but can also occur in the odd-numbered lines or as rhyming couplets, as in Snyder's example. Lines are usually end-stopped, creating a series of tight, single syntactic units, with the final couplet often ending the poem with run-on line. *Shih*, as found in *The Book of Odes* (*Shih ching*), date back to 1000 to 600 B.C. (*The Columbia Book of Chinese Poetry* 9-17).[21] Although not utilizing every rhetorical device available to the *shih* poet (one can say the same for most classical *shih*), Snyder's introductory stanza does employ end rhyme, alliteration, and onomatopoeia, as well as present us with single-line poetic units and a run-on final couplet.

The lyric nature of Snyder's rhyming introductory *shih* fits in with the setting of the poem itself--teacher and disciple seated around a beachside campfire discussing the *dharma*. One can imagine the chanting Snyder, guitar in hand, beating out the words:

All the boys are gathered there

Vulture Peak, in the thin air

Watching cycles pass around

From brain to stone and flesh to ground,

Where love and wisdom are the same

But split like light to make the scene,

Ten million camped in a one-room shack

Tracing all the causes back

To Nothing which is not the start

(Now we love, but here we part)

And not a one can answer why

To the simple garden in my eye.

As with traditional *shih*, Snyder's introductory stanza utilizes a good deal of **alliteration** (and *assonance*), adding to the sense of rhythmic orality. For example:

All **th***e* boys are gath*er*e*d* **th***e*r*e*

Vulture Peak, *i*n **th**e **th***i*n a*i*r

W*a*tching cycles p*a*ss *a*round

Fr*o*m brain t*o* st*o*ne and flesh t*o* gr*o*und,

The "cycles" (*samsāra*) are the stages of existence a sentient being traverses through birth, death, and rebirth until reaching *nirvana* (Skt.), a state achieved through the eradication of suffering (*dukha* Skt.; Pali) and desire. This unusual image might be understood as such: "From brain [consciousness, ego] to stone [death, inanimacy] and

flesh [rebirth] to ground [death/burial, and in this case, perhaps the ending of the cycle--*nirvana*--and a return for the last time into the earth]."

The poem continues with a line echoing Hui-neng's *Platform Sūtra*: "Where meditation and wisdom are the same." Meditation (*dhyana* Skt.) and wisdom (*prajñā* Skt.) are the same because the former "is the body of wisdom, and wisdom is the function of meditation" (10). Snyder's Hui-neng-like line reads "Where love and wisdom are the same." Love (*karunā* Skt., Pali) here means compassion, affection, sympathy; wisdom refers to the immediacy of intuitive knowing without the fetters of intellectualization. Love and wisdom are the primary virtues followed by disciples of Mahāyāna Buddhism, and are, as Snyder says in "Blue Mountains Constantly Walking," "the two components of realization" (*Practice of the Wild* 101). They "are the same" when the discerning mind sheds its dualistic naming/discriminating function. As Hui-neng says, "Know your mind and see your nature. For those who are aware, there is basically no separation" (12).

Snyder next employs some beat lingo in the following line: "But split like light to make the scene . . ." This initially looks like it modifies the preceding line about wisdom and love, but it in fact modifies the next line: "Ten million camped in a one-room shack," which is an allusion to the 2nd century C.E. *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*. Snyder was probably introduced to *Vimalakīrti* through either Kenneth Rexroth's poem "Hojoki," which appeared in Rexroth's *The Signature of All Things* in 1949,[22] or his "Empty Mirror,"[23] which was included in the 1952 *The Dragon & the Unicorn*, a collection that had a marked influence on Snyder's own poetics. Snyder alluded to Vimalakīrti in a letter to Whalen dated March 16, 1954: "My room is small for human beings, but like Vimalakīrti's ten-foot-square-hut, it will accommodate ten thousand Bodhisattvas."[24]

Whalen would himself write a "Vulture Peak" poem in part two of "Absolute Reality Co.: Two Views" in 1964, which begins "Although my room is very small / The ceiling is high."[25] Snyder's choice to allude to this sūtra is apt because he, like Vimalakīrti, "lives in the midst of worldly life yet treads the path of the bodhisattva." Both sūtras are "an illustration of the Buddhist way of life as a path to liberation and of the practical application of insight into emptiness of existence" ("Vimalakīrtinirdesha-sūtra" *Shambhala Dictionary* 243-244). Allusions, as mentioned above, are a traditional aspect of *shih*, as well as much of the modernist poetry Snyder was working against by delving into the transpacific cultural and poetic milieu to create a workable multicultural postwar poetics.

Those who hiply "split" to "make the scene" are the disciples of Buddha who were asked to descend Vulture Peak to check on the layman *bodhisattva* Vimalakīrti. When asked who would volunteer to fill Buddha's request, no one volunteered because they were all in awe of the layman's superior wisdom. Mañjuśhrī, the *Bodhisattva* of Wisdom, finally agreed and all of the other disciples followed him, somehow miraculously fitting into Vimalakirti's bedchamber. While in the "one-room shack," they discussed the primary tenant of Mahāyāna Buddhism, emptiness (*shūnyatā* Skt.), "tracing all the causes back / To nothing which is not the start." Nothing is not the start because there is no single originary point of departure nor any linear trajectory; there is no ego-self, for ego implies something separate and distinct from "the ten thousand things." As Snyder says in his 1990 *TriQuarterly* interview, "Buddhism holds that the universe and all in it are intrinsically in a state of complete wisdom, love and compassion; acting in natural response and mutual interdependence. The personal realization of this from-the-

beginning state cannot be had for and by one-'self'--because it is not fully realized unless one has given the self up; and away" (Martin 90). The Mahāyāna notion of emptiness, then, is a non-negative negation, it is an affirmation of our interrelatedness with all things. Our original nature, or buddha nature, is empty of all (mis)conceptions and attachments, empty of the ego-I, which, at its very core, connotes the delusion of individuality, thus projecting the seeming separateness of an inner "me" and "mind" ("mine") in contradistinction to an exterior Other. As Snyder said years later in "The Etiquette of Freedom," Vimalakīrti was "the legendary Buddhist layman . . . who taught that by directly intuiting our condition in the actually existing world we realize that we have had nothing from the beginning" (*The Practice of the Wild* 23).

Snyder once again employs onomatopoeia in the line "(Now we love, but here we part)," which can be read as the "here and now," thus the parentheses as framing device: right here, right now--this moment; and it is in the void (the blank space) that "we part" with the dualistic notions of "you" and "I,"--here parting as two distinct entities, thus making the true here and now one of infinite connectedness. Snyder's *shih* stanza comes to a close with: "And not a one can answer why / To the simple garden in my eye." As Burton Watson mentions above, the final couplet of a *shih* poem generally ends with a run-on line. The "simple garden in my eye" is perhaps an allusion to the wordless "Flower Sermon" given atop Vulture Peak that Japhy tells Ray about in *The Dharma Bums*:

> "The Buddha was about to start expounding a sūtra and twelve hundred and fifty bhikkus were waiting with their garments arranged and their feet crossed, and all the Buddha did was raise a flower. Everybody was

> perturbed. The Buddha didn't say nothin. Only Kasyapa smiled. That was how the Buddha selected Kasyapa. That's known as the flower sermon, boy." (132)

Snyder's *shih*, to use one of his own phrases, takes readers "out-of-time." As he says in "The Real Work":

> The value and function of poetry can be said in very few words. One side of it is *in-time*, the other is *out-of-time*. The in-time side of it is to tune us into *mother* nature and *human* nature so that we live *in time*, in our societies in a way and on a path in which all things can come to fruition equally, and together in harmony. A path of beauty. And the out-of-time function of poetry is to return us to our own true original nature at this instant forever (Snyder's italics, 73).

To take us "out-of-time" returns us to the here-and-now "instant forever," or "time-being," as Dogen calls it. As such, Snyder's sūtra (not unlike modernist ideologies), with its references to different time periods and cultures--ancient India, twelfth-century France, ancient Greek mythology, and the present memory of the recent past (1956), etc.--works to eradicate the notion of time as past, present, and future, as time flowing by while we, as ego-objects, stand still. Likewise, *The Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, which is also set in the past (written ca. 100 C.E., set during Buddha's lifetime ca. 485-405 BCE) makes, according to Burton Watson, "no pretense at conforming to historical reality, or even conventional concepts of time and space" (8), traits Snyder had already explored in *Myths & Texts* with his unique knowledge of mythological archetypes and cross-cultural histories. In a talk titled "The Time-Being," Dogen says that "The way-seeking mind

arises in this moment. A way-seeking moment arises in this mind. It is the same with practice and with attaining the way. Thus the self setting itself out in array sees itself. . . . [T]he time-being is all there is. . . . Each moment is all being, is the entire world" (77).

Whereas the *shih* introduction sets the philosophical groundwork, Part I of "On Vulture Peak" introduces the "present" setting and players--though this present was recalled almost two years later by Snyder in Kyoto. One of the great attributes of Zen is that its teaching and practice are not thought of as separate and distinct from people's daily lives. As such, Part I opens with an everyday event, one familiar to readers of *The Dharma Bums*:[26]

> J.K. & me was squatting naked and sandy
> At McClure Beach steaming mussels, eating,
> Tossing the shells over our shoulders,
> A pair of drunk Siwash starting a shellmound.
> Neuri sleeping off a hangover face down
> At the foot of a cliff; sea lions off shore

As is the case with most sūtras, the initial situation is described by a first-person narrator (the poet) who, after his appearance in the first line, drops from the scene--at least as an ego-present "I," or in this case, "me." In *Scripture*, on the other hand, Kerouac uses "I" forty-two times. Although Snyder has left rhyme and meter behind after the introductory stanza, he continues to employ traditional alliteration through the repeated "s" sounds found in Part I--"squatting," "sandy," "steaming," "mussels," etc.--which mimic the sounds of the waves rolling on and off of McClure Beach. The setting of Part I is reminiscent of "Logging 12" in *Myths & Texts*, with the poet "On the wooded coast,

eating oysters / Looking off toward China and Japan" (14). The stanza is rather casual, with it's designation of "J.K" rather than spelling out Kerouac's name as Snyder had done in his earlier "Migration of Birds." Also informal is the use of "&" in place of "and," the use of the objective case pronoun "me" rather than the more formal nominative "I," and "was" rather than "were." Three lines later he also uses the adjective "drunk" rather than the more proper "drunken." "Siwash" is also an interesting word choice for Snyder because in Chinook jargon it means "savage," a derogatory term employed by French traders in the Pacific Northwest to designate/denigrate Native Americans.[27] The final two lines of this stanza are rather artfully rendered: "Neuri sleeping *off* a *hangover* face *down* / At the *foot* of a *cliff*; sea lions *off* shore"--producing a sense of suspension or hanging, as does the placement of the semicolon, dangling just off the cliff, ending without a period (my italics). Neuri[28] (or Psyche, as she appears in *The Dharma Bums*[29]) was Marilyn Arnold, a young woman whom Snyder was attracted to. Arnold is, in fact, the "Hindu Deva-girl / Light legs dancing in the waves" whose vision "Kept [the poet] high for weeks" in "For a Far-Out Friend" (*R&CMP* 13-14). With the setting and players laid out in Part I, the *dharma* discourse proper is set to begin.

Part II opens with Snyder as teacher, Kerouac as disciple. "Are bums and drunks truly Angels? / Hairy Immortals drinking poorboys in doorways?" Kerouac presumably asks in the first two lines of this stanza, calling to mind that *The Dharma Bums* is dedicated to seventh-century Chinese poet-recluse Han-shan who was known for his carefree wandering lifestyle, as well as acting as a reminder of Kerouac's reliance on alcohol, one of the main traits distinguishing these "two strange dissimilar monks" in *The Dharma Bums* (133). As a disappointed Japhy asks, "How do you expect to become a

good bhikku or even a Bodhisattva Mahasattva always getting drunk like that?" (144). Rather than castigate Kerouac in "On Vulture Peak," Snyder offers him numerous *kōan*-like lessons on desire and craving (*trishnā* Skt.) in the form of parables like fingers pointing at the moon. In a letter to Joanne Kyger dated April 14, 1959, Snyder says that "Kōan is no secret, the answer to it is the secret. The process of working it out is what teaches. It takes time & is very discouraging at times. The first kōan is just 'opening the gate' & further kōans explore more & more new ground."[30] In the first of these lessons, a seemingly out-of-place and out-of-time one-line parable of desire and subsequent suffering in the form of lust and castration--"Poor Abelard, thou'rt clipped!"[31]--calls to mind a similar line from *Myths & Texts*: "'Herrick thou art too coorse to love'" ("Burning 12" *M&T* 47). Although this twelfth-century reference may seem out of place, it is in fact a good example of the way in which *kōans* are designed to act as a medium through which understanding can be achieved intuitively rather than intellectually. *Kōans*, often transmitted to students through short narratives or poems, intentionally seem illogical, ambiguous, and paradoxical; they are meant to provide insight to the student not through logical analysis, but rather embody in their seeming paradox key elements of Zen teachings. For example, in "Case 12" ("Tozan's 'Masagin'") of *The Blue Cliff Records*,[32] a monk asked Tozan: "What is Buddha?" Tozan replied, "Three pounds of Flax!" (Sekida 179). Likewise, Snyder's seemingly nonsensical response to Kerouac's question about drunks leaves something for further study while simultaneously embodying unpremeditated Zen spontaneity.

Immediately following the Abelard *kōan* is another "lesson," this time a description of the initial sensations one undergoes when taking peyote, a description reminiscent of "Burning 5" in which the poet and a friend smoke jimson weed:

Now both
Being persons--alive
We sit here
The wind
Whirls
"Don't kill it man,
The roach is the best part"
still an incessant chatter
On Vulture Peak (40-41)

Here, as in the following lines from "On Vulture Peak," the poet engages in the use of drugs in an attempt to gain some sort of transcendental wisdom. Likewise, the procedure in both instances has its downsides: in the former, the "incessant chatter" of monkey mind still remains even though the poet is thinking about silence. In the instance below, the side effects sound most unpleasant:

the vomit
& prickles of a gritty desert drug
sweat and fire
Berry lather & lapping dogs--

As Snyder told Ginsberg in a June 3, 1956 letter from Kyoto, "all the interior landscapes that peyote and junk and wine and tea are but chinks in the doors to [enlightenment]" (9).

Snyder knew that true transcendental experiences came from within and at the very least could only be hinted at through the use of drugs. And as Whalen suggested to his friend, "Peyotl is another finger pointing someplace."[33]

Part II of "On Vulture Peak" continues with another delusion, that of birth and death: "All babies / Are unborn," a concept earlier touched on in "Burning 14": "A skin-bound bundle of clutchings / unborn and with no place to go" (49). According to *The Lankāvatāra Sūtra,*[34] "[b]y emptiness of self-nature is meant that all things in their self-nature are un-born; therefore, it is said that things are empty of nature" (Goddard 295). In other words, when we view things with right knowledge, we recognize that they have no self-nature, no individuality, thus they are un-born in the sense that they are not born of themselves or out of something other. In the final three lines of this stanza, Snyder exposes another delusion: the mind that sees and grasps is merely a manifestation of its own ego-activity.

> . . . tracking the moon through
> Flying fenceposts a carload of groceries, home--
> What home, pull in park at, and be known?

The moon, a traditional Buddhist symbol of enlightenment, is not something that can be chased after; "[t]racking" it "through / Flying fenceposts" is like watching it reflected on water: it appears to be in constant movement, broken up, wavy, which is analogous to "normal" consciousness. As Chinese Zen master Huang-po[35] says of the sunlight, "Follow it and, behold, it escapes you; run from it and it follows close. You can neither possess it nor have done with it" (107). Herein lies Snyder's answer to Kerouac's opening question, as found in the final line of the stanza--a line set off by the pervious one with a

dash, as if saying wait a minute: "What home . . . and be known?" The very notions of "home" and being "known" are themselves delusionary concepts like a self as separate from the moon. The "realm of quietude," to quote *The Lankāvatāra Sūtra,* only exists when we recognize that images are illusions that we ourselves invest with our own self-existence, thus separating ourselves from the inextricable reality of interconnectedness (Goddard 298). Here too, Snyder, rather than directly answering Kerouac's questions, presents him with examples of causality. In the cases presented thus far--Abelard, the peyote experience, the delusion of individuality (birth and separateness)--the prior conditions of desire cause suffering in much the same way Kerouac's insatiable appetite for alcohol and salvation from the pangs of *samsāra* caused his suffering, his turning to Buddhism for relief, and his subsequent return to Catholicism after only a few years.

Part III continues the astrological trope which ends the previous section, drawing our attention away from the moon to "the little cloud" which opens this stanza. The "little cloud," a "nebula seen slantwise by the naked eye," is the Andromeda Galaxy, the only galaxy that can be seen from earth without the aid of a telescope. Once again, Snyder provides a "nebulous" *kōan*-like lesson which needs to be worked through, rather than one which is presented as self-evident. On one hand, the Andromeda Galaxy, like the moon, is directly viewable by the naked eye; it needs no intermediary in much the same that we need no intermediary to reach enlightenment--it is already there, all we have to do is recognize it. We can also read the Andromeda myth itself in connection to the three lessons of the previous stanza; that is, by considering what Cassiopeia's (Andromeda's mother) vanity itself tells us.[36] The poem continues with a somewhat perplexing line: "The curse of man's humanity to man." Etymologically, Andromeda can be broken down

as follows: *andros* ("man") and *medomai* ("to think, to be mindful of"). Thus to "be mindful of man" is "The curse of man's humanity to man." In other words, "man's humanity to man" is what is at issue: our "humanity" is the very thing that dualistically sets us apart from the rest of the world around us. To shed this ego designation (human) is indeed what Buddhism calls for.

Attempting to assign who says what to whom throughout "On Vulture Peak" would, if not an exercise in futility, at least not lead to a much more thorough understanding of the content of the poem. Keeping Snyder's description of his "playful and delightful" conversations with Kerouac in mind, however, it would be interesting to see how one of these Rinzai-like "interchanges" would play out in a narrative form similar to those found in *The Blue Cliff Records* or Seung Sahn's *The Whole World Is A Single Flower*. The *sanzen* (Jap.) "interview" might look something like this: One night "two strange dissimilar monks" were eating mussels by a campfire on the beach. Dharma Bum Kerouac, wanting to throw his companion off of his feet, looked to the sky and said, "'the little cloud.'" Dharma Master Snyder, also seeing the Andromeda Galaxy, responded with "a corrective and his understanding": "A nebula seen slantwise by the naked eye." Kerouac, hitting his fist on the sand, shouted "The curse of man's humanity to man. 'My hair / is in a pony-tail, I run!'" Unhappy with this response, Master Snyder said, "Each day a lunchpail and a shirtful of sawdust. / Old women dry pods fry corn in the cinders." Taken aback, Kerouac pointed to the beachside cliff, saying "The head is a hawk on a boulder." Master Snyder, trying to bring his student back to his original recognition, threw three mussel shells at his companion, saying "The boulder a nest of coiled snakes."[37] Fun aside, the final two end-stopped lines are particularly interesting for their

kōan-like allusiveness. A Zen Master (*rōshi* Jap.) might ask, for example, the following types of questions to his or her student during an interview (*sanzen*): The "hawk on a boulder" comes from where? Where is the boulder? Is that nature or mind? If you have no mind, where do the "coiled snakes" come from? Kerouac said, "The head is a hawk on a boulder"; Snyder said, "The boulder a nest of coiled snakes." Which is correct? Is this a lesson in impermanence?

In the next stanza we return more obviously to some of the Mahāyāna concepts presented in the poem's introduction. Part IV reads:

Nearer than breathing
Closer than skin
smack in the earballs
nosehalls, brainpans, tongueclucks
eyeholes, prickbones,
answer! answer! why!
"with lowered lids
i have entered
nibbana"

Meditation (*dhyana*) brings us "Nearer than breathing / Closer than skin" because the ego "I," whom we normally think of as the one *doing* the breathing, falls away, as does the notion of one's skin as a barrier between inside and outside (I/other). Meditation brings us closer to these things in the sense that the "I" dissipates and becomes one with the body and mind. Part of the cessation of clinging to arbitrary conceptions, according to *The Diamond Sūtra*, is excluding "all thoughts connected with the phenomena of sight, sound,

taste, smell, touch, and all discriminations based upon them. . . ." (Goddard 90). These phenomena, known as the Six Senses in Zen meditation--eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, mind--are here still connected with arbitrary conceptions in that they are being played with associationally: "earballs / nosehalls, brainpans, tongueclucks / eyeholes, prickbones." It is not a stretch here to assign these words to Kerouac, as some of his most captivating prose and poetry combines words and sensory associations. This linguistic play in relation to meditation is very telling if we indeed read these as Kerouac's words rather than Snyder's. Kerouac seems here to be contemplating the senses as *things* in such a way that attaches meaning (sounds and shapes) to them, building an extra layer onto his thoughts rather than simply letting them rise and fall in the mindful practice of unfettered meditation-mind. In other words, he is projecting associations onto what should be passing thoughts, separating his senses from his mind by listing them as individual things and thus separate from one another and from his mind. According to Hui-neng, "When you go from one thought to another, don't become attached to any dharma. Once one thought becomes attached, every thought becomes attached, which is what we call 'bondage.' But when you go from one thought to another without becoming attached to any dharma, there's no bondage. That is why 'no attachment' is our foundation" (*The Platform Sūtra* 12). In the dualistic world of causality, one thing (thought) leads to another ad infinitum, though when we accept our non-dualist buddha nature as our true nature--that is, undifferentiated and original--then we recognize that there is no distance between our minds, bodies, and what is "real," for they are one and the same.

The next line--"answer! answer! why!"--can be approached in two ways. If we indeed read the previous lines as Kerouac's, we can almost feel his impatience for

immediate enlightenment (*satori* Jap.) that he claims to have attained numerous times throughout his Buddhist writings. From the standpoint of Zen, however, these directives are reminiscent of Rinzai interviews in which students are presented with *kōans* by their *rōshis*. In a letter to Whalen written two months after sending him "On Vulture Peak," Snyder discusses his experience of *sanzen*:

> Sanzen is terrifying, like going before a firing squad once a day & being told SPEAK & I just sit there 'speechless & intelligent & shaking with shame'----because no logic chopping or cleverness or suchlike will do & so you get sent back to dig & dig for something real that can be used--like the one word before the guillotine falls & all your ingenuity fails you.[38]

And as Buddha tells Ananda in *The Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, "you must learn to answer questions spontaneously with no recourse to discriminating thinking" (Goddard 112). The quote ending part IV--"'with lowered lids / i have entered / nibbana"'--sounds like a worse-for-wear beachside tokay-drinking Kerouac, or like Snyder smoking jimson weed: "Standing / great limp mouth / hanging loose in air / quivers, turns in upon itself" ("Burning 5" *M&T* 41); however, "nibbana" is actually Pali for *nirvana*.

