



Lights and Shadows in Big Sur

The Representation and Influence
of a Californian Little Town Called
BIG SUR
in the Lives and Writings of
Henry Miller's
« Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch »,
and Jack Kerouac's
« Big Sur »



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I do hereby attest that I am the sole author of this project/thesis and that its contents are only the result of the readings and research I have done.

ABSTRACT

« *I wonder why Big Sur has the reputation of being beautiful above and beyond its fearfulness* » - Jack Kerouac - 1962.

« *It was here in Big Sur that I first learned to say Amen* »
Henry Miller - 1957.

There are two ways to describe Big Sur:
a positive and enchanted vision, like Henry Miller;
and a negative and disillusioned vision, like Jack Kerouac.
When Miller saw Paradise in Big Sur; Kerouac saw Hell in this place.
While Kerouac was wandering in Big Sur, Miller found immediately his place.

This little town of California is located along Scenic Highway One, approximately 150 miles south of San Francisco – the birthplace of the Beat Generation and nest of the CunterCulture - and 300 miles North of Los Angeles, United States of America. Big Sur is always referred to as a 90-mile stretch of rugged and awesomely beautiful coastline.

Leaving for Big Sur, it's to follow the path of writers, photographers, painters, sculptors, and many other artists, who were all deeply affected by the supernatural beauty of this place. Artists founded a colony in Big Sur, and the first ones were Henry Miller, and then Jack Kerouac.

It's through those two iconic authors that I studied the relation between Big Sur and literature. How a town can inspire so many artists for several decades; or what has this town to be so special in literature.

Both authors, Jack Kerouac and Henry Miller, wrote a book about this town, but their vision of Big Sur is very different. As the two books are autobiographical, it described a part of their lives in this town, and so there are several things to study – their feelings, their research, how they live, what they think - which was helpful to understand their thinkings, the vision so different of the same town through two very different books. Jack Kerouac's Big Sur is a place where he did not live happy moments, where he felt literally in Hell; but on the contrary, Henry Miller's Big Sur is a place the author liked, considering it as a haven of peace.

The lives of the authors, but also a historical and geographical context are some of the tracks to have a kind of answer to this issue: How Big Sur inspired Henry Miller and Jack Kerouac in their eponymous books?. Intertextuality will be helpful to understand the feelings other authors and artists have about Big Sur.

Finally, the purpose of this thesis is to analyze the influence of Big Sur in those two books. How did it impact authors' lives, but most important their writings. Several points will be discussed: Miller and Kerouac's lives and careers, and the visions of other artists about Big Sur. The geographical context of Big Sur and its surroundings will be explored in a way to fully understand the vision of both authors. But also the role and influence Nature can have on literature.

But first of all, a description of the most notable artists in connection with Big Sur ...

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

CHAPTER I:

When Nature Becomes a Refugey

A) Henry Miller

Henry Miller was born on December 26th, 1891, in New York City, and died on June 7th, 1980, in Pacific Palisades, California, at the age of 89 years old.

He was an American writer, a controversial one, mostly due to novels about sex. Most of his works were banned in Britain and United States until the 1960s due to his frankness about the sex subject and crude words.

Miller grew up in the town of Brooklyn and wrote about his childhood in his book *Black Spring* in 1936.



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In 1924, he decided to quit the job he had at the Western Union of New York to devote his time to writing.

He traveled a lot, particularly in France and Greece. In 1930 he arrived in France, and wrote about his difficult time during the Great Depression in his book *Tropic of Cancer*, published in France in 1934, and in 1961 in the United States. His other book, *Tropic of Capricorn*, published in 1939 in France, and in 1961 in the United States, is about his time in New York. It's with those two books that Miller acquired his reputation as a controversial writer.

Miller went to Greece in 1939, and wrote *The Colossus of Maroussi* in 1941, a book about his time in this country he adored so much.

In 1940/1941, he crossed the United States and wrote a critical book called *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, published in 1945, where he talked about the cost in human terms of mechanization and commercialization in America, which disgusted him.

In December 1943, the American magazine *New Republic* published a letter of Miller where he was complaining about James Laughlin, the editor of the American Book Publishing Company *New Directions*, which had failed to publish his banned books in the United States.

1 Henry Miller in its cabin in Big Sur.

<https://improvisedlife.com/2019/07/25/henry-miller-and-others-on-the-finest-medicine-a-person-can-give-himself/henry-miller-in-cabin-big-sur-1955/>

This letter was read by the American sculptor and artist Jean Varda, who invited Miller to come to stay with him in Monterey, California.

One day, Varda drove Miller down to Big Sur, near Monterey, in order he meets his friend Lynda Sargent, a local writer, who was writing a novel in her cabin overlooking the sea. The cabin had an open room and she offered it to Henry Miller. He accepted the offer, and it's how began the story between Henry Miller and Big Sur.



Henry Miller and Jean Varda ²

Miller's stay in Big Sur provided him with the isolation he needed. He wrote to his friend Anais Nin:

*«I am completely out of the world there. The stores are thirty-five miles away. I have no car. Depend on the mailman to bring food – mail twice a week. Precisely what I want».*³

His *Big Sur*'s book is a love letter to the little town. He counts the quality of living there, the isolation from the rest of the world, the wonderful landscapes and seascapes. But it is also about his daily life, his routine, his neighbors and descriptions of the scenery and wildlife of this refuge.

It's after his settling in Big Sur that he began to write his famous *Rosy Crucifixion Trilogy*, made of three books: *Sexus*, *Plexus* and *Nexus*, which were finally published in the United States in 1965, after several trials for obscenity in 1964.

He wrote other books like *The Cosmological Eye*, in 1939, and *The Wisdom of the Heart*, in 1941. Many of his correspondence with his friends were published in various volumes too.

Miller, the free spirit, became a figure for many admirers, most were writers of the Beat Generation.

He lived in the relative isolation of Big Sur for fifteen years, where he found within himself his own kind of Paradise.

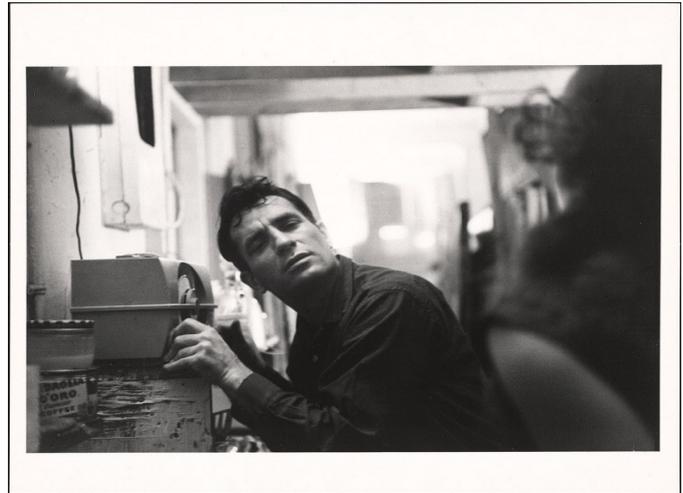
² <http://www.jeanyankovarda.com/bio/late.html>

³ HOYLE, Arthur. *The Unknown Henry Miller : a Seeker in Big Sur*. Arcade Publishing, New Yor. 2014. p.70.

B) Jack Kerouac

Jack Kerouac was born on March 12th, 1922, in Lowell, Massachusetts; and died on October 21st, 1969, in St Peterburg, Florida, at the age of forty-seven.

He was an American novelist and poet, and the leader of the Beat Movement, with his famous book *On the Road*, published in 1957, which had a huge impact on the American youth, and made of Kerouac a national hero. It recounts his adventures on the roads of America with his friend Neal Cassady.



He was the youngest of three children in a Franco-Canadian-American family. He attended local Catholic and public schools and won a football scholarship to Columbia University in New York City.⁴

The young Kerouac was marked by several losses. He lost his brother Gerard in 1926, at age nine. His friend Sebastian Sampas died in 1944. And he lost his father, Leo, in 1946. After his father's death, he took care of his mother, known as Memere, with whom he had a particular relationship.

It's at Columbia University, in 1940, that Kerouac met the two other persons with whom he will create the Beat Generation Movement: Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs. Those three friends and writers became the main figures of this movement.

Ginsberg became his greatest advocate and supporter, and without whom Kerouac probably might never had been published.

He finally left University during his second year and joined the Merchant Marine, and tried to achieve his childhood ambition: writing – not without years of disappointment and frustration, like many authors -, but he was discharged for schizoid personality after a few months.

His first novel, *The Town and the City*, was published in 1950. He then wrote several «true-life» novels like *The Dharma Bums* and *The Subterraneans* in 1958; *Doctor Sax* and *Maggie Cassidy* in 1959, and *Tristessa* in 1960.

Tired and bored by his new fame with his book *On the Road*, being «The King of the Beatniks», and the life of debauchery, sex, alcohol and drugs he has been living for three years, he decided, in 1961, to leave cities for a while and went in the cabin of his friend Lawrence Ferlinghetti, also a beat poet and writer, situated in Big Sur, California. It's here, in the forest, that he wrote - in only ten days - the book *Big Sur*, which relates his story, alone in nature in search of peace.

⁴ Jack Kerouac portrait. Smithsonian Gallery of Art.
https://npg.si.edu/object/npg_NPG.96.188

His plans were to write most of the time in this isolated place without his friends coming to interrupt him., with no distractions, and to recover from a stormy life.

But after three weeks of living alone in this desolate place, Jack finally left the cabin to return to town, in San Francisco. In his book *Big Sur*, he recounts his life before, in San Francisco; during, in Big Sur; and after, in San Francisco, writing about what led him to Big Sur, the horror he lived there, and why he decided to return to the city, and his come back in the Golden Gate town. He magnificently describes Big Sur landscapes, but also painful details of his life and feelings.

Jack Kerouac lived a Boheme and degenerated life at the same time, between writings, alcohol, drugs, and friendships. He was unhappy and frustrated by his life, and life in general. He became drunk, raucous and incoherent with time, his health growing worse and worse.

Finally, at the end of the Sixties, Kerouac was a broken man. He spent all his time in bars and drank heavily.

One night, he was beaten by others drinkers at the Cactus Bar, in Saint Petersburg, Florida, and died one week after that, of internal bleeding, in front of his television.



Jack Kerouac – Allen Ginsberg – William Burroughs

5 <https://medium.com/writingandtyping/writing-lessons-from-the-beat-generation-5cfa07c80811>

C) Hunter Thompson and Other Artists

Hunter Thompson

Hunter Stockton Thompson was born on July 18th, 1937, in Louisville, Kentucky; and killed himself on February 20th, 2005, in Woody Creek, Colorado.

He was an American journalist and creator of the Gonzo journalism, a highly personal style of reporting, that made Thompson a Counterculture icon.

He joined the U.S. Air Force in 1956 where he served as a sports editor for a base newspaper and continued his journalistic career after being discharged from the Army one year later. In 1967, he infiltrated the Hell's Angels motorcycle gang to write his book *Hell's Angels*.



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But he is particularly known for his outrageous behavior, due to high consumption of drugs and alcohol, his distaste for authority, and his love for guns.

In 1971, he was assigned by the magazine *Sports Illustrated* to cover a race in the Nevada state, which became his most famous book, recounting his fabulous journey to Las Vegas, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream*, published in 1972, and which became a film in 1998, starring Johnny Depp in Thompson's role. He then published *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail '72*, where he chronicled the 1972 presidential campaign opposing George McGovern and Richard Nixon, and so showing his interest in politics. Later works include *The Great Shark Hunt* in 1979, *Better than Sex* in 1994, *The Rum Diary* in 1998, or *Kingdom of Fear* in 2003.

It's in 1961 that Thompson arrived at Big Sur. It led him to the Esalen Retreat where he has been employed by the founder of the Retreat to become the caretaker. It was a legendary Retreat in the early 1960s, the birthplace of the Human Potential Movement, « a movement that focused on helping normal persons achieve their full potential through an eclectic combination of therapeutic methods and disciplines. The movement values include tolerance, a basic optimism about human nature, the necessity of honest interpersonal communication, the importance of living life to the fullest in the « Here and Now », and the spirit of experimentation and openness to new experiences »⁷.

It's how began the story between Thompson and Big Sur.

6 Hunter Thompson at work in Big Sur.
<https://www.mbphoto.com/artworks/805/>

7 <https://www.encyclopedia.com/medicine/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/human-potential-movement-0>

Dennis Murphy

He was born on August 27th, 1932, in Salinas, California; and died on October 6th, 2005, in San Francisco, California⁸.

He went to Stanford University, the same University attended by John Steinbeck (author of the famous book *The Grapes of Wrath*), who was a family's friend (Murphy's grandfather, a doctor, delivered Steinbeck).

He was a screenwriter and author, known for his 1958 best selling book *The Sergeant*, for which he wrote the screenplay for the eponym movie in 1968.



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He was only twenty-five years old when his book was published. Steinbeck wrote him several letters to compliment him about his writings.

The Sergeant's story is a drama, a struggle of a GI, at a post-World War II Army camp, based in France, between his attraction to an older man and his love for a French young girl.

He then met Hunter Thompson in 1959, who appreciated his work, and they became friends. It's how Thompson arrived in Big Sur, as the founder of the Esalen Retreat was Murphy's grandmother. His older brother, Michael Murphy, is the co-founder of the Esalen Institute.

During his childhood, he spent a lot of time on the family property in Big Sur, known then as Slate's Hot Springs.

Murphy worked in Southern California as a screenwriter for over thirty years.

He moved to San Francisco in 1994. He had completed work on a second novel, *The Lions of Big Sur*, shortly before his death.

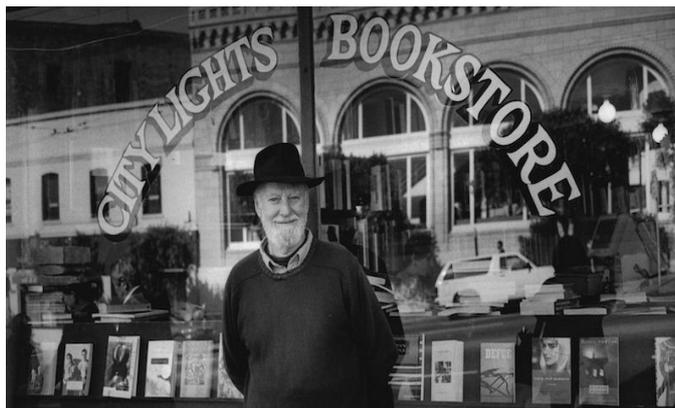
8 Sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Dennis-Murphy-screenwriter-author-of-the-2603063.php

9 [Dennis Murphy Portrait.
https://jimbooks.wordpress.com/2015/03/16/dennis-murphy/](https://jimbooks.wordpress.com/2015/03/16/dennis-murphy/)

Lawrence Ferlinghetti

Lawrence Monsanto Ferlinghetti was born on March 24th, 1919, in Yonkers, New York ; and died on February 22th, 2021, in San Francisco, California. He was an American poet, but most known as one of the founders of the Beat Movement, founded in San Francisco in the mid-1950s.

His father died before his birth and his mother was placed in a mental hospital. It's an aunt who raised him as a young boy.



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He enrolled in the U.S naval as an officer during World War II. On his return, he went to Columbia University to have a Bachelor's in Literature. He then came to France to have a Doctorate at the Sorbonne University in 1951. After that, he returned to America and settled in San Francisco to open his own library in 1953, called «City Lights Bookstore», which soon became a kind of repository for books that other booksellers didn't want, and a kind of salon for the authors who wrote those same books.

In 1956, his bookstore house edition published Allen Ginsberg's most famous book, *Howl and Other Poems*.

Ferlinghetti's most successful book collection, *A Coney Island of the Mind*, was published in 1958, and became the largest-selling book by any living American poet in the second half of the 20th century. A retrospective collection of his poems was published in *Endless Life* in 1981.

Even at the end of his life, he continued to write. In 2017 were published his poetry anthology, *Ferlinghetti's Greatest Poems*, which includes new works.

Shortly before his 100th birthday, Ferlinghetti published the autobiographical novel *Little Boy* in 2019.¹¹

He was a friend of Jack Kerouac and inspired him the character of Monsanto, which is Ferlinghetti himself in Kerouac's books. It was the cabin of Ferlinghetti where Kerouac settled in Big Sur, in his eponymous book.

He was considered the spiritual godfather of the Beat movement.

10 <https://www.albertine.com/remembering-lawrence-ferlinghetti/>

11 "Lawrence Ferlinghetti". *Encyclopedia Britannica*.
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Lawrence-Ferlinghetti>.

Alanis Morissette

She is a Canadian-American singer and songwriter born on June 1st, 1974, in Ontario, Canada. She began her career in her native country around the 1990s. She then quickly moved to Los Angeles to pursue her passion.

She has nine albums to her credits. She wrote a song about Big Sur called simply *Big Sur*¹², presents on his 2012 album *Havoc and Bright Lights*. The video clip shows her driving on the Pacific Coast Highway, playing guitar and singing in the Big Sur nature. She wrote the song as a tribute to this particular place she loves a lot.



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Emile Norman

He was born April 22th, 1918, in San Gabriel, California, and died September 24th, 2009, in Monterey, California.

He was an American artist, known for his sculptures and mosaics.

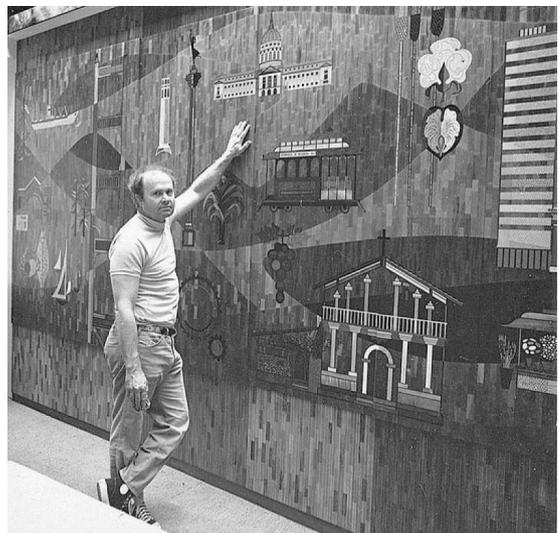
He began his career in California, worked at the Nob Hill Masonic Center in San Francisco; later moved to New York; and finally came back in California, in the Big Sur area in 1946.

He lived and worked at his Big Sur property on Pfeiffer Ridge- the home he built by his own hands in 1954- where he had his studio; with his partner Brooks Clement.

In 2020, his house was on the market for \$2 million.

He was the subject of a documentary in 2006, *Emile Norman: By His Own Design*.

14



12 <https://americansongwriter.com/alanis-morissette-pays-tribute-big-sur-new-/>

13 <https://alanis.com/news/tag/blog>

14 <https://www.latimes.com/local/obituaries/la-me-emile-norman27-2009sep27-story.html>

Lillian Bos Ross and Harry Dick Ross

Lillian was born in 1898, and died in 1959. She was an American author, best known for her trilogy of novels about a family living in Big Sur, called *The Stranger: a novel of the Big Sur*, published in 1942. She then wrote *Blaze Allan*, published in 1944. She was married to Harry Dick Ross, born in 1890, and died in 1989.



In the book *Big Sur*, by the author and historian of the Big Sur Historical Society Jeff Norman, we learn a bit about Lillian and Harry Ross' life :

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« The couple first encountered Big Sur in 1924, when they hiked up the Coast Trail from San Simeon where Harry Dick had been working as a tile-setter at William Randolph Hearst's estate. The Rosses lived for many years in Big Sur, where Lillian, known to her friends as « Shanagolden », wrote her best-selling novel « *The Stranger* » published in 1942. The Rosses represented a new sort of pioneer in the Big Sur region : the kind who came to savor the compelling beauty of the Santa Lucia coastline. In the late 1940s, the Rosses bought land on Partington Ridge, which by then had developed into a vibrant neighborhood of artists, writers, and other assorted bohemians ».¹⁶

Lillian also wrote a poem called *The Coast Ballad*, inspired by a decaying child's cradle in an old stone fireplace where it was written « Juan Jaro de Castro », and which haunted her for a while.

Henry Miller and the Ross family were neighbors. Harry Dick said about Henry Miller :
"He was probably the finest neighbor anybody ever had. He was always bubbling, always full of ideas. When my wife was ill, he'd come over and read to her, be with her, even when she wasn't fully aware of his presence."¹⁷

After Lillian's death, Miller's ex-wife Eve McClure married Harry Dick Ross.

The Stranger is a story about an American pioneer family who lived in Big Sur. The trilogy spans over 100 years and is about the hard life they lived in Big Sur. Three generations of the Zande Allan family lived here and worked on their ranch to subsist. The story begins in 1870, when the main character, Zande Allen, meets Hannah, his mail-order bride, in Monterey, and marries her without knowing her. They live in his cattle ranch where he needs a wife to help him in his chores and to give him descendants. She soon discovers a violent and abrupt husband. It's the story of their complicated relationship and misadventures.

15 NORMAN, Jeff. *Big Sur*. Big Sur Historical Society. 2004. p.54

16 Ibid.55

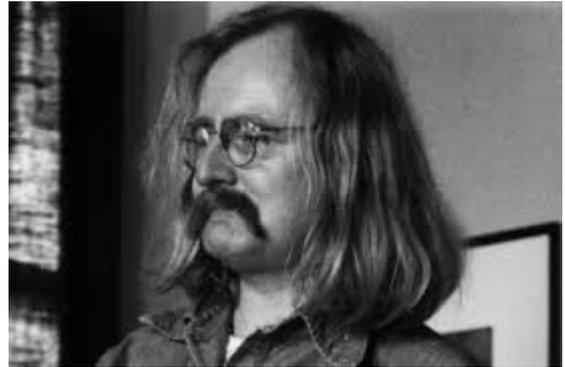
17 <https://www.folksinging.org/traces-of-the-storyteller/>

Richard Brautigan

He was born on January 30th, 1935, in Tacoma, Washington; and died on September 14th, 1984. He was an American poet and writer.

He has a difficult childhood, never met his biological father and had a selfish mother who never showed attention to her children.

When he was in High School, he threw a rock on the police station of his town, was arrested and sent to a mental hospital. He was then diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic.



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After his release, he didn't attend college and left for San Francisco, California, at the age of twenty years old.

He married Virginia Dionne Adler in 1957, and they had a daughter, Lanthe Brautigan, born in 1960. Brautigan was in a period where he was almost too old to be part of the Beat Generation artists, and too young to be part of the Counterculture artists.

Robert Novak, in his book *Dictionary of Literary Biography*¹⁹ wrote that: "Brautigan is commonly seen as the bridge between the Beat Movement of the 1950s and the youth revolution of the 1960s."²⁰

He wrote his first novel in 1964, *A Confederate General from Big Sur*. The story is about a man, Lee Mellon, who believes that he is a descendant of a Confederate General from Big Sur.

It's in 1967 that his best novel was published, *Trout Fishing in America*, which established Brautigan in the literary scene. Then was published *Watermelon Sugar* and *The Pill Versus the Springhill Mine Disaster*, in 1968; *The San Francisco Weather Report* in 1969; *Rommel Drives on Deep Into Egypt* in 1970; *Loading Mercury with a Pitchfork* in 1975; and he is also the author of a poetry collection: *June 30th, June 30th*, in 1978, among others novels.

