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On the Road from Melville to Postmodernism: The Case for Kerouac's Canonization

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of English

East Tennessee State University

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of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in English

by

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May 2008

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Keywords: Jack Kerouac, Beat Generation, Postmodernism, Spontaneous Prose, Influence

ABSTRACT

On the Road from Melville to Postmodernism: The Case for Kerouac's Canonization

by

Jeffrey W. King

With the publication of *On the Road* in 1957, Jack Kerouac became a cultural phenomenon. Crowned the “King” of the Beat Generation, Kerouac embodied the restlessness of Cold War-era America. What no one realized at the time, however, was that the movement that he supposedly led went against Kerouac's own beliefs. Rather than rebellion, Kerouac wanted to write in a way that no one had written before. Heavily influenced by, among others, Mark Twain, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Marcel Proust, Herman Melville, and, especially, James Joyce, Kerouac used the influence of his predecessors to formulate his own style of writing—spontaneous prose. The critics who label Kerouac as a cultural icon akin to James Dean fail to see Kerouac as a serious author. The removal of the cultural fanfare surrounding Kerouac shows the truth about his writing, his influences, and his influence on late-twentieth century literature, including the entire postmodern movement.

DEDICATION

To the Kerouac scholars who have preceded me. Eventually the rest of the world will learn what we already know.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee—Dr. Holland, Dr. Crofts, and Dr. Holmes—for their help in bringing this project to fruition; Dr. Sawyer and Dr. Slagle for their continued support; and my fiancée Jessica for enduring the burial of my nose inside of books for the last several months.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On September 30, 1955, the twenty-four year-old star of Elia Kazan's film adaptation of John Steinbeck's *East of Eden* died in a head-on collision on a California highway. One month later, *A Rebel without a Cause* turned James Dean into an American legend. The post-World War II generation had its icon, one whom it had already lost. The next two years featured the rise of Marilyn Monroe's glamour and Elvis Presley's swagger, but America still longed for the wild rebelliousness that it had found and lost in James Dean. Almost two years to the day after Dean's fatal accident—September 5, 1957—America once again found its wild rebel, this time in the unlikeliest of men. A thirty-five year-old former Columbia University football player and Merchant Marine from Lowell, Massachusetts, published a book about the cross-country travels he made in the late 1940s, mostly searching for work to finance his writing projects. *On the Road* gave America its rebel—seemingly without a cause—Jack Kerouac.

Kerouac, who had spent the previous seven years worrying more about publishing *On the Road* than about getting his “kicks,” unwittingly ushered in a youth movement that changed the cultural and political landscape of America—the Beat Movement, which would haunt Kerouac for the remaining twelve years of his life. The media and the masses wanted an icon, a “King of the Beats.” They wanted television's resident beatnik, Maynard G. Krebs (a caricature who bore a greater resemblance to actor Bob Denver's later role as the title character of *Gilligan's Island* than to Jack Kerouac). They wanted Kerouac to be the rebel beatnik, but in his words, “they just wanted some youth movement to grab onto for their own political and social purpose” (qtd. in Berrigan 318) and did not care that he was “not a beatnik” (Charters, *Kerouac* 279); Kerouac, in fact, “detested” the term (Maher, *Phantoms* xx). They wanted James Dean reborn as Dean

Moriarty. In 1958, Kerouac wrote Lucien Carr about a proposed film version of *On the Road* that included a “big socko ending where Dean crashes and dies, utilizing myth of James Dean” (*Letters 1957-1969* 125). Rather than simply reincarnating the rebelliousness of James Dean in the character Dean Moriarty, Hollywood essentially wanted to recreate *On the Road* as a film about James Dean. As John Leland recently noted, “[w]hat has thrived in the market, in fact, is not Kerouac, but Dean Moriarty” (6). Even though Dean did not represent Kerouac, they have been so intricately linked that, forty years after his death, Kerouac is still not free of the cult that has surrounded Dean Moriarty.

