The Hobo’s Journey:
A Campbellian Reading of Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*
b
by
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I accept lostness forever.

— Jack Kerouac, Visions of Cody
STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

This dissertation has been conducted and presented solely by myself. I have not made use of other people’s work or presented it here without acknowledging the original source of all such work.
ABSTRACT

Something about *On the Road* spoke to the dazed and confused youth of 1950s America. Something offered them a glimmer of hope in silencing the inner tumult stirred by the depression, holocaust, Pearl Harbour, Hiroshima, and Cold War. Jack Kerouac crystallized through his most eminent *roman á clef* the melancholy of a generation of malcontents—what he dubbed ‘the beat generation’. In committing the itinerancy of his own spiritual journey to paper he somehow made everyone else feel less alone in their search for some kind of point—kick-starting a generation of literary iconoclasts and eternal truth-seekers, united in their peripatetic musings.

Like a twentieth century cut of *Pilgrim’s Progress; On the Road* follows Salvatore Paradise, an incarnation of the multifarious, semi-autobiographical Jack Duluoz character, in his quest for Salvation and inner Paradise in God’s country. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell outlined a monolithic model for the conquest of spiritual wholeness through the establishment of recurring tropes in the world’s mythologies—what he called the monomyth, but what is commonly known as ‘the hero’s journey’. The monomyth promotes a one-size-fits-all policy on heroic quests, a single formula that, if followed correctly, guarantees transcendence to a higher metaphysical plane and a shot at inner unity. The great mythic heroes all hold in common an immaculate execution of the journey and subsequent godlike equivalence surpassed only by their divine sense of equilibrium.

The accidie of Sal Paradise challenges Campbell’s theory as despite embarking upon his journey, *On the Road’s* hero fails in his attempts to navigate it, resulting in a stalemate of his character. Paradoxically, this doesn’t mean Sal’s journey is totally devoid of any overt point or meaning, far from it—it was through the sense of
psychical inertia generated from a subversion of the hero’s journey that Kerouac struck such a fervent note with his frustrated readers. My task in the following pages is to establish just how Kerouac was able to surpass a mythic form, as old as time itself, in order to lend a sense of belonging to the beatniks of the 1950s—the disoriented young Americans unmistakably born of a lost generation.
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CHAPTER 1

ON THE ROAD AS QUEST

The fact Jack Kerouac chose to entitle his semi-autobiographic oeuvre the *Dulouz Legend* is telling of a desire to order the anthology into a kind-of personal mythology. In a letter to Neal Cassady, Kerouac related his literary alter ego, Jack Duluoz, to James Joyce’s hero, Stephen Dedalus, musing, ‘I was writing a Joyce-like novel in which I was the Dedalus; and called myself Duluoz.’¹ In another letter he compares himself directly to Dedalus, claiming his ‘schizoid side is the Rakolnikove-Dedalus-George Webber-Duluoz side,’ the disgruntled ‘brooding figure sneering at a world of mediocrities, complacent ignorance, and bigotry exercised by ersatz Franklins.’² The name Dedalus harkens to the father of Icarus who was renowned as ‘an imaginative and resourceful inventor and creative artist for whom the pleasures of design and creation outweighed moral considerations,’ a myth none too dissimilar to Kerouac’s own.³ Daedalus, who managed to lose himself within a labyrinth of his own design and whose ingenious wings gave way to the death of his own son, has come to represent the creative inventor tormented by his own creations.⁴ And like Daedalus, Kerouac, an innovator and purveyor of a radical new way of writing, found himself aggrieved on account of his spontaneous method; Truman Capote, for one, decried his seemingly formless form as ‘typing, not writing’.⁵ Despite his lack of success in

⁴ Ibid., p.267.
eminent literary circles, Kerouac was transformed by the release of *On the Road* into a demigod of disaffected teenagers, whose ignorance irked him.\(^6\) Instead of being lauded over in astute journals he found himself fending benign questions on what it meant to be beat on *The Steve Allen Show* and in *Playboy*.\(^7\) His unwanted celebrity status was an irritant to the drinking problem he developed in his late teens; a crutch that finally gave way when he died of internal bleeding from alcoholism at the tender age of 47. The innate tragedy of the mythic form, then, provides the backbone for Kerouac’s semi-autobiographic odyssey, the *Duluoz Legend*, of which his most famous novel, *On the Road*, forms an integral part.

It could be argued there is no text more influential in the field of comparative mythology than Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.\(^8\) *Hero*, whose enchantment has pervaded modern culture, influencing the likes of George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, George Miller, James Hillman and The Grateful Dead, to name a few, establishes the repetition of tropes throughout the world’s mythologies, the culmination of which is a universal rites of passage narrative, a monomyth known as the hero’s journey.\(^9\) Campbell divides the hero’s journey into three sections: separation, initiation, and return—what he deems to be the nuclear unit of the monomyth.\(^10\) The journey of Buddha, for instance, can be loosely partitioned into the separation of leaving the palace as the prince, Siddhartha Guatama; the initiation of practising austerities and meditating beneath the Bodhi tree; and the return to Benares,

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\(^8\) Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (California: Joseph Campbell Foundation, 2008). From this point forward I shall refer to this text as *Hero*.
\(^10\) Campbell, *Hero*, p.23.
the ordinary world, as the newly enlightened Shakyamuni Buddha. Any rites of passage must have purpose, an end goal in which to strive for, and for Campbell a completion of the full round—a successful hero’s journey—requires the hero seize a symbolic boon; a treasure represented by a number of plastic objects which ultimately symbolizes the raising of the hero to a level of omniscience on a par with the gods.

The true mark of a hero is determined by his or her ability to navigate the journey successfully; to delve into the abyss, extract the fiercely guarded jewel therein and return home with the lessons of its intrepid retrieval firmly in hand. Prometheus gifted fire, Christ taught the Glory of Almighty God and Buddha the way of the Noble Eightfold Path. ‘The effect of the successful adventure of the hero is the unlocking and release again of the flow of life into the body of the world,’ Campbell writes.\(^\text{11}\) The cosmic energy gathered from a completion of the full round resuscitates the individual and communal spirit, kick-starting the heart like a shot of divine adrenaline. Eventually, however, the stimulant wears off, and the heart, gradually slowing to its original monotonous thud, grows hungry for the zeal offered by further adventure once more. When a new call sounds, the hero responds willingly, consolidating the journey as a cyclical venture.\(^\text{12}\)

The circle is a staple of the world’s mythologies, best represented by the ancient Greek symbol of the ouroboros—the serpent which in gorging upon its own tail encapsulates the perpetual cycle of creation and destruction that drives existence. Just as the awakening of the hero ‘rests on a sea of night into which it descends […]

\(^\text{11}\) Campbell, *Hero*, p.32.
\(^\text{12}\) Ibid., p.23.
and out of which it mysteriously wakes,’ for Campbell, the very universe is ‘precipitated out of, and reposes upon, a timelessness back into which it again dissolves.’

Whilst it is fair to establish motifs of the hero’s journey in *On the Road*, such as a separation in the initial beckoning of Sal Paradise to leave Paterson, or an initiation during his travails on the road; upon his return to New Jersey, Sal seems in no greater position spiritually than he was when he left off, scuppering any notions of heroic transcendence. Yet, cyclicality and repetition play a large role in *On the Road*’s overall milieu; even Kerouac’s hitchhiking map from the Winter of 1947, the date of his first trip out on the road, is marred by a countrywide circle. It’s apparent some form of cycle is present in Sal’s journey, but whether it be deemed heroic, in a true Campbellian sense, is debatable.

*On the Road* opens with Sal planning his initial trip out West meticulously, ‘poring over maps of the United States in Paterson for months’. He resolves to hitchhike along Route 6, a practically straight, horizontal line stretching from the East Coast of America to the West; it seems the logical decision to make, and it’s the last of its kind in the novel. Sal’s aspirations to trek Route 6 fall flat when he realises to get to the highway he must first go North to Bear Mountain before he is able to go West, thus delaying his arrival in Denver where his friends await. Critically, he only notices this once he has begun his journey. In the pouring rain, amid the ‘smoky trees

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15 Kerouac, *On the Road*, p.11.
and dismal wilderness’ of Bear Mountain he curses himself for a false start, and when further embittered by having to take a bus back to New York to start over, he vows to never let it happen again.16

From the very beginning of On the Road, then, we’re set up for an idiosyncratic narrative, as Kerouac, in the most literal sense, decries linearity as unfit for purpose through the metaphor of trashing his hike along the ‘great red line’ of Route 6.17 Impulse was a core tenet of Kerouac’s ex tempore method of spontaneous prose, a technique likened to the psychological process of free association.18 On the Road itself was famously written over a three week long burst of spontaneous writing in April of 1951. Typed onto 120ft of architect’s paper glued together with pieces of sticky tape to allow continuous writing, Kerouac’s fabled scroll manuscript is a monument to unhinged creativity, even if it is believed several drafts preceded it.

