

EVERYTHING IS PERMITTED

THREE ESSAYS IN THE SPIRIT OF FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY'S UNDERGROUND

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I admit that twice two makes four is an excellent thing,
but if we are to give everything its due, twice two makes five is
sometimes a very charming thing too.

- Fyodor Dostoevsky
Notes from the Underground

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dostoevsky's Underground	4
The Underground's Uprising in <i>Brothers Karamazov</i>	7
Seeking Suffering	7
<i>Dmitri's Sacrifice</i>	8
<i>Ivan's Conscience</i>	8
<i>Alyosha's Rebellion</i>	9
Fyodor Karamazov: Buffoon, or Holy Fool?	12
Works Cited	14
Henry Chinaski is Underground Los Angeles	15
Works Cited	23
William Burroughs: The Underground Beatnik	24
Works Cited	29

DOSTOEVSKY'S UNDERGROUND

Looking back on my high school years, I recognize now that I had a sort of unique philosophy on the way I fit in to my private all-girls Catholic school. The first semester of my freshman year, I earned a 4.2 GPA, so of course word got around that Gina Caprari got a 4.2 GPA, and I was introduced to my new friends in high school as one of the whiz kids. But being young and painfully uncomfortable in the limelight at my new school with new friends, I quickly began to see the merit in allowing my grades to drop a little, just to remain at a more comfortable, less visible level. I watched as the popular and fun girls in the class copied homework minutes before the bell rang. The cleverest girls in school were the ones who found creative ways to cheat on tests. The wittiest were the ones that failed French and Math because they had a problem with authority, but harnessed real secret talents as cartoon artists, and who we all knew would go far living so close to Hollywood.

So, partly out of laziness, partly out of a desire to rebel, and partly from a wish to be like these attractive girls, I followed their model. I allowed my GPA to drop, I ceased all homework activity until the latest possible deadline, and I refused to join the illustrious Speech and Debate team that my history teacher kept recommending for me. I felt the need to conform and the need to feel attractive, the beginnings of an underground career according to Fyoder Dostoyevsky. His gritty narrator in *Notes from the Underground* awkwardly intrudes on a party for some old schoolmates solely out of a desire to feel “in.” If not for this reason, then why else? He professes that he finds his old schoolmates appalling, minus Simonov, whom he later denounces as well. And he admits he knows he has no business attending the event, even that he recognizes his stubborn attendance as an intrusion. Yet he makes his presence known in an effort to feel like one of the gang.

His transformation completes when his old schoolmates reject him. Dostoyevsky's narrator asserts himself literarily after having been rejected socially, and this is truly underground. He insists he has never "received a slap in the face" (Notes 8), but the thirty-page rant in reaction to his rejection which comprises part I of *Notes* suggests otherwise, and the fact that he so ardently maintains that it is "absolutely a matter of indifference to [him] what [the reader] may think about it" (Notes 8) confirms the notion that he in fact doubly cares what his readers think of him. Later, our narrator declares "I write only for myself" (Notes 27), and that if it appears he writes for readers, "that is simply because it is easier for me to write in that form" (Notes 27). But he contradicts himself. Unless we are to believe that this publication is meant to read as merely a private journal, its writer has in fact published a work for readers, addressing readers, proclaiming himself too lofty to condescend to those readers, which again suggests the opposite – that he is in fact paralyzed with self-doubt and feels he must prove his value to strangers. So the psychology of the underground works in this way. One feels a regular amount of self-doubt and inadequateness, one experiences rejection or attack at a particular moment of vulnerability, and eventually, with the necessary predisposition (violent temper, hyper-anxiety, etc), a person develops an underground nature. It is the same notion that, on a smaller scale, drove me to my first tattoo, a score of odd piercings in my ears, and a hot-pink hair phase when I moved to small-town San Luis Obispo where everyone was the same. Dostoyevsky gives us a character who feels a need to simultaneously be admired by and stand out from those surrounding him, a perfect specimen of the contradictory nature of the underground.