An odd bit of apparent Arab folk wisdom opens Part V: "a camel lets her milk down / when tickled in the snatch," followed immediately by one of the most challenging passages of "On Vulture Peak":

> philosophers are horrified
> because there is no cause
> because everything exists
> because the world is real and so are they

> and so is nothing is, not nothing save us--

The "philosophers"--Theravāda Buddhists, Buddhist "skolars,"[39] and surely Western philosophers as well--are "horrified" that they and "the world [are] real," thus "nothing is." While this line may sound contradictory, it is actually an affirmation of the notion of emptiness mentioned earlier. "[N]othing" or no-thing (emptiness / *shūnyatā*) connotes a mind unfettered by attachments (conceptions, distinctions, delusions)--the "meaningless / Abstractions of the educated mind" ("Logging 5" *M&T* 7); no-thing is the clean mirror-mind simultaneously reflecting and emitting reality. Snyder, in a letter to Kyger, explains that

> Rinzai says, the trouble with you monks is you lack faith in yourselves, in your own minds--exactly what it takes, in zazen for example, to have such complete faith in the natural wisdom of the mind to literally discard reliance on anything you've read or want to read, or whatever people think of you or say to you, or any idea of how others like or dislike you, or any notion of what can be learned of wisdom through "experience"--or even the wash of personal sentiments, recollections & desires, & just search into the mind you have before it became broken up into millions of bits of images & ideas. Huang po[40] says "men are afraid to forget their own minds, afraid of falling into the void. But this void is the root of the mind & all the universes."[41]

Likewise, *The Lankāvatāra Sūtra* says that "Relative-knowledge," which "belongs to the mind-world of the philosophers," is based on relations, appearances, considerations, analyzing, and logic, whereas "Perfect-knowledge" (*Prajñā-pāramitā* Skt.) is the

recognition that all things are manifestations of the discriminating mind; it is the recognition that all things are egoless and unborn in their original buddha-nature. The philosophers, according to Buddha, rely on logic and discrimination, which are based on dualisms and causation, whereas perfect-knowledge no longer discriminates between being and non-being, birth and death (Goddard 301). If, in the dualistic world of causality, we come to recognize our non-dualist buddha nature as our true nature, we can acknowledge that there is no distance between our minds, bodies, and what is real, for they are one and the same. The lines quoted above from "On Vulture Peak," aligned along the left-hand margin as if to set them off, are the heart of Mahāyāna philosophy. As Avalokitesvara, one of Kerouac's favorite *bodhisattvas* puts it in *The Heart Sūtra*, "Form is emptiness, emptiness is not different from form, neither is form different from emptiness, indeed, emptiness is form" (Goddard 85).

Part V of "On Vulture Peak" continues with very Kerouac-sounding phrasing:

bony jungle spring

Shakya in the boondocks.

a broken start,

sprout,

is REALLY gone

Indeed, in response to reading "On Vulture Peak," Whalen wrote Snyder saying that "Kwack [Kerouac] could not have written 'bony jungle spring / Sakya (sic) in the boondocks', but the rhyming is his, I agree."[42] These lines, some of the most obscure in the poem, describe Siddhartha Gautama's enlightenment. Siddhartha, himself emaciated ("bony") after practicing several years of fruitless asceticism, set off on his own to seek

enlightenment. He chose a spot outside of the town of Bodhimanda (present day Bodh-gaya) to contemplate the causes of suffering. Chinese pilgrim-monk Fa-Hien (Chin., Fa-Xian) (ca. 337-ca. 422) describes the city as desolate and empty ("the boondocks"), though "[a]ll around was forest" ("jungle spring") where Siddhartha sat nearby under the Bodhi-tree along the banks of the Falgu River (87).[43] "Shakya," the clan name from which Siddhartha gained the title Shakyamuni ("Sage of the Shakya clan"), sat for forty-nine days, finally achieving enlightenment at the age of thirty-five. The "broken start," a line itself nipped in the bud, refers to the fact that after becoming enlightened, Buddha continued meditating under the Bodhi-tree because he was unsure of how to transmit his new-found enlightenment to others. He soon encountered the five disciples who earlier abandoned him when he gave up asceticism for concentrated meditation (*samādhi* Skt.). Immediately recognizing that he had attained liberation, they asked Buddha for instruction, thus the "sprout" or beginning of the Buddha's teachings (*Buddha-dharma* Skt.) ("Sidhartha Gautama" *SDBZ* 204-205). The teachings are "REALLY gone," a phrase Whalen also uses for the Sanskrit word "Paragate" in "Sourdough Mountain Lookout,"[44] and which Goddard translates as "to that other shore" in *The Heart Sūtra*[45] as seen below (86). "REALLY gone"; that is, gone to the realm of nondualism. The stanza concludes with the excited voice of Kerouac:

wow, he

always been standin there

sweatin' and explainin'?

Has Buddha been preaching the *dharma* all along, Kerouac asks, almost Christianizing him into the figures of the African American street-side proselytizers Ray and Japhy

encounter earlier in *The Dharma Bums*: "A big fat woman like Ma Rainey was standing there with her legs outspread howling out a tremendous sermon in a booming voice that kept breaking from speech to blues-singing music . . ." (86).

The opening of Part VI also contains some key Mahāyāna philosophy:

gone where.

Nowhere, where he came from

thus that thing

that thus thing

where were you born from

born from, born from--

Like the cycle of existence itself (*samsāra*), this stanza opens in mid-sentence, positing a question mark-less question: "gone where[?]" Here Snyder is playing rhythmically with the mantra that concludes *The Heart Sūtra*, one of the most well-known and oft-repeated Buddhist mantras: "Gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate, bodhi, svaha." Goddard translates it as "Gone, gone, gone to that other shore; safely passed to that other shore, O Prajñā-pāramitā! So may it be" (86). Where are you going? and where are you from? are common questions posed in Zen texts. For example, in Chapter Five of *The Transmission of the Lamp*, a collection of more than one thousand Chinese *kōans* compiled in 1004 by Tao-yuan, Hui-neng asks Nanyue "Where from?" The latter answers, "From Mt. Song." Hui-neng questions further: "What is it that thus comes?" Nanyue responds, "Speaking about it won't hit the mark" (qtd. in Glossary *Moon in a Dewdrop* 350). Indeed, to say where one is from or where one is going implies both a point of departure and a point of arrival; for one on the path these two points are irrelevant. Thus Snyder's answer:

"Nowhere, where he came from." "[T]hus that thing" means "thusness" or "suchness" (*tathatā* Skt.), and in Mahāyāna Buddhism indicates the true nature of things as they exist before humans subjectify them. *Tathatā* is formless, indefinable; it is nonphenomenal. In describing the *Tathagata* (one of the ten names Buddha used to describe himself), Vimalakīrti refers to the "Thus Come One as not existing from past times, not departing in the future, nor abiding here at present" (*The Vimalakīrti Sūtra* 130). Thus Snyder's question of "gone where" is a moot point, and perhaps why Snyder asks it here without a capital "G" and with no question mark. Another important Zen question Snyder raises is "where were you born from [?]" Not "where were you born?" (as in what part of the country), but rather "born from." This is indeed a perplexing question. Kerouac would say the "golden eternity," for "If we were not all the golden eternity we / wouldnt be here" (*Scripture* 26). Similarly, Zen masters often ask their students: "Before your father and mother were born, what is your true self?" "Is" is the key. One's true self is not contingent upon notions of conception, place, time, lineage--all connoting ego, individuality, birth. "What is your true self?" It *is*. In other words, it is indefinable; it is *tathatā*. To attempt to define the self necessitates conceptualizations within the world of duality, which in turn separates the self from everything around it. Snyder does not just pose his question--"Where were you born from," he lets it resound in the void: "born from, born from--", as if echoing in one of the caves along the beach. As Snyder told Joanne Kyger in a letter from Kyoto, "The Zen eye is looking at things before they are born, before there is man and women and the shapes of desire; the ground everything grows from neither 'is' nor 'is not' and it rejects nothing."[46]

The use of the dash above leaves the question open, allowing it to morph seamlessly into a more place/culture-specific question, one related to a Native American theme:

Did you fall fall fall

fall

from the salmonberry bough?

Are you the reborn soul

of a bitter cheated chief?

--I came out my mammy

Slick & yapping like a seal

My uncle washed me in the brine

I was a hero & a hunter[47] in my time

A badger gave me visions

A whale made me pure

I sold my wife & children

& jumped into a mirror

The salmonberry bush, native to the North American west coast from California to Alaska, produces a raspberry-like fruit traditionally eaten by many First Nations peoples with salmon roe, or half-dried salmon. The "bitter cheated chief" at first glance might be read as Chief Seattle (1786-1866), leader of the Suquamish and Duwamish tribes in what is now Washington State. However, read in conjunction with the first-person tale set off by a line break--and a good deal of white space--and the reference to the "salmonberry bough," the chief described here is more reminiscent of the one found in "The Story of

Salmon" in Lewis Spence's *The Myths of the North American Indians* (1914). In this Sioux tale, as with its follow-up, "Salmon's Magic Bath," we learn of a chief who, reluctant to part with his daughter, holds a contest for her hand. In short, Salmon wins the contest and thus the chief's daughter. Salmon and his new bride leave, chased by the chief's tribe. Salmon is killed by Coyote and Badger with an arrow. Upon hearing of her nephew's death, Crow searches for Salmon's remains. All she finds is a single salmon egg which she buries and shortly thereafter appears Salmon's son. His aunt tells him to bathe in a mountain pool so he will be able to see spirits. He leaves to hunt down his father's killers and eventually takes a wife (Spence 282-285). As with the introductory *shih* that opens "On Vulture Peak," this tale is presented as an oral rather than written transmission, utilizing meter and end rhyme: "brine"/"time," "visions"/"children," "pure"/"mirror." Here too, Snyder uses the personal pronoun "I," as in Parts III ("My hair is in a pony-tail, I run!") and IV ("with lowered lids / i have entered / nibbana") as the voice of another, incorporating, if you will, oral found objects, adding to the complexity of this cross-cultural and multi-vocal collage.

Part VII opens with a William Carlos Williamsesque three-stepped line:

Hot wispy ghosts blown

down the halls between births,

hobo-jungles of the void--

Snyder's use of assonance and onomatopoeia effectively echoes the moans of the ghosts as they are triadically blown though the hollow halls of the void. The "wispy ghosts" in the "hobo-jungles of the void--" (recalling Kerouac's original question about "bums and drunks"), exist in the "Six Realms" mentioned two lines later. Here we have "hobo-

jungles," whereas in Part V (visually opposite on the preceding page) is the "bony jungle spring." The reader is next presented with the ubiquitous Zen question, though this time in slightly altered form(s): "--Where did we meet last? where / Were you born?", resonating the echo from the previous stanza ("where were you born from / born from, born from--") and looking ahead to the following one ("Was it born?"). This time the questions are asked not by Zen masters, but by "Wobblies of the Six / Realms" who are "--huddling by some campfire / in the stars." These Wobblies (Industrial Workers of the World) not only call to mind those in "shanties / At Hooverville, Sullivan's Gulch" who were "'shot and beat up / For wanting a good bed, good pay, / decent food, in the woods--'" ("Logging 7" *M&T* 9), but also those earlier fellow travelers, Han-shan and Shih-te, who "became Immortals and [who] you sometimes run onto . . . today in the skidrows, orchards, hobo jungles, and logging camps of America" (*R&CMP* 35).

The "Six Realms" are the realms of existence which make up *Bhava-chakra* (Skt.), or "the wheel of life." The realms are divided into three upper (fortunate) and three lower (unfortunate) states. The former are made up of celestial beings, evil spirits, and human beings; the latter consists of hell-beings, hungry ghosts, and animals. The six realms are not thought of as divided between the worldly and heavenly, but rather are considered concrete states of existence determined by one's *karma*.[48] While it might seem logical to assign the "wispy ghosts" (Wobblies) to the realm of the hungry ghosts, Snyder seems to be telling us that they are actually celestial beings, or as he describes Han-shan and Shih-te, "Immortals." They are "huddling by some campfire," as Wobblies were wont to do, but they are doing it "in the stars," not *under* them, returning to the celestial trope explored earlier in the poem--the moon and the Andromeda Galaxy. The stanza closes

with a somewhat confusing image: The Wobblies, "in the stars," are "Resting & muttering before a birth / On Mars[.]" They are not waiting for just any birth; they are waiting for their own rebirths into higher realms. Though celestial beings, they still exist in the Realm of Desire (*kamaloka* Skt.) and are, like the others, subject to the wheel of life because they have not yet overcome desire. Their potential place of birth is certainly curious. Perhaps "a birth / On Mars" is an allusion to the Roman god of War, whom, like Perseus, another fighter (recall the Andromeda myth in Part III), would be adequate symbols for the downtrodden Wobblies to look up to. Furthermore, before becoming associated with war, Mars was the god of fertility, spring, and rebirth. The campfire and birth images call to mind the fire/renewal trope Snyder uses in "Logging 3" with the Lodgepole Pine cones that "shed their seeds / on the bared ground and a new growth springs up" (*M&T* 4).

Part VIII returns the reader to some of the more intense Mahāyāna doctrine like that found in Parts IV-VI, drawing once again on *The Lankāvatāra Sūtra* and Rinzai *kōan* interviews. This stanza, dealing exclusively with the concept of mind, opens with a well-known *kōan* question: "What can be said about a Rabbit / Solitary and without context / Set before the mind. Was it born? / Has it horns?" As in *kōan* interviews, Snyder lays this conundrum out "without context . . . before the mind" to ellicit an unmediated, immediate response devoid of arbitrary phenomological conceptions ("answer! answer! why!"). As Buddha says to Ananda in *The Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, the unenlightened mind deludes itself with transient thoughts which are no more real than "hair on a tortoise, or like horns on a rabbit" (Goddard 183). Furthermore, according to *The Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, "If things are not born of being and non-being, but are simply manifestations of mind itself, they have

no reality, no self-nature:--they are like the horns of a hare, a horse, a donkey, a camel. But the ignorant and the simple-minded, who are given over to their false and erroneous imaginings, discriminate things where they are not" (Goddard 296). While these fantastical animal images are often used in Mahāyāna Buddhism to distinguish between the deluded and awakened mind--the images falling on the side of delusion like birth and death--an alternative reading of the rabbit/horns question can also be posited here. The Zen Circle, a teaching device described by Korean Zen Master Seung Sahn in *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha*, consists of five progressive points representing the stages leading up to and beyond enlightenment. In short, the Zen Circle moves counterclockwise from "attachment to thinking" to "attachment to emptiness" to "attachment to freedom" to "no-attachment thinking." The final stage ends where the first began (thus five stages), with "I," though now the original "Small I" of the ego has become the "Big I" of the *bodhisattvas*. That is, enlightenment has been attained and left behind without attachment (recall the difference between Theravāda and Mahāyāna) so the "Big I," existing in "infinite time, infinite space," works for the benefit of all beings. It is the fourth stage which interests us here, for it represents "the area of magic and miracles. Here, there is complete freedom, with no hindrance in space or time. This is called live thinking" (5-7). Reaching this stage, Master Seung Sahn later explains, "When you are hanging by your hands from a mountain ledge and can let go, nothing thinking of life or death, then you will have true freedom. You can see the wooden dog eating steel and shitting fire. You make friends with the hairy-shelled turtle and the rabbit with horns" (103). At this stage, then, one relinquishes their mind-hold not only on thinking (as in the previous stage), but also not-thinking.

The stanza continues to explore this concept with a line reminiscent of the "1st Chorus" of Kerouac's "Desolation Blues": "we walk around clung / To earth / Like beetles with big brains / Ignorant of where we are now" (*Book of Blues* 117). Snyder says it like this: "Dream people walking around / In dream town." Indeed, we are "Dream people" "[i]gnorant of where we are now," according to Mahāyāna philosophy, because all phenomena is empty. The next three lines take this dream notion back to the city of the Gandharvas, which Snyder earlier used almost verbatim from "Burning 12":

> --the city of the Gandharvas--
>
> not a real city, only the
>
> memory of a city-- (*M&T* 47).

This "unreal city," perhaps a nod to T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*,[49] is a metaphorical city used to discuss the discriminating mind, as Buddha tells Mahamati in *The Lankāvatāra Sūtra*:

> It is like the city of the Gandharvas which the unwitting take to be a real city though it is not so in fact. The city appears as in a vision owing to their attachment to the memory of a city preserved in the mind as a seed; the city can thus be said to be both existent and non-existent. In the same way, clinging to the memory of erroneous speculations and doctrines accumulated since beginningless time, they hold fast to such ideas as oneness and otherness, being and non-being, and their thoughts are not at all clear as to what after all is only seen of the mind. (Goddard 281-282)

In this imaginary city there are no questions of birth and death because there is no question about the city's reality, as in turn there is no question of our birth and death in

Mahāyāna philosophy. The city of the Gandharvas is thus a parable for emptiness and delusion.

The final three lines of the stanza, in the form of a quotation--which almost sounds like it comes from Yeats or Shakespeare--is also a paraphrase from *The Lankāvatāra Sūtra*:

> "The mind dances like the dancer
> The intellect's the jester
> The senses seem to think the world's a stage--"

The paraphrase is conceptually off, though, and one is left wondering why Snyder includes it in quotation marks. One answer might be that Snyder was quoting from memory. Another answer, though perhaps somewhat farfetched, might be that these lines are said by Kerouac, thus the quotes. If this is the case, perhaps Snyder is commenting on Kerouac's level of understanding of what he so eagerly espoused to his friends on the West Coast. To paraphrase Kenneth Rexroth: we're all Buddhists in San Francisco, Jack (Hamalian 243).[50] In explaining the "Mind System" to his disciple Mahamati, Buddha says, "The discriminating-mind is a dancer and a magician with the objective world as his stage. Intuitive-mind is the wise jester who travels with the magician and reflects upon his emptiness and transiency. Universal Mind keeps the record and knows what must be and what may be" (307). As laid out by Buddha, the intellect ("discriminating mind") is the dancer--think monkey mind--whereas Snyder's quote assigns that role to the "jester."

Snyder's Mahāyāna sūtra ends as it began, employing rhyme, meter, alliteration, and assonance, closing the poetic lesson with the noble silence of the tomb:

> For forty years the Buddha begged his bread

And all those years said nothing, so he said,

& Vulture Peak is silent as a tomb.

It is said that Buddha claimed not to have preached a single word in the forty-nine years of his enlightened life, for, as Engo says in his introduction to "Case 90" of *The Blue Cliff Records* ("Chimon and the Essence of Prajñā"), "not one phrase has been handed down, even by the thousand holy ones" (377). Even the Buddhas and patriarchs find it difficult to put the absolute in words. For example, towards the end of *The Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, the aged host asks his guests how one enters into the "gate of nondualism" (104). Mañjuśhrī, the last of the thirty-two bodhisattvas to answer, replies, '"To my way of thinking, all dharmas are without words, without explanations, without purport, without cognition, removed from all questions and answers. In this way one may enter the gate of nondualism." Mañjuśhrī then turns the question back to Vimalakīrti, who "remained silent and did not speak a word" (110). Absolute truth, then, cannot be put into words, thus the poem's abrupt ending, "silent as a tomb." The silence of truth can only be found in absolute *samādhi* (meditation) where there is no-thing, not even the *dharma*; where subject and object become one.

The importance of "On Vulture Peak" for this reader lies precisely in the reason it has been overlooked by critics and somewhat discounted by Snyder himself as just a way "of passing time." Taking Snyder's suggestion to Whalen that the poem is not a final statement, I would argue that the poem, in its "unfinished" state, represents Snyder at his most Zen (spontaneous). The *kōan*-like lessons of "On Vulture Peak" are subtle, caring messages rather than direct instructions, for in Zen, the message can only be transmitted through direct experience and understanding, not through words alone. Snyder's poem,

like sūtras and *kōans*, is purposefully ambiguous, paradoxical, and, for the uninitiated reader, seemingly illogical. While one could say the same for Kerouac's *Scripture*, the two poems differ in that Snyder's more fully and successfully embraces Buddhist ideology in that each successive stanza leaves no conceptual traces, moving from one thought to the next unencumbered, while at the same time leaving ideas for deeper consideration like wispy clouds floating past the moon. As Snyder says, "A poem, like a life, is a brief presentation, a uniqueness in oneness, a complete expression, and a gift. ("A Single Breath" 115). A gift indeed, for "the Zen Master's presence is to help one keep attention undivided, to always look one step farther along, to simplify the mind: like a blade which sharpens to nothing" ("Japan First Time Around" 34). "On Vulture Peak," then, like the blade of wisdom, is "REALLY gone."

Chapter Three
"No Permanent Home": Philip Whalen's "The Slop Barrel: Slices of the Paideuma for All Sentient Beings"

Skhandas my ass!
  --it's not
Even that
        (Jack Kerouac 1956)[1]

Alan Watts, in his oft-quoted 1958 *Chicago Review* essay "Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen," fails to mention Philip Whalen--whose "Sourdough Mountain Lookout" appeared in truncated form in the same issue--even though he takes Gary Snyder, Jack Kerouac, and Allen Ginsberg to task. In fact, towards the beginning of his essay, Watts makes a statement about Confucianism and Taoism that sounds similar to the dynamics one finds at play in Whalen's poetry. The ancient Chinese practitioners possessed, according to Watts, "a universal vision of life as the Tao or way of nature in which the good and evil, the creative and the destructive, the wise and the foolish are the inseparable polarities of existence" (4). The "Beat Zen" of Kerouac, Snyder, and Ginsberg--in contradistinction to the "clearly defined hierarchy" and "rigid discipline" of "square Zen"--"is always a shade too self-conscious, too subjective, and too strident to have the flavor of Zen"(8-9).[2] One could certainly argue that Whalen's poetry is "too self-conscious" and "too subjective," though Whalen's self-consciousness is at once aware of its delusionary nature, while at the same time working through and embracing "the inseparable polarities of existence." Whalen's mind (and poetry), as Watts says of Taoism, moves as "a cork adapts itself to the crests and troughs of waves" (4).

