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The Spirit of Mythical Places: Mountains in Jack Kerouac's prose

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Vedoucí práce: Mgr. Tomáš Roztočil

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Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracoval samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedl jsem veškeré použité podklady a literaturu.

V Olomouci dne:.....

Podpis:

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Abstract

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Mountains and mountain ranges are recognized as one of the most fascinating natural wonders of the world, and humanity has been investigating and exploring them for hundreds of thousands of years. Mountains are examined from various perspectives. For instance, from the purely geological point of view, mountains are defined as an elevated section of Earth's crust higher than the usual land surrounding it. Therefore, geologists are primarily interested in the mountains' height, age, shape, or formation. In other words, they consider mountains as mere physical objects.

This thesis, however, works with the interconnection of spirituality and physicality to illustrate that the mountains in selected Jack Kerouac's works, namely the novels *The Dharma Bums*, *Big Sur*, and *Desolation Angels* and a short story called "Alone on a Mountaintop" published in a collection of short stories *Lonesome Traveler*, represent mythical and conceptual spaces that change the protagonists' behavior and the overall attitude toward the meanings of their lives.

The first part of this thesis is devoted to a theoretical section that initially introduces the definitions of concepts, followed by a subchapter about the spirit of spaces and places. The following subchapters then present the idea of mountain symbolism and mountain topos in literature.

The practical analysis of the thesis consequently applies the theories mentioned in the theoretical part, as it predominantly uses the method of close reading of the selected works alongside the theories of spatial representation and embodiment to comprehensively investigate the concept and the considerable influence of mountains in Jack Kerouac's prose. Thus, the principal aim of the thesis is to point out that mountains in the selected Kerouac's do not represent mere physical objects that the stories are set in. Instead, it tries to depict mountains as conceptual places where the protagonists test their physical and mental ability, connect their spirituality with the spirituality of the mountains, associate mountains with Buddhism and Zen Buddhism, and consider mountains as both a getaway from the chaotic society and as a trap one cannot leave.

Keywords: Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*, *Desolation Angels*, *Big Sur*, mountains, mountain topos, physicality, spirituality, spatiality, conceptuality, embodiment, Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, pilgrimage, getaway, trap

Anotace

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Hory a pohoří jsou odjakživa považovány za jeden z nejúchvatnějších přírodních jevů světa. Lidstvo je z různých pohledů zkoumá již statisíce let. Z čistě geologického hlediska jsou hory definovány jako vyvýšená část zemské kůry, která je vyšší než obvyklá okolní pevnina. Geologové se tedy zajímají o výšku, stáří, tvar nebo vznik jednotlivých hor a pohoří, a tudíž považují hory za pouhé fyzické objekty.

Tato práce však na základě propojení duchovna a fyzična dokazuje, že hory ve vybraných dílech Jacka Kerouaca, konkrétně v románech *Dharmoví tuláci*, *Big Sur*, *Andělé pustiny* a v povídce *Sám na vrcholu hory*, publikované ve sbírce povídek *Osamělý poutník*, představují mýtické a konceptuální prostory, díky kterým protagonisté jednotlivých děl mění chování a pohled na své životy.

První část této bakalářské práce je věnována teoretické sekci, která nejprve definuje pojem „koncept.“ Ta je následována podkapitolou zabývající se duchem místa, na kterou navazují podkapitoly představující pojetí symboliky hor a toposu hor v literatuře.

Praktická část následně aplikuje teorie zmíněné v teoretické sekci. Za pomoci metody zvané „close reading,“ využité při analýze vybraných děl, a následné spojení s teoriemi o prostoru a ztělesnění, zkoumá praktická část zobrazení a celkový vliv hor na hlavní postavy v próze Jacka Kerouaca. Hlavním cílem práce je tedy poukázat na to, že hory ve vybraných Kerouacových dílech nepředstavují pouhé fyzické objekty, v nichž se příběhy odehrávají. Místo toho se tato práce snaží vyobrazit hory jako konceptuální místo, ve kterém hlavní postavy prověřují své fyzické i duševní schopnosti, spojují svou duchovnost s duchovností hor, ztotožňují hory s buddhismem a zenovým buddhismem a považují hory jak za útočiště před chaotickou společností, tak i za past, kterou člověk nemůže opustit.

Klíčová slova: Jack Kerouac, *Dharmoví tuláci*, *Andělé pustiny*, *Big Sur*, hory, topos hor, fyzičnost, duchovnost, prostorovost, konceptualizace, ztělesnění, buddhismus, zenový buddhismus, poutní cesta, útočiště, past

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Introduction

This thesis offers a spatial reading of the mountains in Jack Kerouac's novels *The Dharma Bums*, *Desolation Angels*, *Big Sur*, and a short story "Alone on a Mountaintop" published in a collection of short stories *Lonesome Traveler*. The aim of the thesis is to investigate how the conceptual space of mountains in Kerouac's prose influences the protagonists and how it changes their attitudes toward the meaning of their lives. More specifically, this work aims to indicate that mountains in the abovementioned works are not merely physical objects where the stories take place but important spiritual and conceptual places the protagonists become closely associated with.

Jack Kerouac became a well-known and distinguished writer due to his vivid depiction of his bohemian life on the road, characterized by ever-present alcohol, jazz music, and promiscuity. Nevertheless, despite being predominantly interested in cities, he devoted an abundance of his writing style to the wonders of nature – especially to the solitude of mountains. However, besides brief mentions, there seems to be a lack of deep academic attention to the concept of mountains in Kerouac's prose. Therefore, by merging the method of close reading with the conceptual approach to the theoretical background, this thesis shall try to fill the gap and illustrate the overall importance of mountain space in the selected works of the pioneer of the Beat Generation.

The thesis is divided into three parts. The first part sets the grounds for further discussion with a theoretical background, which first briefly introduces the very definitions of concept. Building upon these definitions, the part then focuses on the concept of space and place, which is further followed by two subchapters concerned with the idea of general mountain symbology and the emergence of topos of mountains in literature.

The second part provides a brief introduction to Jack Kerouac's life, as it focuses on his personal attitude toward mountains. For instance, it points out that in the summer of 1956, Kerouac spent two months in complete isolation as a lookout on Desolation Peak, an experience depicted in his novels *The Dharma Bums* and *Desolation Angels*. Moreover, upon achieving widespread fame with his novel *One the Road* in 1957, he could not bear the sudden notoriety and faced a profound artistic crisis. Consequentially, Kerouac decided to seek new artistic inspiration while being alone in the solitude of mountains, which eventually encouraged him to share his experience in the novel *Big Sur*.

The third part is the most essential one, as it is devoted to the practical section of the thesis. The analysis is divided into six subchapters, each using distinctive approaches in scrutinizing the concept and role of mountains in Kerouac's prose. The practical part is primarily interested in the relations of physicality and mentality, and the representation of mountains as a spiritual and material body. Furthermore, this work comments on the interconnectedness of mountains, Buddhism, and the religious pilgrimage in Kerouac's works. Finally, the last subchapter concludes the practical part by arguing that the pivotal place that serves as a prototype for Kerouac's mountains is Desolation Peak, a place indicating great importance to Kerouac by being repeatedly explored in *The Dharma Bums*, *Desolation Angels*, and "Alone on a Mountaintop."

1. Conceptual background

1.1. Setting the grounds

This thesis builds its research around concepts rather than strict methodology. For this purpose, this chapter shall briefly define *concept* and consequently work with mountains as a *spatial concept* in literature. Furthermore, the theory of space and place, together with mountain symbolism, are fundamental elements to be used in the subsequent analysis. Thus, it is convenient to discuss these phenomena in the following part.

There are multiple accurate definitions of the phenomenon of *concept*, and the ideas of various critics and theorists differ substantially. This thesis primarily works with the definition established by cultural theorists, who define concept as an abstract representation of an object. Famous Dutch cultural theorist Mieke Bal argues that concepts are not firmly established univocal terms but dynamic mental constructs “not because they mean the same thing for everyone, but because they do not.”¹ Moreover, she demonstrates to her readers the so-called ‘traveling concepts’ that ‘travel’ and hence differ between disciples, individual scholars, and historical periods, eventually leading to the assumption that “concepts can become a third partner in the otherwise unverifiable and symbiotic interaction between critic and object.”² In other words, Bal claims that concepts are interpersonal and shared among scholars of different backgrounds across disciplines and the rest of the non-academic social circles. However, concepts are also a third partner in an individual’s perception of objects, and the forthcoming analysis observes that mountains in Jack Kerouac’s prose can become such a partner.

American scholar Joseph Goguen supports Bal’s assumption, adding that the understanding of concepts can differ from person to person according to their requirements, assumptions, thoughts, and beliefs.³ On top of that, he further writes that “some concepts have a hard physical reality, manifesting as perceivable regularities of behavior, or in a more sophisticated language, as invariants over perceptions.”⁴ This implies that everyone perceives and uses concepts in their original way. As the forthcoming analysis illustrates, Goguen’s theory is an essential factor for Kerouac’s

¹ Bal, Mieke. “Working with Concepts.” *European Journal of English Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2009, p.17.

² *Ibid.*, p.19.

³ Goguen, Joseph. “What is a Concept?” *Conceptual Structures: Common Semantics for Sharing Knowledge*. Lecture Notes in Computer Science, vol. 3596, 2005, p.73.

⁴ *Ibid.*

works as his usage of mountains as a concept in his prose is based on the protagonists' thoughts, beliefs, and irregular behaviors.

To reiterate, Bal and Goguen believe that concepts are interpersonal phenomena that create a universal symbolic language responsible for connecting disciplines and people. However, as concepts are dynamic, everyone perceives them differently. The practical part of this thesis intends to scrutinize Jack Kerouac's original attitude toward mountains as a conceptual space in his prose.

1.2. Space and place

In some of the selected Kerouac's works, the protagonists find themselves at places that evoke significant spirituality and behavior. One such place is Desolation Peak, which will be subsequently investigated in greater detail in the following analysis. Therefore, this brief subchapter is devoted to the theory of space and place as it is an essential foundation for analyzing mountains as conceptual space in Kerouac's prose.