In the midst of the fanfare surrounding the birth of the Beat Generation, everyone ignored the fact that by the time *On the Road* was published Kerouac had finished writing the bulk of the “Dulooz legend” that began with *On the Road* (Charters, *Kerouac* 345). Both his disciples and his detractors ignored statements that Kerouac was almost a decade older than he was in the events described in the book. They covered their ears when he said that he was Sal Paradise, the brooding follower, rather than the wild cowboy Dean Moriarty, actually based on Kerouac’s muse, Neal Cassady. America tried to create Kerouac as a composite of James Dean and Maynard G. Krebs and refused to acknowledge that he was just a writer desperately trying to get his books published. Fueled by the media’s comodification of the Beat movement, the myth of Jack Kerouac overshadowed his writing. He became “famous for being famous” (Johnson 24).

What little attention critics paid to Kerouac’s writing focused more on his use of a continuous teletype scroll and the speed at which he wrote than on the work he produced. Talk shows and magazine articles perpetuated the myth that Kerouac wrote *On the Road* in three weeks using a one-hundred-foot teletype scroll so he would not have to stop and change paper. In an appearance on the David Susskind show *Open End*, Truman Capote notoriously said,

“That’s not writing, that’s typewriting” (qtd. in McNally 267). Critics of Kerouac’s methods failed to acknowledge that Kerouac made the quick burst of writing possible by keeping extensive journals of his travels—collected under the title *Windblown World*. Furthermore, Kerouac had already completed several hand-written drafts of the novel (Johnson 28). As for Kerouac’s use of a scroll, this method became unnecessary for later writers with the advent of personal computers, which allow writers to write exactly as Kerouac did, only without the snarky comments from rival authors.

However, the fact that virtually all writers use an electronic version of the scroll has not caused the mystique of the scroll to subside. In 2001, Jim Irsay, owner of the Indianapolis Colts, famously paid 2.43 million dollars for the original scroll manuscript of *On the Road*, which was finally published in 2007 as part of the book’s fiftieth anniversary celebration. In addition to publication of the original scroll, the anniversary celebration featured several new books on Kerouac; scores of newspaper, magazine, and web articles; and a museum-like display as part of the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library, which displayed the scroll and featured its own publication, *Beatific Soul*, written by Berg curator Isaac Gewirtz. The widespread celebration of *On the Road*’s fiftieth anniversary showed that Kerouac is as much an icon of Americana today as he was during his lifetime, if not more so.

The fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *On the Road* became a news-making cultural event. Fans traveled en masse to see the Berg Collection, Kerouac’s grave in Lowell, or City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco. Rather than resembling the anniversary celebrations of other major literary works, the celebration of *On the Road* had a distinct similarity to another major cultural event that transpired only two weeks earlier: the thirtieth anniversary of Elvis Presley’s death, commemorated by a boxed set of remastered DVDs of Elvis’s movies; scores of

newspaper, magazine, and web articles; and throngs of people who visited Graceland. Fifty years after the publication of *On the Road*, Kerouac has yet to shake his label as King of the Beats, and critical praise still eludes him. Jack Kerouac is still just as famous for being famous today as he was in 1957. As fellow Beat author John Clellon Holmes states in a 1986 interview for the documentary film *What Happened to Kerouac?* “[h]e wasn’t famous; he was notorious.” As Holmes points out, critics and fans “weren’t looking at the work, they were looking at their image of the man.” More than twenty years later, many critics and fans still devote their attention to the image rather than the man.

