

The Figure of Thanatos: Processes of Self-creation and Self-destruction

in Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg

Dr Tanguy Harma

PhD

Goldsmiths, University of London

My research project explores the figure of Thanatos in relation to two novels by Jack Kerouac, *Tristessa* and *Big Sur*, published respectively in 1960 and 1962, and one long poem by Allen Ginsberg, 'Howl', published in 1956.¹ Although both writers are labelled as 'Beat writers', this project does not directly address the cultural phenomenon of the 'Beat Generation', a term too generic and imprecise to be truly relevant in a literary context; rather, it is an aesthetic, literary and philosophical investigation that is grounded in close textual analysis, as I will show through this presentation. Each text, each writer is dealt with individually to apprehend the subtlety of their writings, which will then lead to a more conceptual and comparative reading of Thanatos within the texts.

The origins of Thanatos are to be found in Greek mythology. Thanatos is a daemon who serves Hades, ruler of the Underworld. Thanatos is reaching people out in the living world to bring them down to Hades: he embodies a principle of death within life, and a principle of life within death. In my thesis, Thanatos is envisaged as an embodiment of textual strategies that are highly paradoxical. It relies on the formulation of the prospect of disintegration in, and of, the texts. Such a prospect triggers a reaction that seeks to counter this menace of nullification, and that is either self-creative, or self-destructive. This conceptual interplay allowed me to highlight the contradictory dynamics of the selected writings, which all articulate, in their own ways, a trope of decay and death that is used to achieve patterns of self-creation, or a trope of regeneration that accommodates forms of self-destruction in its core.

¹ Jack Kerouac, *Big Sur* [1962], Flamingo Sixties Classic edn (London: Flamingo, 2001);

In order to illuminate this paradox within the texts, I used two distinct critical methods in my thesis. In Part 1, I used Existentialist theory. Through the Existentialist principles of Sartre and those of Camus, I aim at deciphering the ontological processes in Ginsberg's and in Kerouac's texts. Nonetheless, there is a fundamental flaw in using continental philosophy to decipher two literary works that are intrinsically American, especially in regards to the *spiritual* dimension that both Kerouac and Ginsberg relayed through their writings, a dimension that has been consistently ignored by 20th-century French Existentialism for various reasons. Therefore, I designed a theoretical framework that allowed me to integrate the major American traditions that the texts referred to, in particular that of American Transcendentalism. Through a combination of the Transcendentalism of Emerson with the Existentialism of Sartre, I could reformulate the central notions of nothingness and engagement in a way that would make sense within an American context, and in the context of Kerouac's and Ginsberg's writing in particular. Similarly, through an articulation of the Transcendentalism of Thoreau with the Existentialism of Camus, I could determine a type of the absurd, and a form the revolt, that are both typically American, and that intimately resonated with Kerouac's text of *Big Sur* in particular. In fact, the framework that I have designed is that of an American variant of Existentialism in my work, which combines four different theoretical models – that of Sartre, of Camus, of Emerson, and of Thoreau – in order to shed light on the conceptual figure of Thanatos in the texts.

In the second part of the thesis, I am using the metaphysical concept of the sublime, as defined by Kant. The sublime encapsulates a form of beauty so radical

the light of early XX Century organization of new speech-rhythm prosody to *build up* large organic structures’⁴.

It both sustains Ginsberg’s long lines, and dispenses with formal conventions of metre, rhythm and rhyme. It promotes a poetics that is more flexible and open to spontaneous expression and experimentation.

In Part 2 of the poem, Ginsberg introduces the Blakean figure of Moloch, who brings a radical change of tonality to the poem through the disruption of the long line:

What sphinx of cement and aluminum bashed open their skulls

and ate up their brains and imagination?

Moloch! Solitude! Filth! Ugliness! Ashcans and unobtainable

dollars! Children screaming under the stairways! Boys

sobbing in armies! Old men weeping in the parks!

Moloch! Moloch! Nightmare of Moloch! Moloch the loveless!⁵

In this second part, Ginsberg offers an actualisation of the myth of Moloch, who, in the Old Testament, impersonates a fire god whose worship involves the sacrifice of children. In Ginsberg’s poem, Moloch is personified, and embodied in the cultural predicament of post-war America:

⁴ Ginsberg, ‘Notes Written on Finally Recording "Howl"’, in *On the Poetry of Allen Ginsberg*, ed. by Lewis Hyde (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984), p.81.

⁵ ‘Howl’, p.8.

Moloch! Moloch! Nightmare of Moloch! Moloch the loveless! [...]

Moloch whose mind is pure machinery! Moloch whose blood
is running money! Moloch whose fingers are ten armies!
Moloch whose breast is a cannibal dynamo! Moloch
whose ear is a smoking tomb!

Moloch whose eyes are a thousand blind windows! Moloch
whose skyscrapers stand in the long streets like endless
Jeovahs! [...]

Moloch whose love is endless oil and stone! Moloch whose
soul is electricity and banks! Moloch whose poverty is
the specter of genius! Moloch whose fate is a cloud of
sexless hydrogen! Moloch whose name is the Mind! [...]

Moloch! Moloch! Robot apartments! Invisible suburbs! Skel-
eton treasuries! Blind capitals! Demonic industries!
Spectral nations! Invincible mad houses! Granite cocks!
Monstrous bombs!⁶

⁶ Ibid., pp.8-9.

Envisaged as a predator that spreads misery and despair, Moloch incarnates the productive apparatus of post-war industry as well as the military-industrial complex, and more generally the brutality of modern-day capitalism; it is used by Ginsberg as an extended metaphor for the crushing conditions of modernity, which accommodate the menace of complete self-objectification and imminent annihilation.

The figure of Moloch may also be interpreted as an agent of nothingness on the transcendental plane as well, as Ginsberg illustrates a contention between the mechanical processes and materialistic values that Moloch champions and the poet's yearning for an intuitive and spiritual life:

Moloch who frightened me out of my natural ecstasy!

Visions! Omens! Hallucinations! Miracles! ecstasies! Gone down
the American river!

Dreams! Adorations! illuminations! Religions! [...]