Perhaps, like most readers of Whalen, Watts's exclusion was less a matter of oversight than of not knowing where to situate his fellow West Coaster's work. Herein

lies the reason, I would argue, for Whalen's conspicuous absence from the larger critical discussions of the San Francisco Renaissance and the Beat generation: the meanings of his poems, especially the longer ones, are very difficult to pin down; they resist conventional explication and summary in much the same way John Ashbery's poetry does. Anyone who has read Whalen or Ashbery has probably asked themselves these same questions: What do these things *mean*? *What* is he saying? What *are* these *things*? And *where* is he going with it? Even Ginsberg, who would later write the foreword to Whalen's collection of Buddhist poems titled *Canoeing Up Cabarga Creek* (1996),[3] did not initially understand his friend's poetry. Whalen quotes Ginsberg to Snyder in 1956 as saying of "The Slop Barrel," "'I thought I understood it all but I don't anymore. I don't understand these poems.'"[4] And as Ginsberg later informed Neeli Cherkoviski, "'Philip takes your mind deep into his own, but you don't always know it is happening until later, when his perceptive voice finally dominates your own thoughts.'"[5] Fellow poet and Reed College friend Lew Welch suggests that "Whalen's poetry is not difficult. Great poetry never is. Anybody can understand exactly what is being said, though it may take several readings to appreciate how deeply considered his 'meanings' are."[6] Kerouac, too, recognized the uniqueness of Whalen's voice, saying in 1960, "There's a style all your own that no one can pin down or define--a style of Seeing and Saying--You're a definite poet definitely Whalenesque" (Charters vol. II, 286). As these comments from Whalen's friends suggest, even his fellow experimental poets were unable to "pin down" his work, no matter how much they admired it. Indeed, one of the major themes running though Whalen's poetry is precisely the poet's own inability to pin himself down, for in Zen, there is no self to grasp hold of.

As valuable as the scant extant criticism on Whalen is, much of the earlier scholarship, as with most Beat criticism in general, tended to provide broad poetic and historical overviews which leave the poetry itself on the back burner.[7] Despite Whalen's centrality in post-World War Two American literature, what follows is the first extended reading of one of his longer poems. It is my belief that to fully understand Whalen's poetry--and post-War West Coast poetry in general--we need to understand the Buddhist philosophy that Whalen, Snyder, Kerouac and others were grappling with in the early to mid 1950s. We might consider this reading of "The Slop Barrel," then, a case study on Whalen's poetry through the heuristic lens of the Buddhist philosophy the poets were reading and discussing towards the end of their time at Reed College through the early days of Snyder's study in Kyoto.

To read Whalen's poetry is to enter into a world constructed of divers flashes of encyclopedic multi-cultural and historical insight. His own writing, according to the preface of *Every Day* (1965), is "A continuous fabric (nerve movie?)" which causes "distant galaxies hitherto unsuspected . . . to LIGHT UP" (n.p). While his longer poems might seem indecipherable to the uninitiated reader, they accurately embody the poet's Buddhist philosophy and thought processes. As such, Welch's reading of Whalen is correct; when you read them for what they are (without trying to "define" them, as Kerouac says), "[a]nybody can understand exactly what is being said." One of the main difficulties with reading poems like "The Slop Barrel" and "Sourdough Mountain Lookout" is that they appear to be bouncing back and forth spatially and temporally. These poems, though, represent Whalen at his sedentary best: the "mind moving," the poet sitting. These are interior poems, not dissimilar, for example, to Ashbery's "The

Instruction Manual" (1955), which appeared alongside Whalen's work in Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry* in 1960. The "trick" to reading Whalen's poetry as more than just random collections of notebook jottings is to look for, as Whalen says, "the funny combination[s]" that connect one thought to another.[8] These unsuspected combinations come about largely because of one of the hallmarks of Whalen's verse, his honest self-reflection; his is a mind in motion, always working towards (and working out) his own, if you will, salvation. In the case of "The Slop Barrel," the poet's self-reflection throughout the poem leads to the realization that the only way to reach *nirvana* is by recognizing that it is not to be found in some other realm, but by living in the here and now.

Whalen, who was soon to become immortalized as Warren Coughlin in Jack Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* (1958), typed up a batch of twenty-two of his unpublished poems in Berkeley on September 24, 1956, the carbons of which he mailed the following day to his friend and former Reed College roommate, Gary Snyder, who had recently arrived in Japan. The originals were for his new friend Gregory Corso to take back to the East Coast to try to get published.[9] It was not long before the poems found their way into the hands of Ginsberg, that tireless promoter of his colleagues' work.[10] Although what would end up being Whalen's best known poem, "Sourdough Mountain Lookout," was included in the batch of carbons sent to Snyder, it was another poem written during the same period that most piqued his friend's interest--"The Slop Barrel: Slices of the Paideuma for All Sentient Beings." Snyder had left Mill Valley, California on May 6th for Kyoto to study with Miura Isshu Rōshi at the Zen Temple Shokoku-ji. By the 25th he was already asking Whalen to send him some poems: "Man send me your poems--please--they may help keep me sane in this crazy scene."[11] Whalen wrote back less than two

weeks later from Berkeley saying he was working on it: "I have finished the long slop-barrel poem, cutting some & adding another section. I will mail it under separate cover when I get a copy typed on thin paper. I am not yet sarisfried [sic] with it."[12] On September 30, 1956, just five days after Whalen mailed the poems, Snyder wrote back full of praise:

> Well man I read THE SLOP BARREL last night having just received it & was simply stoned. I mean I can't say too much--that little bundle of pomes is elegant, disciplined, spontaneous, balanced, everything they mean by classical without no stink of the lamp. You're miles ahead of me or Ginsberg, simply because of the balance & style. . . . The balance between discipline & spontaneity is almost perfect, & the exciting inner tension of the intellect which the academics wheeze about is solidly but discreetly [sic] there.[13]

Two weeks after receiving Snyder's comments, Whalen confided that his ". . . letter was quite overwhelming." [14]

The poem, which is largely a poetic dialog between two lovers, is also, like "Sourdough Mountain Lookout," an interior exploration of Mahāyāna Buddhist notions of impermanence, interdependence, and awakening. More specifically, throughout the poem we are privy to the poet's grappling with the notion that we mistake the Five *Skandhas*, or aggregates of attachment that collectively make up one's personality, for our notion of Self, which in turn leads to our delusions and thus suffering. According to D. T. Suzuki's translation of *The Lankāvatāra Scripture* in Dwight Goddard's *A Buddhist Bible* (1932/1938)--a book Whalen, Kerouac, and Snyder were intimately familiar with--the

"five grasping elements that make up the aggregates of personality [are] form, sensation, perception, discrimination, and consciousness" (303). Although Suzuki tells us in a note to his translation of *The Heart Sūtra* in *Manual of Zen Buddhism* (1935) that "the conception of Skandha seems to be too vague and indefinite" from "the modern scientific point of view," the narrator of "The Slop Barrel" comes to recognize, as he moves from being trapped in the world of objects and concepts (*samsāra* Skt.), to reaching the other shore of liberation, that our suffering lies not in the *skandhas* themselves, but in our lack of understanding of emptiness (*shūnyatā* Skt.). Indeed, as Suzuki suggests, with "the idea of an ultimate individual reality which is imagined to exist as such for all time to come . . . the error of attachment is committed, and it is this attachment that forever enslaves us to the tyranny of external things" (31; n.2).

We might even think of "The Slop Barrel" as a modern-day exploration of *The Heart Sūtra*, one of the most important texts of Mahāyāna Buddhism.[15] As told by Avalokiteshvara (the *Bodhisattva* of Compassion)[16] to Shariputra (one of the Buddha's ten great disciples), this, more than any other sūtra, succinctly encapsulates the concept of emptiness as related through the Five *Skandhas*. Goddard translates the most well-known line of the sūtra as follows: "Form is emptiness, emptiness is not different from form, neither is form different from emptiness, indeed, emptiness is form." The Five *Skandhas* are addressed a few lines later: "In emptiness there is no form, no sensation, no perception, no discrimination, no consciousness" (85-86).[17] Along with Goddard, another author Whalen and Snyder were reading at the time was English scholar Edward Conze, who teases out the Five *Skandhas* in these terms in *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development* (1951)[18]:

> Anything a person may grasp at, or lean on, or appropriate, must fall within one of those five groups, which make up the *stuff* of 'individuality.' The *belief* in individuality is said to arise from the invention of a 'self' over and above those five heaps. . . . When the individual, as constituted by an arbitrary lump taken from those five heaps, ceases to exist, the result is Nirvana--the goal of Buddhism. (5)

And as Red Pine (Bill Porter) says in his translation of *The Heart Sūtra,* "Basically the skandhas represent an attempt to exhaust the possible paths we might take in our search for a self, for something permanent or pure or separate in the undifferentiated flux of experience. They are five ways of considering our world and looking for something we can call our own" (65). As such, we can say the *skandhas* are at the root of the first of the Four Noble Truths, that life is suffering.[19] If physical phenomena such as our bodies are impermanent, then it follows that the *skandhas* themselves are impermanent. The concept of "self," then, must be a delusion. As Conze says, "it is impossible to 'grasp' at matter, or at feelings, perceptions, impulses and acts of consciousness, without getting involved in suffering (45)." These are the issues Whalen grapples with in "The Slop Barrel," coming, in the end, to the realization that the only way to reach an awakened state is through the immediacy of direct experience, not through questioning, grasping, and desiring. For, as Whalen surely read in Goddard, when "the disciple dwells in contemplation of . . . the five Aggregates of Existence. . . . [h]e knows what Bodily Form (*rupa*) is, how it arises, how it passes away; knows what Feeling (*vedana*) is, how it arises, how it passes away; knows what Perception (*sana*) is, how it arises, how it passes away . . ." and so forth (51).

The narrator of "The Slop Barrel," as is generally the case in Whalen's poetry, can be read as a representation of the poet himself; his unnamed lover in this particular instance is Jinny Baker Lehrman, better known as Princess in *The Dharma Bums*, and in passing as Jinny Jones towards the end of *On the Road*.[20] Like "Sourdough Mountain Lookout," "The Slop Barrel" is six pages in length, multi-stanzaic, and conversational in tone. The stanzas, usually aligned along the left-hand margins, are made up of one to ten lines, each generally acting as a single syntactic unit. In "The Slop Barrel," the two speakers are usually distinguished by poet's voice being left-aligned, while his companion's is usually indented five to eight spaces in. While at first glance appearing rather visually experimental, these poems have less in common with, say, Charles Olson's breath-determined spacing and line-breaks, than with the formalism of the Chinese and Japanese poetry both Whalen and Snyder were studying at the time.

Whalen, then a thirty-three year old ex-Army Air Corps radio operator and mechanics instructor with a GI Bill-funded bachelor's degree from Reed, presents readers of "The Slop Barrel" with a postmodern bricolage of Asian and European philosophy, poetics, and mythologies. Indeed, the title of the poem under consideration here itself speaks volumes. "Paideuma," a word Whalen borrowed from Ezra Pound, who in turn co-opted it from German anthropologist Leo Frobenius, means, according to Hugh Kenner in *The Pound Era*, "a people's whole congeries of patterned energies, from their 'ideas' down to the things they know in their bones, not a *Zeitgeist* before which minds are passive" (507). So it is not just the spirit of the age, but a more intuitive, all-encompassing collective consciousness. We can think of these "Slices," to borrow from the poem's subtitle, then, as sūtra-like lessons delivered to "All Sentient Beings," for in

Mahāyāna Buddhism, practice and awakening is not limited to monks and nuns; everything always already has buddha nature. And where are these lessons served up but in the "Slop Barrel," where, as the word "congeries" indicates in Kenner's definition above, things are heaped up and massed together. Recall that *skandha* literally means "group, aggregate, heap" (*SDBZ* 206).

It appears that some of Whalen's best ideas came to him while he was naked. As with "Sourdough," this poem finds the poet horizontal, disrobed, and contemplative. "The Slop Barrel" is set in the poet's Berkeley bedroom. Part I makes us privy to a bout of verbal foreplay between poet and lover; the repartee is witty, funny, and familiar, as well as mythologically, culturally, and historically packed. The poem opens with the somewhat anxious-sounding poet asking several seemingly unrelated questions:

> We must see, we must know
> What's the name of that star?
> How that ship got inside the bottle
> Is it true your father was a swan?
> What do you look like without clothes?[21]

While the star, swan, and lover's nudity all foreshadow other elements of their conversation to come, it is the first line of the stanza, really, which encapsulates so much of Whalen's Buddhist poetry; indeed, the line amounts to the crux of Western civilization: "We must see, we must know"--form leads to sensation, sensations lead to perceptions, which in turn lead to discrimination, all of which interrelate to comprise consciousness. It is precisely this type of compartmentalization that leads to the binary privileging and othering so prevalent in Western culture. Buddhism, however, posits a non-dualistic

existence in which everything is empty of self-distinguishing characteristics. Rather than categorical thinking, Buddhist thought, and Zen in particular, according to D. T. Suzuki's 1932 *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, "is decidedly not a system founded upon logic and analysis. . . . [I]t is the antipode to logic, by which I mean the dualistic mode of thinking" (8).[22]

As the poem continues, the poet says of his lover that he wants to "look at [her] all over . . . to feel every part of [her]," to get to know the form appearing to his senses. This is not to imply that form here solely indicates the corporeal body; rather, as Red Pine suggests, "It is simply the outside world, in contrast to what we presume is an inside world"(59). It is this inside/outside dichotomy the poet struggles with and overcomes as the poem progresses. Form, then, in this sense is subjective. As the lovers "compare" their "moles and hair," experiencing the psycho-physiological sensations of the second *skandha*, their conversation shifts from the Arthurian swan father ("My daddy was a steamboat man / His name was Lohengrin, his ship / *The Swan*)," to that of the Greek myth of Leda and the Swan: "You have as many scars as my brother, Polydeuces," she says, situating herself as either Helen of Troy or Clytemnestra, both half-sisters of the twins Castor and Pollux (Polydeuces), all of whom were fathered by Zeus. "Helen" appears later in Part IV of the poem in the guise of the Welsh myth of Blodeuwedd, a tale of creation, transience, deceit, and adultery.

Part I of "The Slop Barrel" closes by continuing the mythological theme of Helen by having the lovers conflate the Trojan War with the current Cold War. The "Gods demand a great deal," she says. "This coming war / Nothing will be saved; they claim / It will rid the earth of human wickedness . . ." (ellipses Whalen's). In the final stanza, the

poet brings in horrific and surreal images of the post-atomic world, linking Helen's "coming war" with the present atomic situation:

> Nevertheless when we are vaporized
>
> To descend as rain across strange countries
>
> That we will never see
>
> The roses will grow human ears for petals
>
> To hear the savoy cabbages philosophize.

This "Nevertheless," a word that appears three times in the poem, indicates the transient nature of existence. Even in death--nay, complete annihilation of the species--the cyclic nature of nature will continue. The flowers and cabbages may be grotesquely anthropomorphized, but our trace continues in the vapor.

The thirteen-stanzas of Part II continue the conversation above, picking up, presumably, with a little post-coital banter. The poet, as he does in the first stanza of Part I, plies his lover with a somewhat nervous line of questioning: "You say you're all right / Everthing's all right / Am I supposed to be content with that?" She replies in the form of a *gāthā* (Skt.),[23] a four-line verse often employed in sūtras to summarize sections written in prose:

> If I told you everything
>
> You'd have nothing to say
>
> If I fell to pieces you'd walk away flat
>
> (A weather-vane)

Gāthās are also used as instructional verses, particularly by Zen masters, as is seen in the two most well-known *kōan* collections, *The Blue Cliff Record* (*Pi-yen-lu* Chin.; *Hekiganroku* Jap.) and *The Gateless Gate* (*Wu-men-kuan* Chin.; *Mumonkan* Jap.).[24] Whalen's *gāthā* above reads similarly to a well-known *gāthā* from *The Gateless Gate*. In "Joshu's Oak Tree," Mumon's verse accompanying the famous *kōan* in which Joshu (Chao-chou Chin.) is asked why Bodhidarma went to China, reads:

> Words cannot express things;
>
> Speech does not convey the spirit.
>
> Swayed by words, one is lost;
>
> Blocked by phrases, one is bewildered. (Sekida 110)

Likewise, Whalen is looking for some sense of certainty, some ability to measure the situation. As the conversation continues, he suggests that the couple become the "first to begin / Living forever," and that the peach he offers her--perhaps in place of an apple--is "immortal." His drive for permanence, though, is halted by his lover's Zen-like response: "Both my watches are busted." For what is immortality when one cannot measure "forever"? Without the measurement of time, all one has is the here and now, the present moment of Zen. The poet, as if directing the conversation back to the actual writing of the poem itself, then interjects: "Meanwhile, back at the ranch / Pao Pu-tzu ("in the later years / Of a long Lifetime") / Is making those pills . . . ("the size of a hemp-seed")." With this concern about transcending time ("Living forever" and being "immortal")--which is surely in part a byproduct of both the potential nuclear annihilation mentioned above, as well as the tenuous nature of the relationship he is engaged in during the writing of the poem--it is no surprise that Whalen makes the leap to Ko Hung (283-343 AD), a little

known Chinese Taoist, alchemist, poet, and historian whose work chronicles Taoist mystics' attempts at immortality.[25] Whalen's train of thought is interrupted both here and below by either his own thoughts, the book or notes he is quoting from, or by the interjection of his companion: "(I would prefer the hemp, myself / Since *Sa majesté impériale* / "took a red pill . . . and was not." / None of them artificial kicks for me.)"[26] The poet continues, as if the interjection passed unnoticed:

> to show up later
>
> Riding a Bengal tiger[27]
>
> Both man and beast gassed out of their minds
>
> Laughing and scratching
>
> Pockets and saddlebags full of those pills:
>
> "Come on, man, have a jellybean!"

The contemporary slang Whalen employs here calls to mind Snyder's Americanization and modernization of Han Shan in the second of his *Cold Mountain Poems* ("Go tell families with silverware and cars / 'What's the use of all that noise and money?'"), as well as one of Kenneth Rexroth's Tu Fu translations in *One Hundred Poems from the Japanese*, which came out the same year Whalen was composing his poem ("'Should auld acquaintance be forgot?' Each / Sits listening to his own thoughts, / And the sound of cars starting outside").[28]

The poem moves from the deceptive belief in immortality though alchemy to the first use of actual Buddhist terminology in the next stanza:

> The business of this world
>
> Is to deceive but *it*

Is never deceived.

Maya Desnudata

And the *Duchess*: the same woman. Admire her.

Nevertheless she is somebody else's

Wife. I don't mean unavailable

I mean preoccupied.

The deception "of this world" is known in Buddhist terms as *māyā* (Skt.), or the world of illusion. *Māyā* is the "continually changing, impermanent phenomenal world of appearance and forms, of illusion or deception, which an unenlightened mind takes as the only reality" (*SDBZ* 141).[29] Whalen's use of "*Maya*" here does double duty by also naming Mahāmāyā, Queen Maya of Shakya, the mother of Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha.[30] Whalen interestingly pairs "*Maya*" with "the *Duchess*," a reference to Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess," a poem about an insecure, overbearing husband who thinks his deceased wife had wandering affections.[31] The insecurity in "The Slop Barrel" appears to be on the poet's part, though, not the absent husband's; as he says, "Admire her. / Nevertheless she is somebody else's / Wife." Likewise, Duke of Ferrara says to his companion in Browning's poem, "Will’t please you sit and look at her?"

The question is, in the following stanza, "How to avoid future hangups." This is actually *the* Buddhist question: how to set oneself free from *samsāra*, or as Kerouac put it in the "211th Chorus" of *Mexico City Blues*, "The wheel of the quivering meat conception" (211). One does so by relinquishing grasping, by having no "hangups." "Is this one of them now?" Whalen asks; "[w]e could take a decent time / Figuring out how to avoid repeating / Ourselves." He is speaking here of the fourth s*kandha*,

discrimination, or as Red Pine translates it, "memory." "What this term basically refers to," Red Pine says, "is our karmic genome, the repository of all that we have previously intended, whether expressed in the form of words, deeds, or thoughts. Thus, the fourth *skandha* embraces all the ways we have dealt with what we have experienced in the past and that are available to us as ways to deal with what we find in the present" (40). Three stanzas later, the poet says that his "troubles are pride / And doubt." These two behaviors fall under the fifty-two categories of mental formations listed by the Sarvastivadins[32] as "anything that might provide us with a prefabricated set of guidelines from the past with which to perceive and deal with the world, both inside and outside, as we experience the present" (Red Pine 64).

"The Slop Barrel" continues, the couple still presumably in bed, with the poet asking his companion if she is "still all right," not wanting her "to freeze." She answers his questions about their relationship (and his "hangups") in the form of a linear, goal-oriented *mantra*:

I know where I'm going

I been there before

I know when I get there

I'll travel no more

In what sound like the lyrics to a country and western song, we actually see the reworking of the most famous *mantra* in the Buddhist canon, the one which closes the *The Heart Sūtra*:

Gate, gate,

paragate,

parasamgate,

bodhi, svaha.

Goddard translates of the *mantra* as "Gone, gone, gone to that other shore; safely passed to that other shore, O Prajñā-pāramitā! So may it be."[33] Whalen actually quotes it at the end of "Sourdough Mountain Lookout" as it appeared originally in *The New American Poetry*, though he subsequently dropped the original, keeping only his hip translation:

Gone	Gate
Gone	Gate
Really gone	Paragate
Into the cool.	Parasamgate
Oh Mama!	Svaha! (289).

We might read the italicized quote from "The Slop Barrel" above, then, as "*I know where I'm going*" ("Gone, gone") / "*I been there before*" ("to that other shore"--our original buddha nature) / "*I know when I get there*" ("safely passed to that other shore") / "*I'll travel no more*" ("O Prajñā-pāramitā"--awakening, or transcendent wisdom). To reach the metaphorical other shore is to have divested oneself of the dualistic nature of the ego, to become awakened to one's own buddha nature, which is always already there to begin with. As such, there will be no need to "travel" the *samsāra* world any longer.[34]

Part III opens with what appears to be a shift in location, but is really just the poet's mind moving, presumably remembering and reminiscing about an earlier encounter he and his companion had with her child, who will shortly appear with them in the apartment: "By standing on the rim of the slop barrel / We could look right into the birds' nest. / Thelma, too little, insisted on seeing / We boosted her up / and over the edge /

Head first among the slops in her best Sunday dress[.]" From the child wanting to see the bird's nest from her precipitous perch above the "slops," to a seemingly playful naming game ("Creature you are a cow / Come when I call you and be milked"), to the "Greasy wisdom" of "knowing," Part III is primarily about the third *skandha*, perception. As Thich Nhat Hanh says in *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching*, "The aggregate of perception includes noticing, naming, and conceptualizing, as well as the perceiver and the perceived. When we perceive, we often distort, which brings about many painful feelings" (179). Indeed, the poet falls right back into his habit energies of discrimination without a stanza break between the seemingly pleasant slop barrel memory to saying, "Now let's regret things for a while"--that she "can't read music" and "That [he] never learned Classical languages." Instead of growing up and learning to "behave," they "devoted [themselves] to magic." This "regret" relates back to fifty-two habitual behaviors that fall under the fourth *skandha*, impulses, and is one of the "hangups" he needs to figure "out how to avoid repeating," for it is this repetition--this storehouse of perceptions we fall back on--which leads to suffering. The "magic" the two have devoted themselves to is the act of naming, which links back to the first line of the poem ("We must see, we must know"). Sounding simultaneously child-like and playfully sensual, the next stanza highlights the nefarious nature of Western thought that has led to both the Cold War and pending ecological disaster in which "Nothing will be saved":

> Creature, you are a cow
>
> Come when I call you to be milked.
>
> Creature, you are a lion. Be so kind
>
> As to eat something other than my cow or me.