Despite the fact that much of the focus on Kerouac still centers on the Beat Movement¹ and his alleged involvement with it, attention on Kerouac has slowly begun to shift from the man to the work. As Matt Theado points out, this shift has come about thanks to the work of scholars “blasting the accumulated cultural debris from the excavation pit that had swallowed Kerouac’s neglected—and often out-of-print—work” (1). When Ann Charters published *Kerouac: A Biography*, the first Kerouac biography², in 1973, she used, by her own admission, “scattered evidence” (*Kerouac* 10), including Kerouac’s own fictional autobiography interspersed with interviews with other Beat writers and her own personal experience. For decades, Kerouac’s widow, Stella, and his in-laws, the Sampas family—who were life-long family friends—suppressed Kerouac’s personal journals and correspondence. At the time, biographers could only know what Kerouac had revealed in his fiction or interviews and what they learned through the

¹ The terms “Beat Movement” and “beatnik” should not be confused with the term “Beat Generation” or “Beat Writers.” “Beat Movement” and “beatnik” refer to the cultural movement; “Beat Generation” and “Beat writer” refer to the literary movement.

² Although Bernice Lemire wrote her thesis, “Jack Kerouac’s Early Influences,” often considered the first Kerouac biography, in 1962, she never published her work. Ann Charters’ *Kerouac: A Biography* is the first published Kerouac biography.

stories of Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, Carolyn Cassady (Neal's widow), Gregory Corso, John Clellon Holmes, or other surviving figures of the Beat Generation.

Each successive biography, however, has moved further from the wild stories of Kerouac's life and closer to the importance of Kerouac's writing. This shift did not become entirely possible until the 1990s, after Stella's death, when the Sampas family released Kerouac's journals and letters. The journals and letters showed that many of the frequently discussed stories of Kerouac's life were aberrational events as opposed to his lifestyle. The journals show the truth behind the writing process of *On the Road*: that Kerouac worked from his extensive notes, which he kept on-hand while writing. The letters show his battles with editors over constant rewrites and debates over which seemingly incorrect spellings or commas were intentional. They show the extent of his detachment from the other Beat writers. Most of Kerouac's later collected letters are from his correspondence with members of the Sampas family or to his agent, Sterling Lord. Kerouac kept in contact with John Clellon Holmes, but he distanced himself from the other Beats. As early as 1953, Kerouac began "disassociat[ing] himself" from the friends, including Ginsberg, closely linked to the Beat Generation (Maher, *Kerouac* 270). By the end of his life, Kerouac was a homebody who married the sister of his childhood best friend, Sebastian Sampas, who had died in World War II. His "wild" road trips consisted only of moving his mother to a more favorable climate as the seasons changed, and he disapproved of the lifestyles adopted by his former associates. He stopped speaking to Neal Cassady several years before Neal's death, believing that Neal's involvement with Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters would lead to Neal's early death—which occurred two years before Kerouac's. Their last meeting occurred in 1964, when the Pranksters staged a reunion between Kerouac and Cassady. Kerouac refused to pose for a photograph of him and Cassady sitting on

an American-flag-draped couch. Instead, Kerouac neatly folded the flag and barely spoke to Cassady for the remainder of the night (*Letters 1957-1969* 434n). Kerouac adamantly disagreed with Allen Ginsberg's politics and Ginsberg's favoring a political movement over his poetry (Maher, *Kerouac* 438). In spite of his out-of-control alcoholism, Kerouac worked until the last day of his life, reviving and finishing old stories, such as the posthumously published novella *Pic*, or planning new ones.

More than the harsh reviews his books received, the media-created image of Kerouac "derailed any serious allusions to being beat" (Maher, *Kerouac* 361). Regardless of the depth of his literary or philosophical discussions, interviewers sought the caricature rather than the author. Despite Kerouac's continued focus on his craft, interviewers still wanted "Jack Kerouac" the character rather than Jack Kerouac the writer. For instance, in an April 14, 1964, interview with Miklos Zsedely, assistant director of the Northport Public Library, and Kerouac's friend Stanley Twardowicz, Kerouac, in a seemingly drunken rant about Shakespeare, stated, "[i]n comes a woman called Ann Hathaway, and she does hath a way, you know," and "[t]hen Hamnet died; Hamlet comes from Hamnet" (qtd. in Zsedely 239). Apparently no one else involved in the interview realized that Kerouac was mimicking Stephen Dedalus's monologue on Shakespeare in the "Scylla and Charybdis" section of *Ulysses* (189, 191), which Kerouac studied during the composition of *On the Road* (*Windblown* 237) and used as a model for his later work.

