

# The influence of Buddhism on the Beat Generation: Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg

---

**Mandir, Valerija**

**Undergraduate thesis / Završni rad**

**2023**

*Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj:* **University of Pula / Sveučilište Jurja Dobrile u Puli**

*Permanent link / Trajna poveznica:* <https://um.nsk.hr/um:nbn:hr:137:703336>

*Rights / Prava:* [In copyright](#) / [Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.](#)

*Download date / Datum preuzimanja:* **2024-08-02**



*Repository / Repozitorij:*

[Digital Repository Juraj Dobrila University of Pula](#)



Sveučilište Jurja Dobrile u Puli  
Filozofski fakultet

Valerija Mandir

**THE INFLUENCE OF BUDDHISM ON THE BEAT GENERATION: JACK  
KEROUAC AND ALLEN GINSBERG**

Završni rad

Pula, rujan 2023.

Sveučilište Jurja Dobrile u Puli  
Filozofski fakultet

VALERIJA MANDIR

**THE INFLUENCE OF BUDDHISM ON THE BEAT GENERATION: JACK  
KEROUAC AND ALLEN GINSBERG**

ZAVRŠNI RAD

**JMBAG: 601983 11 0303097440 7, redoviti student**

**Studijski smjer: Sveučilišni preddiplomski studij Engleski jezik i književnost i  
Japanski jezik i kultura**

**Predmet: Književna kritika**

**Znanstveno područje: Humanističke znanosti**

**Znanstveno polje: Filologija**

**Znanstvena grana: Anglistika**

**Mentor: Izv.prof.dr.sc. Igor Grbić**

Pula, rujan 2023.



## IZJAVA O KORIŠTENJU AUTORSKOGA DJELA

Ja, Valerija Mandir, dajem odobrenje Sveučilištu Jurja Dobrile u Puli, nositelju prava korištenja, da moj završni rad pod nazivom „The influence of Buddhism on the Beat Generation: Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg“ upotrijebi da tako navedeno autorsko djelo objavi u javnoj internetskoj bazi Sveučilišne knjižnice Sveučilišta Jurja Dobrile u Puli te preslika u javnu internetsku bazu završnih radova Nacionalne i sveučilišne knjižnice (stavljanje na raspolaganje javnosti), sve u skladu sa Zakonom o autorskom pravu i drugim srodnim pravima i dobrom akademskom praksom, a radi promicanja otvorenoga, slobodnoga pristupa znanstvenim informacijama. Za korištenje autorskog djela na gore navedeni način ne potražujem naknadu.

Potpis

---

U Puli, rujan 2023. godine

## IZJAVA O AKADEMSKOJ ČESTITOSTI

Ja, dolje potpisana Valerija Mandir, kandidatkinja za prvostupnicu Engleskog jezika i književnosti i Japanskog jezika i kulture izjavljujem da je ovaj Završni rad rezultat isključivo mogega vlastitog rada, da se temelji na mojim istraživanjima te da se oslanja na objavljenu literaturu kao što to pokazuju korištene bilješke i bibliografija. Izjavljujem da nijedan dio Završnog rada nije napisan na nedopušteni način, odnosno da nije prepisan iz kojega necitiranog rada te da nijedan dio rada ne krši bilo čija autorska prava. Izjavljujem, također, da nijedan dio rada nije iskorišten za koji drugi rad pri bilo kojoj drugoj visokoškolskoj, znanstvenoj ili radnoj ustanovi.

Student

---

U Puli, rujan 2023. godine



## Content:

INTRODUCTION .....	1
1. DIFFERENT CURRENTS IN BUDDHISM .....	2
1.1 Zen .....	4
1.2. Dharma.....	7
1.3. A different take on religion.....	9
2. THE BEAT GENERATION .....	12
2.1 Meet the Beatniks .....	12
2.2 Authors' lives and the correlation with their work.....	14
2.3 Jack Kerouac .....	14
2.4 Allen Ginsberg.....	16
2.5. Beatniks and Hippies.....	18
3. <i>THE DHARMA BUMS, ON THE ROAD, BIG SUR</i> .....	20
3.1 Sequels and the character's spiritual development.....	20
3.2 The genetic fallacy?.....	21
4. <i>HOWL</i> .....	23
4.1 Capitalism from a spiritual point of view .....	23
4.2 Hidden Buddhism in <i>Howl</i> .....	24
5. BEATNIKS' INFLUENCE ON THE PRESENT .....	26
5.1 Beatniks' centers today .....	26
5.2 The impact of the Beatniks .....	27
CONCLUSION .....	28
Bibliography and sources .....	29
ABSTRACT.....	33
SAŽETAK.....	34

## INTRODUCTION

In order to understand the main idea behind the whole Beatnik concept, one must be familiar with the basics of Buddhism and Zen Buddhism. Many currents of Buddhism explain the reality of existence in different ways, but they all share one common thought or, as the Buddhists would say one truth. That is the truth of reality and the interdependence of all things. It is believed that the ultimate and the first Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, reached his enlightenment by meditating and finding the ultimate reality, realizing that everything is nothing and that everything is the same (Edelglass and Garfield, 2009, p. 3). A doctrine that refers to the individual as an empty object that is the same as everything else around, such as trees, animals, rocks, and mountains. One becomes free from all the pain and suffering when one realizes that the cause of that pain is oneself, and the only way to break the vicious circle of being reborn is to reach Nirvana. In order to reach the state of enlightenment, or to find *dharma*, one must go through suffering and live along with the pain. When one becomes numb to the pain, one realizes the ultimate truth that everything or nothing can be painful and that everything is empty, but empty does not mean it does not physically exist. It only means that in order to find your true peace and to understand reality, one must understand that suffering comes from within. Offering and showing respect to animals and things means ensuring peace and calmness in one's next life because one day you just might wake up as yourself but in a different body, e.g. a worm. That is why true Buddhists are respectful toward all living creatures because it means they are respectful to themselves. When explaining the concept of the importance of nature in Buddhism, it might seem that the reason behind everything is selfishness or the fear of karma. On the contrary, being raised to have respect toward all living creatures from a young age becomes a way of living and it develops a healthy relationship with yourself, brings peace, and removes violence from one's mind and actions. So to overcome the suffering, one must surface the ignorance of reality and by that realize that in nature all things are relevant and of equal importance (Edelglass and Garfield, 2009, p. 171).

## 1. DIFFERENT CURRENTS IN BUDDHISM

In viewing different currents within itself, Buddhism largely differentiates from, for example, Catholicism. Catholicism acknowledges no inside sect, and interpreting the faith differently is considered a sin. On the contrary, the diverse world of Buddhist sects is not seen as a problem or blasphemy but is respected. The traditional number of Buddhist sects in India varied from eighteen to more than thirty. Since Buddhism has no central authority or a central successor like Catholicism has the pope, the different currents of Buddhism developed due to different local traditions and geographical advantages or disadvantages. Monks traveled throughout India and all across Asia to spread Buddhism to different communities. Nevertheless, these sects could live together peacefully because they believed, and they still do, that their goal can be reached through different ways and that each of these ways should be respected (Conze, 1995, pp. 17,18).

Due to the numerous currents of Buddhism, it would be impossible to state how Zen Buddhism differentiates from each and every one of them, so I will stick to the two major currents, Mahayana and Theravada. Firstly I chose the Mahayana, not only because it is one of the two major currents, but because the Beatniks, especially Jack Kerouac in his books, often mention the term *bodhisattva*, which is central to the ideology of this current. *Bodhisattva* is explained as the awakening of oneself, and as a person who seeks to become a buddha. According to Mahayana teachings, anyone can become a buddha, and being reborn as a buddha depends on how well the individual deals with spirituality and enlightenment. Because of that, the world is full of celestial *bodhisattvas* who have aspired to become buddhas, and through various meditations and training, they have accumulated strength and power to function and act as buddhas (*Britannica*, 2023). The most important teaching of Mahayana Buddhism is the doctrine of skillful means known as *upaya*, which implies different means of how one can be helped to reach enlightenment. Those who believe that they have done so, the *bodhisattvas*, are expected to lead others – the laity – into the path of freedom and liberation. Jack Kerouac in his book *The Dharma Bums* (1958) often mentions this term when talking about Princess, the girl he and Japhy often slept with:



"But I'm the old mother of earth. I'm a *Bodhisattva*". She was just a little off her nut but when I heard her say "*Bodhisattva*" I realized she wanted to be a big Buddhist like Japhy and being a girl the only way she could express it was this way, which had its traditional roots in the *yabyum* ceremony of Tibetan Buddhism, so everything was fine (Kerouac, 1958, p. 18).