Upon request of Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs, Kerouac published guidelines for his spontaneous method in Black Mountain Review in 1957. In ‘Essentials of Spontaneous Prose,’ he derides the use of selectivity and instead encourages:

Free deviation (association) of mind into limitless blow-on-subject seas of thought, swimming in sea of English with no discipline other than rhythms of rhetorical exhalation and expostulated statement, like a fist coming down on a table with each complete utterance, bang!19

16 Kerouac, On the Road, p.11.
17 Ibid., p.12.
He ridicules the use of benign punctuation, bemoaning ‘sentence-structures […] arbitrarily riddled by false colons and timid usually needless commas,’ preferring instead the brisk pause of a space dash, required simply for breathing—a beat for a beat generation. Kerouac’s preference for the dash is another tell-tale sign of Joyce’s influence, who, in Visions of Cody, Duluoz outwardly declares to have ‘dug’. Revisions are only allowed for rational mistakes, such as names and dates, and any corrections are to be performed through insertion, not writing, which would imply a more meditative form of editing. ‘If possible write, “without consciousness” in semitrance,’ he notes, but most importantly, ‘write excitedly, swiftly, with writing-or-typing-cramps in accordance (as from center to periphery) with laws of orgasm […] Come from within, out.’ This last point, to ‘Come from within, out,’ is in line with the philosophy of the transcendentalists, in particular the works of Henry David Thoreau, who had a resounding effect on Kerouac. Indeed, biographer Paul Maher Jr. observes that ‘Preoccupations with […] being “like Thoreau” recurred throughout Kerouac’s life.’

A direct reaction to rationalist thought; transcendentalism placed focus on the autarky of the individual soul in defining existence. ‘A man must find his occasions in himself,’ Thoreau believed. It’s easy to see why Kerouac was drawn to this deeply personal, antinomian form of philosophy that found its revival at the tail end of the industrial revolution. Thoreau was writing at a time in which the human soul found

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20 Kerouac, Spontaneous Prose, p.57.
22 Kerouac, Spontaneous Prose, p.57-58.
23 Ibid., p.58.
itself increasingly smothered by a swelling mass of new technologies—a time not unlike Kerouac’s own which was shadowed by the futuristic nightmare of the atom bomb, among other things. To find occasion in oneself, as Thoreau suggests, is to disregard the occasions set forth by those who came before us. Thoreauvian transcendentalism, then, holds little regard for traditional social structures. ‘No way of thinking or doing, however ancient, can be trusted without proof,’ Thoreau warns.\(^{26}\) Campbell’s monomyth appears to be one such metaphysically fixed way of thinking or doing. A potential ‘singleness of the human spirit in its aspirations, powers vicissitudes and wisdom,’ allows little room for heroic deviation or tribulation.\(^{27}\)

In \textit{Walden}, Thoreau posits:

What is a course of history, or philosophy, or poetry, no matter how well selected, or the best society, or the most admirable routine of life, compared with the discipline of looking always at what is to be seen? Will you be a reader, a student merely, or a seer? Read your fate, see what is before you, and walk on into futurity.\(^{28}\)

In other words, Thoreau asks just like Kerouac, that an individual ‘\textit{Come} from within, out.’\(^{29}\) We must react to the world as we each find it, and make life determining judgements based on that interaction from within, not from predetermined, external and impersonal factors. At its core, transcendentalism is an intuitive philosophy. Focusing on the current moment and individual situation above all, it’s spontaneous, and as such opposes the possibility of pre-planned wholeness the structure of Campbell’s monomyth presents.

\(^{26}\) Thoreau, p.16.  
\(^{27}\) Campbell, \textit{Hero}, p.28.  
\(^{28}\) Thoreau, p.174.  
\(^{29}\) Kerouac, \textit{Spontaneous Prose}, p.58.
In many ways, Kerouac’s interest in transcendentalism was a precursor to his later, fleeting fascination in Mahayana Buddhism, a religion also focused on the freeing of oneself from the wheel of worldly strictures. In Kerouac, the Word and the Way: Prose Artist as Spiritual Quester, Ben Giamo proposes that although Kerouac didn’t take a real interest in Buddhism until 1954, some years after the completion of the original On the Road scroll, the novel itself wasn’t actually published until 1957, ‘allowing much time to play with various insertions and perform related editorial tasks’. Thus On the Road is a novel profoundly influenced by two separate strains of thought that are united in their disavowal of worldly structure.

There is no structure on earth more oppressive than that of time—the devourer of all things. Resolution is a prerequisite of our basic, linear conception of time and consequently of traditional three-act dramatic structure, as replicated in the separation, initiation and return of Campbell’s monomyth. If there’s a beginning, basic logic tells us there must be an end. In On the Road, however, there is no resounding sense of resolution, whether it be on a micro or macro level. There are no apotheoses, no ‘divine state[s] to which the human hero attains who has gone beyond the last terrors of ignorance’. The narrative of On the Road is syncopated, instead of rising in a series of ascending denouements in which Sal’s woes are eventually resolved and some form of heroic growth achieved, the novel bops up and down with the frantic, melancholy energy of an improvised jazz quartet. As Ben Giamo puts it, ‘oscillation between ecstasy and suffering […] appears to be the maxim of the novel.’

31 Campbell, Hero, p.23.
32 Ibid., p.127.
33 Giamo, p.20.
to lapse into normality, whether it be through his fugacious attempt at a straight life in Mill City, or his semi-normal nuclear family with Terry and her little son, events in which dramatic resolution seems a possibility, Kerouac tears him from domesticity, hurls him into the back of a ‘49 Hudson and sends him back out on the road. By disallowing Sal to settle, and by keeping him in a constant state of motion, Kerouac subverts the heroic cycle, creating instead a repetitious, temporal anomaly in which heroic transcendence is impossible.

Sal’s friend and paragon, Dean Moriarty represents mastery of time. ‘God exists, we know time. Everything since the Greeks has been predicated wrong […] It’s all this!’ Dean cries, maddened behind the wheel.  

In his excited fluster, Dean refutes the Greek mathematician Euclid’s understanding of the parallel postulate, that is, loosely speaking, a strictly three dimensional, linear conception of space and time. The parallel postulate was a fundamental principle of geometry for millennia, up until the early nineteenth century when Nikolai Lobachevsky and János Bolyai formulated the first systems of non-Euclidean geometry in which they saw the possibility of additional geometries, independent of the parallel postulate. Bernhard Riemann’s perception of non-Euclidean geometry in which he exposed manifolds of dimensions and curvatures paved the way for Einstein’s theory of special relativity and, in turn, Hermann Minkowski’s space-time continuum—two theories that radically altered the way in which we perceive time, space, and subsequently, existence.

34 Kerouac, On the Road, p.108.  
36 Ibid., p.103.
Minkowski articulated that if space is three-dimensional and time is one-dimensional, our reality, that is comprised of both space and time—space-time—may have at least four dimensions.\(^{37}\) In addition to the three visible dimensions, time forms another that is undetectable to the human eye and is thus totally incomprehensible, though many have attempted its translation into three dimensions.\(^{38}\) ‘Henceforth, space by itself, and time by itself, are doomed to fade away into mere shadows,’ Minkowski wrote, quite literally turning the universe on its head.\(^{39}\) If, as suggested by Minkowski, time in the common sense is just an illusion, then causality, the relationship between cause and effect—something like the Thoreauvian emphasis on reacting to the present moment—takes over as the defining point of individual existence. Life is built upon a chain of reactive events—not by the delimiting façade of time. In his autobiography, Rudolf Carnap recalls a conversation with Einstein in which he expressed concern surrounding the formula and purpose of the now:

Once Einstein said that the problem of the Now worried him seriously. He explained that the experience of the Now means something special for man, something essentially different from the past and the future, but that this important difference does not and cannot occur within physics. That this experience cannot be grasped by science seem to him a matter of painful but inevitable resignation.\(^{40}\)

According to Einstein there was something essential about the now just outside the realm of science; an ethereal essence unsympathetic to the systematic probing of

\(^{37}\) Henderson, p.111.
\(^{38}\) Ibid., p.111.
mathematical equation and formulae.\textsuperscript{41} For Kerouac, the pursuit of the now, quite simply, was not a question of physics, but of metaphysics; it’s no coincidence that every time-knowing utterance from Dean is coupled with divine affirmation—‘God exists without qualms.’\textsuperscript{42} To know time is to become god.