Working with the previously mentioned theory and recognizing space and place as a concept, we can assume that no two people perceive a single place or location evenly. Moreover, no two places are the same, and although they might be substantially similar, one place has something the other does not. Likewise, every place is exposed to time, which constantly shapes and modifies it, meaning that one place never remains consistent for a long time. As a result, places become inconstant, leading to an individual's altered perception. Consequently, the geographical point of view examines places and landscapes as continually developing outcomes of processes. Upon arriving at a particular area, geographers ask themselves what it is, how it developed, and why things are the way they are. Stephen Daniels argues that for years "geographers have been studying a lot else besides: theories, ideologies, methodologies, and techniques."⁵ In other words, geographers predominantly work with the place's physical form and tend to ignore its effect.

This thesis, however, looks at space and place through the eyes of human geographers for whom, on the other hand, the effect of space is essential. One of the key figures in human geography, Chinese-born American Yi-Fu Tuan, argues that "place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other."⁶ Tuan's

⁵ Daniels, Stephen. "Place and the Geographical Imagination." *Geography*, vol. 77, no. 4, 1992, p. 310.

⁶ Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. University of Minnesota Press, 1977, p. 3.

theory is reflected in Kerouac's novels, as the characters are both attached to certain places and, at the same time, long for freedom in space. Furthermore, as the analysis justifies, Kerouac's characters tend to look for freedom not in the disarray of the cities but rather in the solitude of the mountains. To further quote Tuan, he believes that although mountains are "merely elements of physical geography,"⁷ they also serve as an image of spaciousness and dreaming places that can outlive human generations.⁸ Tuan's idea of mountains as dreaming places is yet another essential factor for the forthcoming analysis. Despite the characters in selected Kerouac's novels occasionally describing the physical appearance of mountains and being exposed to constantly transforming places, the forthcoming analysis prefers the approach of human geographers, as the effect and spirit of place are of more importance for the research than the physical description of particular places.

It has already been acknowledged that place and space affect everyone, and "being in one place rather than another makes a difference, as does being near rather than far."⁹ Robert Sack's idea of the differences between two places is another fundamental point for analyzing the mountains in Kerouac's prose because, apart from observing places with their eyes, the characters often perceive the places' sounds, smells, tastes, and textures. Combining these senses leads to the formerly discussed divergent perceptions of places. Collocott claims that there is a "pattern of man's oneness with his place. The deep feeling of human harmony with the sights and sounds of the land, the trees and birds and animals, belongs to the wholeness of life, to the sense of nature, kindly, though oft austere, nurse and mother."¹⁰ He further adds that in one's place, the divisions of time become unreal and that in our "transient enjoyment of the earth we know that we are one with our fathers and with all the generations that shall be." In short, Collocott believes it is possible to become one with a particular place and thus achieve a connection resulting in transient enjoyment.

This subchapter has declared that places affect everyone and that no two places are alike. In addition, it has mentioned that geographers investigate the physical attributes of places and thus tend to ignore their effects. However, the upcoming analysis prefers the approach introduced by human geographers primarily interested in the spirit of places

⁷ Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, p. 178.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁹ Sack, Robert D. "The Power of Place and Space." *Geographical Review*, vol. 83, no. 3, 1993, p. 326.

¹⁰ Collocott, E. E. V. "The Spirit of Place." *The Australian Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 2, 1951, p. 110.

and spaces. Namely, the analysis follows Yi-Fu Tuan's definition of space and place and his description of mountains as dreaming places. Further, E. E. V. Collocot argues that it is possible to become one with a particular place, achieving a transient enjoyment that is important for mountains as conceptual space in Kerouac's prose.

1.3. Mountain symbolism

Even though it may not seem straightforward, mountain symbolism is ubiquitous in all the novels this thesis works with. Moreover, alongside the theory of space and place and mountains as a concept in literature, mountain symbolism is the leading academic foundation for the following analysis presented in the thesis at hand. This subchapter, therefore, elaborates on the four primary symbols in Kerouac's depiction of mountains.

According to Robert Macfarlane, in the early history of the West, mountains used to symbolize an apparent residence for mysterious and even sinister creatures.¹¹ Mountains' high altitude, distance, unapproachability, and abstraction above the ordinary world led people to regard them as "the dwelling-place of both gods and monsters. Giant chamois, trolls, imps, [...] and other sinister beings were reputed to patrol the higher slopes of mountains."¹² Simon Schama shares Macfarlane's opinion and adds that Europeans believed in hidden dragons in European cliff caves.¹³ Macfarlane and Schama explain that people thought of these stories because they could not explain the mountains' shapes, storms, and lights.

Due to their shape, physical features, and mystic atmosphere, mountains were, and still are, considered pervasive religious symbols. Macfarlane argues that mountains are closer to the mythical heaven than any other space on Earth and that people thought it possible they "could ascend mountains through a combination of fasting and prayer, thus coming closer to God."¹⁴ In his paper about the mystification of mountaineering, Jon F. Gordon explains that mountain tops "have been the place to receive the word of God since, at least, the time of Moses."¹⁵ In short, he suggests that mountain climbing metaphorically represents being closer to heaven and meeting the gods descending here to Earth.

¹¹ Macfarlane, Robert. *Mountains of the Mind: Adventures in Reaching the Summit*. New York: Random House, Inc., 2003. p. 132.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Schama, Simon. *Landscape and Memory*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1995, p. 411-12.

¹⁴ Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind: Adventures in Reaching the Summit*, p. 133.

¹⁵ Gordon, Jon F. "Means and Motives: The Mystification of Mountaineering Discourse." *Postcolonial Text*, vol. 2, no. 4, 2006, p. 1.

Furthermore, mountains influence and change one's state of mind. According to Macfarlane, "mountains also reshape our understandings of ourselves, of our own interior landscapes. The remoteness of the mountain world [...] can provide us with a valuable perspective down on to the most familiar and best charted regions of our lives."¹⁶ Macfarlane believes that mountains can change our behavior and personality by subtly reorienting and readjusting the points from which we take our bearings.¹⁷ Moreover, the influence is more significant if mountain climbers find themselves alone in places secluded from society and the surrounding world. In Siddall's words, solitude activates wonderful imagination, stimulates dreams, and leads to more intense and remote experiences than are possible in a company.¹⁸ Kateřina Burketová's Bachelor thesis replies that being alone on top of the mountain provides a viewpoint from which a viewer can get two types of perspective.¹⁹ One perspective represents an aerial view of the landscape, the so-called physical perspective. In contrast, the second one activates a new mental perspective, sometimes unraveling previously concealed thoughts and ideas that can arouse nearly divine sensations.

Finally, mountains symbolize physical and mental obstacles. By overcoming them, humanity achieves a presumed dominance over nature and one's mind. For centuries, mountains were recognized as purposeless obstructions. Nevertheless, nowadays, people are willing to accept the challenge presented by mountain ranges.²⁰ Gordon explains that overcoming external nature (physical obstacles) leads to the exertion of the mind, which results in transcendence that is thought ultimately impossible.²¹ Not only does reaching the mountaintop influence mentality, but so does the ascend. In Schama's words, the difficulty of climbing challenges one's muscles and brain at the same level.²²

In summary, mountains symbolize many things, but the following analysis primarily concerns mountains being associated with mystical creatures, religious metaphors, altering behavior and personality, and physical and mental obstacles. As those are the four dominant symbols in Jack Kerouac's prose, they will be further investigated

¹⁶ Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind: Adventures in Reaching the Summit*, p. 103.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Siddall, Stephen. *Landscape and Literature*, edited by Adrian Barlow. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 7.

¹⁹ Burketová, Kateřina. *The Mountain Topos in Early Twentieth-Century British Literature* [online]. Bachelor Thesis, Univerzita Pardubice, Fakulta filozofická, 2016, p. 12.

²⁰ Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind: Adventures in Reaching the Summit*, p. 20.

²¹ Gordon, "Means and Motives: The Mystification of Mountaineering Discourse.", p.13.

²² Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, p. 505.

in a comprehensive way. However, the study proposes that Kerouac's approach to these symbols significantly varies compared to the generally held opinion.

1.4. Mountains as topos and concept in literature

Assuming that mountains are physical objects and regarding cultural theorists' definition of a concept, it is plausible to characterize mountains as a culturally fundamental conceptual space that can play an important role in written fiction. Indeed, American literary critic Jonathan Culler follows the abovementioned Bal's and Goguen's theories, adding that concepts were first used in philosophy, from which they moved to literature, where they solved significant problems but at the same time challenged the limitations of the philosophical proposal.²³ Therefore, Culler's theory leads to the assumption that different writers influence literature by using use different concepts, resulting in a deep-rooted relationship between literature and concepts. Working with mountains as a conceptual space, such a relationship allows one to establish a specific mountain topos in literature. The term *topos* derives from a Greek word for *place*, and literary critics provide various translations such as 'topic,' 'line of argument,' or 'commonplace.'²⁴ In Dyck's words, "these translations have contributed to an ongoing dispute about the meaning of the term."²⁵ However, to form an association between mountain symbolism and the theory of space and place, this thesis operates with topos as a space imbued with thematic meaning. Thereby, the analysis tries to make a connection between mountains regarded both as physical objects as well as concepts in narratives.

Critics argue that the concept of mountains can profoundly influence literature. In addition, they believe some authors were affected by mountains so much that their works shone a new light on literary tradition. In his article, Thomas Sergeant Perry claims that one of such authors was a famous philosopher and writer Jean-Jacques Rousseau whose mountains, in Perry's words, "wrought changes in subsequent literary fashions."²⁶ Although Rousseau might have been one of the pioneers of mountain literature, countless other writers before him were fascinated by mountains and wrote down their perceptions and descriptions. To further quote Perry, "to affirm that no one before Rousseau enjoyed

23 Culler, Jonathan. "Philosophy and Literature: The Fortunes of the Performative." *Poetics Today*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2000, p. 512.

24 Dyck, Ed. "Topos and Enthymeme." *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2002, p. 106.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Perry, Thomas Sergeant. "Mountains in Literature." *The Atlantic*, 1879, p. 304.

mountain scenery would be very much like saying there was no love of liberty in this country (America) before the Declaration of Independence.”²⁷ Naturally, mountain literature did not cease to exist after Rousseau, and some contemporary authors pay attention to the description of mountains, while others are inspired by their history and old age.

In short, the entire history of mountains in literature is a comprehensive and complex issue, and this thesis does not intend to investigate it in greater detail. Instead, its objective is to focus primarily on the perception of mountains in selected Kerouac’s works and to point out how the conceptual space of mountains differs from novel to novel.