The *yabyum* ceremony Kerouac mentions comes from Tibetan customs, that the Beatniks and Kerouac gladly accepted (they mostly followed the Mahayana doctrines, some unconsciously, and others, such as Gary Snyder (Japhy from *The Dharma Bums*), probably consciously). '*Yabyum* was never fully accepted by the Buddhists of China and Japan. Even in Tibet the *yabyum* images are not intended for general use but are meant to be viewed only by those who have received proper instruction..' (*Britannica*, 2016). So it can be concluded that Japhy Ryder (Gary Snyder) knew a lot about many different currents of Buddhism, from Zen Buddhism to Tibetan customs, which at that time all influenced a very inexperienced Kerouac, who just wandered in the world like a real bum searching for his *dharma*. Princess also said that she wanted to help them ('her little children'), which is an obvious reference to the Mahayana teachings about *bodhisattvas*. The main goal for the *bodhisattvas* in the Mahayana teachings is to help others who still have not reached enlightenment.

The other current, Theravada, differentiates from the Mahayana mostly in its definition of what a *bodhisattva* is. Theravadan Buddhists consider the *bodhisattva* as the highest position one can reach, whereas the Mahayana deals more with helping others reach enlightenment through the helper's (the *bodhisattva*'s) suffering (Bodhisattva, no date). Another important aspect that differentiates Theravada from Mahayana is the possibility of reaching enlightenment. According to Theravadan doctrines, one cannot reach enlightenment and become a *bodhisattva* during layman life as one can in the Mahayana current. The separation between monks and laymen plays great importance in reaching enlightenment, for Theravadan Buddhists, because they believe one can become a respected *bodhisattva* only through great effort and training (*Britannica*, 2023).

## 1.1 Zen

Now that I've given a closer look into the two main currents, it is time to explain what Zen Buddhism deals with and what makes it distinctive and special. Firstly, it is important to state that Zen Buddhism belongs to the Mahayana current, but that does not mean Zen teachings strictly follow all of the Mahayana doctrines. Many say that Zen is the easiest of them all to misunderstand, which is why I would like to present only the basics of Zen teachings in order to understand its importance to the Beat Generation. 'Zen defies all concept-making. That is why Zen is difficult to grasp.' (Suzuki, 1934, p. 42). The Beatniks very often mentioned meditation, which is the central idea and the direct translation of the word *zen*. Zen has its origins in India and China (Chinese *chan*, Sanskrit *dhyana*, which in Japanese gave *zen* (禪 - ぜん - zen), and translates as 'meditation'. In Japan, Zen has reached its full glory and it is also known as *Japanese Zen Buddhism*. It was widely accepted by the samurai class due to its artistic element. The samurai had to be educated, so they took literary classes, painting, and calligraphy classes, which were greatly accepted in the Zen teachings. Even nowadays Zen literature and art are known and respected in the whole world (*Britannica*, 2023). What divides Zen from common art is the way art embodies another mechanical instrument. In order for art to be expressed, it needs another object such as paper for literature, or canvas and brushes for paintings. Zen does not need any external object and it intentionally separates itself from needing external appearance. Ignorance plays a great role in understanding something as art according to Zen teachings. One must see beauty in the natural way things exist, it does not need any improvement or beautification (Suzuki, 1934, pp. 38-47). Zen was greatly accepted by the Beatniks, especially the concept of *wabi-sabi* in haiku literature. Since the main goal for samurais was to overcome the fear of death, the Zen training samurais took focused mainly on accepting that fear. *Wabi-sabi* represents the circle of life and the acceptance humans must have in order to know true peace, and true Zen. (Suzuki, 1934, p. 107) The best example of *wabi-sabi* may be gluing broken parts of porcelain with gold. The gold that emerges into broken porcelain represents a beautiful homage to shattered pieces, which metaphorically represents the beauty in the pain. Similarly, haiku poetry in the Beat Generation was an expression of pain and dissatisfaction with the political situation in America in those days. Another expression that may help in understanding Zen teachings comes from Japanese *kono-mama* or *sono-mama* (このまま)

まま or そのまま), which translates directly to 'such as that is' or 'such as this is'. Again, it teaches the followers of Zen to accept things as they are, whether something is beautiful or not (Suzuki, 1934, p. 37). All in all, we can conclude that the main difference Zen brings to the Mahayana teachings is in the way of reaching enlightenment. Mahayana's central concept revolves around following the doctrine of *dharma*, which means they reject other doctrines or religions. On the other hand, Zen teaches us to accept things as they are, which means there is nothing wrong in belonging to two or more different religions and following various doctrines, but it also does not exclude following the doctrine of *dharma*, since it does belong to the Mahayana current. Another important aspect of Zen is again the way *wabi-sabi* is connected to the doctrines. Zen followers are expected to accept the pain and to gain enlightenment through it, whereas the main goal of the Mahayana and Theravada is to break the circle of suffering, which is only possible by *Nirvana* (Diffen LLC, 2023). *Nirvana* is described as a complete extinction of oneself, being free from constant rebirth, and finally knowing peace. (Suzuki, 1984, p. 7)

Since the Beatniks' biggest wish was to fix the social manners through new ways and ideas they took from Buddhism, they often incorporated a lot of those ideas and teachings into their work, indirectly influencing the readers. The father of the Beat Generation, Kerouac, often dealt with the meaning of Zen and tried to explain it through simple conversations between characters Ray and Japhy (Gary Snyder) in *The Dharma Bums*.

"The secret of this kind of climbing," said Japhy, "is like Zen. Don't think. Just dance along. It's the easiest thing in the world, actually easier than walking on flat ground which is monotonous. The cute little problems present themselves at each step and yet you never hesitate and you find yourself on some other boulder you picked out for no special reason at all, just like Zen." Which it was. (Kerouac, 1958, p. 34)

Furthermore, Allen Ginsberg, who dealt with Buddhism and Zen Buddhism long before Kerouac did, often gave interviews and talked about religions, spirituality, and its possible positive influence on Western society if it was to be accepted by a mostly monotheistic society. Ginsberg gave his explanation of Zen in one sentence: 'But the true character of Zen remains almost incomprehensible to those who have not surpassed the immaturity of needing to be justified, whether before the Lord God or before a paternalistic society.' (Ginsberg, 1996, p. 55) Ginsberg incorporated that Zen

thought into all aspects of his life, starting from teaching lectures at university to his literature work.

Lastly, in understanding Zen as a whole, one must be familiar with the concept of *satori*, which refers to the acquiring of a new viewpoint in Zen Buddhism (Suzuki, 1934, p. 88). What makes *satori* important in regard to the Beatniks is exactly that revelation of a new world that Buddhism as an Eastern religion brought into their lives and consequently, into their work. Suzuki (1934, p. 95) explains *satori* as ‘the sudden flashing into the consciousness of a new truth hitherto undreamed of. It is a sort of mental catastrophe taking place all at once..’, and I would argue that explanation is enough to introduce the main idea behind all the fuss of the Beat Generation. Hard to understand as it is, the world of Zen might confuse everyone who is not open to dive into the unknown, but if one is eager to learn (as the Beatniks were), then one has finally mastered Zen and understood *satori*. Eager to change the old ways, and eager to make society realize that the constant repetition will not change anything for the better, the Beatniks took it upon themselves to, through their work, introduce the East to the West.