Dean Moriarty is a fine example of the transcendence triggered by an understanding of the merging of space and time; typifying an existence defined by awareness of causality and the importance of living in the now. Born in the back of a jalopy somewhere between Salt Lake City and Los Angeles, Dean was delivered on the road; unfixed and unresolved, outside of totality and outside of time’s clutches. Dean’s entire narrative is about motion, his battered old paper suitcase jutting from underneath the well-worn mattress of whoever he is sleeping with for a speedy exit. Ben Giamo concurs that ‘to know time is to escape its structure through improvisation,’ to utterly ignore it, then, is through the catastrophic pileup of causal events effected by constant movement at high velocity.\textsuperscript{43} Dean leaves cars, women and children in heaps across America, sticking with no body and no thing, even abandoning Sal in Mexico whilst he is sick with dysentery. With the benefit of objectivity awarded to him on account of his nomadicity, he knows time like no other. Dean even appears able to predict the future; understanding his whereabouts along the infinite cosmological plane to the very minute. ‘Remember not three but three-fourteen,’ he reminds Camille of the correct timings for one of their hotel-bound affairs.\textsuperscript{44} In another instance he rebukes a kid for throwing stones at a car, aware at some point in the future

\textsuperscript{41} Carnap, p.37.
\textsuperscript{42} Kerouac, \textit{On the Road}, p.109.
\textsuperscript{43} Giamo, p.35.
\textsuperscript{44} Kerouac, \textit{On the Road}, p.39.
his mischievous game will lead to a fatal accident. “‘Think of it,” said Dean. “One day he’ll put a stone through a man’s windshield and the man will crash and die — all on account of that little kid. You see what I mean? God exists without qualms.”’

It’s assumed within the fourth dimension infinite variants of our cosmological existence have collated like growth rings around an ancient tree trunk. Horwitz, Arshanky and Elitzur write:

Each individual is a collection of myriad of selves, distributed along his history, each occurrence persisting on the world line, experiencing indefinitely the particular event of that moment. Each of these momentary persons, according to our experience would possess memory of the previous ones, and would therefore believe himself identical with them; yet they would exist separately, as single pictures in a film.

Years later, whilst acting as psychedelic chauffeur for Ken Kesey’s acid test bus, Neal Cassady—Dean’s real-life alias—concluded after some voluble discussion of dimensions, that ‘the fourth dimensional concept of time […] is our soul mind,’ and that, ‘we are actually fourth dimensional beings in a third dimensional body, inhabiting a second dimensional world!’ Dean is haunted by the memory of being orphaned by his alcoholic father, spending a fair share of the novel searching America’s streets and railroads for the old tinsmith, but never actually managing to find him. The story of a vagrant drinking himself into madness and abandoning his children on a whim bears too close a semblance to Dean’s own narrative to be coincidental, and when taking into account that Kerouac is toying with how we perceive space and time, and consequently, reality and its dimensions, it’s feasible that

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45 Kerouac, On the Road, p.109.
47 Edge City: The Story of the Merry Pranksters, dir. by Michael Reuter & Gregor Wille (The Post Republic, 2008).
Dean can’t actually find his father because he is in fact his father. What Dean perceives to be conscious memories of his pa is actually just a dubious form of interdimensional déjà vu—faint etchings on his mind of the not-so-distant past, present or future.

Linear time falters in *On the Road*, jittering and repeating on itself like a scratched Charlie Parker forty-five. During constant back and forth journeys across the country, a myriad of towns and cities sink into an amorphous temporal black hole. The Ghost of the Susquehanna can’t even tell the difference between East and West, or Frederick, Maryland and Fredericksburg, Virginia. The lack of anchoring each character experiences within *On the Road’s* dead space is just one of the devices which lends the novel its prevailing sense of futility and sadness.

Campbell argues that upon surpassing the initial threshold of a departure from the ordinary world, the burgeoning hero enters into a series of initiation rites—a road of trials they must conquer before ascending to a higher level of spiritual existence.

‘Having traversed the threshold, the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials,’ he booms.

Despite his seemingly malleable mysticism, Kerouac cherished no other religion as he did Catholicism. Jesus’ road of trials culminates in passion week, the agonising final week of his mortal life. During passion week, Christ enters Jerusalem and conducts a series of sermons and miracles that bring him into dispute with the

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48 Kerouac, *On the Road*, p.94.
49 Campbell, *Hero*, p.81.
city’s elders, who, shortly after the last supper, charge him with blasphemy for claiming to be the son of God. On trial, Caiaphas, Pontius Pilate and King Herod find him guilty, forcing him to wear a crown of thorns and to carry a cross to Golgotha for crucifixion. He dies soon after being crucified, and is resurrected on Easter Sunday along with new teachings from heaven, true to Campbell’s heroic ideal.

According to Sal, though, ‘the road is life,’ and as both the Catholic and Buddhist doctrines teach, mortal life is suffering in its entirety.\textsuperscript{51} Through On the Road’s narrative black hole, Kerouac seems to caveat that the suffering is perpetual, like a cosmic ring road of never-ending trials without an exit. It’s a thought that recalls the pessimistic philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, specifically his ideas on eternal recurrence, a brand of cyclical philosophy originally proposed by the Presocratics and the Stoics. In The Gay Science, Nietzsche writes of recurrence:

This life as you now live it and have lived it you will have to live once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life must return to you, all in the same succession and sequence.\textsuperscript{52}

Kerouac was undoubtedly inspired by Nietzsche, so much so that as a young man he scrawled a quotation of Nietzsche’s with his own blood: ‘Art is the highest task and the proper metaphysical activity of this life.’\textsuperscript{53} On the very first page of On the Road, Sal recalls how Chad King told him of letters he received from Dean that ‘naively and sweetly asked […] to teach him all about Nietzsche’.\textsuperscript{54} Critically, Nietzsche is

\textsuperscript{51} Kerouac, On the Road, p.192.
\textsuperscript{52} Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). p.194.
\textsuperscript{54} Kerouac, On the Road, p.1.
mentioned again whilst Dean is trying to explain his understanding of time to Sal.\textsuperscript{55} Dean relays, ‘no one can tell us that there is no God. We’ve passed through all forms,’ but Sal doesn’t understand.\textsuperscript{56} ‘There was nothing clear about the things he said, but what he meant to say was somehow made pure and clear […] I had never dreamed Dean would become a mystic,’ Sal narrates confusedly.\textsuperscript{57} As we have already discovered, Dean is a master of time. Godlike, he has swum through all forms. Travelling through temporality, fluid and amorphous—he is Nietzsche’s \textit{ubermensch}. Dean tries repeatedly to bring Sal to his godly understanding of time, ‘remember, Sal, when I first came to New York and I wanted Chad King to teach me about Nietzsche. You see how long ago? […] we know time,’ but never quite manages to pull it off.\textsuperscript{58}

During this particular drive through the Virginia wilds, a formless location in itself, Dean brings to mind the cliché of the jaded time-traveller struggling to convince their temporally trapped loved one of the unfathomable knowledge that all that has ever been will come to pass again, and again, and again. Dean and Sal have been in the same car, driving through the same American backcountry an infinite number of times, and have covered every journey of \textit{On the Road} in the same manner. ‘While I dozed, the muddy Hudson zoomed by the tents outside Sabinal where I had lived and loved and worked in the spectral past,’ Sal daydreams vacantly.\textsuperscript{59}

Ben Giamo argues the final passage of \textit{On the Road}, ‘delivers the story from confusion and desire, from rocking back and forth and going up and down in ecstasy

\textsuperscript{55} Kerouac, \textit{On the Road}, p.108.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., p.108.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., p.109.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., p.108.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., p.153.
and sorrow. Giamo even goes as far as saying Sal’s condition at the end of *On the Road* is one of ‘a very deserved and knowing state of rest’. Giamo’s conclusion of *On the Road* is therefore one of wholeness—a conclusion that falls in line with the apotheosis of a Campbellian hero through a completion of the heroic cycle. In Giamo’s reading of *On the Road*, Sal surpasses the road of trials and receives the boon of the true sense of things—the syncopated nature of existence and the eternal ravages of time. A boon he can bestow upon the ordinary world in the form of his mantric moan for mankind, as pleaded for by the Shrouded Traveler. The conclusion of *On the Road* is more likely a distinctly Kerouacian take on Nietzsche’s thoughts on eternal recurrence, indelibly coloured with Sal’s own sense of spiritual dejection.

At the end of *On the Road*, instead of seizing the golden fleece, Sal is left feeling fleeced by the futility of life. The chain of events that comprise his heroic journey lack the crucial link of spiritual growth, stumbling him into a recurrence of never-ending trials befuddled by the distinct absence of a holistic end. Sal seems destined to a lifetime of feeling something is missing, but never quite grasping what ‘it’ could be.

