“ONE’S-SELF I SING”: THE THEME OF INDIVIDUALISM AS A PART OF THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IN THE WORKS OF MARK TWAIN, ERNEST HEMINGWAY, AND JACK KEROUAC

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION—"SELF-RELIANCE"

> We have yet had no genius in America, with tyrannous eye, which knew the value of our incomparable materials, and saw, in the barbarism and materialism of the times, another carnival of the same gods whose picture he so much admires in Homer; then in the middle age; then in Calvinism.
>
> Ralph Waldo Emerson[1]

Much like the people of America, the American character is an amalgamation of heritages that spans time and place, including not only "British but European [aspects], not only . . . the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries but . . . two thousand years."[2] The American character did not simply or suddenly appear, but rather formed over the course of decades and "the whole of the American environment—the sense of spaciousness, the invitation to mobility, the atmosphere of independence, the encouragement to enterprise and optimism" took part in its formation.[3] The American experience brought about the American character, which helped to enhance the American experience. One of the greatest and most visible aspects of this American character is the philosophy of self-

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[1] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Poet* (1844), in *Essays and Poems by Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Peter Norberg (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2004), 275.
[2] Henry Steele Commager, *The American Mind: An Interpretation of American Thought and Character Since the 1880's* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), 3.
[3] Ibid., 4-5.

reliance and individuality. This concept was "born of geography, nourished by history, confirmed by philosophy, self-reliance was elevated to a philosophical creed, and in time individualism became synonymous with Americanism."[4] Over time, these concepts developed as a part of the American character, but they fundamentally retained the same meaning.

Prior to the 1820s, the United States had little to offer in terms of a unique American culture. The country still relied heavily on the British and other European nations for literature and other markers of "true" civilization. This changed with the rising popularity and publications of Ralph Waldo Emerson. He wrote as a part of the Transcendentalist movement, which "held that truth is truth only as it transcends particular times, places, institutions, and persons."[5] His essays self-consciously defined the American character and greatly influenced American letters. Emerson wrote of what it meant to be an American. As a central figure within the cultural history of American ideas, Emerson "attacked the sterile rationalism and materialism of his age."[6] He advocated the philosophy of self-reliance, which ultimately "diminished the authority of institutions and traditions and empowered the self."[7]

Emerson's influence continued into the twentieth century. Three of the most innovative writers in American letters—Mark Twain, Ernest Hemingway, and Jack Kerouac—dealt with the themes of American individualism that Emerson put forth in his writing. Mark Twain was the first to put these themes into fiction writing, and he created

[4] Ibid., 29.
[5] Eric Foner and John A. Garraty, eds., *The Reader's Companion to American History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1991), 1082.
[6] Ibid., 353.
[7] Ibid., 353.

an American voice. Ernest Hemingway expanded upon the theme of self-reliance and created the code of the well-lived life. Jack Kerouac, in his road novels, partly accepted and partly rejected these themes. Kerouac's writing reflects the notion that the point of life is to find enlightenment, which will lead to redemption. He thought that self-reliance and individuality from institutions were part of this process, but his life and writing ultimately did not match these teachings. All three writers set up prototypical characters that challenge their societal and cultural learning by holding true to their sense of right and wrong. Twain and Hemingway's characters exemplify the idea that doing right, even at the last possible moment, is what matters, whereas Kerouac's characters attempt to do more good than ill, but finally conclude that finding oneself is the end goal of life.

There is no work that directly looks at these three authors, the impact of Emerson on their writing, and the ways that their writing represents a continuity of theme even as it responds to specific contemporary events and conditions. Each man created individualistic characters and explored the themes of honor, innocence, and bravery in the course of the story. Even as they stayed with these traditional themes, initially set forth by Emerson in the nineteenth century and then practically codified in the twentieth century, they each made their own lasting impact on the pervading style of American literature in response to their own cultural conditions.

As the nineteenth century began and it became increasingly clear that the United States would survive as an independent nation, the country began looking for its cultural identity. Emerson wrote during a period of industrial growth and westward expansion, when the country's cultural identity was even more in flux. This rapid development allowed him to challenge the status quo and ask more of the American people. He put

forth the concept of self-reliance and individualism that society took up and adapted to its own uses, even bastardizing Emerson's original intent in the process. Emerson's self-reliance actually deals more with developing a streak of altruism in an individual. Through self-reliance, one ultimately begins to think more about others and the universality of his actions; it is not merely rugged individualism. Emerson taught that individuals should meditate because "any person who honestly examines his own mind and his own heart and carries the examination out to its utmost limits will arrive at conclusions that are not particular, self-centered, and limited, but are universal and applicable to all of humankind."[8]

The political and social conditions in the country during the 1830s were just right for Emerson to write *Nature*, which "provided a philosophical foundation for the production of a new set of cultural values and beliefs."[9] His essay explored the "interaction between the natural world and human consciousness," which led him to conclude that there existed "the values and beliefs that comprise a genuinely democratic culture," which ultimately allows the individual to construct "from experiences that are common to all."[10]

Another of Emerson's influential lectures was "The American Scholar," which he delivered to the Harvard chapter of Phi Beta Kappa in 1837. Though the topic was a traditional one, Emerson "poured into it his fierce conviction that each individual possesses unique talents and ability, and that education should cultivate those talents

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[8] Joseph L. Blau, "Emerson's Transcendentalist Individualism as a Social Philosophy," *The Review of Metaphysics*, 31 (September, 1977), 82.
[9] Peter Norberg, "Introduction: Optimist and Realist," in *Essays and Poems by Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2004), 29.
[10] Ibid., 29.

rather than transmit the intellectual traditions of the past," which emphasized his belief that education is only valuable if used actively.[11]

Emerson's "Self-Reliance," which even further expounded upon his principles of individualism, put forth the notions that "the forces opposing self-assertion are mainly social . . . [and] [m]ental timidity is a reflection of the moral cowardice of the crowd."[12] Rebelling against society, if one were truly living a better life, was acceptable. In this essay, Emerson proclaimed that "a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds."[13] This legitimized the notion of protest, which many argue was the basis for the founding of the country.

Emerson was not alone in his push for an American literature. He merely laid the groundwork in his essays and vocally called for an American literature in *Nature*—"Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not a history of theirs?"[14] Walt Whitman was the next to take up Emerson's mantle in his life-long work, *Leaves of Grass* (1855). In his preface of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman says "Of all nations the United States with veins full of poetical stuff most need poets and will doubtless have the greatest and use them the greatest."[15] Much like Emerson, Whitman wrote a literary declaration of independence, in which he determined that "these new American poets would represent

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[11] Ibid., 31.
[12] Barbara Packer, "Ralph Waldo Emerson," in *Columbia Literary History of the United States*, ed., Emory Elliott (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 388.
[13] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self-Reliance* (1841), in *Essays and Poems by Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 155.
[14] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (1837), in *Essays and Poems by Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 43.
[15] Walt Whitman, "Preface to *Leaves of Grass*" (1855), in *Whitman: Poetry and Prose* (New York: Penguin, 1996), 8.

and inspire the people, assuming the roles of priests and politicians; the new American poetry would be as strong and fluid as its rivers, as sweeping and grand as its landscapes, as various as its people."[16]

Contemporary writers took his definition and worked it into their writings. Emerson's reputation was not limited to his native country. He wrote "at a time when few American authors were known outside the borders of their own country," yet Emerson's work "had been translated into French and German, reviewed in the London *Times*, and respectfully discussed in the *Revue des deux mondes*."[17] He became the best example to both his native country and the world of the American spirit. Emerson began the tradition of "the autonomous individual standing before God (or the Oversoul), living by universal laws in harmony with nature, obeying an inner voice, and letting society take care of itself." Even in the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, writers still used the themes set forth by Emerson.[18]

The first to capture his meaning in fiction was Mark Twain. In his best writing, Twain focuses on the freedom promised by the West and on the importance of individuality. His characters question society and make the right decision based on their own experiences and feelings. Twain's writing had a more direct and obvious influence on later writers, but Emerson provided Twain with the framework to make his mark on the American literary scene. Mark Twain took Emerson's definitions of "America" and "American" and parlayed them into literature.

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[16] Karen Karbiener, "Introduction: Walt Whitman and the Promise of America," in Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass: First and "Death-bed" Editions, Additional Poems* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2004), 45.
[17] Packer, "Ralph Waldo Emerson," *Columbia Literary History of the United States*, 381.
[18] Malcolm Cowley, *A Second Flowering: Works and Days of the Lost Generation* (1956; repr., New York: The Viking Press, 1973), 109.

In the early stages of his career, Twain was more of a poet, with his "voracious cataloguing and disgorging of experience."[19] He began to show his ability to "capture life with words."[20] He exemplified Emerson's definition of a poet: "the poet has a new thought; he has a whole new experience to unfold; he will tell us how it was with him, and all men will be the richer for his fortune."[21]

Twain's experiences allowed him to bring a unique flavor to his writing, which led him to become the first American writer with a truly American voice—"as Samuel Clemens of Hannibal, Missouri, he had been brought up to the ways of the small-town middle class and he had absorbed the oral traditions of the Middle West and the South. As a Mississippi steamboatsman, a would-be bonanza miner, and a frontier journalist, he shared in the newly released energies of his expanding country."[22] Twain's writing was the first to use dialect and local speech. At a base level, his writing was simple, with a "comic interplay between vernacular character and thoughtless conventionality," but it could be expanded to include "the theme of nature versus civilization and disclosed subversive and tragic possibilities."[23]

Ernest Hemingway was the first man since Mark Twain to "alter radically the literary language of the country."[24] Hemingway took Twain's themes and modernized and expanded upon them. Hemingway focused on man in his natural state and how

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[19] Ron Powers, *Mark Twain: A Life* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 66.
[20] Ibid., 66.
[21] Emerson, *The Poet*, 260.
[22] Foner, *The Reader's Companion to American History*, 671.
[23] Ibid., 671.
[24] John McCormick, *American Literature, 1919-1932: A Comparative History* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1971), 44.

living apart brings out the best in man. He ultimately concluded that a man's life only matters if he does something brave or heroic in the end.

According to Hemingway's standards of great literature, as espoused in *Green Hills of Africa*, Emerson's writing was not great:

> All our early classics who did not know that a new classic does not bear any resemblance to the classics that have preceded it. It can steal from anything that it is better than, anything that is not a classic, all classics do that. Some writers are only born to help another writer to write one sentence . . . . They did not use the words that people always have used in speech, the words that survive in language . . . . They had minds, yes. Nice, dry clean minds.

In other words, Emerson did not write great literature himself. His purpose was to inspire others to create great works of literature. A close reading of Emerson's essays reveals that his purpose matched Hemingway's analysis.[25]

Though Hemingway is comparable to Twain in many ways, Hemingway was not "simply another direct product . . . like Sherwood Anderson."[26] Hemingway himself often acknowledged a debt to Twain's work, in particular *Huckleberry Finn*, but he also maintained that his style was mostly his own.[27] Once Hemingway achieved success,

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[25] Ernest Hemingway, *Green Hills of Africa* (1935; repr., New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), 21.

[26] McCormick, *American Literature, 1919-1932*, 44. Sherwood Anderson was another twentieth-century writer. His most famous work is *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), which is a collection of interrelated short stories.

[27] This is not to say that Hemingway blindly accepted Twain's work as an ideal. For example, "When you say Mac [Robert McAlmon] is better than Mark Twain you are right in that Mark Twain wrote great, vast quantities of Hog Wash. He also wrote one, and only one very wonderful thing—Huck Finn. And if you will, now, read Huckleberry Finn, honest to God read it as I re-read it only about three months ago, not anything else by Mark Twain, but Huckleberry Finn, and the last few Chapters of it were just tacked on to finish it off by Howells or somebody. The story stops when Jim, the nigger, is captured and Huck finds himself alone and his nigger gone. That's the end." Ernest Hemingway to Ernest Walsh, January 20, 1926, in Ernest Hemingway *Selected Letters, 1917 to 1961*, ed. Carlos Baker (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1981), 188.

several authors either claimed to be or were ascribed to be Hemingway's mentor. Though, like most writers, Hemingway incorporated aspects of other authors' work in his early attempts at fiction, he firmly believed that "you later had to pay for whatever help . . . imitation gave you in your apprenticeship. It was like consulting a psychiatrist. If you were to go on your own, you soon had to wean yourself of such outside direction."[28] What he produced after 1923 has its own tone and quality so that it is difficult to attribute an influence of other contemporary writing.[29]

Hemingway's writing evolved from that of a critic to the writing of "a man who is at the same time creator and actor in the drama of his social being."[30] Hemingway shifted from rebelling against the staid cultural mores of his parents and grandparents to accepting the importance of naturalism as an indicator of living a good life. For Hemingway, it did not matter what a man had done in his entire life, so long as in the end, when time really mattered, he made the right decision. Hemingway "placed his ultimate trust in his personal, felt sense of experience and that, as with Whitman and Henry Miller, this trust was premised upon a sense of life and death as stages in a passage."[31]

Even later, Jack Kerouac took the themes of America and American and partly accepted and partly rejected them. Kerouac's writings reflect that the path to self-knowledge was as important as actually experiencing enlightenment. On the way to enlightenment, a person will do both good and bad things, but so long as he achieves

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[28] Carlos Baker, *Hemingway: The Writer as Artist* (1952; repr., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 25.
[29] Ibid., 26-27.
[30] Harold T. McCarthy, *The Expatriate Perspective: American Novelists and the Idea of America* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1974), 136.
[31] Ibid., 136.

enlightenment, it does not matter. Kerouac transcended the American experience and writes of a human experience, even as he expanded upon the themes of America and Americans.

Kerouac wanted to believe in the concept of Emerson's self-reliance, but Kerouac was ultimately a dependent person. The prime example of his lack of self-reliance comes at the end of *Big Sur*, when Kerouac, a Catholic, sees the Cross as his salvation in the midst of a nervous breakdown. Kerouac never dealt with the inconsistencies in his thought; rather, he continued to embrace transcendentalism, Buddhism, and Catholicism.[32]

At the same time that these three authors, who represent the American literary establishment, used Emerson's ideas in their writing, they also responded to specific cultural and political developments. Their interpretation of self-reliance and individuality is directly related to what occurred during their careers. Their writing helps to tell the story of the country. Ultimately, Twain, Hemingway, and Kerouac created their own legacies, but their writing about the American theme created their popularity. The characters, themes, and situations they developed express the traditional American culture, which valued traditional ideas like individuality, nature, the West, and travel as a means of finding oneself. Their innovative techniques and styles—Twain's use of dialect, Hemingway's simple prose, and Kerouac's spontaneous prose—created and continued an American literary tradition. Because the theme of individuality and self-reliance is universal and defies a sense of time or a region of the country, readers in the

[32] Ann Charters, *Kerouac: A Biography* (1973; repr., New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 336.

twenty-first century still turn to these authors as they struggle to define their experiences as Americans.

CHAPTER II

MARK TWAIN—THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN AMERICAN VOICE

> Training—training is everything; training is all there is to a person. We speak of nature; it is folly; there is no such thing as nature; what we call by that misleading name is merely heredity and training. We have no thoughts of our own, no opinions of our own; they are transmitted to us, trained into us. All that is original in us, and therefore fairly credible or discredible to us, can be covered up and hidden by the point of a cambric needle, all the rest being atoms contributed by, and inherited from, a procession of ancestors that stretches back a billion years to the Adam-clan or grasshopper or monkey from whom our race has been so tediously and ostentatiously and unprofitably developed. And as for me, all that I think about in this plodding sad pilgrimage, this pathetic drift between the eternities, is to look out and humbly live a pure and high and blameless life, and save that one microscopic atom in me that is truly me: the rest may land in Sheol and welcome for all I care.
>
> Mark Twain[33]

"What is an Englishman? A person who does things because they have been done before. What is an American (or difference between 'em) [?] A person who does things because they *haven't* been done before."[34] This quote fundamentally describes Samuel Clemens's attitude toward his work. Most scholars claim that Mark Twain was the first quintessentially "American" author of fiction. He was the first to develop a truly unique American voice and character in his writings. Earlier American authors, such as

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[33] Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), Bernard L. Stein, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 162.
[34] Frederick Anderson, ed., *Mark Twain's Notebooks & Journals, (1883-1891)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 3: 39.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, relied heavily on European writers. Mark Twain influenced writers throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. He is primarily known for his satires of American society, often pointing out the worst tendencies and hypocrisies in human nature. Twain eventually realized that the primary role of the authors "should be to encourage the aspirations of the human race," which Twain encouraged through his humor.[35]

Throughout his lengthy body of work, Twain developed the theme of America, individualism, and self-reliance as put forth by Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, and the other Transcendentalists. Four of his major works—*Roughing It* (1872), *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884)—exemplify this literary and cultural development. Throughout these four works, Twain develops the themes of the loss of innocence and the development of conscience, while commenting on the development of American culture as it changed between the Civil War and the Gilded Age. Though two are classified as travel books (*Roughing It* and *Life on the Mississippi*), they contain embellished anecdotes and legends as well as information, and they fall in line with the theme developed in Twain's work.

Samuel Langhorne Clemens was born in Florida, Missouri in 1835. His family moved to Hannibal, the inspiration for Twain's greatest known novels, when Clemens was still a young boy. He was apprenticed in a print shop and spent time as a riverboat pilot on the Mississippi—both experiences had a major impact on his life. His

[35] Gladys Carmen Bellamy, *Mark Twain As a Literary Artist* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), 351.

experiences as a riverboat pilot "widened and deepened his understanding of people."[36] When the Civil War broke out, Clemens joined the Confederate forces for one to three weeks before deserting. For the rest of his life, he dealt with the issue of patriotism. In his mind, "misplaced patriotism had prolonged slavery in his own childhood; and in the postwar era, misplaced patriotism expanded slavery through the world in the form of imperialism."[37] He fled to Nevada, where his brother had received an appointment as the secretary to the territorial governor. Clemens intended to live there for three months; he stayed for nearly six years.[38]

While in the West, he began writing for local newspapers and gaining notoriety for his comical renderings of daily events that sometimes caused confusion, but nearly always left the reader amused. His time in the West "sharpened his natural satiric gift and set him to tracking down 'the damned human race' as the quarry for his satire."[39] He soon began signing his work, "Mark Twain," the most famous nom de plume in history. The words literally mean "Mark Two" in steamboat jargon, which is water that is two fathoms deep. However, the words "Mark Two" "cannot be heard in stormy weather, but 'mark twain' has a different sound and catches the ear at once."[40] Another Mississippi

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[36] Philip S. Foner, *Mark Twain Social Critic* (New York: International Publishers, 1958), 17.
[37] Joe B. Fulton, *The Reconstruction of Mark Twain: How a Confederate Bushwhacker Became the Lincoln of Our Literature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 167.
[38] Ron Powers, *Mark Twain: A Life* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 102.
[39] Bellamy, *Mark Twain As a Literary Artist*, 50.
[40] Gary Scharnhorst, ed., "Interview 36 from The 'Twins of Genius' Tour, 1884-1885," in *Mark Twain: The Complete Interviews* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2006), 80.

River boatman had previously used this name. When he died, Clemens adopted it for his own and made it into his own persona.[41]

Clemens covered his European tour in *The Innocents Abroad* (1869), which received favorable reviews. Upon returning from the pilgrimage, Clemens established residence on the East Coast and began his writing career. He married and produced four children. Mark Twain eventually became the biggest personality in American culture. His writing satirized the shortcomings he saw in American society and helped to develop a distinct American voice and style. As personal tragedies struck late in his life, his writing became increasingly bitter. He continued writing until the early twentieth century, finally dying in 1910.[42]

By the time of Clemens's birth, the United States had been an independent country for nearly sixty years. Yet no distinctly American literature had developed. Within a decade, the Transcendentalist writers, led by Ralph Waldo Emerson, developed a new American vision. Americans were encouraged to shed the models of the past and find their own truths in "American Scholar."[43] This philosophy dominated the white upper classes of American society.

The South had its own literary tradition, which sought "to defend, by ruthless satire, the interests of the region's monied classes against a rising tide of populism."[44] This literary tradition was not widespread; it remained in the South, where Clemens surely was exposed to it as a child. This second tradition had two voices—a coarse vernacular and an educated teller. Twain later developed these dualistic voices in his

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[41] Ibid., 80
[42] Foner, *Mark Twain Social Critic*, 9-37.
[43] Powers, *Mark Twain*, 17.
[44] Ibid., 19.

writing. Twain created a narrator, who told the story, and an "Other," who "completes a dialectic that deepens the story and allows the reader to collaborate, constantly deciding which voice is the more persuasive."[45]

Clemens grew up in the border state of Missouri. As a child, he had supported the Southern cause. He abandoned that cause within a few weeks of joining the Confederate army and fled to the West. Upon leaving California, he sought to both embrace his Southern heritage and portray himself as a reconstructed, or changed, Southerner. By being a reconstructed Southerner, he could critique both the South and the North. Twain's writing developed a distinctively Southern characteristic, but he "used that . . . to criticize the whole country."[46] He believed himself loyal to the United States, "repeatedly draw[ing] on his own background as a Confederate as a prerequisite for true loyalty . . .; unlike those Unionists who had never questioned their loyalties, Clemens had undergone a heartfelt reconstruction."[47]

Mark Twain was uniquely qualified to develop the theme of the American experience in his writing because of his life experiences.[48] The diversity of American life that he experienced meant he "knew his land and its idioms as few men have ever known

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[45] Ibid., 117.
[46] Fulton, *The Reconstruction of Mark Twain*, 172.
[47] Ibid., 168.
[48] In his life, Twain had "the experiences of a boy growing up in a river village where he knew the slaves intimately; traveling 'jour' printer who wandered from city to city; pilot on the Mississippi during the flush times; soldier for a few weeks in the Confederate Army, accompanied by 'death-on-the-pale-horse-with-hell-following-after'; quartz-miller, pocket miner, prospector, silver miner; newspaper reporter for four years on city papers; reporter in a state legislature for two sessions and in the national Congress for one session; lecturer on the public platform; responder to toasts at banquets; inventor, publisher, businessman of the Gilded Age." Bellamy, *Mark Twain As a Literary Artist*, 59.

it."[49] He lived on the East and West coasts and the vast middle country. There was little that happened during the middle and later parts of the nineteenth century that he did not witness first hand. Twain carefully observed all that occurred around him and he used it in his writing. He had also borne witness to the three "great phases" of the folk experience in nineteenth-century America—"the Southwestern frontier, the steamboat era, and the rush to the Western mines."[50]

He witnessed the great tragedies of the age and noted the disparities in the American experience "between the lives of the rich and of the poor, between the professed creeds of democracy and religion and the practiced ones."[51] Beyond that, on a trip to India, he saw the ugliness of life as he had never before seen it. Yet, there also "arose a beauty and a dignity that were lasting, because they had their roots in the permanent ugliness."[52] He became concerned with the dignity of the man, particularly those without the means and the power to affect a better life for themselves. As a result of his common experiences, Twain became the voice, the great portrayer, of the common man.

Twain's literary style differed from the other nineteenth-century writers in that his sentences were usually shorter. He worked very hard to discover the right word, knowing "the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning."[53] He ordered his work to deliver the "irate thunderbolt" at just the right moment.[54] Other than that, he had no set plan for his writing; it simply tumbled forth and he did his best to make sense of it. This

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[49] Ibid., 59.
[50] Ibid., 59.
[51] Ibid., 324.
[52] Ibid., 237.
[53] Powers, *Mark Twain*, 184.
[54] Ibid., 184.

occurred even in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. He believed that "authors rarely write books. They conceive them, but the books write themselves . . . . Who can tell what is going to become of a character once created? It goes hither and thither as fancy dictates."[55] He allowed his books to develop organically: "The start may be made with the view of meeting only certain classes or assumed conditions. These change rapidly and the first thought may evolve into something entirely different from the first conception."[56]

Twain first found his literary voice in the West, which was "in part primitive, in part degenerated from higher levels."[57] Twain began seeking out the primitive, to which his natural resources adapted him. He naturally had a quick eye, sensitive ear, and an insight into the human condition. Twain, whether consciously or not, followed the dictates of Emerson by "seek[ing] the elemental and . . . renew[ing] the primitive in racial experience."[58] Twain escaped from the pressures of society and discovered the natural life of the men on Jackass Hill. He, for a change, felt no need to preach to these men about the way they should live. This experience allowed him finally to realize the "literary possibilities" of the frontier raconteur.[59] Twain developed this style in his book about the West, *Roughing It*.