It's after the publication of his novel *The Abortion: An Historical Romance*, in 1977, that Brautigan retreated to Bolinas, California. He continued writing throughout the 1970s, producing such books as *Dreaming of Babylon: A Private Eye Novel*, in 1977; and *Sombrero Fallout* in 1976.

In 1976, he discovered Japan and began to make several trips there, a country he adored.

Despite his notoriety, he had grown depressed and finally committed suicide in September 1984.

18 <http://www.brautigan.net/>

19 <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/richard-brautigan>

20 <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/richard-brautigan>

Robinson Jeffers

John Robinson Jeffers was born on January 10th, 1887, in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania; and died on January 20th, 1962, in Carmel-by-the-Sea, California. He was an American poet, best known for his novels which talk about the beauty of nature on the Californian Coast. He was the first one to put the place on the literary map in the 1920s.

His father, who was a professor of Old Testament Literature, supervised Jeffers' education. He learnt the Greek language at the age of only five years old. He travelled all around the world during his childhood and went to school in Zurich, Leipzig or even Geneva. The family finally moved to California and he was graduated here at the age of eighteen. And began a long list

of Universities where he studied and learnt diverse courses: he entered the University of Southern California to learn literature, where he met his future wife Una Call Kuster. In 1906 he returned to Switzerland to study philosophy, Spanish poetry, French literary history and the history of the Roman Empire. He came back to Los Angeles in 1907 and was admitted to a medical school. He then finished his education at a University in Washington, to study forestry.

He married his schoolmate in 1913, and they moved to Carmel-by-the-Sea, near Big Sur. He began the construction of their cottage – Tor House - in 1919, by his own hands, on the cliffs of the Pacific Ocean, overlooking Point Lobos. Near the cottage, he built a forty-foot tower for his wife, with an incredible view on the Carmel Bay.

His cottage, the tower and the landscapes of the region were a great influence on his life and poetry. Much of his poems were set in the Big Sur region, which he loved so much. Some of his works celebrate the awesome and rugged beauty of the coast, of the cliffs and ravines.

But he was a man disgusted by what he saw around him, and in humanity in general. Particularly about the modern men, who had developed a self-centred vision of the world. In contradiction to the beauty, some of his other poems use themes like adultery, incest, or rape, to show the moral despair of humanity, like in *Cawdor and Other Poems*, in 1928; *Thurso's Landing*, in 1932; or *The Woman at Point Sur*, in 1927, which is about a minister driven mad by his conflicting desires. It's his pessimism about humanity and his abhorrence of the modern civilization which drove him to live secluded far from people and cities, in this part of the California Coast.

Jeffers inspired Henry Miller to move to Big Sur in 1944.

He died in 1962, in his home in Carmel-by-the-Sea, which he loved so much.



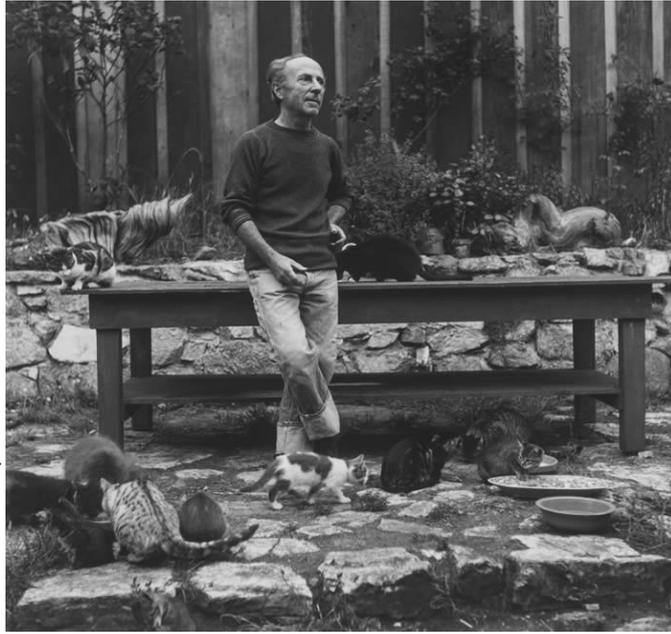
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21 https://www.montereycountyweekly.com/calendar/literature_speakers/robinson-jeffers-fall-festival-in-carmel/ event_5b57f086-c0f3-11e8-99cf-c7718d4809e5.html

Edward Weston

Edward Henry Weston was born on March 24th, 1886, in Highland Park, Illinois; and died on January 1st, 1958, in Carmel-by-the-sea.

He was an American photographer. He began to take pictures at the age of sixteen, when his father offered him a camera. His first pictures were about parks in Chicago and his aunt's farm. In 1906, he moved to California, and worked a bit as a surveyor in Los Angeles. He then worked as an itinerant photographer, taking clichés of pets, kids and even funerals. He finally decided to return to Illinois to learn photography in 1908, and integrated the College of Photography in Effingham, Illinois.



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He came back to California and worked as a retoucher in a studio, and then as a photographer in another one. It's where he discovered his great abilities in lighting and posing.

In 1911, he opened his own photography studio in Tropic, California, where he worked for almost twenty years. He gained an international reputation for his portraits. He moved to Carmel-by-the-Sea in 1927.

He began his work which made him famous: natural forms, close-ups, nudes, and landscapes. Between 1927 and 1930, Weston made a series of close-ups of seashells, peppers, and halved cabbages, bringing out their rich textures. And he began to take pictures of the rocky coast, of shells on the beach, or even vegetables – his most famous picture being *Pepper No. 30*, in 1930²³.

He shot the first of many photographs of rocks and trees at Point Lobos, California.

He worked and lived in a wood cottage in Carmel-by-the-Sea.

Weston became the first photographer to receive a Guggenheim Fellowship for experimental work in 1936. In 1941, he used photographs he made of the East and South to provide illustrations for a new edition of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*.

Doctors discovered he was affected by Parkinson's disease in 1946, which enabled him to work. In 1948, he shot his last photograph of Point Lobos. Over the next ten years, due to his illness, he supervised the printing of his works with his two sons, Brett and Cole.

He died on January 1st, 1958, at his home, Wildcat Hill, in Carmel, and his ashes were scattered into the Pacific Ocean at Point Lobos.

22 http://www.photographywest.com/pages/weston_e_bio.htm

23 <https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/172/2274>

Ansel Adams

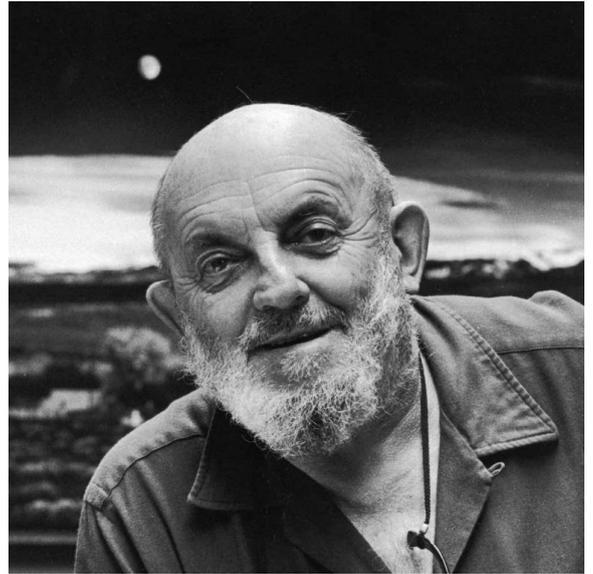
Born February 20th, 1902 in San Francisco, California ; and died on April 22th, 1984, in Monterey, California.

He was an American photographer and environmentalist.

He was a solitary child, and found joy in nature. He loved taking long walks near the Golden Gate, in San Francisco.

He played piano, but gave up music for photography.

His favorite place was Yosemite Park, in California. He spent a lot of time there, from 1916 until his death. His first visit transformed him. He hiked, climbed, explored, and began to take photographs there.



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In 1919, he joined the Sierra Club, and published his work for the first time in their bulletin. His first exhibition in 1928 was in San Francisco, in the Sierra Club headquarters. He met his wife in this club and married her in 1928, and they had two children.

In 1927, he met photographer Edward Weston, and they became important friends.

He endlessly traveled the country in pursuit of its natural beauty and to make photographs.

As an activist for the cause of wilderness and environment, he bought a house on the Big Sur coast, facing the Pacific ocean. Adams drew the plans for the construction of the house, and it took four years before he moved in, in 1965.

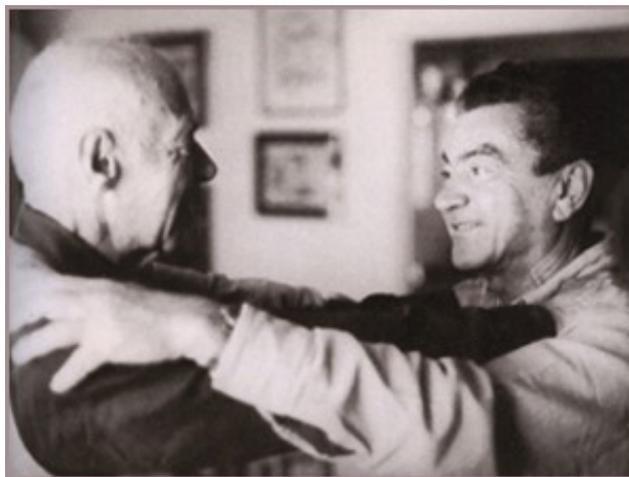
He cherished the grandeur and the quietude of this home he didn't love to leave, in this special place of nature.

Emil White

He was born in Austria in 1901, and died in Big Sur in 1989.

During World War I, White was arrested in Budapest because he was a revolutionary. He was condemned to death, but finally managed to escape.

Few years after, he immigrated to the United States, and in 1942, met Henry Miller in Chicago. They quickly became friends and moved together in Big Sur, California, in 1944. There, he became the caretaker and personal secretary of Miller.



In Big Sur, White started to paint. It gave him a feeling of great accomplishment.²⁵ Many of his paintings were shown in art galleries in the Monterey area, but also in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, and throughout Europe.

White was described by his friends as a colorful character and a remarkable person²⁶.

He published tour guides of the Big Sur area, and purchased in the Sixties the cabin which will become the Henry Miller Library a few years after, and became the director of this institution, which was in honor of his best friend, Miller, after his death, a sort of memorial he converted into a library.

The main building was built in 1966 on Graves Canyon's site; adjacent to the main house was added then the caretaker's cottage. Many changes were then made since 1981.

Henry Miller dedicated his *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch's* book to his best friend Emil White, describing him as «*One of the few friends who has never failed me*»²⁷.

Emil White wrote about Miller in his autobiography «*Little did I know when I first held his books that the man would change my life*».²⁸

In his Last Will and Testament, he wrote «*I am encouraging worldwide enjoyment of Henry Miller's literary and artistic works*»²⁹.

25 <https://henrymiller.org/2017/12/22/why-did-emil-convert-his-house-into-a-memorial-for-henry-because-i-missed-him/>

26 bigsurkate.blog/tag/emil-white/

27 MILLER, Henry. *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch*. New Directions Publishing, New York. 1957. introduction.

28 HOYLE, Arthur. *The Unknown Henry Miller : a Seeker in Big Sur*. Arcade Publishing, New York. 2014. p.81.

29 <https://henrymiller.org/emil-white/>

Joan Baez

Born January 9th, 1941 in Staten Island, New York.

She is an American folksinger and political activist.

Her pretty voice and activist energy put her in many protest movements and music festivals during the Sixties.

She was romantically involved with American singer Bob Dylan, for whom she also played guitar.



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She participated to free concerts for UNESCO, Civil Rights organizations, anti-Vietnam war rallies, or even for the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley University.

She was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2017.

Following her appearance at the 1969 famous Woodstock Festival, she was one of many musicians who played at a festival at Esalen Institute, called *Celebration at Big Sur*. She also led a workshop called *The New Folk Music* at the Institute for a time.

She did not only write albums, but also wrote an autobiography in 1968, called *Daybreak*, and a memoir titled *And a Voice to Sing With* in 1987.

She has her home in Carmel Valley, near Big Sur, where she loves escaping, and her favorite surrounding place is the Esalen Institute.

Jeff Norman

He was born on September 19th, 1951 in Oakland, California; and died on October 31st, 2007.

He was a naturalist and historian. As a consulting biologist, cultural historian, and author, he was fiercely protective of both the biological habitat of the Big Sur region, and the social culture unique to the area.

He moved to Pebble Beach in 1962 with his parents.



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Graduated from Pacific Grove High School in 1969, he attended the University of California Santa Cruz, where he was an avid student of Gandhi's teachings.

At 15 years old, he was the youngest person hired as a lab technician at Hopkins Marine Station, launching his career in biology.

He was also an expert botanist, working for the US Forest Service, State Parks, the University of Santa Cruz, Big Sur Natural History Association, Esalen Institute, Big Sur Historical Society, and more. He was also a consultant for the Big Sur Land Trust and the Monterey Pine Forest Watch.

He lived in Palo Colorado and Bixby Canyon, and in the Post Ranch before acquiring his home, Alta Vista, on January 1st, 1980, a redwood cabin on a 20-acre property in 1981, where he lived for twenty-eight years, until his death. It was his beloved remote sanctuary, on the South Coast of Big Sur, three miles above the highway, with no access to the road.

The land was then transferred to Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park after his death.

He loved Big Sur's wild, rugged central California Coast so much that he dedicated his life to protecting the wilderness and documenting its history.

In 2004, he co-authored *Images of America: Big Sur*, with the Big Sur Historical Society, a book that traced the history of the Coast from the days of the homesteaders, with numerous photographs of the coast.

No one has done more to create awareness around Big Sur's physical majesty and the need to preserve it than Jeff Norman.

31 https://www.montereycountyweekly.com/news/local_news/jeff-norman-s-i-big-sur-i-depicts-the-men-and-women-who-pioneered-the/article_256677f7-41c1-534c-b875-468e88dcec6a.html

Jean Varda

He was born on September 11th, 1893 in Smyrna, Ottoman Empire; and died on January 10th, 1971 in Mexico City.

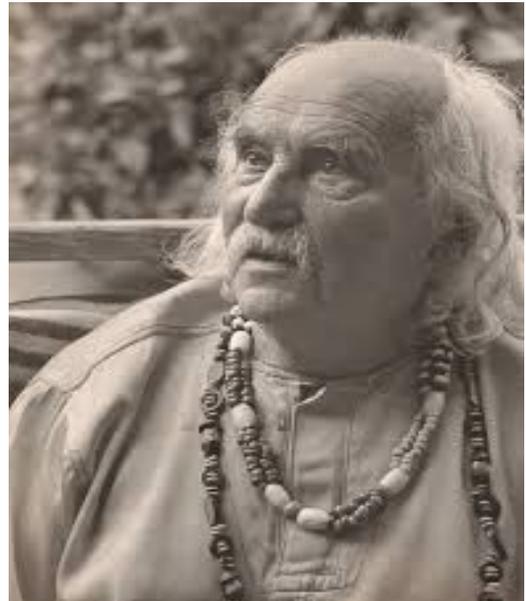
He was a Greek artist, mainly known for his collage works.

He was one of the early adopters of the Sausalito houseboat lifestyle

In 1940, he moved to Anderson Creek, Big Sur, to begin a new life; and married there with his wife Virginia.

It's him, in late 1943, who persuaded Henry Miller to move to Big Sur.

Elayne Wareing Fitzpatrick, in her book *Doing it with the Cosmos: Henry Miller's Big Sur Struggle for Love Beyond Sex* wrote about Varda: « He painted everywhere in Big Sur, so much that a lot of residents had his art on their roofing materials »³³.



32

As we can see here in this first chapter, all those artists, who are painters, singers, photographers or of any kind of the arts branch, were all appealed by the absolute quietude of Big Sur. Some wanted to make a fresh start, or to live a new way of life. Each person has their own reasons, but they almost had the same opinion: Big Sur is a place we have to venerate. And we are going to see in chapter two the places where people can give in to peacefulness and creativity thanks to the extraordinary beauty of the landscapes.

32 <http://sausalitohistorical.squarespace.com/marin-scope-columns/2013/7/23/anais-nin-and-jean-varda.html>

33 FITZPATRICK, Wareing Elayne. *Doing it with the Cosmos : Henry Miller's Big Sur Struggle for Love Beyond Sex*. Xlibris Corporation, Indiana. 2001. p.73.

CHAPTER II

Road One: Road to Paradise

A) Big Sur

Time Line

The Ohlone, the Esselen and the Salinan were the first tribes of Native Americans who inhabited the Big Sur area. Evidence showed that the Esselen tribe lived there around 3500 BC; and their population was estimated from a few hundred to thousands.

In 1542, the Spanish mariner Juan Cabrillo and his crew - the first Europeans to see Big Sur - sailed along the Big Sur coast, which he described as: «*mountains which seem to reach the heavens, and the sea beats on them; sailing along close to land it, it appears as though they would fall on the ships*»³⁴.

In 1769, the Portolia Expedition - still Spanish mariners - arrived in the South of Big Sur. They explored a bit the coast but it was impassable and they didn't go further away due to the wilderness of the area. They called the region «El Pais Grande Del Sur», which means «The Big Country of the South». They finally went to Monterey and established one year later, in 1770, the California Mission.

In 1853, George Davis, the first European settler, claimed a part of the land along the Big Sur River. He built there a cabin.

In 1861, John Bautista Rogers Cooper, born in the British Channel Islands, but converted Mexican citizen, acquired a land and built a cabin for him and his wife, a Native American. Their cabin is the oldest surviving structure in Big Sur, and is situated in the Andrew Molera State Park.³⁵

In 1862, the passage of the Homestead Act allowed few settlers to have for free 160- acre parcels. After five years of residence, or paying 1.50 dollars per acre during six months, they gained full ownership of their land.

In 1868, Native Americans Manual and Florence Innocenti bought George Davis' cabin and the land for \$50.

In 1869, the second European settlers were a French family, the Pfeiffer. Michael Pfeiffer, his wife and their four children arrived in Big Sur and found it to their liking and decided to install themselves here.

The same year, another family settled in Big Sur, William and Sarah Plaskett. They built a sawmill and several homes.

In the 1870s, in a portion of the Big Sur Land, from Mal Paso Crossing to Bixby Creek Ranch, a partial wagon road was built.

34 HAKIM, Joy. *The first Americans*. Oxford University Press, United States. Third Edition. 2002. p.125.

35 https://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=23082

In 1885, a native of Indiana state, Wilber Harlan, settled near Lucia. His descendants still operate the Lucia Lodge in Big Sur nowadays.

In 1891, William F. Notley, settled in Big Sur, at the mouth of Palo Colorado Canyon. His source of income was the harvest of the tanoak bark, which was lucrative. Isaac Swetman and Sam Trotter, who worked for him, settled too in this area.

In 1914, the poet Robinson Jeffers and his wife, settled in Carmel-by-the-Sea, near Big Sur. His source of inspiration for his work was Big Sur, where he found the escape he searched for from the civilization. Many of his works have Big Sur as a backdrop. Out of the destruction of the natural world, he found peace and a quiet way of life. The spirituality around Big Sur was enough for him, so he spent his whole life there.

In 1920, John Junge bought a redwood cabin in Pacific Valley, and settled south to Big Sur.

In 1932, the Bixby Bridge saw the light of day. The bridge is one of the world's largest single-span concrete arch bridges. It rises 260 feet above Bixby Creek, on 714-foot long. It offers overhead views of the waves crashing into rocks and beaches.

In 1933, John Pfeiffer, son of pioneers Michael Pfeiffer and Barbara Laquet, sold 700 acres of his land to the state of California. The original residents wanting to protect and preserve Big Sur lands, sold their own land to make a State Park. It's how Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park was created.

In 1937, Highway One opened and gave quick access to the Big Sur area for everybody. Cars were the quickest way to visit the wild area. It took eighteen years to build this road, using dynamites to create access in the mountains. The road changed the life of the Big Sur inhabitants. The two-lane scenic highway is protected in order to minimize development on this marvelous coast. A trip to Monterey takes less than one hour with the highway One, where it took three hard days by horseback for the pioneers.

In 1944, actor Orson Wells and his wife Rita Hayworth bought a cabin in Big Sur, during a trip on the coast. Big Sur's reputation for beauty attracted a lot of people and movies stars. The couple finally never came back to their home due to their divorce, and it later became the Nepenthe restaurant.

The same year, author Henry Miller, arrived in Big Sur. Like Robinson Jeffers before him, he was searching for peace and tranquility from civilization. Disgusted by the modern American society, he chose Big Sur to settle and live the perfect life; and he made it his home for nearly twenty years.

It was not until the 1950s that electricity arrives in Big Sur, but not everywhere, and few places in the more remote mountainous areas were still without electricity.

Beginning in the 1950s, a resident named Emil White - one of Henry Miller's closest friends - published an annual tourist guide of the Big Sur area. It described Big Sur not only as a place where «all five senses come alive and alert»³⁶, but also with «a scenery as varied as its inhabitants, its topography, and its climate»³⁷.

36 BROOKS, Alden Shelley. *Big Sur, the Making of a Prized California Landscape*. University of California Press, United States. 2017. p.61.

37 Ibid.62.

By the late 1950s, Big Sur had a national reputation due to its scenic grandeur.

In 1957, Henry Miller wrote *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch*, a love letter to the country he praised as an earthly paradise: «*The California that men dreamed of years ago ... this is the face of the Earth as the Creator intended it to look.*»³⁸

In 1962, Jack Kerouac wrote his book *Big Sur*, after his trip of six weeks in the remote area, alone in the cabin of his friend, the poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti. He wanted to escape his life of debauchery and the fame he acquired after his famous book *On the Road*. But he quickly became mad and he related in the book how he went crazy, and so left Big Sur.

The same year, the Esalen Retreat Center was launched by Richard Price and Michael Murphy. It was and still is the institute which attempts to provide the exploration and realization of the self. The Slate's Hot Springs bath is part of the retreat. It attracted and still attracts a lot of celebrities.

The year 1962 was a crucial one for Big Sur, in a negative way. Robinson Jeffers passed away at the age of seventy-five years old, twelve years after his wife. At the same time, Henry Miller decided to leave Big Sur for Los Angeles, in Pacific Palisades.

In 1965, a portion of the Highway One, from the town of Cambria, to Carmel Highlands, was designated by the state of California as the first California Scenic Highway, mostly due to the grandeur of the Big Sur Coast.³⁹

The same year, the movie *The Sandpiper*, starring Elizabeth Taylor and Charles Bronson, showed several scenes set in Big Sur, which rose Big Sur's celebrity in the world.

In 1968, the association «The Friends of the Sea Otters» has been established in order to advocate for the protection and preservation of the Southern sea otter.⁴⁰

In 1973 was released the single *California Saga: California* by the famous rock surfer band The Beach Boys in their album *Holland*, which depicts the rugged wilderness of the Big Sur area and the culture of its inhabitants.

In 1974, the American movie *Zandy's Bride*, starring Gene Hackmann and Liv Ullmann, was released and is also based in the Big Sur region.

In 1986 was created the adoption of a plan for the protection of the unique qualities of Big Sur and its unique development. Called *The Land Use Plan for Big Sur*, it provides development standards to guide the actions of all state and local agencies.

The Coastal commission relies on the certified *Big Sur Coast Land Use Plan* for guidance when reviewing federal projects for consistency with the policies of the *California Coastal Management Program*⁴¹.