Object, you are a tree, to go or stay

At my bidding . . .

However light these six lines sound, they certainly encapsulate the type of violent dualistic thinking that differentiates Western philosophy and religion from that of Buddhism. The stanza, primarily composed of nouns, pronouns, and directives, hits the nail on the head with the words "something other" and "Object." In fact, the "magic" of the naming/othering function here sounds as if the lovers are playing Adam and Eve in the garden: "Creature, you are a cow // Creature, you are a Lion." It is precisely our lack of understanding about the nature of our interconnectedness and impermanence which leads to the dualistic separation of self and other--of the inside/outside distinction made in the first of the *skandhas,* form--creating our perceptions, which are conditioned by afflictions such as pride, doubt, regret, fear, desire, and so forth.

Without this understanding, it is just a short jaunt from the Eden-like naming and categorizing of the "natural world" to its capitalistic commodification. Whalen aims his discriminatory God-like finger on the Douglas fir, again bringing our attention to the transitory nature of existence:

Or more simply still, tree, you are lumber

Top-grade Douglas fir

At so many bucks per thousand board-feet

So that beyond a certain number of trees

Or volume of credit you don't have to know or see

Nothing

"Nevertheless," he continues, "we look / And see, love. / From loving we learn / And knowingly choose: / Greasy wisdom is better than clothes." As with his first use of the adverb "Nevertheless," he uses it here in the face of the land-raping logging industry to say, in effect, "and yet, here we are, right here, right now." Whether it is the war on nature or the war on humankind, "The roses will [continue to] grow," "this world [will continue] / to deceive. . ." Whalen is directly addressing the Five *Skandhas* in this stanza: form ("we look"), perceptions ("and see"), feelings ("love"), mental formations ("we learn"), consciousness ("knowingly choose: / Greasy wisdom"). He has had a flash of insight by recognizing the interconnectedness of the *skandhas*. As Thich Nhat Hanh says, "Each aggregate contains all the other aggregates. Each feeling contains all perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness. Looking into one feeling you can discover everything." The lesson is that the "root of our suffering is not the aggregates but our grasping" (182-183). It is this "Greasy wisdom"--we might call it practical, hands-on wisdom--which enables him to accept the transience of existence in the final stanza of Part III: "I mean I love those trees / And the printing that goes on them / A forest of words and music / You do the translations, I can sing." It is also interesting to note that he moves from a somewhat gentle railing on the capitalist system and those who blindly accept it (from "tree" to "lumber" to "bank" to "know or see / Nothing"), to lauding, as a poet and lover of music, the human product that makes its way to end-product of the tree itself (paper), writing.

Whalen opens Part IV with a three-line *haiku*-like stanza addressing transformation, impermanence, and contingency: "Between water and ice / (Fluid and crystal) / A single chance." I say "*haiku*-like" because the stanza reads a little too

didactically, and even though it provides a seasonal reference (*kigo*) in the shape of the transformative nature of autumn into winter, the time and place specificity of traditional *haiku* is lacking. It is interesting that he reiterates the first line, which is pretty self-evident as it is, in the second line by placing the two forms "(Fluid and crystal)" "[b]etween" parentheses when he could have chosen from any divers selection of traditional *haiku* imagery. Is this the water of a river, a small pool in the crag of a boulder atop Sourdough Mountain after a summer shower, or is it in a freshly-filled ice cube tray? "Between water and ice" is the act of transformation between states; it is also, for the organisms within the water, potentially a transformation from life to death. In this *samsāra* world we are given only "A single chance" (at least in our present incarnation) with which to play out our *karma*; that chance is right here, right now, and as we speak these words. Luckily, our existence is made up of an unfathomable number of transformative moments, each of which presents opportunities to work out our karma.

Ever one to juxtapose images and forms, Whalen moves from a stanza about the mythological Welsh tale of Blodeuwedd,[35] a woman "manufactured / Entirely of flowers / or flames," to one of the most sensual and striking images in "The Slop Barrel" in the form of the Japanese *waka*:

> The heavy folds of your brocade
>
> Black waves of your hair
>
> Spilled across the *tatami*
>
> Black water smashed white at Suma
>
> "No permanent home"

According to R. H. Blyth, the thirty-one syllable[36] "waka aim at beauty, a somewhat superficial beauty sometimes, that excludes all ugly things. The aim of the haiku," on the other hand, "is not beauty; it is something much deeper and wider. It is *significance,* a poetical significance, a 'shock of mild surprise', that the poet receives when the haiku is born, and the reader when it is reborn in his mind."[37] Whalen's *waka* is remarkably similar to one of Rexroth's translations in *One Hundred Poems from the Japanese*. Fujiwara No Toshiyuki's poem reads:

> In the Bay of Sumi
>
> The waves crowd the beach.
>
> Even in the night
>
> By the corridors of dreams,
>
> I come to you secretly. (82) [38]

The beauty of both *waka*, as Blyth would have it, exists in the fact that "[t]he music of the words and the cadence of the line induce in us a certain state of mind which we designate 'poetic'. . ." (Blyth vol. I, 117). In Whalen's *waka*, "The heavy folds" of the intricate fabric speak back to the flowers in the preceding stanza, linking also to his lover's "waves" of hair, which in turn spill upon the straw mat, just like the "water smashed white at Suma." The quote in the final line of the stanza, "No permanent home," could come from any number of sūtras or Chinese or Japanese poems; its importance lies in its recognition of impermanence. Nothing in this stanza, as in life, is not subject to perpetual change: the folds of the fabric are only temporary, as are the waves of hair (and its black color for that matter); the crashing waves and the sand on the beach are also transitory--everything is in motion (as it should be in Zen poetry). Snyder too was taken by the

beauty of this stanza, exclaiming at the end of the November 8, 1956 letter quoted earlier, "Black water smashed white at Suma--jesus what a line!"

In typical Whalen fashion, cultural reference is piled atop cultural reference, effectively creating his own uniquely multi-layered discourse of a "mind moving," which can at times leave readers wondering what they have just read. As Kerouac relayed in a letter to Whalen on June 10, 1959, "Yr. new stuff dazzles me out of my mind. I know at first reading I'll have to read it all over again several times to let it sink in. It's like Gary said, poetry like the horns on a hare. . ." (Charters vol. II, 237-238). And as the next line of the poem has it (sounding reminiscent of the Ginsberg comment quoted earlier), "I just don't understand you, I'm really stumped." Indeed. As with Parts I-III, Whalen continues to move, in what on the surface appears to be a random fashion, from one thought to another in a rather Zen-like way. Here we move from the transformation of the seasons and of liquid to solid (from water to ice); to the transmogrification of flowers to woman to owl (and from living man to death to resurrection) in the Welsh myth of Blodeuwedd; to the three-leafed trifolium which themselves change color over time; to the image of lovers in Kobe, Japan, with "No permanent home"; to a fallen flower outside Whalen's Berkeley window, which itself talks back to the preceding Japanese image.

This flower image appears in the third and final *gāthā* of the poem, which reads:

> Petal from the prune tree
>
> Spins on a spider web
>
> Slung between leaves
>
> A flash in the sun

These four lines provide a brief lesson and summation of what has come before--both directly above in the three preceding stanzas, and in the poem as a whole. In fact, it would not be far-fetched to suggest that these four lines themselves succinctly encapsulate the poem's message of emptiness. With the "prune tree," Whalen engages in the Chinese and Japanese poetic tradition of announcing the arrival of early spring through the plum blossoms (which traditionally symbolize purity and seclusion, as well as perseverance, as they bloom during the coldest months), as well as transience and the flash of awakening. The image of the flash, or intuitive leap, traditionally denotes the difference between Zen and other schools of Buddhism which promote the gradual attainment of awakening. The "flash," or *satori* of Zen, as D.T. Suzuki says, "is the sudden flashing into consciousness of a new truth hitherto undreamed of. . . . [It] comes upon a man unawares, when he feels that he has exhausted his whole being . . . it is the acquiring of a new view point" (65). We will see this "flash" again in the final stanza of the poem.

From the plum blossoms we move to another hallmark of Chinese and Japanese poetry, "Bells in the air!" The poet continues:

> At this distance the overtone
> Fourth above the fundamental
> Carries louder
> Distorting the melody just enough
> To make it unrecognizable

A large bell is traditionally rung just before dawn in Buddhist temples to call monks and nuns to morning devotions and in the evening to call an end to the monastic day. The pre-

dawn tolling of the temple bell was often heard and recorded by numerous mountain-dwelling poet-hermits who had shunned the monastic life for an existence even more removed from society. Chinese poetry is rife with these hermit-practitioners.[39] A Japanese example read by Whalen in Volume I of Blyth's *Haiku* reads:

The sound fades,

The scent of the flowers arises,--

The bell struck in the evening. (26)

Bashō's *haiku*, like Whalen's stanza, addresses the ephemeral nature of sound and the senses. As the evening bell fades, the poet's attention is drawn to the burgeoning smell of the flowers, indicating, as *haiku* traditionally must, the season: spring. The sounds and smells provide us (and Bashō), in a non-didactic way, with seeds of contemplation--birth, death, interconnectedness, impermanence. Whalen's bells, though, which are issuing from Berkeley's Sather Tower less than a mile away from his apartment at 1624 Milvia Street, are doing something different than those of Bashō's. Or rather, he is letting them do something different to him. In attempting to capture the fading sounds by defining them though musical terminology, Whalen is struggling to get a handle on the *skandha* of perception. More accurately, we might say that the sounds of the bells represent the realm of form--of outward circumstances that are seemingly *other* than the poet--which in turn triggers his discriminating mind. So while at first appearing to be in control of the situation by describing the sounds as specifically as possible, it is in fact the world of form which controls him as he subjectively grasps to hold onto to the fleeting phenomena. This moment, really, is emblematic of the first Noble Truth--suffering does not just mean fear or pain or pressing desire, for to discriminate itself is to be deluded. As

Mumon's comments suggest in Case Sixteen ("When the Bell Sounds") of *The Gateless Gate*, "In studying Zen, you should not be swayed by sounds and forms. Even though you attain insight when hearing a voice or seeing a form, this is simply the ordinary way of things" (Sekida 65).

The grasping and naming continues in Part IV as the poet's companion indicates, through Hank Williams-sounding lyrics, that love too is a transient sensation, as are all of the *skandhas*:

YOU DON'T LOVE ME LIKE YOU USED TO

YOU DON'T LOVE ME ANY MORE.[40]

Nature, too, furthers the theme: "The sun has failed entirely / Mountains no longer convince." We can read these lines fairly literally by assuming clouds have rolled in to obstruct the view of the sun and the mountains surrounding San Francisco, the latter of which failing to "convince" because their peaks are shrouded in clouds. However, from the standpoint of Zen, they fail to convince as things *called* "mountains," as objects distinct from the one viewing them. An oft-repeated Buddhist parable of awakening says that when one enters the Way they see mountains as mountains and rivers as rivers; as their practice continues, they see that mountains are not mountains and rivers are not rivers; finally, they see that mountains are indeed mountains and rivers are rivers. In other words, upon entering one's practice, people still define things as other than themselves--a mountain is a mountain, a river a river, a mind is a mind. Through meditation, they are able to drop away the delusive idea that we exist in a world of duality, for in the realm of non-duality, mountains and humans are not separate. Freed from delusion--awakening to

non-attachment of mind, body, and practice--mountains once more are mountains, but contained within them are the ten thousand things, including the practitioners themselves.

The twelfth stanza of Part IV continues with a Rinzai *kōan* interview. In Rinzai interviews (*sanzen*), Zen masters (*rōshis*) present their students with *kōans* which are designed to act as a medium through which understanding can be achieved intuitively rather than intellectually. *Kōans*, like those found in *The Blue Cliff Records* and *The Gateless Gate*, are generally transmitted to students through short narratives or poems which intentionally seem illogical, ambiguous, and paradoxical. They are not puzzles with single prescribed answers arrived at through logical analysis; rather, they are meant to provide insight though embodying key elements of Zen teachings. In a letter sent to Whalen from Kyoto on May 17, 1957, Snyder discusses his recent experience of Rinzai interviews:

> Sanzen is terrifying, like going before a firing squad once a day & being told SPEAK & I just sit there 'speechless & intelligent & shaking with shame'----because no logic chopping or cleverness or suchlike will do & so you get sent back to dig & dig for something real that can be used--like the one word before the guillotine falls & all your ingenuity fails you.[41]

Whalen, apparently not too put off by his friend's first-hand experience, refers to *kōans* in his 1958 poem "Hymnus Ad Patrem Sinensis" by saying, "I praise those ancient Chinamen / Who left me a few words, / Usually a pointless joke or silly question" (*Collected* 105-106). In "The Slop Barrel," the "silly question," one which rightly baffles him, is the catalyst for his insight at the end of the poem. His *sanzen* session reads:

> The technician asks me every morning

"Whattaya know?" and I am

Froze.

Unless I ask I am not alive

Until I find out who is asking

I am only half alive and there is only

WU!

(An ingrown toenail?)

WU!

(A harvest of bats??)

WU!

(A row of pink potted geraniums///???)

smashed flat!!!

Whalen was working part-time at the Poultry Husbandry Laboratory at UC Berkeley during the writing of "The Slop Barrel." His questioning "technician," surely a fellow lab employee, acts here as his *rōshi* by offering the very *kōan*-like "'Whattaya know?'" just after the poet heard "Bells in the air" calling him to his informal *sanzen*

session. Stuck stuttering before this one man "firing squad," the poet finds himself in the midst of the most famous *kōan* of Chao-chou (Chin., or Joshu in Japanese).[42] "Joshu's 'Mu,'" the first case appearing in *The Gateless Gate*, is often the first *kōan* received by a Zen student from his *rōshi*. It reads: "A monk asked Joshu, 'Has a dog the Buddha nature?' Joshu answered, 'Mu.'"[43] Mumon's accompanying comment on the *kōan* is worth quoting here at length:

> In order to master Zen, you must pass the barrier of the patriarchs. To attain this subtle realization, you must completely cut off the way of thinking. If you do not pass the barrier, and do not cut off the way of thinking, then you will be like a ghost clinging to the bushes and weeds. Now, I want to ask you, what is the barrier of the patriarchs? Why, it is the single word 'Mu.' That is the front gate to Zen. (Sekida 27-28)

And as Snyder told Joanne Kyger in a letter from Kyoto in 1959, the "Kōan is no secret, the answer to it is the secret. The process of working it out is what teaches. It takes time & is very discouraging at times. The first kōan is just 'opening the gate' & further kōans explore more & more new ground."[44] Hit with his *kōan*, Whalen is rendered silent. This common Americanism ("'Whattaya know?'") generally leaves one either speechless or at most enables them to respond with a paltry "not much, you?" If given any thought, though, this is a truly profound question, one calling to mind another famous *kōan* which asks students to show their original faces before they were born. In other words, what comes before form? The poet is "Froze" because unless he gives the question of the self serious consideration, he is "only half alive" in the dualistic world of *samsāra*. As Mumon's *gāthā* attending the Chao-chou *kōan* reads: "The dog, the Buddha Nature, / The

Pronouncement, perfect and final. / Before you say it has or has not, / You are a dead man on the spot" (Sekida 28). Another way to address this halting question is by asking "What am I?" One's true self is not contingent upon notions of conception, place, time, lineage--all connoting ego, individuality, birth; it is indefinable. To attempt to define the self necessitates conceptualizations within the world of duality, which in turn separates the self from everything around it. For, as Alan Watts says in his 1947 pamphlet *Zen Buddhism: A New Outline and Introduction*, "Man can only become alive in the fullest sense when he no longer tries to grasp life, when he releases his own life from the strangle-hold of possessiveness so that it can go free and really be itself" (5). As they say in Zen, you have to die on the cushion to find freedom. It is important to note that *wu* does not mean "no"; rather, it means emptiness. Avalokiteshvara puts it this way in *The Heart Sūtra*: "in emptiness there is no form, / no sensation, no perception, no memory and no / consciousness" (Red Pine 2). *Wu*, then, connotes a mind unfettered by attachments.

Whalen's responses to the "'Whattaya know?'" *kōan*--"(An ingrown toenail?)," "(A harvest of bats??)," and "(A row of pink potted geraniums///???)"--though somewhat silly sounding, are reminiscent of the responses Zen masters provide their students who ask, for example, what Buddha is: "three pounds of flax"; "dried shit on a stick."[45] The questioning nature of Whalen's responses, however, still exhibits a mind grasping. As Buddha tells Ananda in *The Śūraṅgama Sūtra,* "you must learn to answer questions spontaneously with no recourse to discriminating thinking" (Goddard 112). Whalen addresses this need for unfettered spontaneity in *The Diamond Noodle* (the title itself a play on *The Diamond Sūtra*):[46] "THE ANSWER! The Answer! What is your reply?

There's always a reply to every answer" (9) Snyder himself addresses these issues in his Part VIII of "On Vulture Peak" when he asks "What can be said about a Rabbit / Solitary and without context / Set before the mind. Was it born? / Has it horns?" As in *kōan* interviews, he lays this conundrum out "without context . . . before the mind" to elicit an unmediated, immediate response devoid of arbitrary phenomological conceptions, echoing the earlier "answer! answer! why!" found in Part IV of the poem. As Buddha says to Ananda in *The Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, the unenlightened mind deludes itself with transient thoughts which are no more real than "hair on a tortoise, or like horns on a rabbit" (Goddard 183).

In the final two stanzas of "The Slop Barrel," Whalen continues his exploration of Buddhist impermanence. The last line of the previous stanza ("smashed flat!!!") acts as a floating modifier between the two stanzas, tying them together through the theme of impermanence and, for lack of a better word, violence. Ending the impromptu *sanzen* session above with "smashed flat!!!" is a reminder that, as Snyder told Ginsberg in a letter dated June 3, 1956, "(Rinzai is the sect of the big stick whack)" (Morgan 5). Whalen mentioned the "'whack on the head'"[47] in Ginsberg's letter four days later when he announced to Snyder that "The Slop Barrel" was finished. Zen *kōan* collections like *The Gateless Gate* and *The Blue Cliff Records* are replete with images of stick-wielding, Wu!-shouting, ass-kicking *rōshis*. Indeed, this aspect of Zen practice is what kept Kerouac from embracing Whalen and Snyder's more austere paths. As Ray says Zen in *The Dharma Bums*, "'It's *mean*,' I complained. 'All those Zen Masters throwing young kids in the mud because they can't answer their silly word questions'" (9). Whalen's "smashed flat!!!," a stick-blow which destroys the storehouse of memory, also sets in

motion a seemingly out of place and out of time scene which may or may not be set in Berkeley with the rest of the poem:

smashed flat!!!

The tonga-walla swerved, the cyclist leapt and

The bicycle folded under the wheels before they stopped

The tong-walla cursing in Bengali while the outraged

Cyclist sullenly repeats:

You *knows* you got to *pay* for the motherfucker

You knows you *got* to pay for the motherfucker

This "anecdote of the bicycle's demise," we are told by Whalen in the poem's introductory note, "is the original property of Mr. Grover Grauman Sales, Jr., of Louisville and San Francisco & used with his kind permission." Although I have been unable to ascertain Mr. Sales's identity, it would be debatable to suggest that he is in fact the "technician" in the preceding interchange. As such, this stanza would, through Sales's anecdote of impermanence, keep the dharma discussion on track by taking us back to the birthplace of Buddhism itself, if we read this episode as originally occurring in India. The swearing of the "tonga-walla" (Indian horse-drawn carriage driver), and the cyclist's outrage will pass, just as the restitution the driver has "*got* to pay for" will eventually be made good and eventually forgotten, bringing to mind one's *karmic* payments made throughout various lifetimes.

In the final stanza of the poem, Whalen juxtaposes the elaborate language above with the simplicity of *haiku*, bringing us back to the immediacy of his experience, while at the same time pushing us into the seemingly paradoxical world of Zen:

The bells have stopped

Flash in the wind

Dog in the pond.

Here. Now. The transcendence of *prajñāpāramita*. The poet has moved from his overwhelming "WU!" experience where he has glimpsed the ultimate truth of *shūnyatā*, back to the world of ordinary activity cited in the previous stanza, finally arriving in the nondualistic world of *samādhi*, or the state of consciousness in which the object and subject become one. As Mumon puts it, the poet has "pass[ed] the barrier of the patriarchs . . . [and] completely cut off the way of thinking," having crossed through "the front gate to Zen." He has recognized that it is not the Five *Skandhas* themselves which are the cause of our suffering, but that our "hangups" reside in our lack of understanding of *shūnyatā* and impermanence. This realization enables him here to respond with complete spontaneity devoid of his earlier questioning and grasping. "The bells have stopped"; he is no longer trying now to measure the absence of sound as he so meticulously tried to measure its distortion earlier, nor is it a question of the dog having or not having buddha nature; "Dog in the pond." To quote from Snyder's *Cold Mountain Poems*, he has "cut down senseless craving" and shed his "tangled, hung-up mind."[48] At this point, personality neither exists nor does not exist. He now dwells in the present moment; he is no longer thinking about "who is asking." His mind is pure and unmoving. The poem ends with silence; the incessant chattering and questioning has stopped, the monkeys have dropped from the vines. WU!