After his first book, *The Innocents Abroad*, proved popular, Mark Twain's editor encouraged him to write a book that detailed his experiences in the West, beginning with

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[55] Scharnhorst, ed., "Interview 220 from 'Dean of Humorists,' 1906-1907," *Mark Twain: The Complete Interviews*, 606.
[56] Ibid., 606-607.
[57] Bellamy, *Mark Twain As a Literary Artist*, 144.
[58] Ibid., 144.
[59] Ibid., 145.

the trip from Missouri.[60] Twain worried about finishing the manuscript before his popularity waned, rendering him and his new book irrelevant.[61] Before too long, Twain lost interest in the project, an affliction he later referred to as his "tank" running dry. Rather than set the manuscript aside for several months before returning to it, a trick he later learned, he attempted to will the book into existence. To do this, he scavenged his old pieces about his time in the West, he exchanged notes with his brother, and looked at anything he could think of to make the book long enough. The completed book functions as a history of early Nevada—the people, the government, and the industries. Twain's book, intended to be part personal narrative and part factual, catches "the fading glory of a vanished day."[62]

The book did fairly well in sales initially. However, in the long term, the book did not sell as well as Twain had hoped. He concluded that this was because

> if one don't secure publicity & notoriety for a book the instant it is issued, no amount of hard work & faithful advertising can accomplish it later on. When we look at what Roughing It sold in the first 3 & 6 months, we naturally argue that it would have sold from full 3 times as many if it had gotten the prompt & early journalistic boost & notoriety that the Innocents had.[63]

Twain feared that early distribution of his book would lead to pirating, an issue he dealt with throughout his career. Readers commented that they liked the book because "they like a book about America because they understand it better," which Twain said was

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[60] Twain had forgotten much of the trip, so he asked his brother, Orion, for any memories he had. Mark Twain to Orion Clemens, July 15, 1870, http://www.marktwainproject.org
[61] Powers, *Mark Twain*, 293.
[62] Bellamy, *Mark Twain As a Literary Artist*, 275.
[63] Twain to Elisha Bliss, Jr., March 4, 1873, http://www.marktwainproject.org.

pleasant to believe . . . because it isn't a great deal of trouble to write books about one's own country."[64]

Roughing It was sold by subscription, rather than in stores. The buyers of such books subscribed before actual publication. They typically lived in small towns that did not have bookstores, making books a rare commodity; so, they wanted big books with a lot of pictures. Most subscription books were nonfiction, with a first-person narrator, and came in a variety of bindings, which allowed the buyer to get the most for their money. These readers "did not want 'literature' but information."[65]

Various reviewers noted different aspects of *Roughing It* in their reviews. One reviewer opined that *Roughing It* "dwell[s] on the outside of things and simply describ[es] manners and customs."[66] A second reviewer focused on the humor of the novel, comparing it to Washington Irving:

> It's not fine and pensive, like Irving's. It is not artificial, or based upon any literary model, and does not depend for its effect upon elaboration or word-cobbling. Its specific character is its spontaneity and naturalness, together with an underlying element of sturdy honesty and rugged sense, antagonistic to sentimentality and shams.[67]

Twain took the humor of older writers and he made it into something new, using Emerson's ideals. This reviewer also commented on the "fresh descriptions of natural

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[64] Twain to Elisha Bliss, Jr., March 20, 1872, http://www.marktwainproject.org.
[65] Everett Emerson, *The Authentic Mark Twain: A Literary Biography of Samuel L. Clemens* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), 63.
[66] "Unsigned Review," in Manchester *Guardian*, March 6, 1872, in *Mark Twain: The Critical Heritage*, Frederick Anderson, ed. (New York: Barnes & Noble Inc., 1971), 46.
[67] "Unsigned Review," in *Overland Monthly*, June 1872, in Anderson, *Mark Twain: The Critical Heritage*, 50.

scenery, some of which, especially in the overland stage-ride, are remarkably graphic and vigorous."[68]

In a pattern that ran throughout Twain's career, it was up to fellow-writer William Dean Howells to grasp and relate to the American public the true nature and intent of Twain's work. Howells recognized that the book was "merely the personal history of Mr. Clemens."[69] Howells "prais[ed] its many excursions, digressions, and scattershot anecdotes as being true to the character of the West."[70] The review in the *Atlantic Monthly* was so complimentary that it "uplifted & reassured" Twain that he claimed he felt "like a mother who has given birth to a white baby when she was awfully afraid it was going to be a mulatto," meaning that he feared how well audiences would receive the book.[71]

The book's lasting impact has to do with the theme of the Old West that Twain created:

> indelible word-portraits of terrain; the texture of town and mining camp; the pervading twin obsessions of money and violence; an accounting of social and racial hierarchies; the sharply observed paradoxes of filigreed wealth amid mountainside boulders, and bohemian post-aesthetes amidst the gunplay; a gift for replicating (and adding to) the sustaining tall tales and myths; and enough stunningly rendered archetypal characters to populate a Dickens novel.[72]

It was the narrator, however, that put Twain's work ahead of other contemporary novels that possessed these elements. Twain's narrator was "deeply involved in what he

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[68] Ibid., 51.
[69] William Dean Howells, "Unsigned Review," in *Atlantic*, June 1872, in Anderson, *Mark Twain: The Critical Heritage*, 48.
[70] Powers, *Mark Twain*, 321.
[71] Twain to William Dean Howells, May 22-29?, 1872, http://www.marktwainproject.org
[72] Powers, *Mark Twain*, 322.

described; at risk; suffering from his mistakes and rejoicing in his pleasures; always . . . on equal footing with the characters around him; and always attuned to and unapologetic about the new blunt language of the West."[73]

The last part of the book differs from the rest in that fifteen of the last seventeen chapters were revised versions of the Sandwich Island letters from Twain's trip in the 1860s. Then to make the book long enough, he added three long appendices—one on Mormon history and the others full of quotations from various documents that related somehow to the topic. This was a practice Twain would employ again in a later book. This book reflects Twain's memories of a former self, making it more personal, yet objective. The reader is encouraged to believe that Samuel Clemens writing as Mark Twain is the protagonist and that the book is autobiographical. Really, the protagonist is the persona of Mark Twain that shows in the best passages of the book.[74]

The primary theme of the book is the "naïve youth . . . go[ing] West and there through initiation los[ing] his innocence."[75] Good-natured victimization and humiliation play a part on the initiation process. But once in, one takes part in "the solidarity and community that belong to those who have achieved status by being initiated."[76] Ultimately, the book celebrates freedom.

Mark Twain is probably best known for the pair of boy books that he wrote, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. These books focused on a small town called St. Petersburg, which his childhood home in Hannibal, Missouri inspired. The true identity of the real-life inspiration for the characters received much

[73] Ibid., 322.
[74] Emerson, *The Authentic Mark Twain*, 65.
[75] Ibid., 65.
[76] Ibid., 67.

attention from the press, but Twain maintained, "The characters were no creation of my own. I simply sketched them from life. I knew both those boys so well that it was easy to write about what they did and said."[77] The characters were conglomerations of boys that he had known, but he called them "a true story. The incidents are, in the main, facts, and I tried to make a faithful painting of certain phases of life on the southern Mississippi."[78] Despite claims to the contrary, the characters were not named after anyone in particular. Tom Sawyer is an ordinary name that "just seemed to fit the boy," whereas "Finn was the real name . . . but I tacked on the Huckleberry . . . there was something about the name Finn that suited, and Huck Finn was all that was needed to somehow describe another kind of boy than Tom Sawyer, a boy of lower extraction or degree. Now Arthur Van de Vanter would have sounded ridiculous applied to characters like either."[79]

These books largely have a more optimistic tone because "[Twain] accepts the whole of life because he accepts the whole of boy nature, good and bad."[80] Twain based these stories on his own experiences, which had been rich and both good and bad. He did not idealize life in a small town along the Mississippi because life was not perfect; but, he

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[77] Twain did not "believe an author, good, bad or indifferent, ever lived, who created a character. It was always drawn from his recollection of someone he had known. Sometimes, like a composite photograph, an author presentation of a character may possibly be from the blending of more than two or more real characters in his recollection. But, even when he is making no attempt to draw his character from life, when he is striving to create something different, even then, however ideal his drawing, he is yet unconsciously drawing from memory." Scharnhorst, ed., "Interview 73 from Across North America, 1895," *Mark Twain: The Complete Interviews*, 174.
[78] Scharnhorst, ed., "Interview 35 from The 'Twins of Genius' Tour, 1884-1885," in *Mark Twain: The Complete Interviews*, 78.
[79] Scharnhorst, ed., "Interview 73 from Across North America, 1895," in *Mark Twain: The Complete Interviews*, 174.
[80] Bellamy, *Mark Twain As a Literary Artist*, 332.

did idealize the richness of experience that life could have. In these boy books, Twain began to "abolish . . . sentimentality as a legitimate pet conceit of American literature, and replaced it with what a later writer [James Agee in "Let Us Now Praise Famous Men"] called 'The Cruel Radiance of What Is.'"[81]

The first of these boy books, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, depicts the eponymous character as "not the Model Boy of the village. [Tom] knew the model boy very well though—and loathed him."[82] Tom befriended Huckleberry Finn, the "juvenile pariah of the village."[83] As the town pariah, Huck had the singular freedom of coming and going,

> at his own free will. He slept on doorsteps in fine weather and in empty hogsheads in wet; he did not have to go to school or to church, or call any being master or obey anybody; he could go fishing or swimming when and where he chose, and stay as long as it suited him; nobody forbade him to fight; he could sit up as late as he pleased; he was always the first boy that went barefoot in the spring and the last to resume leather in the fall; he never had to wash, nor put on clean clothes; he could swear wonderfully. In a word, everything that goes to make life precious, that boy had.[84]

Though Huck lacked what many would consider the basics of life, he was a forbidden hero to the respectable boys of the town. As the plot progresses, Tom and Huck have more encounters and get into shenanigans, seeming to suggest that "Mark Twain held the additional motive of showing his readers that boyish pranks are a natural means of

[81] Powers, *Mark Twain*, 389.
[82] Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), John C. Gerber and Paul Baender, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press1982), 5.
[83] Ibid., 47.
[84] Ibid., 48.

development."[85] Overall, the novel shows the development of boyhood, and to an extent childhood, in a small town in the carefree days before the Civil War.

Twain plumbed the depths of his own experience to find stories to relate.[86] He did not write it to fulfill a contact. He wrote until he "pumped [himself] dry."[87] The main reason was that he did not know how to continue the story. Though he largely gave up on the project over the next several months, he eventually decided he had enough material that he could finish the book and he finished it quickly.[88]

Twain very consciously kept the narrative as the story of a boy instead of carrying it further—"So endeth this chronicle. It being strictly the history of a *boy*, it must stop here; the story could not go much further without becoming the history of a *man*."[89] Twain felt that if he continued, "[Tom] would just be like all the one-horse men in literature & the reader would conceive a hearty contempt for him."[90] Twain felt tempted to continue the book, but "Something told [him] that the book was done when [he] got to that point—& so the strong temptation to put Huck's life at the widow's into detail instead of generalizing it in a paragraph, was resisted."[91] Though Twain readily admitted that the novel was really written for adults, he opted to market the book for boys and to

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[85] Bellamy, *Mark Twain As a Literary Artist*, 334.
[86] This letter shows Twain's excitement upon realizing that his past could be used to write fiction: "Your letter has stirred me to the bottom. The fountains of my great deep are broken up & I have rained reminiscences for four & twenty hours. The old life has swept before me like a panorama; the old days have trooped by in their old glory, again; the old faces have looked out of the mists of the past; old footsteps have sounded in my listening ears; old hands have clasped mine, old voices have greeted me, & the songs I loved ages & ages ago have come wailing down the centuries!" Twain to William Bowen, February 6, 1870, http://www.marktwainproject.org.
[87] Emerson, *The Authentic Mark Twain*, 79.
[88] Powers, *Mark Twain*, 374-375.
[89] Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, 260.
[90] Twain to William Dean Howells, July 5, 1875, http://www.marktwainproject.org.
[91] Twain to Howells, November 23, 1875, http://www.marktwainproject.org.

save the darker elements that comprise the shift from childhood to adulthood for a later novel that had a different narrative voice and perspective: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, told from the perspective of the juvenile pariah.[92]

Howells said *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* offered a "scrupulous regard for the boy's point of view in reference to his surroundings and himself, which shows how rapidly Mr. Clemens has grown as an artist."[93] The novel accurately depicts "the boy-mind, which inhabits a world quite distinct from that in which he is bodily present with his elders, and in this lies its great charm and its universality, for boy-nature, however human nature varies, is the same everywhere."[94] Like all good children's books, adults can read this one and be entertained. *Tom Sawyer* encourages "courage, frankness, truthfulness, and self-reliance" in the children who read it.[95] As adults read the book, they are able to remember what it was like to be children themselves. Yet, some reviewers questioned whether the book was too violent for children to read.[96]

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer did three things for Mark Twain. The novel allowed him to explore the theme of innocence that he began in *Roughing It* from the perspective of a boy. He realized that he could write fiction based on his own childhood. This was the first time he had truly written fiction on his own. His previous books were

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[92] "Mrs. Clemens decides with you that it the book should issue as a book for boys, pure & simple—& so do it I. It is surely the correct idea." Twain to Howells, November 23, 1875, http://www.marktwainproject.org. "It is not a boy's book, at all. It will only be read by adults. It is only written for adults." Twain to Howells, July 5, 1875, http://www.marktwainproject.org.
[93] William Dean Howells, "Unsigned Review," in *Atlantic*, May 1876, in Anderson, *Mark Twain: The Critical Heritage*, 60.
[94] Ibid., 61.
[95] "Unsigned Review," in *New York Times*, January 13, 1877, in Anderson, *Mark Twain: The Critical Heritage*, 70.
[96] Ibid., 72.

mostly embellished records of his own experiences, with him as the narrator. He worried about how a new style of writing would affect his career.[97] *Tom Sawyer* is an account that uses his own experiences, but has its own set of characters, who are based on a conglomeration of people he knew as a child. Lastly, he was able to explore the dichotomy of good boy versus bad boy and take Tom "to maturity through the initiation process that had interested Mark Twain in *Roughing It*."[98] *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* serves as a record of the ideal childhood in that Twain clearly depicts "the privileges, pleasures, and excitements of boyhood" as preferable to "the boredom, required conformity, and routine of adulthood."[99]

Twain began writing what would become *Life on the Mississippi* in 1875. He initially thought the project would be short; but, he soon realized that he would need to write an entire book to exhaust all of the material he found.[100] The *Atlantic Monthly* serialized the first twenty chapters of what would become *Life on the Mississippi* over three months as "Old Times on the Mississippi."[101] These writings look at the

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[97] "I have a selfish interest at stake. Tom Sawyer is a new line of writing for me, & I would like to have every possible advantage in favor of that venture. When it issues, I would like it to have a clear field, & the whole energies of the company put upon it." Twain to the Board of Directors of the American Publishing Co., June 24, 1876, http://www.marktwainproject.org.

[98] Emerson, *The Authentic Mark Twain*, 80.

[99] Ibid., 81.

[100] "The piloting material has been uncovering itself by degrees, until it has exposed such a huge hoard to my view that a whole book will be required to contain it if I use it. So I have agreed to write the book for Bliss . . . It is funny when I reflect that when I originally wrote you & proposed to do from 6 to 9 articles for the magazine, the vague thought in my mind was that 6 might exhaust the material & 9 would be pretty sure to do it. Or rather it seems to me that that was my thought,—can't tell at this distance. But in truth 9 chapters don't now seem to more than open up the subject fairly & start the yarn to wagging." Twain to William Dean Howells, January 26, 1875, http://www.marktwainproject.org

[101] Bellamy, *Mark Twain As a Literary Artist*, 275.

responsibilities and experiences of a riverboat pilot. Soon Twain began writing notes on steamboating from his memory. He quickly moved on to consulting books because he found himself ignorant of many aspects of the river, despite mastering it before the Civil War.[102]

By 1882, Twain's publishers sensed that a book could be made from Twain's knowledge of the river. The chapters Twain had previously written comprise the first part of the book. The second part is based on a trip Twain took to the river in 1882 to flesh out the book. He hoped to gather unbiased information about life on the Mississippi by traveling in disguise; it did not work for long.[103] Twain wanted to create a naïve narrator, like in *Roughing It*, which would have allowed for more humor.[104] When Twain's identity was discovered, he had to scrap the idea of the naïve narrator, which made the story blander.

The first part reflects Twain's idyllic youth; the second part depicts the river as it had changed after railroads became more prominent than river travel. Readers get the feeling that Twain "has taken pains to collect and set forth almost every important fact connected with the Mississippi River—historical or geographical."[105] At the time it was published, *Life on the Mississippi* offered "the only realistic history of piloting on the Mississippi in existence, and written by perhaps the only author of the century whose genius is thoroughly adapted to the subject treated."[106]

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[102] Emerson, *The Authentic Mark Twain*, 118.
[103] Powers, *Mark Twain*, 465.
[104] Emerson, *The Authentic Mark Twain*, 120.
[105] Lafcadio Hearn, "Review," in *New Orleans Times-Democrat*, May 30, 1883, in Anderson, *Mark Twain: The Critical Heritage*, 110.
[106] Ibid., 110.

The second part resembles his early travel writing, which included social commentary and satire. The second part of the book, though it includes character studies and factual information, is largely a social criticism of the South, reflecting Twain as a "desouthernized Southerner."[107] He is "desouthernized" in that he shunned many attitudes and aspects of being a Southerner, yet he embraced the label "Southerner" whenever possible. Twain goes after the symbol he most closely relates to the perceived backwardness of Southern society—Sit Walter Scott, whose medieval chivalry, Twain thought, influenced "Southern architecture, Southern education, Southern society, Southern sports, and Southern literature."[108] All of these, Twain thought, were "drooping under the malignant blight of 'the Sir Walter disease.'"[109]

Life on the Mississippi reflected the changes Twain had seen in his own life from his childhood through the war and Reconstruction. The life Twain described in the first part no longer existed. He created "trustworthy paintings of manners, customs, and social phases which have already been much changed, and will doubtless, before another generation, belong altogether to the past."[110] New kinds of boats populated its waters. Engineers constructed wing dams and dikes to make the river more navigable. The railroad stole much of the business of the river. As in *Roughing It*, Twain wrote about a life that was disappearing.[111]

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[107] Bellamy, *Mark Twain As a Literary Artist*, 278.
[108] Ibid., 279.
[109] Ibid., 279.
[110] Hearn, "Review," 110.
[111] Powers, *Mark Twain*, 466.

In its own right, *Life on the Mississippi* is a "biography of the river" in which Twain "reduced the river to its own language."[112] The book recalls "the spirit of which will be appreciated by all familiar with the picturesque features of American river-life."[113] Possibly the greatest contribution of *Life on the Mississippi* is that it reawakened Twain's desire to complete another "river story" he had begun and set aside in 1876—the novel that became *Huckleberry Finn*. As published, passages in *Life on the Mississippi* are similar to passages later published in *Huckleberry Finn*; one scene in particular that Twain originally wrote for *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, he used in *Life on the Mississippi*. The book ultimately achieves Twain's goal: it is "a memorable study of the great river and of the process of change in American life."[114]

As early as 1875, Twain planned to write another story in the *Tom Sawyer* saga.[115] After several years of gestation, he was ready to complete the manuscript of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. This time Twain uses a first person narrator, feeling that this is necessary to bring the story into adulthood.[116] The use of Huckleberry Finn as the narrator allowed Twain to speak on the issues that were important to him earlier in life—

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[112] Bellamy, *Mark Twain As a Literary Artist*, 279.
[113] Hearn, "Review," 109.
[114] Emerson, *The Authentic Mark Twain*, 125.
[115] With the publication of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, readers immediately began asking for a sequel. As a result of the frequency, Twain sent out a form letter in response to these queries which read:

"I have the honor to reply to your letter just received, that it is my purpose to write a continuation of Tom Sawyer's history, but I am not able at this time to determine when I shall begin the work.

You will excuse this printed form, in consideration of the fact that the inquiry which you have made recurs with sufficient frequency to warrant this method of replying." Twain to unaddressed, 1877, http://www.marktwainproject.org

[116] "I believe it would be fatal to do it in any shape but autobiographically—like Gil Blas. I perhaps made a mistake in not writing it in the first person." Twain to Howells, July 5, 1875, http://www.marktwainproject.org

"freedom, self-indulgence, the pleasure principle, laziness, skepticism, but charity (caring), and decency too"—before he moved to the East and became civilized.[117] The novel starts off in a similar tone to the airy prose of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, but the novel quickly takes on and develops a darker storyline.

The novel breaks into three parts. It begins exactly where the previous one left off. The first sixteen chapters relate to the town of St. Petersburg, which is darker this time with the introduction of Huck's drunkard father and ends with Huck faking his own death. The second part deals with Huck and Jim's encounters and adventures along the river. This is where Twain offers his critique of society, but it also sees the development of Huck's conscience. The second section is the longest. The last part is the last ten chapters of the novel and it devolves into slapstick burlesque as Tom and Huck enter into hijinks to free Jim from captivity. Critics generally pan this part of the novel, arguing that it is an inadequate ending to the themes Twain spent the rest of the narrative developing.[118]

The primary plotline of the novel is the development of Huck's conscience. The first-person narrative allows the reader to glimpse into Huck's private thoughts and his reasoning process. Though Huck becomes momentarily negative, he ultimately takes life as it comes and stoically accepts what happens.[119] This ties in with the theme of the stoic American who nobly endures life's conditions and acts as best as he can in a given situation.

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[117] Emerson, *The Authentic Mark Twain,* 128-129.
[118] Powers, *Mark Twain,* 476.
[119] Bellamy, *Mark Twain As a Literary Artist*, 349.

The development of Huck's conscience reaches its high point when he deliberates whether he should tell Miss Watson that he knows Jim's location. Huck's Southern conditioning tells him he should write the letter, but his experiences with Jim have made him realize that Jim is a human being too. Huck tries to pray his sins away, but has difficulty: "I was letting *on* to give up sin, but away inside of me I was holding on to the biggest one of all. I was trying to make my mouth *say* I would do the right thing and the clean thing, and go and write to that nigger's owner and tell where he was; but deep down in me I knowd it was a lie . . . . You can't pray a lie—I found that out."[120]

Huck ultimately rejects this aspect of Southern race relations and decides, "All right, I'll *go* to hell" before tearing up the letter.[121] Many readers point to this passage as proof that the novel is an essentially antiracist work. Still, its primary importance is that Huck reaches his full potential by realizing that he feels strongly enough about something to go against society. This passage reflects the apotheosis of the individual choice that reflects Emerson's self-reliance. After much internal contemplation, Huck makes a decision that goes against society and his sense of self, but ultimately helps another. This self-actualization is what later authors, such as Ernest Hemingway, strove to develop and include in their own work.