The Underground's Uprising in *Brothers Karamazov*

But *Notes from the Underground* leaves its reader confused and disheartened. Its motive seems to be to alert us of the presence of the underground nature in humans and to demonstrate how this nature can prove dangerous when ignored. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky finally resolves the question of what to do with the dangerous underground disciple. He explores underground nature through a family's dealings with one another and their inherent underground trait, the "Karamazov unrestraint" (Brothers 508), finally satisfying his readers with the conclusion that all of us encounter some of the underground within ourselves, but circumstance and predisposition determine to what extent we allow our underground to take us over.

Seeking Suffering

One theme through which Dostoevsky explores the Karamazov underground tendency is that of seeking suffering. Father Zosima explicitly commands Alyosha to leave the monastery and seek suffering through experience while Ivan tortures himself daily with an over active conscience and Dmitri though he did not kill his father nevertheless accepts punishment for the crime. Dostoevsky implies often throughout the novel that human nature expects suffering as well as happiness and, though the notion seems absurd, that humans relish suffering just as much as its opposite. Just as Dostoevsky's *Notes* narrator seeks humiliation and contempt in inviting himself to his school friends' get-together, the Karamazov brothers all seek some variety of suffering. In Dmitri and Ivan, this notion has manifested itself in an underground way. Just as the *Notes* narrator engages in his own "corrective punishment" (Notes 90), Dmitri and Ivan seek

honor in self-correction. In contrast, Zosima's ideal for Alyosha is that he will recognize his tendency toward underground self-correction and squash it, instead accepting natural suffering as a part of life in William Blake-ian equality with happiness.

Dmitri's Sacrifice

Dmitri's underground motives are perhaps the most complex of the three brothers. Defining Dmitri as solely underground is impossible: though the eldest brother relishes base feelings and evil deeds, he equally rejoices in honor and chivalry. Dmitri drinks himself into fights with innocent bystanders, allows himself to accept money which he knows he will not repay, and entertains ideas of murderous revenge against his father for squandering his inheritance. But just as a younger Zosima knelt before his servant and wept for forgiveness after beating him senseless, Dmitri vows to repay all the wrongs he has committed. He never once lies during the finale trial, and though all the while he insists that he is innocent of his father's murder, he maintains that he should nevertheless be punished for all the sins he has left unrighted. So though he displays characteristics of underground nature (loving evil, indulging in desires rather than acting on reason, etc), much like the murderous friend from Zosima's past who turns himself in after fourteen years of living with guilt, Dmitri sacrifices his freedom when the trial offers him the opportunity to do so by insisting on his own incarceration. Thus, Dmitri may be defined as ultimately honorable even for his Karamazov underground tendency.

Ivan's Conscience

Ivan Karamazov struggles intellectually with his underground thoughts. His encounter with the imagined Devil reveals his subconscious view that life without suffering is meaningless.

His devil asserts that “suffering is life. Without suffering, what pleasure would there be in it – everything would turn into an endless prayer service” (Brothers 642). Because the devil represents a subconscious section of Ivan’s philosophizing, his thoughts reflect Ivan’s secret thoughts. Ivan forever terrorizes himself with an over-active conscience over whether or not he is responsible for his father’s death even after accepting this realization – that life is suffering, therefore one must create suffering for oneself. The idea that one must self-mutilate mirrors the *Notes* narrator’s self-correction. Ivan submits to his underground tendency by torturing himself intellectually.

Alyosha’s Rebellion

While in Dmitri we see a complex mix of underground and honest characterization and in Ivan lives the intellectual underground nature that afflicts Dostoevsky’s *Notes* narrator, the youngest Karamazov Alyosha seeks suffering prescribed by Zosima as a way to gain life experience. Alyosha has not yet fully discovered his underground tendency the way his older brothers have and ultimately must seek suffering to grow as a human being and perhaps in order to discover this trait and master it. When Zosima sends Alyosha “into the world” (Brothers 157), immediately Alyosha wonders why. He reasons with himself that “here [in the monastery] was quiet, here was holiness, and there [outside the monastery] – confusion, and a darkness in which one immediately got lost and went astray” (Brothers 157). But this is precisely why Zosima wants for Alyosha to leave once he has died. Zosima sees that Alyosha needs real life experience. He realizes that in the monastery it is easy to be good and follow one’s morals. The monastery is like a holy commune – all who live there support each other’s morality. It is only in the real world that Alyosha will learn how to manage his own morality, out where that support

system does not exist, and only then, after his morality has been tested, will Alyosha be able to assess what he really believes. And if his faith survives, it will then be strong enough to endure anything.