Similar situations have plagued Kerouac's legacy since the publication of *On the Road* over fifty years ago. Kerouac was not a revolutionary figure inspired by James Dean in *Rebel without a Cause* or Marlon Brando in *The Wild One*, but an intellectual prose-stylist who immersed himself in Joyce, Melville, Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, Proust, Goethe, Twain. The list could go on and on. These figures comprise a short list of literary giants, whereas Kerouac

remains trapped by the stigma of the Beat Generation, relegated to the status of a culturally noteworthy author, but one with minimal literary importance.

In his 1994 book, *The Western Canon*, Harold Bloom provides an extensive list of what he considers as the full canon of western literature. Jack Kerouac, as well as Allen Ginsberg, is conspicuously missing from the section on the twentieth century. If Bloom considers Kerouac at all, he likely lumps him in with works—mostly multicultural—that he deems as “fated to become period pieces” (*Canon* 516). Bloom’s list, however, includes all of Kerouac’s major influences except for Thomas Wolfe, who, presumably, accompanies Kerouac on the list of “period pieces.” Furthermore, the list includes major Kerouac-influenced authors such as Thomas Pynchon, Kurt Vonnegut, Don DeLillo, and Denis Johnson and Kerouac-contemporaries Truman Capote and Vladimir Nabokov. In fact, the only Beat or post-Beat author included on Bloom’s list is poet Gary Snyder. Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs, Corso, Philip Whalen, Hunter S. Thompson, and Charles Bukowski all, in Bloom’s estimation, fail to merit inclusion.

Ironically, though, Bloom’s entire critical theory revolves around the ideas outlined in *The Anxiety of Influence*. Although the book itself focuses on poetry, the theory works for prose as well. Bloom emphasizes the notion that a great writer provides not just a direct influence on later writers, but an “irresistible anxiety” that the later writer cannot escape (*Anxiety* xviii). He states that strong writers “[misread] one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves” (5) and that the strong writer “swerves away from his precursor” (14). According to Bloom, “[n]egation of the precursor is never possible” because the precursor “has been absorbed into the id, rather than into the superego” of the successor (102, 80). In other words, strong precursors have become so imbedded in the subconscious of the strong writer that the successor’s writing will automatically show the influence of the precursor. Furthermore, the strong precursor will

become so intertwined with the strong successor that it will seem as if “the later [writer] himself had written the precursor’s characteristic work” (16). Because of Kerouac’s connection of contamination with strong precursors such as Joyce or Melville and strong successors like Pynchon or DeLillo, Bloom’s model certainly fits when evaluating Kerouac’s work.

When compared to that of his predecessors, Kerouac’s work shows the infusion of James Joyce and Marcel Proust, of Herman Melville and Fyodor Dostoevsky, of Thomas Wolfe and Mark Twain. Additionally, Kerouac’s characters, events, and even, at times, his style, could all seamlessly fit into the novels of his influences, fulfilling Bloom’s final criteria for the anxiety of influence: what Bloom refers to as “*Apophrades*, or the return of the dead,” in which the successor is compared to the precursor in such a way “that at first we might believe the wheel has come full circle” and that the later author influenced the earlier author (*Anxiety* 15-16). Kerouac’s own influence appears in the writing not only of his Beat associates or such post-Beat writers as Thompson and Bukowski, but in postmodernists like Pynchon and Vonnegut, contemporary authors such as DeLillo and Johnson, and even in *In Cold Blood*, the most famous work of Kerouac-criticizer Truman Capote. As Bloom points out in his conclusion to *The Western Canon*, strong writers form a bridge “between strong precursors and strong successors” (487). By creating a bridge that extends from Joyce, Melville, Dostoevsky, and Proust to Pynchon, Vonnegut, and DeLillo, Kerouac proves his worthiness for inclusion in the canon of American literature, not just for his culture-changing *On the Road*, already including on many twentieth-century literature reading lists, but for books that provide greater aesthetic examples of Kerouac’s work: *Visions of Cody*, *Doctor Sax*, *Desolation Angels*, *Book of Dreams*, *Mexico City Blues*, *Old Angel Midnight*, or the “Duluoz Legend” read in its entirety. Rather than preventing him from being taken seriously as a literary figure, Kerouac’s status as a cultural icon should

