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Wandering on His Way: An Examination of Kerouac's Spiritual Progress through *The Subterraneans* and *The Dharma Bums*

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Oral Presentation 2.3

WANDERING ON HIS WAY: AN EXAMINATION OF KEROUAC'S
SPIRITUAL PROGRESS THROUGH *THE SUBTERRANEANS*
AND *THE DHARMA BUMS*

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By writing from the "jewel center of interest...at the moment of writing," as described in Kerouac's "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose" (PBR 58), Kerouac constructs in *The Subterraneans* a brutally confessional and honest representation of Leo Percepied's emotional state following his breakup with Mardou Fox, the emotional effects of which Ray Smith seeks to reconcile in *The Dharma Bums*. The movement from Leo's emotional instability to Ray's meditative wanderings is best illustrated by looking to their complementary characters, Mardou Fox and Japhy Ryder, respectively. By examining the language and style of both narratives, one can uncover the needs of both Leo and Ray and find whether or not Ray represents the realization of Leo's needs.

Kerouac's "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose" lay the groundwork for the logic behind *The Subterraneans*. The guidelines call for focusing on a singular image, idea, or experience from which ideas, associations, and impressions flow uninterrupted by unnecessary punctuation, pauses, and formal structures. To preserve the free-flowing nature of the work and its spontaneity, there can be no revisions, no insertions, and no rethinking of the thought after the thought is complete. The unconscious must be free of "social, psychological, and grammatical restrictions...[in order to] free itself from its muteness and take verbal shape in the outside world" (DLB 292). The object of the exercise is to overcome the hindrance of language and formality which prevent the communication of essential meaning to the reader—the writing should ideally come from the unconscious and appeal to the reader's unconscious so that the reader experiences the text in a near "telepathic shock" (PBR 57). The characteristics of the narratives in question, *The Subterraneans* and *The Dharma Bums*, reflect Kerouac's personal approach to writing, which in this case serve to present-readers with an intensely confessional and provocative examination of the events of life.