Breakthroughs! Over the river! Flips and crucifixions! Gone down

the flood! Highs! Epiphanies! [...] down on the rocks of Time!⁷

Here, Ginsberg's Moloch echoes Blake's figure of Urizen: the Urizenic mentality, as the essence of reason, is precisely what shuts men out of the transcendental experience. I argue in greater detail in the thesis that through Moloch, the

⁷ Ibid., p.9.

rationale of post-war modernity is interpreted by Ginsberg as a barrier to a form of transcendental being; it turns Moloch into an agent of spiritual alienation. Crucially, this menace is, also, internalised: ‘Moloch who entered my soul early’.⁸ It translates ontologically as the characters’ consciousness of death, which corresponds, in an Existentialist context, to the occurrence of a form of nothingness in the poem.

This equation of Moloch with forms of Existentialist and Transcendentalist nothingness is extensively developed in my thesis. What I show, is the way in which the relationship of Part 1 to Part 2 of ‘Howl’, which is the relation of the characters’ chaotic actions to Moloch, exemplifies a Sartrean dialectic between being and nothingness. This relation, I argue, is supported by the form of the epic, which imparts the poetical agency with a sense of both action and community:

The great American epics [...] strategy would be to create a hero rather than celebrate one and to make rather than record the history that surrounds him. They would, in effect, jettison the third-person hero of traditional epic [...]; and in his place they would put the poet himself as a representative, democratic man who discovers his identity and values in the course of writing, on his own and on our behalf.⁹

⁸ Ibid., p.9.

⁹ Richard Gray, *American Poetry of the Twentieth Century*, Longman Literature in English Series (London: Longman, 1990), p.13.

The epic character relies on an adversarial relationship that fosters a sense of performativity within the narrative: its momentum lies in an act of defiance. It translates as an incentive to commit to the here and now in order to claim a future otherwise jeopardised. In other words, as the heroic agency embarks on an odyssey that seeks to defeat the forces of oppression, it builds, reciprocally, the contents of its own existence.

This Existentialist reading of the epic genre allows the characters in ‘Howl’ to become, in a sense, the product of their own struggle against Moloch. This characteristic in ‘Howl’, as it connects the mythical with the real, typifies an ontological struggle against Moloch that translates as an engagement on both the individual and the social plane. It fosters the affirmative and self-creative expression of the characters’ ownmost and uttermost self in Part 1 of the poem, which may be viewed as a form of Existentialist authenticity in a Sartrean context.

Meanwhile, the last part of the poem, the ‘Footnote to ‘Howl’’, reads like an outburst of transcendental joy:

Holy ! Holy !

Holy ! Holy ! Holy ! Holy ! Holy !

The world is holy ! The soul is holy ! The skin is holy ! The nose

is holy ! The tongue and cock and hand and asshole holy !

Everything is holy ! Everybody’s holy ! Everywhere is holy !

Everyday is in eternity ! Everyman’s an angel !¹⁰

¹⁰ ‘Howl’, p.12.

This 'Footnote' features a free, chanting verse; its excessive iterations produce an epileptic effect that signals a climactic sequence. Here, Ginsberg collapses the boundaries between the historical and the universal, and equates explicitly the profane with the divine. As he presents the reader with a testimony of immediate salvation, he echoes the Prophetic tradition:

So, like a prophecy, not only in human terms but a prophecy as if Blake had penetrated the very secret core of the *entire* universe and had come forth with some little magic formula statement in rhyme and rhythm that, if properly heard in the inner inner ear, would deliver you beyond the universe.¹¹

After a mystical experience in which he heard the voice of William Blake reading one of his poems, Ginsberg envisaged the figure of the poet as a medium between the community of men – represented by the readers – and the transcendent; he interpreted his role as an agent of vision whose primary function is to reveal the divine essence of existence.

Crucially, this 'Footnote' suggests that the self is conceived as divine in essence for Ginsberg. That is to say, the self is interpreted as a fragment of the universal mind rooted in the individual, which implies a form of spiritual immanence. This characteristic, which stems from an Emersonian ethos and hails from the English Romantic movement, induces a bi-vocality that is primordial in 'Howl'. In fact, in the poem two voices intermingle: the historical voice that

¹¹ Ginsberg, 'A Blake Experience', in *On the Poetry of Allen Ginsberg*, ed. by Lewis Hyde, pp.120-30 (p.124).

strives towards ontological and social liberation against Moloch – devised as a historical agent of nothingness as we have seen – and the universal voice, that of the mythic, Blakean call that craves for transcendental connection with the divine and spiritual liberation. For Emerson:

To the poet, to the philosopher, to the saint, all things are friendly and sacred, all events profitable, all days holy, all men divine. For the eye is fastened on the life, and slights the circumstance. Every chemical substance, every plant, every animal in its growth, teaches the unity of cause, the variety of appearance.¹²

This conception of spiritual immanence and its ontological implications are central for my argument. According to Emerson, one may achieve a transcendental form of being *through* the realisation of his/her innermost nature. It implies that the enactment of one's own *intuition* – the individual's innermost nature, in Emersonian theory – is crucial to achieve a form of being that is transcendental; in effect for Emerson, the intuition is nothing else than the voice of nature – devised as transcendental in essence – that circulates through the self. This relation allowed me to shape a framework for a transcendental ontology in the poem; a model for an American Existentialism that regards the realisation of the universal principle of creation on the site of the self as the main condition for authentic being in the context of Ginsberg's writing.

¹² Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'History', in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Nature and Selected Essays*, ed. by Ziff, Penguin Classics, 3rd edn (London: Penguin Books, 2003), pp.7-27 (p.155).