serve a statement of how he bridges the gap between literature and pop culture as well as the gap between modernism and postmodernism. Just as *Huckleberry Finn* makes suitable reading for both a graduate student critiquing nineteenth-century America and a young boy in search of an adventure story, Kerouac's work can appeal to both the scholar and the hipster.

In discussing recent authors, Bloom carefully notes that “[c]anonical prophecy needs to be tested about two generations after a writer dies” (487). With the fiftieth anniversary celebration of *On the Road* occurring in 2007 and the fortieth anniversary of Kerouac's death approaching in October, 2009, the time has come to test whether Kerouac merits elevation above his rank as a figure of Americana or whether he truly warrants mention only alongside James Dean as opposed to James Joyce. This project discusses exactly what his precursors pass on to Kerouac, what he gives back to them, and what he in turn passes on to his generation and the generations that followed him.

The first section focuses on the stories themselves and how Kerouac combines the quest novels of Herman Melville and Mark Twain with the personal sagas of Thomas Wolfe, John Galsworthy, James Joyce, and Marcel Proust. The second section discusses Kerouac's characters and underlying themes and the combination of the idealism/nihilism hybrid seen in Melville, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Stendhal, and James Joyce with the search for a balance between spirituality and sexuality of Joyce, Proust, and Dostoevsky. The next section deals with Kerouac's famed spontaneous prose style, which contains elements of William Butler Yeats, Joyce, and occasionally Melville, and how this evolved from his early Wolfean narrative style. The final section discusses the post-Kerouac era of American literature, focusing, naturally, on Kerouac's Beat colleagues Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs, but also on Thomas Pynchon, Kurt

Vonnegut, Don DeLillo, and Denis Johnson, all of whom exhibit a decidedly Kerouac-influenced anxiety.

CHAPTER 2

TALES FROM THE ROAD: KEROUAC'S STORIES

In a 1968 interview with Ted Berrigan, Jack Kerouac explained the oral tradition of his famous spontaneous prose: “did you ever hear a guy telling a long wild tale to a bunch of men in a bar and all are listening and smiling, did you ever hear that guy stop to revise himself...?” (285). Kerouac told stories in this manner, narrating his stories of the road, mountains, and young love (among other things) as if he were telling them across a table in a bar rather than from a notebook or typewriter. Although he carefully constructed the stories themselves prior to writing—his composition journals for *The Town and the City* and *On the Road* were published in 2006 under the title *Windblown World*—Kerouac actually *told* the stories as they came to him, without deliberating over a particular word or phrase. While Kerouac’s method more closely followed a pattern of oral storytelling, his books followed the traditions of the novel as well. He combined elements from the *roman à clef*, picaresque, and *Bildungsroman* to create his “Duluoz Legend.”