The novel ends with ten chapters of burlesque that have always received mixed reviews from critics and scholars. Even the most casual reader notices a shift in the narrative tone and structure of these chapters. Huck and Jim come upon a farm that turns out to belong to Tom's relatives, the Phelps family. The Phelpses mistake Huck for Tom

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[120] Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), Victor Fischer and Lin Salamo, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 269.
[121] Ibid., 271.

and they place Jim in captivity. Then Tom shows up and quickly pretends to be Sid, his younger brother. Tom decides that they must help Jim escape in an elaborate plan that combines elements from all of the escape novels Tom has read. Over the course of three weeks, Jim must saw through his chains, dig a hole in the cabin with a case knife, and write inscriptions on a grindstone for the escape to be done to Tom's satisfaction. At one particularly ridiculous moment, Tom and Huck lift the bed that holds Jim's chains and have him help them carry something. When Jim finally escapes, only to return with a superficially wounded Tom, he discovers that he has been free the entire time. The entire plotline reeks of sadism to the sensitive reader and makes them question Tom's goodness. Early scholars believed Twain simply did not know how to end his otherwise magnificent work, while more recent scholars believe it is a commentary on the treatment of blacks in the post-Reconstruction era.[122]

Though they are friends, Tom and Huck represent two dualities of existence—"Tom Sawyer has a home and a loving, overwatchful aunt who doses him with painkiller; he swipes doughnuts and plays hooky and goes swimming; he is stirred by an ambition to appear as a hero in Sunday school; he is thrilled by his imaginary adventures."[123] Twain paints Tom's as the idyllic existence. It is neither good nor bad, just without serious problems. Tom is far more serious in this novel. His primary concern is "that everything be done 'regular.'"[124] Huck, on the other hand, "fears his father and apparently never knew his mother; a homeless waif, he sleeps on doorsteps or hogsheads; he is troubled by no ambition and steers clear of Sunday school; his life is as aimless as a bit of drift on the

[122] Powers, *Mark Twain*, 477.
[123] Bellamy, *Mark Twain As a Literary Artist*, 336.
[124] Emerson, *The Authentic Mark Twain*, 129.

Mississippi."[125] Despite these seeming shortcomings, Twain found this character worth developing and worked to make his readers find this character worth reading about, which they did and do, time and time again, generation after generation. Huck is similar to, though more fully developed than, his character in *Tom Sawyer* in that "he cherishes his liberty so much that he cannot take very seriously the widow's warnings that his resistance will send him to hell."[126]

Tom and Huck have disparate views on their conduct and the world around them. Tom's world is full of black and white areas. His actions are good or bad; people are good or bad. There is no grey area in between. In Huck's world there are multiple shades of grey. As he and Jim attempt to escape, Huck perpetually lies out of necessity to anyone who seems to threaten their success. Huck's goal is to be free and live, and lying is necessary in this situation. Despite this propensity to lie, Huck has his own code of morals and he has a conscience—he believes very keenly that helping Jim escape is somehow wrong, even though he views Jim as a person. Throughout the novel, Huck has numerous opportunities to cast aside his convictions in favor of taking an easier route, but he never sacrifices or compromises himself.[127] While Tom sticks to the letter of the law, Huck "cuts through to the essentials of the spirit."[128] Huck obeys society's dictates in the broadest sense, while Tom pretty well follows society's expectations for a boy of his station.

In his naïveté, Huck can report on events without passing moral judgment, which essentially makes him the perfect narrator. The reader notices and makes a value

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[125] Bellamy, *Mark Twain As a Literary Artist*, 336.
[126] Emerson, *The Authentic Mark Twain*, 129.
[127] Ibid., 139.
[128] Bellamy, *Mark Twain As a Literary Artist*, 337.

judgment on the events that Huck reports without seeing the deeper meaning. Twain uses Huck's inability "to denounce what he sees" by having Huck express how appalled he is by what he sees.[129] This gives Twain the opportunity to write a sharper and more effective satire. Twain also exhibits masterful storytelling by blending three types of storyteller—the romanticist, the realist, and the satirist—in this novel. The romanticist comes through in the narration of Huck and Jim's adventures. The realist reports accurately on the daily life in the small towns Huck and Jim visit along the river. The satirist critiques the "narrowness and meanness of human nature."[130] Huck's ignorance also allows Twain to vent honestly his criticisms of the South and praise the "freedom from society and its conformist pressures" in ways he could not do in *Life on the Mississippi*.[131]

Twain did not like institutions of any kind. In his opinion, they hindered the full development of man into a free being and they curtailed the ability for thought and originality. Twain sets up three levels of institutionalism and three levels of society in the characters of Tom, Huck, and Jim. Tom is the strictest, the most civilized, representing a "mawkish, romantic, artificial civilization."[132] He believes in doing things by the book, simply because they are in the book. For instance, at the beginning of the novel, Tom forms a gang of robbers and he says they must ransom people. When Ben Rogers questions what being ransomed means, Tom replies, "I don't know. But that's what they do. I've seen it in books; and of course that's what we've got to do . . . . Do you want to go to doing different from what's in the books and get things all muddled

[129] Emerson, *The Authentic Mark Twain*, 136.
[130] Bellamy, *Mark Twain As a Literary Artist*, 338.
[131] Emerson, *The Authentic Mark Twain*, 136.
[132] Bellamy, *Mark Twain As a Literary Artist*, 339.

up?"[133] This is a commentary on people who follows society's dictates without questioning why things are done. Tom's existence in St. Petersburg is so bland that he must use the books he reads to create excitement. Conversely, Jim the slave is the primitive, who is highly superstitious and earthy. Jim will not do anything that goes against these taboos. Jim has a "dark knowledge that lies in his blood and his nerve ends."[134]

Huck is in the middle of these two. He does not follow society or superstition blindly; rather, he asks questions, and, as a result, is the "'natural man,'" to which the Transcendentalists aspired. When he is with either Tom or Jim, he goes along with their ties to institutions. When he is by himself, "because he has no rules to go by he is guided by the voice within himself."[135] Readers can become confused by Huck's seeming ignorance:

> He is an innocent, but with the exception of a few blind spots he is shrewd, far from naïve. His creative imagination helps him to survive even though he has as his companion an escaping slave. He has fundamental convictions, which deepen as the book continues, in opposition to those of the society in which he is placed. His own most meaningful attitudes are based on his acute moral imagination. Because Huck is intelligent, quick, and inventive, he is able to survive, but because he is lower-class, without education or status, he is powerless, able to accomplish very little.[136]

In many ways, Huck is a far more complex, interesting, and real character than Tom or Jim.

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[133] Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, 10-11.
[134] Bellamy, *Mark Twain As a Literary Artist*, 340.
[135] Ibid., 340.
[136] Emerson, *The Authentic Mark Twain*, 137.

The greatest legacy of this book stems from its "encapsulation in a time and place" a singular, yet common, moment in American history.[137] Twain also developed a way of writing in multiple dialects that forever changed American literature. The country now had many voices. In Twain's words, "In this book a number of dialects are used, to wit: the Missouri dialect; the ordinary "Pike-County" dialect; and four modified varieties of this last."[138] He hinted at his research efforts by claiming "The shadings have not been done in a hap-hazard fashion, or by guess-work; but pains-takingly, and with the trustworthy guidance and support of personal familiarity with these several forms of speech."[139] He credited his childhood with his ability to write of these dialects:

> I was born in one of those States and I lived a great deal of my boyhood on a plantation of my uncle's, where forty or fifty Negroes lived belonging to him, and who had been drawn from two or three States and so I gradually absorbed their different dialects which they had brought with them . . . . So a child might pick up the differences in dialect by means of absorption when a practiced writer could not do it twenty years later by closest observation.

Experience clearly played a major role in Twain's ability to render accurately the nuances of Southern culture.[140]

Still others, most notably Ernest Hemingway, claim that "All modern literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*," but Hemingway warns, "If you read it you must stop where the Nigger Jim is stolen from the boys. That is the real end. The rest is just cheating. But it's the best book we've had. All American writing comes from that. There was nothing before. There has been nothing as good

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[137] Powers, *Mark Twain*, 476.
[138] Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, xxxiii.
[139] Ibid., xxxiii.
[140] Scharnhorst, ed., "Interview 53 from The Best and Worst of Times, 1886-1895," in *Mark Twain: The Complete Interviews*, 134.

since."[141] One scholar, Thomas Quirk, challenges readers to view the novel "less for what its various claimants would have it be, and more for what it is: an act of imagination, and one so propulsive that it pulled the author himself along into its created verities."[142] Twain's own Notice before the narrative begins warns readers against reading too much into the book: "Persons attempting to find a Motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a Moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a Plot in it will be shot."[143]

The novel surprisingly received mixed reviews. One commented on the risk Twain took by writing a sequel, but admitted "though *Huckleberry Finn* may not quite reach these two highest points of *Tom Sawyer* [in terms of action], we incline to the opinion that the general level of the later story is perhaps higher than that of the earlier."[144] Another early review, though praising many aspects of the novel, began raising the question the worthiness of its final chapters.[145] However, it concluded that the novel was good reading and that if Twain would continue the story, "he would condense a side of American life that, in a few years, will have to be delved out of newspapers, government reports, county histories, and misleading traditions by unsympathetic sociologists."[146]

Shortly after the novel's release, public discussion of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* took a negative turn. Newspapers across the country denounced the novel as

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[141] Ernest Hemingway, *Green Hills of Africa*, 22.
[142] Powers, *Mark Twain,* 496.
[143] Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, xxxi.
[144] Brander Matthews, "Unsigned Review," in *Saturday Review*, May 30, 1883, in Anderson, *Mark Twain: The Critical Heritage,* 122.
[145] Thomas Sergeant Perry, "Review," in *Century Magazine,* May 1885, in Anderson, *Mark Twain: The Critical Heritage*, 128-129.
[146] Ibid., 130.

irreverent and vulgar. Libraries, most notably the Concord, Massachusetts Public Library, banned the book. This backlash increased public interest in the novel.[147] And yet, with this novel, though Twain wrote up until just before he died, the best of Twain's career was behind him.

Because of the sheer number of books Twain authored, long and short, fiction and nonfiction, during the last three decades of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century, he covered a wide variety of topics in his novels, stories, collections, essays, non-fiction, and other writings. Many readers failed to realize that his main quest as a writer was to reform society. His methods for reform manifested themselves in "a rollicking joke, sheathe[d] . . . in bold burlesque, or clothe[d] . . . in caustic satire."[148] He did this because "men will often accept in jest what they will evade or ignore in a serious medium and that if the jest is repeated often enough they may even discover the truth at its core."[149] Throughout his life, he became more of a moralist, which eventually damaged his writing.[150]

Twain had very high expectations for himself and of what life should be; yet the "ugliness of life [standing] at his elbow, maliciously inviting him to look on shabby scenes, . . . [while] the beauty of life floated far away" continually disappointed him.[151] This general disposition of unmet expectations and a series of personal tragedies later in

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[147] Upon hearing that the Concord Library banned the book, Twain remarked "They have expelled Huck from the library as 'trash and suitable only for the slums.' That will sell 25,000 copies for us sure." Twain to Charles L Webster, March 18, 1885, in Mark Twain, *Mark Twain's Letters: 1876-1885,* Albert Bigelow Paine, ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1917), 452-453.
[148] Bellamy, *Mark Twain As a Literary Artist*, 56.
[149] Ibid., 56-57.
[150] Ibid., 57.
[151] Ibid., 375.

life caused Twain to become increasingly bitter. As Twain aged, his writings became increasingly polemic in nature and his satires increasingly acerbic to the point that his popularity dropped and mass audiences largely ignored his later works. Still, reading his books, one begins "to sense the genius of the man and also to realize that many of his works fail to do justice to that genius."[152] Still, Twain is best known for his impact on the American culture by "availing it of vernacular; rough action sprawled over waterway and open terrain; comedy, political consciousness, and skepticism toward the very idea of lofty instruction."[153]

Twain's emphasis on individuality and the development of conscience places him in line with the Transcendentalist teachings of the importance of the individual over the corrupting institution. Twain's characters and narrators exhibit attitudes that celebrate their individuality and their triumph over civilization, either by personally distancing themselves from it by going West or staying on the Mississippi River or by critiquing the aspects of civilization with which they find fault. The Transcendentalists wrote on the theme of America and what it means to be American. Twain took this definition and parlayed it into literature that the common man could access and appreciate. This tradition of the individual against society permeates later writings, notably Ernest Hemingway, who developed the theme of the well-lived life in accordance with the abiding earth, and Jack Kerouac, who developed the theme of the spiritual quest that partly accepts and partly rejects Twain's view of America.

[152] Ibid., 26.
[153] Powers, *Mark Twain*, 364-365.

CHAPTER III

ERNEST HEMINGWAY—THE EARTH ABIDES

If you serve time for society, democracy, and the other things quite young, and declining any further enlistment make yourself responsible only to yourself, you exchange the pleasant, comforting stench of comrades for something you can never feel in any other way than by yourself. That something I cannot yet define completely but the feeling comes when you write well and truly of something and know impersonally you have written in that way and those who are paid to read it and report on it do not like the subject so they say it is all a fake, yet you know its value absolutely; or when you do something which people do not consider a serious occupation and yet you know, truly, that it is as important and has always been as important as all the things that are in fashion, and when, on the sea, you are alone with it and know that this Gulf Stream you are living with, knowing, learning about, and loving, has moved, as it moves, since before men . . . and the palm fronds of our victories, the worn light bulbs of our discoveries and the empty condoms of our great loves float with no significance against one single, lasting thing—the stream.

Ernest Hemingway[154]

Ernest Hemingway is known for producing an impressive body of literature throughout the mid-twentieth century. He first attained notoriety as the perceived mouthpiece of the Lost Generation of the nineteen-twenties. Elite and popular audiences alike praised his work, though one side almost completely missed the meaning of his work.[155] Hemingway's novels addressed themes and subject matter—love, war, sports,

[154] Ernest Hemingway, *Green Hills of Africa*, 148-150.

[155] "My book will be praised by highbrows and can be read by lowbrows. There is no writing in it that anybody with a high-school education cannot read." Ernest Hemingway to Horace Liveright, March 31, 1925, in Ernest Hemingway, *Selected Letters, 1917-1961*, ed. Carlos Baker (New York: Scribners, 1981), 155.

hunting, and honor—that popular and elite audiences were able to relate to. Elite readers could understand the deeper meaning of Hemingway's work without difficulty. Popular audiences could grasp his meaning because of Hemingway's use of themes with which they were familiar. Unlike many Lost Generation writers, Hemingway's writing was able to transcend ties to the nineteen-twenties. His writing, though set at distinct periods in time, did not depend upon that setting. Rather, his writing spoke about one constant theme that people of all generations could understand—the life well lived in relation to the abiding earth, with a heavy emphasis on naturalism.

Partly due to his own interest in outdoor activities and nature, the natural world is a character in all of his work. This could be because Hemingway lived "at a time when nature was being more and more subordinated to the machine."[156] The young Hemingway wrote in his diary that he wanted to explore the last frontiers of the earth. Though these frontiers had all disappeared by this time, Hemingway "revisited many of the frontiers of the nineteenth century, often recasting them in his fiction as if they still really existed."[157] The transition between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, between manual and mechanized, and between old-fashioned and modern played in out Hemingway's life and in his fiction. For example, one of his characters escapes "to an Edenic fishing trip in the mountains" on "a double-decker autobus that speeds him along a country road."[158] For Hemingway, nature also depicted innocence and the loss of

[156] Frederic J. Svoboda, "The Great Themes in Hemingway: Love, War, Wilderness, and Loss," in *A Historical Guide to Ernest Hemingway*, Linda Wagner-Martin, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 167.
[157] Ibid., 167.
[158] Ibid., 168.

innocence and the contrast between beauty and "the ignorance or savagery of mankind."[159]

Much of Hemingway's fiction portrays "the individual alone with some loss, attempting to cope with that loss in order to come out on the other side of experience with a semblance of understanding of himself and of his place in the larger scheme of things."[160] In the span of a novel, Hemingway's characters experience a lifetime and see the universality of their actions. Neither the characters nor the readers exist in a vacuum. Hemingway had a strong belief that "'man can be destroyed but not defeated' if he tries to do well what life has led him to."[161] This is the sort of character that a wide variety of readers could relate to and perhaps even aspire to imitate. Hemingway's characters are not "squealers, welchers, compromisers, or cowards, and when they confront defeat they realize that the stance they take, the stoic endurance, the stiff upper lip mean a kind of victory."[162]

In that way, Hemingway wrote about the Emersonian ideal of self-reliance and individuality throughout his novels and stories. The best way of exploring this theme is to trace Hemingway's career, beginning with the Lost Generation, and the importance of that movement, through the Great Depression, the Spanish Civil War, World War II, and into the nineteen-fifties, by looking at his four main novels—*The Sun Also Rises* (1926), *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), and *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952). Astute readers are able to notice the connections amongst these works and

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[159] Ibid., 168-169.
[160] Charles M. Oliver, *Critical Companion to Ernest Hemingway: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work* (New York: Facts On File, Inc., 2007), 23.
[161] Ibid., 23.
[162] Robert Penn Warren, "Hemingway," *The Kenyon Review* 9 (Winter 1947), 2.

they can be seen as an extension of the same story, though the characters, settings, and plots vary.

Ernest Miller Hemingway was born in 1899 in Oak Park, Illinois. He grew up in a typical, upper-middle class family. He began writing for the school newspaper and literary journal when he was in high school. Upon graduation in 1917, he worked at *The Kansas City Star* for a brief period before enlisting in the American Red Cross in early 1918. Just over a month after being deployed into Italy, he was wounded while taking cigarettes and candy to soldiers on the front line and, after a long convalescence, sent home. He took to writing again, moving to Paris in 1921, and becoming involved in the Lost Generation expatriate movement. He traveled all over Europe and lived at Key West, Florida; Havana, Cuba; and Ketchum, Idaho throughout his adult life. He married four times and produced three sons. He published nine novels and several collections of short stories, poems, and articles over the span of his career, with some books posthumously published. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954. He committed suicide in 1961, as his mind began to deteriorate.[163]

Hemingway came of age at an important transitional period in American history. New modes of thinking brought about by the Great War challenged the ways and mores of the Victorian age. The horrors of World War I helped unify those who lived through it. In many ways, the "World War I Generation" might be a better name than the "Lost Generation," because it was the war that impacted the writers and divided their lives into two eras. The first era encompassed their childhoods; the second "seemed tawdrier in many ways" when judged against the past, "but still it had become their own world or

[163] Oliver, *Critical Companion to Ernest Hemingway*, 3-21.

century."[164] Hemingway's parents and grandparents "aspired to represent Culture and Conformity"; on the other hand, Hemingway began to "detach his personal identity from that of the parental ideal . . . he sought to catch the ironic tone of Ring Lardner and to use a diction and to project a character purged of gentility."[165] He had held up his parents' culture and found it lacking, believing it to be "the source of the ridiculous in affectation."[166] From an early age, he sought to find the natural elements in life and thought that societal pressures were little more than confining affectations.

World War I played an important role in his development as a writer. Fighting broke out in Europe in 1914. The United States had not yet entered the war because of the pervading isolationist tendencies and the prevailing attitude that the war in Europe was not the United States's to fight. Aside from news sources, English war poetry published in American magazines acquainted Americans with manufactured death for three years before the country entered the war in 1917. As a result of this familiarity, many men who volunteered to serve viewed the war with a fatalistic attitude—they might die or they might not. Though they joined for other reasons—pride, idealism, experience, and the fear of being called a slacker—the mere possibility of death attracted them. For the Americans who decided to fight, death could provide glamorous endings to "what might have been aimless lives."[167] Hemingway was not one to miss out on the excitement.

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[164] Malcolm Cowley, *A Second Flowering: Works and Days of the Lost Generation* (1956, repr., New York: The Viking Press, 1973), vii.
[165] Harold T. McCarthy, *The Expatriate Perspective: American Novelists and the Idea of America* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1974), 139.
[166] Ibid., 139.
[167] Cowley, *A Second Flowering*, 7.

Hemingway was part of a group of apprentice writers, or men who sought to be great men of letters. Almost all of them wanted to see what war was like. The war was a destination for many American men, particularly for apprentice writers. If they could see everything, then they could write about everything. Much like the early days of the Civil War, the American apprentice writers saw the war in Europe as an adventure or an experience that they could ill-afford to miss. They enlisted in the French, British, or Canadian armies before the United States joined the war, but "while facing death they were still, to some extent, the spectators of somebody else's war."[168]

With his poor eyesight preventing him from serving in the United States Army, Hemingway joined the Red Cross as an ambulance driver on the Italian front.[169] He was able to observe the action closely; indeed, he was wounded severely enough to receive a discharge and citations from the Italian army, but he remained an observer.[170] Hemingway's personal experience was not enough to embitter him toward war. Rather, his experiences excited him and led to a life-long fascination with and valorization of danger and death that was explored in the form of war stories and outdoor adventures.[171]

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[168] Ibid., 9-10.

[169] "I was disqualified before I left the States because of my eye." Hemingway to His Family, October 18, 1919 in Hemingway, *Selected Letters*, 18.

[170] He received the "Silver Medal of Military Valor" after he "'rendered generous assistance to the Italian soldiers more seriously wounded by the same explosion and did not allow himself to be carried elsewhere until they had been evacuated.'" Oliver, *A Critical Companion to Ernest Hemingway*, 7.

[171] "There are no heroes in this war. We all offer our bodies and only a few are chosen, but it shouldn't reflect any special credit on those that are chosen. They are just the lucky ones. I am very proud and happy that mine was chosen, but it shouldn't give me any extra credit. Think of the thousands of other boys that offered. All the heroes are dead. And the real heroes are the parents. Dying is a very simple thing. I've looked at death and really I know. If I should have died it would have been very easy for me. Quite the easiest thing I ever did. But the people at home do not realize that. They suffer a thousand times more. When a mother brings a son into the world she must know that

From his experiences, Hemingway garnered a deep sympathy for those who fought, which enabled him to write realistically about the military aspect of the war despite his limited experience.[172]

When the war finally ended after four years of fighting and millions of lives lost, many American soldiers thought the war had ended too soon. They had not gotten the opportunity to discover whether they were brave or not and some experienced a deep shame over not being wounded. Others who had experienced the war began to feel that a part of them had died. They spent their lives seeking a thrill to make them feel something. Hemingway is one of the more extreme examples of this behavior, in that he lived a full life outdoors, hoping to recapture the danger and excitement through extreme experiences.[173]

Immediately after the war, the younger generation hoped they could have a voice in the country. They did not want influence so much as an audience for their thoughts on their experiences. But the events of 1919 quickly shattered those illusions—Congress refused to ratify the Treaty of Versailles, there were a series of major industrial strikes, the Volstead Act, or Prohibition Amendment, was passed, and the Red Scare resulted in the rise of ultra-patriotism. Congressmen and the self-interested businessmen gained more control over American society, which altered the modus operandi of the country's

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some day the son will die, and the mother of a man that has died for his country should be the proudest woman in the world, and the happiest. And how much better to die in all the happy period of undisillusioned youth, to go out in a blaze of light, than to have your body worn out and old and illusions shattered." These words foreshadow his views on bravery in his later work. Hemingway to His Family, October 18, 1919 in Hemingway, *Selected Letters*, 19.

[172] McCarthy, *The Expatriate Perspective*, 141.