Chapter Four
"upsidedown like fools": Jack Kerouac's "Desolation Blues" and the Struggle for Enlightenment

"I write in my notebook with the intention of stimulating good conversation, hoping that it will also be of use to some fellow traveler. But perhaps my notes are mere drunken chatter, the incoherent babbling of a dreamer. If so, read them as such."
("The Knapsack Notebook" of Matsuo Bahso)[1]

Although what might be termed Jack Kerouac's most concentrated Buddhist period (roughly 1953 to 1958)[2] has been well documented in numerous biographies,[3] there has yet to be a systematic critical exploration of the influence of Buddhism on his oeuvre, such as Tony Trigilio's recent book-length *Allen Ginsberg's Buddhist Poetics* (2007). The closest thing Kerouac studies has to a comprehensive discussion of his Buddhist poetics is James T. Jones's groundbreaking *A Map of Mexico City Blues: Jack Kerouac as Poet* (1992), a book that has gone a long way in further "legitimizing" Kerouac's poetry by providing theoretically and historically astute close readings of the work itself, readings that do not simply compare the content of the work to the life.[4] With Jones's study of *Mexico City Blues*[5] in mind, I would suggest that the poetic series which most succinctly captures the internal struggles of Kerouac's quest for enlightenment are the twelve choruses written atop Desolation Peak during the summer of 1956, aptly titled "Desolation Blues." Jones is indeed correct in suggesting that *Mexico City Blues* is "the fulfillment of Kerouac's spontaneous poetics" (12), combining the poet's Buddhist and poetic practices in such a way that Kerouac tells "his own story as a parable of enlightenment. He has become a bodhisattva," Jones argues, "rendering his service to

humankind before attaining parinirvana, the stage at which he will finally escape the cycle of rebirths entirely" (119).[6] What is particularly interesting about "Desolation Blues" in this regard is that "The wheel of the quivering meat / conception" (*MCB* "211th Chorus") which Kerouac seems to be on the verge of escaping as he ". . . awake[s] to Universal Mind / And realize[s] that there is nothing / Whatever to be attained" (*MCB* "183rd Chorus") "in this Karma earth" (*MCB* "229th Chorus"), is once again brought to the fore a year later as the poet comes face to face with "ole Hateful Dulouz Me" during his much anticipated solitude as a fire lookout in Washington's North Cascades in 1956 (*Desolation Angels* 4). Indeed, it is the raw immediacy of Kerouac's internal (and poetic) tension that makes "Desolation Blues" so interesting, and, at times, so emotionally difficult to read. Difficult, not in the sense that one has in reading *Mexico City Blues* (complexity and confusion overshadowed by seeming simplicity); difficult, rather, because these poems so accurately depict the artist's spiritual struggles as he lived in solitude on Desolation Peak for two months, grappling with issues of reality, impermanence, (no)self, and suffering.

Though Kerouac never formalized his Buddhist practice, as did Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, and Philip Whalen, he did immerse himself in primary Buddhist texts, meditated regularly, and found teachers in the form of gondola riding hoboes and his new friends on the West Coast. The imagery, language, and complex hierarchies of Mahāyāna Buddhism[7] were inspirational to both his life and writing, allowing him to experiment more freely with language and providing him with a new vocabulary enabling him to turn his attention away from the material world, particularly his inability in the mid-1950s to find a publisher for his numerous manuscripts. The new-found improvisatory freedom

inherent in Buddhism (first thought best thought) helped him fashion a poetics of spontaneity commensurate with his earlier pre-Buddhist prose experiments such as *On the Road* and *Visions of Cody*.[8]

The twelve choruses comprising "Desolation Blues" lack the free-flowing spontaneous bebop quality of the most accomplished poems in *Mexico City Blues* due, perhaps, to the fact that on Desolation Peak there was "no liquor, no drugs, no chance of faking it" (*Desolation Angels* 4). Nor are theses poems as "successfully" Buddhist in the sense that the earlier sequence so aptly synthesizes poetic practice and Buddhist philosophy, though the series should certainly be read, as Jones does with *Mexico City Blues*, as a parable of the poet's struggle for enlightenment. Here, though, I would suggest that the poet does not convincingly "escape the cycle of rebirths entirely" (Jones 119). In much the same way Kerouac riffs on the image of the bubble (emptiness or *shūnyatā*) in the earlier sequence, he focuses here on being "upsidedown" (the Four Delusions or *viparyāsa* Skt.). Edward Conze, an English scholar Whalen and Snyder were reading at the time,[9] identifies *viparyāsa* as "perverted views," pointing out that other scholars have translated *viparyāsa* as "'wrong notion', 'error', 'what can upset', or 'upside-down views.'" The four perverted views, he continues, "consist in the attempt to seek, or to find (1) permanence in what is essentially impermanent, (2) ease in what is inseparable from suffering, (3) selfhood in what is linked to any self, and (4) delight in what is essentially repulsive and disgusting." They are, in other words, "mis-searches" because "one looks for permanence, etc., in the wrong place. They are mistakes, reversals of the truth, and, in consequence, overthrowers of inward calm" (40). The perverted views are, then, a way

for us to establish a reality, albeit a false one, in the mundane world of birth, death, and rebirth (*samsāra* Skt.).

Bill Porter (Red Pine), in his 2004 translation of *The Heart Sūtra*, also defines *viparyāsa* as "upside-down," a word Kerouac repeats five times throughout "Desolation Blues." *The Heart Sūtra* and *The Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, two of Kerouac's favorite Buddhist texts, were with him atop Desolation Peak in Dwight Goddard's *A Buddhist Bible*, the only book Kerouac took to his lookout post. The former, a one paragraph summary of the *prajñā-pāramita* teaching (transcendental wisdom),[10] describes the truth arrived at by the *bodhisattva* Avalokitesvara, namely that "form is emptiness, emptiness is not different from form, neither is form different from emptiness, indeed, emptiness is form" (Goddard 85). As we will see below, Kerouac incorporates *The Heart Sūtra* into his poem in a way similar to Whalen and Snyder as earlier discussed.

When read in conjunction with *The Scripture of the Golden Eternity* and *The Dharma Bums*[11] as Jones does, *Mexico City Blues* indeed appears, at least poetically, to show Kerouac's attainment of enlightenment, as evidenced in both the spontaneous form and content of the sequence. When read alongside both "Desolation Blues" and *Desolation Angels*,[12] however, we see that Kerouac was still seriously and painfully grappling with the concepts of emptiness and no-mind that he apparently, at least temporarily, overcame at the end of *Mexico City Blues*. For Kerouac, it seems, *satoric* moments--though perhaps "epiphantic" is more accurate--consist of, as Erick Mortenson suggests, "the moment of transcendence itself," for, "rather than seeking to absorb the vision as a fundamental fact of his life, he instead opts to recapture a visionary moment that, once gone, is always a step beyond him" (130). In "Desolation Blues" he appears to

be much more at odds with the Buddhist concepts he explored in the earlier work, as seen in his deeply troubled longing to either immediately and fully achieve *prajñā-pāramita* or simply resigning himself to *duhkha* (suffering).[13] In these poems he behaves, in his own words, as a *tapasa*, or "self-torturer" (*Wake Up* 16).

It is also tempting to read "Desolation Blues" as analogous to such Snyder poems as "Mid-August at Sourdough Mountain Lookout" and "Piute Creek," especially considering they were written by close friends and fellow Baker National Forest lookouts; however, as David Hinton points out in *Mountain Home: The Wilderness Poetry of Ancient China*, rivers-and-mountains poetry--which is how I would define Snyder's poems--"articulates a profound and spiritual sense of belonging to a wilderness of truly awesome dimension" (13). Snyder's poetry accomplishes this, whereas "Desolation Blues" uses the natural world as a stage for human endeavor in much the same way that Ralph Waldo Emerson reads nature as a viewing subject. In this regard, "Desolation Blues" is more akin to the poetry of Philip Whalen ("Sourdough Mountain Lookout," for example) in the sense that the poet-ego is usually present, (though in Whalen's case in a much less dualistic way). Snyder, on the other hand, largely through the obliteration of the poet-ego, succeeds in deconstructing dualistic constructions of "I/it," demonstrating his fundamental connection to time and place. Kerouac's observations in "Desolation Blues" are too clouded by his desire to get off the "god damned hill" ("12th Chorus" 128). Even though all three poets explore nature's cyclicality, regenerative qualities, seeming chaos, and their own place in their environment, Kerouac, no matter how beautiful, astute, and philosophically interesting his observations are, leaves the reader with the sense that the poet, rather than shedding

the ego and accepting his place in the intricate web of the ten thousand things (*yu*) and embracing non-being (*wu*) as Snyder and Whalen do, remains at battle with them. The blues sung here, then, are that of a westerner coming up against the limits of his own cultural upbringing and world view that, try as he might, he is unable to escape.

Both Kerouac's "Desolation Blues" and Whalen's "Sourdough Mountain Lookout" (which Whalen was completing while Kerouac was on Desolation Peak), open with a secluded first person narrator (the poet) "Encircled by chiming mountains" (Whalen *Collected* 40). While the opening of Whalen's poem finds the poet "alone in a glass house on a ridge" (40), Kerouac's poem opens with the observer-poet standing on his head[14] looking out at the void--a suitable image to consider in contradistinction with both Snyder's and Whalen's poems. In *The Dharma Bums*, Ray says, ". . . when I stood on my head to circulate my blood, right on top of the mountain, using a burlap bag for a head mat, and then the mountains looked like little bubbles hanging in the void upsidedown. In fact I realized they were upsidedown and I was upsidedown!" (180). In "Desolation Blues," Kerouac immediately inverts his (and our) conceptions of this traditional pastoral setting; he sees "that the world is hanging / Into an ocean of endless space." The mountains, not chained to conceptions or set routes of ideology, are not only "upsidedown," they are "dripping rock by rock" like stalactites. The seeming solidity of the mountains is thus illusory; like our (mis)conceptions, they break up, roll down, tumble into other things--they are impermanent; they are "Like bubbles in the void" and tend "where they want--" ("1st Chorus" 117). In other words, the mountains are engaged in the Chinese notion of *yu*; they are in constant transformation in the ever-changing realm of *wu*. "When seen from upside down," Jack Dulouz tells us in *Desolation Angels*,

mountains are "just a hanging bubble in the illimitable ocean of space--" (4). Furthermore, as the Buddha tells his disciple Subhuti in the "Dhyana Pāramitā" ("The Practice of Tranquility") section of *The Diamond Sūtra*,

> . . . all the mind's arbitrary conceptions of matter, phenomena, and of all conditioning factors and all conceptions and ideas relating thereto are like a dream, a phantasm, a bubble, a shadow, the evanescent dew, the lightning's flash. Every true disciple should thus look upon all phenomena and upon all the activities of the mind, and keep his mind empty and self-less and tranquil. (Goddard 102)

Kerouac quotes this sentiment almost verbatim from what was by far his favorite Buddhist text, in a letter to Carolyn Cassady (May 17, 1954) when explaining Essential Mind: "it's merely *a dream*, a vision, *a phantasm*, the moon shining on the lake, an *evanescent dew*, *a flash of lightning*, *a shadow* (like the past, like the future), *a bubble*" [my emphasis] (Charters Vol. 1, 422). It also appears in *The Dharma Bums* as Ray sits beside the Skagit River one evening after Fire School, Ray says the "world was like a dream, like a phantom, like a bubble, like a shadow, like a vanishing dew, like a lightning's flash" (172).

The "1st Chorus" moves from the mountain image to one of shooting stars:

> That at night the shooting stars
> Are swimming up to meet us
> Yearning from the bottom black
> But never make it, alas-- ("DB" 117)

The shooting stars are "swimming up" because the poet is still viewing the world from an inverted position, both literally and figuratively. They swim like fish in the endless sea-sky-void. The use of "us" is particularly interesting in that we ("us")--the ego--are apparently separate from the void. They are coming to meet us and are thus apart from us; they are "Yearning"--or is it "us" who yearns to meet them? The "alas" that ends this trope offers a clue to who or what "Yearning" modifies, as does the following quote from Kerouac's October 1958 essay titled "Alone on a Mountaintop," which appeared in *Holiday* magazine (October 1958) two years after his stint atop Desolation Peak: "Thinking of the stars at night after night I began to realize 'the stars are words' and all the innumerable worlds in the Milky Way are words, and so is this world too. And I realize that no matter where I am, whether in a little room full of thought, or in this endless universe of stars and mountains, it's all in my mind" (131). The stars and the "innumerable worlds" are, like words, mere conceptions in the poet's mind; they "never make it" because they are empty. Whalen explores a similar sentiment in "Sourdough Mountain Lookout": "Outside the lookout I lay nude on the granite / Mountain hot September sun but inside my head / Calm dark night with all the other stars" (*Collected* 43). Here, as in Kerouac's "1st Chorus," the poet ("I," "my") appears to be separate from his surroundings, and though they both seem to agree that these surroundings exist in emptiness (in the mind), Whalen's "I" appears to have a better understanding of the concept, in that he, lying on the hot granite, is much more connected to the moment; he is, like a sunning lizard, *there*; he is part and parcel, whereas Kerouac uses words like "us," "Yearning," and "alas." Whalen's head is empty and "Calm"; there is no yearning. Indeed, the question Kerouac asks himself towards the beginning of *Some of the Dharma*

still remains unanswered atop Desolation Peak: "My eyes look west / My eyes look north / My eyes look east / But my tranquil Mind / Which way?" (6). As long as the poet continues to look for tranquility outside of himself, searching the compass points of his ecstatic road, he will fail to realize that "Which way" is not *the* Way.

Because of this ignorant yearning, continues the "1st Chorus," "we never make it . . . / . . . we walk around clung / To earth / Like beetles with big brains / Ignorant of where we are, how / What, & upsidedown like fools, / Talking of governments & history" ("DB" 117). We never arrive because our "big brains" are filled with too many arbitrary conceptions, thus we walk around in a state of delusion.[15] According to another of Kerouac's favorite sūtras in *A Buddhist Bible*,

> Those who see things [through delusion] walk in discrimination and, as they depend on discrimination, they cling to dualism. The world as seen by the discrimination is like seeing one's own image reflected in a mirror, or one's shadow, or the moon reflected in water, or an echo heard in the valley. People grasping their own shadows of discrimination become attracted to this thing and that thing and failing to abandon dualism they go on forever discriminating and thus never attain tranquility. (*The Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, Goddard 278)

To Kerouac, and millions of other Americans after World War II, this "mundane world" made up of "Talking of governments & history," was exacerbated by the political tenor of the times. As Conze says in his discussion of the perverted views, "A great deal of anxiety and mental turmoil quite obviously comes from our expecting a degree of permanence, happiness, etc. . . . . from the world [which] far exceeds that which it can

give, and so we flounder alternatively in vain hopes or despair" (40). This "anxiety and mental turmoil" was only heightened mid-century by the very real possibility that, as Whalen put in "The Slop Barrel," "This coming war / / when we are vaporized / To descend as rain across strange countries / That we will never see" existed at the simple press of a button (*Collected* 57). Likewise, economist John Kenneth Galbraith, two years after Whalen, said "No student of social matters in these days can escape feeling how precarious is the existence of that with which he deals. . . . The unearthly light of a handful of nuclear explosions would signal [humankind's] return to utter deprivation if, indeed, he survived at all" (*The Affluent Society* 5).

The "2nd Chorus" begins with the poet personifying the landscape: "Mountains have skin," they "shoot up clouds of mist"; the "Dead trees" are "artistic," the "creeks roar" and "cataracts tumble pouring." In the second part of the stanza, which is set off with a dash, the poet questions why he "sit[s] here crosslegged / On this steaming rock surface" in meditation and why he writes, when, as he says, "nothing means nothing," echoing Eliot's "Nothing again nothing" and "Nothing with nothing" in *The Waste Land*.[16]

He sits "crosslegged" on his hot rock (recall Whalen atop his) "Scribbling with a pencil," worrying his "juicy head" and "bony hand" with "words," "look[ing] around for more." Here Kerouac further explores the concept of *viparyāsa*:

T s the primordial essence
Manifesting forms, of happy
And unhappy, stuff & no-stuff,
Matter & space, phenomena

Front & noumena behind,

Out of exuberant nothingness

This is what we do; we manifest "phenomena" "[o]ut of exuberant nothingness" to create our realities. This "nothingness," or "primordial essence," is our original mind or buddha nature. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Zen masters often ask their students what their true nature was before their mother and father was born. One's original nature *is*; it comes before ego and is indefinable through perception; it is "noumena." To attempt to define the self necessitates conceptualizations within the world of duality, which in turn separates the self from everything around it. As such, we try to establish our reality by grasping at the Four Delusions. Thus, we claim as pleasant ("happy") that which is really unpleasant ("unhappy") [pride, say, or sensual sensation]; something as permanent ("stuff") which is really impermanent ("no-stuff"). "[P]henomena," then, is in "Front," Kerouac tells us; it is what we see, how we move forward, how we define our reality. "[N]oumena," is "behind"; it is what is in-and-of-itself, what is indefinable by perception, like one's buddha nature, which itself is born "Out of exuberant nothingness" ("DB" 118).

Although Kerouac acknowledges that "nothing means nothing," the "3rd Chorus" opens with the adverb "Yet": "Yet birds mumble in the morning / And raccoons tumble down the draws." Life, in other words, goes on. What distinguishes this chorus from the concepts explored at the end of the previous one is the reader's sense of the poet's conceptual backsliding. On one hand, the notion that life goes on--that one's practice should not be something divorced from everyday existence, however mundane--is one of the hallmarks of Zen. Here, however, even though he acknowledges that life goes on, the poet more obviously grapples with issues of language and identity. The personal pronoun

"I" is repeated four times in the "3rd Chorus" ("I saw," "I open," "I have," and "I try"), as is the preposition "like." Extrapolation? He is, as a viewing-perceiving subject, trying to define things (phenomena) by likening them to ones he is already familiar with: "Birds . . . *like* mice," "bucks & does / . . . *like* cows" which "Run away // *like* silly frightened / schoolteachers," and an "Upsidedown mid morning moon / as delicate / As a slide, *like* snow" (my italics). He not only relies on similes--traditional poetic language no less--he also interjects a comment about his own poetic prowess: "Bears & abominable snowmen / I have not yet seen-- / *Proud of that line*" (my italics) ("DB" 119). It seems he cannot simply present images without the authorial "I" creeping back in to assert his presence. His ego-awareness is always there as a discerning subject-commentator, which is, no matter what alias he appears as, one of the things that gives Kerouac's fiction such raw beauty. In these Buddhist poems, however, it becomes problematic in that his issues of identity highlight the difficulty he has in reconciling the notion that he is inextricably a part of the world around him, not *apart* from it. In other words, in this natural setting, he projects human qualities onto his surroundings to better describe and understand it. In contrast, Snyder's "Piute Creek" finds the poet sitting and looking out, seeing the landscape without having to make associations in his mind; he just reads it, not as a separate entity, but as one intrinsically involved. For Snyder's onlooker, "One granite ridge / A tree, would be enough" because as he sits looking out, he is one with his surroundings; "All the junk that goes with being human / Drops away." "A clear, attentive mind," he tells us, "Has no meaning but that / which sees is truly seen" (*RCMP* 8). Snyder's poems, as well as Whalen's, are much more in tune with Buddhist notions of non-ego and transience than are Kerouac's. The poet/poem here is part and parcel with

his/its environment, whereas in Kerouac's poems there is still an all too obvious Western/Christian disjunction between the landscape, the poet, and his work--between seer and seen, inside and outside.

In the "4th Chorus" of "Desolation Blues," the poet is "plagued" by "All the worries" that have plagued humankind since the time of "Moses, Homer," and others. He has "T S Elioted all the frogs, / Faulknered all the stone"; he has killed rats, remembered his mother and sister, "pondered history, myths, stories," and even "prayed & gave up prayer," yet "still it's upsidedown-- / silent--stiff--wont yield-- / wont tell--"; it is "A big empty / Puppet stage, with rock" ("DB" 120). Kerouac has engaged in the questions, studied the *dharma*, meditated, and come to his "Chinese Han Shan hill"[17] ("7th Chorus") to seek enlightenment, yet he, unlike Mount Hozomeen, "wont yield." Herein lies the crux: he is looking to the stage expecting the show to begin--or perhaps in Buddhist terms, to end. Indeed, as we saw in the "2nd Chorus," Kerouac certainly had an intellectual grasp on the concept of *viparyāsa*, and in turn emptiness (*shūnyatā*); yet, he says, "still it's upsidedown--" ("DB" 120). Perhaps the answer resides in Whalen's assessment of his friend's practice: "As far as I could see, he was interested in the very large, big, wonderful ideas about Buddhism and about the language. . . . Even had he been able to [meditate due to his bad knee], his head wouldn't have stopped long enough for him to endure it. He was too nervous, but he thought it was a good idea" (*Jack's Book* 216-217).

In the "5th Chorus" Kerouac turns his attention momentarily to the mountains twelve miles away in Canada, which "look like they'd beckon," though he "know[s] better,-- / . . . yearn[ing] for the flatlands again, / the gentle hill,--" instead. The hills call,

perhaps with the promise of further Han Shan-like adventures, but he now knows, from his solitude experience, that the flatlands of civilization offer what he needs--friends, booze, and the "stage" upon which to gather materials for his further literary wanderings. His gaze shifts from the horizon(tal) to the vertical: "At 4 PM the clouds of hope / Are horizon salmon floaters / Full of strange promise / abstracted from the golden age / in my breast--." Clouds, in ancient Chinese poetry, are a metaphor for passing thoughts (as well as wandering monks). These clouds above, like memory and youth, are only fleeting; they offer "hope" and "strange promise." This recognition abruptly brings the poet's attention back to the immediacy of why he is there: if not to become enlightened, at least to further contemplate his existence. As such, he muses on the transitory/transformative nature of reality: "Patches of snow dont do anything / but be," they are snow until they melt, "And then water, it's nothing / but water / Till sun evaporates, then mist" ("DB" 121). This nothing "but be" trope winds its way throughout "Desolation Blues," haunting him because he is unable to divest his mind, to cease his abstracting. He knows that everything around him exists for no other reason than existence; it is empty, transient, in flux: snow into water into mist, retaining its essential nature, transforming endlessly into different states. Indeed, original nature *is* flux. The snow does not claim to be permanent, nor the water nor the mist: nature is not clouded by the Four Delusions. As Kerouac said a few months after leaving Desolation Peak in "Orizaba 210 Blues," "Eternally the lightning runs / Through form after form formless" (*Book of Blues* 152). It changes, keeps going; its essential qualities exist in its very formlessness. He knows that "rocks'll sit where they are / forever" like enlightened *tathāgatas* (those who go thusly)[18] and, perhaps in a fit of jealousy--or perhaps to acknowledge his own agency-- he tells us that

they will remain stationary forever, "Lessn I move em, throw em / down the gorge, / And then they spit a minute" ("DB" 121).