‘In Zen there must be *satori*; there must be a general mental upheaval which destroys the old accumulations of intellection and lays down the foundation for a new life; there must be the awakening of a new sense which will review the old things’ (Suzuki, 1934, p. 96)

On top of that, Kerouac even named one of his novels *Satori in Paris* (1966, published by Grove Press New York), in which he describes his journey of finding his heritage in Paris, and at the very beginning he explains *satori*:

Somewhere during my ten days in Paris (and Brittany) I received an illumination of some kind that seems to’ve changed me again, towards what I suppose’ll be my pattern for another seven years or more: in effect, a *satori*; the Japanese word for ‘sudden illumination’, ‘sudden awakening’ or simply ‘kick in the eye.’ (Kerouac, 1966, p. 1)

For the Beatniks, the importance of explaining *satori* to the readers and the society in the 1950s was more than just sharing knowledge about Zen Buddhism, it was about widening society’s horizons and opening their eyes to a new viewpoint on life. The Beatniks believed that they discovered a method that could help them with changing or at least coping with the world, and Zen teachings are all about accepting things as they are, so experiencing *satori* (or at least understanding it) helped them to look at things differently (Lukšić, 2000, p. 60).

## 1.2. Dharma

Just like the Holy Trinity in Christianity (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit), Buddhism has *Triratna*. In Buddhism, the trinity refers to the Buddha, the Doctrine, and the Order (*Britannica*, 2022). The most important to mention for this paper is the second one, the doctrine or the *dharma*. *Dharma* cannot be explained or translated into one word because it is a set of doctrines, teachings, and beliefs that Buddhists follow to find the ultimate truth. Jack Kerouac in his book *The Dharma Bums* (1958) often mentions and tries to simplify the explanation of it. Kerouac named his book *The Dharma Bums*, obviously referring firstly to himself, his friends, and then everyone around, he gave us a good insight into the whole story with a genius title *The Dharma Bums*. A bum, a lost wanderer searching for that 'it', searching for peace, trying to find *dharma*.

And then I thought, later, lying on my bag smoking, "Everything is possible. I am God, I am Buddha, I am imperfect Ray Smith, all at the same time, I am empty space, I am all things. I have all the time in the world from life to life to do what is to do, to do what is done, to do the timeless doing, infinitely perfect within, why cry, why worry, perfect like mind essence and the minds of banana peels" (Kerouac, 1958, p. 61).

By realizing he is equal to everything else, Jack Kerouac (or his alter-ego Ray Smith in this case) found the dharma. 'The word "Buddha" itself is, of course, not a proper name but a title, or epithet, which means the "Enlightened One". It refers to the condition of a man who was a completely unobstructed channel for the spiritual force of *dharma*, or Reality' (Conze, 1980, p. 10). So, knowing that the Buddha is the ultimate impersonation of peace, calmness, and wisdom, it does not come as a surprise that all the rest of us mortals besides Buddha are looking for the truth. Looking for, but also longing for a state of mind in which we finally could understand reality and find the answers to all of our questions about life. The meaning behind such a concept can not be explained easily, but in order to understand the title and the book itself, Conze gave us a short explanation:

Dharma, the second of these Treasures, comprises all the mysteries of the Buddhist faith, and cannot easily be explained in a few words. Buddhists in Asia normally did not describe themselves as 'Buddhists', but as 'followers of the *Dharma*'. (Conze, 1980, p. 13)

Catholics, for example, center their belief around the concept of veneration of God and focus on following the Ten Commandments. Nevertheless, they continue to break these commandments and then confess them, beg for forgiveness, and ultimately live

in a vicious circle, even though sometimes the followers may be unconscious of the whole progress. Unlike Catholics, Buddhists tend to reach the reality that could once free them from suffering and the vicious circle of pain and life. Once, and if they succeed in finding the truth, the vicious circle will be broken and a Buddhist will find his *dharma*. Gary Snyder in his essay *Buddhist Anarchism* explains that 'the actual achievement of Buddhism is the development of practical systems of meditation toward the end of liberating a few dedicated individuals from psychological hangups and cultural conditioning (Snyder, 1961, p.1).' Even from this quote itself, it is clear that the main problem for the activists of the Beat Generation was the government and the ranking classes in society. This is why their work is full of oppression, liberation, and self-improvement attempts. The Beatniks never wanted to violently impose their beliefs or, more accurately, their ways, on anyone else. Sure, they did influence many and they openly accepted new members into their group, which may seem like they encouraged people to hate the government, law, and order, but all they ever actually wanted was peace and freedom of thought, expression, and sexual orientation for everyone, unconsciously promoting the very famous term *American Dream*. On the other hand, like true Americans, the majority of society back then did not support their work and found the Beatniks' work obscene and their way of behaving unacceptable, partly due to the way they presented themselves. In *Big Sur*, a young character, while speaking with Kerouac, addressed this problem and talked about how no one finds them serious and all they said about them is how weird they dress and how they partied too hard all the time.

And you know a lot of this sneery stuff they've written against us, against San Francisco or beat poetry and writers is because a lot of us don't LOOK like writers or intellectuals or anything, you and Pomeray I must say look awful in a way. (Kerouac, 1962, p.100)

So, as it is portrayed in this autobiographical novel, the Beatniks obviously were aware of how they looked, but they just did not care. Being a writer is not about how you dress or what you do; maybe a part of their awareness of that was how immersed they were in Zen Buddhism. The teachings and the doctrines that they followed (to some extent) not only made them not care about what others thought about them, but these were also the main things that differentiated them from the mostly-Catholic conservative society of the 1950s. Not everyone, but at least some major figures such as William S. Burroughs, Jack Kerouac, Neal Cassady, and Allen Ginsberg were influenced by

Buddhism strongly enough not to care about society's opinion. They came to the point of realization that they indeed did not need to dress in a certain society-acceptable way to leave an impact, and by realizing that they came one step closer to finding their *dharma*. So, as the basic Buddhist teaching says that *dharma* can be manifested in our everyday life and actions, and knowing *dharma* is the ultimate reality which seemingly at least Jack Kerouac and his fellow Beatniks reached, their work and their way of living was a virtue – no matter what the the newspaper wrote about them.

### **1.3. A different take on religion**

It is evident that religion is a major theme in the works of the Beat Generation writers, and even though most of the mention is dedicated to Buddhism and its currents such as Zen Buddhism, we can not exclude Catholicism from being a part of those works as well. Beatnik poets, especially Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, not rarely mention Catholicism and their belief in Jesus Christ. Despite their Buddhist practicings, they never declared themselves as Buddhists, but as Catholics. Kerouac even compared Buddha to a 'Jesus of Asia' (Kerouac, 2009, p. 13), which may seem offensive for passionate believers that see everything as a straight line, but not for him, and not for the Beatniks. These comparisons only show that, like all Beatniks, Kerouac did not divide religions. Living in the capitalist postwar American society, being deeply discontented with political systems and regimes, he believed that religion, or better, faith, was the only thing that had permanent value. But the problem was that Catholicism no longer gave him the satisfaction or the moral strength he needed in order to find peace. On the other hand, Buddhism with its core in ignorance and acceptance of things as they are, could not quench the Beatniks' thirst for a change of society (Ivanišević, 1984, pp. 57-60). This means the Beatniks had to take bits and pieces from both religions and practically invent their own. Does that mean they disrespected Catholicism and Buddhism and could people get offended by what Beatniks had to say? Of course, it could be interpreted that way, but they are not the first or the last group to do such things and make a bunch of people angry. *Eclecticism* is what occurs when a religious person (such as Ginsberg or Kerouac) is no longer satisfied only with what one religion has to offer, so unintentionally the answer is sought elsewhere, without specific intention of following any exact doctrine, but the one(s) that give the biggest spiritual satisfaction (*Britannica*, 2017). There were, and still are, a lot