1.5. Conclusion

To recapitulate, the practical part of this thesis builds its research on working with concepts rather than rigorous methodology or disciplines. For that purpose, the analytical part states that the analysis works with concepts defined as abstract representations of objects. Mieke Bal and Joseph Goguen argue that although concepts are interpersonal, everyone recognizes them differently. This idea is convenient to the practical part of this thesis, as it uses the method of close reading to exclusively examine Jack Kerouac’s attitude toward mountains as a concept in his prose.

Furthermore, the practical part is based on novels in which mountains represent a place where the protagonist’s behavior and vision of life differ substantially. Kerouac’s mountains can thus represent a conceptual space that might reveal the deep feeling of human harmony with nature and the purpose of life. The harmony with nature and the wholeness of life are then outlined as the strongest motives that create the protagonist’s desire to return to the mountaintop.

In his book, Robert Macfarlane proposes a complex list of ideas about mountain symbolism, of which four repeatedly appear in Kerouac’s prose and are therefore elaborated on in this thesis. These represent mountains as dwelling points for mystical creatures, mountains considered pervasive religious symbols, mountains as places that influence one’s state of mind, and mountains as both physical and mental obstacles. To repeat Simon Schama’s words, the difficulty of mountain climbing challenges one’s muscles and brain at the same level, and hence a small section of the analysis is devoted to the combination of physical exertion and mental joy.

²⁷ Perry, *Mountains in Literature*, p.304.

Finally, the analytical part also mentions mountains as topos and conceptual spaces in comprehensive literature. It operates with topos as a space imbued with thematic meaning, separating mountains into physical objects and concepts in narratives. It further argues that mountains have brought a cultural revolution to literary fashion. Thus, with the analytical part set, the practical part of this thesis scrutinizes how mountains in Kerouac's prose stand out and how they contribute to the literary fashion.

2. Jack Kerouac

Had own mind. – Am known as “madman bum and angel” with “naked endless head” of “prose”. – Also a verse poet, *Mexico City Blues* (Grove, 1959). – Always considered writing my duty on earth. Also the preaching of universal kindness, which hysterical critics have failed to notice beneath frenetic activity of my true-story novels about the “beat” generation. – Am actually not “beat” but strange solitary crazy Catholic mystic...

Final plans: hermitage in the woods, quiet writing of old age, mellow hopes of Paradise (which comes to everybody anyway).²⁸

Jack Kerouac was born as Jean-Louis LeBriès de Kerouac in Lowell, Massachusetts, on March 12, 1922. Although his first language was the French-Canadian dialect of *joual* and he did not learn to speak English fluently until he was six years old, his works significantly influenced American literature in the 1960s.²⁹ In her introduction to Kerouac’s most famous novel *On the Road*, Ann Charters writes that at the age of nineteen, Kerouac described himself as an independent man who had his own mind. In addition, “he wanted to become ‘an adventurer, a lonesome traveler,’ so that he could be a great American novelist in the tradition of Jack London and Thomas Wolfe.”³⁰ The admiration of Jack London’s naturalism and Thomas Wolfe’s impressionistic prose with autobiographical writing profoundly impacted Kerouac’s prosaic writing about nature while ‘lonesomely’ traveling the United States. However, the deep fondness for mountains was brought to Kerouac by an American environmental activist and the poet of outdoors, Gary Snyder. He took Kerouac on his first-ever mountain hike, where “Kerouac found a certain serenity in the exertion of the hike and the simple meal that Snyder cooked on the fire that evening.”³¹ Kerouac powerfully illustrates this experience in the novel *The Dharma Bums*.

²⁸ Kerouac, Jack. *Lonesome Traveler*, London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2018, p.3.

²⁹ Charters, Ann. “Introduction.” *On the Road*, by Jack Kerouac, London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2000, p. x.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Dittman, Michael J. *Jack Kerouac: A Biography*. Greenwood Press, United States of America, 2004, p. 68.

Despite being raised and buried a Catholic, Kerouac repeatedly tried to find the purpose of life in other religions. He was mainly interested in Buddhism and Zen Buddhism. In Kerouac's biography written by Michael J. Dittman, the author claims that Snyder became Kerouac's personal Buddhist guide. "Snyder was a tough-minded and tough-writing poet whose interest in Buddhism was purer and deeper than Kerouac's. Never lording it over him, however, Snyder helped guide Kerouac in new ways of thinking about Buddhism."³² In other words, Snyder encouraged Kerouac to spend solitary time in the woods, where he could discover new ideas about Buddhism in quiet contemplation. Consequently, in the summer of 1956, following in Snyder's footsteps, "Kerouac spent two months in complete isolation as a lookout on Desolation Peak in the Mount Baker National Forest in Washington state, an experience covered in *The Dharma Bums* and treated in greater detail and depth in *Desolation Angels*."³³ During this time, Kerouac appreciated the solitude of the mountains as he tried to find a new way to combine Buddhism and Catholicism into one religion.

Upon becoming a distinguished and influential author, Kerouac "was unable to bring his thoughts together to form any sort of comprehensible narrative."³⁴ In the summer of 1960, Lawrence Ferlinghetti invited Kerouac to use his cabin in Big Sur, California, to seek new artistic inspiration while being alone again. Charmed by his stay at Desolation Peak and considering mountains as a getaway, Kerouac planned to stay at the cabin for up to three months. However, as if the solitude as a fire watcher had crippled him both physically and emotionally, he was uneasy from the beginning of his stay. Identifying one of the local mountains with a disturbing drug-induced vision from his past and believing something sinister was happening there, he could not stay there any longer and left the cabin after the first three weeks.³⁵ This implies that Kerouac's relationship with mountains was problematic and gradually changed during his lifetime. The alteration of the attitude toward mountains is vividly depicted in Kerouac's novel *Big Sur*, which is reviewed in this thesis.

Known for his autobiographical writing style called "spontaneous prose" and for his vivid depiction of urban life full of jazz, alcohol, promiscuity, drugs, and travel, Jack Kerouac left an indelible mark on worldwide literature. Despite his oft-cited urban

³² Ibid.

³³ Douglas, Ann. "Introduction." *The Dharma Bums*, by Jack Kerouac, London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2018, p. x.

³⁴ Dittman, *Jack Kerouac: A Biography*, p.99.

³⁵ Ibid., p.100.

background, this thesis evinces that Kerouac was overly influenced and attracted by mountains. In fact, after their first mountain climbing trip with Gary Snyder, Kerouac saw mountains as a place where he could reach nirvana, find everlasting happiness, and escape the corrupting force of the city. Furthermore, in Kerouac's eyes, Snyder and mountains were the embodiment of the most accurate, least self-serving form of American optimism.³⁶ On the other hand, toward the end of his life, Kerouac's appreciation of mountains changed exceptionally, leading to an almost irresistible repulsion. Michael J. Dittman claims that the repulsion was caused by Kerouac's inability to write another novel. "Kerouac admitted, reluctantly and sadly, that he hadn't written any prose in years."³⁷ Therefore, Kerouac sought the solitude of mountains to find inspiration but eventually failed miserably. However, this does not change the fact that Kerouac devoted an abundance of his writing time to mountains despite his untimely death at the age of only forty-seven.

³⁶ Douglas, "Introduction," *The Dharma Bums*, p. x.

³⁷ Dittman, *Jack Kerouac: A Biography*, p. 101.

3. Mountains in Jack Kerouac's prose

3.1. Introduction

I nudged myself closer into the ledge and closed my eyes and thought, 'Oh what a life this is, why do we have to be born in the first place, and only so we can have our poor gentle flesh laid out to such impossible horrors as huge mountains and rock and empty space,' and with horror I remembered the famous Zen saying, 'When you get to the top of a mountain, keep climbing.'³⁸

The practical part of this thesis does not investigate Kerouac's personal attitude toward mountains. Instead, it aims to profoundly inspect how mountains influence and affect the protagonists' behavior and perception of their lives. Although Kerouac's novels are primarily autobiographical and he interprets the novels' protagonists as an embodiment of himself in the stories, some sections of his works are purely fictional. For example, despite Kerouac's accurate description of the Matterhorn climbing trip in his novel *The Dharma Bums*, Gary Snyder chided him for the misogynistic interpretation of Buddhism, claiming that it is merely an artistic imagination.³⁹ Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis, the following analysis uses the method of close reading to investigate how Ray Smith in *The Dharma Bums* and Jack Duluoz in *Desolation Angels* and *Big Sur* perceive and observe mountains.

This chapter is divided into six subchapters. One of the main points of this analysis is to investigate the connection between people and mountains on the spiritual level. In that event, the first two subchapters primarily focus on spirituality based on the association of physicality (physical pain) and mentality (mental joy). The arguments and the examples from Kerouac's novels are built upon and supported by the theories provided by scholars Jon F. Gordon and Edwin Bernbaum. Subchapter 4.4 further follows the idea of spirituality by linking it with Buddhism, arguing that mountains are essential to the protagonists' attitude toward Buddhism and the general purpose and meaning of life. Moreover, subchapter 4.4 also investigates mountains as a conceptual space where

³⁸ Kerouac, Jack. *The Dharma Bums*. London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2018, p. 69.

³⁹ Suiter, John. *Poets on the Peaks: Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen and Jack Kerouac in the Cascades*. Washington, D.C., Counterpoint, 2002, p. 245.

the protagonists are closer to the mythical heaven and as a place where fallen angels descend to Earth. Subchapter 4.5 is then devoted to Kerouac's novel *Big Sur*, which initially depicts mountains as a getaway and eventually as a trap. Finally, the last subchapter of the practical part is devoted primarily to Desolation Peak, as it argues that Desolation Peak is a pivotal place upon which all mountains in Jack Kerouac's prose are built.

3.2. Physicality and Mentality

The preceding chapter has already stated that Jack Kerouac's first-ever mountain hike was with Gary Snyder, known as Japhy Ryder in *The Dharma Bums*. Apart from covering the ascent and descent of Matterhorn Peak in the Sierra Nevada, California, the novel vividly depicts one of the main points of this analysis, namely the paradoxical correlation between physical pain and mental happiness. In his paper about the mystification of mountaineering, Jon F. Gordon tries to find the best answer to why people climb mountains. He argues that mountaineering separates the mind from the body, "allowing transcendence to remain a goal [...] on which the endeavor is built."⁴⁰ In simple words, Gordon believes that during mountain climbing, the physical endeavor is separated from the purity of mind. As a result, the climber can achieve an experience beyond normal limits independently of the physical endeavor. Gordon's theory is reflected in *The Dharma Bums*, where physical pain and exhaustion often trigger an otherwise unachievable state of mind.