[173] Cowley, *A Second Flowering*, 13.

business and political workings. These young American writers began to feel like "an oppressed minority, orphans and strangers in their own country."[174]

On top of these overt changes, this group of writers felt, and *wanted* to feel, tired, cynical, and disenchanted with life. Because so few of these writers saw serious combat or received serious wounds, there was little reason for them to call themselves cynical. In all actuality, they were disaffiliated more than disillusioned. They were not so damaged by the post-war life that their outlook was dismal; rather, they believed they did not belong to anyone or anything and that bothered them. The aftermath of the war rather than the war itself caused this problem—"their capacity for illusion had not been destroyed, but merely displaced."[175] Nevertheless, many of the aspiring writers, who were highly critical of post-war American life, opted to leave the country as soon as possible. They went to Europe where they "pursued daring new forms and breached old moral barriers . . . that transformed the arts for many years to come."[176]

In 1920, Hemingway more or less joined the Lost Generation in feeling, if not in actuality.[177] Home from the war, he discovered that "the values of his culture do not correspond to the truths of his experience; when he views nation, religion, and family as so many nets to ensnare his soul and desperately begins out of his response to his

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[174] Ibid., 14.
[175] Ibid., 15.
[176] Morris Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark: A Cultural History of the Great Depression* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company), xvii.
[177] According to legend, after hearing the *patron* of a mechanic shop tell a worker he was part of a "*génération perdue*," Gertrude Stein told Hemingway that "All of you young people who served in the war. You are a lost generation . . . You have no respect for anything. You drink yourselves to death." Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast* (1964, repr., New York: Scribners, 2003), 29.

personal, felt sense of life, to search for a direction in which he can commit himself."[178] When Hemingway later used this phrase in his first novel, *The Sun Also Rises,* he "established the idea of a 'generation' as it had not been established before in American writing, and only rarely in European writing."[179]

Initially, the Lost Generation referred to the generation born around the turn of the century, most specifically "those who had seen not just military service in the war but maiming combat."[180] The other soldiers who had not been wounded were secondary members because they had seen combat. The people who had not fought, the "contemporaries of the war generation," were tertiary members because "virtue rubbed off on them, even though they had not been so fortunate as to suffer combat, because they too were aligned against the older, pre-war group."[181]

The use of the word "lost" bears some explanation. The generation was not lost in the sense that they were "unfortunate or thwarted."[182] The generation was not lost in the sense that they were incompetent or without a sense of duty. The generation was lost because the old world order disappeared with the Great War. The generation was lost because it had no attachment to a region or tradition. Their writing appealed to people across the country rather than primarily to one section because they wrote about modern issues that transcended location. The generation was lost because it had been trained for a world that no longer existed. The generation had to discover a new way of living after

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[178] McCarthy, *The Expatriate Perspective*, 143.
[179] John McCormick, *American Literature, 1919-1932: A Comparative History* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1971), 3.
[180] Ibid., 3.
[181] Ibid., 3.
[182] Malcolm Cowley, *Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s* (1934, repr., New York: Penguin, 1979), 8.

the morals of childhood no longer applied.[183] "Lost" had many applications in the new world. It was

> the revelation in life, and above all in art, of areas of existence, moral attitudes, and views of society that the deprived older generation could not understand or accept. "Lost" implied a heroic abandonment of certainties that would be rewarded by large horizons, as against the slack, indulgent bohemian posings of the earlier generation. "Lost" in Hemingway's sense, really meant "found"; in retrospect, we may say that no generation was less lost and more found, for there was brilliance talent, hard work, and achievement in abundance then.[184]

In reality, then, being lost was not necessarily a bad thing because it granted to people a freedom they did not previously have.

The writers of the Lost Generation were different from those who came before them. Previous writers typically used sectional and local influences in their works. Money was actually an important factor in uniting these authors because of the commonalities wrought by their similar social position. Many of the Lost Generation writers came from middle-class families, associated with other middle-class people, went to the same public schools, had the same college experiences, were shipped off to France, and suffered "the same collapse of emotions" once the peace came.[185] While living abroad, they also had many of the same benefits, such as the "advantages of not having to hold down a job because checks were coming regularly from home or one was on a fellowship, not having to be compromised by the bourgeois values of one's parents, not having to worry about marriage and a family, not having responsibilities of any kind

[183] Ibid., 9.
[184] McCormick, *American Literature, 1919-1932,* 3-4.
[185] Cowley, *Exile's Return*, 5.

except to Art, Truth, and one's friends."[186] It mattered little which part of the country these writers came from. They were able to write stories that spoke to the internal feelings of all of their readers.

Thus, the writers moved to Paris and discovered a new lifestyle that had not been available to them in the United States. For a time, the generation of writers living in Paris discovered that

> it was possible to get drunk as often as one pleased, to stay up all night making love, wander the streets howling into the dawn, be eternally young, sensitive, and promising, do all kinds of experimental work and publish it in the little magazines, be read by an audience of friends who were the perfect classmates, all people of brilliant talent and wit and yet, except for a few, remarkably kind and helpful about one's own work.[187]

The Lost Generation writers formed a type of fraternity. They lived together, worked together, and played together. Because of this tight knit community and the common experiences of the writers, their literature has many common elements. The Lost Generation taught its readers

> what it was like to grow up in the small towns of America, how it feels to fall in love, have sex, get drunk, go to war, be an American in Europe, all for the first time, to be so hungry for life that you want to consume all the food, liquor, and women in the world or to discover that the system created by adults is capitalistic and corrupt or hypocritical and dull.[188]

The literature of the Lost Generation spoke to its readers as no other literature ever had before and in the frankest of terms. Most prominently, the literature seemed to teach that, "only the young are truly human. But then the young are doomed to be the victims of the

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[186] John W. Aldridge, "Afterthoughts on the Twenties and *The Sun Also Rises*," in *New Essays on* The Sun Also Rises, ed. Linda Wagner-Martin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 112.
[187] Ibid., 112.
[188] Ibid., 114.

old, to die in their wars, to be tricked by their deceits, ruined through seduction by their false gods."[189]

Hemingway took his work very seriously. He studied at writing the way a student studies in school. Common lore claims that he strove to find just one true thing to write at a time. Some days he was very productive; others he worked more laboriously with fewer results. His career became a constant revision to the same theme, as opposed to the creation of new plots in an unending battle to stay relevant. An unfortunate accident, in which his wife lost all of the work he had completed to date, left him at the beginning. Rather than give up, he took the opportunity to start over and do better.[190] Despite how he felt, he continued working, often putting in fourteen or more hours a day, controlling his creative output.[191]

Hemingway is known for his sparse wording and for not giving the reader all of the information, particularly when it is not relevant. He liked to move the story along as quickly as he could, while still ensuring the reader knew enough to follow the plot. Upon cutting out the first sixteen pages of *The Sun Also Rises*, he wrote "there is nothing in those first sixteen pages that does not come out, or is explained, or restated in the rest of

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[189] Ibid., 114.

[190] "I've thought a lot about the things you said about working and am starting that way at the beginning. If you think of anything else, I wish you'd write it to me. Am working hard about creating and my mind going about it all the time. Mind seems to be working better." Hemingway to Gertrude Stein, c. February 18, 1923, in Hemingway, *Selected Letters*, 79.

[191] "Have felt pretty low and discouraged here. Working so that you're too tired at night to think let alone write and then in the morning a story starts in your head on the street car and have to choke it off because it was coming so perfectly and easily and clear and right and you know that if you let it go on it will be finished and gone and you'd never be able to write. I'm all constipated up with stuff to write, that I've got to write before it goes bad in me. And am working 14 to 18 hrs a day to keep the show going until the 1st of the year." Hemingway to Edward J. O'Brien, c. November 20, 1923, in Hemingway, *Selected Letters*, 104.

the book—or is unnecessary to state."[192] Overall, he sought to "provide the reader with enough detail of a character's experience that the reader feels something of that experience him- or herself."[193] Until Hemingway began writing, the primary narrative technique was the Victorian, omniscient narrator that told the story. Hemingway revolutionized narration by showing the reader what happened, rather than merely telling the reader what happened and how to feel about it.[194] His narration is "a deceptively bare language pregnant with implication."[195]

Then, as now, the disasters of war were frequently disguised by lofty words. The younger generation was tired of hearing big words that held empty promises. Throughout the war, politicians, journalists, and generals all talked around the fact that war was mechanized killing. For the writers that would eventually become the Lost Generation, this led to a war on "big words and noble sentiments," which helped shape their prose style and led to a more colloquial tone in writing.[196] The writers wanted to get the truth in language. They shied away from telling their readers how to react and tended to write so that readers could think for themselves.[197] Hemingway wrote about this theme in *A Farewell to Arms*: "Abstract words such as glory, honor courage, or hallow were

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[192] Hemingway to Sherwood Anderson, July 1, 1926, in Hemingway, *Selected Letters*, 208.
[193] Oliver, *Critical Companion to Ernest Hemingway*, 21.
[194] Hemingway "wanted to make readers feel the emotion directly—not as if they were being told about it, but as if they were taking part in it. The best way to produce this effect, he decided as a first theorem, was to set down exactly, in their proper sequence, the sights, sounds, touches, tastes, and smells that had evoked an emotion he remembered feeling. Then, without auctorial comments and without ever saying that he or his hero had been frightened, sad, or angry, he could make the reader feel the emotion for himself." Cowley, *A Second Flowering*, 62.
[195] Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark*, 151.
[196] Cowley, *A Second Flowering*, 17.
[197] Ibid., 16-17.

obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates."[198] One might add words like "patriotism" and "duty" as well.

Hemingway's early fiction attempted to eliminate the author's presence as much as possible and convey his meaning in as direct a way as possible. At the start of his career, critics called him an experimental stylist because of his "abrupt rhythms, understatement and objectivity."[199] The characters in his early fiction seem to exhibit qualities that all young people appreciate: "the marvelous intensity about people and raw experience, the preoccupation with the self, with love, sex, freedom, time, adventure, the irreverence toward the world of the fathers, the disdain for the adult religion of work, self-sacrifice, expediency, competition, and conformity."[200] Yet, it was likely the stark, simple prose that spoke to the younger generation more than anything. Hemingway was not afraid to challenge social convention by writing about unpleasant things, if he thought they were true and necessary.[201]

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[198] Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (1929, repr., New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1957), 178.

[199] Matthew J. Bruccoli, *Fitzgerald and Hemingway: A Dangerous Friendship* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc., 1994), 11.

[200] Aldridge, "Afterthoughts on the Twenties and *The Sun Also Rises*," 114-115.

[201] "You see I'm trying in all my stories to get the feeling of actual life across—not just to depict life—or criticize it—but to actually make it alive. So that when you have read something by me you actually experience the thing. You can't do this without putting in the bad and the ugly as well as what is beautiful. Because if it is all beautiful you can't believe in it. Things aren't that way. It is only by showing both sides—3 dimensions and if possible 4 that you can write the way I want to.
So when you see anything of mine that you don't like remember that I'm sincere in doing it and that I'm working toward something. If I write an ugly story that might be hateful to you or to Mother the next one might be one that you would like exceedingly." Hemingway to Dr. C. E. Hemingway, March 20, 1925, in Hemingway, *Selected Letters*, 153.

Due to the length of Hemingway's career as a writer of prose fiction, which lasted roughly forty years, the evolution of his style can be placed into three periods. The early style, which includes his earliest short stories through *The Sun Also Rises*, is notable for short, declarative sentences, with simple diction. He uses "dramatic, ironic, repetitive, and oblique" dialogue. He employs understatement and humor to convey his point to the astute reader. Much like Twain, Hemingway tells two stories—one that popular audiences can perceive and one that educated audiences understand. The middle period encompasses *A Farewell to Arms* and his better short stories. In this period, Hemingway used a wider range of tense and the use of subordinate clauses. The late period has longer sentences that often become convoluted. He is more ironic and the type of narrator he used is different. However, even as his mind began to slip and the public questioned his capabilities, he still wrote pieces that were every bit as clear and tight as his earlier work.[202]

In many ways, moving to Europe enabled Hemingway to write. Though he had dabbled in prose writing since high school, he primarily stuck to journalism. He moved to Europe as a journalist and only then, "after his sense of American life had been placed in the focus on a European perspective," was he able to begin writing how he wanted to write.[203] The distance from American culture provided Hemingway with the perspective to make an objective comparison and analysis that he could not do while still living in the country.[204] While in Europe, Hemingway eschewed the popular bars and cafes that the other expatriates frequented. He preferred to be around "the folk least conditioned by the

[202] McCormick, *American Literature, 1919-1932*, 49.
[203] McCarthy, *The Expatriate Perspective*, 175.
[204] Ibid., 146.

sophistication of modern life and truest to folk ways, to natural instinct, and to the ceremonies and rituals through which their basic social needs had found expression for centuries."[205] This preference for people who lived naturally and freely shows up throughout his literature.

Hemingway's writing realistically depicts natural settings because he thought that this would allow the reader to delve more deeply into the experience of reading. The naturalism Hemingway depicted is dependent upon sensation, which a reader of any educational level or background is able to experience, even on a very superficial level. Hemingway set the conflict of the story against a vibrant physical world because "the very relishing of the beauty is merely a kind of desperate and momentary compensation possible in the midst of the predicament."[206]

Hemingway had a select number of topics that he was interested in exploring and developing in his writing. Given his experiences in World War I, war was an important topic for him.[207] He also liked to write about the peacetime equivalent of war—sports, bullfighting, eroticism, and violence.[208] Hemingway placed a heavy emphasis on playing (or doing) with all that one has for the sake of the game. Once other goals, such as

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[205] Ibid., 146-147.
[206] Warren, "Hemingway," 8-9.
[207] "Like me to write you a little essay on The Importance of Subject? Well the reason you are so sore you missed the war is because war is the best subject of all. It groups the maximum of material and speeds up the action and brings out all sorts of stuff that normally you have to wait a lifetime to get." Hemingway to F. Scott Fitzgerald, December 15, 1925, in Hemingway, *Selected Letters, 1917-1961*, 176.
[208] When it comes to hunting, an activity that Hemingway loved, many critics see him as someone who shoots for the fun of it, without thinking about the consequences. This portrait would hold true for those reading *Green Hills of Africa*. However, his posthumously published *Under Kilimanjaro* presents a different interpretation in which Hemingway upheld the gaming laws that Theodore Roosevelt put into place and lived by a hunter's code of honor. See Kevin Maier, "Hemingway's Hunting: An Ecological Reconsideration," *The Hemingway Review*, 25 (Spring 2006): 119-122.

revenge or money, come into the equation, the player and the sport are no longer pure or good.[209] Love, wilderness, and loss received much attention as well.[210] These are all themes and ideas that lowbrow audiences of both genders can appreciate in some capacity, which contributed to his widespread appeal. In most of Hemingway's novels, love and war (or its peacetime equivalent) go together—the war-wounded Jake Barnes and Lady Brett Ashley in *The Sun Also Rises*; soldier Frederic Henry and Catherine Barkley in *A Farewell to Arms*; "guerilla dynamiter" Robert Jordan and Maria in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*; and Santiago the fisherman reflects on his dead wife in *The Old Man and the Sea*.[211]

These themes build upon the Emersonian theme of self-knowledge. Frederic Henry tells his story years after the fact. He writes "in rueful hindsight" because he had had time to reflect on the events of his war experiences and romance with Catherine and "as he contemplates his losses, [he may] be seen as approaching true maturity."[212] Robert Jordan is unable to reflect on the events of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, but he is a more introspective character, so the action is told with more insight in the first place. The question in this novel is whether Jordan can live his whole life in three days. Hemingway allows the reader to answer that question for themselves through his clear prose and the characters he creates. The band of Spanish guerillas become like Jordan's family, thus tying in the theme of the need for human connections.[213]

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[209] McCarthy, *The Expatriate Perspective*, 137.
[210] Svoboda, "The Great Themes in Hemingway," 156.
[211] Ibid., 158-159.
[212] Ibid., 161, 163.
[213] Ibid., 163-164.

The theme of loss is probably the lasting impact of Hemingway's writing. Hemingway did not pander to the emotions of his readers. Rather, he captured their interest with "the sense that, whatever the position in which his characters may find themselves, living their lives with authenticity in a world that makes such lives nearly impossible is what is most important."[214] The characters often begin as immature, but they grow as the novel progresses, much like readers grow as they experience life or well-written novels. Along the way, they experience losses and victories that change them. Hemingway's audience, both elite and popular, understood such concerns, so he continued to explore the same themes.[215]

Having rejected the Lost Generation label for himself and for his generation, it is ironic that "his first book [is] widely accepted as Exhibit A of lost-generationism."[216] Hemingway never really thought that the "Lost Generation" tag should have applied to him; he did not feel lost. Yet, the reading public saddled him with the term. *The Sun Also Rises* was Hemingway's declaration of independence from the Lost Generation. He had had to dissociate himself from the concept of lostness to write the book. While he may have told F. Scott Fitzgerald that the book was "'a hell of a sad story' whose only instruction was 'how people go to hell,'" the point of the book was that the earth abides.[217] Another irony of the book is that people tend to focus more on Brett Ashley and her drunken cohorts than on Hemingway's true purpose of the abiding earth. After establishing himself as a master writer by the age of thirty, he was able to follow one of

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[214] Ibid., 171.
[215] Ibid., 171.
[216] Carlos Baker, *Hemingway: The Writer As Artist* (1952, repr., Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 82.
[217] Hemingway to F. Scott Fitzgerald, c. May 26, 1926 and Hemingway to Maxwell Perkins, November 19, 1926, in Hemingway, *Selected Letters*, 204 and 229.

his favorite maxims—"Don't do anything too bloody long"—and conquer new literary and personal ground.[218]

The post-World War I sentiment manifested itself in conspicuous consumption. There was a postwar boom which gave people advantages that they had never had before as well. Expendable income was one such advantage. With disposable income, people were buying consumer products in mass quantities for the first time. This mass consumption of consumer goods led to a self-centered attitude in many Americans. The Lost Generation did not like the excess exhibited by their contemporaries, even as they enjoyed many excesses while living abroad. Hemingway used the war to show how the war changed both him and the Lost Generation, and as a medium for critiquing the faults he saw in the post-war society.[219]

The nineteenth-century values that figured so prominently in the upbringing of the men and women who came of age in the first decade of the twentieth century eroded as a result of the war. Home, family, church, and country no longer provided the security they once had. Money, as opposed to the moral and physical "strenuous life" advocated by Teddy Roosevelt, became the driving force of society. Everything was for sale, including the virtue of the so-called artists who populated the Latin Quarter of Paris. The old bohemian way of life became gentrified and fewer artists engaged in real work. Americans had become a nation of consumers as "debt became a way of life in the rush to buy now, live now."[220] In Hemingway's opinion, money was not corrupting so long as

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[218] Baker, *Hemingway,* 77.
[219] McCormick, *American Literature, 1919-1932,* 15.
[220] Michael S. Reynolds, "The Sun in Its Time: Recovering the Historical Context," in *New Essays on* The Sun Also Rises, ed. Linda Wagner-Martin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 50.

it was earned. But, the Americans in Paris were not working and that galled him. Thus, he wrote *The Sun Also Rises* to protest this mass consumer culture.[221]

Sometime later, Hemingway said, "people aren't all as bad as some writers find them or as hollowed out and exhausted emotionally as some of the *Sun* generation."[222] This indicted "those who allowed themselves to flounder in an emulsion of ennui and alcohol when there was so much else to be done."[223] Hemingway was never able to accept those who floundered; he preferred the kind of men who "kept their mouths shut and took life as it came."[224] He recorded his scorn for the faux artists of Montparnasse and was able to retreat to the position of dispassionate spectator who witnessed "aimless revels which at once amused him and left him sick at heart."[225]

Throughout his body of work, Hemingway used "tight-lipped heroics" to counter "the attempt to end heroism by organization."[226] The individual always triumphs, even if only morally, over society. However, society ultimately wins because an individual cannot change society singlehandedly. An example of this is Pedro Romero, a young bullfighter, in *The Sun Also Rises*. He maintains his original moral code while the rest of the characters, who were physically or morally wounded by World War I, try to find a new code to live by. Their feelings have been deadened and they are only able to enjoy the simplest and strongest of pleasures. They have "an attitude of resigned acceptance

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[221] Ibid., 45-50.
[222] Hemingway to Maxwell Perkins, December 7, 1926 in Hemingway, *Selected Letters*, 238.
[223] Baker, *Hemingway: The Writer As Artist*, 90.
[224] Ibid., 90.
[225] Ibid., 77.
[226] John P. Sisk, "Beatniks and Tradition," in *The Social Radical in American Literature*, ed. Robert H. Woodward (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1968), 96.

toward all sorts of disasters, including those caused by their own follies."[227] Romero serves as an example for the protagonist, Jake Barnes, who spends most of the novel resisting the frivolous nature of his compatriots, but ultimately indulges in their impulses. Romero and Barnes win a small victory by living apart from those around them; but, they are ultimately unable to change those around them, which would have been a triumph in a larger sense.[228]

Hemingway continually criticized the tendency in American culture to press for conformity. Hemingway found American culture to be too serious, practical, and insensitive to natural living, thus reducing people to cogs of the social machine.[229] Though many of Hemingway's novels had violent passages in them, his primary concern was that "the individual human being has lost his sacredness, and the intuition of human community that had shaped the laws and institutions of the culture had been lost."[230] Man lost his natural state of being. This criticism was subtler, but more radical than the critics of the nineteen-thirties who were concerned with economics and politics. Exposing the violent, yet sterile nature of the Western world was Hemingway's main achievement as a social critic.[231] He subtly showed people a better way of living their lives, by creating more heroic characters and by developing the themes of the abiding earth and a life well lived. Man is a transient being, so his only way to matter is to make an impact during his time on earth. Regardless of whether or not a man makes an impact, the earth will continue.

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[227] Cowley, *A Second Flowering*, 71.
[228] Ibid., 71.
[229] McCarthy, *The Expatriate Perspective*, 150.
[230] Ibid., 145.
[231] Ibid., 186.

The story always revolved around "the self of the central character, more or less autobiographical, conceived as heroic and presented in varying degrees of irony."[232] Hemingway's novels end with "not a public triumph, [but] an equivocal triumph that could be interpreted as a defeat" reinforcing the idea that man can be destroyed but not defeated.[233] Though man neither wins in the public sphere nor loses in the personal sphere, he has triumphed on a personal level by living his life on his own terms.[234] The bullfighter is Hemingway's ultimate example of this ideal:

> The bullfighter who chooses again and again to encounter the possibility of death in order to demonstrate his mastery of a contrived, deadly situation, a mastery that is an affirmation of youth and sexuality, of courage and grace—even, for aficionados, an affirmation of the human spirit—became for Hemingway symbolic of man's capacity to shape his own experience.[235]

The bullfighter does what he must do, despite all of the dangers that are involved, he plays by the rules, and he truly lives.

Hemingway claimed that the original dedication of *The Sun Also Rises* was, "TO MY SON . . . This collection of Instructive Anecdotes."[236] F. Scott Fitzgerald took the original dedication seriously, so Hemingway replied to set the record straight:

> It is so obviously *not* a collection of instructive anecdotes and is such a hell of a sad story—and the only instruction is how people go to hell—that I thought it was rather pleasant to dedicate it to Bumby-- . . . . I won't put in the anecdote part—but I'll dedicate it to him for reasons that will be obvious when you read the book.[237]

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[232] McCormick, *American Literature, 1919-1932*, 73.
[233] Ibid., 73.
[234] McCarthy, *The Expatriate Perspective*, 149.
[235] Ibid., 137.
[236] Hemingway to Fitzgerald, April 20, 1926, in Hemingway, *Selected Letters*, 199.
[237] Hemingway to Fitzgerald, circa May 26, 1926, in Hemingway, *Selected Letters*, 204-205.