Left kicking his legs at the end of a pier, it’s clear Sal’s run out of places to look for answers, having hit a dead end both literally and metaphorically. Consequently, Sal’s supposed lesson for mankind reads like a eulogy for the collective soul of the twentieth century. ‘Nobody, nobody knows what’s going to happen to anybody besides the forlorn rags of growing old,’ he reflects, gazing longingly into the

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60 Giamo, p.42.
61 Ibid., p.42.
62 Ibid., p.42.
dimming New Jersey skyline. Sal fails in seizing the transcendent boon so dramatically that by the end of the novel he refuses to recognize even the possibility of its existence. What Sal has learnt in his journey, ironically, is that there is nothing to learn—there is no panacea for the muddlement of life, it is what it is. Unfortunately, and as the rest of the Dulouz Legend attests, claiming there aren’t any answers isn’t enough to end a search for them, no matter how futile a search it may be. Sal’s dwelling upon Dean at the end of the novel is an indication of his continued, latent sense of wondering. ‘I think of Dean Moriarty, I even think of Old Dean Moriarty the father we never found, I think of Dean Moriarty,’ he writes. Dean Moriarty—the only person who claimed to know anything about the true nature of this life.

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64 Ibid., p.281.
CHAPTER 2

THE HOLY GOOF:

DEAN MORIARTY AS TRICKSTER

In blending the age-old antipodes of Occident and Orient, primitive and civilized, contemporary and archaic, the monomyth reveals a hidden mutuality within the soul of mankind—a parallelism in our collective hopes, fears and fantasies.\(^\text{65}\) It’s this, the unification of the ‘hidden processes of the enigma *Homo Sapiens,*’ which lands the monomyth within the amorphous world of depth psychology.\(^\text{66}\) After all, mythology, Campbell argues, is merely ‘psychology […] misread as biography, history, and cosmology.’\(^\text{67}\) The homogeneity of the monomyth is an acknowledgement of Carl Jung’s pioneering work on the collective unconscious—a theory imperative to an understanding of the psychological function of the hero’s journey.

In addition to Freud’s personal unconscious, Jung argued for a wholly subconscious layer of the psyche built upon unknowable, prenatally fixed images that haunt our waking lives—what he referred to as ‘archetypes’—‘universal images that have existed since the remotest times.’\(^\text{68}\) The archetypes most commonly referred to in Jung’s work include: the anima, the animus, the shadow, the mother, the child, the wise old man, and the trickster. Jung believed the psyche had hermaphroditic attributes and that depending upon the conscious gender of an individual their unconscious would be rooted in the opposite sex. The masculine psyche is driven by a feminine

\(^{65}\) Campbell, *Hero,* p.219-220.
\(^{66}\) Ibid., p.219-220.
\(^{67}\) Ibid., p.219.
unconscious, the anima, and the feminine psyche by a masculine, the animus.\textsuperscript{69} He concluded the epicene nature of the mind could be found in the transsexual symbols of the world’s divine syzygies—the male-female pairs of deities and the singular gods that portray both masculine and feminine attributes.\textsuperscript{70} The shadow is the dark side of one’s subconscious; built upon repressed memories and fantasies, it’s overtly negative, and perhaps closer to Freud’s conception of the unconscious. The mother archetype is the foremost example of the male projection of the anima; simultaneously terrifying and nurturing, she is manifest in the world’s goddess’ and life-giving nature symbols.\textsuperscript{71} The child archetype represents the prenatal and preconscious aspect of the psyche, whose present purpose is to ‘compensate or correct […] the inevitable one-sidedness and extravagances of the conscious mind’.\textsuperscript{72} The wise old man expresses the drive of the personal spirit to remain true to the child; he is ‘the revealer and enlightener, the speaking fountainhead of [the] soul’.\textsuperscript{73}

The trickster figure betokens man’s infantile, primitive mind—a psyche stuck between burgeoning consciousness and the chaotic void of unconsciousness. Primitive man’s mental immaturity is reflected in the impishness of the trickster, who, in a paradoxically adroit and foolish manner, acts upon unreasoned impulse, serving as a ‘faithful recollection of an absolutely undifferentiated human consciousness’.\textsuperscript{74} Defined by his divine-animal nature, he is conversely superior to man because of the

\textsuperscript{69} Jung, p.27.  
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., p.56.  
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., p.82.  
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., p.162.  
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., p.37.  
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., p.260.
unabridged potentiality awarded him by his stupid spontaneity, as well as inferior, due
to the nuisance his irrationality causes himself and those around him.\textsuperscript{75}

Together the archetypes comprise Jung’s collective unconscious—an
amorphous aspect undifferentiated in each of us, regardless of colour or creed.\textsuperscript{76} When
combined, the collective unconscious, personal unconscious and individual ego total
the self—the soul.\textsuperscript{77} For Jung, the self is an \textit{a priori} feature of the mind, that is, we
begin our existence psychically whole. However, immediately after birth our ego
begins to stray from the totality of the self through a process known as ‘inflation’.\textsuperscript{78}
The first portion of life is defined by this inflation of ego; a separation from the self
which brings about a sense of alienation and a yearning for metaphysical meaning that
was pre-existent in the originally complete self.\textsuperscript{79} The second part of life is
subsequently characterized by the desire for a return to wholeness and a search for the
\textit{imago dei}, the image of god, that is ultimately just a search for ourselves.\textsuperscript{80} What Jung
termed ‘individuation,’ the psychical model for Campbell’s monomyth, is a twofold
process; an initial inflation and separation of ego followed by a potential deflation and
return to the totality of self.\textsuperscript{81} ‘The birth, life, and death of the individual may be
regarded as a descent into unconsciousness and return,’ Campbell concurs.\textsuperscript{82}
Assimilation of the archetypal images, ‘the deep forces that have shaped man’s

\textsuperscript{75} Jung, p.264.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., p.3.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., p.276.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., p.145.
\textsuperscript{79} Donald Kalsched, \textit{Trauma and the Soul: A Psycho-Spiritual Approach to Human
Development and its Interruption} (Sussex: Routledge). p.16.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., p.17.
\textsuperscript{81} Jung., p.40.
\textsuperscript{82} Campbell, \textit{Hero}, p.222.
destiny,’ drives the individuation process, and consequently Campbell’s monomyth, too.83 Campbell writes:

The first work of the hero is to retreat from the world scene of secondary efforts to those causal zones of the psyche where the difficulties really reside, and there to clarify the difficulties, eradicate them in his own case […] and break through to the undistorted, direct, experience and assimilation of what C. G. Jung has called “the archetypal images.”84

In *On the Road* we find several emanations of archetypal figures: The Shrouded Traveller as the shadow; Terry as the mother archetype; Old Bull Lee, the wise old man; and the primary focus of this chapter, Dean Moriarty as the trickster figure. We may call such manifestations, projections—mostly incognizant superimpositions of unconscious figures onto concrete reality. Jung writes, ‘a scientific psychology must regard those transcendent intuitions that sprang from the human mind in all ages as *projections* […] as psychic contents that were extrapolated in metaphysical space and hypostatized.’85 A projection, having been through the hypostatical wringer, is scarred by human consciousness and individual perceptions of the physical world. Thus representations of any one figure tends to vary. Hence the archetype of Terry in *On the Road* differentiates from that of the Madonna by a few minor details, but its innate meaning as that of the mother archetype remains intact.

Our natural compulsion to project archetypes is the reason the trickster permeates such a diverse range of lore; manifesting in the figures of Prometheus, Hermes, Ture, Ma-ui, Eshu-Elegba, Wakdjunkaga, raven, rabbit, spider, coyote, Lazarillo de Tormes, El Buscòn, Gil Blas, Felix Krull, Augie March, and San Pedro,

84 Ibid., p.12.
85 Jung, p.59.
to name a few. In ‘A Tolerated Margin of Mess: The Trickster and His Tales Reconsidered,’ Barbara Babcock-Abrahams adds Butch Cassidy to the list of mythic Tricksters, extending the projection of archetypes to non-fictional figures from popular culture.\(^86\) Any such list would be remiss to ignore Neal Cassady, the real-life alias of Dean Moriarty—the ‘HOLY GOOF’.\(^87\) Gregory Stephenson argues a heroic ideal for Kerouac was that of the ‘dumbsaint’.\(^88\) ‘Be crazy dumbaint of the mind,’ he advised in ‘Essentials of Spontaneous Prose.’\(^89\) The holy goof and the dumbaint are interchangeable terms. Dean is both god and fool; beautiful in his buffoonery and divine in his doltishness—a trickster through and through.

As previously noted, it is impossible to fully comprehend an archetype, they are by nature unknowable, which is precisely why we wish to know them. There is no archetype of an archetype—no typology or singular definition. It is, however, possible to draw comparisons among lore and establish motifs that, although in no way fixed, can be seen to recur among figures—a process that allows us to approach something resembling a typology. Babcock-Abrahams has established at least sixteen traits of the trickster figure, the following of which can be seen to apply to Dean: tricksters may exist separate to and ignore conventional temporal and spatial boundaries; inhabit liminal spaces; frequently portray some mental and/or physical problem; have an enormous libido; have an ability to disperse themselves and a tendency to be


\(^87\) Kerouac, *On the Road*, p.176.