The sixth and seventh choruses, situated at the midpoint of the sequence, perfectly encapsulate the basic dichotomy Kerouac grappled with throughout his relationship with Buddhism, which prevented him from attaining the non-dualistic understanding of reality he so fervently strived for. The "6th Chorus" most clearly and personally presents this struggle, with the "7th Chorus" reveling in what it is the poet most wants, which, as he tells us towards the beginning of *Desolation Angels*, is to get "down off the mountain and [get] the whole bloody mess of boredom done" with, thus ending, at least temporarily, his desire induced suffering (41). The "6th Chorus" merits inclusion here in full as it best shows the dualisms at work in the poet's mind as they are happening.

I just dont understand--
tho mist'll be mist till
Heavens obdure, tho man'll
Be man till heavens obdure
Or hells obscure I just
dont
I just dont
Dont
Understand
I dont--
I want to know--soon's a do
I dont understand--if I said:

"I dont care" I understand--

I understand that

it doesnt matter.

Still the birdy clings, to earth,

He dont go silent on me,

I dont stop writing,

I dont stop living,

What a fool,--blast the bird.

The only thing that ever happens

to Hozomeen

Is that he'll get a wreath

of clouds

Every now & then

& breed to revel

Without moving a mighty shoulder

--I envy him his rock ("DB" 122)

The beginning of the chorus echoes Ray's comment at the end of *The Dharma Bums* when he says, "I didn't know anything anymore, I didn't care, and it didn't matter, and suddenly I felt really free" (183-184). It is difficult to take this seemingly emancipatory declaration at the end of this sentence at face value, when compared to the repeated stutterings above, as well as with the anxiety and pain exhibited in *Desolation Angels*. He does in fact possess the understanding, he just cannot, perhaps due to his Catholic

upbringing, wholly accept the truth of emptiness that he espouses in *Scripture*, namely that "Enlightenment comes when you don't care" (49). He tells us here that he "understand[s] that / it doesnt matter."[19] William Everson addressed this sentiment in his 1959 essay "Dionysus and the Beat Generation" by quoting "Desolation Blues" (without attribution), suggesting that the "Dionysian spirit" of the Beats was a "mood of positive repudiation, as summed up in the phrase 'I don't know; I don't care; and it doesn't make any difference,' [which was] counter-balanced by an opposite mood of negative affirmation: 'Beat means beatitude'" (21). Kerouac understands, at least intellectually, that the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth continues to turn, that the "mist'll be mist" eternally, and that, as he read in *The Heart Sūtra*, "Form is emptiness, emptiness is not different from form" (Goddard 85). Yet, "Still the birdy clings, to earth"; it continues to sing, as does the poet for that matter; he does not stop writing or living. Why, then, he seems to ask, can he not be more like Hozomeen--motionless, yet ever-changing in its seeming stasis. The poem's first and last lines--the former ending with a dash, the latter beginning with one--sum up in two lines the quandary: "I just dont understand-- // --I envy him his rock." The dashes, line breaks, and repetitions are all endemic of a mind hard at work grappling with, on the one hand, the logic the Western mind tends to grasp at when struggling spiritually with Buddhist doctrine, and on the other, the very real presence of the present moment, the day-to-day existence of corporeal reality. As such, these choruses highlight the complexities of the poet's spiritual quest, one which bounced back-and-forth between his early (and late) Catholicism and midlife explorations of Buddhism.

The "7th Chorus," also reproduced here in its entirety, explains in characteristically explosive free-associational Kerouac style what it is that the poet wants:

But I want to live, I want
to get down
Off this Chinese Han Shan hill
and make it
To the city & walk the streets
And drink good wine
(Christian Brothers Port)
Or whiskey (Early Times
or Old Grand Dad)
And go to Chinese Movies
on Saturday Afternoon
And buy presents in the window
and watch the dust gather
On little stationary toys
In celluloid windows of children
And go to the vast markets
And eat tortillas beans
ice cream
And crime--and banana splits
and tea
And benzedrine & broads--

and waterfronts
And plays & and play marquees
and Square Times
And you--I'd like to celebrate
upside
Down in cities ("DB" 123)

Ironically, in "Alone on a Mountaintop" Kerouac tells us that "After all this kind of fanfare, and even more, I came to a point where I needed solitude and just stop the machine of 'thinking' and 'enjoying' what they call 'living,' I just wanted to lie in the grass and look at the clouds. . . . And anyway I was sick and tired of all the ships and railroads and Times Squares of time--" (118). One cannot help but recall--and I'm sure Kerouac's allusions here are intentional--Thoreau's "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived" (*Walden* 61), as well as Whitman's "I loafe and invite my soul, / I lean and loaf at my ease observing a spear of summer grass" ("Song of Myself" 188). Unfortunately, what Kerouac fails to do is to follow through with Thoreau's desire "to stand on the meeting of two eternities, the past and future, which is precisely the present moment; to toe that line. . . . To anticipate, not the sunrise and the dawn merely, but, if possible, Nature herself!" (*Walden* 11). It is the present moment that Kerouac struggles with, as evidenced most explicitly in the seemingly frantic alternating sections (past, present, future) of *Desolation Angels*.

The "7th Chorus" itself echoes Whitman's "I celebrate myself," though Kerouac's "But I want to live" smacks sadly of a sense of longing and desperation (desolation). The

tragedy lies, for this reader, in the pre-lookout exuberance Kerouac expressed in three letters to Gary Snyder between January and March 1956 from Rocky Mount, North Carolina, just before he headed west to live with Snyder at Marin-an. On January 17th, he tells of "Long days this Spring meditating in my piney woods, and writing, and continuing my long 'Some of the Dharma,' which reports on dhyanas and samadhis and all kinds of Buddhist poems and notes and outcries and is now also over 300 pages long. So I'll be busy right up to mountain-lookout time." His time spent in study and meditation appears to have paid off by the February 14th letter: "And now I am abiding in the truly wonderful bliss of the Prajñā-knowing, knowing the known, knowing that emptiness is what it all is, and we all are it, and we have nothing absolutely nothing to worry about." And on March 8th, he confides his hope that "[s]omething will happen to me on Desolation Peak . . . as happened to Hui-neng on Vulture Peak,[20] I can sense it. . . . I'm really getting a great deal of dharma-satisfaction lately, tho that may be an ill sign. . . ." (Charters Vol. 1, 545, 551, 567). Contrast this exuberance, perhaps foreshadowed by the "ill sign," with the Forty-Forth chapter of *Desolation Angels*:

> What did I learn on gwaddawackamblack? I learned that I hate myself because by myself I am only myself and not even that and how monotonous it is to be monostonos . . . I learned to disappreciate things themselves and hanshan man made me mop I dont want it . . . I want to come down RIGHT AWAY . . . I want to return at once . . . I got a place to go and poems to write about hearts not just rocks--Desolation Adventure finds me finding at the bottom of myself abysmal nothingness worse than that no illusion even--my mind's in rags--. (68)

Kerouac wants to get "Off this Chinese Han Shan hill / and make it / to the city." Not only to literally "make it" down there (to civilization), but perhaps once again to find the "IT" of *On the Road*.

While the "7th Chorus" echoes Whitman, it would be a mistake to read Kerouac's poem solely *against* Whitman as opposed to in conversation *with* him. Kerouac first became interested in Whitman at Bartlett Junior High in the mid 1930s, an interest that developed into a full-blown appreciation in the 1940s when he spent the summer of 1940 reading Whitman, Thoreau, and Emily Dickinson. In June of the following year, he read the 1855 version of *Leaves of Grass* and wrote his own free-verse poem titled "Definition of a Poet," and in 1948 he wrote a paper for Alfred Kazin at the New School for Social Research in New York titled "Whitman: A Prophet of the Sexual Revolution." Kerouac's 1941 "Definition of a Poet" is someone whom

> spends his time thinking
> about what it is that's
> wrong, and although he
> knows he can never quite
> find out what this wrong
> is, he goes right on
> thinking it out and writing
> it down. (*Atop an Underwood* 122)

Kerouac apparently needed the stimulus of the road and the city to keep "thinking it out and writing it down." The boredom brought on by solitude atop Desolation Peak, unlike Whalen's and Snyder's lookout experiences, was too much for Kerouac; he needed to get

"To the city & walk the streets." He needed, as he wrote to Norma Blickfelt not long after writing the above poem, to "go on writing, studying, travelling [sic], singing, loving, seeing, smelling, hearing, and feeling. . . ." (Charters Vol. 1, 28). These, the words of twenty year old John Kerouac, are not much different from the sentiments of the Kerouac of 1956. In the "7th Chorus," Kerouac projects into the future, echoing Whitman's "The Sleepers": "I wander all night in my vision, / Stepping with light feet . . . swiftly and noiselessly stepping and stopping . . ." (Whitman 542). More specifically, though, we can read the "7th Chorus" as Kerouac's mountaintop "Song of the Open Road" (1856), written one hundred years after his predecessor's poem. In this mountaintop vision, Kerouac saunters Whitmanesquely through the streets with a good bottle of wine, gazing into shop windows, eating, cavorting with women, and, in Whitmanesque fashion, projecting himself on to more than one locale (Seattle, San Francisco, and New York). As he told Robert Lax[21] in a letter dated Oct 26, 1954: "I'm no saint, I'm sensual, I can't resist wine, am liable to sneers and secret wraths and attachment to imaginary lives before my eyes--but I intend to ascend by stages and self-control to the Vow to help all sentient beings find enlightenment and holy escape from the sin and stain of life-body itself. . . ." (Charters Vol. 1, 447-448). Stylistically, the "7th Chorus," through the use of anaphora--eleven lines beginning with the word "and"--also owes an obvious debt to Whitman. Both poems also end similarly, though one ends with a statement, the other with a question; the latter is perhaps more open and embracing: Kerouac ("And you--I'd like to celebrate / upside / Down in cities"); Whitman ("Camerado, I give you my hand . . . Will you give me yourself? will you come travel with me?") ("Song of the Open Road" 307). And, of course, "Song of Myself" prominently opens with the word "celebrate." So, then, to read

the "7th Chorus" as a failing on Kerouac's part--the failure being the longing to descend to the city--we should consider the poem's content and style as infused with the road tradition that turned Kerouac on to Whitman in the first place.

The "8th Chorus" opens with another unusual image, one reminiscent of the youthfully mystical *Dr. Sax*[22]: "Once I saw a giant / in a building / / He's here now, bending / over me, / Giant diamond gone insane" ("DB" 124). The giant once seen from inside a building refers to the painting of Hozomeen Snyder made from atop his lookout post on Sourdough in 1953, which he later mailed to Kerouac in February 1956 before Kerouac headed west to be with him at Marin-an. As Ray says towards the end of *The Dharma Bums*,

> . . . suddenly I woke up with my hair standing on end, I had just seen a huge black monster standing in my window, and I looked, and it had a star over it, and it was Mount Hozomeen . . . staring in my window. . . . It had the same unmistakable witches' tower shape Japhy had given it in his brush drawing of it that used to hang on the burlap wall in the flowery shack in Corte Madera. (178-179)

The "Giant diamond gone insane, / Ta, the Golden Eternity," he calls it in this chorus, riffing on the title of *The Diamond Sūtra*. His language then seems to break down, getting more "insane," more sing-song, spontaneous--"Ta Ta Ta Ta, / Tathata, trumpet, Ta Ta" ("DB" 124). Kerouac played with this "Ta" trope less than two weeks before leaving for California. On March 5th he wrote a short prose piece titled "SKETCH of Twin Tree Grove" in what would become *Some of the Dharma*. Seated in his sister's back yard in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, he examined "the holy yellow long bowing weeds that

face my grass sitmat of Tathagata Seat of purity---they point in all directions and hairily converse as the winds dictate Ta Ta Ta ta, in gossip groups with lone bhikkus proud to show off and sick ones and half dead fallin ones. . ." (414). *Tathatā* (Skt.) means "suchness," or the true nature of things devoid of the Four Delusions. That is, it is "beyond all concepts and distinctions. . . . It is formless, unmade, and devoid of self-nature" (*SDBZ* 221). A *tathāgata*, then, is, in Kerouac's own words, "He-Who-Has-Attained-to-Suchness-of-Mind" (*Wake Up* 35); or, as *The Diamond Sūtra* puts it, "'He who has thus come' and 'He who has thus gone'" (Goddard 103). This mode of existence, for lack of a better phrase, is what Kerouac so desperately strived for; for, to be like Hozomeen, would mean to exist, like the mist, in a state of suchness. In other words, to *be* one's original nature.

We see a similar breakdown of language in *Desolation Angels*, though this time Kerouac takes his experiments to their logical end--from sentences, to syllables, to symbols (five large triangles), to illegible scribbles, to colors and sounds ("black black black black / bling bling bling") (58). In a rough-and-tumble panic-stricken landslide of despair, he exclaims: "Enough I've said it all, and there's not even a Desolation in Solitude, not even this page, not even words. . . (57)". In what amounts to an impromptu mini-sūtra, he continues:

> O Ignorant brothers, O Ignorant Sisters, O Ignorant me! . . . --come, now, children, wake up . . . being and not being, what's the difference?--Prides, animosities, fears, contempts, slights, personalities, suspicions, sinister forebodings. . . . WHO WRITES WRONG ON THE WHO THE WHY THE WHAT WAIT O THING I I I I I I I I I I I O MODIIGRAGA NA

> PA RA TO MA NI CO SA PA RI MA TO MA NA PA SHOOOOOOO
>
> BIZA RIII - - - - - - - I O O O O--M M M--S O--S" etc. (Chapter 37; Book 1, 57)

Kerouac, in his list of eight conceits, appears to be addressing the *kleshas* (Skt.), which refer to "all the properties that dull the mind and are the basis for all unwholesome actions and thus bind people to the cycle of rebirth." They are "desire or craving, hate, delusion, false views, doubt, rigidity, excitability, shamelessness, lack of consciousness" (*SDBZ* 117). The delusion, Conze says, "results from the four perverted views which superimposes permanence, ease, self and attractiveness on the data of experience which do not contain them" (206). Rather than reading the next few lines as simply a breakdown of discourse, I would suggest that Kerouac is tuning in to the cosmic sounds of a syllabic mantra. Chant, for example, "NA PA RA TO MA NI CO"; it is not that dissimilar from, say, the Mani Mantra of Avalokitesvara, the *Bodhisattva* of Compassion, which reads "Om Mani Padme Hum" ("Hail to the jewel in the lotus"). As Kerouac read in Lin Yutang's *The Wisdom of China and India*, "the mechanism of our thinking and language fails [when trying to describe *nirvana*], because our words must fail to describe our unconditioned existence" (550).[23] And as he read in *The Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, "Highest Reality is an exalted state of bliss, it is not a state of word-discrimination and it cannot be entered into by mere statements concerning it" (Goddard 287). One gets the sense, though, that Kerouac's move to the mantra here has as much to do with placating his own anxieties as with spreading the Dharma, as is the case as we move through "Desolation Blues." We will see him experiment again with the mantra form in the "10th Chorus."

The "8th Chorus" continues with quote Everson addressed above: "But *I dont know* / *I dont care* / *and it makes no difference* / And now I'm wise" (Kerouac's italics) ("DB" 124). [Recall Everson's "'I don't know; I don't care; and it doesn't make any difference" above]. Jack Dulouz, repeating his italicized declaration in *Desolation Angels*, calls it "the final human prayer--" (78). This prayer just does not ring true, as mentioned above, especially considering what he tells us in the next line of the poem: "When the whole wide world / is fast asleep I cry." Perhaps this show of emotion is meant to indicate compassion for the "whole wide world," but it seems that this sadness is prompted by his inability to fully accept, at least at this point, that he indeed does not care, that the world is empty, that "it makes no difference," and that this emptiness is itself meaningful, that no-thing *is* something. He is unable to quell his mind's intellectual activities--to cease trying to define the world--as is evidenced by the way in which his surroundings continually *bring to mind* other images, things, memories.

The chorus ends with an odd turn, though perhaps not so odd considering Kerouac's seeming inability to accept his experience in the mountains as a single overwhelming whole (*shang*), rather than one of the dualistic separation of self/other. In what sounds like an apologia to both his then-divorced second wife (Joan Haverty) and his daughter (Janet), then five years old, the poet says, "Let me offer you / my reassuring profile / Saying, 'It's okay, girl, we'll / make it / till the sun goes down forever."[24] In a move that is typical in Kerouac's Buddhist writings, he ends the poem with a conflation of Buddhism and Christianity: "'We're fallen / angels,'" he tells her, "'Who didnt believe / That nothing means nothing.'"[25] This is the main issue at stake here for Kerouac: emptiness, or at least his understanding of it. *Nothing* (emptiness) means *no-thing* when it

loses its "thingness," when divested from the realm of the perceiving dualist mind. *Nothing* connotes a mind unfettered by attachments (conceptions, distinctions, delusions); *nothing* is the clean mirror-mind simultaneously reflecting and emitting reality. The world is real when it exists not as a delusion in the mind but *as* the mind; it is empty when delusion is done away with.

The "9th Chorus" continues the "upsidedown" theme, beginning and ending with the following lines: "We're hanging into the abyss / of blue--" and "We hang in, upsidedown, --Too much to be real." What we "hang in" are "innumerable / and endless worlds / More numerous even (& the number of beings!) / Than all the rocks that cracked / and became little rocks." Worlds more numerous than the sands in the Ganges, as Buddha said. We might think of these innumerable worlds in terms of the inexhaustible present moments that make up our existence, thus our innumerable rebirths in ever-present flux--i.e., impermanence. To "hang" is to be hung up, attached, unable to see the world for what it is, not as seen through our delusionary attachments to it and to ourselves. Attachments connote grasping, which in turn super-imposes the delusion of permanence. Talking back stylistically to the "7th Chorus," Keoruac includes a thirteen-line-long Whitmanesque catalogue of the "real" in the form of a geography of impermanence: "In all that rib of rock / That extends from Alaska," south through the western rim of North and South America, all the way "on around to Siberia--." Even mapped, though, the world is "In other words, & all the grains / of sand that comprise / A rock, and all the grains / of atomstuff therein," are all "--Too much to be real" ("DB" 125). Impermanence and interdependence go hand in hand, both calling into question notions of self-existence.

The "10th Chorus," which more fully explores notions of the real and unreal, marks a critical juncture in the sequence. If the sixth and seventh choruses highlight the dualist nature Kerouac was struggling with, then the "10th Chorus" marks the turning point that was initially stated in the "8th Chorus": "*I don't know* / *I don't care* / *and it makes no difference*" ("DB" 124). The "9th Chorus" follows this sentiment with the long catalogue of place names, and here in the "10th Chorus," the poet shrugs his shoulders and says "it's real" over and over (nine times) in another extended catalogue of things:

> But it's real
>
> it's as real as the squares
>
> on this page
>
> And as real as my sore ass
>
> sitting on a rock
>
> And as real as hand, sun,
>
> pencil, knee
>
> Ant, breezed, stick,
>
> water, tree, color,
>
> peeop, birdfeather,
>
> snag, smoke
>
> haze, goat
>
> appearance
>
> and low crazed cloud

It is all real, he says, emphasizing the physicality of language, including the unreal of "swchernepetchzels / in Prienna." Even his "dreams" are "Real, real as fog in London

town." Here, Kerouac states what may well be his new mantra of "Praha Maha Fuckit" ("DB" 126), a play on the Sanskrit title of *The Heart Sūtra* (*Mahāprajñāpāramita-hridaya-sūtra*).[26] In doing so, he includes his own linguistically playful rendition--at least rhythmically--of the mantra which closes the sūtra. Here it is the original with line breaks:

Gate,
Gate,
paragate,
parasamgate,
bodhi,
svaha

Goddard translates it as "Gone, gone, gone to that other shore; safely passed to that other shore, O Prajñā-pāramitā! So may it be" (86). And here is the ending of Kerouac's poem:

--Real, real
unreal,
deal,
Zeal
I say, dont care if it's real
or unreal, I'se ("DB" 126)

Reality, for Mahāyāna Buddhists, *is* the mind, and the mind is connected with everything around it. In other words, the nature of the mind and the nature of the world are one and the same because everything exists *in* the mind. We try to distinguish things as outside of the mind and as different from it, but we are only able to do so, after all, *inside* it. Thus,

our nature cannot be separated from what we think of as reality. In turn, reality is our nature and our nature is our reality. It follows logically, then, that enlightenment--or as the Theravādaists think of it, *nirvana*--is not a reality *different* in any way from the mind itself. So to attempt to reach *nirvana* is, it seems, pointless, because *nirvana* cannot be anything other than the mind itself, thus reality. The "other shore" exists within *this* reality, within *this* mind; it is not some *other* place, some *other* shore; it is always already present in our buddha nature, right here, right now. As Conze says, "any kind of discrimination is regarded as a perversion, and so is any affirmation or negation, any assumption of separate reality. Suchness alone lies outside the range of perverted knowledge" (205).

"And if you dont like the tone / of my poems," Kerouac tells us at the beginning of the penultimate stanza, "you can go jump in the lake." Then, seemingly defining himself as a *bodhisattva*[27] in a very Whitmanesque tone, says:

I have been empowered
to lay my hand
On your shoulder
and remind you
That you are utterly free,
Free as empty space.