of religious groups that are considered outcasts to the main group because they decide to follow only a part of the religion, or decide to interpret doctrines differently. For example, Chögyam Trungpa, originally a Tibetan Buddhist master, was anything but an orthodox Buddhist. Trungpa coined the term 'crazy wisdom' and is known to be the embodiment of the mentioned term. Apart from that, he is known for bringing Buddhism to the West, both in Europe and America. His philosophy, in layman's terms, was to always do the unexpected. The population of 'Gen Z' (generation born between 1997 and 2012) would say 'Never let them know your next move' if they were to describe Trungpa's ways. As a prophet told him that he would bring Buddhism to the West, Trungpa founded a university in Colorado called Naropa University. In fact, Allen Ginsberg lectured poetry and William Burroughs lectured literature there. It was known as a hangout for hippies, weirdos, outcasts, and the Beatniks. Trungpa, the founder, alongside the usage of drugs such as cocaine, was an alcoholic, he slept with his students (even married one of them), physically assaulted his wife, etc., but still, those were not the 'craziest wisdom' examples he acted out. The most controversial thing he did was to establish an army, and not just any army, but a Buddhist army. Contrary to one of the most important Buddhist principles, non-violence, Trungpa declared himself the supreme commander of the army. However, his philosophy being to always do the unexpected, Trungpa disbanded the army and said: 'Did you think we were going to use force on anyone or anything? We are disbanding the army!' Despite forming an army, which is an absolute paradox to all Buddhist teachings, surprisingly none of his contemporary teachers of Tibetan Buddhism hesitated to acknowledge him as a supreme master and enlightened person. One of his colleagues said that 'he drank alcohol like I drink water' and often gave lectures drunk, and sometimes completely drunk (Telećan, 2023, p. 2). So if Trungpa gave lectures drunk, and later on Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs held lectures at the university that he founded, it is no wonder that there was no big difference between his and all the Beatniks' take on religion. They all drank alcohol (not to mention the usage of drugs) despite it being against Buddhist doctrines. It seems that such groups, or religious sects, only take from the religion what is easy to love – meditations, long walks (inspired by the Tibetans), calmness, and mercifulness. The other side (the hard part) such as abstinence from alcohol, drugs, and sex is a part of the religion that such groups, including the Beatniks, did not decide to follow or accept. Knowing that Jack Kerouac indeed did not abstain from those little pleasures of life, that could be the reason why



he often struggled with finding his reality (*dharma*). Those pleasures eventually cost him his sanity and later on even his life. In *The Dharma Bums*, he even admits his drinking problem, many times, for example:

"Ah I would have written it anyway. You're just drinking too much all the time, I don't see how you're even going to gain enlightenment and manage to stay out in the mountains, you'll always be coming down the hill spending your bean money on wine and finally you'll end up lying in the street in the rain, dead drunk, and then they'll take you away and you'll have to be reborn a teetotalin bartender to atone for your karma." He was really sad about it, and worried about me, but I just went on drinking. (Kerouac, 1958, p. 94).

He died at only 47 years old, from an abdominal hemorrhage caused by heavy drinking. He was taken to the hospital prior to vomiting blood, and the doctors had to pump into him 30 units of type A blood. After his surgery, the hospital had a shortage, but he still didn't make it. The doctors said he was in shock already by the time they put him in the emergency room, and that he hadn't recovered since (Figueroa IV, 2020). The reason Kerouac was so lost in his religion, sexuality, and even his own beliefs might be because he did not find peace earlier in his life. He traveled all across America to find peace and calmness, practicing his Buddhism, especially Zen (but only taking the parts he liked from the religion). After all, his main goal was finding the 'it' – self-knowledge and experience (thoroughly explained in *On The Road*). 'The only ones for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved' (Kerouac, 1957, p.6). So it is no surprise that Kerouac got involved with a group that based many of their opinions and worldview on Buddhism. Ever since his young age Kerouac had experienced loss, death, or as the Buddhists would say *dukkha*.

*Dukkha* (Pali: 'sorrow' or 'suffering'), Sanskrit *Duhkha*, in Buddhist thought, is the true nature of all existence. Much Buddhist doctrine is based on the fact of suffering: 'Recognition of the fact of suffering as one of three basic characteristics of existence' (*Britannica*, 2003).

Seeing three major figures in his life die (first his brother who was only 9 years old, then his best friend, and later his father), Kerouac longed for comfort, for some kind of consolation, which is seen in many of his works. Within the group, he found support and the answers he was yearning for. He could freely express himself, and his sexuality, he could explore and try to find himself, and no one would judge him.

## 2. THE BEAT GENERATION

It might be confusing to understand the meaning of the Beat Generation without first understanding how the term was coined, so in this chapter, I will try to lead you through the history of the name, and I will introduce you to some of the main activists of the movement.

### 2.1 Meet the Beatniks

*The Beatniks* was a term used for poets and activists of the 1940s and 1950s who fought against capitalism, industrialism, and materialism. 'The great father of the Beat Generation', known as Jack Kerouac, tried to explain the origin of their name and said that their group was some sort of a secret because in order to understand them you would have to be a part of them. On a spiritual level, they understood there was no need in exploiting and showing themselves, which therefore meant they had been completely tortured by the world around them and they knew all sorts of pain: ergo, they were beaten down and that is why they are the Beat Generation. Other important Beatnik figures such as Gregory Corso and Allen Ginsberg also gave their definition of the movement. G. Corso explained it as an eternal spirit instead of a broken one. Ginsberg, in his way, tried to elevate the term economically; he said the Beatniks were the ones who wished not to work for money and carry weapons to kill, but were instead inspired by democracy and wished to act on their own will (Ivanišević, 1984, p. 9). A. Ginsberg also emphasized that the main figures of the Beat Generation were Jack Kerouac and William S. Burroughs, saying that between 1945 and 1955 Kerouac had already completed his masterpieces, and by the time A. Ginsberg published his famous poem *Howl* the movement had historically already ended. *Howl* is described as the crown of Ginsberg's and Beatniks' opinions on the political and social situation of the 1950s (Šindolić, 2017, p. 244).

The term *beatnik* is a compound of two words: *beat* and *sputnik*. *Beat* means 'beaten down' or 'exhausted, tired' (but it also holds a spiritual meaning). Sputnik 1, the first satellite launched into space, was the second word, and together they inspired the journalist Herb Caen to coin the word *beatnik*. Sputnik 1's huge cultural impact and the 'pain' *beat* represented were combined and the term *beatnik* was invented (Wills, 2019). Herb Caen was not important only as a columnist but also as a commentator of

social and cultural events. His name was always connected with the Beat Generation and it is safe to say that the invention of their name is what made him famous. Nevertheless, he did not support the Beat movement and had quite often made serious statements against them and described them as a 'moral disease' or 'juvenile delinquency'. Herb had stated that if his son was ever to become a Beatnik, he would not support him (Ivanišević, 1984, p.10). H. Caen was not the only known opponent against the Beatniks. In fact, the Beatniks had more opponents than followers: maybe because of the media representation, or because of their dissolute lifestyle, but it is sure their name brought up controversy and gossip. The conservative society back then found things such as homosexuality and spirituality wrong and obscene, so not rarely some of the Beatnik novels ended up in trials for promoting such concepts (for example, Ginsberg's *Howl* and W. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*). However, Kerouac's novels were never accused of obscenity. In 1959 J. Kerouac tried to put an end to bad-mouthing the Beat movement and to prevent the misuse of the term in the media, which represented the Beatniks as 'losers'. In many interviews, Kerouac tried to explain the relevance of pain and suffering which are needed for stepping into the light (obviously influenced by Buddhist thought). Being beaten down does not mean one is a loser, but one accepts the path from being a 'loser' to a space of 'religious illumination' (Ginsberg, 1997, pp. 153-154).

All of the most important events that contributed to the development of the Beat movement happened in three main locations: San Francisco North Beach, Greenwich in New York, and Los Angeles Venice West (Ivanišević, 1984, p.11).

Out of the literature circle, an important figure to mention was Neal Cassady, a true Bohemian of the Beat Generation that served as an inspiration to both Kerouac and Ginsberg. In many of Kerouac's works, especially *The Dharma Bums* and *On the Road*, Kerouac admires the character of Neal Cassady and sometimes makes the reader believe he is even in love with him, or with the idea of him (even though Kerouac was one of the rare Beatnik figures that were not homosexual).

## 2.2 Authors' lives and the correlation with their work

Among many authors of the Beat Generation, the ones who had put their life into their work the most were Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg. Others had also found inspiration in their way of living, big parties, alcohol, and drugs (especially William Burroughs and Gary Snyder), but Kerouac and Ginsberg had by far given those pleasures of life a deeper meaning and had incorporated it into their writing.