Given Alyosha's character since youth, it makes good sense that the youngest Karamazov should join the monastery the first chance he gets. Dostoevsky seems to deliberately emphasize Alyosha's naïveté with the anecdote about his being squeamish when the other boys in school joke about naughty things. He describes this one trait as Alyosha's only flaw as a child. And so it follows that Alyosha should find the monastery attractive. There he may hide himself from the darkness of society just as he once covered his ears from the boys' taunts.

Zosima detects Alyosha's tendency to hide from dissent. It may be why Alyosha never takes sides between his brothers and his father. But the elder orders Alyosha to tend to his brothers and father as they are fighting, to leave him dying at the monastery and help to settle their squabble, in hopes that being involved in their lives will inject some life experience into his own. Though this will cause Alyosha much stress and anguish – in short, suffering – it will allow him to see what the world is really like and act as a medium for testing and hopefully strengthening his faith and character.

Alyosha's objective to seek suffering is not unlike the goal Alyosha himself sees as his brother Ivan's life objective. When speaking to Rakitin, Alyosha asserts that "Ivan is not seeking money or ease. Perhaps he is seeking suffering... his is a stormy soul. His mind is held captive. There is a great and unresolved thought in him. He's one of those who don't need millions, but need to resolve their thought" (Brothers 81). At the monastery, Zosima mentions Ivan's irresolution as well, pointing out his ability to create two-sided arguments as a sign that he does not really know on which side he stands. In the same way that Alyosha does not take sides

in his family's squabble, Ivan is unable to take a real stand in his arguments. Both "seek suffering" in order to establish themselves. The "Rebellion" section outlines Alyosha's crisis of faith through a chronicle of Ivan's own faith questions. When Zosima dies Alyosha asks the same questions as his elder brother: how could a loving and just God allow for injustice here on earth?

Zosima's death stench shakes Alyosha to the bones. The youngest Karamazov has trouble seeing followers all around the monastery disrespect his great spiritual father's memory with questions of his morality. Worse, he questions himself whether Zosima was the father he thought him to be. When Father Paissy asks whether Alyosha is "leaving the hermitage? Without permission?" (Brothers 337), Alyosha simply gives "a twisted smile" and "[waves] his hand as if he [cares] nothing even about respect" (Brothers 337). He has allowed the dissenters to foul his mood, and penetrate even deeper than that; to shake his faith in Zosima. In his conversation with Rakitin immediately following, Alyosha remembers his talk with Ivan: "...some vague but tormenting and evil impression from the recollection of the previous day's conversation with his brother Ivan now suddenly stirred again in his soul, demanding more and more to come to the surface" (Brothers 340). And the meaning of this vague recollection becomes starkly clear to Alyosha when he speaks Ivan's reasonings word for word to Rakitin: "I do not rebel against my God, I simply "do not accept his world"" (Brothers 341). The evolution of his vague discomfort with the happenings at the monastery into a full understanding of his own crisis of faith is complete. He realizes that he is himself feeling the same crisis to which when speaking with his brother Ivan he fancied he was immune.