In *The Dharma Bums*, Ray says, "One night in a meditation vision Avalokitesvara the Hearer and Answerer of Prayer said to me 'You are empowered to remind people that they are utterly free' so I laid my hand on myself to remind myself first then felt gay, yelled 'Ta,' opened my eyes, and a shooting star shot" (182). It is difficult, though, not

to think back to the letter Kerouac wrote Allen Ginsberg in December of 1954, in which he speculates about his place as a student of Buddhism:

> Now, as to my being master, and you disciple--I'm only a Junior Arhat[28] not yet free from the intoxicants. The danger of my being a Teacher is twofold:
>
> 1) I'm too ignorant still to give the true teaching and am only in the early stages of vow-making, not actual turning-about within.
>
> 2) Teaching may & will be appreciated by intelligent but insincere poseurs who will use it for their own terrestrices and evil and heretical ends--This includes myself--i.e. a poet using Buddhist images for his own advantage instead of for spreading the Law. (Charters Vol. 1, 452)

Closer to the writing of the poems under consideration here is the 9th section of *Old Angel Midnight* in which Kerouac reiterates the notion: "I'm not a teacher, not a sage, not a Roshi, not a writer or master or even a giggling dharma bum I'm my mother's son & my mother is the universe--." Ironically, although he claims not to be a teacher, he follows the above with a short *gāthā*:

> What is this universe
>
> but a lot of waves
>
> And a craving desire
>
> is a wave
>
> Belonging to a wave
>
> in a world of waves . . ." (*Old Angel Midnight* 11)

Likewise, in continuing the "11th Chorus," the poet tells us, while seemingly excising his own burdens as well as ours, that

You dont have to be famous,
dont have to be perfect,
Dont have to work,
dont have to marry,
Dont have to carry burdens,
dont have to gnaw & kneel,

Next, he inserts a *haiku*, or what he called "Dharma Pops," which is reminiscent of a similar "pop" in *Desolation Angels*: "A cup of coffee and cigarettes, why zazen?" (40):

the taste
of rain--
Why kneel?[29]

In other words, why meditate or pray when the present moment itself exists in the bliss of *nirvana*? You "Dont even have to sit / / go ahead & blow, // Explode & go" ("DB" 127). Perhaps too, Kerouac finally embraces his own contradictions like Whitman: "(Still here I carry my old delicious burdens, / I carry them, men and women, I carry them with me wherever I go, / I swear it is impossible for me to get rid of them, / I am fill'd with them, and I will fill them in return.)" ("Song of the Open Road" 297). In *Some of the Dharma* two years earlier, though, Kerouac is seen struggling with his contradictions in such a way that discounts rather than embraces them: "--I make my constant different discriminations in sheer agreement to ignore the Truth---(for human reasons)---I know

that I dont have to trouble myself with all this phantasmal multiplicity---but I do for the hell of it" (61).

The final chorus, written in the form of a dialogue between Kerouac and a flower, opens with the poet turning his attention back to nature, thus providing us with an analogy for his (and our) place in the world: "Little weird flower, / why did you grow? / Who planted you / on this god damned hill?"[30] The age old questions, reflecting here Kerouac's Catholic upbringing: Why am I here? Who is in charge? Interestingly, he not only supposes a higher power in the form of a Christian God ("Who"), he also simultaneously suggests--perhaps inadvertently--that there needs to be some sort of human agency involved in the existence (and placement) of the plant. In other words, the Garden is here for our exploitation and direction, a very Christian notion, one which overlooks the idea of interdependence and mutual co-arising. Moving closer to some sort of realization, he says, "I was under the impression / that you were supposed to be / some kind of perfect nature. / Oh, you are? / Just jiggle in the wind. I see." To "Just jiggle in the wind," we might say, is the Zen ideal. Kerouac recognizes this, but his path (the Road) necessitates intentional movement and direction. At this point, he notices more flowers, perhaps for the first time, but is unaware, unlike Snyder and Whalen, of their names: "At yr feet I see a nosegay / bou kay / Of seven little purple apes / who dint grow so high." Realizing the flowers are not there as a mirror in which to define his self-existence, he ends the poem thusly:

I thot last week

you were funeral bouquets

for me

that never askt

to be born

or die

But now I guess

I'm just talkin

thru my

empty head ("DB" 128)

The dualism is still there ("I" / "you"), but the final chorus conveys a much subtler and seemingly more profound grasp of the Buddhist concepts Kerouac struggles with throughout twelve choruses. Thus ends "Desolation Blues."

One is left wondering if he has finally passed to the other shore of enlightenment, or if he has, like Whitman, simply embraced his multitudes, thus accepting, as the first of the Four Noble Truths tells us, that all life is suffering. Perhaps, rather than reading his experience atop Desolation Peak as a failed attempt at attaining transcendental wisdom, we might consider that Kerouac instead experienced *yathābhūtam*,[31] or "the seeing of things truly" (*Wake Up* 103). As he says towards the end of "Alone on a Mountaintop":

> I realized I didn't have to hide myself in desolation but could accept society for better or for worse . . . I saw that if it wasn't for my six senses, of seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, tasting and thinking, the self of that, which is non-existent, there would be no phenomena to perceive at all. . . . The fear of extinction is much worse than extinction (death) itself.--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. . . . Yes, to try to *attain* to Nirvana when you're already there, to attain to the top of a mountain when you're already there only to have to stay--thus to *stay* in the Nirvana Bliss, is all I have to do, you have to do, no effort, no path really, no discipline but just to know that all is empty and awake. . . . (132-133)

For Kerouac, then, acknowledging that we already exist in *nirvana* is the key; it is not a matter of striving to attain something, but rather a matter of waking up to one's buddha nature. In fact, the paragraph above amounts to Kerouac's understanding (and somewhat Christianized retelling) of *The Heart Sūtra*. As Avalokitesvara says to Sariputra, "all things having the nature of emptiness have no beginning and no ending. They are neither faultless nor not faultless; they are neither perfect nor imperfect. . . . There is no sight, no sound, no smell, no taste, no touch, no mental process, no object, no knowledge, no ignorance." Having "no beginning and no ending" connotes impermanence, non-self-existence. If that were not enough of a kick in the pants (to a follower, and to the earlier Buddhist sects), there is also "no Noble Path [there is] . . . no death. . . . There is no knowledge of Nirvana, there is no obtaining of Nirvana, there is no not obtaining of Nirvana." Why can one not obtain *nirvana*? Because if personality were permanent there would be no way to attainment. However, "It is only because personality is made up of elements that pass away, that personality may attain Nirvana." One "must pass beyond consciousness . . . beyond discrimination and knowledge, beyond the reach of change or fear" to see through the perverted views (and nirvana) to, as Kerouac says, "*stay* in the Nirvana Bliss" (Goddard 85-86).

The value of "Desolation Blues" resides less in its poetic quality, compared to *Mexico City Blues*, than in its succinct presentation of the poet's struggle in coming face-to-face with his dualistic demons through the self-imposed solitude of sixty-three days atop his "Chinese Han Shan hill," the same solitude Snyder and Whalen found so liberating. As such, these choruses are some of Kerouac's most beautiful and telling poems; they capture, especially the sixth and seventh choruses, the dualistic nature not only of the Western mind at odds with Asian philosophy, but also the life-long anxiety Kerouac dealt with concerning his place in the world. In the end, Kerouac is, as he tells us in his own voice in *Satori in Paris*,[32] a recorder of real-life experiences, favoring "the tale that's told for companionship and to teach something religious, of religious reverence, about real life, in this real world . . ." (10).

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Notes

Notes to Introduction

[1] James Breslin, *From Modern to Contemporary: American Poetry, 1945-1965* (University of Chicago Press, 1984).

[2] See Irving Howe's "Mass Society and Post-Modern Fiction" (1959) and Paul O'Neil's The Only Rebellion Around" (1959) in Chapter One.

[3] Kenneth Rexroth, "Disengagement: The Art of the Beat Generation" (*New World Writing* 11, 1957).

[4] Gary Snyder, letter to Philip Whalen, 8 Nov. 1956, Philip Glen Whalen Papers, Reed College.

[5] Philip Whalen, letter to Gary Snyder, 13 Nov.1956, Gary Snyder Papers, University of California, Davis.

[6] This is the title of Everson's first book after leaving the Dominican order in December 1969: *Man-Fate: The Swan Song of Brother Antoninus* (New Directions, 1973).

[7] Just days after Pearl Harbor Japanese Americans were fired from their civilian jobs, their law and medical licenses were revoked, their fishing boats confiscated, and so on. Some of those relocated were Issei, Japanese migrants who clung to Japanese customs and communities. Some were Nisei, American-born citizens of Issei parents whose language and traditions they left behind as they assimilated into the American culture of the West. And some were Kibei, American born Japanese who studied in Japan. Interestingly, the Japanese were some of the most loyal of American citizens, with some thirty three thousand Nisei men serving in the European theater during the war.

[8] "'Goldberry is Waiting': or, P.W., His Magic Education as a Poet" (*Collected* 827).

[9] "Zen Poet: Interview with Yves Le Pellec" (*Off the Wall: Interviews with Philip Whalen*. Ed. Donald Allen. Bolinas, CA: Four Seas Foundation, 1978), 58.

[10] Kerouac told the story in *Escapade Magazine* in 1960 in an article titled "The Year for Zen": "How did I become a Buddhist? Well, after that love affair I described in The Subterraneans, I didn't know what to do. I went home and just sat in my room hurting. I was suffering, you know, from the grief of losing a love, even though I really wanted to lose it. Well, I went to the library to read Thoreau. I said 'I'm going to cut out from civilization and go back and live in the woods like Thoreau', and I started to read Thoreau and he

talked about Hindu philosophy. So I put Thoreau down and took out, accidentally, *The Life of Buddha by Ashvaghosa*" (qtd. in Barry Miles's *Jack Kerouac: King of the Beats*, 194).

[11] R. H. Blyth, *Haiku* Vols. I-IV (Hokuseido, 1949-1952).

[12] Gary Snyder, "Goddess of Mountains and Rivers" (*A Place in Space: Ethics, Aesthetics, and Watersheds*. Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1995), 85.

[13] Gary Snyder, letter to Philip Whalen, 12 Nov. 1953, Philip Glen Whalen Papers, Reed College.

[14] Gary Snyder, letter to Philip Whalen, 20 Nov. 1953, Philip Glen Whalen Papers, Reed College.

[15] Gary Snyder, letter to Philip Whalen, 9 Dec. 1953, Philip Glen Whalen Papers, Reed College.

[16] Gary Snyder, letter to Philip Whalen, 12 Jan. 1954, Philip Glen Whalen Papers, Reed College.

[17] *Mexico City Blues*, 1955, New York: Grove Press, 1990 (211).

[18] See *Every Day* (San Francisco: Coyote Books, 1965), 15-16; or *The Collected Poems of Philip Whalen* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), 368-369.

[19] "The waterfall is muffled, / and my ten foot square hut lies / In the abysm of a sea / Of sibilant quiet." See *The Complete Poems of Kenneth Rexroth* 285; originally published in *The Signature of All Things* (1949).

[20] Gary Snyder, letter to Philip Whalen, 16 March 1954, Philip Whalen Papers, Reed College.

[21] The reference to "Basho's frog" brings in another Asian influence, Japanese *haiku*--perhaps the most famous *haiku* in the literature. Rexroth translates it in *One Hundred Poems from the Japanese* as: "An old pond-- / The sound / Of a diving frog" (*Collected* 115). Whalen, Snyder, and Kerouac all incorporate *haiku* into the poems under consideration in this study, thus I will refrain from discussing the form here.

[22] George Agustus Moore (1852-1933), Irish poet, novelist, art critic, short story writer, and memoirist often credited with being the first modern Irish author.

[23] "There is nothing but what is seen of the mind itself"(Goddard 289).

Notes to Chapter Two

[1] Jack Kerouac to Gary Snyder, 21 May, 1957 (*Selected Letters: 1957-1969*), 43.

[2] Gary Snyder, letter to Philip Whalen, 8 March 1957. Philip Glen Whalen Papers, Special Collections and Archives Manuscript Collections, Eric V. Hauser Memorial Library, Reed College.

[3] Ginsberg later wrote a very different Vulture Peak poem titled "Vulture Peak: Gridhakuta Hill" based on his visit to the sacred site with Snyder, Kyger, and Peter Orlovsky in the winter of 1962 (dated "Benares, April 18, 1963.") Published in *Planet News* 1968; also see *Collected Poems*, 306-307.

[4] Jann Garitty and Gary Snyder, e-mail to author, 22 May 2009.

[5] All quotes are drawn from *Left Out in the Rain: New Poems 1947-1985* (New York: North Point Press, 1986), 70-73.

[6] *Yugen* 6, edited by LeRoi Jones, also contains Snyder's "A Walk," "Wild Horses," and "after work," as well as poetry by Robert Creeley, Jack Kerouac, Paul Blackburn, and others.

[7] Gary Snyder, letter to Joanne Kyger, 6 August 1959. "Gary Snyder fonds" in Contemporary Literature Collection, Special Collections and Rare Books Division, Bennett Library, Simon Fraser University.

[8] Kerouac told Charters, "In pencil, carefully revised and everything, because it was a scripture. I had no right to be spontaneous" (*Kerouac: A Biography*), 246.

[9] Avalokitesvara embodies "two fundamental aspects of buddhahood, compassion . . . and wisdom" (*The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen*), 14.

[10] Hui-neng (638-713), considered the father of Zen, was the sixth patriarch of the "Southern School" in China. Author of *The Platform Sūtra*, the only Chinese text to be afforded the title of sūtra.

[11] The Rinzai school, "one of the most important schools of Ch'an (Zen) . . . originated with the great Chinese Zen master Lin-chi I-hsuan (Jap., Rinzai Gigen)." One of the two schools of Zen active in Japan today, Rinzai stresses the use of kōans for "the fast way to the realization of enlightenment." The Soto school, on the other hand, stresses seated meditation (*zazen*)" (*SDBZ* 187).

[12] *Upaya* (Skt.): "The ability of a bodhisattva to guide beings to liberation through skillful means. All possible methods and ruses from straightforward talk to the most conspicuous miracles could be applicable" (*SDBZ* 239).

[13] Gary Snyder, letter to Philip Whalen, 31 July 1957, Philip Whalen Papers, Reed College.

[14] According to Whalen, "He had a lot of funny ideas and a lot of strange notions that he'd come up with, so that he was fun to be with, even though he'd go through these terrific changes where he'd suddenly be attacking you and saying everything was bad, everything was dirty, everything was ugly" (Gifford and Lee 218).

[15] Gary Snyder, letter to Philip Whalen, 8 March 1957, Philip Whalen Papers, Reed College.

[16] Subhuti, one of the ten leading disciples of Buddha, is generally thought to be the recorder of many of the most important Mahāyāna sūtras.

[17] *The Diamond Sūtra*, also known as the *Diamond-cutter Perfection of Insight Sūtra*, focuses on the doctrine of emptiness (*shūnyatā*), succinctly encapsulating the Six Perfections: *Dana-Pāramitā* (The Perfection of Generosity), *Sila-Pāramitā* (The Perfection of Morality), *Ksanti-Pāramitā* (The Perfection of Patience), *Virya-Pāramitā* (The Perfection of Strenuousness), *Dhyana-Pāramitā* (The Perfection of Meditation), and *Prajñā-Pāramitā* (The Perfection of Insight).

[18] *The Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, composed in the 2nd century C.E., is an influential Mahāyāna text which has exercised a large influence on the Buddhism of China and Japan.

[19] *The Platform Sūtra* of Hui-neng (638-713) is comprised of the basic teachings of Zen and the sayings, discourses, and biography of its author.

[20] "XI. Nalanda & Patna" (*Passage Through India: An Expanded Illustrated Edition*), 53-56.

[21] See Watson's *The Columbia Book of Chinese Poetry* for description of *shih* poetry (9-17), and (18-43) for examples of the form.

[22] From "Hojoki": "The waterfall is muffled, / and my ten foot square hut lies / In the abysm of a sea / Of sibilant quiet" (*The Complete Poems of Kenneth Rexroth* 285).

[23] From "Empty Mirror: "I sit / In my ten foot square hut, The birds sing." (*The Complete Poems of Kenneth Rexroth* 321).

[24] Gary Snyder, letter to Philip Whalen, 16 March 1954, Philip Whalen Papers, Reed College.

[25] See *Every Day*, 15-16; or *The Collected Poems of Philip Whalen*, 368-369.

[26] Kerouac's recollection of the event in *The Dharma Bums*: "[W]e borrowed Sean's jalopy and drove about a hundred miles up the seacoast to an isolated beach where we picked mussels right of the washed rocks of the sea and smoked them in a big woodfire covered with seaweed. We had wine and bread and cheese and Psyche spent the whole day lying on her stomach in her jeans and sweater, saying nothing. . . . There were natural caves on that beach where Japhy had once brought big parties of people and had organized naked bonfire dances" (137-138).

[27] We also see the term used around this same time in *Myths & Texts*: "From Siwash strawberry-pickers in the Skagit" ("Burning 15"), 50.

[28] According to Morgan, "at one point Snyder hoped to have a relationship with [Neuri], but nothing ever came of it" (4 fn. 2).

[29] Ray describes Neuri (Psyche) in *The Dharma Bums*: "[T]hey were all secretly jealous of Japhy's favorite doll Psyche, who came the following weekend real cute in jeans and a little white collar falling over her black turtleneck sweater and a tender little body and face. Japhy had told me he was a bit in love with her himself. But he had a hard time convincing her to make love he had to get her drunk, once she got drinking she couldn't stop" (137).

[30] Gary Snyder, letter to Joanne Kyger, 14 April 1959, Gary Snyder fonds, Simon Fraser University.

[31] Peter Abelard, a twelfth century philosopher-theologian, sought a position as tutor in the house of Parisian canon Fulbert, whose niece, Heloise, was in his charge. Abelard seduced and impregnated Heloise and against Heloise's wishes, the two wed in secret at the suggestion of Fulbert. When the union was announced, Heloise denied it and fled to a convent, prompting her uncle to think that Abelard wanted nothing more to do with her. Fulbert summarily had Abelard castrated. Snyder probably became aquainted with Abelard while reading Kenneth Rexroth's long poem "The Phoenix and the Tortoise" (1944)--"Abelard crying for that girl" (*Collected* 255).

[32] *The Blue Cliff Records* (Chin. *Pi-yen-lu*), the oldest and one of the most complex texts of Zen literature, is comprised of 100 *kōans* collected by Setcho Juken (Chi., Hsueh-tou Ch'ung-hsien) (*SDBZ* 170).

[33] Philip Whalen, letter to Gary Snyder, 22 May 1955, Gary Snyder Papers, University of California, Davis.

[34] *The Lankāvatāra Sūtra* is a "Mahāyāna sūtra that stresses the inner enlightenment that does away with all duality and is raised above all distinctions. . . . In the sūtra is also found the view that words are not necessary for the transmission of the teaching" (*SDBZ* 125).

[35] Huang-po Hsi-yun (d. 850) was one of the greatest Zen masters whose teachings were recorded by Pei Hsiu under the abbreviated title of *Huang-po Ch'uan-hsin-fa-yao*.

[36] Andromeda, the daughter of King Cephas and Queen Cassiopeia of Ethiopia, was chained to a seaside rock as a sacrifice to the sea monster Cetus in retribution for Cassiopeia's bragging that she was more

beautiful than the daughters of the sea god Nereus. Perseus, taken by Andromeda's beauty, slew Cetus by cutting off its head just as he had recently done to the snake-haired Medusa (Hamilton 204-207).

[37] The natural image rock outcropping that closes the stanza calls to mind the ". . . notable serpentine outcropping, not far after Rifle Camp" in "The Circumambulation of Mt. Tamalpais," and later from "An Offering to Tara": "On the lofty mountain / Is the nest of a hawk; / On the lofty rock, / The nest of a white hawk; . . ." (*MRWE* 87; 112).

[38] Gary Snyder, letter to Philip Whalen, 17 May 1957, Philip Whalen Papers, Reed College.

[39] "At least what irritates me constantly around these skolars is, they have no contact between their symbolic knowledge, i.e. all the buks they've read, & what happens to them every day, direct like." Gary Snyder, letter to Philip Whalen, 20 November 1953, Philip Whalen Papers, Reed College.

[40] Snyder is perhaps here quoting John Blofeld's *The Zen Teachings of Huang Po*: "Men are afraid to forget their minds, fearing to fall through the Void with nothing to stay their fall. They do not know that the Void is not really void, but the realm of the real Dharma" 41. He was also familiar with D.T. Suzuki's translation of Huang Po in the 1935 *Manual of Zen Buddhism* (Kyoto: Eastern Buddhism Society), which he mentioned in a letter to Whalen dated 10/22/56 (Reed).

[41] Gary Snyder, letter to Joanne Kyger, 31 May 1959, Gary Snyder fonds, Simon Fraser University.

[42] Philip Whalen, letter to Gary Snyder, 23 March 1957, Gary Snyder Papers, University of California, Davis.

[43] Also see "X. Bodh Gaya" (*Passage Through India*), 47-53.

[44] "Sourdough Mountain Lookout" was originally published in excerpted form in the *Chicago Review*'s special Zen issue 12.2 (Summer 1958). The poem was first published in book form by Whalen in *Like I Say* (New York: Totem Press, 1960) and also appeared in Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960* that same year.

[45] *The Heart Sūtra* is a one paragraph summary of the Prajñā-pāramitā teaching (The Perfection of Insight). It describes the truth arrived at by the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, namely that "form is emptiness, emptiness is not different from form, neither is form different from emptiness, indeed, emptiness is form" (Goddard 85).

[46] Gary Snyder, letter to Joanne Kyger, 9 November 1959, Gary Snyder fonds, Simon Fraser University.

[47] The *Yugen* version read "cocksman" rather than "hunter" 36.

[48] "Bhava-chakra" (*SDBZ* 19).

[49] "Unreal City, / Under the brown fog of a winter dawn . . . ," Part I "The Burial of the Dead."

[50] Keruoac tells this story thusly: ". . . Rexroth, hearing of [an earlier argument Kerouac had with Ginsberg], and seeing me demand wine in his house, yelled 'Just because you're a genius you think you can act RUDE and UNMANNERLY! Get out of my house, all of you!" (Me, Neal, Whalen, Ginsberg, Peter Orlovsky) I yelled 'Aw you're frightening me to death!" (*Some of the Dharma* 346).

Notes to Chapter Three

[1] Jack Kerouac, *Book of Haikus* (Ed. and Intro. Regina Weinreich. New York: Penguin, 2003), 92.

[2] Watts provides the following quote from Ginsberg's "Dawn," which appeared in the previous issue of *Chicago Review* (12.1), as an example of Beat over-self-consciousness: "I must write down / every recurring thought-- / stop every beating second." Rightly, Watts points out that "this is too indirect and didactic for Zen, which would rather hand you the thing itself without comment" (a la William Carlos Williams). Ginsberg here is trying too hard to control both his thoughts and time, as if the former were inside and the latter outside, connoting an individual consciousness distinct from its surroundings; a recorder of, as the stanza preceding the above quote says, "the physical world / moment to moment" (8). Whalen, on the other hand, describes the seeing-into-writing process like this in "The Slop Barrel": "The pen forms the letters / Their shape is in the muscles / Of my hand and arm" (*Collected* 61). The poet here is not trying to "stop every beating second" like Ginsberg; rather, the process is flowing in a more interconnected and less grasping way.

[3] Interestingly, "The Slop Barrel" is not included in this collection.

[4] Philip Whalen, letter to Gary Snyder, 15 Oct. 1956. Gary Snyder Papers, University of California, Davis.

[5] Neeli Cherkoviski, "A Letter to the San Francisco Chronicle Book Review" (www.bigbridge.org/REV-PCW.HTM), Web. 12 July 2011.