In Hemingway's opinion, "the point of the book . . . was that the earth abideth forever . . . [he] didn't mean the book to be a hollow or bitter satire but a damn tragedy with the earth abiding forever as the hero."[238] In actuality, Hemingway had "a great deal of fondness and admiration for the earth, and not a hell of a lot for [his] generation."[239]

When the novel was published in 1926, Hemingway thought some people missed the point. While he had intended the story to be a tragedy, he noticed people "[took] it for a jazz superficial story. If you went any deeper inside they couldn't read it because they would be crying all the time."[240] The novel quickly became the handbook of conduct for young people in the 1920s. An observer noted "many of the younger writers had already begun to talk, walk, and shadowbox like Hemingway, when they weren't flourishing capes in front of an imaginary bull."[241]

Another quality that becomes more fully expressed in *A Farewell to Arms* is Hemingway's glorification of the natural. His characters have the most fun and are at their best when they are doing something natural—hunting, fishing, making love—rather than partaking in society. In *The Sun Also Rises*, the protagonist, Jake Barnes, goes fishing. In the process of being in the water, he is purified of society.[242] For Hemingway, action produces better results than contemplation or frivolity. His heroes live most fully when they are in danger. Male-female relationships "place an erotic focus

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[238] Hemingway to Maxwell Perkins, November 19, 1926, in Hemingway, *Selected Letters*, 229.
[239] Ibid., 229.
[240] Hemingway to Hadley Hemingway, November 18, 1926, in Hemingway, *Selected Letters*, 226.
[241] Cowley, *A Second Flowering*, 71.
[242] Fiedler argues that the stream in Burgeute "links back to the rivers of Hemingway's youth, the rivers of upper Michigan, whose mythical source is the Mississippi of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn." Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel, Revised Edition* (New York: Stein and Day, 1966), 356.

on or near death and danger . . . [;] eroticism . . . may be defined as a focusing upon experience for its own sake, as against experience lived in society or experience having results beyond the super individual's own consciousness."[243]

A life truly lived was a religion to Hemingway, which is why he focused on this theme throughout his life.[244] His novels have an element of time running out in them. Man only has so long to make his life count. The Old Man, Santiago, in *The Old Man and the Sea*, goes out beyond where he should for the chance to catch a fish. He does catch a fish and has the adventure of a lifetime in trying to bring it back in. Though the fish is ultimately eaten by sharks and only its skeleton survives, Santiago still fought. In the novel, Hemingway worked to capture the simplicity of the story, while at the same time writing "a good non-overweight book where a man shows what a human being is capable of and the dignity of the human soul without the word soul being capitalized."[245]

Another example of time running out is in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, when Robert Jordan must use the time he has left on the suicide mission to blow up a bridge.[246] Jordan ponders time throughout the novel, but understands the point most clearly in the middle of the novel:

> Maybe that is what I am to get now from life. Maybe that is my life and instead of it being threescore years and ten it is forty-eight hours or just threescore hours and ten or twelve rather . . . . I suppose it is possible to live as full a life in seventy hours as in seventy years; granted that your

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[243] McCormick, *American Literature, 1919-1945*, 70.
[244] McCarthy, *The Expatriate Perspective*, 153.
[245] Hemingway to Wallace Meyer, March 4 and 7, 1952, in Hemingway, *Selected Letters*, 758. Hemingway had a lot of confidence in the goodness of this book. "This is the prose that I have been working for all my life that should read easily and simply and seem short and yet have all the dimensions of the visible world and the world of a man's spirit. It is as good prose as I can write as of now." Hemingway to Charles Scribner, October 5, 1951, in Hemingway, *Selected Letters*, 738.
[246] Oliver, *Critical Companion of Ernest Hemingway*, 149.

> life has been full up to the time that the seventy hours start and that you have reached a certain age . . . . So if your life trades its seventy years for seventy hours I have that value now and I am lucky enough to know it. And if there is not any such thing as a long time, nor the rest of your lives, nor from now on, but there is only now, why then now is the thing to praise and I am very happy with it.[247]

The novel is mostly written in the present to convey the sense of urgency that Jordan's time is running out and he only has so long to make a difference. The lyrical tone of the novel is different from Hemingway's earlier works, which scholars believe means "the author seems to be affirming here the possibilities of meaningful, heroic sacrifice and a common human bond."[248] Much like life, the novel ends where it begins, "where Jordan is feeling his heart beating against the pine needle floor of the forest . . . . He has had his problem and all his life before him at the start and he has all his life in those days and at the end there is only death for him and he truly isn't afraid of it at all because he has a chance to finish his mission."[249]

Epigraphs play a very important part in Hemingway's work. They give an important clue about the true theme of the work. *The Sun Also Rises* makes for an interesting case because its two epigraphs caused a lot of confusion and led to many misreadings of the novel. The first epigraph is the quote by Gertrude Stein—"You are all

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[247] Ernest Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940, repr., New York: Scribners, 2003), 166. Hemingway wrote that the end of the novel wore him out. "The last chapter is the most exciting in the book. It's almost unbearable exciting during and after the bridge is blown . . . . I was as limp and dead as though it had all happened to me. Anyhow it is a hell of a book. I knew I had to write a hell of a last chapter. But have it all now except the very end—the action and the emotion are all done . . . . I hated to have that damned Jordan get that he got after living with the son of a bitch for 17 months. Felt worse than if it were me." Hemingway to Maxwell Perkins, July 13, 1940, in Hemingway, *Selected Letters*, 506.

[248] Edward Quinn, *History in Literature: A Reader's Guide to 20th Century History and the Literature It Inspired* (New York: Facts On File, Inc., 2004), 302.

[249] Hemingway to Maxwell Perkins, August 26, 1940, in Hemingway, *Selected Letters*, 514.

a Lost Generation." The more important epigraph that tells the meaning of the book is Ecclesiastes 1:4-7, which reads:

> One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth forever . . . . The sun also ariseth, and the sub goeth down, and hasteth to the place where he arose . . . . The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits . . . . All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.[250]

The epigraph says that though these people live transient, empty lives, the earth will still be there. Jake struggles throughout the novel to live a life of purpose but wants to join in the frivolity of his friends. His narration hints at the epigraph of living with a purpose so that your life matters when it ends: "I did not care what [the world] was all about. All I wanted to know what how to live in it. Maybe if you found out how to live in it you learned from that what it was all about."[251]

Many readers focused on Gertrude Stein's statement, believing that it not only hearkened the existence of a lost generation, but also showed that Hemingway identified with them. Ultimately, he only used Stein's epigraph in an ironic or sarcastic tone and really meant for people to focus on the verse from Ecclesiastes.[252] That verse was supposed to indicate that he thought "there was no such thing as a lost generation."[253] The discerning reader, of which there appears to have been relatively few during the nineteen-twenties, should have realized that the heroes of the novel, Jake Barnes, Bill Gorton, and Pedro Romero, were solid; they were not lost. These characters refused to succumb to

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[250] Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926, repr., New York: Scribners, 1986), ii.
[251] Oliver, *Critical Companion of Ernest Hemingway*, 348. Quote from Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, 148.
[252] Bruccoli, *Fitzgerald and Hemingway: A Dangerous Friendship*, 130.
[253] Baker, *Hemingway: The Writer As Artist*, 80.

their inner demons like Robert Cohn, Lady Brett Ashley, and Mike Campbell and "three lost neurotics do not make a lost generation."[254]

In many ways, the epigraph from Ecclesiastes can even be seen as an epigraph to all of Hemingway's novels. He writes continually about the cycles of life—birth, action, and death. Through it all, the earth remains. Regardless of whether the earth is "profaned or perverted" or "lost irrevocably," the natural worlds that Hemingway explores in his novels, and the impact those worlds have on his characters, establish his importance.

For Whom the Bell Tolls is another of Hemingway's novels with an important epigraph. This one is taken from John Donne's essay:

> No man is an *Iland*, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the *Continent*, a part of the *maine*; if a *Clod* bee washed away by the *Sea*, *Europe* is the lesse, as well as if a *Promonotorie* were, as well as if a *Mannor* of thy *friends* or of *thine owne* were; any mans *death* diminishes *me*, because I am involved in *Mankinde*; And therefore never send to know for whom the *bell* tolls; It tolls for *thee*.[255]

This hints that all of man is a part of life and his contributions to it affect everyone equally. Robert Jordan's shortness of time illustrates that precisely because we are dying we must not only contribute to life, but examine our lives and make sure they have been full because "seventy years in and of itself is not enough, and three days may be sufficient if they are lived well."[256]

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[254] Ibid., 81.
[255] Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, ii.
[256] Oliver, *Critical Companion of Ernest Hemingway*, 151. Hemingway even uses the epigraphs for his non-fiction works to instruct readers. The epigraph for *The Green Hills of Africa* reads: "Unlike many novels, none of the characters or incidents in this book is imaginary. Any one not finding sufficient love interest is at liberty, while reading it, to insert whatever love interest he or she may have at the time. The writer has attempted to write an absolutely true book to see whether the shape of a country and the pattern of a

As a writer, Hemingway is a controversial figure because he "displayed an American discomfort with the public role of writer and intellectual that necessarily was his on the evidence of his published work."[257] Throughout his life, he consistently eschewed his place within the intellectual community, preferring to "pose as a fisherman, big game hunter, boxer, rail bird, heavy drinker, sexual athlete, aficionado of baseball, bullfighting, and warfare rather than as a writer."[258] At the same time, he was fiercely protective of his responsibility as a writer. He maintained discipline and upheld self-set standards and expected his publisher to do the same, hence his outrage at a seemingly superfluous new edition of *A Farewell to Arms* in 1948:

> I have turned down all sorts of propositions, deals, etc. and have kept the product pure. Whatever it is it is as good as I can make it and I have not corrupted it by working for the coast nor doing things I thought were shitty and would hurt me as a writer no matter how much money they brought in . . .
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> I do not give one inferior fuck whether Scribners makes a dime on an edition of [*A Farewell to Arms*] such as you describe. All that is is a prestige (for you and me both) and a piece of good will edition and you do not need to make any money out of it . . .
>
> To return to the book: If I write an introduction automatically all the poor bloody collectors have to buy it . . .
>
> So remember, or try to think, that you are a publisher and you have to carry the ball sometimes and not just me who goes to fight in all the fucking wars and gets my brains knocked out and never fake and cheat in writing or write crap for all the dough they offer and waste my expensive time and my one and only life helping [Malcolm] Cowley to find out facts and sources for a damned piece that disgusts me to do but is probably necessary historically and from which you will profit plenty more than I

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month's action can, if truly presented, compete with a work of the imagination." Hemingway, *The Green Hills of Africa*, iii. And the epigraph for *A Moveable Feast* reads: "If the reader prefers, this book may be regarded as fiction. But there is always the chance that such a book of fiction may throw some light on what has been written as fact." Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast*, iii.

[257] McCormick, *American Literature 1919-1932*, 43.

[258] Ibid., 43.

> will in the long run. Sometimes the run seems very god-damned long too when I see good books of mine out of print.[259]

He was one of the first writers who took his writing seriously and allowed it to develop with a life of its own. He continually strove to write the perfect novel and his body of work shows that progression.

Hemingway reaches the apex of his creative achievement with *The Old Man and the Sea*. A harsh critic of his own writing, even he acknowledges the greatness of the novel.[260] The novel affected the close friends Hemingway allowed to read it. Initially, the novel was an epilogue to a longer work on the sea, but Hemingway thought *The Old Man and the Sea* could stand alone. However, he always recognized that "this can always be republished as [an epilogue]" or even "as an epilogue to all [his] writing and what [he has] learned, or tried to learn, while writing and trying to live."[261] Hemingway wrote the novel after a period of not publishing anything.[262]

It was two novels, *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms*, that cemented his place as one of the American literary greats of the twentieth century. In reverse chronological order, these fairly autobiographical books represent Hemingway's life from 1918 to 1925 and tell "the moral history of the nineteen-twenties."[263] Hemingway never intended for his novel to be the so-called textbook of the lost generation. Yet, in *The Sun*

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[259] Hemingway to Charles Scribner, June 3, 1948, in Hemingway, *Selected Letters*, 637.
[260] "[I]t destroys good and able work by being placed alongside of it. I'll try to write better but it will be tough." Hemingway to Wallace Meyer, March 4 and 7, 1952, in Hemingway, *Selected Letters*, 757.
[261] Ibid., 757.
[262] "I am tired of not publishing anything. Other writers publish short books. But I am supposed to always lay back and come in with War and Peace or Crime and Punishment or be considered a bum. This is probably very bad for a writer and I will bet it did more to wreck poor old Scott than anything except Zelda, himself and booze." Ibid., 758.
[263] Baker, *Hemingway: The Writer As Artist*, 76-77.

Also Rises, he gave them a name, which they latched onto. Next, they asked him for a guide, "so Hemingway gave them Nick Adams and Jake Barnes, whose adventures gave them a guidebook and a code of conduct."[264] His "dramatization of the moral predicament of a small group of Jazz Age D.P's" transcended the geographical confines of France and Spain and served as a social history of the era.[265]

Hemingway's style and attitude, nascent in *The Sun Also Rises* and more fully formed in *A Farewell to Arms*, permeated his future work. The men born a few years after Hemingway, like Robert Penn Warren (born in 1905) and John Steinbeck (born in 1902), were too young to fight in World War I, but they were influenced as much or more than Hemingway's own generation by his writing.[266] Though Hemingway published a novel, two works of non-fiction, and two collections of short stories during the nineteen-thirties, his influence was more limited to a passive, though pervading, presence as opposed to an active force.[267]

This influence continued until the World War II generation. For them, Hemingway "defined war and one's place, or lack of place, in it."[268] Some veterans claimed that "even before the war Hemingway was teaching members of [their] generation how to bear the burdens that they expected to have to bear."[269] For all combatants, even those who had not read his works, Hemingway was the teacher of "how to live with disaster, and many learned how to die with it."[270] Hemingway's style was

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[264] Cowley, *A Second Flowering*, 226-227.
[265] Baker, *Hemingway: The Writer As Artist*, 79-80.
[266] Cowley, *A Second Flowering*, 227.
[267] Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark*, 153.
[268] McCormick, *American Literature, 1919-1932*,
[269] Svoboda, "The Great Themes in Hemingway," 170.
[270] McCormick, *American Literature, 1919-1932*, 45.

adopted, then adapted, by the journalists and the social writers of the 1930s and onward. The creators of the hard-boiled detective novel, such as Dashiell Hammett, used him as a model in their writing as well.[271]

Probably the biggest testament to Hemingway's influence is that he changed the way future writers approached their craft. Later writers either strove to imitate his style or they fought his influence. His influence is better gauged by the odd places that it is (poorly) imitated. This is because his work was immediately widely available and it appeared to be an advance in narrative form to both the literary and the non-literary. Rather than actually imitating his style, these attempted copiers often mimic, what they perceive to be, an attitude. For instance, readers of *Death in the Afternoon* (1932), which details the ceremony of bullfighting, often came away with the notion of "a tough American . . . cutting a fine figure as he advises the bullfighter which horn the bull favors, and perhaps guiding the surgeon's hand in the infirmary" afterwards, as opposed to appreciating the artistry of the description, which is what Hemingway actually innovated.[272]

Every subsequent generation reads *The Sun Also Rises*, and any major literary work for that matter, through its own experiences. The Beat Generation saw the lifestyle depicted by Hemingway as admirable and believed it was a precursor to *On the Road*. On the other hand, the more socially conservative youngsters of the 1980s tended to find little worth in the lifestyle of Hemingway's characters.[273] For them, *The Sun Also Rises* represents "a study in moral failure, a jaded world of unemployed and irresponsible

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[271] Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark*, 152.
[272] McCormick, *American Literature, 1919-1932*, 59.
[273] Reynolds, "The *Sun* in Its Time," 44-45

characters who drink too much—a fable of ideological bankruptcy."[274] Rather than viewing *The Sun Also Rises* as a guidebook or a worthless tale of depravity, this novel can be used as an "instruction manual on how to respond to and behave in the testing situations of life now that the rules have changed and the world has become, in effect, an unknown foreign country."[275]

The Lost Generation gained and maintained their popularity through a somewhat twisted bit of luck. Their counterparts in Europe for the most part died during the war; therefore, there was little European literature being produced that spoke to the younger adults. The European public resented the wealth and self-satisfaction of the United States; but, it was also impressed enough to be mildly interested in the creative output of American writers. When translations of American work became available, Europeans were happily surprised to discover the "protest against wealth and complacency, presented in scenes of violence and abject suffering."[276] The writers of the 1920s did not celebrate wealth or the fast society of the decade. Though wealth was not the root of all evil as in the Great Depression, few wealthy characters lived full and happy lives. The rich tended to be miserable or completely whimsical, which exemplified the authors' opinion of wealth. This attitude appealed to the Europeans ravaged by war and to the Americans who wanted to be cynical.[277]

The Lost Generation remained lucky, continuing to produce books during the Depression, thus not suffering as much as the apprentice writers of the 1930s. The literature of the 1930s, influenced by the desolation of the Depression, saw the rise of

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[274] Ibid., 44-45
[275] Aldridge, "Afterthoughts on the Twenties and *The Sun Also Rises*," 117.
[276] Cowley, *A Second Flowering*, 236-237.
[277] Ibid., 237.

disenchantment with society and the proletarian novels, which eventually served as a bridge between the Lost Generation and the Beat Generation of the 1950s. Then, the country entered World War II. The men serving in World War II had far more casualties, because some men were in the service for up to five years. They had much less time to write. And, they returned home without the great angst of the World War I generation. These soldiers grew up after the horrors of World War I and there was very little doubt about the justification of World War II. The lack of doubt about the justness of war caused a somewhat easier transition from peace to war and back again. The World War II soldiers also returned home to a job market that put almost all of them to work with the passage of the GI Bill. As with World War I, this war still was not the Lost Generation's war.[278]

Many of the Lost Generation writers fizzled out and faded into distant memory, but Ernest Hemingway avoided this fate. After becoming extremely popular in the 1920s with *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), Hemingway continued to write, using the current event of the Spanish Civil War in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), and reflecting on the process of aging in *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952). Rather than continuing to write about the same period, Hemingway maintained his relevancy by writing on a theme that transcended time and could be developed as his writing developed.

It also helped that he loved what he did and mastered his craft. He once wrote, "[I] am thoroughly disgusted with writing but as there is nothing else I care as much for

[278] Ibid., 237

will continue writing."[279] However, he also acknowledged the loneliness of writing fiction and how difficult it was to render his stories in a way that people were moved by them.[280] His primary advice on writing, which is fairly characteristic of his personality, was "You just have to go on when it is worst and most helpless—there is only one thing to do with a novel and that is go straight on through to the end of the damn thing."[281]

A careful reading of Hemingway's novels reveal lessons from the American frontier past, such as "courage, fidelity, honor, and rectitude that might still have the power to influence human conduct when all other values were being called into question."[282] In his writing, Hemingway created a kind of code of conduct by which valorous individuals would live. Though he wrote about very specific situations, the code of honor that the reader can extrapolate and apply to life, giving "meaning, partially at least, to the confusions of living."[283] The rising action of the novel focuses on the character's effort to define the code through introspection. Once the character defines it, the character must maintain it throughout the climax and denouement of the plot. The code is always, ultimately, to accept life and challenges stoically, and then act in the way

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[279] Hemingway to F. Scott Fitzgerald, April 20, 1926, in Hemingway, *Selected Letters*, 200.

[280] "You know that fiction, prose rather, is possibly the roughest trade of all in writing. You do not have the reference, the old important reference. You have the sheet of blank paper, the pencil, and the obligation to invent truer than things can be true. You have to take what is not palpable and make it completely palpable and also have it seem normal and so that it can become a part of the experience of the person who reads it. Obviously, this is impossible and that is probably why it is considered to be valuable when you are able to do it. But it is impossible to hire out or contract to be able to do it, as to hire out to be an alchemist." Hemingway to Bernard Berenson, September 24, 1954, in Hemingway, *Selected Letters*, 837.

[281] Hemingway to Fitzgerald, September 13, 1929, in Hemingway, *Selected Letters*, 306.

[282] Aldridge, "Afterthoughts on the Twenties and *The Sun Also Rises*," 117.

[283] Warren, "Hemingway," 2.

that accords the greatest good, which is the Emersonian ideal of self-reliance. For the reader, the effort then becomes maintaining the code in their lives.[284]

[284] Ibid., 3.

CHAPTER IV

JACK KEROUAC—THE ROAD TO REDEMPTION

> [I]n solitude, in pain, writing hymns and prayers even at dawn, thinking "When this book is finished, which is going to be the sum and substance and crap of everything I've been thru throughout this whole goddam life, I shall be redeemed."
>
> Jack Kerouac[285]

The malaise of post-World War II American society manifested itself in an emphasis on conformity. The Beat writers wanted to be more unique and live their lives on their own terms. To do this, they went on roadtrips looking for the meaning of life or simply because they could not sit still. Eventually, they recorded their experiences and observations in the hopes of informing the rest of society of a better way to live, which caused a strong reaction in the reading public. Because of the delay between the adventures that comprise the novels of the Beats and their publication, readers were reacting to something that had happened after the manuscript had already been written or the story already internalized. The primary societal reactant was the backlash against McCarthyism when to be different was dangerous. Though there was an economic boom after World War II as well, it manifested itself in a family-friendly way, so the consumption was not perceived as selfish as after World War I.

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[285] Jack Kerouac, *The Vanity of Duluoz: An Adventurous Education, 1935-46* (1968, repr., New York: Penguin, 1994), 268.

The writers who would become the Beat Generation were the first to loudly and vociferously rebel against the blandness, conformity, and perceived lack of culture in the United States. Even as early as 1948, before he had really written much, Jack Kerouac, who eventually became the movement's leader, saw "a new literary age . . . beginning in America[,] . . . [with] young Americans . . . turning to a new evaluation of the individual: his 'position' itself, personal and psychic."[286] The Beats sought the "freedom to pick up and go across the country at a moment's notice," which is why so many of them published novels with one or more roadtrips in the plot.[287] While their rebellion was more social and cultural, it had political ramifications as well. These writers were mostly politically apathetic. Yet the young people who consumed their literature turned their discontent to the political arena. This coincides with the increase of the United States's involvement in Vietnam and the protest against it.

The entirety of Kerouac's work makes up the Duluoz Legend, which is comprised of twelve "true-story" novels that tell the life story of the author.[288] He saw the Legend as a work in progress: "When I'm done, in about 10, 15 years, it will cover all the years of my life, like Proust, but done on the run, a Running Proust."[289] His road novels, *On the Road* (1957), *Visions of Cody* (1960), *The Subterraneans* (1958), *Tristessa* (1960), and *The Dharma Bums* (1958) tell of his quest for enlightenment, inner peace, freedom,

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[286] Jack Kerouac to Neal Cassady, October 3, 1948, in Jack Kerouac, *Selected Letters, 1940-1956*, ed. Ann Charters (New York: Penguin, 1995), 167.
[287] David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York: The Random House Publishing Group, 1993), 295.
[288] The books depict events in Kerouac's life, but to protect the guilty, he would mix up the order of events within a novel. Events could also be changed with the distance of memory and in the process of editing for publication.
[289] Kerouac to Malcolm Cowley, September 11, 1955, in Kerouac, *Selected Letters, 1940-1956*, 515.

and the true America.[290] Kerouac's characters seem to go a step further than Hemingway's by seeking to understand the meaning of existence, as opposed to accepting a life well-lived (in whatever shape that may be) as an end unto itself. Though the novels in sum tell the story of Kerouac's life, they were not written or published in that order. To study the evolution of Kerouac's style and themes, the best way to organize the works is by the order they were written. The quest for enlightenment or the meaning of life is a thread developed throughout Kerouac's road novels.

Kerouac wrote at a time when the definition of individuality was in a precarious position. Individual citizens had to be careful of what they said or how they acted because "any minor offense could have been labeled deviant, and citizens suffered the curtailment of civil liberties in the name of upholding freedom from totalitarianism."[291] The state defined what it meant to be a good citizen so that it could protect democracy within the country. At this point in history, officials acutely worried about dissent from and contradictions to the American way of life. "Homogeneity and consensus, no matter how compulsory," were the way to protect the American way of life.[292] Kerouac attempted to preserve Emerson's concept of individuality and self-reliance in the midst of this environment. Yet, on a personal level, Kerouac's Catholic upbringing and the life of the artist led him to profound loneliness as opposed to the celebrated individuality that he tried to instill in others.[293]

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[290] This list reflects the order in which the novels were written, as opposed to the order of their publication.
[291] Penny Vlagopoulos, "Rewriting America: Kerouac's Nation of 'Underground Monsters,'" in Jack Kerouac, *On the Road: The Original Scroll* (New York: Viking, 2007), 55.
[292] Ibid., 55.
[293] Ibid., 58.