And this is exactly what Zosima wished for Alyosha when he demanded that his young pupil leave the monastery after his death. In Alyosha's records of Zosima's last homilies Zosima

idealizes the isolation of the monk: “The monk is reproached for his isolation: ‘You isolate yourself in order to save your soul behind monastery walls, but you forget the brotherly ministry to mankind’” (Brothers 314). Zosima asserts that a man like himself who has experienced the world and its suffering and shortcomings better serves mankind in the monastery, practicing self-control and removing himself from temptations. He has already tested his faith and now desires to practice it with others who have come to the same solid conclusions. But a young man like Alyosha who has not experienced the world has never made a real informed decision about his faith. Alyosha has read books and followed dogma with a black and white sense of right and wrong. He feels a vague but strong appreciation for the solid goodness of Zosima, the only constant in his world. But when he begins to hear the confessions of his brothers and meets with Grushenka, he realizes that life is full of gray areas, and where his faith ends up at the end of his life is left to the reader’s imagination.

Fyodor Karamazov: Buffoon, or Holy Fool?

Fyodor Karamazov proves an entirely different beast from that of his sons. While Dostoevsky explores the underground aspects of seeking suffering in the brothers Karamazov, in Fyodor he presents an underground buffoonery. Throughout the novel, Dostoevsky contrasts holy fools with buffoons. Stinking Lizaveta, for example, is a holy fool, harmless, well-meaning, whose only fault proves an inability to fit in socially with her community. Dostoevsky calls Father Varsonofy, who Father Zosima succeeds as elder at the monastery, a holy fool, “buried without any corruption in [him]” (Brothers 331). Fyodor, however, earns the title “buffoon” instead as he merely feigns honesty and goodness while acting from dishonorable

motives. Buffoon throughout the novel is used as an insult, as Ivan abuses his Devil with the declaration, “Buffoon!” (Brothers 645) together with “scoundrel” (Brothers 645) and “ass” (Brothers 644). Fyoder’s buffoonery proves underground in the sense that he seeks to justify his inadequacies by acting like a fool rather than honestly reviewing his problem traits (the Karamazov unrestraint) and working to right the wrongs he has committed. Fyoder, in contrast with his sons, seemingly lacks a conscience altogether, while the brothers Karamazov struggle endlessly with their own.

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HENRY CHINASKI IS UNDERGROUND LOS ANGELES

The great Southern California City of Los Angeles spans almost 500 square miles with its county suburb arms reaching south verily through San Diego, east as far as Joshua Tree, and up north again to Camarillo where the urban sprawl meets with Ventura. The giant octopus-armed city has out-urbanized countless cultural centers of the United States in just a century, making other landscapes appear crushed, flattened. Larger than life, Los Angeles has had something to prove to its eastern sister cities. With the outburst of cars and freeways, its residents are hermitish and multi-cultured. Its Hollywood has offered inhabitants a great escape from the ordinariness of daily life, trudging to and from aesthetically-wanting slums. It was the home of Charles Bukowski, and doubtless influenced his coming of age novel *Ham on Rye*, providing a setting and an inspiration for his protagonist, Henry Chinaski. A clear shadow of Bukowski's own person, Chinaski grows up in the rapidly changing urban center throughout the 1930s and 1940s. The city diffuses with Chinaski as the German-born tough kid takes on traits of his surroundings; he is isolationist, escapist, aesthetically wanting, out to prove his value, without a clear God, himself undergoing the rapid change that is his adolescence. Henry Chinaski is his generation's Los Angeles.

Throughout the novel, Henry spends much of his time in seclusion. Awkward friends gravitate toward him, Chinaski never seeks his own acquaintances. His isolationist attitude reflects the manner in which Los Angeles formatted itself in the 30s and 40s. With the onset of the automobile, city managers argued cars "restored health" (Fotsch 22) as they "brought the rider in direct contact with the environment" (Fotsch 22) and passed "environmental and public health benefits to urban residents" (Fotsch 13), inherent in "the entire banishment of the horse from city streets" (Fotsch 13), not to mention lower noise pollution created by trains. Los Angeles became, as Paul Fotsch suggests, "the quintessential automobile-centered city" (158).