In 2013, Jack Kerouac's novel's *Big Sur* was adapted into a movie of the eponym name, and starring Kate Bosworth.

38 BROOKS, Alden Shelley. *Big Sur, the Making of a Prized California Landscape*. University of California Press, United States. 2017. p.5.

39 <https://highway1discoveryroute.com/activities/highway-1-scenic-drives-where-to-stop/>

40 BROOKS, Alden Shelley. *Big Sur, the Making of a Prized California Landscape*. University of California Press, United States. 2017. p.117.

41 <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CZIC-hd211-c2-m67-1986/html/CZIC-hd211-c2-m67-1986.htm>

In 2018, it was estimated that there were 1,728 residents in the Big Sur region, 892 housing units, 639 households, and 253 vacant or rental housing units,

The Meeting of Land and Sea

Big Sur is not really a town strictly speaking, but more a region, without really defined boundaries, and contains some of the most rugged terrains in the United States. It's why the colonists, the Spaniards, refused to travel along the Pacific Coast, due to its huge mountains and deep canyons, even if American Indian tribes inhabited there.

At first, only the south part of Big Sur was accessible, but only by horseback or foot. It remained the most inaccessible area of the United States until 1937, when Highway One was completed, after eighteen years of hard work.

Big Sur is nestled between the two biggest cities of California, 300 miles north of Los Angeles, and 150 miles south of San Francisco, along the Pacific Coast Highway, known as Highway One. It's a place of approximately 90-mile stretch, between the two little towns of Carmel-by-the-Sea in the North, and San Simeon in the South.

Most of the interior region is uninhabited, people concentrated on the coast, even if it still is a kind of isolated region compared to other cities. There are around 2000 residents year-round, and the accommodations for visitors are controlled to do not overpopulate and denature the place. There are only four small settlements for tourism in the whole region.

Big Sur enjoys a temperate climate, due to the proximity of the ocean. Winters are mild, and rainy days are interspersed with periods of bright sunshine. The coastal fog cools the summer mornings, but it usually lifts by early afternoon.

The biggest attraction in Big Sur is nature. Huge forests of redwoods, stunning views, the grandeur of the coast, and the endless sea are a few of the many qualities of this place. The Santa Lucia Mountains rise from the Pacific Ocean, creating the illusion of a meeting between the land, the sky, and the sea.

One of the favourite ways to pass the time in Big Sur is to simply do nothing. But there are so many other things to do. Big Sur offers hiking and outdoor activities, thank to the numerous state and federal lands and parks, like Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park, Point Sur Lightstation, Garrapata State Park, and Andrew Molera State Park. Several beaches offer a great alternative to the sunny days like Pfeiffer Beach, Sand Dollar Beach, and Garrapata State Park beach - where you could admire sea otters, sea lions, seals or whales.

Many local sites retain names from settlers: Bottcher, Gamboa, Anderson, Partington, Dani ridge, Harlans, McQuades, Ross, Mt Manuel, Pfeiffer Ridge, Cooper Pont, Partington Cove, and McWay are few of the names of the places.

Nature controlled the place, not humans. The fog, the wind, fires, and landslides control Big Sur's life, and of its inhabitants. It's over the control of people. Several times - around fifty-five times - Highway One was closed due to terrible landslides, cutting Big Sur off the world, making of it an even more isolated region.

It's a special place to many people, and it attained a worldwide reputation for its beauty and its majestic surroundings. Million people from around the globe visit Big Sur, and this unique place is ranked among the top 35 tourist destinations worldwide.

The Coast has been called the «*longest and most scenic stretch of undeveloped coastline in the United States.*»⁴²

Highway One is ranked one of the top ten motorcycle rides in the United States of America and even the most popular rides on the globe. Its narrow roads, tight turns, and wonderful expansive views on the Ocean are unbelievable⁴³. It's the finest scenic highway in the country.⁴⁴

With time, Big Sur has developed into something a bit different, for better or for worse. Tourists changed Big Sur. Expansive restaurants made their apparition in the local landscape. It became more a place for fortunate people in search of their inner selves in a wonderful natural setting. It became the capital of the New-Age Movement. The Eighties saw Millionaires descend in Big Sur, creating a certain embourgeoisement of the place.

But before, Big Sur was one of the most austere regions of the United States. Artists came to find peace and solitude in order to appeal to more creativity. A generation of bohemians like Henry Miller or Robinson Jeffers was part of this little community. Many artists of the Beat Generation, which means youth middle-class Americans, came to escape the commercialized, conformist and belligerent post-war culture.⁴⁵ It was more worship of nature rather than narcissism like today.⁴⁶ The Fifties, Sixties and Seventies saw writers of the Beat Generation and of the Counterculture wondering in Big Sur in quest of spirituality and inspiration.

But the local landowning families, the *State Coastal Commission*, and the difficulty of building on mountains and coast have cooperated to keep it underpopulated, and try to keep Big Sur as it was before. The region is heavily protected because of its popularity, in order to preserve the rural and natural character of the land. The *Big Sur Local Coastal Plan* states that the region is meant to be an experience that visitors transit through, not a destination. It's for that reason that development of all kinds is severely restricted.

But it doesn't change the beauty of this place, open to everybody on Earth. The canopy of trees, this huge patch of wilderness, the rugged coast, this natural wonder, are still here for the joy of every human in this planet. Even if fires explode and destroy several acres, it never kills Big Sur.

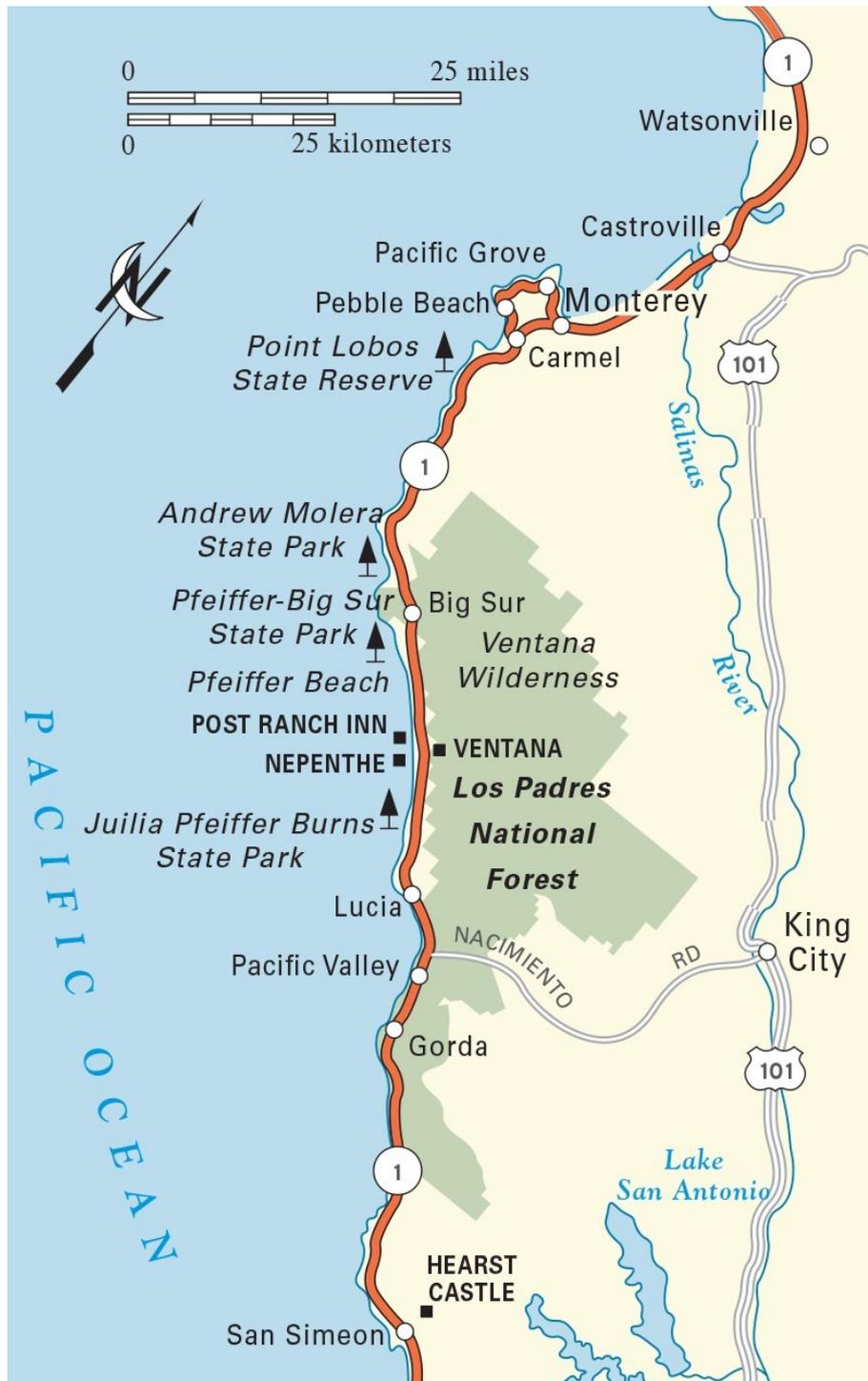
42 <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna15317575>

43 <https://highway1discoveryroute.com/activities/highway-1-scenic-drives-where-to-stop/>

44 BROOKS, Alden Shelley. *Big Sur, the Making of a Prized California Landscape*. University of California Press, United States. 2017. p.85.

45 Ibid.64.

46 <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2009-sep-06-tr-jeffers6-story.html>



47

B) The Esalen Institute

Time Line

The first homesteader of the Esalen place was Thomas Slate, in 1882, when he filed a land patent under the Homestead Act of 1862. It became known as the Slates Hot Springs. It was the first business for tourists in Big Sur.

In 1910, Henry Murphy, a Californian physician, purchased the land. It became known as *Big Sur Hot Springs*, but was more generally referred to as *Slate's Hot Springs*.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Michael Murphy and Dick Price both attended Stanford University. They developed an interest in human psychology and earned degrees in the subject in 1952. Price was influenced by a lecture Aldous Huxley gave in 1960 titled *Human Potentialities*. After graduating from Stanford, Price attended Harvard University to continue studying psychology. Murphy, meanwhile, traveled to India where he stayed for several months before returning to San Francisco.

On November 26, 1957, Price's parents involuntarily committed him to a mental hospital for a year. The experience was awful and it's from that moment he decided to create an environment where people could explore new thoughts and ideas without judgment.

In May 1960, Price returned to San Francisco and lived with a Taoist teacher. It's at that time that he met Michael Murphy. Both had finished their studies, Harvard for Price and Stanford for Murphy; and served time in the Army. Their similar interests and experiences were the foundation of their partnership to create Esalen.

In 1961, they were searching a property and looked at the Murphy's Slates Hot Springs in Big Sur. The hotel and property were patrolled by the soon-author Hunter Thompson. At that time, the property was known for the gay community who came from San Francisco to filled the baths on weekends.

In 1962, the father of Michael Murphy, who was a lawyer, managed to persuade his mother, which was the owner at that time, to allow her grandson, Michael, to lease the property to him and Richard Price.

In 1963, they were finally the owner of their business, named Esalen Institute, as a non-profit organization. They published their workshops' catalog with seminars like *Drug-induced Mysticism*, *The Expanding Vision*, *Individual and Cultural Definitions of Rationality*, or even *The Human Potentiality*. In the year 1961, the property of Dennis Murphy's grandmother became known as the Esalen Institute.

Following the 1963 Monterey Folk Festival, folk concerts were organized at Esalen, and the event *Celebration at Big Sur*⁴⁸, a gathering of music followers and friends, ended up at Nepenthe.

48 *Celebration at Big Sur*. Documentary Film of the 1969 Big Sur Folk Festival in Big Sur, California, featuring Bill Crosby, Neil Young, Joni Mitchell, Joan Baez and many others. 1974.
The festival, one in an annual series of concerts from 1964 to 1971, was held on the weekend of September 13-14, 1969, only one month after the famous Woodstock. Around 15000 people were gathering on the Esalen grounds.

In 1964, Esalen Institute began to sponsor many research initiatives, educational projects, and invitational conferences. Singer and activist Joan Baez led a workshop entitled *The New Folk Music*.

From 1966, the Institute began to gain attention. Several articles were published in different magazines around the world: *Madame Figaro* magazine in France; *The New York Times* in the United States; *Geo* magazine in Deutschland; *Spa Veda* in Italy; or even *Asia Spa* in China.

In 1969, Esalen Institute made an apparition in the American movie *Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice*, where sophisticated Los Angeles residents Bob - played by Robert Culp- and Carol Sanders - Natalie Wood - spent a weekend of emotional honesty at an Esalen-style retreat, after which they return to their life determined to embrace free love and complete openness.

In the mid-1970, the Institute opened a satellite center, a branch of Esalen, in San Francisco, that offered extensive programs, until it closed in the mid-1970s for financial reasons.

In 1985, Dick Price, the key leader of the Institute, dies suddenly in a hiking accident, which brought many changes to the Institute. Steven Donovan became President, and Brian Lyke served as General Manager. Nancy Lunney became the Director of Programming,

In 1991, in the film *What About Bob?*, Bill Murray's character mentions that he hasn't felt this good since Esalen, upon his arrival at his psychiatrist's vacation home.

In the mid-1990, Dick Price's son, David Price, became the General Manager of Esalen.

In 1998, Esalen launched the *Center for Theory and Research*, in order to initiate new areas of practice and action for social change and realization of the Human Potential. The same year, the Sulphur Baths were destroyed by severe weather conditions, and were rebuilt, but at great expense.

A Retreat Center in an Unforgettable Landscape

The grounds of the Esalen Institute were first home to a Native American Tribe known as the Esselen, from whom the Institute adopted its name, which suggests adventure and unexplored frontiers.

Dennis Murphy's grandmother, nicknamed Bunnie, owned this property on 120 acres of land, perched between ocean and mountains, with hot mineral springs on a seaside cliff, in the heart of Big Sur, in 1919, with the intent of turning it into a European-style health spa.

In the late 1950s and early 1960, it was finally a place where bikers, gays, or just neighbors (like Henry Miller or activist singer Joan Baez⁴⁹) hang out at the Hot Springs for a bath. In order to have a kind of «tranquility», she hired a young guy from Kentucky to guard the place, named Hunter Thompson, not yet the famous Gonzo journalist he will become.

49 <http://www.joanbaez.com/bio/>

A few years later, Dennis Murphy and his friend Richard Price took the helm of the property in order to create a new space for exploring the meeting of spirituality and psychology, with non-traditional workshops and lectures to present their ideas. But it's only after Thompson was fired that Bunnie agreed to let her grandson pursue his vision of this New Age retreat on her property.

They began to draw up plans, and envisioned to offer a wide range of psychological techniques, philosophy and religious disciplines, focusing largely on the teachings of Eastern religious philosophy and psychology.

They were assisted in their work by several persons, like Alan Watts, Aldous Huxley – both British writers and philosophers -, Timothy Leary – an American psychologist and writer -, Ken Kesey – an American writer -, and several more.

But there were – and still are – people: People who live there but also who come from worldwide, like sociologists, philosophers, theologians, artists, dancers, or writers. It's an opening place for everybody, without distinction. Each person has something unique to bring to Esalen, to teach to others, and to share. Esalen is about inspiration, intellectual freedom, and the opportunity to explore the deepest self. People come to meditate, to sing, to dance, to create, to find clarity, to enjoy the place, to learn, and most importantly, to connect. When they leave, they are changed forever and ready to fight the world.

The Institute played a key role in the Human Potential Movement, which took roots in the Sixties. This movement focused on helping people to achieve their full potential through several combinations of therapeutic methods and disciplines, called workshops, like meditation, yoga, psychology, ecology, personal growth, spirituality, physical wellness, spiritual awareness, martial arts, dance, mythology, religious and spiritual studies, tai chi, massage, among many others. The Institute's catalog is full of programs, and the property is large enough to run many workshops. Values are the key to this experience like openness, honesty, optimism, tolerance, good human nature and communication.

The aim is to integrate the mind, the spirit, the body, and the heart in relation to the environment which surrounds the being. And it's through the education of the senses and emotions - and of course with the magic help of the enchanting landscape and the relaxing sounds of the sea - that people realize they are part of something bigger. It helped people to rediscover their bodies, redefine their soul, and to bring mind, body and spirit together.

During the period of the Counterculture, Big Sur became « the leading town » for hippies, who came to Esalen for a retreat in order to embrace a new way of life ; with the help of drugs of course too. The Institute was even nicknamed « The Country Club », where the most common drug at that time , the LSD⁵⁰ (Lysergic Acid Diethylamide), a hallucinogenic one, served as a tool for mind-explorations. It's how Esalen became a Countercultural mecca during the Sixties and Seventies, before the transformation of a spiritual high place for wealthy people years later.

As author Shelley Alden Brooks said in her book *Big Sur: The Making of a Prized California Landscape*, the aim of the Esalen Institute is:

« Spreading an essential message – that everyone possesses a spark of divinity, which when cultivated or harnessed can set a person on a path to realizing his or her full, human potential ». ⁵¹

50 <https://www.drugs.com/illicit/lsd.html>

51 BROOKS, Alden Shelley. *Big Sur, the Making of a Prized California Landscape*. University of California Press, United States. 2017. p.78.

Still today, Esalen remains a refuge for people in transition, the birthplace of a kind of religion, a way to retreat in nature in order to assess and improve our human condition, as it has been built to make changes to respond to internal and external factors ; and best of it, in a front-row view of the edge of the world.

Janet Stone, a yoga instructor in San Francisco who led workshops at Esalen said :

*“You feel it the moment you step in, t’s like you’ve gone through some invisible doors into a different portal.”*⁵²

As Murphy noted:

*«I don’t think it would have worked as well if we started Esalen in New Jersey for example. The sheer magnitude of the land and the power of the elements are what shape lives in Big Sur ».*⁵³

54

C)



55000 / CA-1 / Big Sur
CA 93920

52 <https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Esalen-Institute-Big-Sur-icon-faces-existential-15210753.php#photo-18201887>

53 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/travel/index/stories/mcnichol03151998.htm>

54 <https://www.montereyherald.com/2017/05/10/esalen-lays-off-majority-of-staff-temporarily/>

C) Nepenthe

Time Line

In 1925, the cabin, which will become Nepenthe, is built by homesteader Sam Trotter, overlooking the South Coast of Monterey County. For many years, it was an overnight resting place for travelers and hikers, and a summer rest for the *Trails Club of Jolon* members.

In 1925, a group of Christian Scientists from Principia College in Elmhurst, Illinois came to California. They hired local master carpenter Sam Trotter to build a three-story log house on the edge of a cliff in Big Sur, which they planned to use it as a private resort during horseback riding trips. They named the group the *Coastland Trails Club* (also known as the *Trail Club of Jolon*).

By the early 1940s, they were no longer using the cabin and had rented it to a writer named Lynda Sargent. She invited author Henry Miller, who had arrived in Monterey penniless, to stay with her until he found his own place to rent.

In 1937, the Coast Highway One opened, giving access to cars to the Big Sur region.

In 1944, actor Orson Wells bought the property which will become Nepenthe, for his fiancé Rita Hayworth, but they never moved in.

Henry Miller arrived in Big Sur in 1944. He spent his first couple months there, sleeping on the floor of Lynda Sargent's cabin.. Evidently they didn't take kindly to each other at first, but soon enough they could be found tap, tapping away far into the night on their respective typewriters.

In 1947, the Fassett family - William and Madeleine, better known as Bill and Lolly ; and their five children, Griff, Kaffe, Dorcas Jane, Holly and Kim - bought Nepenthe, a rustic log cabin surrounded by oak trees, with no electricity, for \$22,000.

In 1949, the Nepenthe restaurant opened its doors. The service was only for dinner, Tuesdays through Saturdays, and at noon on Sundays, for the brunch, and closed at midnight. The opening was attended by around 500 people.

By the mid-1950s, with progress, and an influx of tourists, the place felt less remote. Nepenthe added lunch service to the current dinner service.

In 1959, Hearst Castle in Cambria opened, bringing tourists from the South.

In 1962, the Esalen Institute opened near Nepenthe, bringing again more tourists.

Following the 1963 Monterey Folk Festival, concerts at Esalen, and *Celebration at Big Sur*, a coterie of music followers and friends ended up at Nepenthe.

In 1964, the Phoenix shop opened at Nepenthe, which contained worldly goods, on the South-facing ledge below the restaurant. The idea of the shop was to collect unusual items from around the world.

The same year, the American movie «*The Sandpiper*» was filmed at Nepenthe, featuring Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. Taylor dined with Burton at Nepenthe daily during filming.

The producer, Martin Ransohoff, celebrated Nepenthe's folk dance scene in the movie, bringing Nepenthe a great deal of attention.

Into the **mid-1960s**, the restaurant closed for the season on November 1, following a special masked ball at Halloween.

It wasn't until the **mid-1960s** that Lolly and Bill installed a payphone outside the back door of the restaurant, and even later one for the restaurant.

In the **late 1960s**, they opened their doors year-round.

In the **1970s**, the Juice Bar opened.

In **1980**, the Café Amphora opened.

In **1983**, the Fassett family was forced to close the restaurant because of multiple fires.

In **1986**, the key person of Nepenthe died, Lolly, which changed a lot of things, it was the end of an era.

In **1992**, Café Kevah opened.

The same year, Lolly's husband, Bill, died. It solidified the authority of the next generation on Nepenthe, giving Holly, one of a girls of Lolly and Bill, and to Kirk, Holly's son, the autonomy as managers and the position of the family legacy.

In **1998**, the Fassett family was forced again to close the restaurant for three months because of fires.

In **2000**, webcams were added to the roof of Nepenthe.
The same year, a wine program began.

In **2002**, Nepenthe staff made wine with the Pisoni Family.
The same year, they were named number 34 of the 50 best restaurants in the world.

In **2008**, filming began for Jack Kerouac's documentary.
The same year, Highway One was closed due to fires, which costs a lot to the restaurant.

In **2009**, Nepenthe celebrated its 60th anniversary.

In early **February 2017**, several mudslides blocked the road in more than half a dozen locations. The bridge was closed due to damages. Nepenthe was completely isolated, like Esalen. Food and supplies were brought by helicopters.

On **October 13, 2017**, the bridge reopened.

In **2017**, the restaurant was owned and operated by the grandson of the founders, Kirk Gafill. His sister Erin Lee Gafill and her family live in the original log cabin.

In **2019**, Nepenthe celebrated its 70th anniversary.

The Mystic Magic of Nepenthe

Nepenthe restaurant is located on a Big Sur's cliff, 800 feet above the Pacific Ocean. Its incredible and magical views on the Santa Lucia Mountains and the Pacific make of it a place full of mysticism and magic.

At first, the land was only 12 acres, but since the Fassett family bought it, it grows to 37 acres of land, with adding of several cabins and structures over the years, with not only a restaurant, but now a cafe and a shop.

Nepenthe is the high place of Big Sur, and its terrace – a semicircular one facing south with a bench of 100-foot running the length of the restaurant - the highlight of the restaurant, with its particular view with no limits over the ocean and the sky. But also an open fireplace in the center of the room. People who were there all said that «*you feel immense and unspoiled in front of this spectacle which offers to you*», as the author and Fassett family member Romney Steele said in her book *My Nepenthe: Bohemian Tales of Food, Family, and Big Sur*.⁵⁵

When Bill and Lolly Fassett, owner of Nepenthe, arrived in the 1940s, it was an isolated area. Tourism was not developed a lot, it was only seasonal. It was a quiet place made of native people, ranchers or artists in search of inspiration and solitude.