Jack Kerouac was born in Lowell, Massachusetts in 1922. His parents, Leo and Gabrielle Kerouac, were French-Canadian immigrants. He had an older brother, Gerard, and an older sister. Kerouac received a scholarship to Columbia University and planned on playing football, but an injury eventually led him to drop out. While at Columbia, he met Allen Ginsberg, Lucien Carr, and William Burroughs. He served in the U.S. Navy and Merchant Marine during World War II. Like Ernest Hemingway, Kerouac is most known for the style of prose he invented. Kerouac's prose is called "spontaneous prose," and it revolutionized American letters, making way for the journalistic writing that became popular in the late 1960s and early 1970s. He published a lesser novel, *The Town and the City*, in 1950, but did not reach acclaim until *On the Road* was published in 1957. He was unable to withstand the pressures of fame and turned to alcohol, which eventually killed him in 1969.[294]

The death of Kerouac's brother, at the age of nine, played a major role in Jack's life and writing. From the age of four, Kerouac had a real-life example of the frailty of existence. Kerouac sought to live and write in honor of Gerard's goodness, though he never quite lived up to the example. All of Kerouac's writing is a study of life and how to truly get the most out of it.[295] In sharing his experiences, he wanted to "glorify life and offer comfort and sustenance to readers despite the antagonisms, hostilities, defilements, contentions, and sorrows weathered on the road and in town and city."[296]

Kerouac's writing reacted to the Great Depression, World War II and the immediate postwar world, shifting social and sexual mores, and McCarthyism. His

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[294] Timeline by Ann Charters in Kerouac, *Selected Letters, 1940-1956*, xxv-xxvi.
[295] Benedict Giamo, *Kerouac, The Word and the Way: Prose Artist as Spiritual Quester* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), xiii.
[296] Ibid., xvi.

experience in Lowell allowed him to comment on the Great Depression because the town experienced its effects in devastating ways, like those living in the Dust Bowl areas. Lowell was in an economic decline long before the Depression because anti-union sentiment amongst owners caused many mills to relocate to the South. Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal did not alleviate the unemployment in Lowell; only World War II helped its residents. The men remaining in Lowell either joined the armed forces or performed war-work in factories. After the war, not all of them returned. Many "took to wandering" like hoboes, but "at least as often they were drawn to the large metropolitan areas of the East Coast."[297] Some men used the postwar world to avoid domestic conformity, while others perpetuated it by quickly establishing families and neighborhoods of other young people.[298]

The postwar world saw a change in acceptable social and sexual behavior—"some women became more economically enfranchised; more men and women explored extramarital heterosexual congress; some explored homosocial cultures countenancing homosexuality and/or homophobically persecuting it."[299] This was the result of men and women joining the armed forces and the workforce for the duration of the war. Like the early 1900s saw a rise in heterosocial gatherings, the 1940s saw a rise in homosocial gatherings. Women, experiencing a newfound freedom of being asked to join the workforce, became bolder in asserting and accepting their sexuality. After the war, those

[297] R. J. Ellis, *'Liar! Liar!': Jack Kerouac—Novelist* (London: Greenwich Exchange, 1999), 33.
[298] Ibid., 30-33.
[299] Ibid., 34-35.

who did not revert to their prewar roles, were "left . . . adrift in this repressive climate, compelled to congregate where 'deviant' behavior survived, in larger cities."[300]

This played into the environment of McCarthyism. The witch hunts initially focused on communists, but soon McCarthy included homosexuals in his quest to purify the country because he viewed both as threats to national security. By placing both homosexuals and communists in the same category, McCarthy "discredit[ed] both institutions by the strategy of tainting both by mutual association in a classic process of cultural condensation."[301] This was the environment that led to the demand for cultural conformity to avoid persecution.

Kerouac wanted more than anything to be a writer, mostly because he wanted people to listen to him and take what he had to say seriously. He relied on observational methods, feeling that his formal education at Columbia led to only one truth: "that formal education is not near enough an approach to Minerva."[302] He developed a habit early in his life of carrying around notebooks and writing his observations in them. He called this "sketching."[303] This eventually developed into his method of spontaneous prose, which he described as a "new narrative, unplanned, ored up from the bottom of the mind, orgasmically rushing from the center out."[304] His style of collecting material and thinking about the world eventually paid off because he "so aptly capture[d] the music of his movement, the attitudes and aspirations of his time" that he became the voice of the

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[300] Ibid., 35.
[301] Ibid., 36.
[302] Kerouac to Bill Ryan, January 10, 1943 in Kerouac, *Selected Letters, 1940-1956,* 36.
[303] Halberstam, *The Fifties*, 299.
[304] Kerouac to Robert Giroux, late summer 1954 in Kerouac, *Selected Letters, 1940-1956,* 445.

Beats.[305] The use of spontaneous prose and the first-person narrator in many of his novels, but most notably *On the Road* realistically renders the "swells of excitement and the drain of despair."[306] About half of his novels were written with his spontaneous prose style, which is "best characterized by its stream of consciousness that joined with the torrential flow of experience."[307]

According to Jack Kerouac, he and John Clellon Holmes "were sitting around trying to think up the meaning of the Lost Generation and the subsequent Existentialism and [Kerouac] said, 'You know, this is really a Beat Generation,' and [Holmes] leapt up and said, 'That's it, that's right!'"[308] The term "Beat Generation" has evolved in meaning from its initial adoption in the postwar 1940s to the end of the 1960s, when the movement ended. Throughout the era, the term meant different things to different people. Allen Ginsberg, poet laureate of the Beat Generation, tried to give the phrase a positive spin by adding "wide-eyed, perceptive" to the definition, thus suggesting a "private, mystic insight."[309] This counters the opinion that the Beats were like burnt out hippies. Kerouac later defined the term as "'a swing group of new American men' in the late 1940s that were 'intent on joy' because they had survived World War II and possessed 'wild selfbelieving individuality.'"[310] He thought that the Beat moment ended before it really took off. Until 1957, when Viking finally published Kerouac's *On the Road*, the term "Beats" was strictly limited to a small coterie of writers, poets, and their

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[305] Arthur and Kit Knight, eds., *Kerouac and the Beats: A Primary Sourcebook* (New York, Paragon House, 1988), ix.
[306] Giamo, *Kerouac, The Word and the Way*, 21.
[307] Ibid., xiv.
[308] Ann Charters, ed., *Beat Down To Your Soul: What Was the Beat Generation?* (New York: Penguin, 2001), xv.
[309] Ibid., xxii.
[310] Ibid., xv.

friends. After the publication of *On the Road* and in the aftermath of the obscenity trial over Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* (1957), it became a "bohemian literary movement."[311]

In 1948, Kerouac began writing an account of his 1947 travels with Neal Cassady using a narrator called Ray Smith. In 1949, Kerouac was again traveling and keeping a detailed journal of the adventures he had shared with his close friend, Neal Cassady. That March, he began a second version of the novel that would become *On the Road*, this time with a narrator called Red Moultrie. Despite having worked on the novel for a few years, Kerouac still was not pleased with its tone. He thought he was not "capturing the true spirit of Neal's rapid-paced frenzied personality."[312] His problem was solved when he received the "Joan Anderson Letter," a seventeen page missive describing in minute detail a relationship Cassady had had with a woman named Joan. Cassady wrote it "just as if he were speaking to Jack face to face" and it was "effective in capturing the unfettered nature of Neal's life."[313]

The "Joan Anderson letter" can be credited with giving Kerouac the impetus to finish his novel. The letter elicited a strong reaction in him because he knew the letter

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[311] Ibid., xix.

[312] Bill Morgan, *The Typewriter is Holy: The Complete, Uncensored History of the Beat Generation* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 55.

[313] Ibid., 55. In a later interview, Kerouac told his version of the Joan Anderson Letter story: "I got the idea for the spontaneous style of *On the Road* from seeing how good old Neal Cassady wrote his letters to me, all first person, fast, mad, confessional, completely serious, all detailed, with real names in his case however….It's a cruel lie for those West Coast punks to say that I got the idea of *On the Road* from him. All his letters to me were about his younger days before I met him….The letter, the main letter I mean, was 40,000 words long…Neal and I called it for convenience the Joan Anderson Letter." Jack Kerouac, interviewed by Ted Berrigan, n.d., in George Plimpton, ed., *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews, fourth series* (New York: The Viking Press, 1974), 365.

opened up a new possibility of writing.[314] While living with his second wife, Joan Haverty, in the spring of 1951, Kerouac wrote what became the published version of the novel as a way of answering his wife's questions about his travels with Cassady.[315] Kerouac wrote the novel in a matter of weeks on taped-together sheets of onion paper and fed them through his typewriter.[316] This was so he did not have to stop and reload the paper, which would have interrupted his "spontaneous composition."[317]

The novel was supposed to tell the story of his friendship with Cassady and the adventures they had traveling across the country. Even while still working on the novel, Kerouac knew that he was doing something radically different that might not be immediately popular with the literary establishment—"Book marks [a] complete departure from *Town and City* and in fact from previous American Lit. I don't know how

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[314] "You gather together all the best styles . . . of Joyce, Céline, Dosty [Dostoevsky] & Proust . . . and utilize them in the muscular rush of your own narrative style & excitement . . . You and I will be the two most important writers in America in 20 years at the least. Think that. That's why I see no harm in addressing my next ten novels & possible lifework to you and you alone . . . Don't undervalue your poolhall musings, your excruciating details about streets, appointment times, hotel rooms, bar locations, window measurements, smells, heights of trees." Kerouac to Neal Cassady, December 27, 1950, in Kerouac, *Selected Letters, 1940-1956*, 242-243.

[315] Kurt Hemmer, ed., *Encyclopedia of Beat Literature* (New York: Facts On File, 2007), 176. "Story deals with you and me and the road . . . how we first met 1947, early days; Denver 47 etc.; 1940 trip in Hudson; that summer in queer Plymouth and 110-mile-an-hour Caddy and Chi and Detroit; and final trip to Mexcity with Jeffries—last part dealing with your last trip to N.Y. and how I saw you cuttin around corner of 7th Ave. last time . . . Plot, if any, is devoted to your development from young jailkid of early days to later (present) W.C. Fields saintliness." Kerouac to Neal Cassady, May 22, 1951, in Kerouac, *Selected Letters, 1940-1956*, 315.

[316] "I tell you another, I wrote that book on COFFEE . . . remember said rule. Benny, tea, anything I KNOW none as good as coffee for real mental power kicks . . . . Remember! COFFEE (try it, please)." Kerouac to Neal Cassady, June 10, 1951, in Kerouac, *Selected Letters, 1940-1956*, 318-319.

[317] Hemmer, *Encyclopedia of Beat Literature*, 176.

it will be received."[318] The novel was very different from anything that had come before it, but at the same time, the novel did what all revolutionary novels do for the generations that first receive them—it created a new vocabulary that allowed readers "to reimagine their daily lives," so that they were the "lucky participant[s] receiving privileged information."[319]

Upon finishing the manuscript, Kerouac realized that he might have a difficulty in getting the book published, but he felt confident that the book would eventually be well received. "*On the Road* is a very great book, but I may have to end up daring publishers to publish it . . . but he who publishes it will make money."[320] Allen Ginsberg, who had been acting as Kerouac's agent for some time, was one of the first people to read the manuscript. Ginsberg did not "see how it [would] ever be published, it's so personal, it's so full of sex language, so full of [their] local mythological references" that he did not think it was yet worth sending to a publisher.[321] He advised Kerouac to keep working on it. Kerouac lost his temper. [322] As usual, Ginsberg forgave his friend's blow up and reassured him that Kerouac had talent.

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[318] Kerouac to Neal Cassady, May 22, 1951, in Kerouac, *Selected Letters, 1940-1956*, 315.
[319] Vlagopoulos, "Rewriting America," 63.
[320] Kerouac to Allen Ginsberg, May 10, 1952, in Kerouac, *Selected Letters, 1940-1956*, 353.
[321] Ginsberg to Kerouac, June 12, 1952, in Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, *The Letters*, ed. Bill Morgan and David Stanford (New York, Viking, 2010), 176.
[322] "Can you tell me even for instance…with all this talk about pocket book styles and the new trend in writing about drugs and sex why my *On the Road* written in 1951 wasn't ever published?—why they publish Holmes's book which stinks and don't publish mine because it's not as good as some of the other things I've done? Is this the fate of an idiot who can't handle his own business or [is] it the general fartsmell of New York in general. . . Do you think I don't realize how jealous you are and how you and Holmes and Solomon all would give your right arm to be able to write like the writing in *On the Road*…And leaving me no alternative but to write stupid letters like this when if instead

Jack Kerouac's second novel, *On the Road*, sat in the offices of Viking Press for three long years.[323] Finally, in 1957, the "hesitant" publishers thought the "climate was right" to give Jack a contract.[324] The process of publishing Kerouac's novel began in 1955. Malcolm Cowley, a cohort of the Lost Generation, became one of Jack's editors. Cowley's main concern about the novel was that Jack had not done enough in changing the names of the characters and their physical characteristics to avoid a libel suit, if the real-life counterpart felt that Kerouac's representation held them up to shame or ridicule. Kerouac eventually had to get releases from Neal Cassady (the inspiration for Dean Moriarty) and Allen Ginsberg (Carlo Marx).[325]

The road trip novel begins with Sal Paradise planning his first trip across the country. Sal plans to follow Route 6, which runs from Cape Cod to Los Angeles. Yet he is forced to revise his plans, not as the result of any malicious acts by man, but by the vagaries of life. This begins a pattern of plans made and then dashed by life that runs the course of the novel. Throughout the narrative of *On the Road*, the character experiences a series of highs and lows, which "generates rich insights into self and other, society in general, the stuff of human nature, and nature itself—its movement from high to low

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you were men I could at least get the satisfaction of belting you all on the kisser—too many glasses to take off . . . . You're all a bunch of insignificant literary egos . . . you can't even leave New York you're so stultified." Kerouac to Ginsberg, August 5, 1952, in Kerouac, *Selected Letters, 1940-1956*, 377-379.

[323] Kerouac published a conventional novel called *The Town and the City* in 1950. It went largely unnoticed and differs drastically from the rest of his work.

[324] Jack Kerouac and Joyce Johnson, *Door Wide Open: A Beat Love Affair in Letters, 1957-1958* (New York, Viking, 2000), xiv.

[325] "Just got a cheering letter from Malcolm Cowley today, containing two libel-clearing statement-forms, for me to have signed by the two heroes of ON THE ROAD (which the lawyer prepared) so it looks like things are coming along and of course there is no doubt about my two old buddies signing this thing." Kerouac to Sterling Lord, November 10, 1955, in Kerouac, *Selected Letters, 1940-1956*, 529-530.

energy states and back again."[326] Dean Moriarty, his mentor, often serves as a reason for these highs and lows.

Dean Moriarty represents the restlessness of possibility, the road that leads everywhere. The road and Dean are very focused on the present. Sal, the narrator, catches this attitude and he seeks to find the "lost bliss of boyhood."[327] While going along on the adventures, Sal realizes the limited scope of Dean's desires—Dean will perpetually "crisscross . . . the continent, driven by the mad rush of blind passion and momentary whim of desire."[328] The celebrated freedom of the road and time spent with Dean leads Sal to sorrow and mortality.

At its heart, some critics believed that the novel was "a muted reflective elegy hedged from beginning to end by Sal's confused estimation of Dean, who even at the novel's end remains a problem for Sal as a psychological impasse, a fabulous reminder of how warped the American male identity can become when it fails to grow up."[329] At the end of the novel, Sal finally rejects the best friend he ever had for Remi and a limo ride. Sal finally matures and is saved by the very commercialism he rejected throughout the novel. Rather than merely being a travelogue, Kerouac made his cross-country journeys into one of the ultimate meditations on coming of age. The end of the novel presents a choice to the discerning reader—"either like Dean we embody innocence without

[326] Giamo, *Kerouac, The Word and the Way*, 20.
[327] Ibid., 22.
[328] Ibid., 23.
[329] J.T. Barbarese, "Fifty Years of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*," *The Sewanee Review* 112 (Fall 2004), 592.

knowing it, or we cease to be children, enter the wage-stream and full political consciousness and . . . leave our bags at the door."[330]

The basic plotline of the novel, people leaving their pasts and striking out on their own, was not new in American literature, but, according to some critics, "Kerouac's genius was in writing a story in which the stated search for Dean Moriarty's father was not actually the true goal."[331] The narrator discovers that "everyone he encountered along the way was a reflection of God."[332] The novel resonated with millions of people who yearned to be on the road with Sal and Dean and "discover their own place in the universe."[333]

Other scholars view *On the Road* as an early expression of the rejection of a traditional home life by men as they began to stay single longer or decided to leave their families and lead hedonistic lives. The most marked representation of this lifestyle, which contrasts with the Beat ideology, is that of the playboy. Hugh Heffner's publication, *Playboy*, encouraged men to live self-centered, swank bachelor lives. The Beats encouraged men to live a nomadic lifestyle. Because both promoted singleness, there was a grudging unity. Yet, there were differences. The Beats had sex for free or relatively little cost. The Beats found women and paired up with them. The playboys forked over large sums of money to bed women. The Beats were mobile while the playboys were grounded. Both promoted a disruption in the traditional life, but neither

[330] Ibid., 593.
[331] Morgan, *The Typewriter is Holy*, 134.
[332] Ibid., 134.
[333] Ibid., 134.

gained enough force to shake and destroy the foundations of the family.[334] However, even Kerouac's idealized home life, though atypical, is more bohemian than radical: "The happiest days of my life, I can tell you, were spent living . . . at Columbia when all the kids were around, including Lucien. You'd wake up in the morning and find the house full of people talking or reading books, and you'd go to bed at night with most of them still there and getting ready to curl up on couches and pillows on the floor."[335]

Throughout his novel, Kerouac used mobility "to express resistance to established norms in the culture, such as rootedness, family values, and the 'American Dream.'"[336] The very act of roaming constantly across the country represented a rebellion against authority and cultural norms. Ultimately, this theme fits into the pioneer image of the mobile American West.[337]

Another important aspect of the theme of mobility is that Sal always has his aunt to return home to, just as the Beats themselves always had a home base to which they could return when weary of the road. Naturally, there was the desire to experiment. Yet there was the more important, overriding desire to have some semblance of stability.[338] Like the Lost Generation of the 1920s, the Beat Generation focused on the word "transition," as their world was also in a constant state of flux.[339] This generation had faced the Depression, World War II, the advent of the nuclear age, the lowering of the

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[334] Linda McDowell, "Off the Road: Alternative Views of Rebellion, Resistance and 'The Beats,'" *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 21 (1996): 412.
[335] Kerouac to Caroline Kerouac Blake, March 14, 1945, in Kerouac, *Selected Letters, 1940-1956*, 88.
[336] Tim Cresswell, "Mobility as Resistance: A Geographical Reading of Kerouac's 'On the Road,'" *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 18 (1993): 249.
[337] Ibid., 249.
[338] Ibid., 249.
[339] Ibid., 254.

Iron Curtain, the rise of electronic mass media, and a loss of faith in God and family. The audience of the Beat generation also faced the red-baiting of the early 1950s. The established culture was simply not appealing to young people who wanted a break from the harsh realities they blamed their parents for causing.[340]

The popularity of the car as a symbol of freedom and mobility rose concurrently with the popularity of the road novel. The car was still a status symbol in the 1950s. While the average family owned a car, not every teenager and young adult did. Therefore, the act of stealing a car was far more heroically seen than it is today because a car was still a rare commodity for youth. What the characters in *On the Road* did to the cars they drove (many were wrecked or abandoned) was rather shocking. The characters in *On the Road* exhibited disillusionment with places and a fascination with "just going."[341]

By the time the characters reach one town, they are ready to move to another or, often, back to the place they just left. Upon arriving in Los Angeles, the narrator says, "I love the way everybody says 'LA' on the coast; it's their one and only golden town where all is said and done."[342] Four pages later, he says, "I never felt sadder in my life. LA is the loneliest and most brutal of American cities: New York gets god-awful cold in the winter but there's a feeling of wacky comradeship somewhere in some streets. LA is a jungle."[343] Sal proves to be happy just moving about from place to place.[344] For him, it

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[340] Ibid., 254.
[341] Ibid., 255.
[342] Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (1957, repr., New York: Penguin, 2003), 82.
[343] Ibid., 86.
[344] "It was drizzling and mysterious at the beginning of our journey. I could see what it was all going to be one big saga of the mist. 'Whooee!' yelled Dean. 'Here we go'. And he hunched over the wheel and gunned her; he was back in his element, everybody could

is about the journey, not the destination.[345] Mobility equates to purposelessness and a road to poverty, as none of the characters can hold down a job. Stability equaled social climbing, the ultimate sin of pretension.[346]

Kerouac constantly encourages the reader to reflect by hinting at Sal's own reflections. An example of this is Sal's dream about the Shrouded Traveler:

> Something, someone, some spirit was pursuing all of us across the desert of life and was bound to catch us before we reached heaven. Naturally, now that I look back on it, this is only death: death will overtake us before heaven. The one thing that we yearn for in all our living days, that makes us sigh and groan and undergo sweet nauseas of all kinds, is the remembrance of some lost bliss that was probably experienced in the womb and can only be reproduced (though we hate to admit it) in death. But who wants to die? In the rush of events I kept thinking about this in the back of my mind. I told it to Dean and he instantly recognized it as the mere simple longing for pure death; and because we're all of us never in life again, he, rightly, would have nothing to do with it, and I agreed with him then.[347]

Kerouac seems to hint that Sal comes back to these thoughts with the "then" and that he comes to a different conclusion. By the third trip that Sal takes, the reader discovers that he is traveling to find experience and meaning as opposed to wandering aimlessly or merely following Dean. While Dean keeps moving to avoid time and escape mortality, Sal's perpetually thwarted plans make him more conscious of time and mortality.

The Shrouded Traveler allows Kerouac (through Sal's narration) to ruminate about life and thus transcend the drudgery of pleasure and sorrow. With the Shrouded Traveler, Kerouac can argue that all life is suffering, which is "where the road begins and

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see that. We were all delighted, we all realized that we were leaving confusion and nonsense behind and performing our one and noble function of the time, *move*. And we moved." Ibid., 134.

[345] "All alone in the night I had my own thoughts and held the car to the white line in the holy road. What was I doing? Where was I going? I'd soon find out." Ibid., 138-139.

[346] Cresswell, 254-255.