[6] Lew Welch, "Whalen's Poetry Swings like Jazz," Rev. of *On Bear's Head*, *San Francisco Chronicle* 6/22/69 (www.jacketmagazine.com/11/Whalen-rev-by-Welch.html).

[7] The scant amount of Whalen scholarship to date (compared to that on Snyder, Ginsberg, and Kerouac) tends to either pair Whalen up with other San Francisco Renaissance and Beat generation writers, or makes broad claims about his poetics designed to cover his oeuvre in general. Geoffrey Thurley, for example, reads Whalen alongside Michael McClure and Gregory Corso, whereas Michael Davidson, in his landmark study of the San Francisco Renaissance, discusses Whalen and Snyder in a single chapter. Paul Christensen provides the most sustained biographical discussion of Whalen, as well as close readings of some of the more important poems, in his chapter in Ann Charters's *The Beats: Literary Bohemians in Postwar America* (1983). Leslie Scalapino's introductory essays in Whalen's *Overtime: Selected Poems* (1999) and the recently published *The Collected Poems of Philip Whalen* (2007), both edited by Michael Rothenberg, are as full of flashes of insight and are as exciting to read as Whalen's poems themselves. The most recent overview of Whalen's work is Jane Falk's "Finger Pointing at the Moon: Zen and the Poetry of Philip Whalen," which appears in *The Emergence of Buddhist American Literature* (2009). Falk's essay explores how Whalen's poetry evolved over time as he moved from being a lay practitioner in the 1950s and 1960s, to a formal Zen practitioner in the 1970s, eventually receiving transmission from Richard Baker Roshi in 1987. Whalen's poetry, she suggests, shows "fewer direct allusions to Zen tenets, sūtras, or practices and more attention to how phenomena of ordinary life and mind interpenetrate" (116). The most substantial and focused article to date is Bruce Holsapple's "On Whalen's Use of Voice," which appeared in the latest issue of *Paideuma*. Holsapple discusses "the theoretical space between . . . 'the implied author,' the author implied by the text, and the lyric subject of the speaker," as he sees it evolving through Whalen's career (124). While I generally agree with Holsapple's assertion that "Whalen seeks movement in a poem, speed rather than thematic density, diversity rather than unity" (136), I would argue that the poem under discussion here, as well "Sourdough Mountain Lookout," are indeed thematically dense and tightly unified, though they both certainly explode with speed and movement. Readers of Whalen also have John Suiter's beautifully produced *Poets on the Peaks: Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen & Jack Kerouac in the North Cascades* (2002), as well as what has become the online storehouse of brief articles and reviews on Whalen, Rothenberg's website bigbridge.org.

[8] See "Interview with Aram Saroyan" (*Off the Wall: Interviews with Philip Whalen*. Ed. Donald Allen. Bolinas, CA: Four Seas Foundation, 197), 48.

[9] As he told Snyder, "Gregory Corso will get most of the rest for the Cambridge Review people or I.E. or whatever--he has more or less been given carte-blanche to collect mss from the coast." Philip Whalen, letter to Gary Snyder, 25 Sept. 1956. Gary Snyder Papers, University of California, Davis.

[10] As Kerouac wrote to Whalen four months after Corso received the poems, "Meyer Schapiro the art critic read your work one night when Allen visited him, and said it was good except when it dealt with enlightenment per se. . . . I don't agree that we should not discuss Buddha . . . who says? I like your poetry and Gary's because it discusses enlightenment in various cleaver ways." See *Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters, 1940-1956*, Ed. Ann Charters (New York: Penguin, 1995), 599. The manuscript eventually made its way to LeRoi Jones's Totem Press, where they were published in *Like I Say*, Whalen's first book. Jones also published Snyder's second published book, *Myths & Texts*, the same year.

[11] Gary Snyder, letter to Philip Whalen, 25 May 1956. Philip Glen Whalen Papers, Special Collections and Archives Manuscript Collections, Eric V. Hauser Memorial Library, Reed College.

[12] Philip Whalen, letter to Gary Snyder, 7 June 1956. Gary Snyder Papers, University of California, Davis.

[13] Gary Snyder, letter to Philip Whalen, 30 Sept. 1956. Philip Glen Whalen Papers, Reed College.

[14] Philip Whalen, letter to Gary Snyder, 15 Oct. 1956. Gary Snyder Papers, University of California, Davis.

[15] Mahāyāna Buddhism ("The Greater Vehicle") is the predominant form of Buddhism in North Asia. Mahayana broadened the earlier teachings of Theravada (Hinayana) Buddhism by reinterpreting the ideals, rewards, and practices of Buddhism to include everyone, not just monks and nuns.

[16] A *bodhisattva* is one on the path to enlightenment, the end result he or she willingly foregoes until all sentient beings are freed from the cycle of birth and death.

[17] Whalen, Snyder, and Kerouac were heavily invested in Goddard's anthology in the mid 1950s--Kerouac especially, who lifted his copy from the San Jose Public Library on a visit to Neal and Carolyn Cassady in 1954.

[18] Conze translates the Five *Skandhas* as "The Body / Feelings / Perceptions / Impulses and Emotions / Acts of Consciousness" (see below).

[19] Kerouac defined the Four Noble Truths in *Wake Up: A Life of the Buddha*, which he began researching and writing in 1954: "1. All life is suffering . . . (all existence is in a state of misery, impermanency and

unreality.) / 2. The cause of suffering is ignorant craving / 3. The suppression of suffering can be achieved / 4. The way is the Noble Eightfold Path" (30).

[20] Sal refers to Jones as "a former love of mine" in *On the Road* (New York: Penguin Essential Edition, 2005), 248. Lerhman appears in five, probably six, of the unpublished extant letters exchanged between Whalen and Snyder between March 1954 and August 1956. She continued her relationship with Whalen for two months after Snyder left for Kyoto, during which time "The Slop Barrel" was written (March 5, 1956 through August 11, 1956). On August 15th, according to the last letter consulted here (8/4/56), the Lehrmans were to depart for New York, Mrs. Lehrman pregnant with her second child.

[21] All quotes from "The Slop Barrel" come from *The Collected Poems of Philip Whalen* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), 56-62.

[22] Whalen first came in contact with the work of Suzuki in 1950 or 1951 while at Reed. In his interview with Yves Le Pellec, Whalen says that it was Snyder who introduced him to Zen: "The last year I was in college I was living in a big house with Gary and Lew Welch and a whole flock of other friends, and Gary discovered the writings of D.T. Suzuki in the college library and began bringing them home. It sort of renewed my interest in Buddhism" (59). "Zen Poet: Interview with Yves Le Pellec." *Off the Wall: Interviews with Philip Whalen*. Ed. Donald Allen (Bolinas, CA: Four Seas Foundation, 1978), 50-67.

[23] Snyder and Whalen were exchanging *gāthās* in their letters at least two years prior to the writing of "The Slop Barrel," as this letter to Whalen indicates. "& here is my Gāthā," Snyder says; it begins "wind has blown / the blossoms down / / no use dodging puddles / when your feet are soaked." Gary Snyder, letter to Philip Whalen, 16 March 1954. Philip Glen Whalen Papers, Special Collections and Archives Manuscript Collections, Eric V. Hauser Memorial Library, Reed College.

[24] *The Gateless Gate* was composed during the Sung Dynasty (960-1279) by the monk Wu-men (1183-1260) [Mumon Ekai Jap.] in 1228. It is comprised of forty-eight *kōans* which are accompanied by Mumon's commentary and a *gāthā* further exploring each case. See *Two Zen Classics*: The Gateless Gate *and* The Blue Cliff Records, Trans. by Sekida, Katsuki (Boston: Shambhala, 2005). Whalen quotes from *The Gateless Gate* in his poem "Metaphysical Insomnia Jazz, Mumonkan XXIX," which was published in *Memoirs of an Interglacial Age* the same year "The Slop Barrel" appeared in *Like I Say*. In this poem dated "7:IV:58," Whalen, as the title indicates, quotes from Case Twenty-nine, "The Sixth Patriarch's 'Your Mind

Moves,'" which is one of the more oft-quoted *kōans* in the literature. The *kōan* reads: "The wind was flapping the temple flag, and two monks started an argument. One said the flag moved, the other said the wind moved; they argued back and forth but could not reach a conclusion. The Sixth Patriarch said, 'It is not the wind that moves, it is not the flag that moves; it is your mind that moves. The two monks were awe-struck" (Sekida 96). Whalen's summation of this *kōan* about two monks arguing about whether it is the wind that moves or the flag, reads: "'IT IS THE WIND MOVING.' / 'IT IS THE FLAG MOVING.' / 'IT IS THE MIND MOVING.'" Snyder was incorporating *kōans* even earlier in his poetry: "Q. what is the way of non-activity? / A. it is activity" ("Burning 11" *M&T* 46).

[25] Ko Hung's *Shenhsienchuan* was a biography of more than one hundred Taoist masters. Also see *Alchemy, Medicine, Religion in the China of A.D. 320: The Nei P'ien of Ko Hung (Pao-p'u tzu*), Trans. James R. Ware (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1966). Ko Hung's *Pao P'u Tzu* (*He Who Holds to Simplicity*) is an obscure modern Taoist text (ca. 320 A.D.) made up of two parts, the *Wai p'ien* ("outer chapters"), which is largely Confucian in content, and twenty chapters of the *Nei p'ien* ("inner chapters"), which is more Taoist and alchemical in nature. Snyder was also reading Ko Hung at this time, as the closing of his November 8, 1956 letter to Whalen from Kyoto indicates: "Hoar frost & red leaf / Mercy is the Queen of Heaven / Sending Eagles of Destruction [/] I eat blackbirds & shit sunshine / Pao Pao Tzu," Philip Glen Whalen Papers, Reed College.

[26] The "red pill," surely a reference to the fact that at "the top of the genie's pharmacopoeia stands cinnabar," is also a reference to the red hemp seeds in Whalen's poem (Hung 178).

[27] Tiger, incidentally, was one of Snyder's nicknames used by himself and Whalen in their correspondence.

[28] Snyder, *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems* (40); Rexroth, *One Hundred Poems from the Japanese* (5).

[29] As long as one is hindered by *māyā* (which is itself a product of the Five *Skandhas*) they will be unable to escape *samsāra*, or the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. The root of our suffering (deception) lies not in *māyā* or the *skandhas* themselves, but in the erroneous belief that phenomenal world is the only reality, for, as Zen teaches, *samsāra* and *nirvana* are one and the same.

[30] Whalen's pairing of "*Maya*" with the word "*Desnudata*" is intriguing. It is possible that he came across the word while speaking with Kenneth Rexroth, who was to mention Christian Knorr von Rosenroth's *Kabbala Desnudata* in his introduction to his to A.E. Waite's *The Holy Kabbalah* in 1960. See Rexroth's

"The Holy Kabbalah" in *Assays* (41-51). Or, perhaps, Whalen had Goya's provocative *La Maja Denuda* in mind. Another possibility is that Whalen is playing with the name of the Buddha's cousin, Devadatta, who planned the murder of Buddha eight years before his natural death.

[31] "She had / A heart--how shall I say?--too soon made glad, / Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er / She looked on, and her looks went everywhere."

[32] Sarvāstivāda is school of Hīnayāna Buddhism. Its name translates as "'the teaching that says that everything is'" (*SDBZ* 188).

[33] Goddard, *A Buddhist Bible*, 86.

[34] That is, unless of course one is a Mahāyāna Buddhist, in which case after going beyond, they "return" as a *bodhisattva* to work toward the freedom of all other sentient beings.

[35] Blodeuwedd was "manufactured / Entirely of flowers / or flames" by Gwydion and King Math to become the wife of Lleu Llaw Gyffes. Blodeuwedd cheats on and then kills her husband, who is restored to life by Gwydion, who then transforms the murderess into an owl. Whalen's inclusion of a Welsh mythological figure was well chosen, for Blodeuwedd is, like our delusions, "manufactured" out of the void. Interesting too is the fact that he refers to Bloudeuwedd as "Helen," linking her back to the other adulterous Helen in Part I.

[36] Whalen's *waka* has thirty-three rather than thirty-one syllables. Close enough in this author's estimation to indeed define this stanza as such, considering Whalen's exploration of *haiku* and *gāthā* in the poem.

[37] Reginald Blyth, *Haiku*, vol. 1 (Japan: Hokuseido, 1949-1952), 113-113.

[38] Whalen could have also drawn his Suma inspiration from *The Tale of Genji*, which he was reading at the time, for "Genji was banished to Suma," as Rexroth notes in his above mentioned book (120-121).

[39] T'ao Ch'ien (365-427 C.E.), Han Shan (c. 7th-9th centuries C.E.), Li Po (701-762 C.E.), Chia Tao (779-843 C.E.), Su Tung-P'o (1037-1101 C.E.), Stonehouse (1272-1252 C.E.).

[40] "Well, why don't you love me like you used to do / How come you treat me like a worn out shoe?"

[41] Gary Snyder, letter to Philip Whalen, 17 May 1957, Philip Whalen Papers, Reed College. Snyder quotes "speechless & intelligent & shaking with shame" from the end of Section I of Ginsberg's "Howl."

[42] Chao-chou (778-897), who became a monk as an adolescent at Mount Sung, is said to achieved enlightenment at the age of 18. There are 525 recorded saying and poems of Chao-chou. See *The Recorded Sayings of Zen Master Joshu*, trans. James Green (Boston: Shambhala, 1998).

[43] Snyder himself mentions Chao-chou's kōan in "Burning 6" in *Myths & Texts*: "(sitting on Chao-chou's *wu* / my feet sleep)" (42).

[44] Gary Snyder, letter to Joanne Kyger, 14 April 1959, Gary Snyder fonds, Simon Fraser University.

[45] See Case 12, "Tozan's 'Masagin'" in *The Blue Cliff Records* and Case 21, "Ummon's 'Kanshiketsu'" in *The Gateless Gate* (Sekida 179-182 and 77-78 respectively).

[46] *The Diamond Sūtra*, also known as the *Diamond-cutter Perfection of Insight Sūtra*, focuses on the doctrine of emptiness (*shūnyatā*), succinctly encapsulating the Six Perfections: *Dana-Pāramitā* (The Perfection of Generosity), *Sila-Pāramitā* (The Perfection of Morality), *Ksanti-Pāramitā* (The Perfection of Patience), *Virya-Pāramitā* (The Perfection of Strenuousness), *Dhyana-Pāramitā* (The Perfection of Meditation), and *Prajñā-Pāramitā* (The Perfection of Insight).

[47] Philip Whalen, letter to Gary Snyder, 7 June 1956. Gary Snyder Papers, University of California, Davis.

[48] Cold Mountain Poems nos. 15 and 19 (*Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems)*, 53; 57.

Notes to Chapter Four

[1] Matsuo Basho, "The Knapsack Notebook" (*The Narrow Road to the Interior and Other Writings*, Trans. Sam Hamill Boston: Shambhala, 2000), 57.

[2] This period of intensive writing and Buddhist study saw the composition of *San Francisco Blues* (1953), the first book he wrote after he began studying Buddhism; *Maggie Cassidy* (1953); *Some of the Dharma* (1953-56); *Mexico City Blues* (1955); *Tristessa* (1955-56); *Scripture of the Golden Eternity* (1956); *Old Angel Midnight* (1956-59); the first part of *Desolation Angels* (1956); "Desolation Blues" (1956); and *The Dharma Bums* (1958).

[3] See, for example, Paul Maher, Jr, *Kerouac: His Life and Work* Revised and Updated 2004 (New York: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2007); Gerarld Nicosia, *Memory Babe: A Critical Biography of Jack Kerou*ac (Berkeley: UC Press, 1994); John Suiter, *Poets on the Peaks: Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen & Jack Kerouac in the North Cascades* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2002).

[4] Jones's book is the only full-length study of Kerouac's poetry and, while it touches on other works by Kerouac (mostly prose), its primary focus, as the title tells us, is *Mexico City Blues*.

[5] *Mexico City Blues* was written in 1955 and not published until 1959 by Grove Press.

[6] *Samsāra*, or as Kerouac termed it in the "211th Chorus" of *Mexico City Blues*, "The wheel of the quivering meat conception," is the repeated cycle of birth and death which sentient beings undergo until they reach nirvana.

[7] Mahāyāna Buddhism ("The Greater Vehicle") is the predominate form of Buddhism in North Asia. Mahāyāna broadened the earlier teachings of the older Theravada (Hīnayāna) Buddhism by reinterpreting the ideals, rewards, and practices of Buddhism to include everyone, not just monks and nuns. The fundamental distinction between Theravada and Mahāyāna Buddhism is found in the respective practitioner's goals for achieving enlightenment. According to Burton Watson, "the aim of religious practice [for the Theravada Buddhists] was to achieve the state of arhat, one who has gained release from suffering and passed beyond the confines of the world. . . . In contrast to the state of arhat, [the Mahāyāna Buddhists] chose as their goal and ideal the figure of the bodhisattva, one who vows not only to achieve enlightenment for himself but to assist all others to do likewise ("Introduction" *The Vimalakīrti Sūtra* 6). Zen is a school of Mahāyāna Buddhism. At the beginning of *The Dharma Bums*, when Ray Smith (Kerouac) meets Japhy Ryder (Snyder), he says, "'I'm not a Zen Buddhist, I'm a serious Buddhist, I'm an oldfashioned dreamy Hinayana coward of later Mahayanism' . . . my contention being that Zen Buddhism didn't concentrate on kindness so much as on confusing the intellect to make it perceive the illusion of all sources of things. 'It's *mean*,' I complained. 'All those Zen Masters throwing young kids into the mud because they can't answer their silly word questions'" (8-9).

[8] *On the Road* was written in 1951 and not published until 1957. *Visions of Cody* sat unpublished even longer than *On the Road*; it was written in 1951-52 and published in 1972. Both books were published by Viking Penguin.

[9] See Conze's *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development* (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1951) and *Buddhist Texts Through the Ages* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954). I am quoting here from Conze's 1962 *Buddhist Thought in India.*

[10] Prajñā-pāramita is the last of the Six Perfections, as seen in *The Diamond Sutra*, Kerouac's favorite Buddhist text.

[11] *The Scripture of the Golden Eternity* was composed in 1956 and published by City Lights in 1960; *The Dharma Bums*, written in 1957 on the heels of On the Road's success, was published by Viking Penguin the following year.

[12] *Desolation Angels*, written in 1956 and 1961 as two separate books, was published by Riverhead in 1965.

[13] *Duhkha*, the first of the Four Noble Truths, is most often translated as "suffering." According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen*, "*Duhkha* not only signifies suffering in the sense of unpleasant sensations; it also refers to everything, both material and mental, that is conditioned, that is subject to arising and passing away. . . . (61).

[14] Kerouac stood on his head every day to relieve the thrombophlebitis that he was first affliced with in 1945.

[15] Kerouac addressed these anxieties a few months earlier in the tenth numbered section of *Old Angel Midnight*: "there is no ego owning going on anywhere in the universal dream only endless talk & twaddle & tales of idiots--told for nothing & waving like leaves of a sea of trees in the birdy tweeking morning when motors & valley bourk" (15). And two years earlier in *Some of the Dharma*: "Always swimming ahead in new time is frightening, because we cling to arbitrary conceptions of ourselves and of something happening to those selves, and all of it is tormented and unpredictable and sad" (35).

[16] “Nothing again nothing,” Part II “A Game of Chess”; “Nothing with nothing,” Part III “The Fire Sermon.”

[17] Han Shan, also known as Cold Mountain, was a Seventh or Eighth century Chinese recluse poet. Kerouac came to know him through Snyder, who shared his Cold Mountain translations with Kerouac.

[18] *Tathāgata*, one of the several titles used by the Buddha to refer to himself after he attained enlightenment.

[19] See *Earth Poetry: Selected Essays and Interviews, 1950 - 1977*. Ed. Lee Bartlett, (Berkeley: Oyez, 1980), 21.

[20] Hui-neng (638-713), often considered the father of Zen, was the sixth patriarch of the "Southern School" in China. Author of *The Platform Sūtra*, the only Chinese text to be afforded the title of sūtra.

[21] Robert Lax, editor of the Catholic magazine *Jubilee*, and the Paris magazine *New Story*. Kerouac donated several pieces to Jubilee.

[22] *Dr. Sax* was written in 1952 and published in 1959 by Grove Press.

[23] In a letter to Carolyn Cassady dated 8/26/54, Kerouac says "If you want to study Buddha just get Lin Yutang's WISDOM OF CHINA AND INDIA out of the library and start on that" (Charters vol. I, 441).

[24] Kerouac had felt persecuted since the birth of Janet Kerouac on February 16, 1952 by Haverty's demands for child support. He was eventually arrested in December of 1954 and had to appear in Domestic Relations Court the following month. With Allen Ginsberg's brother, Eugene Brooks, arguing his cause, the judge agreed to postpone the case, and a paternity test, for a year due to Kerouac's phlebitis. In a letter dated January 18, 1955, Kerouac told Ginsberg that Joan "Showed me pixes of the dotter who I think looks like me, especially frowning square-browed photo, so may be mine" (Charters Vol. 1, 458).

[25] Ray says the same thing at the end of *The Dharma Bums*, only this time posed as a question: "Are we fallen angels who didn't want to believe that nothing is nothing and so were born to lose our loved ones and dear friends one by one and finally our own life, to see it proved?" (183).

[26] Kerouac was very familiar with *The Heart Sūtra*, for, as he told Snyder in a letter (March 8, 1956) shortly before leaving for California, he had "typed out the Maha Prajñā Pāramitā Hridaya" in one of his little notebooks (Charters Vol. 1, 567-568).

[27] A *bodhisattva* is one on the path to enlightenment, the end result he or she willingly foregoes until all sentient beings are freed from the cycle of birth and death.

[28] Phrase taken from *Some of the Dharma*, late 1953 or early 1954 (7). Kerouac takes this phrase from the "Introduction" of the *Śūraṅġama Sūtra*: ". . . Great Disciples who were all great Arhats and free from all intoxicants. . ." (Goddard 108). An *arhat* is one who has attained enlightenment by following the teachings of another. As such, they are free from the cycle of birth and death (*samsāra*).

[29] The same line, in prose from *The Dharma Bums*: "'The taste of rain, why kneel?'" (182).

[30] Ray says in *The Dharma Bums* that "little flowers grew everywhere around the rocks, and no one had asked them to grow, or me to grow" (180).

[31] *Yathābhūtam* is "knowledge in accordance with reality; knowledge of true reality, of 'suchness'" (*SDBZ* 252).

[32] *Satori in Paris* was written in 1965 and published the following year by Grove Press.