From this perspective, authentic being in 'Howl' is achieved through the characters' performance of intuitive actions in historical reality:

[...] who studied Plotinus Poe St John of the Cross telepathy and
 bop kabbalah because the cosmos instinctively vibrated
 at their feet in Kansas,

who loned it through the streets of Idaho seeking visionary
 indian angels who were visionary indian angels,
 who thought they were only mad when Baltimore gleamed in
 supernatural ecstasy,

[...]

who lounged hungry and lonesome through Houston seeking
 jazz or sex or soup, and followed the brilliant Spaniard
 to converse about America and Eternity, a hopeless task,
 and so took a ship to Africa.¹³

Upon this premise, the actions in Part 1 of 'Howl', interpreted in Sartrean terms as the characters' commitment to historical reality, may also be viewed from an *Emersonian* viewpoint as attempts to fulfil their intuition, to exemplify the creative spirit of the universal mind. These courses of action are spontaneously motivated, either implicitly or more explicitly, by a mystical drive towards the transcendent; a drive that reaffirms the presence of a creative principle that is spiritual in essence, and which highlights the impulse upon which Ginsberg's

¹³ 'Howl', p. 3.

characters act. This impulse in turn generates a type of engagement in the poem that is spiritual by nature: ‘Man in his fullest state thinks poetically, taking the tropes that furnish his mind from the natural world around him. The spirit that is present behind nature does not act upon us from without but acts within us’.¹⁴ Therefore in Part 1 of ‘Howl’, the enactment of the creative spirit through the characters’ intuitive actions stems from the embodiment of the universal mind within the self; this is what induces a form of being that is potentially authentic both in an Existentialist context *and* in a Transcendentalist one.

It appears that Ginsberg’s poetical strategy in Part 1 of ‘Howl’ serves as a catalyst to support the characters’ attempts to realise their ownmost self and fulfil their innermost nature, which they exemplify through their intuitive actions. In fact, Ginsberg’s poetical practice, *in itself*, may be devised as exemplifying the creative spirit of the universal mind *through* the poem, thereby realising an Emersonian form of engagement through the writing that defeats Moloch’s menace of poetical nothingness. Ginsberg achieves this effect, partly, through the spontaneity of his writing:

Speak now, or ever hold your peace, write whatever comes to mind,
 adding vowels, adding alluvials, adding to the end of the sentence, and
 then rather than revising, if you have a new thought, go on to articulate it
 in the next sentence.¹⁵

¹⁴ Larzer Ziff, ‘Introduction’, in *Nature and Selected Essays*, ed. by Ziff, pp. 7-27 (p. 17).

¹⁵ Ginsberg, ‘Early Poetic Community’, interview with Robert Duncan, in *Allen Verbatim: Lectures on Poetry, Politics, Consciousness*, ed. by Gordon Ball (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), pp.131-50 (p.144).

His spontaneous method of composition generates a type of poetry that may be interpreted as an immediate realisation of his *own* intuition in writing form, *right there and right then*; the reader has access to the poet's intuitive self-expression, which in an Emersonian context is intrinsically authentic.

Meanwhile, for Emerson, intuition must be embodied and acted out in order to realise the divine essence of creation and engender authentic being. The other device Ginsberg uses, accordingly, is that of a poetics of *breath*, which fosters an organic relation from nature to the self and from the self to nature through inspiration and expiration respectively:

[...] the ... rhythmic ... units ... that I'd written down ... were basically ... breathing exercise forms ... which if anybody else repeated ... would catalyze in them the same *pranic* breathing ... physiological spasm ... that I was going through ... and so would presumably catalyze in them the same *affects* or emotions.¹⁶

I demonstrate in the thesis that through an arrangement of breathing patterns, Ginsberg seeks to *embody* his own intuition within the rhythm of the poem itself, so that his Prophetic vision may be passed on to the reader, and performed instantaneously by the community of readers upon the act of reading the poem. This poetical attempt to capture the intuitive performance of the self in writing

¹⁶ Ginsberg, 'Improvised Poetics', Interview by Michael Aldrich, Edward Kissam, and Nancy Blecker, in *ibid.*, pp.124-58 (p.141).

form and enact it in the here-and-now turns 'Howl' into an exercise of transcendental performativity, which here again generates authenticity both in an Existentialist, and in a Transcendentalist context. It promotes a strategy of engagement in 'Howl' that is as existential as it is transcendental: it seeks to negate the principles of alienation that the poem articulates both intra-, and extra-diagetically in order to liberate the self ontologically *and* spiritually.

Consequently, in the light of the paradoxical movements that operate in 'Howl' between the forms of engagement that the agency of the poem articulates, and the processes of alienation that emanate from Moloch, as chief agent of nothingness, Thanatos takes the form of a procreative movement that is fundamentally self-creative. It epitomises a fleeting motif of ontological, spiritual but also poetical liberation that defeats Moloch through the realisation of the universal mind of creation ingrained in the self.

Kerouac's *Big Sur* reads like the antithesis of *On the Road*. In *Big Sur*, both contents and form manifest a radical break from Kerouac's previous road novels. The excitement and the enthusiastic tone of the early prose have faded away; they are replaced with a sense of doom and gloom that impregnates the novel from the very first pages. *Big Sur* deals with the narrator's experience of physical decay and mental breakdown, who relocates to a Californian beach to rest and retrieve a sense of unity and transcendence. This retreat was initially envisioned by Duluoz, the narrator, as a perfect getaway from the city, from excessive drinking, and from his state of lethargy:

But the rucksack sits hopefully in a strewn mess of bottles all empty, empty poorboys of white ports, butts, junk, horror... 'One fast move or I'm gone', I realize, gone the way of the last three years of drunken hopelessness which is a physical and spiritual and metaphysical hopelessness you cant learn in school no matter how many books on existentialism or pessimism you read, or how many jugs of vision producing Ayahuasca you drink.¹⁷

From an Existentialist perspective, the predicament Duluoz is immersed in typifies the limit-situation of the novel. In fact, what Duluoz experiences in the first pages of *Big Sur*, I argue, is a form of anguish that may be defined in Sartrean terms:

[...] the face of yourself you see in the mirror with its expression of unbearable anguish so haggard and awful with sorrow you cant even cry for a thing so ugly, so lost, no connection whatever with early perfection and therefore nothing to connect with tears or anything [...] Enough! 'One fast move or I'm gone'.¹⁸

Here, Kerouac uses a mirror to indicate that the narrator's look is reflexive. In an Existentialist context, reflexivity occurs when 'consciousness turns its attention towards itself, towards the consciousness that "has" the experience and that

¹⁷ *Big Sur*, p.4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.4-5.

performs the reflection upon it'.¹⁹ This is how consciousness becomes self-consciousness, which translates in the narrative as Duluoz's awareness of his own decaying self. It is this self-reflection that generates anguish, understood as a form of 'dread before nothingness'.²⁰ According to Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*: 'Anguish is precisely my consciousness of being my own future, in the mode of *not-being* it'.²¹ It corresponds to the emotional symptom of nothingness, which is but the consciousness of one's own death. This nothingness is internalised by the narrator in *Big Sur*, who reckons: 'I've got to escape or die'.²²

And so he does. By escaping to an isolated cabin on the beach of Big Sur, Duluoz acts out a form of engagement that translates as a *commitment* to nature, which is also a *disengagement from* the urban environment of post-war America. In great measure, this engagement towards nature mimics that of Henry David Thoreau in *Walden* (1854), which exemplifies the Transcendentalist appeal for a mystical brand of the pastoral:

Marvelous opening moment in fact of the first afternoon I'm left alone in the cabin and I make my first meal, wash my first dishes, nap, and wake

¹⁹ Allard Den Dulk, *Existentialist Engagement in Wallace, Egger & Foer: A Philosophical Analysis of Contemporary American Literature* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), p.26.