Prior to the Matterhorn Peak hike, Ray Smith, the protagonist of the story, is a heavy drinker who attends three-day parties characterized by their large amount of alcohol and the enactments of the erotic Buddhist Yab-Yum rituals. Moreover, he suffers spiritual conflicts amid the middle-class American life, and its emptiness prevents him from finding the purpose and meaning of life. During the Matterhorn trek, however, his point of view essentially changes. In his words, the first moments of being in the mountains "sure felt great and suddenly I realized this (in spite of my swollen foot veins) would do me a lot of good and get me away from drinking and maybe make me appreciate perhaps a whole new way of living."⁴¹ Despite being written in parentheses, Ray's comment on his swollen foot veins should not be taken lightly. It implies that the mind can indeed be separated from the body and that physical endeavor does not influence

⁴⁰ Gordon, *Means and Motives: The Mystification of Mountaineering Discourse*, p.13.

⁴¹ Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*, p. 46.

mentality because Ray's swollen foot veins do not cause him any aversion toward the mountains.

In fact, as the hike gets more strenuous, Ray says that "as we got higher we got more tired and now like two true mountainclimbers we weren't talking any more and didn't have to talk and were glad...so huddled in our own thoughts we tromped on."⁴² On the one hand, the tiredness prevents them from talking to each other. However, on the other, it enables them to be huddled in their own thoughts, making Ray feel devoted and hence appreciate the whole new way of living he yearns for.

Indeed, the overall experience of the ongoing mountain hike makes Ray happy. The hike takes three days, and as Ray and Japhy spend the first night in the solitude of the mountains, Ray abruptly awakes with his eyes gazing at the stars. In his words, he "thanked God I'd come on this mountain climb. My legs felt better, my whole body felt strong. The crack of the dying logs was like Japhy making little comments on my happiness."⁴³ Suddenly, his swollen foot veins are gone, and not only does his body feel strong, but also his mind is satisfied and full of gratitude and happiness. The mountains and nature establish a balanced harmony between his body and his mind, eventually resulting in transcendence that is otherwise thought ultimately impossible. Jon F. Gordon would argue that the transcendence was achieved primarily through Ray's domination of nature.⁴⁴ At the same time, however, Gordon emphasizes that transcendence or, in his words, the feeling of invincibility is merely a temporal illusion of pride because, sooner or later, the mountains would inevitably regain domination over the climber. Gordon's theory is reflected further in the story as the two friends are finally reaching the summit of Matterhorn.

On this occasion, Ray's ankles are again "in great pain from yesterday's muscle strain."⁴⁵ At this point, the hike gets so strenuous that his body suffers considerably, and the cruelty of the mountain takes control over his movements, thwarting him from going on. The suffering body eventually takes control of his mind, preventing him from thinking straight, and he gets afraid of falling down. "I now began to be afraid to go any higher from sheer fear of being too high. I began to be afraid of being blown away by the wind."⁴⁶ As a consequence, Ray never reaches the Matterhorn's peak. On the other hand, Japhy,

⁴² Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*, p. 52.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁴⁴ Gordon, *Means and Motives: The Mystification of Mountaineering Discourse*, p. 5.

⁴⁵ Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*, p. 66.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

in Ray's words a mountain goat, manages to reach it, and then he decides to run the mountain down while yodeling. Upon seeing this, Ray realizes that "it's *impossible to fall off mountains* you fool and with a yodel of my own I suddenly got up and began running down the mountain after him doing exactly the same huge leaps, the same fantastic runs and jumps [...]."⁴⁷ Within seconds, the physical pain once again disappears, allowing Ray to take 'fantastic runs and jumps' down the mountain. Later, Ray admits that seeing Japhy running down the mountain made him understand everything and that his mind was again separated from the physical pain of the body. Furthermore, this time, it is the mind that controls the body.

Strikingly, Ray and Japhy get separated during the descent, and Ray intentionally finds himself walking alone "just to pick my way singing and thinking along the little black cruds of a deer trail through the rocks, no call to think ahead or worry, just follow the little balls of deer crud with your eyes cast down and enjoy life."⁴⁸ In other words, the preceding tiredness caused by the physical endeavor of the ascend and the inability to talk to Japhy compels Ray to be left alone with his thoughts, eventually leading to his long-searched happiness in life. At the very end of the hike, Ray concedes: "I had never had a happier moment in my life than those lonely moments coming down that little deer trace when we hiked off with our packs I turned to take a final look up that way . . . , and I thanked everything up that way."⁴⁹ Despite being in great physical pain and unable to reach the sought peak, Ray experiences the happiest moments of his life while in the mountains.

In summary, Jon F. Gordon argues that mountaineering is an activity that can separate the mind from the body. In such a context, physical pain does not affect one's mind, allowing transcendence regardless of how much pain the body suffers. Jack Kerouac vividly depicts the correlation between physical pain and mental happiness in his novel *The Dharma Bums*, in which the protagonist, Ray Smith, is in searing physical pain but simultaneously experiencing the happiest moments of his life. In his own words, "A little weariness'll change a lot of things. My legs are screaming to stop, but I have joy."⁵⁰ He further admits that the pain he encountered in the mountains made him feel real again and that he learned everything and is ultimately ready to live his life.⁵¹ Indeed, Gordon's theory is approved in Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums*, which realistically covers

⁴⁷ Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*, p. 71.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 73.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 73.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 75.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 81.

the unison between body and mind. It shows that physical pain does not control our mind, and this can consequently lead to otherwise ultimately impossible transcendence.

3.3. Mountains as a space for spiritual and material body

Following on from the previous subchapter, Kerouac's protagonists often associate physical pain with instances of embodied spirituality. Generally, as spirituality relates to abstract and meditative mindfulness, the association with physical pain is somewhat counterproductive. However, the analysis proves that Kerouac's protagonists go through the happiest and the most spiritual moments of their lives while physically suffering in the mountains, which unconsciously alters their state of mind and their overall spirituality and a sense of embodiment. As the following subchapter devoted to the association of Buddhism and mountains points out, Kerouac was particularly interested in Zen Buddhism, which, paradoxically, identifies spirituality with motionless meditation. Therefore, Kerouac's fusion of spirituality and physical pain is a surprising and unprecedented concept.

Edwin Bernbaum claims that "mountains commonly awaken in individuals a sense of wonder and awe that sets them apart as places imbued with evocative beauty and meaning."⁵² In addition, many hikers and climbers go to the mountains "for esthetic and spiritual inspiration and renewal, often regarding them as expressions of important values [...]."⁵³ Nevertheless, Bernbaum does not consider physical endeavor. He argues that hikers and climbers achieve spiritual inspiration and renewal upon reaching the very top of the mountains. Once there, the exposure to calmness, purity, and solitude changes the climbers' spirituality. Jack Kerouac's characters, on the other hand, use physical pain as a foundation upon which spirituality is built. In *Big Sur*, the novel's protagonist, Jack Duluoz, is fascinated by his strength while walking in the mountains, saying, "[...] it's just amazing now inside our own souls we can lift out so much strength I think it would be enough strength to move mountains at that, to lift our boots up again and go clomping along happy out of nothing but the good source power in our own bones [...]."⁵⁴ Unlike Ray Smith in *The Dharma Bums*, Jack Duluoz in *Big Sur* does not experience ultimate happiness while physically suffering. Instead, he compares the power of his mind with

⁵² Bernbaum, Edwin. "Sacred Mountains: Themes and Teachings." *Mountain Research and Development*, vol. 26, no. 4, 2006, p. 305.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Kerouac, Jack. *Big Sur*. London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2018, p. 89.

the power of his body, creating a sort of harmony between them. The harmony is so powerful that the physical exertion intensifies the strength of Jack's soul. In other words, physicality and spirituality conjoin. Thus, the character of Jack Duluoz applies Bernbaum's theory into practice as mountains indeed manage to awaken the sense of wonder and awe, but this awakening is not achieved by passively being in the mountains; it is the active physical endeavor that stimulates the irregular spirituality in Duluoz's mind.

As has already been acknowledged in Chapter 2, in the summer of 1956, Kerouac spent two months as a fire lookout on Desolation Peak, an experience minutely covered in his novels *The Dharma Bums* and *Desolation Angels*. As Desolation Peak represents a central point for the mountains in Kerouac's prose, it is elaborated on in great detail at the end of the practical part. However, since some sections of *The Dharma Bums* and *Desolation Angels* depict Desolation Peak as a conceptual space devoted primarily to the spiritual and material body, these sections are relevant to this subchapter and hence shall be mentioned here. In *Desolation Angels*, Kerouac describes the mountains as an embodiment of both purity and evil. The protagonist, Jack Duluoz as in *Big Sur*, describes his stay as "neither sweet nor bitter but just what it is, and so it is."⁵⁵ Occasionally, Desolation Peak is referred to as a mountaintop trap from which one cannot leave, but at the same time, as salvation that saves the soul from the wickedness of society. The contradiction and uncertainty leave the protagonist restless, forcing him to spend more time with his thoughts. "Hold together, Jack, pass through everything, and everything is one dream, one appearance, one flash, one sad eye, one crystal lucid mystery, one word – Hold still, man, regain your love of life [...]."⁵⁶ The embodiment and spirituality merge into one, causing Jack to regard mountains as both a spiritual and material body he cannot intuitively understand. Hence, he simultaneously strives to interpret mountains both through his bodily experience and through an embodiment of something emotionally closer to him.

Consequently, the more time Jack spends with the mountains, the more he characterizes them as human beings. He uses conceptual metaphors such as the "crazed mountains march to the sunset like drunken cavaliers in Messina"⁵⁷ to draw a connection between human beings and mountains. By comparing mountains to marching drunken

⁵⁵ Kerouac, Jack. *Desolation Angels*. London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2020, p. 6.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

cavaliers, Jack tries to bring himself closer to the mountains and thus become one with them. Simply put, he personifies mountains as symbols of people and society.

Apart from other peaks, the one that fascinates him the most is a mountain called Hozomeen. *The Dharma Bums* depicts Hozomeen as a giant black monster leaning over the backyard and staring into the window.⁵⁸ Moreover, the peak can return the attack of a vast storm.⁵⁹ As leaning, staring and attacking are active physical movements, the protagonist believes Hozomeen in *The Dharma Bums* to be a monstrous embodiment of an active human being.