It was a community of sharing and mutual assistance, in the sense that they share the food they cultivated, but also other resources, the news ... The mailman was the trusty man to make most of those tasks, as Henry Miller described it in his book. It was the colorful moment of the week, when he arrived with food, news, letters and more.

And it's on the base of this sharing that the Fassett couple wanted to make something bigger. The view they enjoyed through their land was – as Lolly said it wonderfully :

«*It was too beautiful to keep to ourselves and must be shared with the world*⁵⁶ [...] *no individual can own it, Nepenthe belongs to everyone*»⁵⁷

Through hard work and sacrifices, Lolly and Bill managed to build an incredible place, a place for people, open to everybody, where they can come and enjoy a meal or a drink with a magic view of the Pacific Ocean, and forget their daily problems. And in general, the ambiance and the view have their impact.

Nepenthe became the epicenter of Big Sur, and provided a welcome place for culture : many artists came, like Jack Kerouac, Richard Brautigan, Dennis Murphy – who played poker at the tables -, Anaïs Nin, Dylan Thomas, Ernest Hemingway, Harry Dick Ross – who was bartender sometimes -, actress Kim Novak – who lived in the Big Sur area -, Salvador Dali, Steve Mc Queen, or even Clint Eastwood – who bought later the Mission Ranch in Carmel-by-the-Sea ; among many others. Henry Miller became friends with Bill, and they organized ping-pong tournaments in the restaurants.

55 STEELE, Romney. *My Nepenthe : Bohemian Tales of Food, Family, and Big Sur*. Andrews McMeel Publishing, United States. 2009.

56 Ibid.34.

57 Ibid.91.

The opening of Highway One, the renowned of Henry Miller and the bohemian mysticism which surrounds Nepenthe, brought many people to this special place. The restaurant grew as its fame. People came for the food, the view, the poetry readings, or the belly dancing organized on the terrace. The only important thing for the Fassett couple was that people wear a smile when they left the place.

Nepenthe has always been in the Fassett family. Of course people who work there as like family members, they are part of the story ; but several family members still work today there. Nepenthe stays a family business with all the love they have for this wonderful adventure which began decades ago. Bill Fassett said :

*«Nepenthe is a beautiful place, a haven where public and employees alike live for a timeless moment in Beauty».*⁵⁸

Nepenthe has the best view of any restaurant in the world. Even the astronaut Buzz Aldrin, who walked on the moon, was astonished by the vision of the moon from the terrace :

*«I've never seen the moon look more beautiful than it is now, and I've walked on the moon »*⁵⁹.

As Lolly Fassett said :

*«We want everyone who comes to Nepenthe and Big Sur to leave with a lasting memory of a beautiful experience – after all Nepenthe derives from the Greek and means « Surcease from Sorrow! »*⁶⁰



48510 / CA-1 / Big Sur / CA 93920

58 Ibid.198.

59 Ibid.224.

60 Ibid.59.

61 <https://www.californiabeaches.com/restaurant/nepenthe-restaurant/>

D) Henry Miller's Library

Time Line

In the **mid-1960s**, Henry Miller's friend Emil White built the house for his friend.

In **1980**, after Henry Miller's death, Emil White made the property a memorial to his friend, exposing artworks and photographs by local artists in memory of the author.

In **1981**, with the help of the *Big Sur Land Trust*, Emil White officially organized and opened "The Henry Miller Memorial Library", and became the director of this institution.

In **1989**, Emil White died. It's the *Big Sur Land Trust* which managed the library.

In **1998**, the *Big Sur Land Trust* didn't manage anymore the institution. The non-profit *Henry Miller Memorial Library Inc.* was created to sustain and run the library.

In **2000**, two major Miller collections were acquired by the library. It makes the library the second most extensive repository of Henry Miller's books, next to the University of Los Angeles, California.

In **2004**, the singer Patti Smith led a fundraiser to help the library: "*Helping out the Library is helping out the consciousness and legacy of Henry Miller. The place is symbolic of his mind and life and energy.*"⁶²

In **2013**, a week-long celebration at the «City Reliquary», in Williamsburg, Brooklyn was organized around Henry Miller's works, in partnership with the Henry Miller Memorial Library.

In **2014**, a symposium called *Aller-Retour Paris*, was organized at the *Shakespeare and Company* bookstore in Paris, in partnership with the Henry Miller Memorial Library.

In **2015**, the library received a *Community Stories Grant* from Cal Humanities for its Big Sur Stories program.

The same year, , a weekly series called *Under the Persimmon Tree*, was organized and included the listening of audios possessed by the library, and conducting interviews with visitors and members.

In **2016**, the library, with *Folkyeah Presents*, curated a benefit performance for homeowners affected by the Soberanes fires. Performers included many musicians like Al Jardine (Beach Boys), and raised \$40,000.

62 <http://shop.blumoonposters.com/Henry-Miller-Patti-Smith-Carmel-CA-2004-Hatch-Show-Print-BMP-HSP-p-lp-hmiller2004.htm>

An Extraordinary Legacy

The Henry Miller Library is a non-profit organization founded in 1981, one year after Henry Miller's death, by his longtime friend Emil White, in honor of their friendship and Miller's work. It's a place to celebrate Miller's works, life and legacy in this landscape that inspired him.

The main cabin in the redwood grove is the bookstore, with a ping pong table outside, and a little amphitheater made of wood planks under the pines.

All of Miller's books are sold in this dedicated place, but also books of other writers Miller influenced all along with his career, and after. Manuscripts, letters, pictures, or paintings of Miller are also exhibited.

The place is like a center for arts, a cultural resource center, with a public gallery, a library and workshop spaces, where artists, students, musicians, writers and neophytes can appreciate Miller's legacy, literature, and art; and many performances of all kind by many different people.

The library also supports education in the Arts and the local environment, and serves as a social center for the community.

There is a unique collection of rare Miller works which is constantly expanded through acquisitions and donations.

In the summer months, many events are organized like music concerts – Patti Smith, Arcade Fire and many others came -, lectures, books signings, writing workshops, videos projections, the Big Sur International Short Film Screening Series, Big Sur Fashion Show, and so much more.⁶³

In 2011, a CNN journalist who traveled to Big Sur reported:

*«The library isn't a remnant of what Big Sur was; it's the beating cultural heart of Big Sur right now. Popular bands like Arcade Fire perform here. And on any given weekend, you'll find a performance or a fair of some sort. But its default role is to be an oasis: free coffee and ping-pong for the curious. A lush lawn to nap on. Bikers, hippies and the polar-fleeced alike find reasons to linger here. After a day spent being humbled by the grandeur of Big Sur's natural bounty, checking in with fellow humans and the art they create can serve as a ballast ».*⁶⁴

Magnus Toren, the library's executive director since 1993 once said :

*«We have a precision here that's perfect. It's a humble little cabin, but it's located within this magnificent landscape »*⁶⁵

It's in this wonderful place that Miller wrote many of his most important books, including the *Rosy Crucifixion* trilogy.⁶⁶ And it's here that his ashes were dispersed.

63 [Visitcalifornia.com/fr/attraction/bibliotheque-henry-miller-memorial-library](http://visitcalifornia.com/fr/attraction/bibliotheque-henry-miller-memorial-library)

64 <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/TRAVEL/06/01/newnam.big.sur/index.html>

65 today.com/popculture/big-sur-calif-haven-writers-musicians-wbna43815719

66 <https://thegoodlife,thegoodhub.com/2017/04/26/en-route-pour-big-sur-les-traces-de-jack-kerouac/>

Miller's name will always be linked to Big Sur, he contributed to the renowned of Big Sur ; his Big Sur's book is a love letter to this special town where he spent twenty years of his life – from 1944 to 1964.

The Henry Miller Library is the cultural soul of Big Sur, « *where nothing happens* ». ⁶⁷

In 1997, the library staff, with the blessings of the *Big Sur Land Trust*, began the process of becoming an independent 501 © organization. That process is now completed.



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As we can see in this second chapter, all those three places are described in the same way: a refuge where we can feel the power of the elements, which enhances the creativity and the inner peace of the self. They all have a mystic and magic atmosphere very special to them. The astonishing beauty of the places captivates the soul. But it happens that a few people did not feel the same thing for Big Sur, and it's why we are going to study two different visions of Big Sur, through Henry Miller's and Jack Kerouac's books; and then through several other artists I presented in the first chapter of this study.

67 <https://henrymiller.org>

68 <https://fr.trip.com/travel-guide/attraction/city/henry-miller-memorial-library-18697274/>

CHAPTER III

Between Nature and Arts

Nature is omnipresent in literature, and there is no exception in the works of Miller and Kerouac. The benefits of natural surroundings are important to fully understand the authors and why Big Sur is different from the other towns in the world. Its wilderness and peacefulness are driving forces in the authors' writings. The dialogue between literature and Nature has effects on people's behavior, there is a special relationship between humans and Nature, a kind of connection. For Miller, the link with Nature is more romanticized than for Kerouac, it's almost idyllic, where it's self-destructive for Kerouac.

A) Miller's Mystic Sur: The Hidden Paradize

When Henry Miller arrives in Big Sur, the weather is horrible; but it is in the afternoon. And he even has the time to relax at the Sulphur baths. Another important thing is that he is not alone, as he dined with friends. And he doesn't stop to this detail of the bad weather, he continues to enjoy his first day in Big Sur:

*« It was twelve years ago on a day in February that I arrived in Big Sur -in the midst of a **violent downpour**. Toward **dusk** that same day, after a rejuvenating bath outdoors at the hot sulphur springs (Slade's Springs), I had dinner with the Rosses in the quaint old cottage they then occupied at Livermore Edge. It was the beginning of something more than a friendship.»*⁶⁹

As soon as the first day, he knows that he will love this new life in Big Sur. His first impression of Big Sur is rather positive. He feels that this beginning to this new community and this new way of life will bring him satisfaction:

*« It would be more just, perhaps, to call it an **initiation into a new way of life**.»*⁷⁰

It's a good start, even if the weather is not perfect, it doesn't affect him at all because he seems to do not pay too much attention to that, he doesn't complain about it. We can even think that he acknowledges it in a sense, that it is not negative at all, it's how Big Sur functions, behaves. It is as if Big Sur was a person, a kind of anthropomorphism. Miller personifies Big Sur through its behavior and language. It seems that here we feel the weather in a different manner. It can has something beautiful because of the wonderful landscapes all around, all this emptiness. It's different than in cities where people feel bad when the weather is not good:

*« Big Sur has a climate of its own and a **character** all its own. It is a region where extremes meet, a region where one is always conscious of weather, of space, of **grandeur**, and of eloquent silence.»*⁷¹

69 MILLER, Henry. *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch*. New Directions Publishing Corporation, New York. 1957.p.3.

70 Ibid.3.

71 Ibid.4.

We have the impression that he already feels like a permanent resident, after only a few days, to bring to this part of the earth, and he says himself that he wants to be a man of this land, he seems convinced of that :

*« It was a few weeks after this meeting that I read Lillian Bos Ross' book, « The Stranger ». Till then I had been only a visitor. The reading of this « little classic », as it is called, made me more than ever determined to **take root here**. »⁷²*

The word/color « Blue » is mentioned several times in the book, to speak about the sky or the sea. Reading Miller's book, we assimilate Big Sur with the blue color :

*« On a clear, bright day, when the **blue** of the **sea** rivals the **blue** of the **sky**. »⁷³*

*« ...the **blue white**-capped Pacific... »⁷⁴*

*« The sun was low and bright in the sky, the atmosphere extremely clear, the temperature that of a day in late spring ... the Pacific ... by the far off horizon so sharp and clear, by the bright **blue** immensity of it all »⁷⁵*

The blue color is commonly assimilated with purity. There is symbolism with this color, here representing the sky and the sea, which evokes the space, endless space, a sky and a sea where we can't see the end, the limit, a sort of eternity. It conveys calm and serenity. The blue color is a sign of inspiration for Miller, as this special place gives him a lot of inspiration for the books he wrote there. He probably feels here serenity he didn't find elsewhere. It's not unusual that colors are a source of inspiration for artists in general. And Miller is no exception to the rule.

Blue is not the only color Miller makes reference to. His text is full of colors to speak about the fauna and all the things which surround him. The colors are always bright ones, and not dark at all :

*« ... the **gold**-crested hills, the **marble**-topped peaks. »⁷⁶*

*« At night the boulevard is studded with **ruby** eyes. »⁷⁷*

*« Here at Big Sur, at a certain time of the year and a certain time of the day only, a pale **blue-green** hue pervades the distant hills »⁷⁸*

*« At dawn, I look out to sea, where the far horizon is painted with bands of **rainbow** tints »⁷⁹*

*« [...] skies of pure azure and walls of fog moving in and out of the canyons with invisible feet, hills in winter of **emerald green** and in summer mountain upon mountain of pure **gold**... »⁸⁰*

72 Ibid.4.
73 Ibid.4.
74 Ibid.21.
75 Ibid.299.
76 Ibid.7.
77 Ibid.8.
78 Ibid.92.
79 Ibid.93.
80 Ibid.22.

The gold color is associated with wisdom. For example all the Buddha statues in the world are painted in gold color. And wisdom is what Miller found in Big Sur. He lived an extravagant and vagabond life in Paris or Greece before arriving in Big Sur. But now he is wiser, probably because of the age, but also because of the way of life he leads in Big Sur. Many people thought that Miller, writing books about sex, was leading a depraved life in Big Sur, and came to make orgies or live an obscene life, but they finally saw a man who led a peaceful life with his wife and children. Gold color also symbolizes wealth, as the gold digger, which here is associated with Big Sur, about the sumptuousness and grandeur of the landscapes in this place. But gold is also the color of the sacred, and so of Heaven for Miller :

« *The sea, took a step or two outdoors to glance at the hills which were all **gold**, and, heaving a genuine sigh, exclaimed: «I see now why you didn't go to Mexico. This is the next thing to **Heaven**».* »⁸¹

The emblematic flower of California is also of gold color – an orange-gold color - the California golden poppy, that we find everywhere in California landscapes ; and it's good to notice that the California state is also called the Golden State.

The green color is associated with nature, which perfectly corresponds to Big Sur, as it's a place surrounded by nature, far away from overcrowded cities .

The weather, as we saw above, has a major place in Henry Miller's work. The weather when he arrives in Big Sur is quite horrible, but soon it becomes again mild. Which allows Miller and the reader at the same time to appreciate the wonderful landscape. Miller describes perfectly surroundings, with a sort of love in his choice of words, almost allowing ourselves to believe we are here with him, with still the colors which characterize this special landscape. The weather may be an important element in the creation of the atmosphere :

« *In summer, when the **fogs roll in**, one can look down upon a sea of clouds floating listlessly above the ocean; they have the appearance, at times, of huge **iridescent soap bubbles**, over which, now and then, may be seen a **double rainbow**. In January and February the **hills are greenest**, almost as green as **the Emerald Isle**. From November to February are the best months, the **air fresh and invigorating**, the **skies clear**, the sun still **warm** enough to take a **sunbath**.* »⁸²

« *... at this hour one **experiences an indescribable thrill** in observing the **spatial depths** between the trees, between the limbs, boughs and branches, between the leaves. It is **no longer earth and air**, but light and form- **heavenly light, celestial form** ... They clothe themselves in **vibrant-colors** raiment **glittering** with **metallic residues**.* »⁸³

« *It is all so **inviting**, so **spectacular**, so **complete** in itself, that at first you are **emotionally stymied**. The preliminary out of **intoxication** which inevitably follows is one the alcoholic never knows.* »⁸⁴

He also here uses strong words and verbs as «experience», «intoxicate», or «reward», meaning that he not only looks at the landscape, it's not only about observation, but to feel the landscape, he experiences the grandeur and beauty of this special place.

81 Ibid.212.

82 Ibid.5.

83 Ibid.92.

84 Ibid.93.

He experiences magic, illumination through the place. And several times he uses Christian words, like here with « heavenly ». Probably because for him, this place was inevitably created by God himself, is it seems so perfect, with no flaws. And he wrote that several lines after :

« Toward sundown, when the hills in back of us are flushed with that other « **true light** », the trees and scrub in the canyons take on a wholly different aspect. Everything is brush and cones, umbrellas of light-the leaves, boughs, stalks, trunks standing out separate and defined, as if **etched by the Creator Himself** »⁸⁵

« That is how I like to begin each day. A day well begun, I say. And that is why I choose to remain here, on the slopes of the Santa Lucia, where to **give thanks to the Creator comes natural and easy**. »⁸⁶

« ... shortly after sunup of a morning when the fog has obliterated the highway below, I am then **rewarded** with a **spectacle rare** to witness. Looking up the coast toward Nepenthe ... the sun rising behind me throws an enlarged shadow of me into the iridescent fog below. I lift my arms as in **prayer** ... »⁸⁷

« Fall and winter are the best times to get the « **revelation** », for then the atmosphere is clear, the skies more full of excitements, and the light of the sun, because of the low arc it describes, more effective. It's at this hour, after a light rain, that the hills are ringed with fuzzy trails which undulate with the undulating folds of the hills. Turning a bend, the hill before you stands out like the coat of an Airedale seen through a magnifying glass »⁸⁸

« I was in an excellent mood because, as always when dumping the garbage, I had been **rewarded** by a **breath-taking view** of the coast. This particular morning everything was bright and still ; the sky, the water, the mountains stared back at me as if reflected in a mirror. If the earth weren't curved I could have gazed right into China, the atmosphere was that clean and clear. »⁸⁹

« The sea was calm, almost glassy, the tide at low ebb ; the coral-colored gums of the boulders that line the shore stuck out prominently. Gazing at the charred, bleached rocks that dotted the waterline, their flaky, scaly surfaces glittering like mica, I almost **fell into a trance**. »⁹⁰

But Nature is not the only thing Miller praises about ; animals are also tenderly described, all those God's creatures are part of the landscapes, and Miller writes about them marvelously . The fauna and flora are big parts of Miller's book, as it is what composes Big Sur. It's like he was paying tribute to them :

« There were always **birds**: the **pirates** and **scavengers** of the blue as well as the migratory variety. (At intervals the **condor** passed, huge as an ocean liner.) ... the **sloth** »⁹¹

« ... when I stare at the huge, frightening **buzzards** swirling lazily above, circling, dipping, forever circling, when I observe the **willow** gently swaying its long fragile branches drooping ever lower, ever greener and **tenderer**, when I hear the **frog** croaking in the pool or a **bird** calling from the

85 Ibid.92.
86 Ibid.404.
87 Ibid.95.
88 Ibid.92.
89 Ibid.349.
90 Ibid.239.
91 Ibid.7.

bush, when I suddenly turn and espy a *lemon* ripening on a dwarfish *tree* or notice that the *camellia* has just begun to bloom, I see my children set against an *eternal background*.»⁹²

«How often, walking the barren hills, I've stopped to examine a twig, a *dead leaf*, a fragrant bit of sage, a *rare flower* that has lingered on despite the killing heat. Or stood in front of a *tree* studying the bark, as if I have never before noticed that *trunks* are covered with bark, and that the bark as well as the *tree* itself leads its own life.»⁹³

«It's when the *lupin* has run its course, as well as the *bluebonnets* and the *wild flowers*, when the *foxtails* are no longer a menace to the *dogs*, when there is no longer a riot and profusion assailing the sense, that one begins to observe the *myriad elements* which go to make up *Nature*»⁹⁴

«... the hot sulphur baths at Slade's Springs ... I share the delicious solitude with the rocks, the *sea otters*, a passing *whale*, the drifting *clouds*, *mist* and *fog*, the floating islands of kelp and the screeching *gulls*»⁹⁵

But the thing which is striking is the repetition several times in the text of the word «Peace», which shows how Miller sees Big Sur, full of peacefulness and so in a very good and positive manner :

«*Kindness, goodness, peace and mercy*.»⁹⁶

«*Peace and Solitude: a potpourri*»⁹⁷

«When first I beheld this *wondrous* region I thought to myself- «Here I will find *peace*. Here I shall find the strength to do the work I was made to do.»⁹⁸

«*Peace and solitude!* I have had a taste of it, even here in America. Ah, those first days on Partington Ridge! On rising I would go to the cabin door and, casting my eyes over the velvety, rolling hills, such a feeling of *contentment*, such a feeling of *gratitude* was mine that instinctively my hand went up in *benediction*. *Blessings! Blessings* on you, one and all! I *blessed* the *trees*, the *birds*, the *dogs*, the *cats*, I *blessed* the *flowers*, the *pomegranates*, the thorny *cactus*, I *blessed* men and women everywhere, no matter on which side of the fence they happened to be.»⁹⁹

«...here there is abiding *peace*, the *peace of God*, and the *serene security* created by a handful of good neighbors living at one with the creature world, with noble, ancient *trees*, *scrub* and *sagebrush*, wild *lilac* and lovely *lupin*, with *poppies* and *buzzards*, *eagles* and humming *birds*, *gophers* and *rattlesnakes*, and *sea and sky unending*.»¹⁰⁰

92 Ibid.21.
93 Ibid.92.
94 Ibid.93.
95 Ibid.237.
96 Ibid.8.
97 Ibid.39.
98 Ibid.402.
99 Ibid.404.
100 Ibid.404.

And more than to be associated to «Peace» for Miller, Big Sur is often described as a Paradise for him and others who visit him, as the perfect place :

« *Paradise* »¹⁰¹

« *paradisiacal qualities* »¹⁰²

« *And to top it off he had given him a picture of Big Sur which made it sound like the **paradise** which it is.* »¹⁰³

« *C'est un vrai **paradis*** », he mumbled as he descended the steps. »¹⁰⁴

« ... one thing is certain in my mind-that this is a **paradise**. »¹⁰⁵

Miller uses different literary devices, like alliteration, which help to insist on the words which describe Big Sur. It's used a lot in poetry, and it shows how Miller is more poetic than Kerouac in his descriptions of the town, and the fact that he draws a parallel between Big Sur and poetry to express its splendor, as it's the better way to do that :

« *Often, when following the trail which meanders over the hills, I pull myself up in an effort to encompass the **glory** and the **grandeur** which envelops the whole horizon.* »¹⁰⁶

He also uses the literary device known as the Pathetic Fallacy, which is a way to designate human feelings to elements of Nature, which again shows how Nature is important for Miller. Nature is here endowed with human feelings :

« *Though young, geologically speaking, the land has a **hoary** look. From the ocean depths there issued strange formations, contours **unique** and **seductive**.* »¹⁰⁷

But the most striking literary device Miller uses to describe this special place for him is the Pathos, which arouses an emotional response to the author but also to the reader, and through this literary device, he achieves his aim to share his love for the town.