²⁰ Ann Fulton, *Apostles of Sartre: Existentialism in America, 1945-1963* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999), p.73.

²¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* [1943], trans. by Hazel E. Barnes, rev. by Arlette Elkaim-Sartre (Oxon: Routledge Classics, repr. 2007), p.56.

²² *Big Sur*, p.5.

up to hear the rapturous ring of silence or Heaven even within and throughout the gurgle of the creek.²³

Thoreau's method in *Walden* embodies a movement from the particular to the universal, and from the empirical towards the ideal: it takes the observation of nature as its starting point. For Thoreau, the diversity of natural phenomena ultimately pertains to the unity and ubiquity of the principle of creation, that is, the godhead. Thus for Thoreau, nature is envisaged as the physical expression of the spiritual essence of creation, which is universal and a-historical.

This conception has major ontological consequences: in Thoreau's Transcendentalism, being finds its most authentic expression by existing as close as possible to natural phenomena. This search for the greatest possible closeness to nature recalls Camus's creative interplay between the absurd and authentic being. For Camus, the absurd generates an affirmative engagement with one's environment; simultaneously, the individual who engages is ever aware of the predicament of absurdity, which acknowledges the structural impossibility of coalescing with the world. As we transpose Camus's Existentialist precepts to Thoreau's transcendental ontology, it follows that the self, although it cannot be wholly and perfectly integrated into nature, actively militates for its inclusion. It is *through one's attempts to merge with nature*, that the individual experiences a form of ultimate being – of *authentic* being – that is potentially transcendental, and that simultaneously regenerates the self.

²³ Ibid., p.15.

Nonetheless in *Big Sur*, as Duluoz runs away from the big city, his attempt at reconnection with primitive nature fails irremediably. As Duluoz goes down the canyon, Kerouac makes it clear that his narrator is not welcome to Big Sur: ‘An angry war that doesn’t want me pokin around [...] – It is a dark clangor in the rain forest and doesnt want no skid row bum to carry to the sea’.²⁴ Through a trope of alienation that references several attributes of the Gothic, Duluoz is estranged from nature, which is pictured as a force that is frightful and inimical. Accordingly, the loss of his close relationship with nature involves a separation from its spiritual essence in a Transcendentalist context, which signifies the narrator’s segregation from the divine. Simultaneously, Kerouac makes Duluoz’s descent on Big Sur look like a re-enactment of the Christian myth of the Fall. In my thesis, I show that through this intermingling of several spiritual frameworks, Kerouac works at the edge of the Transcendentalist tradition, *reconfigured in Christian terms*. This sudden estrangement from transcendental nature and from the divine provides Kerouac’s writing in *Big Sur* with a distinct melancholy that mourns a mythical state of Edenic harmony – that of the pastoral.

Nevertheless, the narrator’s estrangement from outer nature in the novel is also an effect of his self-alienation. The reflexivity of Duluoz’s consciousness, which I have underlined earlier, is underpinned by the relentless inwardness of his look. This inwards look, as it monitors the harmful effects of alcohol and sickness on both body and mind, magnifies the sick self; this is what maintains the experience of anguish throughout the novel. Crucially, Duluoz’s visual focus on his own mortification is precisely what keeps him from accessing visions, which

²⁴ Ibid., p.9.

have a transcendental value in Kerouac's writing. I demonstrate in the thesis that the inner-directedness of the narrator's look is what nullifies his capacity to experience visionary states. These states, which materialise a continuity between the individual, nature and the divine, are intrinsically regenerative for the self in a Transcendentalist context; this is what Kerouac illustrated through the 'IT' moments of novels such as *On the Road* for instance.

In *Big Sur*, as Duluoz fails to apprehend the visionary, he cannot transact with the spiritual essence of nature and actualise his own self: as a consequence, he degenerates: "I'm going crazy [...] maybe I'll have to, maybe we'll have to leave or something, I think I'll die here".²⁵ This narrative strategy, which is foregrounded in the narrator's experience of anguish, typifies a process of self-alienation in the novel, which is strengthened by the modernistic quality of the writing:

The allusiveness of Modernism, with all its tangents and cotangents in stream of consciousness and the modern novel, [...] denotes an insipient and binding reflexivity; when conjoined with realism in 'modern realism', the term is used to signify the priority of a subjective imagination or consciousness as it apprehends and reconstructs everyday reality. [...] Modernism is realism reinvented, its phenomenological origins in the superseding inner vision of the artist.²⁶

²⁵ Ibid., p.170.

²⁶ Aaron Sultanik, *Inventing Orders: An Essay and Critique in 20th Century American Literature (1950-2000)* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2003), pp.12-13.

Kerouac's modernistic style emphasises the confessional dimension of his project, which, as it seeks to absorb the world and re-present it through prose – thereby rendering private life public – discloses the writer's interiority.