But this advancement was not without consequences. Fotsch argues that while creating the best highway system in the country, investing in Los Angeles's roads and freeways contributed to the complete isolationism of its residents. He refers to "the freeway's capacity for social isolation—the distancing it allows between drivers and surrounding environment" (Fotsch 159) in that the freeways enclose their passengers on a concrete stretch, often with heavy walls and barricades on either side which block drivers' views of the landscape. The effect on the driver is a feeling of "autonomy" (Fotsch 23), riding in a narrow tube disconnected from all around him.

Additionally, the automobile "created an environment for isolation by making it difficult to become acquainted with neighbors" (Fotsch 101) as pedestrian life, which facilitated conversation and friendship in casual run-ins, waned. In the same way, Henry Chinaski builds walls around himself in order to disconnect from others. He learns early to exude a persona which pushes others away, which Mrs. Westphal addresses when she keeps him after class one day in grammar school:

"Your parents don't give you much love, do they?"

"I don't need that stuff," I told her.

"Henry, everybody needs love."

"I don't need anything."

...She stood up, came to my desk and slowly took my head in her hands... I reached around and grabbed her legs.

"Henry! You must stop fighting everybody! We want to help you"

(Bukowski 56).

Henry turns to a familiar pattern. Mrs. Westphal's inquiries into his home life make Chinaski uncomfortable, and, as she foresees, he is not accustomed to such loving reinforcement. As a result, Chinaski lapses into sexual misconduct. His outburst is so sudden and offensive (in the

next moment he exclaims, “All right... let’s fuck! [Bukowski 56]) that Mrs. Westphal pushes him away and henceforth refrains from such warm embraces. Similarly, he glories in bandages that cover his face after receiving acne treatment, confessing, “I was *hidden*. It was wonderful... I felt very exceptional and a bit evil... It didn’t pay to trust another human being. Humans didn’t have it, whatever it took” (Bukowski 144). Driven to a complete distrust of others by his parents’ maddening behavior and the horrific glances he receives on account of his acne, Henry reflects the isolationism inherent in Los Angeles automobile dependence.

Chinaski additionally displays a very Los Angeleno affinity for escapism in his short story writing. While staying at home all day with his terrible acne, Henry invents adventures starring the World War I German aviator Baron Von Himmlen, who predictably echoes many of Chinaski’s own features. The Baron is “not popular with his fellow fliers” (Bukowski 146) just as Chinaski has trouble fitting into his high school, neither does he “bother with women” (Bukowski 146) just as his author experiences no positive female interest. But in Henry’s world, the Baron is “above all that... too busy... shooting Allied planes out of the sky” (Bukowski 146). He is an “ugly man with scars on his face, but... beautiful if you looked long enough—it was in the eyes, his style, his courage, his fierce aloneness” (Bukowski 146). Escaping to a world where his own characteristics transcend all others, Chinaski reflects the escapism the rise of Hollywood provided for Los Angelenos in the 1920s and 30s. Merry Ovnick suggests “motion pictures offered one way of coping with the insecurity of a period of rapid change and unsettling change: they invited escapism into a world of fantasies” (158). In the same way Chinaski creates his own world to escape from the hideousness of his reality, Hollywood provided a place “where fairytale pretense was reality” (Ovnick 158), a place for its disillusioned citizens to escape from the dullness of their day to day lives. Movies presented one solution for the depressing

isolationism Angelenos felt, and while Henry conversely revels in his seclusion, he shares the imaginative escape, which for him venerates his loneliness rather than endorses comfort in community.