On the other hand, in *Desolation Angels*, Hozomeen is depicted as a somewhat passive and friendly human being. The physical movements are superseded by emotional feelings, urging Jack to regard Hozomeen as his loyal companion. Jack eventually refers to Hozomeen as *he* rather than *it*, making the relationship more personal. “My God look at Hozomeen, is he worried or tearful? Does he smile? God I’m bored! But is Hozomeen bored?”⁶⁰ The relationship and enchantment become so significant that Jack spends long afternoons sitting in the cabin, intentionally facing Hozomeen with “nothing for me to do but wait – and breathe.”⁶¹ During the nights, Hozomeen serves as Jack’s guardian while sitting quietly and not moving. “I would swear that Hozomeen would move if we could induce him but he spends the night with me [...]”⁶² is not a typical declarative sentence, as Jack’s usage of *but* indicates rather an imperative one. Despite believing Hozomeen can move, Jack cannot imagine spending time in the mountains without his only loyal companion. Thereby, he wants Hozomeen to stay, protect him, and make him realize the purpose of his life. The overall influence of Hozomeen eventually makes Jack understand his life, come face to face with himself, and become, in his own words, a new man.

To reiterate, Edwin Bernbaum’s theory that mountains evoke spiritual inspiration and renewal in one’s mind does not involve physical exertion. Nevertheless, the protagonists of *Big Sur* and *Desolation Angels* work in tune with Bernbaum’s theory by conjoining spirituality with physical endeavor. Kerouac surprisingly compels the protagonist of *Big Sur* and *Desolation Angels* to forge a great connection between spirituality and physical pain and thereby become one with their minds and thoughts. On the other hand, the protagonist of *The Dharma Bums* disconnects the mind from the body,

⁵⁸ Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*, p. 196.

⁵⁹ Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*, p. 203.

⁶⁰ Kerouac, *Desolation Angels*, pp. 4-5.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

implying the diversity in Kerouac's approach toward mountains in his prose. Consequently, the novels' approaches toward physicality and spirituality marginally differ. Nonetheless, both *The Dharma Bums* and *Desolation Angels* establish a significant association between spirituality and the sense of embodiment as in both novels, the protagonist describes mountains as a symbolic embodiment of both purity and evil. The only exception is a mountain called Hozomeen, described as an embodiment of a human being. Here, however, the novels once again differ. In *The Dharma Bums*, Hozomeen is depicted as a monster, whereas in *Desolation Angels*, the peak is appraised as a loyal companion, a guardian, and the "most beautiful mountain I ever seen"⁶³ without which the protagonist cannot imagine living in the mountains. It indicates that Kerouac works with mountains as a continually transforming concept that varies across his novels. Yet despite the diversity, mountains in Kerouac's prose are an essential link that correlates spirituality and embodiment with religion, namely Buddhism and Zen Buddhism.

3.4. Mountains as a Religious Space: Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, and religious pilgrimage

Macfarlane and Gordon argue that mountains can metaphorically represent being closer to the mythical heaven and meeting the gods descending here to Earth.⁶⁴ In other words, mountains were, and in some regions of the world still are, an essential mythical space closely identified with religions. Furthermore, mountains serve as a destination point for many monks who make their religious pilgrimage in search of a new state of their mind. Thus, this subchapter investigates how mountains behave as mythical and spiritual places in Kerouac's novels. In addition, it follows the aforementioned theory of both physical and mental suffering as it briefly focuses on the protagonists' painful wanderings and pilgrimage through mountains in search of sacredness.

To remind the reader of Kerouac's philosophy of religion, he was raised and buried a Catholic.⁶⁵ Still, throughout his life, he regularly sought the purpose and meaning of life in other religions and faiths. What encouraged him to be interested primarily in Buddhism and how did it make him alter his point of view is a topic for interested biographers. For this thesis, however, it is necessary to acknowledge that the two religions

⁶³ Kerouac, *Desolation Angels*, p. 4.

⁶⁴ For further reference, see Subchapter 1.3.

⁶⁵ For further reference, see Chapter 2.

melded in Kerouac's mind, creating a hybrid form of mysticism.⁶⁶ Furthermore, Kerouac was heavily influenced by the first law of Buddhism, "all life is suffering," in which he eventually interpreted that to embrace the 'right' religion, one must mentally and physically suffer. The idea of physical and mental suffering has already been acknowledged in the previous subchapters. This subchapter, therefore, follows the previous ones as it further investigates mountains in Kerouac's prose – in this instance as a pillar of the protagonists' approaches toward Buddhism and how mountains can become a third partner in the fusion of Catholicism and Buddhism.

The novel that most vividly reflects the relationship between Catholicism and Buddhism is *The Dharma Bums*. In his paper about the ritual aspects of *The Dharma Bums*, Alan L. Miller writes that the protagonist, Ray Smith, did not see any conflict between Buddhism and Catholicism. Rather, "he was immersed in the practice of his own peculiar appropriation of Buddhism learned from books,"⁶⁷ which he eventually connects with Catholicism and his practice to find the truth, "a reality in which all religions participated."⁶⁸ Perhaps more importantly, Ray "clearly functioned intuitively and expressed his feelings and experiences in action rather than intellectualizing them."⁶⁹ Alan L. Miller thus reflects on the importance of physical activity that the characters of the novel associate with religions and mountains. As this is an essential factor in Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums*, many other scholars put much effort into their investigations. One such scholar is Benedict Giomo.

Particularly interested in literary studies and the correlation of religions, Benedict Giomo, a Professor Emeritus of American Studies, argues that the confluence of Buddhism and Catholicism frequently occurs in most of Kerouac's works. He further claims that "the challenges and struggles of coming face-to-face with Buddhist concepts, tenets, images, and practices give a whole new dimension to Kerouac's spiritual quest."⁷⁰ Giomo's mention of the *spiritual quest* is essential for this analysis, as the protagonists of *The Dharma Bums* and *Desolation Angels* associate mountains with spiritual pursuits or, to emphasize religion, pilgrimage. To further quote Giomo, "*The Dharma Bums* is Kerouac's Buddhist shrine. The novel is carefully crafted to show the main character's

⁶⁶ Dittman, *Jack Kerouac: A Biography*, p.58.

⁶⁷ Miller, Alan L. "Ritual Aspects of Narrative: An Analysis of Jack Kerouac's 'The Dharma Bums.'" *Journal of Ritual Studies*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1995, p. 44.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Giomo, Benedict. "Enlightened Attachment: Kerouac's Impermanent Buddhist Trek." *Religion & Literature*, vol. 35, no. 2/3, 2003, p. 174.

spiritual progress with the dharma (in Buddhism, the term *dharma* means *truth*).⁷¹ Moreover, Giomo believes that *The Dharma Bums* is written as a diary reflecting the self-willed religious heroes “who cast themselves away to rucksack up and down, and to and fro as they make their pilgrimage through the void-like wilderness of nature.”⁷² In other words, the characters in *The Dharma Bums*, namely Ray Smith and Japhy Ryder, associate Buddhism and mountain hiking with their pilgrimage to find the truth.

Giomo consistently follows his colleague, professor Samuel I. Bellman, who, in his paper written only one year after the publication of *The Dharma Bums*, argues that “Ray becomes a confirmed Zen quietist, and picks up a welter of information about Oriental poets, tea brewing, and the proper utilization of such material factors as sex and mountain trails.”⁷³ Bellman’s deliberate usage of the phrase “picks up a welter of information” indicates that Ray’s attitude toward Buddhism is somewhat original. To clarify, Ray does not fathom Buddhism in its entirety. Instead, he purposely “picks up” only a handful of Buddhism beliefs, such as tea brewing and the utilization of sex and mountain trails, that he deems valuable, practical, and necessary for his way of living.

Nevertheless, by describing Ray as a Zen quietist, Samuel I. Bellman believes that thanks to mountain hiking and nature, Ray finally sees things as they happen and, more importantly, accepts and appreciates them. “The details of Ray’s aimless, babe-in-the-woods wanderings, combined with such frequently used terms as Dharma Bums and Zen Lunatics, throw into bold relief the extremely effective descriptions of the glories of nature and out-of-doors self-fulfillment.”⁷⁴ The idea of wandering and self-fulfillment realized in Buddhist terms is thus regarded as the primary motive that drives both the story and the protagonists forward. However, it shall not be left out that it is not Buddhism in its entirety but rather some handful of Buddhist ideas and beliefs, as the examples from the novel itself prove.

During the Matterhorn hike depicted in *The Dharma Bums*, Japhy Ryder tells Ray, “‘The secret of this kind of climbing,’ said Japhy, ‘is like Zen. Don’t think. Just dance along. It’s the easiest thing in the world, actually easier than walking on flat ground which is monotonous.’”⁷⁵ This example is an intricate and complex blend of Buddhism, pilgrimage, and the aforementioned physical endeavor. Moreover, it demonstrates

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 182.

⁷² Ibid., pp. 182-3.

⁷³ Bellman, Samuel I. “On the Mountain.” *Chicago Review*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1959, p. 70.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 71.

⁷⁵ Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*, p. 54.

mountains as a physical and spiritual challenge one must face to come closer to sacredness. However, as Japhy says, mountain climbing is, in fact, easier than walking on flat ground, leading to the assumption that the characters are closer to the holiness of Buddhism and hence closer to the demanded truth thanks to the ease of mountain climbing.

To further emphasize Japhy's influence over Ray's behavior, toward the end of *The Dharma Bums*, Ray describes himself as a Buddha, uttering sentences such as "I am the Buddha known as the Quitter" and "I am Buddha Empty-Eat."⁷⁶ Ray's comments make Japhy furious, claiming that Ray can never become Buddha. Instead, Japhy repeats to Ray the constantly used phrase "Buddhism is activity"⁷⁷ and that hiking, especially in the mountains, is a way of furthering Buddhist and spiritual revolution. American scholar David Robertson supports this theory by claiming that Japhy believes hiking "at one and the same time frees us from a dependency on nonessential things."⁷⁸ As a result, Japhy sees mountain hiking as an escape from an attitude toward material objects and as a necessary link between the human body and the sacredness of Buddhism.

Yet another American scholar, P.J. Johnston, would agree both with Japhy and with Robertson, arguing that walking or journeying is indeed an essential factor in establishing a link between a human being and holiness or sacredness. "Perhaps there is something about journey itself that makes it possible to perceive the omnipresent sacredness – a reconfiguration of perspective that comes about through the process of alienation and reintegration that far-flung travel affords."⁷⁹ To work with Johnston's theory, the characters in *The Dharma Bums* cannot reach omnipresent sacredness while passively staying in the mountains. It is the active wandering itself that makes it possible.