He plays on pathos in order to touch the reader when he writes about the magnificence of the landscapes. He manages to capture all the beauty of Big Sur, and he wonderfully narrates the nature around him. It's probably why this book is considered a love letter to Big Sur :

« *He has need of **harmonious surroundings**.* »¹⁰⁸

« *Here the redwood ... At dawn its **majesty** is almost **painful to behold**. That same prehistoric look. The look of **always**. Nature smiling at herself in the mirror of **eternity**.* »¹⁰⁹

101 Ibid.15.
102 Ibid.26.
103 Ibid.298.
104 Ibid.300.
105 Ibid.351.
106 Ibid.6.
107 Ibid.7.
108 Ibid.14.
109 Ibid.8.

« At night one feels the silence all about, a *silence* which begins far back of the ridge and which creeps in with the fog and the stars, with the *warm valley winds*, and which carries in its folds a *mystery* as deep as the earth's own. A *magnetic, healing ambiance*. »¹¹⁰

But we can notice that all along with Miller's book, there are a lot of contradictions that seems to characterize Big Sur too:

« I have had here some of the most *bitter experiences* of my life; I have also known here some of the most *exalted moments*. *Sweet or bitter*, I am now convinced that all experience is enriching and rewarding. Above all, instructive. »¹¹¹

« There are two magic hours of the day ... One is dawn, the other sunset. In both we have what I like to think of as « the true light »: the one *cold*, the other *warm*, but both creating an *ambiance* of super-reality, of the reality behind reality. »¹¹²

« The Santa Lucia range is hermaphroditic. In form and contour the hills and mountains are usually *feminine*, in strength and vitality *masculine*. »¹¹³

Big Sur seems a contradiction in itself, good and bad, wonderful and frightening. At the beginning of his book, Miller describes the sea, the main element which represents Big Sur, as tempting because it is absolutely wonderful, but also difficult to reach, as it is frightening how the sea pours on the rocks; and in the same way, he also uses this same contradiction in the same page, writing that it's an inviting land, because it's so beautiful and welcoming, but at the same time hard to conquer, because of it's localization, but also of the elements:

« The sea, which looks so near and so *tempting*, is often *difficult to reach*. »¹¹⁴

« An *inviting land*, but *hard to conquer*. »¹¹⁵

And at the next page, the contrast still appears, between the wild place Big Sur is, but at the same time so enchanting:

« In the beginning, that is. If there ever was a beginning. It was always a *wild, rocky coast*, *desolate and forbidding* to the man of the pavements, *eloquent and enchanting to the Taliessins*. »¹¹⁶

He feels a kind of ambivalence, he has mixed feelings about Big Sur, but for him it's always a good thing. He does not write complaints about the place at all, but describes it precisely as it is, with all his sides and distinctive features. It seems that it's a thing everybody feels about Big Sur, this sacred and wild place drives people to have ambivalent feelings about it. And it's the case with Jack Kerouac then ...

110 Ibid.403.

111 Ibid.30.

112 Ibid.93.

113 Ibid.94.

114 Ibid.6.

115 Ibid.6.

116 Ibid.7.

B) Kerouac's Hostile Sur: The Lost Paradise

Jack Kerouac arrives in Big Sur with an aim, to retrieve some level of personal and artistic relief¹¹⁷, it's a kind of retreat for him. He needs, at this time of his life, comfort but also salvation. He wants to escape big cities and live for a while a sort of self-sufficient lifestyle.

He does not have the same approach as Miller has with Nature, but he is attentive to the environment around him, and to fauna. And he hopes it will help him to find serenity. In his book *The American Landscape*, Stephen F. Mills explains how Nature can help people to find peace¹¹⁸:

« American scenery has historically been thought to contain the power for such transcendental revelation or peace: « the contemplation of landscape was one way in which individuals could penetrate beyond the immediate to more fundamental forces and processes to become aware of the very essence of experience ».

As soon as the beginning of the book, it's already an effusion of negative words, really hard negative words; the roar of the place is so frightening for him and he repeated this particular verb several times in his book:

« ...when he lets me off at the Raton Canyon Bridge, and counts the money I **sense something wrong** somehow, there's an **awful roar** of surf but it isn't coming from the right place, like you'd expect it to come from « over there » but it's coming from « under there » »¹¹⁹

« the sea roar »¹²⁰

« The sea roar is **bad** enough except it keeps **bashing and barking** at me like a dog in the fog down there »¹²¹

« The **bleak awful roaring isolateness**, no ordinary man could do it I'm telling you. »¹²²

« There are glades down there, **ferns of horror** and slippery logs, mosses, **dangerous** plashings, **humid** mists rise **coldly** like **the breath of death**, **big dangerous trees** are beginning to bend over my head and brush my pack – There's a **noise** I know can only grow louder as I **sink down** and for **fear** how **loud** it can grow I stop and listen, it rises up **crashing** mysteriously at me from a **ragging battle** among **dark** things, wood or rock or something cracked, all smashed, all wet black sunken earth **danger** – I'm **afraid** to go down there »¹²³

« The **raging coast!** So that when later I heard people say « Oh Big Sur must be beautiful! ». I gulp to wonder why it has the reputation of being beautiful above and beyond its **fearfulness**, its **blakean groaning roughcock**. Creation throes, those vistas when you drive the coast highway on a sunny day opening up the eye for miles of **horrible** washing sawing »¹²⁴

117 GILSON, Edwin. *Beat in Big Sur : The Spiritual Wilderness of Jack Kerouac*. University College Dublin. p.3. https://www.academia.edu/14211497/Beat_in_Big_Sur_The_Spiritual_Wilderness_of_Jack_Kerouac

118 MILLS, F. Stephen. *The American Landscape*. Edinburgh University Press. p.52.

119 KEROUAC, Jack. *Big Sur*. Penguin Books, United States. 1962. p.10.

120 Ibid.11.

121 Ibid.10.

122 Ibid.32.

123 Ibid.12.

124 Ibid.15.

« I look up at the sun going down golden throughout the *insane shivering canyon*, that blasted rogue wind comes topping down trees a mile away with an *advancing roar* that when it hits the broken cries of mother and son in grief are blown away with all those crazy scattering leaves – The *creek screeches*. »¹²⁵

« In my condition they look human trembling to that brink – hastening, hastening – In that *awful huge roar* blast of autumn Sur wind. »¹²⁶

Everything seems horrible for him at his arrival in Big Sur, he never uses a positive word at that time of the story. And very early we know that Kerouac and Big Sur are not compatible. And it means a lot to the writer's personality, as it's well-known that the description of a landscape may be in harmony with the hero's state of mind. Through his words, he depicts himself as a person mentally and spiritually ill.

We have the impression that the description he makes of Big Sur is comparable to a descent in Hell. It's probably a kind of metaphor here, which could explain that he does not find Paradise but Hell in Big Sur.

The depiction of the colors in the book is quite different from Miller's. There is a myriad of colors in the world, and in Big Sur's landscapes particularly. But Kerouac sees the things differently : the sea is blue but everything around is either white or black. Nothing in the middle. And he tends to use massively obscure colors than brighter, which reflects his ill-being :

« I can see the bridge but I can see nothing below it – The bridge continues the coast highway from one bluff to another, it's a nice *white* bridge with *white* rails and there's a *white* line running down the middle familiar and highway ... »¹²⁷

« The *blue* sea crashing high waves is full of *huge black rocks* rising like old ogresome castles dripping wet slime, a billion years of woe right there, the moogrus big clunk of it right there with its slaverous lips of foam at the base »¹²⁸

« (...) expression of *horror* on my face after all those nights sitting in the seashore under *giant black cliffs*. »¹²⁹

« The *huge black rocks* seem to move »¹³⁰

« Maybe I shouldna gone out and *scared* or bored or belabored myself so much, tho, on that beach at night which would *scare* any ordinary mortal – Every night around eight after supper I'd put on my big fisherman coat and take the notebook, pencil and lamp and start down the trail (sometimes passing ghostly Alf on the way) and go under that *frightful* high bridge and see through the *dark fog* ahead the *white mouths of ocean* coming high at me »¹³¹

« A minute later my heart's in my mouth again because I see *black things* in the *white sand* ahead but it's only piles of good old mule dung in Heaven. »¹³²

125 Ibid.189.
126 Ibid.182.
127 Ibid.10.
128 Ibid.15.
129 Ibid.46.
130 Ibid.33.
131 Ibid.31.
132 Ibid.13.

We have the impression that he is afraid of everything here. He does not feel at home in this place like Henry Miller was. He seems intimidated by those special landscapes around him. He is not familiar at all with that.

« It was even *frightening* at the other peaceful end of Raton Canyon, the east end. »¹³³

« The thing that was *frightening* was the mountain that rose up at the east end, a strange Burmese like mountain with levels and moody terraces and a strange ricepaddy hat on top that I kept staring at with a *sinking heart* even at first when I was healthy and feeling good »¹³⁴

« Even *the first frightening night* on the beach in the fog with my notebook and pencil, sitting there crosslegged in the sand facing all the *Pacific fury* »¹³⁵

« (...) huge blasts of *frightening gale* like wind came pouring into the canyon making all the trees roar with a really *frightening* intensity that sometimes built up to a booming war of trees that shook the cabin and woke you up – And was in fact one of the things that contributed to my mad fit. »¹³⁶

« And I'd get *scared* of the rising tide with its 15 foot waves. »¹³⁷

« But it's time to leave, I'm now *so scared* by that iodine blast by the sea and by the boredom of the cabin I take 20 dollars worth of perishable food left and spread it out on a big board below the cabin porch for the bluejays and the racoon and the mouse and the whole lot, pack up, and go. »¹³⁸

« But the moment I'm alone on the path a million waving moony arms are thrashing around me and every hole in the cliffs and burnt out trees I'd calmly passed a hundred times all summer in dead of fog, now has something moving in it quickly – *I hurry back* – Even on the porch I'm *scared* to see the familiar bushes near the outhouse or down by the broken treetrunk »¹³⁹

It takes time for Kerouac to get used to Big Sur and its surroundings. The descriptions he makes of the landscapes and things around him are so negative, everything seems evil for him. He does not make people want to come here. He delivers a bad image of the place, and we have the impression that the environment is hostile with Kerouac's presence.

« ... the sight of that simple *sad mountain*, together with the bridge and that car that had flipped over twice or so and landed flump in the sand with no more sign of human elbows or shred neckties (like a *terrifying poem* about America you could write), agh, HOO HOO of *Owls* living in *old evil hollow trees* in that *misty tangled* further part of the *canyon* where I was always *afraid* to go anyhow –

That *unclimbing tangled steep cliff* at the base of Mien Mo rising to *gawky dead trees* among bushes so dense and up to heathers God knows how deep with hidden caves no one not even I spose the Indians of the 10th Century had ever explored – And those *big gooky rainforest ferns* among lightning struck conifers right beside sudden black vine cliff faces rising right at

133 Ibid.16.
134 Ibid.16.
135 Ibid.21.
136 Ibid.28.
137 Ibid.32.
138 Ibid.42.
139 Ibid.200.

your side as you walk the peaceful path – And as I say *that ocean coming at you higher than the towns* – So many *evil combinations* even unto the *bat* who would come at me later...»¹⁴⁰

«The *horrible Sur*»¹⁴¹

«As soon as I find a glade near the creek I realize it's too *sinister* there»¹⁴²

«...I even spotted his powerful flashlight up at the bridge the first night, right thru the fog the eerie finger reaching the pale bottom of that *high monstrosity*, and even spotted it out over the *farmless sea* as I sat by *caves* in the *crashing dark* in my fisherman's outfit writing down what the sea was saying – Worst of all spotting it up at those *tangled mad cliffsides* where *owls* hooted oorahoo»¹⁴³

«But the new Big Sur Autumn was now all winey *sparkling blue* which made the *terribleness and giantness* of the *coast* all the more clear to see in all its *gruesome splendor*, miles and miles of it snaking away south, our three jeeps twisting and turning the increasing curves, sheer drops at our sides, further *ghostly high bridges* to cross with *smashings* below»¹⁴⁴

«To me it's just an *inhospitable madhouse of the earth*, I've seen it enough and even swallowed it in that deep breath»¹⁴⁵

In fact, Kerouac feels rejected by Big Sur, because of Nature and animals' behaviors. But the real problem, it's that he prefers to accuse them instead of looking inside him and his soul, because he is the sole responsible for this feeling, as it's in his mind. He doesn't manage to get used to this place, or even tries to open his mind :

«I go down by the creek and throw myself in the sand and lie looking with sad eyes at *the water* which no longer friends me but sorta *wants me to go away*.»¹⁴⁶

«The *sea* seems to *yell to me* GO TO YOUR DESIRE DONT HANG AROUND *HERE*»¹⁴⁷

As Miller before, he uses the literary technic called «pathetic fallacy», using human words to describe animals or Nature's behaviors. Nature is endowed with human feelings, and even human voices. He gives them human feelings and behaviors. The seals cry like babies, the sea and the creek speak with several voices :

«And we come out on the highway and go right battin up to Monterey in the *Big Sur dusk* where down there on the *faint gloamy frothing rocks* you can hear the *seals cry*.»¹⁴⁸

140 Ibid.17.

141 Ibid.153.

142 Ibid.212.

143 Ibid.18.

144 Ibid.105.

145 Ibid.106.

146 Ibid.113.

147 Ibid.41.

148 Ibid.131.

« Boom, clap, the waves are still talking but now I'm *sick and tired* of whatever they ever said or ever said or ever will say. »¹⁴⁹

« A *creek having so many voices* it's amazing, from the kettledrum basin deep bumpbumps to the little gurgly feminine crickles over shallow rocks, sudden choruses of other singers and voices from the log dam, dibble, dibble all night long and all day long the voices of the creek amusing me so much at first but in the later *horror* of that *madness* night becoming the babble and rave of *evil* angels in my head. »¹⁵⁰

But in this violent downpour, Kerouac feels sometimes joy and happiness, and he transcribes that through positive words. It happens during his first days in Big Sur, when he is set up in the little cabin at Raton Canyon and begins to have his little habits :

« Ah, *at first there were fine days and nights*, right after Monsanto drove me to Monterey and back with two boxes of a full grub list and left me there alone for three weeks of solitude, as we'd agreed – so *fearless and happy* »¹⁵¹

« Because *it was so beautiful at first*, even the circumstance of my sleeping bag suddenly erupting feathers in the middle of the night as I turned over to sleep on, so I curse and have to get up and sew it by lamplight or in the morning it might be empty of feathers. »¹⁵²

« *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 up to hear the *rapturous ring of silence* or *Heaven* even within and throughout the gurgle of the creek – When you say AM ALONE and the cabin is suddenly home only because you made one meal and washed your first meal dishes. »¹⁵³

« The first signpost came after that *marvelous day* I went hiking up the canyon road again to the highway at the bridge and as I walked way up there I could see the *peaceful roof of my cabin* way below and half mile away in the *old trees*, could see the porch, the cot where I slept, and my red handkerchief on the bench beside the cot »¹⁵⁴

« It's all *marvelous* – And at first it's so amazing to be able to *enjoy dreamy afternoon meadows* of heather up the other end of the canyon and just by walking less than a half mile you can suddenly also enjoy *wild gloomy sea* coast, or if you're sick of either of these just sit by the creek in a gladey spot and dream over snags – So easy in the woods to *daydream* and pray to the local spirits and say « Allow me to stay here, I only want peace » and those foggy peaks answer back mutely Yes. »¹⁵⁵

« But the most *marvelous day* of all when I completely forgot who I was where I was or the time a day just with my pants rolled up above my knees wading in the creek rearranging the rocks and some of the snags so that the water where I stooped (near the sandy shore) to get jugfuls would, instead of just sluggishly passing by shallow over mud, with *bugs* in it, now come rushing in a *pure gurgly clear stream* and deep too. »¹⁵⁶

149 Ibid.182.
150 Ibid.20.
151 Ibid.17.
152 Ibid.19.
153 Ibid.20.
154 Ibid.40.
155 Ibid.23.
156 Ibid.28.

« But it is *beautiful* especially to see up ahead north a vast expanse of curving seacoast with inland mountains dreaming under slow clouds. »¹⁵⁷

« (...) that *gorgeous long coast* up to Monterey (...), there's all kinds a *interesting things to see* anyway like the seals barking on rocks below, or quiet *old farms* made of logs on the hills across the highway, or sudden upstretches that go along *dreamy seaside meadows* where cows grace and graze in full sight of *endless blue Pacific*. »¹⁵⁸

« I make supper with a *happy song* and go out in the foggy moonlight (the *moon* sent its *white luminescence* through) and marveled to watch the new swift *gurgling clear water* run with its *pretty flashes of light* - And when the fog's over and *the stars and the moon come out at night* it'll be a *beautiful sight*. And such things – a whole mess of *little joys* like that *amazing* me when I came back in the *horror* of later to see how they'd all changed and become *sinister*, even my *poor* little wood platform and mill race when my eyes and my stomach *nauseous* and my soul *screaming* a thousand babbling words. »¹⁵⁹

« With my mind even and upright and abiding nowhere, (...) I go dancing off like a *fool* from my *sweet retreat*, rucksack on back, *after only three weeks* and really after *only 3 or 4 days of boredom*. It's a *beautiful day* as I come out of that *ghostly canyon road* and step out on the coast highway. »¹⁶⁰

But the joy is very short in the time. After the fear when he arrives in Big Sur, and then the happiness when he stays alone in his retreat in complete nature and peace, he feels quickly that something was wrong. He becomes insane, overwhelmed by fear, confusion and distress :

« Because on *the fourth day I began to get bored* and noted it in my diary with amazement, « Already bored? ». »¹⁶¹

« I went *crazy inside three weeks*. »¹⁶²

« In fact, flying silently around my lamplit cabin at 3 o'clock in the morning as I'm *reading Doctor Jekyll and Mister Hyde* – Small wonder maybe that *I myself turned from serene Jekyll to hysterical Hyde in the short pace of six weeks, losing absolute control of the peace mechanisms of my mind for the first time in my life*. »¹⁶³

« (...) *paranoia* (...) »¹⁶⁴

« (...) the final *horrible* night. »¹⁶⁵

« (...) coming *madness in Big Sur*. »¹⁶⁶

157 Ibid.44.
158 Ibid.46.
159 Ibid.29.
160 Ibid.43.
161 Ibid.30.
162 Ibid.39.
163 Ibid.18.
164 Ibid.127.
165 Ibid.114.
166 Ibid.153.

« (...) maybe I'll have to, maybe we'll have to *leave* or something, I think *I'll die here*. »¹⁶⁷

Because of the paranoia and madness which invades him, Kerouac decides to return to San Francisco. He later comes back with his friends. And which is surprising is that when he was there alone, he didn't see stars in the sky; but when he comes back with his friends, the sky is full of stars. As if he is more aware of things around him when he is not alone. He probably needs to be surrounded by people, because he is not capable at all to be alone with himself, it is too complicated and it hurts him so much :

« Every day is *cold and cloudy*, or *damp*, not cold in the eastern sense, and every night is absolutely fog: *no stars* whatever to be seen. »¹⁶⁸

When we know that he is the cherished son of his mother, it makes sense. He is incapable to stay alone, alone physically, spiritually and psychologically. Big Sur is not the problem in fact, it's inside him. It's what we understand through this book.

Just like Miller, to a very different degree, he has those kinds of ambivalent feelings about Big Sur : beautiful but at the same time scary for him. When he is in Big Sur, he does not like it, but when he returns to San Francisco, he misses Big Sur, and he even becomes nostalgic for his stay in the little cabin. It seems that he does not feel good anywhere in fact, as if he was lost, and it brings a lot of contradictions in his text, and it denotes a kind of instability of the persona :

« (...) I remembered in the cabin of *sweet loneliness on Big Sur*(...) »¹⁶⁹

« It all adds up to the *confusion* that's beginning to pile up in my battered drinking barin anyway, the constant reminders of *death* not the least of which was the *death of my peaceful love of Raton Canyon now suddenly becoming a horror*. »¹⁷⁰

« I now remember *Big Sur* with a clear piercing *love and agony* »¹⁷¹

« (...) waking up in the morning groaning far from my clean cot on the porch in Big Sur – No bluejays yakking for me to wake up any more, no gurgling creek, I'm back in the grooky city and I'm trapped »¹⁷²

« Later that day the two jeeps resume down to Monterey and down that blasted road I walked on blistered feet back to the *frightful bridge* at Raton Canyon – And I'd thought I'd never see the place again. The sight of the canyon down there as we renegotiated the mountain road made me bite my lip with *marvel and sadness* »¹⁷³

After all the torments he felt, he finally finds a sort of peace in his Big Sur retreat, surrounded by friends and animals. And it's only at this moment, that he really enjoys the place, looking differently at things, using only positive words to describe what surrounding him.

The lexical field of Paradise appears at the end of the book to describe the magical place where he is and he realizes the beauty of Big Sur :

167 Ibid.194.

168 Ibid.28.

169 Ibid.166.

170 Ibid.107.

171 Ibid.55.

172 Ibid.70.

173 Ibid.89.

« In fact very contented – I rose *that following morning with more joy and health and purpose than ever*, and there was me old Big Sur Valley all mine again »¹⁷⁴

« ... there was the mountain of Mien Mo in the distance just a *dismal old hill* with *funny bushes* around the sides and a *peaceful farm* on top, and nothing to do all day but *amuse myself* undisturbed by witches and booze »¹⁷⁵

« And when I visit *the sea it doesnt scare me anymore* ... and go back to my cabin and just quietly pour my coffee in the cup, afternoon, how *pleasant!* »¹⁷⁶

« ... Hack a giant redwood log in half in the middle of the creek – That kind of *day, perfect*, ending up sewing my holy sweater singing « *There's no place like home* » remembering my mother »¹⁷⁷

« I go walking towards Mien Mo mountain in the moon illuminated August night, see *gorgeous misty mountains* rising the horizon and like *saying to me* « *You dont have to torture your consciousness with endless thinking* » so I sit in the sand and look inward and see those old roses of the unborn again »¹⁷⁸

« Amazing, and in just a few hours this change – And I have enough physical energy to walk back to the sea suddenly realizing *what a beautiful oriental silk scroll painting this whole canyon would make* »¹⁷⁹

« That's how I go to sleep, under the stars on the porch, and at dawn I turn over with a *blissful smile on my face* because the *owls are callin* and answering from two different huge dead trunks across the valley, hoo hoo hoo. »¹⁸⁰

He even uses bright colors to describe landscapes, it's not only black and white anymore, but yellow color also appears in his text, warm color and positive one :

« It's as *familiar* as an *old* face in an *old* photograph as tho I'm gone a million years from all that sun shaded brush on rocks and that *heartless blue of the sea washing white on yellow sand*, those rills of *yellow arroyo* running down mighty cliff shoulders, those *distant blue meadows*, that whole ponderous groaning upheaval so *strange* to see after the last several days of just looking at little faces and mouths of people »¹⁸¹

It's only at the end of the adventure that Kerouac manages to see things as they are and to fully enjoys the magic of Big Sur. He removes the barriers he raised himself which avoided him to relax and enjoy life :

174 Ibid.117.
175 Ibid.118.
176 Ibid.119.
177 Ibid.120.
178 Ibid.120.
179 Ibid.121.
180 Ibid.121.
181 Ibid.90.

« I sit there in the *hot sun* and close my eyes: and there's the *golden swarming peace of Heaven in my eyelids* – It comes with a *sure hand* a *soft blessing* as big as it is *beneficent, i.e., endless* – I've fallen asleep. »¹⁸²

« *Blessed relief has come to me from just that minute* – *Everything has washed away* – I'm *perfectly normal again* – I'm *sitting smiling in the sun, the birds sing again, all's well again.* »¹⁸³

And just like Miller before him, he uses the sentence « peace of Heaven ». He is finally capable to see Big Sur as it is, a peaceful place, a kind of Heaven, with paradisaical qualities. It's one of his friends who explains to him that his behavior was not compatible with happiness and he gives him pieces of advice to look at the bright side of life, and with the help of this friend, he probably tried to see things differently and to work on himself :

« (...) *you give up so easy to discouragement.* »¹⁸⁴

« (...) *you're so wrapped up in yourself.* »¹⁸⁵

Henry Miller noticed Big Sur's qualities before Jack Kerouac. It took time for him to appreciate and open his soul to the mysticism of this place ; but he finally saw it and he felt blessed by the beauty of the land. And we will see then that Miller and Kerouac are not the only ones to have been appealed by the esteemed beauty of this Heaven ...