Also like the Los Angeles typecast, Henry Chinaski's outward appearance remains unmanageable. In the same way that Los Angeles has been condemned by some as New York's ugly sister, Henry's society labels him abhorrent with the onset of his *acne vulgaris*. He describes his boils as "all over [his] face, back, neck, and some on [his] chest" (Bukowski 122), "inflamed, relentless, large, swollen boils filled with pus" (Bukowski 137), wondering "how ugly a person could get" (Bukowski 137). In the same way, 1930s Los Angeles dealt with a rising aesthetic problem. As migrators poured into the city and its surrounding suburbs and with the extremely rapid increase in industrialization, pollution became a huge issue. September 8, 1943 marked the very first "daylight dim-out caused by smog" (Caughey 383), but the "ominous gray and yellowing overcast" (Caughey 383) had long been noticeable in the city. Smog became not only a giant health factor, but an aesthetic shortcoming. While before, dusty-road rural Los Angeles boasted ocean views, year-round riding weather, and clear skies, 1930s Los Angeles saw the beginning of what would become "that great brown bag in the sky" (Caughey 381). Los Angeles also lacked the timeless architecture of older eastern cities; instead, drab concrete and stucco made up much of 1930s and 40s pragmatist residential construction. Skid Row quickly developed during this era as well. Mark Wild describes how many impressive neighborhoods like Bunker Hill dismantled; previously a "prestigious neighborhood of elegant mansions [Bunker Hill was] now subdivided into apartments and rented out to motley collections of bachelors and the elderly" (Wild 12). Wild also iterates tacky "cabaret music, cowboy band's wild discord, and forced laughter" (Wild 12), asserting that in many parts of Los Angeles one

now “passed through crowds of street speakers, police officers, prostitutes, church people, alcoholics, laborers, and cross-dressers” (Wild 12). This change signifies a diluting of a mainstream style of morality in Los Angeles, as well as a decline in cultural aesthetics such as architecture and natural landscape beauty. In the same way that Los Angeles declined aesthetically during its period of rapid change, Henry’s adolescence malforms his appearance with the onset of his uniquely terrible skin condition.

Just as Los Angeles had something to prove to its older eastern sister cities like New York, Henry Chinaski feels all his life a desperate need to assert his worth. He constantly picks fights, once with a tattoo-ed motorist on his way to the beach. Chinaski describes the man as “a big guy in his twenties with hairy arms” (Bukowski 165), and Chinaski can’t help but get into it with him. He tells the man, “All right, you want trouble? *Park it*. I’m trouble” (Bukowski 165), even though he can tell the man “was trying to show off in front of his girl” (Bukowski 165). Henry cannot let disrespect go unnoticed and unpunished, and often picks fights with guys against whom he knows he has no chance, just upon the principle that he must at the very least always attempt to redeem his dignity. He positively revels in being pulverized by kids twice his size, waiting desperately for a day when he will finally win the fight. In the very same way that Los Angeles’ nouveaux-riche citizens felt the need to live up to standards of eastern old-money cities in a real-life East-Egg–West-Egg rivalry, Henry Chinaski pits himself against some of his rich ex-classmates from Chelsey High who have “sports cars and expensive clothes” (Bukowski 154). Chinaski cites the boys’ inexperience with hard work and a hard life, describing their bodies as “soft, they had never faced any fire. They were beautiful nothings” (Bukowski 212). In contrast, Chinaski has been born into a poor broken family, has no elite pedigree, and appears aesthetically opposite his rich classmate’s “sculpted face” (Bukowski 215). Just as urban and

cultural centers like New York and Philadelphia could boast antique roots and generations-deep wealth and prestige, the kid Henry fights, Jimmy Newhall, basks in his old-money glory, or at least older than Henry's nonexistent money. And, just like his mother city whose values lie in places other than establishment and wealth, Henry fights back, wishing to prove that money does not always prevail, that even though he may not be steeped in established generations he possesses values that command respect.

Lastly, Henry Chinaski lacks the presence of a real God throughout his adolescence. While he evokes God at some points in the novel, he uses his evocation to question his deity. With the onset of his acne, he begins to lose what faith he might have had, speaking to God, "You have been picking on me too much so I am asking You to come down here so I can put You to the test!" (Bukowski 141). After questioning God in this fashion, he receives a startling and horrifying sign from the brown box of Bible quotations his grandmother gave him. He picks one up which reads, "GOD HAS FORSAKEN YOU" (Bukowski 142), marking Henry's denunciation of any sort of faith. Just as he has lost faith in the goodness of people as a result of his family's behavior and his own marginalization, when the God in whom he has been seasoned to believe does not appear at one of the most crucial suffering moments in his life, Chinaski abandons hope of a higher power as well. Though he merely imagines the quotation as he later checks the whole box and does not find it, this seems to be the only sign that God gives him, and it is an appalling one. In a similar way, Los Angeles has no definitive God. As a result of so much immigration and diversity in the area, there has virtually never been one dominating religion to represent the city. Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, Catholics, Hindus, Daoists, Christians, agnostics, atheists, and every other religion connected to any culture exists within the boundaries of the city, and while there may be a large population that subscribes to a religion,