## 2.3 Jack Kerouac

Since I started exploring the Beat Generation world, my eye has always been caught by Kerouac's two most famous novels: *The Dharma Bums* and *On the Road*. All of his novels are autobiographical, but these two show the closest correlation with Buddhism, which I have been exploring. Katica Ivanišević in her book *Suvremena Američka književnost I* explains that Kerouac's opus can be divided into two parts: 'novels on the road' and 'novels from Lowell'. (Ivanišević, 1984, p.20) Lowell is the small town in Massachusetts where Kerouac grew up. Since Lowell had a large population of French Canadians, Kerouac only spoke French until he was 6 years old, when he started learning English (*Britannica*, 2023). Despite English being his second language, he became one of the most important American novelists and activists of all time, representing the idea of the freedom of spirit, also known as the *American Dream* (Hrvatska enciklopedija, 2021). The differences between the 'novels from Lowell' and 'novels on the road' are firstly in the location of Kerouac's stories. The 'novels from Lowell' are set in his hometown and mostly only reflect his childhood, subjectively describing events that had happened. The 'novels on the road', on the other hand, are written very objectively, describing Kerouac's spontaneous travels through America with his friends and giving us the best insight into the Beat world. Kerouac is very famous for his spontaneous prose type of writing (also known as stream of consciousness), letting his thoughts and words flow freely onto paper, and leaving them as they came out, without further change. Allen Ginsberg later called it 'spontaneous bop prosody'. Another interesting aspect of Kerouac's writing style is his immersion in Buddhism, especially during the production of his early work. That immersion resulted in possible *automatic writing*, which often occurs during meditation or under the influence of narcotics which can result in the spiritual awakening of the writer, or in such cases, of the messenger (*Britannica*, 1998). Due to the fact that the

stories in Kerouac's novels are semi-autobiographical, and we know that his early fascination with Buddhism made him meditate a lot, it is evident that his spiritual state had a big influence on the production itself. The legendary manuscript of *On the Road* was written in three weeks on a 37-meter-long paper taped together and fed into a manual typewriter (*Britannica*, 2023). The novel was not only revolutionary for the way it was written, but also because of the story of the novel itself. Writing about drugs, sex, the unconventional behavior of the characters and the usage of slang in language was all a turning point in literature (Hrvatska enciklopedija, 2021). Turning away from the most represented religion in America and shifting to Zen Buddhism and Eastern cultures, Jack Kerouac (together with other Beatniks) set the ground for religious and cultural diversities that can be seen in America today to be freely expressed. Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* represents the essential image of the Beatniks, introducing Zen Buddhism and oriental religion, as well as its influence on the spiritual revival of Beatniks (Ivanišević, 1984, p.16). Besides prose, Kerouac also wrote some poetry that was highly influenced by Zen literature, more precisely by Japanese haikus. He mentions writing and thinking of haiku poems in the novel:

We made up haikus as we climbed, winding up and up now on the slopes of brush. "Rocks on the side of the cliff" I said, "why don't they tumble down?" Maybe that's a haiku, maybe not, it might be a little too complicated (Kerouac, 1958, p. 31).

Whether the haiku from the novel was too complicated, or the haikus overall were too complicated, it seems that Kerouac longed for more simplicity so he proposed the *Western haiku*. Instead of having 17 syllables (5-7-5) as the original haiku has, he simplified the form into just 3 short lines. He incorporated the haiku into his prose work, especially in *The Dharma Bums* (*Britannica*, 2021). Nevertheless, Kerouac also wrote poetry such as *Mexico City Blues*, longer than the 3 short lines he earlier suggested. This poem consists of 242 choruses or stanzas, and it is also autobiographical, written under the influence of drugs such as marijuana and morphine (he lived with a heroin addict friend Bill Garver at the time). His fellow Beatnik Gary Snyder described *Mexico City Blues* as 'the greatest piece of religious poetry I've ever seen' (McNally, 2003, p. 195). Considering the fact Gary Snyder is a respected American poet (also a member of the Beat Generation), a winner of the Pulitzer Prize for poetry, and, most importantly, a Buddhist monk, these words must carry some weight. The last novel I would like to mention is *Big Sur*, which represents an important stage of Kerouac's life and provides

us with a different aspect than the novels *On the Road* and *The Dharma Bums*. By the time *Big Sur* was published, Kerouac had gained so much fame that firstly he did not know how to deal with and secondly did not want to deal with. Once again it is an autobiographical novel, but this time the tone of the novel is not juvenile, exciting, or tireless. *Big Sur's* tone is dark, soft, and almost suicidal because Kerouac constantly tries to run away from everything and everyone but ends up being lonely when he does so. He can never run away from this vicious circle that fame has brought him – not only fame but also his life choices. In this novel, he also expresses his disappointment in religion, probably Buddhism, which he so eagerly wanted to pursue. He realizes that the path he chose to follow did not give him the results he wanted, so he felt lost and showed resentment toward not only Buddhism but also his fellow Beatniks. Knowing Kerouac died shortly after publishing *Big Sur* (only seven years later), this was the time Kerouac already had major issues with alcohol, so we could explain that dissatisfaction by his addiction.

## **2.4 Allen Ginsberg**

Even though Allen Ginsberg's first aim was not to give us an insight into the religious life of the Beat Generation directly, he gives us another important retrospective into the Beatniks' world, which is the retrospective of the political and social conditions of America in the 1940s and 1950s, influenced by Buddhist ideals.

This does not mean Ginsberg was 'less of a Buddhist' than Kerouac, it only means that in his work he more precisely dealt with all social issues rather than with religion only. His most famous poem, *Howl*, is still seen as a symbol of American freedom, an anti-war and anti-violence poem that is simply 'howling', ergo urging for a new and better political and social system (Šindolić, 2017, pp. 611-615). Ginsberg is known for his extensive poetry style and usage of slang and vulgar language so he was even tried for obscenity because of some of his poems. An important fact to mention about A. Ginsberg's life is his time spent in a mental institution in Rockland in 1948. Rockland's mental institution was not new for Ginsberg: his mother had been put there when he was still very young, and that experience had influenced all of Ginsberg's opus. He reflects on his time there in his most famous poem, *Howl*:

I'm with you in Rockland where you imitate the shade of my mother. I'm with you in  
Rockland where you've murdered your twelve secretaries... (3.5-8)

In these lines Ginsberg talks to a third person, an imaginary friend, or himself, explaining everyone is a victim of the life conditions in America. The first reading of *Howl* was at the famous Six Gallery event in San Francisco in 1955, an event which is seen as the beginning of the Beat Renaissance in America (Poetry Foundation, no date). The extravagant and unusual poem had another strange aspect to it – the only thing the verse is conditioned by is the length of breath. Each verse has as many characters as the performer (in this case Ginsberg himself) is capable of saying out loud effortlessly (Ivanišević, 1984, pp. 37,38). No matter how immersed he was in the whole concept of Zen teachings about accepting the reality of life, Ginsberg's view on life (at least according to his poems) is very melancholic and sorrowful, partly due to being right about the bad social situation in America, and partly due to being declared mentally unstable. When the Croatian poet Vojo Šindolić interviewed Ginsberg and asked him to give the readers of the world a message, Ginsberg replied; 'I wake up every morning and realize there is no victory.' (Ginsberg, 2017, p. 250) This, if we think about the influence of Zen Buddhism on him, could mean Ginsberg finally reached a point when he accepted the pain and simply decided to live with it, which might mean after some time it would no longer be a pain, but just a numb feeling of awareness. This quote shows the direct influence of Buddhism on Ginsberg and its portrayal in his work. Vojo Šindolić and Ginsberg were lifetime friends until Ginsberg's death, and during that time Ginsberg visited the Balkans and wrote a couple of poems inspired by the social situation there. The one poem that I think represents the real social situation in all of former Yugoslavia's countries is *Peace in Bosnia & Herzegovina*, in which he talks about the injustice among the different religions and ethnicities that exist there. He mentions the horrors of the last war and the results it left us with. The fact that this poem is still very unknown in Croatia (and all of our neighboring countries) only means that the society we live in is still not ready to face the sad facts about our real racial and nationalistic social standards. If poets like Ginsberg, who were influenced by other religions than Catholicism (in his case Eastern religions) saw the problem in just a couple of days he stayed here, it is evident that our educational system needs a renaissance. Ginsberg had an open mind and an open heart toward all religions, which is a characteristic of a true Buddhist. Not long after publishing *Howl*, Ginsberg got