Additionally, Japhy teaches Ray that being in the mountains is like being simultaneously at the beginning and at the end of the world and that mountains, not people, are patient Buddhas. "This is the beginning and the end of the world right here. Look at all those patient Buddhas lookin at us saying nothing."⁸⁰ Japhy's statement links mountains with mythical heaven and religious symbols as mentioned in subchapter 1.3.

⁷⁶ Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*, p. 152.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 148.

⁷⁸ Robertson, David. "Real Matter, Spiritual Mountain: Gary Snyder and Jack Kerouac on Mt. Tamalpais." *Western American Literature*, vol. 27, no. 3, 1992, p. 220.

⁷⁹ Johnston, P. J. "Dharma Bums: The Beat Generation and the Making of Countercultural Pilgrimage." *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, vol. 33, 2013, p. 178.

⁸⁰ Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*, p. 56.

To demonstrate that mountains in Jack Kerouac's prose indeed represent mythical heaven, a significant excerpt from *Desolation Angels* shall thus be used.

To yet again bring attention to Desolation Peak, the protagonist of the novel declares that "When I get to the top of Desolation Peak and everybody leaves on mules and I'm alone I will come face to face with God or Tathagata and find out once and for all what is the meaning of all existence and suffering and going to and fro in vain."⁸¹ This example ingeniously fuses mountains with mythical heaven, Catholicism with Buddhism, and physical suffering with spirituality. Similarly, it proves that mountains in Kerouac's novels are not merely physical objects but rather a conceptual place where the protagonists come closer to God, Buddha, or Tathagata (a different name for Buddha, or "he who had come and gone"⁸²).

However, Kerouac does not associate mountains with gods only. Especially in *Desolation Angels*, as its name suggests, he writes that mountains are places where angels descend from the mythical heaven and are transformed into human beings. Stephen Prothero is an American scholar and professor heavily influenced and attracted by religions who argues that Kerouac believed every human being was a fallen angel and that especially the beat generation was sent to Earth to be blessed by suffering.⁸³ Consequentially, Kerouac considered all his beatnik friends prophets, "assigning them a place little closer to heaven, christened them 'desolation angels.'"⁸⁴ Nevertheless, Kerouac could not fully understand the purpose of why fallen angels were sent to Earth to suffer in the first place. In *Desolation Angels*, the protagonist says, "I only know one thing; everybody in the world is an angel [...] I see the big sad invisible wings on all the shoulders and I feel bad they're invisible and of no earthly use and never were and all we're doing is fighting to our deaths."⁸⁵ While in *Desolation Angels* Kerouac associates the fallen angels with fighting, in *The Dharma Bums* he associates them with mental suffering instead. "Are we fallen angels who didn't want to believe that nothing is nothing and so we were born to lose our loved ones and dear friends one by one and finally our own life, to see it proved?"⁸⁶ In other words, the protagonists of both *Desolation Angels*

⁸¹ Kerouac, *Desolation Angels*, p. 4.

⁸² Thomas, E. J. "Tathāgata and Tahāgaya." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*, vol. 8, no. 2/3, University of London, 1936, p. 785.

⁸³ Prothero, Stephen. "On the Holy Road: The Beat Movement as Spiritual Protest." *The Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 84, no. 2, 1991, p. 221.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

⁸⁵ Kerouac, *Desolation Angels*, pp. 69-70.

⁸⁶ Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*, p. 201.

and *The Dharma Bums* are puzzled by the purpose and meaning of the fallen angels. Nevertheless, they are mutually assured of one thing – that mountains are places where fallen angels were transformed into human beings.

In summary, the mountains in Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* and *Desolation Angels* are closely and functionally associated with Buddhism. Furthermore, the novels' protagonists achieve the omnipresent sacredness of Buddhism by actively wandering in the mountains. Literary critic Keith N. Hull affirms this theory by arguing that "Ray's spiritual journey is the object of the novel."⁸⁷ To put it another way, Hull argues that Buddhism and Zen Buddhism in Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* and *Desolation Angels* are regarded as a new perception of reality and the acceptance of the natural world that together point to the protagonists' enlightenment.⁸⁸ The wandering is thus regarded as a spiritual pilgrimage to find the truth and the meaning of life, resulting in the mountains being depicted as a conceptual space where the protagonists come closer to the mythical heaven. To furthermore develop this idea, mountains are also a conceptual space where one comes face to face with God or Buddha and where fallen angels descend to Earth. Adding the fact that Kerouac's protagonists achieve transcendence while physically struggling in the mountains, one can assume that the link between mountains and Buddhism is a concept that works as a foundation upon which the stories of *The Dharma Bums* and *Desolation Angels* are built.

3.5. Mountains as both a getaway and a trap

When the success of his most eminent novel, *On The Road*, (first published in 1957) made Jack Kerouac a distinguished and influential author, he began to struggle with his life consistently. The sudden fame and stardom caught Kerouac unprepared and vulnerable. Being in the spotlight was not his natural habitat, and the constant pressure of the journalists led Kerouac out of his comfort zone. Consequently, being unable to bring his thoughts together and come up with any comprehensible narrative, he began drinking even more heavily than he used to before the immense popularity.

A few years passed before he felt the overwhelming urge to be alone, believing that "being removed from everyone might clear his mind."⁸⁹ As a result, his great friend, another beat icon Lawrence Ferlinghetti, invited him to his cabin in Big Sur, California,

⁸⁷ Hull, Keith N. "A Dharma Bum Goes West to Meet the East." *Western American Literature*, vol. 11, no. 4, 1977, p. 329.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 328.

⁸⁹ Dittman, *Jack Kerouac: A Biography*, p. 99.

where Kerouac could embrace the solitude of nature and mountains. Initially, Kerouac was open to the idea, planning to be shrouded by the loneliness of the mountains for up to three months straight while constantly believing that mountains would help him slow down his rate of intoxication.⁹⁰ Eventually, however, as if the solitude of the mountains worsened his condition, Kerouac left the cabin after the first three weeks.⁹¹ Later, he described his experiences in the short novel named, perhaps unsurprisingly, *Big Sur*. This subchapter is, therefore, primarily devoted to this novel, as it initially depicts mountains as a promising getaway, yet eventually as an emotional trap.

At the beginning of the novel, as the protagonist, Jack Duluouz, sets off to the secluded cabin for the first time, the idea of being alone in the mountains is so overwhelming that it is depicted as the only option how to leave the disarray of society behind. Upon finally reaching the cabin and finding himself in complete solitude, Jack begins to appreciate nature and the mountains, quietly whispering to himself, “so easy in the woods to daydream and pray to the local spirits and say ‘Allow me to stay here, I only want peace’ and those foggy peaks answer back mutely Yes.”⁹² A couple of lines later, Jack confesses that he wants to change his life. “No more dissipation, it’s time for me to quietly watch the world and even enjoy it, first in the woods like these, then just calmly walk and talk among people of the world, no booze, no drugs, no binges, no bouts with beatniks and drunks [...]”⁹³ Curiously, Jack mentions his beatnik friends many a time, intentionally trying to be “a long way from the beat generation, in this rain forest.”⁹⁴ This implies that he wants to be away from any civilization, his dearest friends included. However, this is only temporary, as his claim “then just calmly walk and talk among people of the world” suggests. Simply put, Jack treats both mountains and nature as a conceptual space where he can find peace, clear his chaotic mind, and be away from society. Yet at the same time, he does not want to be alone any longer than necessary.

Even so, in the first place, Jack Duluouz achieves a great personal relationship with nature and the mountains. Exploring the association between literature and the world, Swedish scholar Elin Käck argues that Kerouac’s *Big Sur* is preoccupied with the interrelationships of humans and nature.⁹⁵ At first, the cabin stands “for the attempt at

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ For further reference, see Chapter 2.

⁹² Kerouac, *Big Sur*, p. 17.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 19.

⁹⁵ Käck, Elin. “‘Horrible Washing Sawing’: Ecology and Anthropocentric Sublimity in Jack Kerouac’s *Big Sur*.” *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2020, p. 153.

self-improvement, with the initial ambition of a stay characterized by a self-reliance.”⁹⁶ Elin Käck thus agrees with the assumption that at the beginning of the novel, mountains are depicted and treated as a getaway from society and Jack’s chaotic mind, adding that soon, the solitude of mountains and nature has a healing effect on Jack.

This assumption, however, goes abruptly awry when on the fourth day, Jack gets bored and starts to miss his friends. “Because on the fourth day I began to get bored and noted it in my diary with amazement.”⁹⁷ Additionally, the sun, fog, wind, clouds, and tree stumps are the same every day, confusing Jack and hence preventing him from intensifying his connection to nature. In Käck’s words, *Big Sur* eventually “describes a failed attempt to be alone and connected to nature.”⁹⁸ As a consequence, after three weeks of solitude, Jack leaves the cabin prematurely, looking forward to drinking wine with his friends and “forgetting entirely that only three weeks previous I’d been sent fleeing from that gooky city by the horrors.”⁹⁹ However, after some time spent in the city, the vision of returning to the mountains overwhelmed Jack once again. On this occasion, however, he invited some of his dearest friends to accompany him back to the cabin, for he did not want to be alone anymore.

To further follow Elin Käck, she argues that Jack’s decision to invite his friends ultimately leads to inevitable disappointment. With his friends around, Jack’s mind paradoxically suffers. “I’m SICK I yell emphatically to the trees, to the woods around, to the hills above, looking around desperately, nobody cares.”¹⁰⁰ Using the word *nobody*, Jack refers to his friends who, in Jack’s eyes, do not understand his eccentric behavior. In fact, having his friends around make Jack realize that he should be left alone. Consequentially, he begins to question whether inviting them to the cabin was a good idea. “Can it be that Ron and all these other guys, Dave and McLear or somebody, the other guys earlier are all a big of bunch of witches out to make me go mad?”¹⁰¹ Therefore, one afternoon as his friends decide to go for a trip, Jack intentionally decides to stay alone in the cabin, saying, “no I’ll stay here and get better – I gotta be alone.”¹⁰² The solitude again bears its fruit. “I swear on my arm I’m as well as I ever was: just like that

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 157.

⁹⁷ Kerouac, *Big Sur*, p. 23.

⁹⁸ Käck, “‘Horrible Washing Sawing’: Ecology and Anthropocentric Sublimity in Jack Kerouac’s *Big Sur*,” p. 155.