\(^89\) Kerouac, *Spontaneous Prose*, p.59.
ambiguous; follow the principle of motley; are generally amoral and asocial; and are often given a role in which they usually have freedom from some of the demands of the social code.⁹⁰

Through his idiocy the potentiality of the trickster is boundless and so he exists as a liminal character, occupying what Campbell calls, ‘the world and the age between deep sleep and waking consciousness, the zone where the One breaks into the manifold and the many are reconciled in the One’.⁹¹ He is often found lurking in the hinterland of society, as to occupy civilized space would necessarily inhibit the freedom his unreason relies upon. More often than not it is precisely his stupidity that finds him removed from civilization in the first place. In the case of Wakdjunkaga, the North American trickster of the Winnebago tribe, he finds himself isolated after destroying a boat in which he was meant to ferry the guests of a warbundle ceremony, which, coincidentally, he had already desecrated by cohabiting with a woman during, anyway.

As an individual who was conceived in the back of a moving car, the liminality of Dean, who spends his life moving, is striking. He does inhabit social spaces from time to time, owning several apartments with different women, but his battered suitcase serves as a symbol for the futility of such ventures, allowing him to disperse on a whim at any given moment. Dean is most comfortable behind the wheel of a car—a movable object that inhabits the transitional space of roads. Many trickster figures are cosmically bound to roads through their divine titles, such as the Yoruban god, Eshu, the patron of roads; or the Greek god, Hermes, the patron of travellers.

⁹⁰ Babcock-Abrahams, p.160.
⁹¹ Campbell, Hero, p.253.
Just like Wakdjunkaga who smashes his boat for no real reason, Dean’s inability to remain within civilized space is largely his own fault. In Part Two of *On the Road*, Sal recalls one of many tales of Dean’s socially isolating, random madness:

I learned that Dean had lived happily with Camille in San Francisco ever since that fall of 1947; he got a job on the railroad and made a lot of money. He became the Father of a cute little girl, Amy Moriarty. Then suddenly he blew his top while walking down the street one day. He saw a ’49 Hudson for sale and rushed to the bank for his entire roll. He bought the car on the spot. Ed Dunkel was with him. Now they were broke.\(^{92}\)

Any employment of Dean never lasts. Whether it be repairing railroads, tending parking lots, fitting tyres, or selling door-to-door; he much prefers the chaotic life of an unemployed car thief. The morning after stealing a detective’s car during an undone night in downtown Denver, Dean worries, ‘every precinct knows my fingerprints from the year that I stole five hundred cars.’\(^{93}\) His character as a jobless thief, then, is not just marginal in the psychological sense but in the sociological sense, too. In *Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts and Criticism*, William J. Hynes and William G. Doty note that the trickster is typically ‘cast as an “out” person, and his activities are often outlawish, outlandish, outrageous, out of bounds, and out-of-order.’\(^{94}\)

I dedicated the previous chapter to the warping of spatiotemporal boundaries in *On the Road*, in which Dean plays no small part. Nevertheless, a few succinct words will suffice to summarise the trickster aspect of Dean’s ‘knowing time’.\(^{95}\) Conventional notions of time and space are destroyed in *On the Road*. The hero’s

\(^{92}\) Kerouac, *On the Road*, p.100.
\(^{93}\) Ibid., p.203.
\(^{95}\) Kerouac, *On the Road*, p.108.
journey of Sal Paradise takes place within an eternally recurring temporal black hole, which, as pointed out earlier, Dean seems to hold higher knowledge of, as shown by his repeated announcements regarding knowing time. Dean’s severed spatiotemporal ties and deep understanding of the recurring nature of time are reflected in his announcement, ‘Everything since the Greeks has been predicated wrong. You can’t make it with geometry and geometrical systems of thinking. It’s all this!’ A statement that grounds the temporal philosophy of Dean outside of societal conventions.\textsuperscript{96} Such a quote, when read alongside Sal’s pathetic worldly response to Dean’s transcendental sooth-statement, ‘At one point I moaned about life’s troubles – how poor my family was, how much I wanted to help Lucille, who was also poor and had a daughter,’ exemplifies Dean’s superiority in his knowledge of existence—superiority awarded to him by nature of his ability to transcend time and space, a trait of a trickster-figure.\textsuperscript{97}

Babcock-Abrahams notes that a projection of the trickster will typically portray mental and/or physical problems. Whether it be Wakdjunkaga’s gnawed penis, Prometheus’ pecked liver, or young Dionysus’ dismemberment by the titans, the trickster figure is renowned for being physically and mentally mutilated.\textsuperscript{98} The schizoid personality of Dean hardly requires elaborating; his attention deficiency and whimsical ‘ah — ahem — yes, yes, of course,’ interjections of mental utterances make up so much of what he is as a character.\textsuperscript{99} What is normal mentally for the rest of us, like showing restraint on account of protecting the ego, isn’t at all for Dean as a consciously inept trickster figure. Dean is hindered mentally by an inability to contain

\textsuperscript{96} Kerouac, \textit{On the Road}, p.108.
\textsuperscript{97} Babcock-Abrahams, p.160.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., p.160.
his primitivism, and so exhibits symptoms of various psychological health problems, like ADHD or schizophrenia. As Sal understands it, he has ‘tremendously involved and tormented mental categories’.  

At one-point Dean answers the door of his San-Franciscan apartment stark-naked with a bandage wrapped around his hand. He tells Sal of a fight he had with Marylou in which he broke his thumb after it deflected off her eyebrow. ‘She didn’t even have a bruise and in fact laughed, but my thumb broke above the wrist,’ Dean recounts, unmoved. The fight with Marylou seems to trigger a snowballing of medical problems for Dean, all of which are dutifully detailed to Sal. In addition to his broken thumb, Dean develops an infection from working through the injury; a sore butt from penicillin shots; hives, because he is allergic to the medicine the doctor has prescribed; an inflamed cyst on his leg; a damaged foot; and a collapsed nasal bridge—in Dean’s words, he’s a ‘classification three-A, jazz hounded Moriarty.’

Despite all of this, in true trickster fashion, the ailments have not ruined Dean as they would an egotistic being. Upon Sal’s visit their hindrance melts away. ‘And yet – and yet, I’ve never felt better and finer and happier with the world and to see lovely little children playing in the sun and I am so glad to see you, my fine gone wonderful Sal,’ Dean beams.

The trickster is renowned for blurring the lines between good and bad, often transforming a bad situation into good and vice versa. Just like Wakdjungkaga who soon forgets his chewed penis, Dean doesn’t dwell on his tortured past, the transience of his non-binary mind won’t allow it.

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101 Ibid., p.168.
102 Ibid., p.169.
103 Ibid., p.169.
104 Hynes and Doty, p.37.
In *Structural Anthropology*, Claude Lévi-Strauss writes, ‘the trickster is the embodiment of all complementary opposites, but in particular of that between immediate sexual gratification and the demands of civilization.’\(^{105}\) The concupiscence of the trickster represents man’s most base animal drive—to philander incessantly without fear of emotional or physical reprisal. The Tibetan trickster, Uncle Tompa draped himself in the robes of a nun so he could invade a cloister and copulate with all the sisters inside, only to be discovered once a spate of pregnancies broke out. From the moment we meet Dean we are made aware of his negligent promiscuity as he argues with a teenage Marylou over an affair. ‘To him sex was the one and only holy and important thing in life,’ Sal says.\(^{106}\)

Before Sal is able to reconnect with Dean at the beginning of *On the Road*, he meets with Carlo Marx who informs him, ‘Dean was making love to two girls at the same time, they being Marylou, his first wife, who waited for him in a hotel room, and Camille, a new girl, who waited for him in a hotel room.’\(^{107}\) Carlo Marx, who was based on Allen Ginsberg, an openly gay man, goes on to tell Sal that in between visiting Marylou and Camille, Dean returns to him for their own unfinished business whereby they gulp benzedrine, sit cross-legged and chat into the small hours.\(^{108}\) It’s well recorded that Cassady was bisexual, so it isn’t difficult to read a queer subtext.

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\(^{106}\) Kerouac, *On the Road*, p.4.

\(^{107}\) Ibid., p.38.

\(^{108}\) Ibid., p.38.
into the relationship between Dean and Carlo, adding an additional trickster-like layer to Dean’s character.\textsuperscript{109}

Homosexuality is prevalent in trickster myths, as you would imagine it to be, considering the trickster archetype is the androgynous brain undifferentiated and free of all conscious prejudices. Kerouac, however, although friends with many gay men, usually erased male homosexuality out of his books, probably on account of his prevailing sense of conservatism, tinged with Catholic guilt.\textsuperscript{110} A more outright example of Dean’s bisexuality in \textit{On the Road} comes when he asks Sal to ‘work’ Marylou in front of him.\textsuperscript{111} Similarly, in the middle of a journey eastward to New York, Dean attempts to sell himself to their chauffer, a ‘fag,’ in a hotel room.\textsuperscript{112} When the driver refuses Dean’s advances, he complains, ‘You see, man, it’s better not to bother. Offer them what they secretly want and they of course become immediately panic-stricken.’\textsuperscript{113} In a similar manner to Dean, Dionysus attempted to whore himself to Prosymnus in return for directions into Hades, but, when he returned to find him dead, he decided to enter the shepherd’s tomb and fulfil his promise using the branch of a nearby fig tree, instead.