interested in Cuba. The revolution that had recently happened had little to do with Ginsberg alone, but harsh communist regimes and the endangerment of freedom of sexual expression might be the reason Ginsberg decided to write *Prose Contribution to Cuban Revolution*, first published in 1961. Aside from all other social dilemmas that could be examined from this work, what is important for this thesis is a fragment where Ginsberg mentions religion and his own possible separation from the concept of monotheism. 'A side effect of loss of dependence on words is the final break-up of my previously monotheistic memory-conception of one holy eternity, one God.' (Ginsberg, 2000, p.142). A circle around him – his friends/colleagues (the Beatniks) were open about their interest in other religions, especially Buddhism and its currents, which sooner or later accumulated in Ginsberg's easing towards new concepts (such as polytheism). For the Beatniks, being a poet in the 1950s and 1960s was much more about caring for society and spreading new ideas and thoughts that in their case came from Buddhism, than about earning money from publishing their works. Even though the Beatniks never cared about fame, the power that fame brought meant their ideas would be heard and the situation in the world might change. It might be hard to see the connection politics and religion have and how Ginsberg wanted to emphasize one's influence on the other, as well as the influence of both on society. Acceptance of differences as equally important and beautiful is a Buddhist virtue Ginsberg wanted to instill in American society. By being active in the political world – simply by commenting on current political situations such as the Cuban Revolution, he directly influenced many young people thirsty for change. Through his letters, novels, and poems, Ginsberg significantly paved the way for today's freedom of religious and sexual expression in America.

## **2.5. Beatniks and Hippies**

One of the many interviews Vojo Šindolić had with Allen Ginsberg, held in Belgrade in 1986, brought up a question of the influence the Beat Generation had on the Hippie movement. Even though the Beatniks were known for their suppression of politics, materialism, etc., they are not to be confused with the Hippie movement. Hippies did come after the Beatniks and the Beatniks were a sort of an inspiration for them, but they differed in putting their ideas into practice. Both movements did advocate sexual



freedom, anti-war ideas, and the legalization of drugs, but they did it in completely different ways. Hippies were a large, well-formed group that usually met at concerts, expressing themselves through colorful clothes and protests. The Beatniks did share the same beliefs, but they always kept a low profile and quite everything they did was to find a personal purpose, to find the 'it' – the meaning of life and spiritual peace. When Ginsberg was asked about it, he did not mention the differences but only reflected on the social-political influence the Beatniks did (not) have, unlike the Hippie movement. Ginsberg also mentioned that W. Burroughs and J. Kerouac may have had the biggest, if not the only influence on society and politics. For example, Burroughs did a lot of investigation about corrupt policemen and Kerouac explored the world of different consciousnesses. He agrees both movements had the same ideas about making the world a better place, and what they had in common was a belief and a desire that our planet could be saved. What Ginsberg emphasized is that it is not important whether those ideas came from democrats, conservatives, or the ones advocating sexual freedom: the Beatniks and Hippies (Vojo Šindolić, 2017, p. 244). So the main difference between the two movements was the way they realized their ideas.

### **3. THE DHARMA BUMS, ON THE ROAD, BIG SUR**

Besides the same author, what kind of connection do these works have and how do they (if even) reflect the author's life? The comparison and the similarity of these works will become clear as soon as you dig deeper into Kerouac's opus and his personal connection with the novel's characters.

#### **3.1 Sequels and the character's spiritual development**

If I were to compare the stages of life with these three novels, *On The Road* (Kerouac, 1957) would be puberty, *The Dharma Bums* (Kerouac, 1958) would be adolescence, and *Big Sur* (Kerouac, 1962) would represent a mid-life crisis. The three novels were published within a period of six years, but character development makes it seem they are decades apart. Even though the novels are not sequels and have no exact plot to be followed, we can see almost the same pattern of events while the main thing that changes is the main character's attitude towards life. A life of parties, drugs, and alcohol continues throughout all three, but in different proportions. Kerouac's fame by the time had grown and so had his dissatisfaction with the consequences of fame with which he had to deal with. His first big success, *On The Road*, was in fact a journal of Kerouac's travels with his friends, their abundant party life, and a perfect example of juvenile carelessness depicted through juvenile eyes. At that time, Kerouac's only concern was finding his true purpose, the 'it', and enjoying life.

By the time Kerouac published *The Dharma Bums*, (only a year after), he, to a great extent, began showing his interest in Eastern religions, especially Zen Buddhism, and he also put major emphasis on explaining that to his readers. Of course, part of the book is dedicated to depicting the party life with his friends, but to a much lesser extent than in *On The Road*. Here we can see how the main character (but in real life Jack Kerouac) slowly becomes a loner instead of an extroverted party animal, and his focus shifts from partying to more seriously trying to find his purpose through experimenting with both drugs and religions. The biggest problem Kerouac and many Beatniks had was that they were unwilling to accept the fact that they had to sacrifice some joys of life (in their case drugs, sex parties, etc.) in order for them to truly find the purpose they were yearning

for. Their way of life goes against the beliefs of Buddhism through which they thought they would find that purpose.

The last 'sequel', *Big Sur*, was a depiction of Kerouac's disappointment, sadness, and discontent with how his life had turned out. Throughout the novel, he tries to run away from something and tries to revive the 'old fire' which he could feel when being around his friends, but nothing seems to satisfy him anymore.

Even though Kerouac was still young, and so was his character, his alter-ego, through these three books we can see a major shift from a juvenile spirit to an extinguished spirit. It is almost like he goes through sin, redemption, and grief from which he can not run away. The character development in these three books is largely a real description of what was going on with Kerouac in real life.

### **3.2 The genetic fallacy?**

In literary criticism, the genetic fallacy refers to identifying the author's work with his personal life, which is why the whole identification of the Beatniks' opus could be seen as a big fallacy. Nevertheless, the Beatniks are so obvious in incorporating bits and pieces of their personal life into their work that I can almost surely say that we are not dealing with genetic fallacy. Examples are many, but I will explain only two, one in Kerouac and the other in Ginsberg.

Kerouac's admiration for his fellow Beatnik Neal Cassady was probably based on his own inability to ever live that carelessly. One thing is to try and act like Neal Cassady (which ruined Kerouac in the first place), and a completely different thing is to be Neal Cassady in spirit. 'I could hear Dean, blissful and blabbering and frantically rocking. Only a guy who's spent five years in jail can go to such maniacal helpless extremes...' (Kerouac, 1957, p. 78).

Dean Moriarty (Neal Cassady) was not just Kerouac's muse but also served as an inspiration for Ginsberg in his poem *Howl*. In the poem, Ginsberg describes him like this:

Whoring through Colorado in myriad stolen night-cars, N.C., secret hero of these poems, cocksman and Adonis of Denver – joy to the memory of his innumerable lays of girls in empty lots & diner backyards, moviehouses' rickety rows, on mountaintops in caves or with

gaunt waitresses in familiar roadside lonely petticoat upliftings & especially secret gas-station solipsisms of johns, & hometown alleys too. (1.117-124)

These two examples are only part of their life, in this case referring to Neal Cassady and the fictional character that was based on him, but almost their entire opus is in line with their life. In *The Dharma Bums*, Kerouac writes about Japhy Rider, a self-proclaimed Buddhist that eventually goes to Japan to practice his religion. In real life, Kerouac's friend, Gary Snyder, went to Japan and really converted to Buddhism. Furthermore, Kerouac's alcohol problems as well as Ginsberg's mental health problems are mentioned in their works, so it is obvious that we are not dealing with the genetic fallacy, but with semi-autobiographical works.