Meanwhile, the narrator's relocation to Big Sur also involves a process of *disengagement* from the contemporaneous social and historical reality; a disengagement which, as I show in the thesis, paradoxically fuels his existential crisis. For Thoreau, authentic being presupposes an uncluttered and immediate channel between nature and the individual: one must secure the purest and most direct path to nature so that he/she may *attempt* to merge with it with minimum hindrance. It involves a radical practice of disengagement from historical reality which, as I discuss in the thesis, exemplifies an act of revolt that is primarily ontological, and that resembles that of Camus in its structure. In *Big Sur*, Duluoz's revolt mimics that of Thoreau in *Walden*. It translates as a withdrawal from the cultural predicament of an America that is increasingly standardised, mechanised and commodified. This revolt – as *disengagement* – creates a sharp opposition in the text between the materialistic world and the spiritual self, between the profane socio-historical environments of modernity and the transcendental and a-historical ideal of nature. I demonstrate in greater detail in the thesis that Duluoz's revolt in *Big Sur* is romantic in origin and spiritual in destination. This revolt, nonetheless, is motivated by the ideal self, and destined towards the transcendental self; it signals a radical form of individualism that typifies an engagement *towards the self*, an engagement whose finality is directed exclusively inwards. I demonstrate in the thesis that the self-centredness and

inner-directedness that Duluoz's revolt exemplifies hastens his fall into solipsism, which in turn strengthens his own wretchedness.

Eventually, in the last pages of *Big Sur*, Duluoz is wholly consumed and falls victim to an eerie vision:

I see the Cross, it's silent, it stays a long time, my heart goes out to it, my whole body fades away to it, I hold out my arms to be taken away to it, by God I am being taken away my body starts dying and swooning out to the Cross standing in a luminous area of the darkness, I start to scream because I know I'm dying [...] and just let myself go into death and the Cross: as soon as that happens I slowly sink back to life.²⁷

This epiphany references the codes of Catholic revelation. From a narrative point of view, Duluoz's vision of the cross in the last two chapters of the novel constitutes a logical outcome of his revolt. It allows the reader to re-evaluate the nature of the physical and mental collapse Duluoz has succumbed to and to redefine it as a series of religious hardships on the way to salvation rendered in Christian terms. The narrator's revelation may be envisaged as a reward handed down by the divine, a godly compensation in recognition of the ordeal he has gone through; it manifests a significant departure from the Transcendentalist tradition of Thoreau. This engagement with the divine at the end of *Big Sur* suggests that the nature of divinity is no longer envisaged as immanent: it is not immediate and simultaneous with being any longer, in accordance with the

²⁷ *Big Sur*, p.180.

pantheistic precepts of American Transcendentalism, but rather chronological and teleological – that is, *subsequent* to his being – in line with the Christic sequence of life, death, and resurrection; this allows Kerouac to introduce a sacrificial dimension, central in his writing.

The sacrificing of Duluoz's body through the devastating effects of alcohol especially may be envisaged as a form of liminal religious practice. It enables Kerouac to both incarnate the ineffable suffering of existence – which becomes a primer in his late writings – and play with the religious codes of Roman Catholicism, which imply that the body must be renounced and crucified in order for the soul's deliverance. In *Big Sur*, this crucifixion is self-inflicted; Duluoz's martyrdom encapsulates a truly masochistic impulse in which the urge for self-annihilation is prominent. This clandestine passion for self-destruction and death is articulated in the text as a trope of the glorification of suffering, which echoes Kerouac's resolute belief in an after-life.

Therefore, the figure of Thanatos in *Big Sur* may be equated with a form of inwardness. The manifestation of Thanatos emerges from an inwards movement embodied in the narrator at the level of his reflexive look, which keeps the narrator from transacting with nature and which builds nothingness into the text; Thanatos, as an inwards movement, also figures at the level of the narrator's actions through the disengagement that he performs, which may be read as an attempt to emancipate from social and historical responsibility in order to channel the transcendent. The exclusive and idealistic form of this engagement towards the transcendent generates a self-centredness that translates into an alienating form of solipsism. The narrator's self-alienation is morally motivated; it illustrates

a commitment to Thanatos through self-destruction. This self-destruction owes a great deal to a sacrificial tendency deeply embodied in Kerouac's Catholic past:

[T]he Catholic focus on the Passion and death of Jesus Christ, via the mortification of the body, embodies a mysticism of sacrifice. [...] The Catholic penitent tries to perfect suffering in this life and hotshot it to the hereafter by paying the price of, not a thousand lives, but a single fantastic death.²⁸

For Kerouac in his texts, death becomes desirable because it is synonymous with the highest form of liberation. It is this dialectic of sacrifice that equates the degradation of the self with divine salvation; it is also this dialectic that enables the figure of Thanatos to be recalibrated in Catholic terms. At the same time, this tropism for self-suppression brings an end to travel writing as transcendental possibility. It signals a crucial movement in *Tristessa* – an experience of sublimation which, although anterior and of a different nature to *Big Sur*, is equally introspective and self-destructive. The tendency towards death *through* being calls for an investigation of how the Sublime plays a role in Thanatos.

Tristessa was written between 1955 and 1956, as Kerouac paid a visit to William Burroughs in Mexico City. It is a story of unrequited love between Kerouac's narrator, Jack Duluoz, and a young Mexican woman named Tristessa, a morphine user who spirals into addiction. The story is grounded in the narrator's

²⁸ Thomas Bierowski, *Kerouac in Ecstasy: Shamanic Expression in the Writings* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2011), p.170.

attraction to Tristessa's beauty and self-destruction – a beauty *generated* by self-destruction from the perspective of Duluoz. Kerouac celebrates his heroine as much for her beauty as for her self-destructive tendencies. In fact, it seems that Tristessa is death in disguise: through the device of personification, Kerouac gives a physical form to his obsession with death, by making it beautiful and enticing; in one word, desirable. Tristessa embodies a remarkable oxymoron that intermingles beauty with death, joy with fright and redemption with threat, thereby conveying the paradox of Thanatos into the text.

In *Tristessa*, Kerouac celebrates the heroine's beauty throughout the novella. Tristessa is 'a beautiful girl' with a 'big sad face'.²⁹ Her eyes are 'dove's eyes, lidded, perfect, dark, pools, mysterious':³⁰ the dove, a biblical metaphor, suggests innocence and benevolence; it also stands for the holy ghost, the manifestation of the divine on earth: Tristessa is touched by grace. Beyond her physical attributes however, it is her cultural background that Duluoz idealises and fantasises about. In fact, Tristessa belongs to a specific geographical, social and cultural environment that is extremely alluring to Kerouac. From *On the Road* to *Tristessa*, Mexico is intensely idealised by Kerouac for both literary and ideological reasons. In Kerouac's writing, Mexico stands for the mythical South; it is devised as a safehaven for illegitimate behaviour as well as a land for opportunity, full of natural beauty and untouched by the industrious action of men, a fertile land that offers visitors the illusion of the possibility of retrieving lost innocence, in typical Romantic fashion.