The bizarreness of Dean answering the door wearing nothing but a soiled bandage on his hand jovially reminds us we are in the presence of comedy when

\textsuperscript{111} Kerouac, \textit{On the Road}, p.118.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., p.190.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., p.190.
dealing with the trickster. The trickster provides solace from the psychical censorship of the ego and the mask of civility. Babcock-Abrahams argues the trickster is not merely a representation of a primitive, undifferentiated mind, but is also a ‘present and constant perception of opposition, of difference essential to human constructs’.\(^{114}\) ‘A clown figure working in continuous opposition to the well-wishing creator very often appears in myth and folktale, as accounting for the ills and difficulties of existence this side of the veil,’ Campbell agrees.\(^{115}\) In his buffoonery, trickster provides a much-needed lapse in mental suppression. ‘The king creates and needs the fool, for one who actually reigns and holds power has little capacity for irony or self-caricature,’ says Babock-Abrahams.\(^{116}\)

During the sixties, Neal Cassady was a member of Ken Kesey’s Merry Pranksters, an acid induced collective on a consciousness expansion trip across America, a journey similar to Kerouac’s own in the late forties. The name Merry Pranksters has its own clowning connotations, and it was Cassady—Dean—that drove the pranksters on their first trip out East in 1964.\(^{117}\) The most outright portrayal of Dean as a clown comes at the end of On the Road when he appears to a jaded Sal dressed in stockings and clutching a flute. ‘He took out his new wooden flute. He played a few squeaky notes on it and jumped up and down in his stocking feet,’ Sal narrates.\(^{118}\) In this penultimate scene, Dean transforms into the medieval court jester trying his utmost to crack a smile on the grave face of Sal, the weary despot sick of his folly.

\(^{114}\) Babcock-Abrahams, p.164.
\(^{115}\) Campbell, Hero, p.250.
\(^{116}\) Babcock-Abrahams, p.186.
\(^{118}\) Kerouac, On the Road, p.278.
The comedic aspect of Dean’s character is magnified by frequent comparisons to Groucho Marx, the head-honcho of the iconoclastic comedy act, The Marx Brothers.\textsuperscript{119} Kerouac was a fan of The Marx Brothers, referring to them as early as \textit{The Town and the City} and going so far as to dedicate a poem, \textit{To Harpo Marx}, to the act’s mute, vagabond brother.\textsuperscript{120} In a journal entry, Kerouac writes of \textit{Animal Crackers}, ‘I saw it six times in 1930. Harpo is beautiful.’\textsuperscript{121} Harpo’s muteness makes him a less obvious comparison to Dean, who, like Groucho, harbours a well-versed, albeit unpredictable tongue. However, Dean is still similar to Harpo in many ways, not least because in the final description we read of him he is wearing a moth-eaten overcoat, the chosen garb of the Marx Brothers’ tramp sibling, but because he also shares, along with Harpo, several affinities to the Greek trickster-god, Hermes.\textsuperscript{122}

In \textit{Harpo Marx as Trickster}, Charlene Fix highlights the parallels between Harpo’s harp and Hermes’ lyre.\textsuperscript{123} In \textit{On the Road}, Dean also plays an instrument—the flute, a more contemporary version of the pan flute, which Hermes is accredited with having invented. Fix also observes that Hermes is reported to have stolen cattle from Apollo as an infant, consolidating him as the god of thieves—a title that would suit either Harpo or Dean just as easily.\textsuperscript{124} Harpo loots his way through the films, and Dean, of course, spends a great deal of \textit{On the Road} stealing cars.

\textsuperscript{120} Jack Kerouac, \textit{The Town and the City} (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1959). p.38.
\textsuperscript{121} Jack Kerouac, ‘Journal Entry,’ extracted from \textit{A Jack Kerouac ROMnibus} (Penguin Electronic, 1995).
\textsuperscript{122} Kerouac, \textit{On the Road}, p.280.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., p.13.
Dean’s largest affinity with Harpo and Hermes is not as a musician or thief however, it is through the role of the psychopomp—the conductor of souls and messenger from the realm of the gods. ‘Trickster is often a psychopomp, a mediator who crosses and resets the lines between life and death […] he may bring something across […] from the gods to humans—be it a message, punishment, an essential cultural power, or even life itself,’ Hynes and Doty write.\textsuperscript{125} His foremost title: the messenger of the gods, consolidates Hermes as the most prevalent psychopomp in Greek mythology, at least. As maieutic messenger, Hermes relays intimations from his father, Zeus, to man and deity alike, their narratives often liable to a reworking from his shrewd tongue. Unlike Harpo, Hermes is \textit{facundus}, but one needn’t be able to speak to bring tidings, and Harpo’s silent message, Fix suggests, was to offer a downtrodden mankind the gifts of the imagination to fight fascism.\textsuperscript{126} Hermes was not only a good talker, but he was also a terrific liar. He is established as such early on in his myth, whereby he attempts to wriggle out of punishment for stealing Apollo’s cattle by spinning a web of insincerities. Receiving intimations from a liar is always dubious, so all those who receive Hermes’ reports are expected to do their best to interpret the veiled truth from his messages. It’s this, the ambiguous quality of Hermes’ messages which lends his name to hermeneutics—the study of interpretation.

According to Hynes and Doty, ‘there is a chance-y element in all hermeneutical interpretation: sometimes the interpreter […] intuits the correct solutions, and sometimes she or he does not.’\textsuperscript{127} Throughout \textit{On the Road}, Dean does his best as psychopomp to relay a transcendent message to Sal, a revelation regarding the true

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nature of time and existence meant to guide him on his journey towards spiritual wholeness. Sal’s lingering confusion at the end of the novel, though, suggests any such communication has been lost in translation—drowned in the quagmire of brain vomit that typifies Dean’s incessant rambling.

Sal’s task as Campbellian hero is to assimilate the archetypes, of which Dean is the most brazen example of just one. When Old Bull Lee pleads of him to stay in New Orleans instead of zipping off to California, Sal disregards the words of the wise old man, too. Even, Terry, a heavenly vision of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe—an ardent incarnation of the great mother, finds herself abandoned by Sal. As long as the collective unconscious goes on unassimilated in such a way, the full round of the hero’s journey and its bounty of wholeness will remain forever out of reach. Sal’s inability to heed the lessons of the archetypes results in a premature death of oneness—a stillbirth of self reflected by a loss of all bearings, inside and out.

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129 Ibid., p.92.
CHAPTER 3

TRANSPERSONAL TREASURE:

SAL’S SEARCH FOR INNER PARADISE

Upon surpassing the threshold of the ordinary world and surviving the travails therein, the Campbellian hero is wont to claim some form of transpersonal treasure, a boon representing the raising of the hero to godly omniscience. In *Hero*, Campbell writes that the prize of the hero’s journey is not to become a god or goddess, *per se*, but to receive their transcendent grace, ‘the power of their sustaining substance’.\(^{130}\) Campbell believed that in eclipsing the mortal realm through an intrepid reclamation of spirit, the hero’s mind ‘breaks the bounding sphere of the cosmos to a realization transcending all experiences of form’.\(^{131}\) The successful hero’s journey subsequently results in a transpersonal discovery of the ineluctable void of eternity—what is deemed to be, in short, the grace of the gods.\(^{132}\) As noted in the previous chapter, ‘mythology is where the psyche “was” before psychology made it an object of scientific investigation,’ therefore the apotheosis of the hero, in actual fact, amounts to a completion of Jung’s individuation process and a return to a prenatal state of wholeness.\(^{133}\) ‘The perilous journey was a labor not of attainment but of reattainment […] the godly powers sought and dangerously won are revealed to have been within the heart of the hero all the time,’ Campbell writes.\(^{134}\) In *On the Road*, Sal expressly acknowledges a desire for a return to the complete, prenatal self, writing, ‘The one

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\(^{130}\) Campbell, *Hero*, p.155.
\(^{131}\) Ibid., p.163.
\(^{132}\) Ibid., p.163.
\(^{134}\) Campbell, *Hero*, p.53.
thing that we yearn for in our living days […] is the remembrance of some lost bliss that was probably experienced in the womb and can only be reproduced (though we hate to admit it) in death.” The ultimate boon of Sal’s journey and of the hero’s journey in general, then, is the total self—one’s eternal soul.