#### **4. HOWL**

Still today, *Howl* remains one of America's most controversial poems, partly due to the expressions Ginsberg used, partly due to its hyper-realistic, yet vulgarly expressed feelings about 1950s and 1960s society's religion, politics, and spiritual state. In this chapter, I will try to emphasize how is the influence of Buddhism hidden behind Ginsberg's thought process and his choice of expression in the poem *Howl*.

##### **4.1 Capitalism from a spiritual point of view**

Katica Ivanišević, in her book *Suvremena američka književnost I*, writes about publishing the poem *Howl* and the problems Ginsberg had to face during that time. It is said that *Howl* is a manifesto of Ginsberg's own dissatisfaction with the world he lived in and that it was an insult to good taste. Ginsberg became famous in a day, and literary critics could not agree whether the poem was a complete negation of any literary sense or an absolute literary masterpiece. *Howl* ended up in court, where it was argued once again whether the poem was social protest or hard pornography. Nine experts, critics, and writers agreed that the poem was a serious work of literary art, even though Ginsberg used expressions and experiences that had never before been seen in a poem. It was considered that the poem was an author's personal wish to defend human liberty from the civilization that so desperately wanted to ruin it. The judge proclaimed the poem legal, emphasizing that it was of great social and cultural value (Ivanišević, 1984, pp. 32, 37-38). Even though *Howl* is not strictly a religious poem, it deals a lot with Ginsberg's personal spiritual development, and it portrays Ginsberg's dissatisfaction with the lack of social morals in America. It is an artistic expression of a specific view on life, sexuality, religion, and spirituality in general. Ginsberg, among many other Beatnik figures, openly expressed his homosexuality which is why this poem also represents his suffering and his cry for understanding and acceptance (not just for himself, but for everyone). Like many post-modernist writers, Ginsberg's ideas were unconventional and rarely accepted by the majority, and Ginsberg himself said that he was only a writer, not a cult figure like the media tried to present him (Šindolić, 2017, p. 236). We can conclude that Ginsberg expressed his sorrow and anger with capitalism in every line of this legendary poem, trying to explain the madness they as citizens had to accept and, eventually, being declared mad even though the Beatniks were the only ones to understand injustice.

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness starving hysterical naked  
(1.1-2) who were expelled from the academies for crazy & publishing obscene odes on the  
windows of the skull (1.15-16)

He even referred to, probably, Burroughs' investigation of corrupt policemen, saying:

Who reappeared on the West Coast investigating the FBI in beards and shorts with big  
pacifist eyes sexy in their dark skin passing out incomprehensible leaflets, who burned  
cigarette holes in their arms protesting the narcotic tobacco haze of Capitalism..(1. 77-81)

#### **4.2 Hidden Buddhism in *Howl***

It is truly no wonder that Ginsberg's poem ended up on trial. However, the real reason behind it may not be obscenity, but the ugly truth about American politics and the injustice citizens had to deal with. In Ginsberg's *Footnote to Howl* he once again shifts back to spirituality, influenced by Buddhism. Ginsberg says:

Everything is holy! everybody's holy! everywhere is holy! every day is in eternity!  
Everyman's an angel! The bum's as holy as the seraphim! the madman is holy as you my  
soul are holy! (ll. 5-8)

Even though resentment is much more present than the aspect of spirituality, we can not ignore where Ginsberg's ideas came from. Ginsberg was a man of culture who had seen and explored the world: from Mexico to India, his interest in other cultures than his own was wide and his heart was open to accepting what was good. Ginsberg spent two years in India studying Indian philosophy and Buddhist meditation, and he visited many towns, temples, and sacred places. In the late 60s, Ginsberg composed music for Blake's *Songs of Innocence*, with the help of music legends such as Mick Jagger, Bob Dylan, Paul McCartney, and John Lennon (Šindolić, 2017, p. 231).

Ginsberg wanted to turn from the traditional way of life, and in accordance with Zen, he tried to shift back to instincts instead of logic and reason and to continue living as naturally as possible. He believed that the beauty is more than just the outside, it has no limits or a set of rules that can be explained within one religion, dogma, or political rules. Only a soul that accepts everyone can experience its uniqueness and the only way to truly find enlightenment is to go back to human's primal feeling, our instinct. Those feelings explain Ginsberg's saying that 'everything is holy': Zen's base stands

in acceptance of everything, there must be good and bad for the natural order. Beatniks believed that a person must surpass reason and logic to find the truth (*dharma*). The influence Zen Buddhism had on Ginsberg is evident in his desire to clarify the importance of nature (Ivanišević, 1984, p. 60).

## **5. BEATNIKS' INFLUENCE ON THE PRESENT**

Since the Beatniks started spreading their thoughts through their works, America has not been the same. It might seem minor at first, but the pressure they had to endure during the 1950s and the 1960s was enormous in comparison to the pressure their followers endure today. Their legacy is kept and it is seen not only in museums but in the everyday life of Americans and everyone who is now free to express their own opinion without the fear of being rejected or seen as an outcast. They set the base for the diversity that can be seen in America today.

### **5.1 Beatniks' centers today**

The most important place where the legacy of the Beat Generation is shown today is nowhere else than in San Francisco, the epicenter of the movement in the 1950s. The Beat Museum was founded in 2003 by Jerry and Estelle Cimino after they met John Allen Cassady, Neal Cassady's son. Before founding The Beat Museum, John and Jerry founded The Beat Museum on Wheels (also known as Beatmobile). Traveling from coast to coast they shared the story of the Beat Generation with many fans in high schools, colleges, and community art centers. They performed a 90-minute live performance about the Beatniks (*The Beat Museum on Wheels*, no date). After The Beat Museum on Wheels closed, The Beat Museum was opened. They are dedicated to spreading the spirit of the Beat Generation, tolerance, and compassion. They keep some of the original manuscripts, rare books, letters, and memoirs. They present the work of the Beat Generation to the general public.

Another important aspect that the Beat Generation left on the world was the one in the field of music. A lot of great music names have a connection with the Beatniks. First, the one and only Elvis Presley. The Beatniks loved to spend their time visiting jazz clubs and listening to jazz music, which was unpopular at the time, and so did Elvis. Like the Beats, Elvis was a refreshment to the scene with his unconventional way of performing and the choice of rhythm. Another great musician that said he 'naturally fell in with the Beat scene..' was Bob Dylan, who popularized poetic lyrics in the music industry (Chastain, 2014).



## **5.2 The impact of the Beatniks**

Even though their name may be less popular than the Hippies, the Beat Generation's legacy lives today. It laid the foundation for the cultural, ethical, religious, and sexual diversity that America has today. The pressure they endured from the media and society back in the day paid off, at least in the way of freedom of expression. Political instability and injustice between the social classes that we obviously can see today have not changed, in fact, they may have only got worse. Nevertheless, two of the most important things Beatniks advocated, religion and sexuality, have never been more diverse than today. Their novels and poems are avant-garde pieces of literature that true equalists, like them, will always appreciate and understand.

## CONCLUSION

All in all, Buddhism as an Eastern religion had an enormous influence on the works of the Beat Generation writers, starting from the unconventional forms, all the way to the worldview of the characters and writers themselves. Stepping away from the traditional American religion, Christianity, their work opened the doors for the diversity of religions that can be seen in America today. What is special about Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, as well as all of their Beatnik colleagues, is that religion did not only influence their work but also their lives. It is important to note that we can see a strong personal involvement in every novel or poem, inspired by either life events or by the beauty of Zen, which is often one of the main topics. Exploring the world of the Beat Generation will lead you to a revelation of the Eastern world, from simple and known things such as tea ceremonies to the complexity and importance of meditation and *satori*, a term used to describe the enlightenment. An interesting fact we know about the Beatniks is the way they practiced the so-praised Buddhism; even though they mention Buddhism on multiple occasions Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac never declared themselves as Buddhists but as Catholics. They were also open about the usage of drugs and alcohol, as well as about their abundant sex life. In those terms, they did not follow the traditional Buddhist rules, but the influence is still visible. Religion certainly remains one of the most important features of the Beat Generation's works and will continue to inspire and support new open-minded Beatnik-like artists.