Big Sur: Between Heaven and Hell¹⁸⁶

182 Ibid.215.

183 Ibid.216.

184 Ibid.186.

185 Ibid.189.

186 Picture by myself. April 11th, 2016. Bixby Bridge, Big Sur.

C) Big Sur and its Artists

ALANIS MORISSETTE fell in love with the little place of Big Sur, so much that she wrote a song about this special place. The song, simply called « Big Sur », is a tribute to this wonderful landscape on the California Coast. A bit of history of the land has been mentioned by the singer, like the three Indian tribes who lived there before : the Ohlone, the Esselen, and the Salinan. She also mentioned a lot of artists who came in Big Sur in the mid-20th century, like Henry Miller and Jack Kerouac of course, but also Richard Brautigan, Hunter Stockton Thompson, Emile Norman, Edward Weston, Robinson Jeffers, and Anaïs Nin. Several references to the Big Sur history and life are made, which shows how this land is important for her. She mentioned Julia, which is the name of the park Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park, named after Julia Pfeiffer Burns, a pioneer woman who lived there. But also the Andrew Molera State Park, which is the largest state park on the Big Sur Coast ; Helmuth Deetjen, who managed the Deetjen's Big Sur Inn with his wife Helen Haight Deetjen, until his death in 1972. They were the first to offer accommodation and meals for travelers. Mickey refers to Mickey Muennig¹⁸⁷, an American architect, who built the hotel Post Ranch Inn , which opened its doors in 1992. He fell in love with this area in 1971, and never left it. He owned a home on Partington Ridge which he built with his own hands. Bill and Lolly were the tenants of the famous Nepenthe restaurant. Ventana is also another resort in Big Sur, very luxurious, with restaurants, a spa and a swimming pool. Fritz is a reference to the Esalen Retreat with its hot springs. Fritz Perls was a German psychiatrist who taught workshops at the Center, and one of the cabins of the retreat is named Fritz Perls House as a tribute to his work.

Many of the words Morisette used in her song described perfectly Big Sur, like Highway One, as it's the only road of the area ; but also the redwoods, those giants trees which are specifically of this region ; the Pacific, as the ocean is endless here ; but also the forest, which is everywhere. The sun is important too, and the bluffs which are characteristically of the land too.

The fact that she is barefoot means the liberty of the self, the good simple life, and Nature. The title « All roads lead to Big Sur », means that sad or happy, we go to Big Sur to revitalize ourselves, or to celebrate life and just enjoy.

Morisette feels at home in Big Sur, even if she doesn't live here, because she feels safe and happy, it's her peaceful place probably.

In an article on her website, we learn that she loves hiking in Big Sur, and she does that with her kid Ever. And they had a conversation about Big Sur which reveals the importance of the town for her :

"Mommy, why do you love Big Sur so much?"

"Well, sweet, this place is close to mommy's heart because of how breathtaking it is, beautiful. many writers have written here and there are frogs. and a big big ocean. and rain. and mist ; and in Big Sur, there are many many beautiful trees. and sun dappling through the trees..., I feel god here, I feel love here. like how I love you. There are many words we could use to describe it. Like life, energy, source. I love this place, my favorite place »¹⁸⁸

She also wrote a song called « Flowers of Entanglement », in her 2008 album « Torch », where she says « Miss our Big Sur getaways », which reasserts the importance of this place for her.

187 <http://littleatoms.com/life/man-who-built-big-sur>

188 *Hiking with Ever*. August, 7th 2014. Alanis Morisette.
<https://alanis.com/news/hiking-with-ever-in-big-sur>

Big Sur¹⁸⁹

Highway One
Crystalline-haunted sun
With the Pacific masculine crash

My little one
Enthralled by the redwoods
As I write amongst monarchs and mist

Me and Anaïs and Henry and Jack Kerouac
Me and the Ohlone, the Esselen, the Salinan
Me and Julia, Helmuth and Brautigan
All roads lead to Big Sur
All roads home to Big Sur

Clear celestial and frogs
Fritz in cabins of logs
Amongst the springs we are barefoot and warmed

(CHORUS)

I am climbing on the Bluff
Beseeching god to answer us
Not much distracts from our shamanic creek breakfast
This watery heartbeat by the forest

(CHORUS)

Me and Mickey and a path high on the Molera
Me and Lolly and Bill watching a red-tailed hawk
Me and the posts take it all in through the big Ventana
All roads lead to Big Sur
All roads home to Big Sur



189 <https://songmeanings.com/songs/view/3530822107859482324/>

HUNTER STOCKTON THOMPSON, the Gonzo journalist, arrived in 1961 in Big Sur. Though he came there to focus on writing, he continued to submit articles to newspapers and magazines in an effort to provide some form of income to support himself. And it's the article he wrote for *Rogue Magazine*, entitled «*Big Sur: The Tropic of Henry Miller*»¹⁹⁰, - which talks about the town, but also of the property where he worked, and that he criticized - that put an end to his job in Big Sur. He was finally fired only eight months after his arrival.

Thompson was not in tune with the Big Sur environment and people. He wrote to one of his friends:

*«I am surrounded by lunatics here, people screeching every time I pull a trigger, yelling about my blood, soaked shirt, packs of queers waiting to do me in, so many creditors that I've lost count, an huge doberman on the bed, a pistol by the desk, time passing getting balter, no money, a great thirst for all the world's whiskey, my clothes rotting in the fog, a motorcycle with no light, a landlady who's writing a novel on butcher paper, wild boar in the hills and queers on the road, vats of homemade beer in the closet, shooting cats to ease the pressure, the jabbering of Buddhists in the trees, whores in the canyon, Christ only knows if I can last it out.»*¹⁹¹

He also made descriptions rather unflattering of the town, becoming - at this stage of the thesis - the second one to do not appreciate a lot Big Sur:

*«Almost everything you hear about Big Sur is rumor, legend or an outright lie. This place is a myth-maker's paradise, so vast and so varied and so beautiful that the imagination of the visitor is tempted to run wild at the sight of it. In reality, Big Sur is very like Valhalla – a place that a lot of people have heard of, and that very few can tell you anything about.»*¹⁹²

*«Some of them will stay as long as a week, just wandering around, asking questions, forever popping up where you least expect them – finally wandering off, complaining bitterly that Big Sur is «nothing but a damn wilderness.»*¹⁹³

*«This place is a real menagerie...There are only two legitimate wives on the property; the other females are either mistresses, “companions,” or hopeless losers...the late Dr. Murphy, conceived this place as a great health spa, a virtual bastion of decency and clean living. But something went wrong. During World War Two it became a haven for draft dodgers, and over the years it has evolved into a lonely campground for the morally deformed, a pandora's box of human oddities, and a popular sinkhole of idle decadence.»*¹⁹⁴

Murphy's matriarch did not appreciate all those details Thompson wrote in his article, particularly the part about Esalen and the Sulphur Baths as homosexual place, it's why Thompson was given one month to leave the property. He finally stayed around Big Sur for several more months in order to continue the writing of his book, and then came back to his birthplace, Louisville, in Kentucky.

190 MARKOFF, John. *Fear and Loathing in Big Sur*. *Alta Journal*, Jan.22th 2018.
<https://altaonline.com/fear-loathing-big-sur/>

191 THOMPSON, S.Hunter. *Big Sur : the Tropic of Henry Miller*. *Rogue Magazine*. 1961.
www.rodakis.com/big-sur

192 Ibid.

193 Ibid.

194 FEEHAN, Rory. *Hunter S.Thompson: Gonzo Frontiersman*. Essay. Sep.22th, 2012.
<https://www.beatdom.com/hunter-s-thompson-gonzo-frontiersman/>

But there is a reason which can explain why Thompson did not find happiness in Big Sur. In one of his letters published in his book « The Proud Highway » in 1997, he talked about Big Sur as the garden of agony because it seems that his job as a caretaker led him into a fight with aggressive gays men in the Hot Sulphur Baths, and he was beaten up, which gave him another reason to hate this place. He has been hurt in his pride.¹⁹⁵

It goes without saying that Thompson's temper was too much for this peaceful place, he was absolutely not in harmony with Big Sur. He was the outlaw of Big Sur, so different than the people of the community who lived there.

EMILE NORMAN's name, as Robinson Jeffers before, resonates strongly with Big Sur.

One day, while driving up to Mendocino to check out some 400 acres of land for sale, Norman and his boyfriend took a detour through Highway 1 and Big Sur. They were marveled at the views from the road, and so bought a house near the Big Sur River. Their home was a workstation, but also a sanctuary for them, and Big Sur was Norman's territory.

Nature was important in Norman's life and work, it's why he loved so much and cherished Big Sur :

*« Nature is full of wonder. Endless descriptions of beauty ».*¹⁹⁶

He discovered that this special place on Earth has a power :

*« I've been around the world four times, seen how beautiful it is. I realized there's no place on the Earth as beautiful as Big Sur, California. There's something magical about this place ».*¹⁹⁷

EMIL WHITE made a description of Big Sur's inhabitants, who were only hundred at that time he lived there, describing them as « friendly, warmhearted, intelligent » painters, writers, ranchers, and woodsmen, « all living compatibly and having in common a deep love for the place itself ».¹⁹⁸

And to show how this special place was important for him, I found a sentence he said which makes us realize how Big Sur was wonderful for him, and how it gave his life a sense : in an interview he gave shortly before his death, he was asked whether he had any regrets, and he said : « I only wished I had moved to Big Sur sooner ».¹⁹⁹

RICHARD BRAUTIGAN wrote in his book « A Confederate General from Big Sur »²⁰⁰ that the main character goes to Big Sur in order for his soul can enjoy his liberty, meaning that in Big Sur you feel free and can live in a peaceful way.

195 REYNOLDS, Bill. *On the Road to Gonzo : Hunter S.Thompson's Early Literary Journalism (1961-1970)*. Ryerson University, Canada. June 2012. p.61.

https://ialjs.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/051-084_RoadtoGonzoReynolds.pdf

196 <https://www.montereyherald.com/2008/06/08/life-of-wonder-artist-emile-normans-work-has-brought-him-around-the-world-and-back-to-magical-big-sur/>

197 Ibid.

198 BROOKS, Alden Shelley. *Big Sur: The Making of a Prized California Landscape*. University of California Press. 2017. p.55.

199 <https://henrymiller.org/emil-white/>

200 BRAUTIGAN, Richard. *Le Général Sudiste de Big Sur*. Christian Bourgois Editeur. 1975. p.64.

LILLIAN BOS ROSS, one of the first writers to live in Big Sur, once described it as « *not a place at all, but a state of mind* ». Lillian and her husband, the sculptor Harry Dick Ross, made a trip on the California Coast, in order to see what was the empty place on the map between San Simeon and Monterey. She felt something particular for this special place, it's why they decided to take roots here. It inspired her a poem, written in 1926, and called « *The Coast Ballad* »²⁰¹, about a young vaquero who won a wife at a card game in the little town of Jolon, at the South of Big Sur. She then wrote a book, still inspired by Big Sur surroundings, « *The Stranger* », written in 1941, which became a movie in 1974, « *Zandy's Bride* ». In the book, Zandy « buys » a woman to become his wife, but life together is difficult in this isolated place on the West Coast. It's only at the end, after several adventures and discords, that Zandy and his bride make peace and he declares "For the first time in my life I feel to home in world I was borned in"²⁰².

South Coast

By Lillian Bos Ross, Sam Eskin, Richard Dehr and Frank Miller
(This shows 14 of the 16 original verses and is the most performed version of the song.)

203

My name is Lonjano de Castro
My father was a Spanish grandee
But I won my wife in a card game
To hell with those lords o'er the sea

In my youth I had a Monterey homestead,
Creeks, valleys and mountains all mine;
Where I built me a snug little shanty
And I roofed it and floored it with pine.

I had a bronco, a buckskin –
Like a bird he flew over the trail;
I rode him out forty miles every Friday
Just to get me some grub and my mail.

CHORUS:
Well the South Coast is wild coast and lonely
You might win in a game at Jolon
But a lion still rules the barranca
And a man there is always alone

I sat in a card game at Jolon
I played there with a half-breed named Juan
And after I'd won his money
He said, "Your homestead 'gainst my daughter Dawn."

I turned up the ace...I had won her
My heart, which was down in my feet,
Jumped up to my throat in a hurry –
Like a young summer's day she was sweet.

He opened the door to the kitchen;
He called the girl out with a curse
"Take her, God damn her, you've won her,
She's yours now for better or worse!"

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Her arms had to tighten around me
As we rode up the hills from the south
Not a word did I hear from her that day,
Nor a kiss from her pretty young mouth.

(Chorus)

We got to the cabin at twilight,
The stars twinkled over the coast.
She soon loved the orchard and the valley,
But I knew that she loved me the most.

That was a gay happy winter;
I carved on a cradle of pine
By the fire in that snug little shanty
And I sang with that gay wife of mine.

But then I got hurt in a landslide,
Crushed hip and twice broken bone;
She saddled up Buck like lightning
And rode out through the night to Jolon.

(Chorus)

The lion screamed in the barranca;
Buck bolted and he fell on a slide.
My young wife lay dead in the moonlight
My heart died that night with my bride.

They buried her out in the orchard.
They carried me down to Jolon.
I've lost my chiquita, my nino;
I'm an old broken man, all alone.

The cabin still stands on the hillside,
It's doors open to the wind,
But the cradle and my heart are empty –
I can never go there again.

(Chorus)



- 201 ROSS, Bos Lillian. *The South Coast* ballad. 1926.
<https://pandemo.livejournal.com/576842.html>
202 ROSS, Bos Lillian. *The Stranger*. Le Club Français du Livre, Paris. 1960. p.293.
203 <https://www.wcreynolds.com/images/writings/Southcoast.pdf>

ROBINSON JEFFERS, and his wife Una had been taken by the beauty of Big Sur and the little town of Carmel-By-The-Sea, and felt a profound connection to the landscape. He saw Big Sur as a world apart, as the most wonderful place in the world.

From 1919 to 1962, Jeffers wrote more than 400 poems about this part of the California Coast, extolling its natural beauty and wilderness. He called this place dear to his heart « *Their inevitable place* ». ²⁰⁴ It was more than a home for them, it was a refuge : « *All that we saw or heard here was beautiful* ». ²⁰⁵ He wrote about Big Sur :

« *For the first time in my life, I could see people living – amid magnificently unspoiled scenery – essentially as they did in the Idyls or the Sagas, or in Homer’s « Ithaca » ».* ²⁰⁶

Author Shelley Alden Brooks, in her wonderful book « *Big Sur: The Making of a Prized California Landscape* » wrote about Jeffers and his relation to Big Sur :

« *He found his poetic inspiration most readily on the days of winter rain and summer fog, when Big Sur’s natural elements appeared even more imposing. Jeffers’s powerful verse left the impression of a landscape of unrivaled grandeur, of natural forces that dwarfed human activity* ». ²⁰⁷

Carmel Point ²⁰⁸

The extraordinary patience of things!
This beautiful place defaced with a crop of suburban
houses
How beautiful when we first beheld it
Unbroken field of poppy and lupin walled with clean
cliffs
No intrusion but two or three horses pasturing
Or a few milch cows rubbing their flanks on the
outcrop rockheads.
Now the spoiler has come: does it care?
Not faintly. It has all time.
It knows the people are a tide
That swells and in time will ebb, and all
Their woks dissolve.
Meanwhile the image of the pristine beauty
Lives in the very grain of the granite
Safe as the endless ocean that climbs our cliff
As for us:

We must uncenter our minds from ourselves
We must unhumanize our views a little, and become confident
As the rock and ocean that we were made from.



Tor House, Jeffers’ house ²⁰⁹

204 VILANO, Matt. *A poet’s home in Carmel*. San Francisco Gate Newspaper. July, 2006.
<https://www.sfgate.com/entertainment/article/A-poet-s-home-in-Carmel-2531616.php>

205 torhouse.org/history

206 TIMBERG, Scott. *A Poetic Path*. Los Angeles Times Magazine. Sep.2009.
<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2009-sep-06-tr-jeffers6-story.html>

207 BROOKS, Alden Shelley. *Big Sur: The Making of a Prized California Landscape*. University of California Press. 2017. p.17.

208 <https://poets.org/poem/carmel-point>

209 <https://www.seemonterey.com/listings/robinson-jeffers-tor-house/529/>

EDWARD WESTON went with his two sons to «*the most exciting environs*», meaning Big Sur, for a day trip to Highway 1 in March 1929. And what he wrote about this place is just incredible, because he did not use only words, but also his greatest talent, photography to show how this place is magical:

«*The Coast was on a grand scale: mountainous cliffs thrust buttresses far out into the ocean, anchored safely for eternity: against the rising sun, their black solidity accentuated by rising mists and sunlit water, the ensemble was tremendous. But I lack words, I am inarticulate, anything I might write down would sound trivial as « ain't nature grand ». I hope the one negative made from this point will, in a small way, record my feeling*»²¹⁰.



211

SONGBIRD²¹² movie, produced by Adam Mason, and starring Demi Moore, describes how our world lives in confinement because of the Covid 23 virus. There are camps for contaminated people, where they die in suffering. People who are immunized have wristbands and can freely go outside. We learn in the movie that the only town in the United States of America which has no covid cases and where life is «normal» - as before - is Big Sur. And so it's the hero's aim to go there and to be free, a dream. It's a kind of paradise.

210 <https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-6160907>

211 Ibid.

212 SONGBIRD movie, produced by Adam Mason. *Invisible Narratives Company*. 2020

ANSEL ADAMS²¹³ said about Big Sur :

« Surely no more beautiful and spiritually uplifting coastline exists on this Earth »²¹⁴

California Coast South of Big Sur Circa 1950²¹⁵



DONALD PIKE, author of the book « *The Greatest meeting of Land and Sea* », wrote about Big Sur powerful things, showing how Big Sur has this special impact on the soul and body :

« The Big Sur country is never anything but a remarkable and a singular experience »²¹⁶

« It's a land where man can measure himself and re-energize his soul »²¹⁷

« The experience can also cleanse the soul of unnecessary emotional baggage »²¹⁸.

KIM NOVAK, the American actress, told in an interview in 1964 for LIFE Magazine :

« Maybe I should be in Hollywood studying acting, but here I have my Utopia ! »²¹⁹.

THE RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS, the American Rock band, mentioned Big Sur in their song « *Road Trippin* »²²⁰ : « In Big Sur we take some time to linger on », ²²¹ which shows the peacefulness of the place.

213 <https://www.anseladams.com/>

214 BROOKS, Alden Shelley. *Big Sur: The Making of a Prized California Landscape*. University of California Press. 2017. p.1.

215 <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/ansel-adams-california-coast-south-of-big-sur>

216 PIKE, Donald. *The Greatest Meeting of Land and Sea*. Fourth Printing. 1990. p.22.

217 Ibid.26.

218 Ibid.28.

219 BROOKS, Alden Shelley. *Big Sur: The Making of a Prized California Landscape*. University of California Press. 2017. p.69.

220 [Today.com/popculture/big-sur-calif-haven-writers-musicians-wbna48815719](https://www.today.com/popculture/big-sur-calif-haven-writers-musicians-wbna48815719)

221 <https://songmeanings.com/songs/view/13856/>

THE BEACH BOYS' co-founder, Al Jardine, in the early Seventies, built a recording studio 10-minute walk from Pfeiffer Beach, in Big Sur. Those California boys were famous for their surf and love songs. They wrote several songs about California, and in one of them, simply called «California», written in 1973, they wrote about the quietude and love in Big Sur :

*«Have you ever been to a festival, the Big Sur congregation?
Where Country Joe will do his show
And he'd sing about liberty
And the people there in the open air
Yeah the people there love to sing and share their new found liberty»²²²*

Another one called «Big Sur» was written before, in 1971, and is a bonus track on the remastered album «*Feel Flow: the Sunflower & Surf's Up Sessions 1969-1971*», which came out in July 2021; it describes the beauty and special elements of the Big Sur Coast.

California saga: Big Sur ²²³

Cashmere hills filled with evergreens
Flowin' frown the clouds down to meet the sea
With the granite cliff as a referee
Crimson sunsets and golden dawns
Mother deer with their newborn fawns
Under Big Sur skies and that's where I belong
Big Sur I've got plans for you
Me and mine are going to
Add ourselves to your lengthy list of lovers
And live in canyons covered with a springtime green
While birds and flowers to be heard and seen
And on my old guitar I'll make up songs to single panSparklin' springs from the mountainside
Join the Big Sur river rushing to the tide
Where my kids can search for sea shells at low tide
Big Sur my astrology it says that I am meant to be
Where the rugged mountain meets the water
And so while stars shine brightly and up above
Fog rolls in through a redwood grove
And to my dying fire I think I'll add a log

But not only do artists talk about Big Sur, magazines, websites and many other forms of media are forever singing Big Sur's praises.

CONDE NAST travelers magazine named Highway 1 «*one of the top 10 world-famous streets*», and even "*one of the best drives on Earth*".²²⁴ Mostly because every five minutes, we are tempted to stop the car or walk, astonished by the splendor of the coast. Ocean views are uninterrupted,

222 https://www.streetdirectory.com/lyricadvisor/song/ceuofe/california_saga_california/

223 <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/the-beach-boys-feel-flows-the-sunflower-surfs-up-sessions-big-sur-1177572/>

224 <https://highway1discoveryroute.com/activities/highway-1-scenic-drives-where-to-stop/>

THE WASHINGTON TIMES stated that Big Sur is «one of the most beautiful coastlines anywhere in the world, an isolated stretch of road, mythic in reputation». ²²⁵

THE SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE newspaper, in the early 1960s, labeled the Big Sur Coast as a «Timeless Eden». ²²⁶

TRIP ADVISOR, the American travel company online, in 2008, for its «Travelers' Choice Destination Award», ranked Big Sur second among all United States destinations, due to its natural scenery, but also for its preservation - no advertisements, or billboards are allowed along the highway.

LISA ELLEY, the award-winning San Francisco Bay artist, called her painting «Welcome to Paradise», which means everything. She adds to her masterpiece this description :

«If you're lucky enough to drive down the Pacific Coast in Big Sur, you'll never forget the caress of the coastal breeze, the majestic cliffs, the crash of wild surf, and the visual feast of wildflowers and evergreens as the Los Padres forest greets the ocean in this magical California Paradise » ²²⁷.



228

225 <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2006/jul/7/20060707-084209-3823r/>

226 BROOKS, Alden Shelley. *Big Sur: The Making of a Prized California Landscape*. University of California Press. 2017. p.5.

227 <https://www.lisaelley.com/>

228 <https://www.lisaelley.com/store/p1308/welcome-to-paradise.html>

CHAPITRE IV

All Roads Lead to Big Sur

A) Different Views on Paradise

Why artists don't see the same things in Big Sur? Why they don't have the same feelings? We can agree that most of the artists we talked about love this special place, but few don't seem to like it. Why did Henry Miller see a Paradise in Big Sur when Jack Kerouac saw Hell? Is it really because of this little city itself, or maybe there is something else?