²⁹ *Tristessa*, p.10.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.26.

To achieve this effect, Kerouac uses the main tropes of Orientalism. For Edward Said:

[T]he imaginative examination of things Oriental was based more or less exclusively upon a sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged, first according to general ideas about who or what was an Oriental, then according to a detailed logic governed not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections.³¹

Even though Mexico does not belong to the geographical East, Kerouac's representation of Mexicans as Fellaheen in particular is symptomatic of this romantic projection, a projection that is often reductive and that corresponds, first and foremost, to a distinctive narrative strategy in *Tristessa*. It allows Kerouac to romanticise and mythify Mexico; as he freely remodels the Mexican culture, its natives are rendered *deliberately* exotic and primitive. It implies that Kerouac has little interest in economic inconsistencies regarding social organisation; rather, he is using the idea of the primitive as scaffolding for his own aesthetic practice. Therefore for Kerouac, *Tristessa*'s origin is synonymous with a form of cultural euphoria; the mythification of her roots participates in the definition of her beauty. Through the dramatisation and idealisation of her beauty, Kerouac creates a favourable aesthetic ground to the emergence of the sublime, as we are about to see.

³¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* [1978], 25th Anniversary edn (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), p.8.

Tristessa's appearance, however idealised, remains contradictory in nature. Kerouac depicts Tristessa with '[...] long sad eyelids, and Virgin Mary resignation [...] and eyes of astonishing mystery with nothing-but-earth-depth expressionless half disdain and half mournful lamentation of pain'.³² We may say that Tristessa embodies the biblical figure of the *pietà*, the mother of the Christ; the compassion, and so forth. While this is very true, my reading, however, suggests that the novella stages a reenactment of the passion of the Christ, in which the authorial figure stands for the Creator, and Tristessa embodies the suffering of Christ as she goes through an allegorical process of crucifixion through the drugs. Indeed, Kerouac's religious depiction of Tristessa brings her close to martyrdom:

[O]nce a year together they [Tristessa and her band]'d taken hikes to Chalmas to the mountain to climb part of it on their knees to come to the shrine of piled crutches left there by pilgrims healed of disease, the thousand *tapete*-straws laid out in the mist where they sleep the night out in blankets and raincoats – returning, devout, hungry, healthy, to light new candles to the Mother and hitting the street again for their morphine –³³

In accordance with the codes of Roman Catholicism, Kerouac punishes the transient body to elevate the soul. As Duloz claims: 'And as I know death is best'.³⁴ As Kerouac stands for Tristessa's Creator, he must degrade and destroy

³² *Tristessa*, p.8.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.12.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.81.

her carnal envelope to free her divine essence, a source of transcendence for the narrator/observer: 'I think of the inexpressible tenderness of receiving [...] the sacrificial sick body of Tristessa and I almost feel like crying'.³⁵ Tristessa thus embodies an intermingling of beauty and pain: these two factors interact with one another in a process of qualification and annihilation of forms, which is reminiscent of the figure of Thanatos in *Big Sur*.

In the second part of the novella, Tristessa's condition deteriorates, mainly because of the drugs. And yet, although she becomes an easy pray for death, she does not lose her aura:

[...] here comes a strange woman up the steps, unearthly and pale, slow, majestic, neither young nor old, I cant help staring at her and even when I realize it's Tristessa I keep staring and wondering at this strange woman.³⁶

For the narrator, this fusion between Tristessa's grace and the destructive action of the drugs contains the paradox of the beauty of death. As the last page reads: 'Bull and Tristessa are both bags of bones – But O the grace of some bones'.³⁷ This paradox is primordial in *Tristessa*, it epitomises a form of reverence for death in the novella, which illustrates the paradox of Thanatos. Through this paradox, the novella entertains an ambivalent sense of beauty, a beauty based on a process of annihilation of forms. First, Kerouac instills beauty into the text by idealising the character of Tristessa, as well as her cultural environment which is

³⁵ Ibid., p.53.

³⁶ Ibid., pp.72-73.

³⁷ Ibid., p.96.

devised through an Orientalist perspective. Once the form of beauty is erected, Kerouac methodically destroys it by means of an analogy with the Christian paradigm; simultaneously, he uses morphine – a drug with ultimate self-destructive properties – to debase and annihilate the very form of beauty previously constructed. The principle of death that Tristessa embodies is what generates the narrator's attraction towards her, but also what provokes the dissolution and remodelling of her own form in the novella: through the action of the drugs, her physical aspect constantly changes and yet never loses its singular magnetism.

This contradictory movement tallies with that of the sublime, which encapsulates beauty and terror at the same time. For Immanuel Kant, the sublime is distinct from the beautiful. The beautiful is an object of contemplation that provides pleasure through its mere form. The sublime, on the other hand, involves a kind of beauty that generates a breach in rational understanding, a breach that stems from the sense of threat of the phenomenon at stake: 'In the immeasurableness of nature and the incompetence of our faculty for adopting a standard proportionate to the aesthetic estimation of the magnitude of its realm, we found our own limitation'.³⁸ For Kant, the sublime is a fearful process, because at first, man's imagination cannot comprehend the phenomenon. Reason is deterred precisely because the sublime contains a form of terror that eludes conventional systems of representation: in *Tristessa*, this terror is the terror of death, which is implied by the gradual suppression of the heroine's body.

³⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* [1790], trans. by James Creed Meredith, rev. and ed. by Nicholas Walker, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.54.