⁹⁹ Kerouac, *Big Sur*, p. 34.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 86.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 87.

¹⁰² Ibid.

suddenly.”¹⁰³ Eventually, “everything is fine and splendid!”¹⁰⁴ However, as soon as his friends return, the cabin in the mountains once again becomes an emotional trap, depriving Jack of the desired happiness he experiences while being alone.

In summary, the relationship between the protagonist, Jack Duluouz, and the mountains is complicated. In her paper, Elin Käck concludes that in the end, “nature, it seems, disappoints.”¹⁰⁵ Not falsifying Käck’s theory, at the beginning of the novel *Big Sur*, however, nature does not disappoint. During the first stay at the cabin, Jack is happy and finds the peace he so desperately longs for. What precipitously alters his point of view is the upcoming boredom and the eagerness to have his dearest friends around. Surprisingly then, after some time spent alone being happy, Jack wants to be a part of society and spend some time with his friends. Yet while having friends around, his mind suffers, leading to an urge to be once again exposed to the solitude of mountains. Therefore, at first regarded as a getaway, nature and mountains soon become an emotional trap, as Jack cannot decide whether to be alone or have his friends around.

3.6. Desolation Peak as a pivotal place for the concept of mountains in Kerouac’s prose

Desolation Peak has already been touched upon in many subchapters throughout the analysis. Primarily, it was mentioned in the subchapters devoted to spirituality and Buddhism. This subchapter, however, argues that Desolation Peak represents a foundation upon which the mountains in Kerouac’s prose stand. This is supported by the fact that Jack Kerouac writes about Desolation Peak in three differing works – *The Dharma Bums*, *Desolation Angels*, and a short story called “Alone on a Mountaintop,” published in a short story collection *Lonesome Traveler*. Furthermore, the subchapter at hand presents to the reader that, as a matter of fact, Desolation Peak is a conceptual place where all the aforementioned concepts, such as physicality, mentality, spirituality, embodiment, Buddhism, and mountains as a getaway and a trap, merge. Thus, it investigates Desolation Peak as the core of all the concepts discussed in the practical part. Furthermore, it investigates Desolation Peak as a theoretical peak of this thesis.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 91.

¹⁰⁵ Käck, “‘Horrible Washing Sawing’: Ecology and Anthropocentric Sublimity in Jack Kerouac’s *Big Sur*,” p. 162.

3.6.1. The contrasting faces of Desolation Peak

Throughout the thesis, it has been repeatedly pointed out that in the summer of 1956, Kerouac spent two months in complete isolation as a fire lookout on Desolation Peak in the Mount Baker National Forest in Washington. In Michael J. Dittman's words, Kerouac felt that being on Desolation Peak would help him receive another vision before he headed back to the disorderly life of civilization.¹⁰⁶ As the notion of mountains being regarded simultaneously as a getaway and a trap are predominantly depicted in Kerouac's novel *Big Sur* (for further reference, see the preceding subchapter), one might assume that Desolation Peak would be displayed as a getaway only. However, the following examples from *The Dharma Bums*, *Desolation Angels* and "Alone on a Mountaintop" disprove this hypothesis, implying that the protagonists' attitudes toward Desolation Peak significantly differ from novel to novel.

For example, in *The Dharma Bums*, Desolation Peak is depicted as a getaway and a mythical place with great spiritual energy where Ray, the protagonist, is happy. The following examples and passages from the novel prove this theory. "Well I don't care, all I want is to be alone up there this summer."¹⁰⁷ A few lines later, "suddenly I realized I was truly alone and had nothing to do but feed myself and rest and amuse myself, and nobody could criticize."¹⁰⁸ Finally, "I was feeling happier than in years and years, since childhood, I felt deliberate and glad and solitary. In my diary I wrote, 'Oh I'm happy!'"¹⁰⁹ Ray's positive state of mind changes only seldom. "Sometimes I'd get mad because things didn't work out well, I'd spoil a flapjack, or slip in the snowfield while getting water, or one time my shovel went sailing down into the gorge, and I'd be so mad I'd want to bite the mountaintops [...]."¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, Ray's overall experience is pleasant. The stay on Desolation Peak, as depicted in *The Dharma Bums*, thus serves as a soothing mind balm.

On the other hand, in *Desolation Angels*, the situation could not be more different. The novel is divided into two parts. The first part, whose entire story takes place at Desolation Peak, is called 'Desolation in Solitude.' The title itself thus implies a rather negative attitude toward the place. Subchapter 4.3 argues that Hozomeen, one of the

¹⁰⁶ Dittman, *Jack Kerouac: A Biography*, p. 86.

¹⁰⁷ Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*, p. 191.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

mountains surrounding the protagonist, is in *Desolation Angels* depicted as an embodiment of a human being, without which the protagonist cannot imagine being in the solitude of the mountains. Simply put, Hozomeen makes the otherwise dreadful stay manageable.

Jack Duluo, the protagonist, is hence eager to leave the place and return to society. Therefore, his point of view and indecisiveness resembles the attitude of the protagonist of *Big Sur*. Consequently, Desolation Peak and mountains in general become a trap, the same way as in *Big Sur*. “Then come the long daydreams of what I’ll do when I get out of here, that mountaintop trap.”¹¹¹ The desire to go “back to the reality” takes control over Jack’s mind, preventing him from being happy. American scholar Todd Giles argues that the solitude brought on by Desolation Peak was too much for Jack, urging him to get to the city and walk the streets.¹¹² As a result, Jack begins to hate the solitude of Desolation Peak, his thoughts drifting away toward only one phenomenon – the vitality of cities. “I sit there wondering if my own travels down the Coast to Frisco and Mexico wont be just as sad and mad – but by bejesus j Christ it’ll be bettern hanging around *this* rock.”¹¹³ As time passes, he becomes increasingly desperate to leave Desolation Peak. “I want to come down RIGHT AWAY because the smell of onions on my hand as I bring blueberries to my lips on the mountainside suddenly reminds me of the hamburgers [...] of the World to which I want to return at once.”¹¹⁴ Additionally, “but enough! enough of rocks and trees and yaloping y-birds! I wanta to go where there’s lamps and telephones and rumped couches with women on them [...]”¹¹⁵ Surprisingly then, there is a great contradiction between the two novels. Whereas in *The Dharma Bums*, Desolation Peak is depicted as a getaway from the chaotic society, in *Desolation Angels*, on the other hand, the place is described as a trap that prevents the protagonist pursue his desire of being in the cities.

Enter a short story “Alone on a Mountaintop” published in 1960 in a collection called *Lonesome Traveler*. Perhaps because being written and published two years after *The Dharma Bums*, the protagonist’s attitude toward Desolation Peak in this short story is virtually identical to that of the famous novel. For this purpose, it is unnecessary to

¹¹¹ Kerouac, *Desolation Angels*, p. 18.

¹¹² Giles, Todd. “‘Upsidedown like fools’: Jack Kerouac’s ‘Desolation Blues’ and the Struggle for Enlightenment.” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 53, no. 2, 2011, p. 192.

¹¹³ Kerouac, *Desolation Angels*, p. 33.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

provide repetitious examples. However, in “Alone on a Mountaintop,” the reader learns something that is left out in either *The Dharma Bums* or *Desolation Peak*. Toward the end of the short story, the protagonist claims that “no man should go through life without once experiencing healthy, even bored solitude in the wilderness, finding himself depending solely on himself and thereby learning his true and hidden strength.”¹¹⁶ The protagonist’s philosophy of everybody experiencing healthy solitude in the wilderness is then reflected at the very end of the short story. Upon leaving the Desolation Peak, the protagonist stops and says, “I turned and blessed Desolation Peak and the little pagoda on top and thanked them for the shelter and the lesson I’d been taught.”¹¹⁷ The overall influence of Desolation Peak is thus positive, and Jack learns a new life-changing lesson.

Unsurprisingly, this life-changing experience is also depicted in *The Dharma Bums*. “Desolation, Desolation, I owe so much to Desolation, thank you forever for guiding me to the place where I learned all.”¹¹⁸ Additionally, “as I was hiking down the mountain with my pack, I turned and knelt on the trail and said ‘Thank you, shack.’”¹¹⁹ To follow the importance of Buddhism investigated in subchapter 4.4, Alan L. Miller argues that Desolation Peak near the end of *The Dharma Bums* is a “solitary experience that seems to be enough to sustain Ray for the life ‘in the world,’ among the suffering beings caught in samsara – those unwilling or unable to taste the exhilarating life of the mountain top.”¹²⁰ Miller thus implies that Desolation Peak, as depicted in *The Dharma Bums*, and most probably as well as in “Alone on a Mountaintop,” prepares the protagonists for their return to society.

Nevertheless, despite being depicted as a trap in *Desolation Angels*, in the end, Desolation Peak positively influences Jack Duluouz, too. “I’ve taken one final look at the shuttered (good-bye strange) cabin and even made a little kneel to it [...], the shack where everything had been promised to me by Visions on lighting nights.”¹²¹ Simplifying greatly, although the stay at Desolation Peak, as depicted in *The Dharma Bums*, *Desolation Peak*, and “Alone on a Mountaintop,” differs, the result is inevitably the same. Eventually, Desolation Peak serves all the protagonists as a place that teaches them an essential life-changing lesson, leaving them grateful and glad.

¹¹⁶ Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveler*, p. 108.

¹¹⁷ Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveler*, p. 112.

¹¹⁸ Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*, p. 205.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Miller, “Ritual Aspects of Narrative: An Analysis of Jack Kerouac’s ‘The Dharma Bums.’”, p. 52.

¹²¹ Kerouac, *Desolation Angels*, p. 74.

3.6.2. Desolation Peak as a dwelling place for the Primordial Bear

Due to their shape, physical features, and mystic atmosphere, mountains are often perceived as places not strictly associated with reality. Subchapter 1.3 devoted to mountain symbolism refers to Robert Macfarlane, who believes that in the early history of the West, mountains used to symbolize a residence of both gods and monsters.¹²² The idea of mountains in selected Kerouac's works being depicted as a dwelling place of gods is investigated in subchapter 3.4. Macfarlane further adds that "other sinister beings were reputed to patrol the higher slopes of mountains."¹²³ One such being patrols the Desolation Peak in Jack Kerouac's *Desolation Angels* and *Lonesome Traveler*. Curiously, it is not an appalling monstrosity but a bear. Nevertheless, in Kerouac's protagonists' view, the bear still partially represents a monster. "One morning I find bear stool and signs of where the unseen monster has taken cans of frozen hardened can-milk [...]."¹²⁴ Despite being unseen, the bear scares the protagonists as they believe that "he was King Bear, who could crush my head in his paws and crack my spine like a stick and this was his house, his yard, his domain."¹²⁵ Most importantly, it is a bear that "owns all the Northwest and all the Snow and commands all mountains"¹²⁶ and that "has millenniums of thus-prowling here behind him – He has seen Indians and Redcoats come and go, and will see it again."¹²⁷ These assumptions lead the protagonists to regard the unseen bear as a "Primordial Bear"¹²⁸ that has been patrolling Desolation Peak since the beginning of the world. Hence, he owns and commands all the surrounding mountains.