[347] Kerouac, *On the Road*, 124.

ends, and the various detours around such a condition and first principle can only result in a peace that is hollow and restless."[348] Dean exemplifies this hollow and restless peace. By the end of the novel, Sal seems to be happily settling down. Dean, the persistent traveler, appears one more time and is utterly deranged. Ultimately, Kerouac "challenges hedonism, not on the basis of morality, but simply in terms of the nature of things as they are."[349]

Time is another important theme in the novel. Kerouac attacks the corruption of time by capitalism. Just as the characters do not like being bound by a single place, they also do not like the idea of being bound by time. As a result, few of the characters work or last long at the jobs they manage to get. When they do have jobs, they do not show up and perform reliably. Rather, they come in late, leave early, and do not pay much attention. That never matters much because they are rarely in the same place for long anyway. Throughout the novel, Sal rarely mentions a specific date or time. He occasionally refers to months or seasons because they are broad and less restrictive.[350]

In an attempt to critique the treatment of time in the United States, Kerouac makes numerous references to the "less constricting temporal order of Mexico."[351] In Mexico, the characters certainly have no job and no schedule. It is the opposite of the more oppressive United States. The characters value beauty more than time in Mexico, as evidenced by Dean trading his wristwatch for "'the sweetest and purest and smallest

[348] Giamo, *Kerouac, The Word and the Way,* 41.
[349] Ibid., 43.
[350] Erik R. Mortenson, "Beating Time: Configurations of Temporality in Jack Kerouac's 'On the Road,'" *College Literature* 28 (Fall 2001): 52-53.
[351] Ibid., 61.

crystal she [a little Mexican girl] has personally picked from the mountain for [him].'"[352] The dismissal of time by the Mexicans carries over to the affair Sal has in California with a Mexican woman. To every concern Sal raises, she says, "Manana . . . . Everything'll be all right tomorrow." Sal thought manana was "a lovely word and one that probably means heaven."[353]

At the same time that Kerouac expresses distaste for the "American dream," *On the Road* is a truly American book with the word "America" or "American" appearing on almost every page. He believed his roadtrips were the beginning of a study

> of the face of America itself . . . and before long not a river or mountain peak or bay or town or city will escape my attention. Now what does all this mean? I know some people who would regard it as a kind of recidivous childishness. And yet I know some people who would regard it as a step ahead. Because, after all, what is the ruling thought in the American temperament if it isn't a purposeful energetic search after useful knowledge. The 'livelihood of man' in America instead of the vague and prosy 'brotherhood of man' of Europe. My subject as a writer is of course America, and simple, I must know everything about it . . . Well, my purpose is Balzacian in scope—to conquer knowledge of the U.S.A. (the center of the world for me just as Paris was the center of the world for Balzac)—my purpose is to know it as I know the palm of my hand . . . It's the difference between a culture of turmoil, resentment, and inter-human struggle, and a culture of livelihood, purpose, land, and natural struggle.[354]

While resistant to the twentieth-century definition of America, Kerouac seems to hearken back to a previous age in which the rugged, independent individual symbolized all that was great about the country. In a strange way, the hobo, the vagrant, became the modern cowboy because he was not tied to any single place or person. Just as his character searches for himself, Kerouac searched for a reconstructed America that fit his hopes for

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[352] Kerouac, *On the Road*, 298.
[353] Ibid., 94.
[354] Kerouac to Hal Chase, April 19, 1947 (unmailed), in Kerouac, *Selected Letters, 1940-1956*, 107-108.

life. Like Mark Twain, Kerouac longed for a time long past and a way of life that no longer existed.[355]

One reviewer who saw the merit of *On the Road* as a counter-culture novel said of the main characters:

> Sexually promiscuous, drink-and-drug ridden, thieving, lying, betraying, they belong to volatility, to movement, to sensation. They spend themselves gladly and savagely; their joys are hysterical and obsessive, their sorrows sentimental or incoherent. They are the shaped, not the shapers; something has been 'done' to them, and what has been done justifies what they now do. They disclaim all responsibility for the world; yet if they are, so to speak, 'out of society,' they cannot be thought of, nor can they think of themselves seriously, in any other context than in the cities of mid-twentieth century America—in its 'jazz joints,' cheap hotels, bars, and road houses.[356]

Regardless of how accurate this description of the characters and the people on whom they were based, it was Gilbert Millstein's review in the *New York Times*, which named *On the Road* its generation's *The Sun Also Rises* and compared Kerouac to Ernest Hemingway, thus ensuring the novel a place in history.[357]

Millstein accurately understood the individualism of the novel and the environment into which Kerouac and his cohort were born: "The 'Beat Generation' was born disillusioned; it takes for granted the imminence of war, the barrenness of politics and the hostility of the rest of society. It is not even impressed by (although it never pretends to scorn) material well-being (as distinguished from materialism). It does not know what refuge it is seeking, but it is seeking."[358] A few days after this positive review, David Dempsey published a negative review in the *New York Times*. His review

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[355] Cresswell, 259.
[356] Gene Baro, "Restless Rebels in Search of—What?" *New York Herald Tribune Book Review*, September 15, 1957.
[357] Gilbert Millstein, "Books of the Times," *New York Times*, September 5, 1957.
[358] Ibid.

said that unlike the Lost Generation, which contented itself with being lost, this new generation feels that "to remain uncommitted, one must at least flirt with depravity."[359] Dempsey enjoyed reading the book as an oddity, but thought that "it is a road, as far as the characters are concerned, that leads nowhere."[360]

Some early readers of the novel did not quite understand the meaning of the youthful tone of the novel, which depicts the narrator's enthusiasm toward life, and this turned them off. The rave review in the *New York Times* robbed Kerouac of his privacy and his postfame novels tend to "emphasize the high price of 'making it' in America."[361] Critics "deplored the delirious manners and reckless mores of headstrong characters who seemed able to sacrifice conventional bonds and obligations for the sake of excitement;" it was "hedonistic, nihilistic, and blatantly onanistic."[362]

With the publication of the novel, the Beat Generation entered popular culture. Many people of the older generation did not understand what was wrong with the Beat Generation. The writers came to its defense: "Perhaps all generations feel that they have inherited 'the worst of all possible worlds,' but the Beat Generation probably has more claim to the feeling than any that have come before it."[363] This generation lived through the Great Depression, witnessed the horrors of World War II either by serving in it or knowing those who did, and saw the rise of the military industrial complex. John Clellon Holmes charged that the older generation least understood Kerouac's assertion that "they were on a quest, and that the specific objects of their quest was spiritual . . . . [T]heir real

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[359] David Dempsey, "In Pursuit of 'Kicks,'" *New York Times*, September 8, 1957.
[360] Ibid.
[361] Hemmer, *The Encyclopedia of Beat Literature*, 177-178.
[362] Knight, *Kerouac and the Beats*, ix-x.
[363] John Clellon Holmes, "The Philosophy of the Beat Generation," *Esquire* (February 1958), 36.

journey was inward; and if they seemed to trespass most boundaries, legal and moral, it was only in the hope of finding a belief on the other side."[364]

Visions of Cody is "an experimental recasting of" *On the Road*.[365] Kerouac initially referred to this book as "Visions of Neal," because he again focused on Neal Cassady and some even thought the two manuscripts were really different drafts of the same overall story.[366] In this book, Kerouac more fully explores his unique style of sketching and spontaneous prose. The book includes "150 pages of tape-recorded dialog of Neal talking to [Kerouac] high not-caring . . . then it has a 30 page stretch IMITATING the sound of the tape . . . and ends with tears."[367] Benedict Giamo, a Kerouac scholar, concludes that "spontaneous prose challenges an author to absorb the revelatory moment, the divine spark, writing freely and naturally and honestly and profusely, without literary affectation, and not only from the head, but from the heart and soul and through the body and blood, bones and bowels."[368]

The Subterraneans depicts "the overwhelming sense of disorientation" that afflicted Kerouac at this period in his life.[369] The novel tells the story of an interracial affair in which Kerouac took part. Kerouac modeled this novel after Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Notes From the Underground* (1864) by writing it in a full confessional

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[364] Ibid., 35.
[365] Giamo, *Kerouac, The Word and the Way*, xv.
[366] Kerouac to Philip Whalen, July 12, 1957, in Jack Kerouac, *Selected Letters, 1957-1969*, ed. Ann Charters (New York: Viking, 1999), 64.
[367] Kerouac to Elbert Lenrow, January 13, 1958, in Kerouac, *Selected Letters, 1957-1969*, 103.
[368] Giamo, *Kerouac, The Word and the Way*, 46.
[369] Ibid., 69.

style.[370] The novel also demonstrates his "Proustness" in that *The Subterraneans* is "an analysis of the affair with Mardou more than a narration."[371]

The confessional nature of this novel makes the use of spontaneous prose very appropriate. His style works with the "self-limitation, romance, beat behavior, and the attendant antagonisms, doubts, and conflicts" that drive the plot of the novel.[372] Ironically, Kerouac opens the novel with distance between himself and the subterraneans, appearing to show the reader that he "wants to disavow early on the role of spokesmen for the beats, let alone king or father"—efforts he redoubled after he was published and instantly gained fame.[373]

The crux of the novel's action deals with the cycle of grief and hope, which allows Kerouac to explore the Catholic cycle of sin, guilt, and redemption. At this point in his life, "he found himself lacking and longing for spiritual purification in the midst of certain human folly."[374] The spiritual struggle depicted stems from Kerouac being "a lapsed Catholic pre-Vatican II . . . with pagan impulses and a medieval load on his conscience, let loose amid the secular strife of the modernist era."[375] The first-person narrator, Leo Percepied, writes the novel, though his pain "won't be erased by the writing of this but heightened," however, in the end it "will be redeemed."[376]

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[370] Kerouac to John Clellon Holmes, April 13, 1958, in Kerouac, *Selected Letters, 1957-1969*, 120.
[371] Kerouac to Ann Charters, November 11, 1967, in Kerouac, *Selected Letters, 1957-1969*, 443.
[372] Giamo, *Kerouac, The Word and the Way*, 70.
[373] Ibid., 71.
[374] Ibid., 79.
[375] Ibid., 79.
[376] Jack Kerouac, *The Subterraneans* (New York: Grove, 1958), 18.

Throughout the novel, Kerouac vacillates between hedonism and asceticism, which "brought home to him . . . [the message] that sweetness and happiness were always vulnerable to fury and pain."[377] The bohemian subterraneans exemplified the "futility inherent in the human condition itself."[378] Kerouac portrayed "the temporal world as one promising suffering and tribulation," opting to have Leo resolve to "turn his hurt into a halo, forgiving all, and seeing events as part and parcel of a deflated divine comedy (or farce)."[379]

Kerouac's novel *Tristessa* was written while he lived in Mexico and depicts the "extreme marginality" both he (and the narrator as an extension of self) felt at this time.[380] In Mexico, Kerouac lived cut off from everything and he "could not have drifted further from the conventional notion of the good life."[381] The novel explores the concept of sorrow and suffering as necessary parts of life. Though he is describing life in Mexico, he realized that "the slums [he] described . . . and the people therein are not a whit different from Bombay or Calcutta or Delhi or Benares slums, smells of dead dogs, human shit, banana peels & mud," which gives a more universal feeling to his depiction.[382] Kerouac again blends concepts of Catholicism and Buddhism in the novel. He uses the First Noble Truth—life is sorrow—in conjunction with Catholic guilt looking for death as an escape from sorrow.

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[377] Giamo, *Kerouac, The Word and the Way*, 80.
[378] Ibid., 80.
[379] Ibid., 81.
[380] Ibid., 101.
[381] Ibid., 101.
[382] Kerouac to Philip Whalen, October 17, 1961, in Kerouac, *Selected Letters, 1957-1969*, 306.

Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* was written from November 26 to December 7, 1957 and represents Kerouac's shrine to Buddhism. This novel is "mostly about [Gary Snyder], [Kerouac's] freight hop from Frisco in Fall 1955 and meeting [Snyder] and the Gallery 6 poetry reading and [their] climb of Matterhorn with John Montgomery."[383] His characters willfully place themselves outside of ordinary life to "rucksack up and down, and to and fro as they make their pilgrimage through the wilderness of nature and culture."[384] Unlike his other narrators, Ray Smith is not a writer or an artist. He is a sort of religious poet, traveling to find some meaning from his life. He lives in a state of Buddhist readiness and "exhibits aspects of the Four Jnanas, or rapturous holy states: compassion, joy, peace, and equanimity."[385]

Kerouac uses this book to instruct others on the Buddhist quest, to pass on "some kind of vital knowledge that will equip others for the tough job of living."[386] He speaks of his quest early in the book, when Smith prays to have "enough time and enough sense and strength to be able to tell people what [he knows] . . . so they'd know what [he knows] and not despair so much."[387] While trying to instruct others, Smith is also trying to learn "how to cast off the evils of the world and the city and find [his] own pure soul."[388]

Smith's spiritual mentor in this novel, Japhy Ryder (based on Gary Snyder) contrasts sharply with Sal's mentor in *On the Road*. These stark differences speak to the distance Kerouac had traveled in his own spiritual journey. Ryder exhibits qualities that

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[383] Kerouac to Gary Snyder, April 3, 1957, in Kerouac, *Selected Letters, 1957-1969*, 24.
[384] Giamo, *Kerouac, The Word and the Way*, 132.
[385] Ibid., 134.
[386] Ibid., 136.
[387] Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums* (1958, repr., New York: Penguin, 2006), 25.
[388] Ibid., 118.

speak to Smith's current state, as well as "charting the course for where he has yet to go."[389] Ryder is a good role model: "intelligent, disciplined, rugged, and . . . a poet and Buddhist mountain man easy with solitude."[390] Throughout the novel, Ryder lives in two huts, which represent the "values of the simple contemplative life, expressing the clarity, efficiency, and order that are rooted in the aesthetic and spiritual ideals of traditional Asian belief."[391]

The Dharma Bums lays out a blueprint for the counterculture that was beginning to form. Japhy calls this the "rucksack revolution":

> See the whole thing is a world full of rucksack wanderers, Dharma Bums refusing to subscribe to the general demand that they consume production and therefore have to work for the privilege of consuming, all that crap they didn't really want anyway such as refrigerators, TV sets, cars, at least new fancy cars, certain hair oils and deodorants and general junk you finally always see a week later in the garbage anyway, all of them imprisoned in a system of work, produce, consume, work, produce, consume, I see a vision of a great rucksack revolution thousands or even millions of young Americans wandering around with rucksacks, going up to mountains to pray, making children laugh and old men glad, making young girls happy and older girls happier, all of em' Zen Lunatics who go about writing poems that happen to appear in their heads for no reason and also by giving kind and also by strange unexpected acts keep giving visions of eternal freedom to everybody and to all living creatures.[392]

This so-called revolution speaks to the dissatisfaction many young people felt toward the materialism of the 1950s. By large segments of society turning its back on "the materialistic cycle," they might "drive a wedge into it" and plot a new course.[393] Materialism did not necessarily bring about a better life. In exchange for "stimulating consumer culture," Americans have "sacrificed not only our pocketbooks and our simple

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[389] Giamo, *Kerouac, The Word and the Way*, 137.
[390] Ibid., 137.
[391] Ibid., 137.
[392] Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*, 73-74.
[393] Giamo, *Kerouac, The Word and the Way*, 137.

definition of *necessity*, not only our neighborhoods and downtowns, not only our natural environment, but our pursuit of happiness as well."[394]

About halfway through the novel, the sorrow of the inevitability of death overtakes Ray. Almost immediately, "the Tree of Buddha as well as the Cross of Jesus," again depicting the spiritual struggle the Kerouac experienced, comforts Ray[395] The two images work together, because both the New Testament of the Bible and the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism deal with "confronting or justifying or surmounting everyday human suffering."[396] Much like Kerouac, Ray acknowledges the validity of the truth and beauty of all religions and does not really discriminate. Though Ray ultimately achieves "an *aesthetic* and *idealized* form of enlightenment," he must go back down the mountain eventually. The reader is left to speculate whether he (and Kerouac) was able to maintain their serenity once they rejoined society.

Kerouac's last novel, *Big Sur* (1962), is not really part of the Road Novels, but it serves as a kind of epilogue to his work. Kerouac believed that by the time *Big Sur* was published, the beat movement had played itself out in the media—"They're all sick and tired of this beatnik business and it's their own fault since they started it and pumped it up themselves."[397] Kerouac thought that this book, which he wrote on the same roll of

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[394] Ibid., 137.
[395] Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*, 104.
[396] Giamo, *Kerouac, The Word and the Way*, 141. The Four Noble Truths are "life is difficult[;] life is difficult because we crave satisfaction in ways that are inherently dissatisfying[;] the possibility of liberation from difficulties exists for everyone[;] and the way to realize this liberation and enlightenment is by leading a compassionate life of virtue, wisdom, and meditation." Lama Surya Das, *Awakening the Buddha Within: Eight Steps to Enlightenment, Tibetan Wisdom for the Western World* (New York: Broadway Books, 1998), 77.
[397] Kerouac to John Clellon Holmes, June 8, 1962, in Kerouac, *Selected Letters, 1957-1969*, 341.

teletype paper that he wrote *The Dharma Bums*, "was written with more excitement than Dharma Bums, is probably a better 'novel,' doesn't preach, sometimes run breathless like On the Road, surpasses Tristessa for sad misery, has flashes of the greatest prose of Visions of Cody and [Dr.] Sax [(1959)]."[398] Though he wrote the bulk of the novel in ten days, his efforts were the result of "a year of meditating and meditating and even practising long thrownaway excerpts on the story."[399]

Big Sur tells the story of Duluoz's undoing, which is the story of Kerouac's own mental breakdown. A fear of death and the shortness of life overwhelm Duluoz. At that point, nothing—not religion (Catholic or Buddhist), not writing, not solitude, not sybaritism—can sustain him in that moment of sheer terror.[400] Ultimately, Duluoz sees the image of the cross, which signifies Kerouac's return to Catholicism. A reviewer for the *New York Times* saw the vision of Kerouac's earlier novels—they "are arguments for a good way to live, or at least a better way . . . [that is] sensual, uninhibited, and irresponsible"—and recognizes that *Big Sur* preaches "life at its best is dedicated, 'religious' and even beatific."[401] Though "fragments of the old vision remain," this book argues that "things are . . . not as Zen as they used to be, and this is all to the good."[402] Kerouac separates himself from the Beat movement by suggesting an even better way to live.[403]

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[398] Kerouac to Lord, October 9, 1961, in Kerouac, *Selected Letters, 1957-1969*, 300-301.
[399] Ibid., 301.
[400] Giamo, *Kerouac, The Word and the Way,* xiii.
[401] William Wiegand, "A Turn in the Road for the King of the Beats," *New York Times*, September 16, 1962.
[402] Ibid.
[403] Ibid.

The Beat Generation literature fits into the subversive tradition in American literature. It is subversive because the writers seem to threaten the very culture they came from—in this case, the middle class. Conversely, the enemy of the subversive writers is organized society. Regardless of how the Beat writers attempted to cut themselves off from society, they were still a part of it. Though the Beats may have gone further at distancing themselves from society than any other subversive writers before, they were too connected to the city, the symbol of society, to be truly separate.[404]

The publication of *On the Road* led to a sharp increase in interest in the Beat Generation. However, the press ignored Kerouac's claims that the Beat period had ended in the late 1940s. To him, the novel documented the last years of the Beat movement, but to the press, the publication marked its beginning.

Despite the popularity of the style, scholarly and mainstream criticism of the Beats writers suggests intolerance toward their mission. Part of this is a holdover from the McCarthy days combined with the belief that "Bohemianism was no longer possible" after the 1920s.[405] The criticism of the Beats continues into the twenty-first century. Anthony Daniels, in John Leland's *Why Kerouac Matters: The Lessons of* On the Road *(They're Not What You Think)* (2007) says, "I have seen some of the most mediocre minds of my generation destroyed by too great an interest in the Beats," in parody of the opening line of Ginsberg's *Howl*, a free verse poem in the style of Walt Whitman that critiques the conformity of the postwar society as being ruinous to his generation's

[404] Robert A. Lee, *Modern American Counter Writing: Beats, Outriders, Ethnics* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 10.
[405] Charters, *Beat Down To Your Soul*, xxxvi.

creative freedom. [406] Roger Kimball claimed "They were drug-abusing sexual predators and infantilized narcissists whose shamelessness helped dupe a confused and gullible public into believing that their utterances were works of genius."[407] One essayist commented that the Beats have had good press if public interest is the measuring tool, yet they have had bad press if the determining factor is clarity.[408] The Beat Generation was the first to "be tirelessly promoted by its leading poet while also being exploited by commercial interests, hounded by the national press, and ridiculed on television and in the movies."[409] Ironically, media, through attacking the works of Kerouac and Ginsberg, helped ensure the popularity of the movement.

The term "Beat" began to describe more than a literary movement; it morphed into a lifestyle, which not all of the writers liked, called "Beatnik." The Beatniks developed a very bad reputation for vandalism and other acts of violence. This perversion of his intent hurt Kerouac very much and he sought to distinguish himself and his group of friends from the Beatniks. In his essay, "Beatific: On the Origins of a Generation," Kerouac expressed his hurt at being associated with the Beatniks and invoked the words of his beloved older brother—"Ti Jean never hurt any living being, all living beings whether it's just a little cat or squirrel or whatever, all, are going to heaven straight into God's snowy arms so never hurt anything and if you see anybody hurt anything stop them as best you can."[410] He closed with a denunciation of violence and ill-will against the Beat movement: "But yet, but yet, woe, woe unto those who think that

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[406] Morgan, *The Typewriter is Holy*, xiii.
[407] Ibid., xiii.
[408] John P. Sisk, "Beatniks and Tradition," in *The Social Radical in American Literature*, ed. Robert H. Woodward (New York: Odyssey Press, 1968), 94.
[409] Charters, *Beat Down To Your Soul*, xix.
[410] Jack Kerouac, "Beatific: On the Origins of a Generation," *Encounter* 13 (1959), 61.

the Beat Generation means crime, delinquency, immorality, amorality . . . woe unto those who attack it on the grounds that they simply don't understand history and the yearnings of human souls . . . woe unto those who don't realize that America must, will, is, changing now, for the better I say."[411]

By the end of the 1950s, many people thought that they belonged to the Beat Generation, even if they did not "go on the road with Kerouac or take off [their] clothes with Ginsberg or get stoned with Herbert Huncke [writer, poet, and sub-culture icon]."[412] Young Americans began quietly dissenting, partly in reaction to the Cold War and partly in reaction to the staid conformity of the country.[413] "By some miracle of metamorphosis," the youth of the mid-1950s picked up the gestures and the style of the Beat generation. Bop played on the radio, words like "go" and "crazy" entered the lexicon, drugs were fairly widely available, and "even the clothes style of the beat hipsters carried over to the new Rock'n'Roll youth via Montgomery Clift (leather jacket), Marlon Brando (T-shirt), and Elvis Presley (long sideburns)."[414] Though Kerouac and Ginsberg named New York City and the Bay Area of Northern California as the loci of the movement, an underground literary movement in rebellion against society existed in cities all across the country, as evidenced by privately printed small literary magazines.[415] Not every writer at these magazines identified with Kerouac and Ginsberg, but they were a part of the underground nonetheless and exhibit the widespread nature of the movement.

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[411] Ibid., 61.
[412] Charters, *Beat Down To Your Soul*, xvi.
[413] Ibid., xix.
[414] Ibid., xxx.
[415] Ibid., xxxii-xxxiii.

Thanks to a 1958 article in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the word "Beat" began calling to mind the coffee shop-dwelling, poetry-chanting figures often lampooned in the media. The beatniks further discredited the Beats as a literary movement. Immediately following in their wake came the newly-freed youth, who converged on Greenwich Village and Berkeley and made numerous ventures across the highways.[416] From these came the "drug-flower children" who participated in the culture of Haight-Ashbury culture, the Summer of Love in 1967, and Woodstock in 1969.[417] Some scholars claim that the Beats helped influence the Free Speech Movement, the sexual revolution, the Chicago Democratic Convention protests of 1968, and various anti-war, anti-violence protests.[418] They faded from the cultural forefront and disappeared altogether until a minor resurgence of Beat popularity in the early twenty-first century, coinciding with the fiftieth anniversaries of the publication of *Howl* (1956) and *On the Road* (1957).[419]

Not too long after Kerouac became established as the head of the Beat movement, he began to withdraw. He was the ultimate, unburdened traveler; yet, he had a hard time shedding his past. John Clellon Holmes once noted that Kerouac was "a very, very proper middle-class boy from a mill town in New England. He believed that life could break open somehow. He wanted it to break open, but he didn't have the guts to do it himself. He didn't have the way to do it himself."[420] As early as 1964, Kerouac began distancing himself from the rest of the Beat generation and the hippies. When Cassady attempted to arrange a meeting between Kerouac and Ken Kesey and the Merry

[416] Lee, *Modern American Counter Writing*, 10.
[417] Ibid., 10.
[418] Ibid., 10.
[419] Ibid., 10.
[420] Halberstam, *The Fifties*, 302.