Yet for Kant, the terror ingrained in the sublime also stems from the sheer indecipherability of the phenomenon at stake; paradoxically, it allows for a form of transcendence that may be *felt* and recorded by the beholder of the vision, that is, Kerouac's narrator. The sense of transcendence in *Tristessa* stems, in great part, from Kerouac's syncretic representation of spirituality, where Catholicism mingles with Buddhism. As this passage shows: 'I see [...] innumerable hands that have come [...] to bless her and pronounce her Bodhisat [...]. Her Enlightenment is perfect [...]. "She's an Angel"'.³⁹ Here, Kerouac mixes up religious codes as *Tristessa* is compared to both a Bodhisattva and an Angel. He extracts holy figures from each religious system that symbolise deliverance from the body, and places them in the narrative. Kerouac's elaboration of a syncretic form introduces an open spiritual system with multiple entries which, according to Lardas, 'did not so much secularize the sacred as sacralize the secular, turning everyday existence into a drama of ultimate consequences'.⁴⁰ This idiosyncratic feature in Kerouac's writing, which is Transcendentalist and Romantic in inspiration, is paramount in *Tristessa*: it allows Kerouac to connect the higher with the base and sacralise the heroine in particular, even though she is a morphine user.

This syncretic quality follows on from the Orientalist discourse as well. Orientalism tends to amalgamate religious frameworks of reference into a mystical aggregate; it subverts the various theological doctrines it is made of through a mythification of their systems of belief. Hence, Kerouac does not

³⁹ *Tristessa*, p.57.

⁴⁰ John Lardas, *The Bop Apocalypse: The Religious Visions of Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), p.6.

simply render Tristessa as *trans*-religious: he makes her truly mystical through the transcendent impulse implied by this syncretism, a *mysticism* that emanates from the integration of a multiplicity of religious systems into a *spiritual* form of universalism. In *Tristessa* this syncretism also signposts a way to come to terms with the dualism of the text through its resilience to any fixed representation.

Crucially, this transcending feature at the core of Kerouac's syncretic formulation of divinity is instrumental for the elaboration of a form of sublimity in the text. For Kant: '[...] the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes, a representation of limitlessness, yet with a super-added thought of its totality'.⁴¹ In the novella, the fragmented references to the divine merge into a mysticism whose nature is indeterminate yet boundless; as an effect, it renders Tristessa fundamentally *indecipherable*. For Bjørn Myskja: '[In the Sublime,] the cognitive failure is not of the kind where something is experienced as merely meaningless, but rather one where the existence of something that is inaccessible to ordinary cognition is indicated'.⁴² This is how the syncretic dimension of *Tristessa* may be viewed as instrumental for the staging of the Sublime in the novella.

Meanwhile in the narrative, Duloz's room is located on the top floor of a building; it convokes images of a look-out post in the reader's mind, a look-out post from where he may watch Tristessa, devised as a sublime object.

Accordingly, for Kant the phenomenon of the sublime is located *within* the subject: 'For the beautiful in nature we must seek a ground external to ourselves,

⁴¹ Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, p.90.

⁴² Bjørn K. Myskja, *The Sublime in Kant and Beckett: Aesthetic Judgement, Ethics and Literature* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2001), p.1.

but for the sublime one merely *in ourselves* and the attitude of mind that introduces sublimity into the representation of nature'.⁴³ Therefore, the sublime only exists as a phenomenon that takes place in the receiver's mind. It implies that the sublime is, *in fine*, mediated through the observer: in this regard, the irruption of the sublime in *Tristessa* is nothing more than a *vision* located in the narrator's mind. Duluoz, as the beholder of the vision, may watch the object of the sublime and enjoy the show.

Nonetheless, as he watches, Duluoz feels more and more disturbed. The spectacle Duluoz attends to generates a series of paradoxical feelings: there is both delight in the act of contemplation, and a feeling of anxiety that creeps up in the text. These antagonistic feelings make Duluoz's narration quite unreliable; it becomes, at times, erratic and confused. This confusion, I argue, is a by-product of the vision of sublimity: faced with such an extraordinary phenomenon, the receiver is at a loss to interpret it; the narrator's fantastic vision of beauty and death, that of his own physical and metaphysical ideal, disrupts his rational faculties, and points to the potentiality of his own death in return. As this passage shows:

I've seen it a million times, in Mexico the young men want the young girls
 – Their birthrate is terrific – They turn em out wailin and dying by the
 golden tons in vats of semiwinery messaferies of oy Ole Tokyo birthcrib –
 I lost track of my thought here.⁴⁴

⁴³ Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, p.93.

⁴⁴ *Tristessa*, pp.55-56.

Here, the syntax indicates a floating moment during which the narrator's consciousness is disconnected, letting the flow of words pile up in rhythm until reason is finally recovered: 'I lost track of my thought here'.⁴⁵ This passage may be read as a radical instance of the aesthetic practice of Kerouac: it is rhythmic spontaneous prose, it is modernist, it is surrealist; most importantly, this passage mimics a specific moment of the sublime, namely the temporary upholding of reason, which pre-empts the nullification of the rational self.

Such a syntactical combination suggests that the prose itself is reflective of the disjunction of reason implied by the phenomenon of the Sublime. In this sense, modernistic forms of writing, which both emerge from, and elude, consciousness, are instrumental for the elaboration of sublimity into the text itself. According to Jean-François Lyotard:

Joyce allows the unrepresentable to become perceptible in his writing itself, in the signifier. The whole range of available narrative and even stylistic operators is put into play without concern for the unity of the whole, and new operators are tried. The grammar and vocabulary of literary language are no longer accepted as given; rather, they appear as academic forms [...] which prevent the unrepresentable from being put forward. Here, then, lies the difference: modern aesthetics is an aesthetic of the sublime.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* [1979], trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Theory and History of Literature Series, 10 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p.81.

For Lyotard, modernistic forms are intrinsically linked to the formulation of sublimity. While the syntactical digressions of the writer's stream of consciousness tend in appearance to blur meanings in the text, they offer an opportunity to experience an approximate *idea* of its signification. For Kant: 'The sublime is that, the mere capacity of thinking which evidences a faculty of mind transcending every standard of sense'.⁴⁷ This type of writing may be viewed as one of the representational strategies of the Sublime; as it conveys the menace of the nullification of rational meaning, it embodies the figure of Thanatos within the text itself.

Therefore in *Tristessa*, the paradox of Thanatos is epitomised through the vision of sublimity, which is also the vision of death, as Kerouac renders it ultimately desirable: "'This is what you give me instead of death?' – I try to know what to give her instead – No such thing better than death'.⁴⁸ The equivocal nature of this vision in the novella is both transcendental and mortiferous. It shares a great deal with the vision of the cross at the end of *Big Sur*: both visions take the Christian paradigm of rebirth as an implicit model, establishing incarnate existence as an existential horizon that must be transcended through the sacrifice of the self.