In simple words, the Primordial Bear resides at Desolation Peak where he is continually aware of the world around him, protecting the Desolation Peak from evil spirits. Illustrating the bear, Kerouac thus follows the idea of mountains as a dwelling place for both gods and atypical creatures. However, as depicted in *Desolation Angels* and *Lonesome Traveler*, the bear is not a stereotypical people-killing monster. Although he could crush the protagonists' heads in his paws and crack their spines like a stick, he predominantly represents a mythical being that inhabits the Desolation Peak, "paying no attention to things animate or inanimate."¹²⁹ Therefore, Jack Kerouac alters the idea of

¹²² Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind: Adventures in Reaching the Summit*, p. 132.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Kerouac, *Desolation Angels*, p. 57.

¹²⁵ Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveler*, p. 110.

¹²⁶ Kerouac, *Desolation Angels*, p. 58.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveler*, p. 110.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

mountains being a dwelling place for monsters by providing the readers with an unseen bear whose sole purpose is, despite being capable of killing a person, to wander aimlessly around Desolation Peak. Strikingly, the protagonists in Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums*, *Desolation Peak*, and *Lonesome Traveler* also aimlessly wander around Desolation Peak. Therefore, the bear could be perceived as a physical embodiment of the protagonists.

3.6.3. The co-occurrence of spirituality and Buddhism at Desolation Peak

It has already been acknowledged in subchapter 4.3, devoted to spirituality, that the protagonists of *The Dharma Bums* and *Desolation Angels* are particularly attracted by a mountain called Hozomeen surrounding Desolation Peak. However, owing to the solitude, Desolation Peak is more than just about Hozomeen. It is a conceptual space where the protagonists face their most concealed thoughts.

In *The Dharma Bums*, while being cut off from society, Ray Smith arrives at an unexpected conclusion that “the circumstances of existence are pretty glorious.”¹³⁰ More importantly, “the world was upsidedown hanging in an ocean of endless space [...]”¹³¹ Foreseeably, Ray's ideas and thoughts, as depicted in *The Dharma Bums*, go hand-in-hand with Buddhism, as Desolation Peak is a space enabling these two concepts to merge seamlessly.

This also applies to *Desolation Angels*, where thanks to the silence and the seclusion of Desolation Peak, Jack realizes that “there is no Buddha, no awakener, and there is no Meaning, no Dharma, and it is all only the wile of Maya.”¹³² Further in the story, Jack decides to “keep the mind neutral”¹³³ as he learns that “there are worse things to fear on the (upsidedown) surface of this earth than darkness and tears – There's people, your legs giving way, and finally your pockets get rifled, and finally you convulse and die.”¹³⁴ Despite being depicted as a trap in *Desolation Angels* and as a getaway in *The Dharma Bums* and *Lonesome Traveler*, Desolation Peak unquestionably represents a specific place for all the protagonists of the aforementioned novels.

In fact, upon descending the mountain and finding himself once again in the city, Jack Duluouz misses Desolation Peak immensely. “Nobody deigns to look at me but sneer – It's awful, it's hell – I begin to realize I should be back in my mountain shack on a cold

¹³⁰ Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*, p. 200.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Kerouac, *Desolation Angels*, p. 52.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 73.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 74.

moonlit night.”¹³⁵ Furthermore, “it don’t make no sense, the world is too magical, I better go back to my rock.”¹³⁶ At this point, Desolation Peak does not represent a mere place anymore. It is a place that belongs to Jack, and Jack belongs to it. Thus, as it continually speaks to the protagonists, Desolation Peak is illustrated as a prototype for Jack Kerouac’s mountains space in general.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

Conclusion

This thesis explored the concept of mountains in Jack Kerouac's novels *The Dharma Bums*, *Desolation Angels*, *Big Sur*, and the short story "Alone on a Mountaintop" published in a collection of short stories titled *Lonesome Traveler*. More especially, the analysis of the thesis intended to scrutinize the role of mountains in the aforementioned works, with a special focus on presenting mountains as conceptual places that greatly influence the protagonists. Furthermore, its aim was to call to attention the fact that mountains in Kerouac's prose are not merely physical objects representing an obstacle or a destination, but places of fundamental and personal importance.

The thesis was divided into three parts. The first part was devoted to the theoretical part that introduced the idea of concepts, together with the value of the spirit of space and place. Additionally, the theoretical part also discussed the phenomenon of mountain symbolism and the topos of mountains in literature. Attention was paid to Mieke Bal's and Joseph Goguen's arguments that despite concepts being interpersonal, everyone recognizes them differently. Moreover, concepts create a universal symbolic language responsible for the connection between disciples and people. This assumption, together with Collocott's argument that it is possible to become one with a particular place, was eventually applied to the analysis of mountains conducted in the practical part. Finally, the theoretical part briefly presented the four dominant mountain symbols that are pervasive in Kerouac's prose; mystical creatures, religious metaphors, altering behavior and personality, and physical and mental obstacles.

The second part summarily presented to the reader the life of Jack Kerouac and his personal attitude toward mountains and nature. It argued that despite being known predominantly for his vivid depiction of urban life, his works are profoundly influenced by mountains. In Kerouac's biography written Michael J. Dittman, the author argues that the deep fondness for mountains was brought to Kerouac by an American environmental activist and the poet of outdoors, Gary Snyder. It was Snyder who took Kerouac on his first-ever mountain hike, an experience that left a lasting mark on Kerouac's attitude toward mountains and nature. Likewise, Snyder became Kerouac's personal Buddhist guide, encouraging him to spend solitary time in the mountains where he could discover new ideas about the meanings of religion and life. Eventually, however, Kerouac's approach toward mountains gradually changed during his lifetime, and so did the concept of mountains in his prose.

Finally, the third part of the thesis was devoted to the practical analysis, which investigated the concept of mountains in Jack Kerouac's prose. Combining numerous perspectives and concepts, it proved that Kerouac's protagonists experience the happiest moments of their lives while staying physically active in the mountains. In other words, the physical pain encountered in the mountains alters the protagonists' thinking and their attitude toward their lives, making them, in their words, better people. Eventually, however, the protagonists associate mountains with spaces for spiritual and material bodies. In this instance, Kerouac's works marginally differ, as some depict mountains as an embodiment of human beings and purity, whereas some as an embodiment of monsters and evil. The same applies to mountains regarded as both a getaway and a trap. Again, there is a great contradiction between Kerouac's works, implying that the relationship between mountains and the protagonists is complicated, as they cannot decide whether to be left alone in the solitude of mountains or to attend parties in urban life. Nevertheless, mountains in all the investigated works are functionally associated with religion and religious pilgrimage. As the protagonists achieve omnipresent sacredness and transcendence while actively wandering in the mountains, the practical part has argued that the link between mountains and religion is a foundation upon which Kerouac's mountains stand.

Conclusively, scrutinizing Desolation Peak as a theoretical peak of the thesis, the practical part arrived at the intended conclusion that despite many dissimilarities, mountains in Kerouac's prose are not mere unimportant physical objects. They are conceptual places that enable the protagonists of the novels to change their lives and experience sacredness and transcendence. Finally, mountains in Jack Kerouac's prose leave the protagonists restless, forcing them to treat the conceptual space of mountains as an out-of-this-world place that energizes them both their physically and mentally, making them better people.

Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá tematikou hor v próze amerického spisovatele a předního představitele beat generation Jacka Kerouaca. Na základě propojení duchovna a fyzická se snaží dokázat, že hory v Kerouacových románech *Dharmoví tuláci*, *Andělé pustiny*, *Big Sur* a v povídce *Sám na vrcholu hory* představují mýtické prostory, které mají výrazný podíl na změně chování a přístupů k životům jednotlivých hlavních postav. Hlavním cílem práce tedy je poukázat na fakt, že Jack Kerouac ve své próze nevnímá hory jako obyčejné místo, ve které je zasazen děj, nýbrž jako místo, se kterým jsou jeho protagonisté silně emotivně spjati.

Práce je rozdělena do tří částí. První z nich se věnuje teoretické sekci, ve které je představen pojem *koncept*. To je následováno podkapitolami věnující se konceptu o duchu místa, symbolice hor a v neposlední řadě toposu hor v literatuře. Teoretická část tedy představuje důležitý základ, na který následně navazuje celá praktická část.

Druhá část práce krátce zmiňuje život Jacka Kerouaca a jeho osobní přístup k přírodě a k horám. Jelikož Kerouacovy osobní zkušenosti a příhody byly námětem pro jeho autobiografické romány, je hlavním tématem druhé části Kerouacův pobyt v pohoří Big Sur a Desolation Peak. Okrajově jsou zmíněni i ostatní představitelé beat generation, kteří měli do jisté míry vliv na Kerouacův osobní přístup k horám.

Třetí část je věnovaná praktické části, která důkladně zkoumá vyobrazení hor ve výše zmíněných dílech. Poukazuje na fakt, že hory v Kerouacově tvorbě nejsou pouhé materiální objekty, nýbrž místa úzce spjatá s fyzickým i duševním vypjetím. Mimo jiné slouží hory v Kerouacově tvorbě jako pomyslný cíl pro náboženskou pouť nebo jako útočiště před chaotickým městským životem. Důležitým prvkem třetí části je vrchol Desolation Peak, o kterém Kerouac detailně píše v románech *Dharmoví tuláci* a *Andělé pustiny*, a který je vnímán jako stěžejní místo pro koncept hor v Kerouacově próze.

Závěr této práce dokazuje, že Jack Kerouac vyobrazuje hory jako mýtická místa, která jeho protagonistům, navzdory všem překážkám, dodávají psychickou i fyzickou energii a obohacují jejich životy. Sami protagonisté navíc několikrát zmiňují, že se díky horám stávají, alespoň do určité míry, lepšími lidmi.

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