Big Sur has this remarkable topography, the relaxing sea and the rocky coast, which seems both a blessing and a curse, like the feelings of the artists who came there. Big Sur's landscape is the most spectacular, but at the same time the most frightening for a few people, like the conquistadors or most particularly here, Jack Kerouac.

When we read Jack Kerouac's book and a few elements about his own life, it appears that he is not able to enjoy simple things. And it's probably why Big Sur did not reveal itself as marvelous as it can be for many other artists or people.

His book is full of dark elements, contrary to Miller's. He writes about his Big Sur's stay with a dark and confused tone for the most part. Hopefully there is an optimistic end, which shows that the Big Sur's magic is real, but it's not until the end that we see a happy tone. Big Sur scares him. In Nature he did not see magic or peace, but instead hostility; and it's the same thing with the ocean. He arrived in Big Sur with the hope to find peace and put distance with his life of success and debauchery. He is in physical and mental exhaustion, and the aim of this retreat in the secluded cabin in the woods is to find peace and come back to a more simple and primary life. But after several days of joy to be alone, he is caught again by despair. And all the things around him become horrific, the mountains, the ocean and nature in general. He even sees death in this place.²²⁹ Which is the first time since the beginning of this thesis that we hear that.

His demons catch him again and he drinks a lot and becomes quickly mad. But it seems that it's not Big Sur which is involved, but more Kerouac's problems and personality:

« Any drinker knows how the process works: the first day you get drunk is okay, the morning after means a big head but so you can kill that easy with a few more drinks and a meal, but if you pass up the meal and go on to another night's drunk, and wake up to keep the toot going, and continue on to the fourth day, there'll come one day when the drinks wont take effect because you're chemically overloaded and you'll have to sleep it off but cant sleep any more because it was alcohol itself that made you sleep those last five nights, so delirium sets in – Sleeplessness, sweat, trembling, a groaning feeling of weakness where your arms are numb and useless, nightmares »²³⁰

Kerouac's problem with alcohol has a huge impact on his personality and his life in general. Alcohol produces great instability in him. He is not able to act normally, or even think correctly. And the fact that he is famous doesn't help him in fact. He has a huge problem managing his fame, and finally it's more a curse for him.

229 [Huffpost.com/entry/big-sur-calif_n_908152](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/big-sur-calif_n_908152)

230 KEROUAC, Jack. *Big Sur*. Penguin Books, United States. 1962. p.75.

« Because after all the poor kid actually believes that there's something noble and idealistic and kind about all this beat stuff, and I'm supposed to be the King of the Beatniks according to the newspapers, so but at the same time I'm sick and tired of all the endless enthusiasms of new young kids trying to know me and pour out all their lives into me so that I'll jump up and down and say yes yes that's right, which I can't do any more. My reason for coming to Big Sur for the summer being precisely to get away from that sort of thing »²³¹.

Alcohol is a very addictive drug and it modifies people's personalities. And several problems come out of this bad habit, like memory loss, problems in coordination, and even dementia. And we can notice that it is what happens to Kerouac. Harvey A. Siegal and James A. Inciardi, in their article « A brief history of alcohol » explain this plague :

« Alcoholic people have higher rates of depression, suicide, and evidence of other mental illnesses ».²³²

And it is what we notice about *Big Sur*'s author in only a few weeks in the isolation of his cabin. He becomes quickly mad and seems eroded by a mental illness. The isolation is not good for him. To be alone with his own thinkings is quite bad and his fragile state of mind. He falls again into his bad habits of drinking and madness. He drinks so much that he plunges into a profound delirium. He finally decides to return to San Francisco, and it's only when he comes back to Big Sur with his friends, that he finally sees peace in this special place. It's only after a nap on the porch of the cabin that everything seems to go back to normal. It shows that Kerouac is not able to stay alone, and not with his own thinkings. He needs people around him to feel good. He is bad for himself and can't see things clearly when he is alone. And it's only surrounded by people that he finds peace in Big Sur, and at this moment, the Big Sur's magic reveals to him. His mind seems very closed to beautiful things, he does not seem capable anymore to be amazed, probably because of his own demons and the pain it provokes. There is this tension between the desire to be alone, but at the same time the need to be around other people, it's complicated.

But he already has problems with his mental state before his stay in Big Sur. It's not the isolation or Big Sur which are responsible for that. In Kerouac's biography « *Jack Kerouac: King of the Beats, a Portrait* », written by Barry Miles, we learn that he is schizophrenic for a long time :

« I was in the navy, but I was discharged after two months. Schizoid personality. »²³³

« One of the reasons for my being in the hospital, besides dementia praecox, is a complex condition of my mind, split up, as it were, in two parts, one normal, the other schizoid. »²³⁴

« He was well aware that he had psychological problems ».²³⁵

And of course, alcohol increases his fragile mental state, and depression is the result of his excessive drinking for long years, it leads him to depression and dementia. It's why he is not able to see things in a positive way, all those problems avoid him to be really happy and enjoy simple things. And we can imagine that this « escape » in alcohol is the reflection of his inner turmoil.

231 Ibid.109.

232 SIEGAL, A. Harvey and INCIARDI, A. James. *A Brief History of Alcohol*. <https://catalogimages.wiley.com/images/db/pdf/9780470670279.excerpt.pdf>

233 MILES, Barry. *Jack Kerouac : King of the Beats, A Portrait*. Virgin Publishing Ltd, Great Britain. 1998. p.42.

234 Ibid.48.

235 Ibid.88.

He never feels entirely at home in society, even when he was not famous yet. The success of « *On the Road* » was not helpful at all for him, it didn't help his psychological disorders, and the chemical dependency, and more of that, the control of Memere, his mother on him. There was a disillusionment in his soul, and it led him to self-destruction.

We learn in this same book that Jack Kerouac was always searching for escape from everything, because he was never happy with anything, and alcohol was his favorite escape :

« *His whole life was about escape ... He was such a dreamer. It was escape all the time.* »²³⁶

« *Jack was unhappy and frustrated* ». ²³⁷

« *Jack's basic thing was escape. Buddhism, the trips, the drink, the drugs, everything was an escape.* »²³⁸

Kerouac wrote more than ten pages about the horror of his awoken nightmares in Big Sur, his mental breakdown, which is in fact a battle with his own demons. It's only at the end that he realized that Big Sur is a piece of heaven, when he wakes up from a nap on the porch of his little cabin. And at this moment we understand that all those things that happened were just a projection of his fears and his state of mind. And when we read a second time the novel, we notice that the Big Sur's scenery changes at the same time as Jack's mood and state of mind. The description of the surroundings is expressed through his emotions.

Hunter Thompson, who is more on Kerouac's side than Miller's concerning the Big Sur special charm, wrote something which explains perfectly Kerouac's behavior there :

« *To see Big Sur is one thing, and to live here is quite another. The little man who comes down from the city to « get away from it all » runs amok on wine two weeks later because there is nobody to talk and the silence is driving him crazy. Big Sur is full of loneliness* ». ²³⁹

Thompson, for that matter, saw in Big Sur an incredible sunset as he wrote it. Even if this place was not for him, he was capable to see beautiful things in a place he did not love so much. And he added that it was maybe a sign, a divine sign ; and where is the best place to find a sign ... perhaps the paradise :

« *... Incredible sunset outside ... Perhaps this is the omen we were waiting for ...* »²⁴⁰

To come back to Jack Kerouac, it's a sentence one of his friends – Ben Fagan - said to him at the end of the book that is the key of peace for the author, but also a hint to find paradise :

« (...) « *just float with the world* ». »²⁴¹

Henry Miller wrote something really interesting about people's behavior, and it clearly shows that it's Kerouac who made Big Sur a frightening place, and not the contrary :

236 Ibid.199.

237 Ibid.211.

238 Ibid.260.

239 THOMPSON, S.Hunter. *Big Sur : the Tropic of Henry Miller*. Rogue Magazine. 1961. www.rodakis.com/big-sur

240 https://natedsanderson.com/Hunter_Thompson_Letter_Signed_From_Big_Sur_in_1960

241 KEROUAC, Jack. *Big Sur*. Penguin Books, United States. 1962. p.162.

« Comes a settling down period, generally accompanied by a slight touch of boredom-the ransom one pays for flirting with *perfection*. Then follows the trouble period, when inner doubts pave the way for domestic squabbles, and the whole horizon grows dark with conflict.

When at last you hit bottom, you say-every one has said it at least one !»Big Sur? Why, it's just like every other place!» Speaking thus, you voice a profound truth, since *a place is only what you make it, what you bring to it, just as with a friend, a lover, a wife, a pet or a pursuit*. Yes, Big Sur can be a dream come true- or a complete washout. »²⁴²

« I come back once again to those individuals who came here full of needs and who fled after a time because « *it* » was not what they hoped to find, or because « *they* » were not what they thought themselves to be ». ²⁴³

In this sentence above, Henry Miller draws this correlation between the pronoun « *it* » which represents Big Sur here, and the pronoun « *them* » representing in this example Jack Kerouac, and it shows that paradise is a perfect blend of atmosphere and ourself. Which explains why Jack Kerouac doesn't find in Big Sur paradise at first.

He didn't really understand this strange fascination for Big Sur, he didn't see magic and mysticism there – not quickly. And it's the big difference between him and Henry Miller. But there was something very different from the start between them. Kerouac came to Big Sur to flee his fame for a while ; but Henry Miller came by chance, when his friend offered him to come with him and stay there. He was searching for a refuge where to take roots, as he found in Greece, far away from the dominant American culture he rejected. They also have a really different attitude toward the celebrity. Miller was not famous yet, as his books were banned in United States.

But even then, when his « *Rosy Cruxifiction* » was published, he continued to talk by letter with admirers and invite people to talk about his writings. Kerouac was already famous when he arrived and wanted to escape this nightmare it was for him. They are really different on that point. It's why they didn't see Big Sur the same way probably. The conditions were really different for them :

« I know there are some who complain that Big Sur does not offer enough stimulus. My feeling, on the contrary, is that there is too much stimulus here. *To the man whose senses are alive and alert* there is not even the need to stir from one's threshold. For such a one there is a world here as full and rich, as compelling and instructive. »²⁴⁴

Kerouac imagines Big Sur will be helpful for him, he came with a precise intention, whereas Miller just came without anything in mind. There is also a big difference in their age when they arrived, and it was not the same period.

On the contrary, Henry Miller's tone in his book is not dark at all, it's more romantic. His description of the landscapes is captivating. He finds joy in every little thing in Big Sur. He is more open to things ; as he said above « *his senses were alive and alert* », which allowed him to enjoy all the things Big Sur has to offer. He is amazed of everything, the sun, the ocean, nature, fauna and flora. His text is effusive of positive words. It's like an ode to nature and a love letter to Big Sur. He makes poetic descriptions of the surroundings and wildlife :

242 Ibid.37.

243 MILLER, Henry. *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch*. New Directions Publishing Corporation, New York. 1957.p.27.

244 Ibid.33.

« It is a region where extremes meet, where one is always conscious of weather, of space, of grandeur and of eloquent silence. Many people remark that it is a landscape in which the masculine and feminine elements are perfectly blended. It is a Paradise which is constantly challenging one to live at one's highest level or go down in conflict and defeat...

Often I say to myself, especially when the clouds pile up in the north and the sea is churning with whitecaps and the grain bends low under the wind: « This is the California that man dreamed of years ago, this is the Pacific that Balboa looked out on from the Peak of Darien, this is the face of the world as the Creator intended it to look. How wonderful is the earth and the creatures which inhabit it! This is Heaven enough. Why ask for more? »²⁴⁵

« The place itself is so overwhelmingly bigger, greater, than anyone could hope to make it that it engenders a humility and reverence not frequently met with in Americans. There being nothing to improve on in the surroundings, the tendency is to set about improving oneself ».²⁴⁶

« The moment one gives close attention to anything, even a blade of grass, it becomes a mysterious, awesome, indescribably magnificent world in itself ».²⁴⁷

« The aim of life is to live and to live means to be aware, joyously, drunkenly, serenely, divinely aware ».²⁴⁸

The aim of Miller was to find tranquility to write his books, and he finally found it in Big Sur. He wrote to his friend Anaïs Nin and described the incredible appeal of Big Sur :

« I have much work to finish and am seeking peace and isolation. I am completely out of the world there. The stores are 35 miles away. I have no car. Depend on mailman to bring food – mail twice a week. Precisely what I want ».²⁴⁹

« I am living with nature more and more, and this Big Sur country (where I have been now for 2 months) is truly tremendous. There are only about 25 people on this mail route. Back from the coast, over the mountains, there is an absolute emptiness. It is almost as forbidding as Tibet, and it fascinates me. »

He wrote to several friends to explain how life - his new life - was marvelous. Here are several words he wrote to his friend Lawrence Durrell, in February 1945 :

« I have a wonderful cabin you know ... I open the door in the morning, look toward the sun rising over the mountains, and then bless the whole world birds, flowers and beasts included. After I have moved my bowels I take the hound for a walk. Then a stint of writing, then lunch, then a siesta, then watercolors, then correspondence, then a book, then a fuck, then a nap, then dinner, and so to bed early and all's well except when I visit the dentist now and then ».²⁵⁰

245 HOYLE, Arthur. *The Unknown Henry Miller : a Seeker in Big Sur*. Arcade Publishing, New York. 2014. p.71.

246 BROOKS, Alden Shelley. *Big Sur : The Making of a Prized California Landscape*. University of California Press. 2017. p.50.

247 KUNDTZ, David. *Moments In Between : The Art of the Quiet Mind*. Mango Media Inc. 2006. p.93.

248 MILLER, Henry. *The Wisdom of the Heart*. New Directions Publishing. 2016. p.2.

249 BROOKS, Alden Shelley. *Big Sur : The Making of a Prized California Landscape*. University of California Press. 2017. p.70.

250 Ibid.108.

«... it does begin to seem as tho' I'd found'home' at last. Maybe I've just found myself».²⁵¹

The sentence he wrote here is very powerful, he said «*I found myself*», which means that he feels finally in peace with himself and the life he lives right now, in the place and state of mind he is at that precise time. And we can notice that it is what missing in Kerouac, he never found himself, in a place, or with himself. It can explain why he did not see Big Sur as Henry Miller saw it. He loved so much that place that when he returned to Europe for a trip in 1952 – so eight years after he settled there – he felt homesick for the first time in his life. It shows how Big Sur was important for him, but more, he considered this place like his own place, his favorite place on earth, his home:

«*My first real home In America*»²⁵²

«*It was here at Big Sur that I first learned to say Amen!*»²⁵³

«*For the first time in my life*» to quote Zande Allen's words, «*I felt to home in the world I was borned in*».²⁵⁴

Miller, like Robinson Jeffers before him, considered Big Sur as a refuge from the crazy urban life they hated. They wanted to live in a place in connection with nature, a quiet and peaceful life, where they can feel free :

«*Nowhere else in the world is the divorce between man and nature so complete*».²⁵⁵

«*Big Sur is a region which corresponded to my notion of something truly American, something simple, primitive, and as yet unspoiled*».²⁵⁶

«*Miller portrayed life in Big Sur as uplifting – a place where residents and even visitors could transcend many of the demoralizing realities of the mid-20th century*».²⁵⁷

Loneliness can be good for people, like Henry Miller ; but for some, like Jack Kerouac, it can be a malediction. To be alone with oneself means to think a lot, and sometimes to become mad. The aim is to appreciate and use this loneliness, but it's not easy at all. Big Sur is an intoxication, good for Miller, but bad for Kerouac – at first. Big Sur opens you up, but it can tear at your soul, leaving emptiness inside.

**** «*Big Sur has a community content to live within a powerful landscape.*»²⁵⁸ ****

251 Ibid.108.

252 <https://www.enotes.com/topics/big-sur-oranges-hieronymus-bosch>

253 BROOKS, Alden Shelley.*Big Sur : The Making of a Prized California Landscape*. University of California Press. 2017. p.32.

254 Ibid.4.

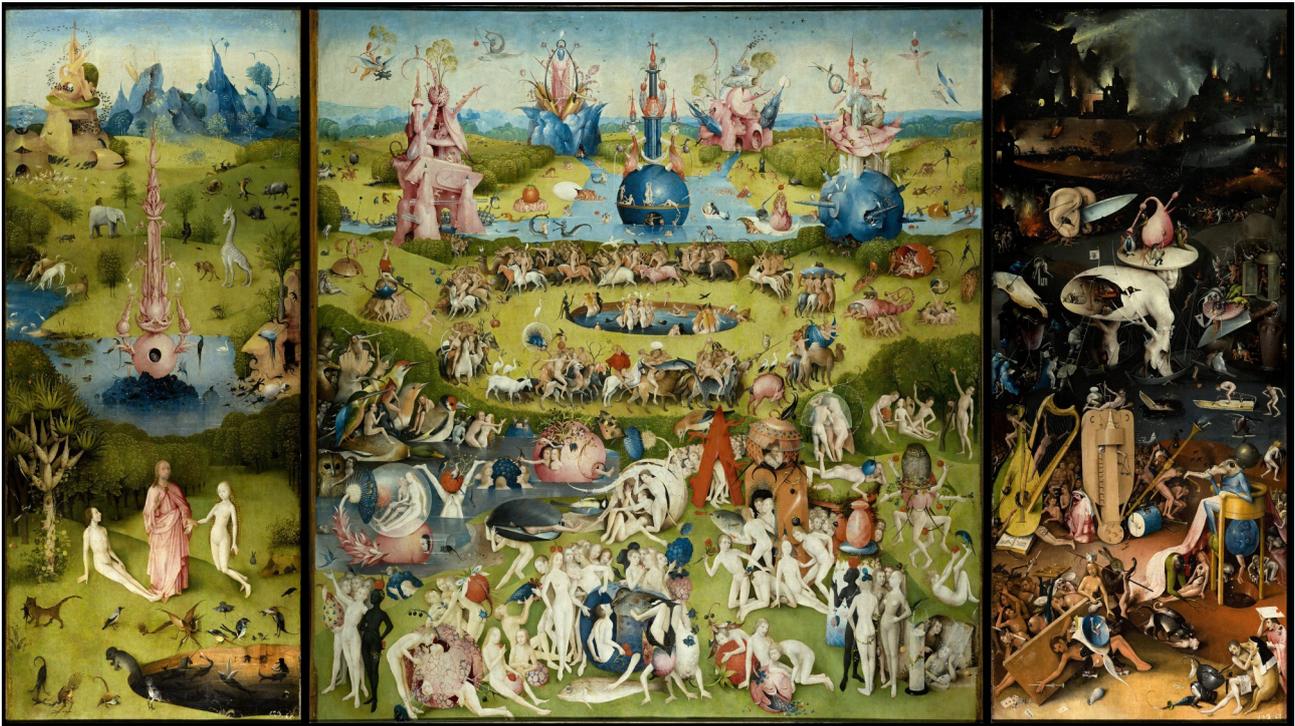
255 Ibid.47.

256 Ibid.48.

257 Ibid.54.

258 Ibid.39.

B) Heaven Versus Hell



259

Hieronymus Bosch's triptych « *The Millennium* »

Can we draw a parallel between Big Sur and Paradise or Big Sur and Hell? Do the two ways to see this place – like Miller or Kerouac – are wrong? Or maybe it's between those two versions, or paradise and hell interlinked. We can only confirm at this point of the study that Big Sur is a wonderful meeting between earth and sky, sea and sky, but also between paradise and hell if we listen to Kerouac's and Miller's stories.

The title of Miller's book « *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch* » is taken from a triptych painting of a Dutch artist, Hieronymus Bosch, which was made between 1503 and 1510, and is exhibited in Prado Museum in Madrid, Spain.

In this masterpiece, the painter used oranges and other fruits to symbolize the delights of paradise.

To analyze a paint is really personal and depends on what we have in mind, it can be really different from one person to another. But here Miller has already commented on the paint, and through his words and a little bit of analysis of mine, we can say that this masterpiece has a connection with Big Sur.

The left part represents Paradise, while the right part represents Hell. In between, we have the Garden of Earthly Delights. Miller linked Big Sur to this garden because he perceived this same freedom and pleasure in the paint and in this special place Big Sur was for him. Where Bosch used fruits to symbolize paradise, Miller used elements from Nature to symbolize it. He said about the Dutch artist :

259 comprendrelapinture.com/le-jardin-des-delices-jerome-bosch/

« Bosch is one of the very few painters – he was indeed more than a painter ! - who acquired a magic vision. He saw through the phenomenal world, rendered it transparent, and thus revealed its pristine aspect. Seeing the world through his eyes it appears to us once again as a world of indestructible order, beauty, harmony, which it is our privilege to accept as a paradise or convert into a purgatory. »²⁶⁰.

And Miller, like Bosch, had this magic vision too, contrary to Kerouac. He was able to see things in a wonderful way, and most importantly, to deliver it in his writings. Both made it through art, the first by painting, and the second by writing.

Miller depicts Big Sur like Bosch did it with his Millennium triptych, as the Garden of Earthly Delights. Bosch's and Miller's place is described with a wonderful and calm landscape, with clear colors, and water as the predominant element ; whereas Bosch's and Kerouac's hell is described with dark colors, and sufferings everywhere. The predominant element in Bosch's hell is fire.

So, Bosch 's Garden of Earthly Delights and Big Sur can be linked, but also God's Garden of Eden. In this garden of the creation, we find the same things as in the previous places : wonderful landscapes, mountains, clear colors, freedom (through the nudity of the characters), the predominant element is water. Everybody lives in peace with everything around them, fauna and flora. And to look further, to continue the thinking about Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden defining Big Sur as a garden of Eden too, and knowing that Miller's wife was named Eve (McClure), we could say that Miller is like Adam in Big Sur, as it was -not the first to come in Big Sur – but the first to make its reputation as a Paradise, an Earthly Paradise. We have here a kind of analogy. This can explain why Miller makes a lot of reference to Big Sur as a jewel created by God himself, as was made paradise ; and which is described as a place of delights, surrounding by a luxurious nature, where people live in simplicity and in harmony with people and nature. It's a kind of perfect happiness:

« Miller exalted Big Sur as a place where 'to give thanks to the Creator comes natural and easy. Out yonder they may curse, revile and torture one another, defile all the human instincts, make a shambles of creation (if it were in their power), but here, no, here it is unthinkable, here there is abiding peace, the peace of God »²⁶¹.

In a letter, Miller expressed his gratitude for having settled in Big Sur :

« I get up with the dawn these days. Am out on the road watching it come over the hills as I walk beside the sea. There is here a quality of the eternal which I have felt nowhere else except in Greece. It is most fortunate I chose this place to live in. »²⁶²

« This is **Heaven** Enough »²⁶³

« The face of the Earth as the **creator** intended it to look ». ²⁶⁴

260 MILLER, Henry. *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch*. New Directions Publishing Corporation, New York. 1957.p.23.

261 HOYLE, Arthur. *The Unknown Henry Miller : a Seeker in Big Sur*. Arcade Publishing, New York.2014. p.2.

262 MILLER, Henry. *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch*. New Directions Publishing Corporation, New York. 1957.p.121.