## Bibliography and sources

1. CONZE, E. (1995). *A short history of Buddhism*. Oxford: Oneworld.
2. EDELGALSS, W. and GARFIELD, J.L. (2009). *Buddhist philosophy: Essential readings*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
3. GINSBERG, A. (1994/2017). *Kozmopolitanski pozdravi*. Translated by V. Šindolić., Zagreb: h,d,p,.
4. GINSBERG, A. (1996) 'A letter from Allen Ginsberg', *Chicago Review*, 42(3/4), pp. 55–57.
5. GINSBERG, A. (1997). *Zaliječiti Američki duh*. Nova Istra. Translated by M. Šoljan, 2(II,V)
6. GINSBERG, A. (2000) *Deliberate prose: Selected essays, 1952-1995*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
7. GINSBERG, A. (2006). *Collected Poems 1947-1997*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics.
8. IVANIŠEVIĆ, K. (1984). *Suvremena američka književnost*. Pula: Istarska naklada.
9. KEROUAC, J. (1957). *On the Road*. New York: The Viking Press
10. KEROUAC, J. (1958). *The Dharma Bums*. New York: Viking Press.
11. KEROUAC, J. (1962). *Big Sur*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy.
12. KEROUAC, J. (1966). *Satori in Paris*. New York: Grove Press.
13. KEROUAC, J. (2009). *Wake up: A life of the Buddha*. London: Penguin Classics
14. LUKŠIĆ, I. (2000) *Šezdesete: Zbornik = the sixties*. Zagreb: Hrvatsko filološko društvo.

15. MCNALLY, D. (2003). *Desolate angel: Jack Kerouac, the beat generation, and America*. Da Capo Press.
16. SUZUKI, D. T. (1934). *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*. Kyoto: Eastern Buddhist Society

### Online sources

1. "Buddhism vs Zen." *Diffen.com*. Diffen LLC, n.d. Web. (Accessed: 30 April 2023). Available at: [Buddhism vs Zen - Difference and Comparison | Diffen](#)
2. Art, D. (no date) *Zen Buddhism: Essay: The Metropolitan Museum of Art: Heilbrunn timeline of art history, The Met's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. Available at: [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/zen/hd\\_zen.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/zen/hd_zen.htm) (Accessed: 28 April 2023).
3. Boddhisattva (no date) *Original Buddhas*. Available at: <https://www.originalbuddhas.com/blog/boddhisattva> (Accessed 25 April 2023).
4. Bodiford, W. M. (2023) "Zen" *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Zen>. (Accessed 28 April 2023.)
5. Chastain, E. and Carroll, N. T. (no date) *A "Beat" Generation: Influence and knowledge from the masters, The-artifice.com*. Available at: <https://the-artifice.com/beat-generation-influence/> (Accessed: 19 June 2023).
6. Encyclopedia Britannica. (1998). Automatic writing. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Available at: [Automatic writing | Mediumship, Divination, Occultism | Britannica](#) (Accessed: September 4, 2023)
7. Encyclopedia Britannica. (2003). Dukkha. In *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/dukkha> (Accessed: March 25, 2023).
8. Encyclopedia Britannica. (2023). Dharma. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/dharma-religious-concept> (Accessed: April 9, 2023).

9. Encyclopedia Britannica. (2017). Eclecticism. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Available at: [Eclecticism | Religious Syncretism, Cultural Fusion & Intellectual Diversity | Britannica](#) (Accessed: September 6, 2023)
10. Encyclopedia Britannica. (2023). Theravada. In *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Theravada>. (Accessed: April 29, 2023).
11. Encyclopedia Britannica. (2016). Yab-yum. In *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/yab-yum> (Accessed: March 25, 2023).
12. Figueroa IV, D. (2020) *Jack Kerouac found the end of his road in St. Petersburg 50 Years Ago*, *Tampa Bay Times*. Available at: <https://www.tampabay.com/arts-entertainment/arts/books/2019/10/22/jack-kerouac-found-the-end-of-his-road-in-st-petersburg-50-years-ago/> (Accessed: March 25, 2023).
13. North Beach, T.B.M. (2018) *About the Beat Museum, The Beat Museum*. Available at: <https://www.kerouac.com/about/> (Accessed: 19 June 2023).
14. Silk, J.A. (2016). Bodhisattva | Buddhist ideal. In: *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/bodhisattva>.
15. Silk, J.A. (2017). Mahayana | Buddhism. In: *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mahayana>. (Accessed: April 29, 2023).
16. Telečan, D. (2023) *Dinko Telečan: Chögyam Trungpa, Nemo casopis* . Nemo casopis. Available at: <https://nemo-casopis.com/eseji/dinko-telecan/chogyam-trungpa/> (Accessed: May 7, 2023).
17. The Beat Museum on Wheels (no date) *Welcome to the Beat Museum on Wheels Web Site, Welcome to The Beat Museum on Wheels Web Site*. Available at: <https://beatmuseumonwheels.kerouac.com/> (Accessed: 19 June 2023).
18. The Editors (no date) *The Beat Poets, Poetry Foundation*. Available at: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/collections/147552/an-introduction-to-the-beat-poets> (Accessed: 01 June 2023).

19. Weinreich, R. (2023) "Jack Kerouac" *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jack-Kerouac> (Accessed: March 25, 2023).
20. Wills, M. (2019) *How the beat generation became "beatniks"*, *JSTOR Daily*. Available at: <https://daily.jstor.org/how-the-beat-generation-became-beatniks/> (Accessed: March 24, 2023).

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper emphasizes the influence Buddhism has on the works of the Beat Generation writers, especially Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac. It begins with highlighting some of the most important Buddhist treasures such as *bodhisattva* and *dharma* (*dharma* stands for ultimate truth), which are crucial for understanding the paper and their work. Beatniks can be seen as outcasts of Buddhism, because through their actions they violated the traditional rules of the religion, even though they often wrote about it and praised it. The revelation they felt when exploring Buddhism and Zen Buddhism led to the understanding of *satori*, which stands for enlightenment. Most of the works of the most influential representatives of the generation are based on their private lives or are inspired by their personal attitudes towards the world, which is why their works are semi-autobiographical and are not considered to be the genetic fallacy. Allen Ginsberg in his poem *Howl* expresses his dissatisfaction with the political and social state in America, whereas Jack Kerouac in his works incorporates a part of himself and his spiritual development through time. The cognition of peace that came with Buddhist teachings inspired these writers to share new ideas with the distorted world they were living in, eventually resulting in one central thought that followed all their work: rebellion and dissatisfaction with social morals.

**Keywords:** Beat Generation, Buddhism, cognition of peace, *dharma*, spiritual development, social morals, *satori*, the genetic fallacy, Zen

## SAŽETAK

Ovaj rad ističe utjecaj budizma na djela pisaca Beat generacije, posebice Allena Ginsberga i Jack Kerouaca. Započinje isticanjem nekih od najvažnijih budističkih blaga, kao što su *bodhisattva* i *dharma* (*dharma* kao krajnja istina), koja su ključna za razumijevanja rada i djela pisaca. Otkrivenje koje su doživjeli istražujući budizam i zen budizam dovelo ih je do shvaćanja *satorija*, koji označava prosvjetljenje. Bitnike u religioznom smislu možemo smatrati odmetnicima, jer su svojim načinom života kršili tradicionalna pravila budizma, iako su o samom nerijetko pisali i hvalili ga. Većina djela najutjecajnijih predstavnika generacije temelje se na njihovom privatnom životu ili su inspirirani njihovim odnosom prema svijetu, zbog čega su njihova djela poluautobiografska i ne smatraju se genetskom zabludom. Ginsberg u pjesmi *Howl* izražava svoje nezadovoljstvo političkim i društvenim stanjem u Americi, dok Kerouac u svoja djela unosi dio sebe i svog duhovnog razvoja. Spoznaja mira koja je došla s budističkim učenjima nadahnula je ove pisce da podijele nove ideje s iskrivljenim svijetom u kojem su živjeli, što je rezultiralo središnjom mišlju koja je pratila njihov rad: pobuna i nezadovoljstvo društvenim moralom.

**Ključne riječi:** Beat generacija, budizam, društveni moral, *dharma*, duhovni razvoj genetska, zabluda, spoznaja mira, *satori*, zen