*On the Road*’s boon takes the ambiguous form of ‘it,’ a McGuffin Sal hunts throughout the novel. It, however, seems to be prerequisite for many of post-war America’s fringe characters: the homeless, disabled, and racially segregated. Through awarding spiritual completion to America’s underclasses, Kerouac identified in the torturous lives of the marginalized an opportunity at wholeness otherwise denied to those of more comfortable social status. The most outward portrayal of marginalized spiritual superiority comes in Sal’s frequent visits to Jazz clubs where, amid his excited commentary of African-American jazz bands, it goes seldom unmentioned. Of one African-American tenorman in particular, Sal announces, ‘the tenorman had it and everybody knew he had it’.

Dean is awarded godly status on account of his overwhelming destitution, providing a-kind-of heroic benchmark for Sal. When Dean, worn-ragged, receives a dressing down from a barrage of ex-girlfriends, Sal proclaims, ‘He was B E A T — the root, the soul of Beatific’. For Kerouac, the word ‘beat’ was homonymic; in the first instance it meant dog-tired, but it also functioned as an abbreviation of the words ‘beatific’ and ‘beatitude,’ the states of being blissfully happy and supremely blessed. Thus for Kerouac, the conditions of being beaten and blessed go hand-in-hand. The

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135 Kerouac, *On the Road*, p.112.
136 Ibid., p.179.
137 Ibid., p.177.
only way to experience the zenith of spiritual existence, to acquire a state of bliss, is to hit rock-bottom in the same manner as Jesus nailed to the cross at Golgotha—as it’s said, ‘man’s extremity is God’s opportunity’.  

In Part Two of On the Road, after being abandoned by Mary Lou, Sal finds himself confronted by it whilst down and out on Market Street in San Francisco:

I had reached the point of ecstasy that I always wanted to reach, which was the complete step across chronological time into timeless shadows […] I felt sweet, swinging bliss, like a big shot of heroin in the mainline vein; like a gulp of wine late in the afternoon and it makes you shudder; my feet tingled.

Prior to his destitution on Market Street, Sal has a run in with a goddess in the form of a lowly fish and chip shop worker. He believes the woman to be ‘his mother of about two hundred years ago in England,’ solidifying her as another projection of the eternal great mother archetype. For Campbell, meeting with the goddess’ or gods at this crucial point is inevitable as they are the ‘custodians of the elixir of imperishable being’—of the boon the hero so desperately seeks. In this, the ‘holy void of uncreated emptiness,’ Sal is temporarily restored to the wholeness of self he yearns for throughout the novel—he manages to find the bliss he last experienced in the womb.

During his transcendent experience the true nature of time and being that Dean has tried so hard to intimate to Sal is unmasked in all its glory. ‘I realized that I had died and been reborn numberless times but just didn’t remember […] like falling asleep and

139 Kerouac, On the Road, p.156-157.
140 Ibid., p.157.
141 Campbell, Hero, p.155.
142 Kerouac, On the Road, p.157.
waking up again a million times,’ Sal reflects. But, just as with other numinous run-ins, Sal fails to internalize the experience into something psychically transforming and leaves the life-altering encounter unchanged. ‘I was too young to know what happened,’ he laments, as though he retrospectively rue a lost opportunity, and the following chapter opens as if nothing had happened at all.

In ‘Circular Journey: Jack Kerouac’s Duluoz Legend,’ Gregory Stephenson notes that for Kerouac, to be beat is to ‘temporarily’ diminish the ego in order to allow the psyche to become more receptive to its ‘more sublime aspects,’ confirming that a momentary lapse in ego stirred by extreme fatigue plunges Sal into a state of bliss during his waking sleepwalk on Market Street. Just as Stephenson says, being beat for Kerouac is only ever temporary and therefore any transcendence into a state of wholeness similar to the sensation Sal feels on Market Street is ephemeral, like a fleeting, pleasant dream—hazy and self-diminishing. The true test of a Campbellian hero comes in his or her ability to retain the divine experience and transform it into something meaningful; to extract from it the enlightening boon to bestow upon the ignorant, permanently shifting the mortal coil in the process. During the journey, Campbell writes, ‘The hero has died as a modern man; but as eternal man⎯perfected, unspecific, universal man—he has been reborn.’ This fatal lapse in Sal’s journey is the equivalent of Buddha leaving the Bodhi tree to return to his prior princely ways, ignoring all that was learnt during his tenure in the void and negating his duty as Campbellian hero to bestow his findings upon his fellow man. For Campbell, a

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144 Ibid., p.157
146 Campbell, *Hero*, p.15.
completion of the full round requires the hero bring the ‘runes of wisdom [...] back into the kingdom of humanity,’ in order to revivify and renew the ‘community, the nation, the planet, or the ten thousand worlds.’\textsuperscript{147} And yet it is Dean who saves Sal immediately after his brush with the imago dei on Market Street, not Sal who is able to rescue mankind with his lessons from the other side.\textsuperscript{148} Instead, he offers a nebulous lament in the form of his closing eulogy for the soul.

Such a catastrophic failure to make good on apotheosis, to refuse to be raised to a divine level of understanding, confirms what we have suspected all along—Sal is no hero at all, much less a Campbellian one. Robert Segal concludes that although Campbell believed there to be a potential hero in every human being, few people in practice are heroic, writing, ‘all may harbour a deeper side of themselves awaiting discovery, but only a few possess the courage and perseverance to discover it.’\textsuperscript{149}

Sal’s inability to complete the full round of the hero’s journey by seizing the boon of ‘it,’ an eternal understanding of the nature of time and of existence, amounts to a floundering of the individuation process it represents. Sal’s psyche is doomed to exist in a forever fragmented state, a collective unconscious perpetually seeking to reconnect with the totality of self lost in the eternal maternal womb. The prevailing state of alienation and sense of aimless melancholy so apparent in \textit{On the Road} surely stems from this tragic flaw of his, but why is it that Sal’s journey meets such a spiritual dead-end?

\textsuperscript{147} Campbell, \textit{Hero}, p.167.
\textsuperscript{148} Kerouac, \textit{On the Road}, p.158.
Recalling Sal Paradise is merely On the Road’s incarnation of Kerouac’s predominant Jack Duluoz character, a literary representation of himself—the semi-autobiographical nature of Kerouac’s overarching Duluoz Legend offers a unique insight into the crestfallen ethos of On the Road. Kerouac’s incorporation of the psychological process of free association through spontaneous prose, and love of writing late at night, in chemically heightened states, as well as frequent insertion of dream figures into his work, invites a psychoanalytical reading through his literature that would otherwise be misplaced.

In ‘Sharing a Shadow,’ James T. Jones establishes that both Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg practised what Jung called ‘amplificatory interpretation,’ that is, attempting to extract meaning from unconscious dream-images—archetypal symbols—through conscious projection into their writing.150 In a letter to a friend, Kerouac wrote, ‘I want to fish as deep down as possible into my own subconscious in the belief that once that far down, everyone will understand because they are the same that far down.’151 In the preface of his published dream journal, Book of Dreams, Kerouac recalled of the entries he made with ‘eerie sleeping cap head’—‘what shame I’d feel to see such naked revelations so insouciantly stated.’152 The subconscious mind, he continues, ‘does not make any mental discriminations of good or bad […] it just deals with the realities.’153

The deep rooting of Kerouac’s work within his own psychic fabric is further evidenced when he admits, ‘The heroes of “On the Road,” “The Subterraneans,” etc. reappear

153 Ibid., xvii.
here,’ that is, within his personal dreams. In Desolation Angels, Kerouac goes even further in personalising his work by having Duluoz compare spontaneous prose to the holy Act of Contrition, writing:

I was originating […] all of it innocent go-ahead confession, the discipline of making the mind the slave of the tongue with no chance to lie or re-elaborate (in keeping not only with the Dichtung Warheit Goethe but those of the Catholic Church my childhood).

Evidently, Kerouac endeavoured to project all he could from his life and psyche into his writing; he felt obliged to do so not just as an artist, but as a Catholic—writing from a stream of consciousness was a religious function, a form of revelatory confession. Of Freud and Jung, he wrote in a letter to his sister, Nin, ‘I’ve studied these people long ago, but now for the first time, I find that their knowledge can help me. So now they’re not just books, but salvation.’ In this respect the entire Duluoz Legend, including On the Road, is effectively bio-imaged. Kerouac the person is inherently bound within the psychic contents of the Duluoz protagonist—the rites of passage of Sal Paradise are not only the rites of passage of Jack Duluoz, but they are in turn a psychological projection of the initiation rites undertaken by Kerouac as a young adult, too.