The difference with *Big Sur*, however, is that this sacrifice is externalised and projected onto Tristessa's body. This is what enables the narrator to experience a vision of death which, instead of generating anguish by turning back upon itself, depends upon a surrogate for its articulation. The vision of sublimity thus becomes the fantasy of death, where death is turned into a conceptual vehicle

⁴⁷ Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, p.98.

⁴⁸ *Tristessa*, p.82.

for creativity in the text, an epitome of Thanatos in the writing. Nevertheless, for Thanatos to be preserved in *Tristessa*, the desire for death must be maintained throughout the text. Just as *Tristessa* cannot give in to annihilation straight away, as the narrative would self-destruct; it must cultivate death throughout. This is where the paradox of Thanatos is exemplified at the level of the text itself: *Tristessa* hosts strategies of destruction that are located within the very textual forms that underpin the novella.

To conclude, it appears that the several manifestations of Thanatos in Kerouac's writing all emerge from a transcendental practice that is ultimately detrimental for his narrators. In *Big Sur*, Duluoz craves emancipation from social responsibility and historical reality in order to channel the transcendental self without reserve; in *Tristessa*, he stages a yearning for the transcendent that is strikingly morbid and death-oriented. The exclusive, idealistic and sacrificial form of this engagement towards the transcendent in the two novels I have selected produces a downwards spiral that irremediably brings the narrators towards disintegration. In Ginsberg's 'Howl', the figure of Thanatos exemplifies a symmetrical movement in reverse: through a transcendental form of engagement that is directed both outwards and sideways, the characters create an ascending vortex that is beneficial for the self. This form of transcendence typifies the characters' struggle against the alienating matrix of socio-historical reality, which simultaneously fulfills their intuition. This coalescence of historical and a-historical motives in Ginsberg's poem is eminently virtuous on several planes: it generates an ultimate form of authentic being both in an Existentialist context and

in a Transcendentalist one. This authenticity in 'Howl' is foregrounded in a fundamental inclusiveness which, as it manifests an experiential plurality, defeats the singularity of nothingness (the characters versus Moloch). Simultaneously, it endows the writing with a faithful tone that proclaims an unalterable confidence in the future, as the self envisages its immediate liberation in terms that are ontological, social and spiritual.

Whereas, in Kerouac's writing, liberation remains illusory; it is erected as an unachievable ideal towards which his narrators continually strive at the expense of their own selves. This narrative strategy, which breeds a harrowing tone of melancholy in both novels, posits a sacrificial dimension that is preeminent in Kerouac's late writing. Ultimately, when Kerouac claims that he is 'actually not "beat" but strange solitary crazy Catholic mystic', it does not mean that the figure of the Beat visionary died completely for Kerouac; rather, that it matured into a more radical form capable of accommodating the resolution and liminality of his Catholic vision.⁴⁹ The narrators' immolation in the writings may be interpreted as a singular Catholic practice that acts out the refusal of the world incarnate in order to commit wholly and exclusively to a personal and idealistic quest for divinity, a quest that is as uplifting as it is mortifying in Kerouac's work.

⁴⁹ Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveller* [1958] (London: André Deutsch, 1962), p.vi.

Bibliography

- Primary sources:

Ginsberg, Allen, 'Howl', in *Howl, Kaddish and Other Poems* [1956], Penguin
Modern Classics (London: Penguin Books, 2009), pp. 1-13

Kerouac, Jack, *Big Sur* [1962], Flamingo Sixties Classic edn (London: Flamingo,
2001)

—, *Tristessa* [1960] (London: Penguin Books, 1992)

- Secondary sources:

Ball, Gordon, ed., *Allen Verbatim: Lectures on Poetry, Politics, Consciousness*
(New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974)

Bierowski, Thomas, *Kerouac in Ecstasy: Shamanic Expression in the Writings*
(Jefferson: McFarland, 2011)

Dulk, Allard Den, *Existentialist Engagement in Wallace, Egger & Foer: A
Philosophical Analysis of Contemporary American Literature* (New York:
Bloomsbury, 2015)

Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 'History' [1836], in *Nature and Selected Essays*, ed. by
Ziff, pp. 149-73

Ginsberg, Allen, 'A Blake Experience' [1966], in *On the Poetry of Allen
Ginsberg*, ed. by Hyde, pp. 120-30

- , ‘Early Poetic Community’ [1971], Interview with Robert Duncan, in *Allen Verbatim*, ed. by Ball, pp. 131-50
- , ‘Improvised Poetics’ [1980], Interview with Michael Aldrich, Edward Kissam, and Nancy Blecker, in *Spontaneous Mind*, ed. by Carter, pp. 124-58
- Gray, Richard, *American Poetry of the Twentieth Century* [1976], Longman Literature in English Series (London: Longman, 1990)
- Hyde, Lewis, ed., *On the Poetry of Allen Ginsberg (Under Discussion)* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984)
- Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Judgement* [1790], trans. by James Creed Meredith, rev. and ed. by Nicholas Walker, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)
- Kerouac, Jack, *Lonesome Traveller* [1958] (London: André Deutsch, 1962)
- Lardas, John, *The Bop Apocalypse: The Religious Visions of Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001)
- Lyotard, Jean-François, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* [1979], trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Theory and History of Literature Series, 10 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997)
- Myskja, Bjørn K., *The Sublime in Kant and Beckett: Aesthetic Judgement, Ethics and Literature* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2001)
- Said, Edward W., *Orientalism* [1978], 25th Anniversary edn (London: Penguin Classics, 2003)

- Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* [1943], trans. by Hazel E. Barnes, rev. by Arlette Elkaim-Sartre (Oxon: Routledge Classics, repr. 2007)
- Sultanik, Aaron, *Inventing Orders: An Essay and Critique in 20th Century American Literature (1950-2000)* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2003)
- Ziff, Larzer, 'Introduction', in *Nature and Selected Essays*, ed. by Ziff, pp. 7-27
- , ed., *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Nature and Selected Essays*, Penguin Classics, 3rd edn (London: Penguin Books, 2003)