comprehensively all religions cancel each other out. Without a defining moral identity, some refer to Los Angeles as a uniquely morally “lost” city, much like Henry Chinaski’s own personal manufactured morality. Rather than subscribe to any one religion, Chinaski seems to take from many cultures and ideologies bits and pieces of morality that suit his own world. He subscribes to an every-man-for-himself system of ethics in which, having been exploited and beat down his entire childhood, Chinaski feels justified obtaining any monetary support or goods he can without being caught.

Henry Chinaski ultimately undergoes the same transformation that his home city endures during the 1930s and 1940s. In his adolescence his experiences chronicle the same rapid chaotic change and harbor the same results. Chinaski’s outlook remains optimistic as Bukowski’s *Ham on Rye* celebrates the unique loneliness that he endures as a sign of true experience and strength. Just as Los Angeles will fight through such trying times in its future as it endured in its past, Henry Chinaski fights on. The self-assured isolationist’s story mimics the life of a city built up concretely by the swarms of its populations: always on the edge of collapse, and yet never susceptible to self-destruction.

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WILLIAM BURROUGHS: THE UNDERGROUND BEATNIK

My uncle Oscar wears beat suspenders and duct-tapes his shoes until he absolutely has to buy new ones. Never having had a formal job since I was born and no degree past high school, a few years ago he retreated from his bungalow off the highway because here-and-there movie shoots finally failed to pay bills, and my uncle Oscar, genius of construction and mechanics, built a solid dwelling from a pop-me-up trailer, complete with carport and garden, to the side of his driveway. There, he sways in an old rocking chair that used to display at my Nona's house, smoking pot and scratching his four dogs, reading literature on every subject you can think of. A true Romantic, Oscar breaks the mold of a career and family life, pursuing instead his intellectual curiosities, stimulated by his grass and pipe, up in the mountains. A William Burroughs of contemporary Los Angeles county, my uncle Oscar resembles a disillusioned but hopelessly content war veteran. Hilariously addicted to conspiracies and amiably resigned to his drug use, he mirrors the notoriously nihilistic and passionate oldest member of the Beat generation. Often misunderstood in the scholarly world as cynical floozies addicted to kicks, Beat writers employ philosophy that actually parallels much of that of the earlier Romantic movement. Revering a similar intensity of feeling through the portal of creative literature, the Beats experimented with drugs, alcohol, sex, and travel, all their "kicks," as a way to break free from what had become a systematic and stifling society, just as romantic writers like William Blake and John Keats strove to reestablish a passion for life as a reaction against the Enlightenment. The Beat spokesperson of this nihilistic tendency, William Burroughs, embodies John Keats's dark apprehensions in his writing, but though his notions of reality remain dark and at times cynical, revealing the underworld of societies he has encountered, like Keats, Burroughs suggests that life's underbelly is just as important to understand and accept as Kerouac's very different mystic topside.

Burroughs provides balance to the Beat movement, making the entire generation an equalized life view of hardship and hope, akin even to the notions of Devouring and Prolific of earliest romantic William Blake.