Jones contends that Kerouac was deeply preoccupied with gnawing personal issues of his past—most notably the premature death of his brother, Gerard, and the agonising death of his father, Leo. Visions of Gerard, the first novel in the

154 Kerouac, Book of Dreams, xv.
157 Jones, p.236.
chronology of the *Dulouz Legend*, was premised upon Gerard’s death. An agonising pain tale of Duluoz’s childhood, marred by the death of his saintly brother, *Visions of Gerard* precedes *On the Road*, its contents affecting the history and psychological makeup of Sal Paradise.\(^{158}\) In a discussion of Kerouac’s repression of trauma, Jones establishes the emanation of the Shrouded Traveller in *On the Road* as evidence of resistance to deal with the haunting of difficult memories—the Shrouded Traveller being an obvious projection of the shadow archetype, the dark, repressed, side of the unconscious.\(^{159}\)

Kerouac felt an overwhelming guilt for the death of his older brother who died at the age of nine due to a rheumatic heart; in one letter comparing his relationship with Gerard to the betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot, writing, ‘I betrayed him merely by living when he died’.\(^{160}\) Personal friend and biographer, Ann Charters writes that his childhood was ‘often a dark and gloomy time,’ in no small part due to Gerard’s death, which shook Kerouac, then just four years old, to his very core; so much so that he was ‘too nervous to sleep alone for years afterwards,’ forcing him to share his mother’s bed for much of his childhood.\(^{161}\) ‘For the first ten years of his life Kerouac associated the gloom and darkness with the confusion and unhappiness he felt after Gerard’s death,’ Charters says.\(^{162}\) ‘It was only huddled against the warm back of his mother that he felt the shadows of the night pressed against the dark screened window of the bedroom couldn’t hurt him.’\(^{163}\)

\(^{159}\) Jones, p.238.  
\(^{161}\) Charters, *Biography*, p.28.  
\(^{162}\) Ibid., p.29.  
\(^{163}\) Ibid., p.29.
It was through the traumatic experience of Gerard’s death that Duluoz was robbed of his childhood innocence and a chance at anything that could be deemed as normal psychic development later in life. In *Visions of Gerard, Ti Jean*—little Jack Duluoz recalls the precise moment he was confronted by the death of his brother, claiming it was as if ‘a curtain had opened.’ While watching his family mourn the little body in the front parlour of their humble Lowell home, Duluoz claims a grim epiphany cracked open in his head, ‘Gerard is dead and the soul is dead and the world is dead and dead is dead.’ It was at that moment the trauma of Gerard’s death forced Duluoz’s being to split into indecipherable and irreconcilable pieces—inside he became confused, disjointed and disconnected. Jungian Psychoanalyst, Donald Kalsched writes that:

The psyche’s normal reaction to trauma is to withdraw from the scene of the injury. If withdrawal is not possible, then a part of the self must be withdrawn, and for this to happen the otherwise integrated ego must split into fragments or *dissociate*. In other words, the event of trauma causes the ego to evacuate from the remainder of the self in order to avoid further harm to the total soul. An activation of what Kalsched calls the ‘self-care system,’ during childhood is detrimental to later development of the psyche as it forecloses the liminal space in which the developing brain of the child is working. In a moment of fight or flight, the elasticated ego-self axis is severed, sometimes indefinitely. Edward Edinger writes that the event of childhood trauma can mean that ‘the child’s ego can be caught up in a sterile oscillation between inflation

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165 Ibid., p.93.
167 Kalsched, *Trauma and the Soul*, p.19.
and alienation that builds up more and more frustration and despair.\textsuperscript{168} ‘The connection between ego and self is vitally important to psychic health [...] when the connection is broken the result is emptiness, despair, meaninglessness and in extreme cases psychosis or suicide,’ Edinger continues.\textsuperscript{169} With the ego-self axis disintegrated, the ego hangs in nothingness, alienated and forever conscious of its lack—soul murder is committed.\textsuperscript{170} The soul, as \textit{Ti Jean} relates, ‘is dead’.\textsuperscript{171}

According to Charters, Kerouac ‘was always fragmented, without coherence or direction for the pieces of the self that he was enclosed within.’\textsuperscript{172} A symptom of which are the various identities he applied to himself throughout the different stages of his life—the Paradises, Smiths, Duluozs, and the like—what he later called his ‘vanities’.\textsuperscript{173} Whilst laying on a cold, hard bed in a lonely hostel in Des Moines, Sal recalls a bizarre sense of not knowing himself, writing, ‘that was the one distinct time in my life, the strangest moment of all, when I didn’t know who I was [...] I wasn’t scared; I was just somebody else, some stranger, and my whole life was a haunted life, the life of a ghost.’\textsuperscript{174} Later, he pleads of his friends, ‘This can’t go on all the time—all this frantiness and jumping around. We’ve got to go someplace, find something.’\textsuperscript{175} What Sal is searching for is the self—his soul—nowhere to be found.

\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., p.43.
\textsuperscript{171} Kerouac, \textit{Visions of Gerard}, p.93.
\textsuperscript{172} Charters, \textit{Biography}, p.21.
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., p.21.
\textsuperscript{174} Kerouac, \textit{On the Road}, p.15.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., p.105.
The simmering suicide of Kerouac’s alcoholism provides the greatest proof of an internal sense of incompleteness. Jung himself believed the thirst for alcohol to be a tell-tale sign of a craving for wholeness.\textsuperscript{176} James Hollis concurs that rather than seeing the alcoholic as a loser or someone lacking in willpower, many now see him or her as an example of somebody in need of a sense of self.\textsuperscript{177} Kerouac recounted the torment of his alcoholism most prominently in \textit{Big Sur}, in which Duluoz vacates to the seaside in hope of sanctuary, only to become consumed by a hellish bout of delirium tremens. His yearning for selfhood no doubt served as a catalyst for his fling with Buddhism as portrayed in \textit{Dharma Bums} and \textit{Desolation Angels} wherein Duluoz attempts to recreate Buddha’s enlightenment beneath the Bodhi tree, this time atop the barren plateau of Desolation Peak, a stark mountain in the Sierra Nevadas. Alone on the grey, moonish mountaintop, Duluoz hoped to be confronted by God or Tathagata, to find out once for all, ‘the meaning of all this existence and suffering and going to and fro in vain’.\textsuperscript{178} Both Duluoz’s unquenchable thirst for alcohol and pursuit of Buddhism points to a desperate search for some form of internal completion—to a desirous meeting with the Godhead and an eventual return of the ego to self denied of him by the premature death of his brother.

In the end, one can’t help but wonder whether Duluoz ever found what he spent his life searching for—whether Sal ever managed to find Paradise. On that fateful morning in October 1969, when, already four drinks down, Kerouac hurried to the bathroom and began vomiting hot blood from his tormented insides, did he find it in

\textsuperscript{176} Jan Bauer, \textit{Alcoholism and Women: The Background and the Psychology} (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1982). p.127.
\textsuperscript{178} Kerouac, \textit{Desolation Angels}, p.4.
the crimson reflection of the toilet bowl? When the doctor turned to the next of kin and said sadly that he wouldn’t wake from surgery due to complications from alcoholism, did the slumbering patient wear a contented smile? Within the realms of what it meant to be beaten and beatific for Kerouac, the manner in which he died seems perfectly apt—God surely found him in his extremity.

Kerouac remained a committed Catholic throughout his entire life, even during his stint with Buddhism. Reminiscing of a jovial conversation with his momentary Zen master, the poet Gary Snyder, he chuckles:

Gary said, ‘You old son of a -----, you’re going to end up asking for the Catholic rites on your deathbed.’ I said, ‘How did you know, my dear? Didn’t you know I was a lay Jesuit?’ He got mad at me.179

The condition of suffering so prevalent in Catholic teaching formed the basis for Kerouac’s body of work and his very existence. His pious family motto: Aimer, Travailler, et Souffrir—Love, Work, and Suffer, remained close to his heart, always. Through the cruel deaths of his brother and father, a fundamental belief that, ‘Birth [is] the direct cause of all pain and death,’ was somehow fully justified.180 A life so haunted by trauma and suffering would never allow transcendence on the human plane—relief, finally, could only ever be rewarded in death. In Desolation Angels, Duluoz himself remarks, ‘there can be no haven for the living lamb but plenty haven for the dead lamb.’181

180 Ibid., p.189.
181 Kerouac, Desolation Angels, p.360.
According to Campbell, ‘The hero is the one who, while still alive, knows and represents the claims of the superconsciousness which throughout creation is more or less unconscious.’ In this respect the Duluoz character is no hero, and yet some form of heterodox boon survives him—his distinctly unheroic Dulouz Legend, in which the numbing confusedness of life is recounted so succinctly as to bring comfort and solace to us, the spiritually bewildered, through the knowledge that we’re all in the same rudderless boat, bobbing along the same obsidian ocean of existence. In a world where profane space steamrolls the sacred, where the zeal of religious symbolism has rusted beyond recognition and the only transcendence available comes via the nearest router, Kerouac’s divinations take on newer life still. Sal may fail as Campbellian hero, but he does so in a manner which embodies the everyday heroism required of the modern alienated individual—to bear an existence defined by a lack of spiritual purpose and direction. He is a paragon of the UNHERO, a crazed solitary catholic mystic who warns us that in this life, at least, there may be ‘nowhere [else] to go but everywhere’.

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182 Campbell, Hero, p.239.
183 Kerouac, On the Road, p.25.
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