263 HOYLE, Arthur. *The Unknown Henry Miller : a Seeker in Big Sur*. Arcade Publishing, New York.2014. p.71.

264 henrymiller.org/2016/08/31/how-did-henry-make-it-to-big-sur-exactly/

The Garden of Eden – also known as Paradise - is described as both human and divine, as Big Sur is: human by its inhabitants and divine through its incredible nature. We can say that Big Sur is a replica of the Garden of Eden, and so an Earthly Paradise. And if the Garden of Eden gives this feeling of eternity, we can notice that everybody (the California State, inhabitants of Big Sur) make everything possible to keep this same feeling, this timeless feeling. And we can also say that Miller and Big Sur will always be an eternal link, the author will be always linked to Big Sur, a kind of eternity.

«In his great triptych «The Millennium» Bosch used oranges and other fruits to symbolize the delights of paradise ... Henry Miller wrote with a buoyancy and brimming energy that are infectious. He had a fine touch for comedy. But this is also a serious book – the testament of a free spirit who broke through the restraints and clichés of modern life to find within himself his own kind of paradise»²⁶⁵

The word «Paradise», is a Persian word and means «Garden»²⁶⁶, more exactly «enclosed Garden», which could correspond to Big Sur too. As it's far away from the «modern» civilization, and very different from other places in the world.



²⁶⁷ The Garden of Earthly Delights of Hieronymus Bosch
Esalen Retreat of Big Sur
The Garden of Eden of God

But if Bosch and Miller found in Big Sur a Paradisiacal garden, why Kerouac made so much time to feel this same feeling? It seems that Hell and Paradise are not only outside, in the world, but also in ourselves:

«Looking at a fragment of «The Millennium» by Hieronymus Bosch the other day, I pointed out to our neighbor, Jack Morgenrath, how hallucinatingly real were the oranges that diapered the trees.

265 MILLER, Henry. *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch*. New Directions Publishing Corporation, New York. 1957. Back Cover.

266 <https://www.reforme.net/meditations/2019/05/15/apocalypse-211-5-du-jardin-deden-a-la-ville-de-dieu/>

267 The Garden of Earthly Delight of Hieronymus Bosch
comprendrelapinture.com/le-jardin-des-delices-jerome-bosch/
Esalen Retreat of Big Sur
<https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Esalen-Institute-Big-Sur-icon-faces-existential-15210753.php>
The Garden of Eden
<https://www.reforme.net/meditations/2019/05/15/apocalypse-211-5-du-jardin-deden-a-la-ville-de-dieu/>

I asked him why it was that these oranges, so preternaturally real in appearance, possessed something more than would oranges painted, say, by Cézanne or even by Van Gogh. To Jack it was simple: « It's because of the ambiance »».²⁶⁸

Here Miller talks about the surrounding ambiance. Meaning that if you feel good and are in tune with yourself, in the right place, it becomes your ideal ambiance to feel in paradise. But you have to be ready to see it, and it's the problem with Jack Kerouac, he didn't see it at first because he has so many problems with himself. You cannot feel those beautiful things which are peace, love fauna and flora around if you are not aware of that. You have to be in harmony with the place, but also with yourself to find your earthly paradise. For that matter, in some writings, paradise is described as a felicity state and natural grace, Lady Luck smiling on you :

« The windows of the soul are infinite, we are told. And it is through the eyes of the soul that paradise is visioned – If there are flaws in your paradise, open more windows ! Vision is entirely a creative faculty: it uses the body and the mind as the navigator uses his instruments »»²⁶⁹.

And here a difference has to be made about Paradise and Hell, if Miller saw Paradise in Big Sur, in the place itself ; Jack Kerouac didn't see Hell in Big Sur itself, but in the situation he was when he was in Big Sur. Here the Hell Kerouac lived can be explained as an unpleasant experience or situation in which he suffers a lot, and Big Sur was not the cause at all, it was only the reflection of his inner turmoils. There is a big difference in that. And there is a good reason for that : if Big Sur was Hell, how did Kerouac manage to write his book ? Big Sur had been very inspiring for him, and it helped him to change his mind, his tortured mind.

We can conclude this part by saying that in fact Paradise and Hell are all around us but also inside us. The state of mind has a lot to do in this quest for paradise. It's where Kerouac fails when Miller wins, as his life is less chaotic. We can now say that paradise and hell are metaphors, and paradise is the metaphor of happiness et well-being, a kind of plenitude between ourself and what are outside. Miller evokes paradise eleven times in his book, and nine times the word peace, which shows us that he represents Big Sur as a sanctuary where he can live in peace. It's a kind of sacred place, and a lot of people found this same thing . In her book *Romancing the Sur : Reflections on Life in Big Sur*, author Linda Jones tells about how people are happy in this special place :

« Heidi Sutton, author's friend said « Big Sur is heaven » »²⁷⁰

« A noted old-timer has said: « I couldn't imagine a heaven more beautiful than Big Sur » ».²⁷¹

« We watch God here in Big Sur too, a poignant process that shapes our souls ».²⁷²

And by using all those words with a chretieny connotation, we can not stop to think that there is something spiritual in Big Sur. It's not a work in theology, so I will not go further on the chretieny subject, but it appears through the reading of our two books, and many others about Big Sur that something spiritual controls the place, which is charged with good energies and vibes, with a special atmosphere :

268 MILLER, Henry. *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch*. New Directions Publishing Corporation, New York. 1957.p23.

269 Ibid.25.

270 JONES, Sonrisa Linda. *Romancing the Sur : Reflections on Life in Big Sur*. Survision.p22.

271 Ibid.42.

272 Ibid.129.

«it is a *paradise* that *makes even the loss of Eden seem insignificant*»²⁷³

« If the soul were to choose an arena in which to stage its agonies, this would be *the* place for it. One feels *exposed*-not only *to the elements*, but to *the sight of God. Naked*». ²⁷⁴

French Professor Rachid Amirou said:

«Paradise left churches and places of worships for places, ideally far far away ... People leave big cities they do not bear anymore, calling them Hell, to find a little piece of Haven totally different, far away from everything »²⁷⁵

If places are not Hell or Paradise, it has something else, perhaps something spiritual as we said, or something magical

C) A touch of Magic

At first, there were only pioneers in Big Sur, and then several artists came ... and it changed the landscape ... but it still stays an isolated and wild place ... for better or for worse. But even if Jack Kerouac didn't see magic in Big Sur quickly, it doesn't alter the fact that this place has a special aura. The West has always been a mythic and mystical destination in American history, where happiness seems so close.

Qualities are what made Big Sur distinct, and it has a lot of qualities like the enchanting landscapes, the isolated part of the land, its mysticism, and its magical feelings it gives us where we are there. We can feel so minuscule between the mountains and the Pacific ocean, and so noble between the silence and the power of the landscapes, that we feel an excessive joy and happiness with no apparent reasons at first. But in fact it's the harmony between the universe and our being that provokes its magic feeling. The calm and serenity of the wonderful surroundings exert a force, as Nature does, because Nature in this refuge place entertains us and inspires us. The ocean spray and the mist which envelop Big Sur made it an enigmatic and mysterious place.

The particularity which makes Big Sur its peacefulness is very special: it's the isolation. The fact that there is a good distance between this magnificent country and the noisy cities, with the chaos and stress it provokes. And it has a lot of benefits, because without the chaos which busy our minds, we can notice details that, at any other time, would have been nothing more than background noise. It's this openness that is important:

« Big Sur's isolation provided a natural sanctuary for contemplation »²⁷⁶.

It's a small and also a kind of idealistic community of people, who put distance with society at large, and far away from the consumerism which pollutes cities and people.

273 America's Wilderness. *The Photographs of Ansel Adams, with the writings of John Muir*. Courage Book. Philadelphia. 1997. p.114.

274 MILLER, Henry. *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch*. New Directions Publishing Corporation, New York. 1957.p.146.

275 Journals.openedition.org/articulo/179

276 WORTHY Videriksen, Crista. *Big Sur California : Zen Central*. Pilot Getaways Magazine. Sept/Oct 2016. p.24-31.

The uncommercialized stretches and the isolation in this appealing natural environment, are the keys, and which give its uniqueness. Big Sur can be defined as a retreat from the urban life, with not the same constraints as in other cities, living here is quite different :

«What do visitors do in Big Sur? Simply absorb the beauty and reconnect with themselves and each other. There's no downtown and only 1000 residents in this 90-mile stretch of coastline. Big Sur offers only a few visitor accommodations and restaurants, so it's never crowded »²⁷⁷.

«Big Sur, according to Jeffers, could remind people how to live in a nondestructive manner, how to value noninvasive interactions with the earth, and how to protect natural beauty in the face of such human-inflicted horrors ».²⁷⁸

The place itself has a special state of mind, full of mystery and magic. It's like she has an entity into itself. It's probably the reason why this wonderful land became a place of pilgrimage ; for the authors at first, but then to people in general :

«Hippies came to Big Sur hoping to find meaning for their lives amid a troubled world. They resembled Robinson Jeffers, Henry Miller, Jack Kerouac, and countless others who embraced Big Sur for its distance from America's technological, commercialized mass culture ».²⁷⁹

«Big Sur is a haven for artists, writers and thinkers from all walks of life »²⁸⁰.

All the magical qualities of Big Sur have the power to inspire everybody on Earth, without exception. It's a place of personal freedom, where the miraculousness of silence can restore the soul, as John Muir – author and naturalist - wrote it :

«And into the forest I go, to lose my mind and find my soul »²⁸¹

The experience of loneliness allows to the artists, but also people, to re-center to themselves. Big Sur gained popularity due to its artists at first – Henry Miller and Jack Kerouac - and of its centers of zenitude – Esalen Institute. All those authors and special places – Henry Miller Library and Nepenthe Restaurant - brought attention to Big Sur and they show it as a refuge where peace and serenity are part of its atmosphere, where people can be in communion with nature, re-center on themselves :

«A place to find oneself, as so many adherents of the counterculture – following Jack Kerouac's steps – attempted to do in Big Sur's forest and beaches ; or a place to experiment with the New Age spiritual and psychological developments of the Esalen Institute. The apparent freedom and looseness offered by Big Sur's open spaces and unconventional community beckoned to Jeffers, Miller, Kerouac (all of whom hailed from the eastern seaboard), and to countless others ».²⁸²

277 WORTHY Videriksen, Crista. *Big Sur California : Zen Central*. Pilot Getaways Magazine. Sept/Oct 2016. p.24-31.

278 Ibid.

279 Ibid.

280 Ibid.

281 https://vault.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/writings/misquotes.aspx

282 WORTHY Videriksen, Crista. *Big Sur California : Zen Central*. Pilot Getaways Magazine. Sept/Oct 2016. p.24-31.

« Big Sur is California's « zen central », on the central coast. It's a place where the harried can go and relax almost instantly. There's something about this place that has attracted generations of people, from writers and beatniks to film and television stars »²⁸³.

Big Sur is synonym with the connexion to nature, but also the connexion to ourselves, where in fact everything is possible, where you can feel out of the world in this little part of California. The artists also provided an aura of glamour and creativity to the land :

« These artists flocked to Big Sur for reasons similar to those of other artists forming colonies : to find a beautiful place of inspiration, to escape the distractions of an urban area, and to make a political statement of sorts by rejecting certain aspects of contemporary society. In Big Sur, these artists both rejected certain aspects of modernity – namely the suburbs and the Cold War – while taking full advantage of the highway and telephones that afforded connections to the larger world ».²⁸⁴

« This artists's haven also attracted Jack Kerouac, whose 1962 memoir *Big Sur* further enhanced the area's reputation as a favorable environment for nonconformists. Big Sur's backcountry and unconventional community beckoned to the counterculture, which is partly why Michael Murphy and Richard Price established a new sort of retreat celebrating human potential on the grounds of the former Slate's Hot Springs. The Esalen Institute, launched in 1962, sought to provide a space for the exploration and realization of such potential. Throughout the decade the institute attracted a diverse group of celebrities. Musicians such as George Harrison, Paul Simon, Art Garfunkel, Ali Akbar Kahn, Joan Baez, and Bob Dylan, as well as the philosopher Alan Watts, the author Aldous Huxley, the architect and innovator Buckminster Fuller, the LSD advocate Timothy Leary, and Ansel Adams all offered their talents to the young institute and in doing so enhanced the mystique of Big Sur. »²⁸⁵

« Some of Big Sur's most ardent admirers have been iconic writers and artists who created an enduring mystique for this coastline. Through their interpretation of its charm and the allure of their very presence, the poet Robinson Jeffers, the authors Henry Miller and Jack Kerouac, and the photographer Ansel Adams have helped ensure that Big Sur world receive international attention. With the reputation built by these artists and a host of other creative and unconventional residents, the popular media started in the middle of the 20th century to present Big Sur as a spot unique to California. Its impressive natural features represented the best of the West, while its avant-garde reputation beckoned to those who saw in Big Sur's way of life the opportunity to nourish or recreate themselves far from mainstream society ».²⁸⁶

But the « monastic » life requires much more of them than a bare desire for solitude. Even if we are never bothered in Nature, and we are always struck by the imposing landscapes and the wide-open spaces, to be alone is not always easy, as we saw with Jack Kerouac. A retreat in Nature has several advantages, and not only solitude. You can find here enlightenment, peace, time for yourself, but also to heal, through the connection with Nature :

283 WORTHY Videriksen, Crista. *Big Sur California : Zen Central*. Pilot Getaways Magazine. Sept/Oct 2016. p.24-31.

284 Ibid.

285 BROOKS, Alden Shelley. *Big Sur : The Making of a Prized California Landscape*. University of California Press, 2007. p.74.

286 Ibid.4.

«The phrase «Ten minutes being present in nature is equivalent to a year in therapy». To be healed of worry by the magic of sunlight, birdsong, an earth-scented breeze. Perhaps it's not these experiences in and of themselves that heal, but our openness to the natural world that mutures without fail. After years of living in Big Sur, I'm confident that this is the trick. Without beauty of some kind, the soul shrivels. Of course, we suffer in Big Sur too, yet the landscape here has an immediate healing impact. If we step outside and take some deep breaths, go for a hike or watch a sunset, we feel immensely better».²⁸⁷

By its beauty and majestic landscapes, Big Sur always stays in your mind. It opens «horizons». It's why so many artists came, and still come there. It possesses a kind of attractivity, by its catalyst for inspiration, its hub of creativity and its magnetic qualities :

«There's definitely a magnet on that horizon. And those who secretly feel their divine discontent come to this dramatic land to find ... something».²⁸⁸

«Plenty of people did arrive in pursuit of «finding themselves», and they did so because Big Sur had a history of alternative thinkers».²⁸⁹

«Nature's scale in Big Sur made humans think about their place in the scheme of things differently from what they would in almost any other place in the country».²⁹⁰

We can conclude that this place is surrounded by mysticism and magic, it's only a question of belief, if we are enough «open» to believe in its magic or not. But one thing is absolutely certain, it's a truly special place which attracts a lot of people. It's the ultimate escape from the rest of the world, a place where you can restore your soul with the special essence of Big Sur. This special land touches man's soul and is an inspiration that enhances creativity and happiness :

«You know you've reached the Big Sur state of mind whenb the rest of the world falls away, your thoughts abnd senses are tuned to the present moment, and your heart finds peace»²⁹¹.

«Living Eden for its remarkable beauty and powerful natural elements. Bif Sur's reputation derives primarily from its physical landscape, but its cultural significance is closely intertwined with its popularity. Around the same time as this PBS film aired, National Geographic Traveler recognized Big Sur as one of the world's fifty greatest destinations».²⁹²

«Big Sur offers escape, but more than that, it can help us come home to who we really are».²⁹³

Author Arthur Hoyle, in his book «The Unknown Henry Miller, a Seeker in Big Sur» wrote about the aim of people who quit everything to live in a refuge-place like Big Sur :

287 SONRISA, Jones Linda. *Romancing the Sur : Reflections on Life in Big Sur*. Survision, 2018. p.54.

288 Ibid.137.

289 Ibid.61.

290 Ibid.84.

291 WORTHY Videriksen, Crista. *Big Sur California : Zen Central*. Pilot Getaways Magazine. Sept/Oct 2016. p.24-31.

292 Ibid.

293 SONRISA, Jones Linda. *Romancing the Sur : Reflections on Life in Big Sur*. Survision, 2018. p.54.

« Miller observes that people seek out places like Big Sur because they have discovered « that the American way of life is an illusory kind of existence, that the price demanded for the security and abundance it pretends to offer is too great ». Miller has found in Big Sur the kind of community that he believes should prevail throughout the country, a community of self-sufficient individuals who interact with one another in a truly democratic spirit.

« There being nothing to improve on in the surroundings, the tendency is to set about improving oneself », Miller notes approvingly. In such a community, the individual is free to pursue his most important task, self-fulfillment ». ²⁹⁴

« Big Sur has this intoxicating allure, draws you in, holds you, and never wants to let you go. When you're in Big Sur, you're forced to enjoy the simple things in life, the things most important to me and most important to this book: food, family, art, and nature » ²⁹⁵.

« This place is a myth-maker's paradise, so vast and so varied and so beautiful that the imagination of the visitor is tempted to run wild at the sight of it » ²⁹⁶

294 HOYLE, Arthur. *The Unknown Henry Miller : a Seeker in Big Sur*. Arcade Publishing, New York.2014. p.217.

295 STEELE, Romney. *My Nepenthe : Bohemian Tales of Food, Family, and Big Sur*. Andrews Mc Meel Publishing, LLC.2015. p.210.

296 BROOKS, Alden Shelley. *Big Sur : The Making of a Prized California Landscape*. University of California Press, 2007. p.59.

CONCLUSION

People have been making pilgrimages to Big Sur for decades. And for most of them, it has always been a Revelation.

Big Sur appears to be a Garden of Delights. A peaceful place where the arts have a unique place. The surroundings and the elements make this «city» a really special place, as we saw with Henry Miller and Jack Kerouac, but also with many other artists of different horizons.

The Indian novelist Anita Desai wrote «*Wherever you go becomes a part of you somehow*», and she was right, because in the end, Big Sur was an incredible experience, in the lives and writings of Henry Miller and Jack Kerouac particularly. The evidence ...? They both wrote a book about this special place, among many others, which shows that it worthed it. Good or bad experience, it creates something beautiful.

The influence of this coastal place was and still is powerful. The grandeur of the landscapes, the mysticism of wilderness, and the immersion in nature are conducive to finding inner peace, which is the key to everything, and most particularly for inspiration and creativity. Big Sur is full of qualities that allow artists to complete successfully their works: its peace, its tranquility, its power, its mysticism, its energy, its elements, far away from chaotic and noisy cities, a place of reconnection, uncommercialized land, never crowded, its loneliness, its zenitude, its serenity, its special atmosphere, a place to re-center on ourself, its connection to nature and self, its escape of the distractions of urban areas, that favours self-enlightenment. Sky and Sea, Being and Soul, Spirituality and Psychology, Solitude and Peace, all those ambivalences appeal to creativity and inspiration. All those things arouse feelings in the soul and heart of the authors, like love, fear, or doubts, but a thing is clear, it reawakens the depths of the soul.

The first contact with this part of the Californian coast was brutal for Kerouac and Miller, but not exactly in the same way: Miller felt immediately at home, and found quickly peace. The description of the landscape seems in harmony with Miller's state of mind, soul, and personality. On the contrary, Kerouac was not in a good state of mind to enjoy anything at that time, he had several inner turmoils, a tormented soul, and a schizophrenic personality. Where Miller saw divine love, delicious solitude, gratitude and enchanting landscapes, Kerouac saw hostile things and horrors, was full of fearfulness, heard roar everywhere. It is a match between happiness in Big Sur and Madness in Big Sur; alienation from nature for Kerouac and peace from nature for Miller.

But Big Sur was a revelation for both of them, even if it took more time for Kerouac. This part of California can be seen as beautiful, frightening, or lonely, depending on the mental state of mind of the person. Which explains Kerouac's disappointment. It appeared to be Miller's salvation, while at the same time Kerouac's downfall. But Big Sur is not a kind of Hell, as Kerouac's hell is not Big sur but himself. He creates his own Hell through his addiction to alcohol, his problems of schizophrenia, and his fragile state of mind. It's why it took much time for Kerouac to enjoy the magic of this sacred place. But in the end of the book, at the time he finds a kind of peace with himself, he realizes that at this moment, at this exact place and moment, here in Big Sur, it's magical. We can already notice that before the end in the book, when he leaves Big Sur and back to San Francisco, he realizes that his routine in Big Sur misses him.

One of Miller's friends, author Anaïs Nin once said: «*We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are*». ²⁹⁷ As we saw, through the writings of Miller, and Kerouac, and few other artists - Hunter Thompson, Dennis Murphy, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Alanis Morissette, Emile Norman, Lillian Bos Ross, Robinson Jeffers, Edward Weston, Ansel Adams, Emil White, Joan Baez, Jeff Norman, Jean Varda, and many others (as I can't cite everybody), Big Sur as an aura, something special, a place with a state of mind to itself, an entity to itself. It's a place of pilgrimage, and its refuges - like the Henry Miller Library, the Nepenthe restaurant, the Esalen Institute, and of course Nature - help to create this ambiance of haven, and to allow the exploration of the self. It's like the place can heal everything, and probably that after the horrors Kerouac lived there, he was then healed by the place for a time.

«*It's always been a refuge for artists*» ²⁹⁸

Henry Miller can be seen as the prophet of Big Sur, who made the «celebrity» of the place, forever singing the praises of its perfect atmosphere. He had the biggest influence on Big Sur, and still continues nowadays to inspire readers to find refuge and solace in the Big Sur wilderness.

«*They will all continue to talk about their Big Sur adventure for the rest of their lives - wistfully, regretfully, or elatedly*». ²⁹⁹

Why Big Sur and not another town, what is the difference between Big Sur and somewhere else around the globe, it's quite simple: Man has not wholly succeeded in leaving his mark. Elements and not human beings are in control of Big Sur's life. It's a sort of protected sanctuary, a haven of peace. In fact, Jack Kerouac and Henry Miller's stories are the experiences of relational isolation in wonderful nature and surroundings. An exceptional place where you come to lose yourself, and to finally better find yourself. A spiritual retreat from life provides a wonderful way to quiet the mind and reconnect with the heart.

In the end, we can say that Big Sur is a Garden of Delights, which is still nowadays an inspiration like the Garden of Eden, between humanity and divinity: humanity for the human beings, and divinity for the powerful and mystic elements which surround Big Sur. This special place will continue to have this mystic and enigmatic power on people, this refuge-like, where inspiration and enlightenment are the key words. Big Sur epitomizes Paradise in a way, a kind of Eden for whoever knows to open its heart. Just come, stop, look, listen, and breathe, and the magic appears, the Big Sur Prize ...

The Big Sur credo could be: «get rid of a skin too tight - through the Esalen Institute; reinvent yourself - through the readings at the Henry Miller Library; forget the problems of everyday life - through the Nepenthe Restaurant; and just breathe - through Nature; and allow yourself to lose yourself».

And like everybody who came to this magical place, I found my paradise there too.

297 <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/04/crosswords/daily-puzzle-2017-08-05.html>

298 [mercurynews.com/2020/05/18/turning-a-page-on-big-sur-and-the-rugged-journey-into-writers-imaginations/](https://www.mercurynews.com/2020/05/18/turning-a-page-on-big-sur-and-the-rugged-journey-into-writers-imaginations/)

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