Burroughs supplies his Beat generation with harsher views of life in describing characters who actually act on all the regular shameful daily notions the average man suppresses. In Junky, Burroughs describes the character Norton as a “hard-working thief” (Charters 104) who “did not feel right unless he stole something every day from the shipyard where he worked” (Charters 104). Disillusioned with being locked down in a job he uses simply to stay afloat, Norton feels compelled to steal. Like many other working men of his time, Norton is an Odysseus, having relatable desires to explore and meddle in adventures beyond the shipyard which represents for him the slough of daily routine and anxiety over the next meal. Norton’s struggle embodies a common Wordsworthian theme, the call to embrace one’s intrinsic tendencies, adventure into nature, and find solace outside of daily work life. But it is with characters like the narrator in Naked Lunch that his darker and most Keatsian views come out. The narrator describes a “hot shot [informer]” (Charters 127) to a college kid on a train, recalling the “dropper full of clotted blood hanging out of a blue arm” (Charters 127) and calling the scene “tasty” (Charters 127). The scene is dismal and disturbing, easily interpreted as reaching for nothing more substantial than shock value. But the moral of the story is clear for Burroughs. Though the drug world he describes here is violent and dark, it still maintains a solid if unusual justice and order. Informants break an unspoken code in this world and pay a deserving price. Burroughs simply brings to our attention a different form of justice, perhaps in an effort to open his readers’ minds to the truth of a world with which they are completely unfamiliar, just as Keats presents images of death frequently in his poetry as if to awaken his reader from any illusions that we all must

ultimately submit to our mortality. His “Ode to a Nightingale” invokes drunken oblivion a generation before Burroughs, calling, “O, for a draught of vintage!... That I might drink, and leave the world unseen” (Norton 903). Keats also wishes to escape his stifling and at times depressive life, turning to alcohol in this poem just as Burroughs’ characters often turn to drugs and alcohol. He similarly references a disillusionment with society also present in Burroughs’s writing as a “drowsy numbness [which] pains my sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk” (Norton 903). Lamenting the numbness he feels, Keats implies that he values the intensity of emotion, whether positive or negative, as a means of reminding ourselves we are alive. In the same way, Burroughs embraces intense despair and violence as a necessary section of life, relating to his Beat readers the dark side of William Blake’s balanced world.

It is Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg who supply the Beat movement with the Blake-ian Prolific. Both hopeful mystics who revered the no-roots intuitive lives of their comrades, Kerouac and Ginsberg lament a disillusioned world in their works, but ultimately determine that one can attain a fulfilling life between depressive moments. Though Kerouac’s protagonist Sal Paradise in *The Open Road* flits from woman to woman and place to place, he delights in his friends’ idiosyncrasies and misadventures. Paradise romanticizes Dean Moriarty, admitting when Dean leaves him in Mexico, feverish and sick, that Moriarty is “a rat” (Kerouac 288), but realizing he “[has] to understand the impossible complexity of [Dean’s] life, how he had to leave... to get on with his wives and woes” (Kerouac 288). Though for a moment Sal is beat by the sickness and disappointed in his erratic old pal, he ultimately embraces Dean’s inconsistencies and loves him all the same. Kerouac values harmony of relationships and understanding between people. Ginsberg similarly creates more hopeful writing on a whole, often finding escape from disillusionment in nature, a hallmark of Wordsworthian romanticism.

In his "Sunflower Sutra," Ginsberg describes the "oily water on the river" (Charters 73) and "no fish in that stream" (Charters 73), but finds comfort in a sunflower, which brings him "memories of Blake" (Charters 73). In perhaps his most famous poem, "I wandered lonely as a cloud," William Wordsworth cites daffodils as an escape from loneliness, intimating that "in vacant or pensive mood" (Wordsworth 306) the vision of golden flowers comforts him, just as Ginsberg's golden sunflower supplies comfort to his "bleak and blue" (Charters 72) thoughts. The same Wordsworthian tendency toward nature as a healing source appears in Ginsberg, echoing Wordsworth's hopeful poetry.

Though William Burroughs almost single-handedly earns the Beats a reputation for being down-and-out bum writers, insistent on showing their readers a shock-value compilation of experiences with one another, Beat philosophy remains largely romantic. Refusing to ignore the most paralyzingly dismal parts of life, Burroughs supplies the generation with the truth about a world they have never experienced, and Kerouac and Ginsberg provide solace in nature and the ultimately fruitful human spirit. Together, these three hard-hitting writers of the Beat movement produce the William Blake balance between what is Good and what is Evil.

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