Pranksters, Kerouac was "repulsed by the group whose counterculture his books inspired."[421]

After the publication of *On the Road*, Kerouac believed that everyone was thriving except for him, which "only contributed to Jack's bitter feelings toward the unfairness of the world in general and publishing in particular."[422] He had worked very hard for ten years to receive the recognition he thought he wanted for his work. It seemed that everyone he knew had ridden his coattails to success and were profiting in the form of easy publication of their manuscripts. This led Kerouac to drink. In less bitter moments, Jack thought that his fame had robbed him of his life, his privacy and he was never quite sure how to deal with that.[423] His deepest yearning was to be seen as a mainstream American man of letters like Melville, Whitman, Hemingway, and London.[424] Regardless of his personal feelings toward the rest of the Beat generation, Kerouac realized what his book had done for American letters and for future writers. He knew he was not supposed to have written like the Lost Generation, but to create a new literary form and "you wouldn't have a Ken Kesey [drug enthusiast who belonged with

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[421]Hemmer, *Encyclopedia of Beat Literature*, 179.
[422] Morgan, *The Typewriter is Holy*, 197.
[423] In a later interview, William S. Burroughs said, "One thing that happened to Jack was that he never understood that he had become *Jack Kerouac*, the Marlon Brando of literature, that he had become a personality, a notoriety. He felt that people were no longer talking to him, but to an image. He knew nothing about that, cared less, and beyond that it seriously bollixed his mind." Knight, *Jack Kerouac and the Beats*, 151.
[424] Regina Weinreich, "The Beat Generation is Now About Everything," in *A Concise Companion to Postwar America*, ed. Josephine S. Hendin (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2004), 77.

the Merry Pranksters] . . . without somebody breaking the ground and springing personal storytelling loose from 'fictional' devices."[425]

Kerouac's obituary shows that in the end society may have internalized more of Kerouac's message than he thought. The obituary acknowledged that *On the Road* "became a basic text for youth who found their country claustrophobic and oppressive. At the same time, it was a spontaneous and passionate celebration of the country itself."[426] The obituary also distinguished Kerouac from the other writers in his generation because "he had no use for the radical politics that came to preoccupy many of his friends and readers."[427]

The Beats have become more popular today than they have been in over fifty years. Coffeehouses are a favorite hangout of younger people. Bars promote "beatnik night," in which people come dressed in their version of a Beatnik and participate in open mic nights.[428] Most importantly, the Beats left behind a literary record, which is more than the hippies were able to do. Whether or not it was a revolution or merely a relaxing of attitudes is still a matter for debate that probably will not be solved for some years.[429]

Kerouac's reputation suffered during the 1970s. Allen Ginsberg could not tolerate this lack of appreciation, so he revitalized interest in Jack's writing in 1974 by opening the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado. In the years since his death, interest in Jack Kerouac has led to two

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[425] Kerouac to Tom Guinzburg, January 17, 1962, in Kerouac, *Selected Letters, 1957-1969*, 326.

[426] Joseph Lelyveld, "Jack Kerouac, Novelist, Dead; Father of the Beat Generation," *New York Times*, October 22, 1969.

[427] Ibid.

[428] Bruce Cook, *The Beat Generation* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 252.

[429] Ibid., 252.

bibliographies, two journals, literary studies, and numerous biographies. Most of his books remain in print. A few are either assigned reading on college campuses or are strongly recommended to freshmen by seniors. Many members of Generation X name *On the Road* as one of their favorite books.[430] His ultimate legacy is not the exaggerated stories about his life as recording in his books, but his "development of . . . literary inventions, which helped transform American writing to meet the emerging postmodern era."[431]

Kerouac's primary quarrel with American culture in the postwar years was that he thought middle-class life was "dull, anxious, and pointless."[432] His remedy was that life should be "more alive, more spontaneous . . . [it] should break through its cautious negations and its purse-mouthed string saving to caper in the present—the great shouting intensities of direct experience and heightened sensation."[433] And, that is what Kerouac did in his writing. He loudly rebelled against middle-class life and exuberantly pointed to his nomadic life as the ultimate level of freedom. The movers and shakers of every generation have "always led in the endless job of clearing out the junk" but Kerouac and his cronies seemed "to want, not a clean house, but no house at all."[434] To him, being confined in one place was the ultimate injury to the soul. That is why in both Kerouac's literature and his life, he never stayed in the same place for long.

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[430] Ibid., 248.
[431] Hemmer, *Encyclopedia of Beat Literature*, 174-175.
[432] Champney Freeman, "Review: Beat-Up or Beatific?" *The Antioch Review* 19 (Spring 1959): 115.
[433] Ibid., 115.
[434] Ibid., 116.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION—"A SONG OF AMERICA"

Centre of equal daughters, equal sons,
All, all alike endear'd, grown, ungrown, young or old,
Strong, ample, fair, enduring, capable, rich,
Perennial with the Earth, with Freedom, Law and Love,
A grand, sane towering seated Mother,
Chair'd in the adamant of Time.

Walt Whitman[435]

According to one school of literary historians, American literature did not truly exist until the second third of the nineteenth century. That is not to say Americans did not publish, but rather, that their writing was not distinctly American. Scholars give many reasons for this lack of literature. The most commonly cited are that American literature to that point relied too heavily on British and European styles or simply that "what writing there was does not deserve the dignity of being called literature."[436]

[435] Walt Whitman, *America* (1888), in *Whitman: Poetry and Prose* (New York: Penguin, 1996), 616.
[436] Eric Foner and John A. Garraty, eds., *The Reader's Companion to American History*, 667.

Colonial American writing was quite prolific, but most of the works published in the New World were religious, rather than entertaining.[437] After the American Revolution, writers, seeking to capitalize on patriotic feeling, attempted to create an American mythology that would lead to an American identity. Many of these works focused on the war and the founding fathers.[438] The first true novels published in the United States consisted of a seduction plot that had "a threatened woman at the center, who, faced with a tempter's charms, undergoes an internal struggle between passion and restraint that strikingly resembles the national debate over radical Republicanism versus Federalist conservatism."[439] This type of propaganda was more interesting than the religious works, but it still lacked a real American character. American writers began the move toward an American literary and cultural tradition in earnest after Ralph Waldo Emerson called for an American literature. His writings, which spanned the 1830s to the 1850s, "significantly shaped the cultural values and intellectual traditions that remain central to our understanding of American culture."[440]

Americans at this point exhibited many of the positive characteristics of what twenty-first century people think of as the American spirit. As a whole, Americans were optimistic and energetic about the future, with "spacious ideas, [their] imagination roamed a continent, and [they were] impatient with petty transactions, hesitations, and timidities."[441] They truly believed that the best was yet to come. This attitude of optimism continued throughout the nineteenth century. The American was courageous

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[437] Ibid., 667.
[438] Ibid., 668.
[439] Ibid., 669.
[440] Peter Norberg, "Introduction: Optimist and Realist," in *Essays and Poems by Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 17.
[441] Henry Steele Commager, *The American Mind*, 6.

because "he was so sure that fortitude, together with industry, shrewdness, and a little luck, was bound to be rewarded in the end."[442] He prized hard work and integrity believing that in time his family would be rewarded with a better life. He sought a to solve any problems he discovered and "was happiest when he could find a mechanical solution to problems."[443]

The self-made man became the symbol of what was best and possible in the United States. This was the era that used a celebration of the common man as a rallying point, when equality seemed to "permeate [. . .] the American's life and thought, his conduct, work, and play, his language and literature, his religion and his politics, and it conditioned all the relationships of his life" and was valued highly.[444] Nineteenth-century Americans appreciated Emerson's laudation of self-reliance because it was practical. Like their ancestors of the Revolutionary generation, Americans in the nineteenth century were individualistic and nonconforming. They were willing to dissent to expand their freedom, fortune, education, and relaxation.[445] Americans appreciated and respected hard work, independence, and ingenuity—all of which the concept of self-reliance encapsulated. The idealism that Emerson espoused went beyond most average Americans, but the common sense philosophy of self-reliance resonated with them.

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[442] Commager, *The American Mind*, 6-7.
[443] Ibid., 8.
[444] Ibid., 13. Scholars of the nineteenth-century, like Edward Pessen in *Riches, Class, and Power Before the Civil War*, argue against the idea that the common man had much power. In reality, at this time a smaller elite controlled many aspects of life, but the common man was used to garner popular support.
[445] Ibid., 21.

However, this was acceptable to Emerson because he believed that Americans would eventually embrace his idealism.[446]

The American philosophy was an amalgamation of experience and relied upon Puritanism, rationalism, and idealism.[447] The nineteenth-century man lived out the Puritan work ethic. The nineteenth-century man rationalized self-reliance because it "fortif[ied] the American for the experience that he was to embrace, justif[ied] his effort and his hazards, [gave] meaning to his history, and guarantee[d] his destiny . . . . It . . . prove[d] that the happiness of man was dependent on virtue, enterprise, freedom, and the recognition of the sovereignty of moral law."[448] Self-reliance did all of these things. The nineteenth-century man appreciated the "big words" that Hemingway's generation later learned to distrust, because "words like truth, justice, loyalty, reverence, virtue, and honor meant much to [the nineteenth-century man] and meant simply, for he had not yet learned to be confused by semantics" and had no conception that his government or its leaders were wrong in their decisions.[449]

In this climate, thinking men began calling for greater efforts to form an American style of literature. They formed literary societies, such as the Boston Unitarians, who "began to make possible a genuine critical discussion of what kind of

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[446] Ibid., 8.
[447] Ibid., 26.
[448] Ibid., 27. The nineteenth-century man's reliance on rationalism does not necessarily conflict with the popularity of the Romantic Movement in art and literature. The common man wanted life to be practical, though he had an idealistic streak in him. However, when he appreciated artistic endeavors it was for the rationalism, as opposed to the idealism. The artists, like Emerson, appreciated idealism primarily and rationalism secondarily.
[449] Ibid., 30.

literature would be appropriate for a democracy."[450] Emerson introduced "The American Scholar" at Harvard in 1837 in response to these discussions. As a result, the late 1830s "witnessed the greatest outpouring of literary genius in American history, before or since—the romances of Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Herman Melville; the poetry of Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson; the prose inventions of Emerson and Thoreau."—but there was still no truly unique and American voice in the fiction literature.[451]

Many of these thinkers of the 1830s belonged to the Transcendentalist movement. German thought, either directly or indirectly, influenced these men. The Transcendentalists began by offering a romantic critique of the Unitarian church, which had trained many of these men. At this point, the Unitarian church rejected many of the Puritan beliefs because they were unscriptural. Instead, the Unitarians "offered . . . a 'rational' or 'liberal' theology stressing self-culture and the human capacity for good."[452] Emerson and the men in his group were not satisfied with this approach toward religion. Thus, the Transcendentalists attempted to "replace a religion of forms and observances with a warmer, more intuitive life of the spirit."[453]

In "The American Scholar," Emerson challenged the young men he addressed (and later the reading public) to throw off tradition. He "laments for America's cultural backwardness, calls for a national literature, attempts to define the place of the scholar in

[450] Foner, *The Reader's Companion to American History*, 669.
[451] Ibid., 669.
[452] Ibid., 1082.
[453] Ibid., 1082.

a democratic and mercantile society."[454] If the educated wanted to change the world, they must be active because "meek young men grow up in libraries, believing it their duty to accept the views, which Cicero, which Locke, which Bacon, have given, forgetful that Cicero, Locke and Bacon were only young men in libraries, when they wrote these books."[455]

Without downplaying the value of books, Emerson warns that Man the Thinker is better than the bookworm because the bookworm "look[s] backward and not forward. But genius looks forward: the eyes of man are set in his forehead: not in his hindhead: man hopes: genius creates."[456] Tradition tramples the ability of brilliance to flourish. Even following in the tradition of creativity causes the end of genius: "Genius is always sufficiently the enemy of genius by over influence. The literature of every nation bears me witness. The English dramatic poets have Shakespearized now for two hundred years."[457] The way out of this is to perpetually and aggressively attempt to find a new tradition of one's own making.[458]

Some critics claim that Emerson's philosophy of self-reliance led to the rampant materialism that began growing in the nineteenth century and continues to manifest itself today. However, they miss the point that Emerson attempted to make. Emerson wrote as

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[454] Barbara Packer, "Ralph Waldo Emerson," in *Columbia Literary History of the United States*, ed. Emory Elliott (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 386.
[455] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The American Scholar* (1837), in *Essays and Poems by Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 83.
[456] Ibid., 84.
[457] Ibid., 84.
[458] Packer, *Columbia Literary History of the United States*, 386.

he did because materialism "is exactly the condition of conformity from which Emerson would liberate" the American people.[459]

Rather, Emerson's point is that if individuals would trust themselves, they could not only accomplish anything they attempted, but also find "that the opinions of the majority in American society lead away from self-trust and into conformity."[460] Self-reliance meant "a fundamental trust in one's vision" so that one could bring about an authentic change.[461] The individual, in Emerson's opinion, is "best and most when alone."[462] As materialism became more prevalent, Americans defined themselves by what they did and what they owned, rather than who they were, leading to the loss of the individual.[463]

Individuality could not occur overnight or even very quickly. The process of individuality is "arrived at by untaught sallies of the spirit, by a continual self-recovery, and by entire humility."[464] The process is a perpetual "recovery from our failures, and especially from the failure of what we thought we knew, in the face of experiences that indicate otherwise."[465] Man would be able to attain a positive state of individuality, but then fall because man is not perfect. Through repetition of introspection and action, man would eventually transform into and remain a better individual. Emerson encourages

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[459] Norberg, "Introduction: Optimist and Realist," 38.
[460] Ibid., 17.
[461] David Jacobson, "Vision's Imperative: 'Self-Reliance' and the Command to See Things as They Are," *Studies in Romanticism* 29 (Winter 1990), 563.
[462] Floyd Stovall, "The Value of Emerson Today," *College English* 3 (February 1942), 451.
[463] Norberg, "Introduction: Optimist and Realist," 18.
[464] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (1837), in *Essays and Poems by Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2004), 73.
[465] Norberg, "Introduction: Optimist and Realist," 20.

man to meet and master his conditions and so engage the world around him.[466] By confronting "the potluck of the day," and taking "the good we find, asking no questions, we shall have heaping measures" and experience the ultimate that life, particularly life in the United States, can offer.[467] Emerson knew that the country was not where he thought it should be, but he always looked to the future. He believed that one day, morality would triumph over conformity and would create "a state of things which allows every man the largest liberty compatible with the liberty of every other man."[468]

Walt Whitman was the first to capture Emerson's entreaties to celebrate individualism. If Emerson can be viewed as the Godfather of American literature, Whitman should be the poet laureate due to the influence he exerted over subsequent writers and literary movements. Whitman's life was devoted to one work, *Leaves of Grass*, which he revised and republished over the course of nearly forty years. In the collection of poems, Whitman used his love of New York, which he considered to be the "heart of America," to inspire a love of his country.[469] To Whitman, the "diversity, energy, and ambitions of New York represented the promise of America: By finding his voice on the city streets and ferries, he was able to sing for his country's open roads and great rivers."[470]

Whitman's life's work did many things for American literature, aside from celebrating American life. The title of his work is metaphor for the "unregulated,

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[466] Norberg, "Introduction: Optimist and Realist," 20.
[467] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Experience* (1844), in *Essays and Poems by Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 287-288.
[468] Stovall, "The Value of Emerson Today," 452.
[469] Karen Karbiener, "Introduction: Walt Whitman and the Promise of America," in Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass: First and "Death-bed" Editions, Additional Poems* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2004), 43.
[470] Ibid., 43.

'organically grown' lines of the poem in the 'leaves' of the book."[471] He used grass as a symbol of democracy and equality. Grass is a fairly ubiquitous element across most of the country. Each "leaf," a softer word than "blade," is singular yet contributes to the whole effect. Similarly "each reader will find that he or she is part of *Leaves of Grass*—a book about all Americans that could have been written by any American."[472] The content of Whitman's work strove to eliminate the barrier between reader and writer by including both himself and the reader in his work. He also questioned the divide between class, gender and race, believing that such distinctions were irrelevant and actually ruinous to the American spirit. Lastly, he asks and challenges his readers to work to fulfill the great promise of the country.[473]

Whitman, as a poet, captured the essence of Emerson, an essayist. What remained was for someone to take Whitman's poetry and translate it into novel-form. Mark Twain did this. Twain participated in all aspects of American life—the South, the Mississippi River, the West, and the Northeast. As a result, he was better able than anyone to tell of the American experience. His themes expand upon the notion of individuality and self-reliance and adapted them to the innovations taking place in American culture. The diligent hard work of earlier Americans faded into the rise of the get rich quick mentality that culminated in the revelry of the nineteen twenties. Twain's generation experienced the most rapid development in American history up to that point: "from the steamboat age of a canal-river-, and waterway-linked republic of the 1840s and 1850s, through the continental spree of railroad building after the Civil War, to the onset

[471] Ibid., 44.
[472] Ibid., 44.
[473] Ibid., 53.

of democratic private transportation: Henry Ford's Model T passenger car of the 1900s."[474]

Twain paid attention to what was popular in the American media and he incorporated that into his writing. By tapping into the interests of the country, he could insure that his writing was widely read. When writing about the West was popular, he wrote about it; when there was a resurgence of writing about King Arthur, he wrote about that as well. His use of dialect responded to the popularity of Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus stories.[475]

Like his predecessors, Twain took his cues from European writers, but he made the result uniquely his own and uniquely American. Charles Dickens was at the height of his popularity when Twain wrote. Dickens popularized the first-person narrator, which Twain perfected in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Twain made it possible for the reader to become familiar with his characters, an element that Dickens's writing lacked.[476]

Twain's first work to explore self-reliance and individuality was *Roughing It*, in which his character moved to the West and lost his innocence in the midst of the lawlessness that characterized the Old West. He had a fling with the mining craze, which was unsuccessful. Then, he turned to observing and critiquing. During this work, Twain began developing his storytelling style, for which he is most well-known. This novel's publication coincided with European exploration of Africa, the Nile, and the Arctic,

[474] Philip Fisher, "Mark Twain," in *Columbia Literary History of the United States*, ed., Elliott, 627.
[475] Ibid., 635.
[476] Ibid., 636.

which helped its popularity.[477] *Life on the Mississippi* is a continuation of these themes of self-discovery and social critique. Both novels depict lifestyles that had faded from existence by the time of publication. Yet Twain celebrates the individual experience despite modern advances.

Twain's boy novels are his enduring legacy and represent the fullest development of his writing. Both *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* are modeled after people he knew as a child. *Tom Sawyer* celebrates the carefree life of the middle third of the nineteenth century. *Huckleberry Finn* celebrates the development of conscience and the flourishing of individuality. Huck Finn marks the apex of Twain's career. In the novel, Huck decides to follow his conscience rather than following the dictates of society because he cares less about society than about being able to live with his decisions. Huck's decision follows Emerson's self-reliance in that Huck's inner searching led to actions that benefit another human. Self-reliance leads to a universal conscience in which "what is proper for one to do, is proper for all, and what is improper for one it improper for all."[478]

After Mark Twain and Huckleberry Finn came Ernest Hemingway and his individualistic characters with their own moral codes. Hemingway's novels—*The Sun Also Rises, A Farewell to Arms, For Whom the Bell Tolls,* and *The Old Man and the Sea*—all depict an individual who is forced to decide between their own moral code and society. Though his novels typically depict a society or an environment that is completely chaotic and ruinous to normal life, Hemingway leaves open the opportunity

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[477] Ibid., 641.
[478] Joseph L. Blau, "Emerson's Transcendentalist Individualism as a Social Philosophy," *The Review of Metaphysics,* 31 (September, 1977), 89.

for living with honor. For Hemingway, what was truly important was that a man did the right thing in the end because then his life would have mattered. Hemingway's characters, particularly Robert Jordan in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, internalized Emerson's definition of self-reliance—in meditating on their own conscience, they made the right decision, which positively impacted others.[479]

Hemingway's characters enjoyed living in the outdoors because that was the most natural environment in which man could exist. Outdoors had no pretensions or demands for conformity. The outdoors for Hemingway represented the freedom of Mark Twain's Old West. Hemingway himself loved hunting and fishing, which tied him to popular audiences, while his stories about the earth abiding tied him to elite audiences. In his writing, he created a code of manhood in which men were to stoically take what life gave them and move on from there.

Jack Kerouac developed a single character and focused on that individual's journey through life. Kerouac celebrated the individuality of his character. Yet his writing differs from Emerson, Whitman, Twain, and Hemingway in that the focus is on the character's experience as opposed to their development into a good human being, ultimately missing the true point of Emerson's self-reliance. Spiritual development and the exploration of one's individuality are the important parts of Kerouac's message. So long as a person reaches enlightenment, it matters little whether the person does good or bad along the way or whether they make their life matter. The journey in and of itself is what matters. By the time that Kerouac wrote, Emerson's definition of self-reliance had morphed into the selfish manifestation for which critics denounced him. Individuals

[479] Linda W. Wagner, "Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Stein," in *Columbia Literary History of the United States*, ed., Elliott, 877.

resisted conformity, but they did not live to create a better society; they sought a better way of life for themselves.

By the time that Kerouac wrote, the country had drastically changed in some respects but it remained the same in others. In the twentieth century, Americans were typically urban. They had more leisure time, but they always rushed to accomplish more. Advances in medicine, industry, and technology should have made people happier, but "nervous breakdowns became so common as to be almost unfashionable."[480] They looked to the past as a better time because it seemed less complicated. Rather than look to the future with hope and anticipation, Americans were uncertain, doubtful, and insecure about the future, though they still believed that theirs was the chosen land. The twentieth century witnessed a standardization of character and habit as a result of mass media.[481]

In terms of morals, the American character remained the same. Honor, courage, and loyalty were still important characteristics. The Cold War decreased an individual's ability to dissent without being ostracized. Loyalty and conformity became linked. Individuality was still prized, but Americans had to walk a thin line between individuality and nonconformity. Culturally, Americans changed. Their humor was less exaggerated and familiar and more acerbic and pointed. Labor-saving devices created more work and a less free society. Americans became interdependent upon their technology and upon others, which led to a decrease in independence. As a result, Americans turned to the past for cues on a better way of life. American society as a whole did not change, but many Americans looked to the ideology and the literature of the past to escape from their discontent with American society. This was true in the 1920s, the 1960s, and it is still

[480] Commager, *The American Mind*, 407.
[481] Ibid., 406-408.

true in the twenty-first century, which is why works that celebrate the individualism of Emerson, Twain, Hemingway, and Kerouac are read by modern audiences.[482]

Twain, Hemingway, and Kerouac all create a prototype character that marks the apex of the individual experience according to their culture. For Twain, Huck's decision to go to hell rather than send the letter alerting Miss Watson to her slave's whereabouts is the highest point to which a person can aspire to. Huck not only chose an individualistic experience over following society, he also recognized the true universality of freedom. For Hemingway, the best a man can do is live naturally and decide that his altruistic impulses should be acted upon, like Robert Jordan's decision to blow up the bridge. For Kerouac, a person needed to live apart from society and explore their inner selves to get the most out of life. His characters, like Sal Paradise, reflect the idea that what a person did throughout his life mattered less than who a person was.

In their own way, the three major authors of American letters celebrated the individualism and self-reliance that Ralph Waldo Emerson defined in his essays. These writings led to the creation of an American voice that celebrated the concepts and character upon which the country was founded—individualism, nonconformity, freedom, and the appearance of equality. The content of their literature reflects the attitudes of the time, but it also transcends time and speaks to the human condition, inspiring individuals to live, be, and do better.

[482] Ibid., 409-419.

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VITA

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Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: "ONE'S-SELF I SING": THE THEME OF INDIVIDUALISM AS A PART OF THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IN THE WORK OF MARK TWAIN, ERNEST HEMINGWAY, AND JACK KEROUAC

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Title of Study: "ONE'S-SELF I SING": THE THEME OF INDIVIDUALISM AS A PART OF THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IN THE WORK OF MARK TWAIN, ERNEST HEMINGWAY, AND JACK KEROUAC

Pages in Study: 130 Candidate for the Degree of Master of Arts

Major Field: History

Scope and Method of Study: Three men—Mark Twain, Ernest Hemingway, and Jack Kerouac—are credited with changing the existing style of American literature. Yet in different ways, each explored and developed the theme of individuality as a part of the American experience, as set forth by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman. In looking at the letters, private papers, and published works of Twain, Hemingway, and Kerouac, as well as literary studies of their works, each author also had a specific goal in mind for developing this theme. The theme of individuality runs deep in American culture and is able to transcend time and place, speaking to people across the generations.

Findings and Conclusions: Mark Twain, Ernest Hemingway, and Jack Kerouac created characters that are prototypes that mark the apex of the individual experience according to their cultures. In so doing, each author celebrated the individualism and self-reliance that Ralph Waldo Emerson defined in his essays and speeches. Through this, Twain, Hemingway, and Kerouac created and contributed to an American voice that celebrated the concepts and characters upon which the United States was founded. The content of their novels reflect the attitudes and mores of their times, but their writing transcends time and speaks to the human condition.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Dr. Michael F. Logan