Most discussion of Kerouac’s storytelling centers on the autobiographical nature of his books, ignoring the *fictionalized* portion of *fictionalized autobiography*. Many Kerouac enthusiasts read his books as a chronology of his life, beginning with *Visions of Gerard* and ending with *Satori in Paris*. Character guides are a staple of Kerouac biographies. As with Herman Melville’s *The Confidence-Man* and James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, identification of which character represents which real-life source often overshadows Kerouac’s books. Determining that Melville’s beggar represents Edgar Allan Poe (Hayford 207-18); that Joyce modeled Cranly after his friend John Francis Byrne (Ellmann, *Joyce* 114); or that Kerouac transformed Allen Ginsberg into a lost Marx brother, Carlo, in *On the Road* provides an

interesting footnote to each of these works but should not represent the only way of looking at these books. Each work has artistic merit beyond its historical commentary or biographical nature. In Kerouac's case, using his books as nothing more than a multi-volume biography more closely resembles literary fetish than it does literary criticism.

For example, in *On the Road* Kerouac becomes "Sal Paradise" and his mother Gabrielle becomes his aunt. A reader interested in *On the Road* only as an autobiography will mentally transpose the relationship between Sal and his aunt to Kerouac and his mother without thinking of the Freudian implications of the character change. Not only is Sal Paradise an orphan, but he helps his friend Dean Moriarty search for three things: girls, Dean's father, and the elusive "IT." The first two show Sal's need for both parentage and close female companionship; the third represents the spiritual quest that fills not only Kerouac's books but several pre-eminent American novels as well, most notably Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Melville's *Moby-Dick*.

Like Dean and Sal on the open road, Huck Finn and Jim travel the Mississippi River in search of total freedom, what Dean Moriarty calls "IT." Both novels take the shape of a picaresque as the lead characters encounter adventure after adventure in their travels. Along the river, Huck and Jim find family feuds, forgotten relatives, and the Dauphin. On the road, Dean and Sal find the absurdities of the modernized West, hitchhikers galore, and Mexican prostitutes. Huck and Jim, or Dean and Sal, see America from the safety of their raft or car as the case might be. As Tim Hunt points out, they "pass through the world but are not forced (at least temporarily) to be of it" (43). The raft and the road provide the characters with safety unmatched by the rest of the world. Eventually, though, the trips must end, and, while the individual experiences differ, the quests have the same result: One character chooses civilization; another chooses desolation.

As narrator, Huck never reveals what ultimately happens to Jim after he is freed from slavery, but he explains how Tom Sawyer, who joined Huck and Jim for the latter part of their adventure, returns to his family. Shot in the leg during an earlier rescue of Jim, Tom, having recovered from his wound, keeps “his bullet around his neck on a watch-guard for a watch, and is always seeing what time it is” (279). Tom has his memento of the trip along the river, but remains rooted to his family. Huck, on the other hand, when faced with adoption by Aunt Sally, refuses to let her “sivilize” him, so he runs away again to the wilderness of the west. As with Jim’s ultimate fate, Huck’s future remains a mystery; however, it does not appear particularly promising. In absconding to the west, Huck optimistically faces the danger of the unknown; his future is limitless. However, he also forsakes those who could help him through those dangers, choosing instead to rely only on his youthful wits.

The same holds true for Dean Moriarty. In an earlier episode of *On the Road*, Dean and Sal take a job driving a Cadillac from Denver to Chicago. The novel ends with Sal Paradise riding away in a Cadillac hired to take him and his friends to a Duke Ellington concert while “Dean, ragged in a motheaten overcoat he brought specially for the freezing temperatures of the East, walk[s] off alone” (306). Like Tom, Sal gives up adventure for a more civilized life. Like Dean, Huck cannot leave the vastness of America and the road (or river) behind. Although no one knows Dean’s future—in the end, even narrator Sal only can “think of Dean Moriarty” (307)—he and Sal appear to be heading in “opposite directions”, both literally and figuratively (Leland 105). Like Huck Finn before him, the slightly older Dean Moriarty (Dean is in his early twenties) refuses “to give in to the fact that there is no more ‘Indian Territory’” (Hunt 52). Sal goes one direction with his future wife towards a more upper-crust cultural event and Dean walks off in the other towards the West and the road.

Similarly, *Moby-Dick* ends with its heroes completely lost. Only instead of the vastness of the road or wilderness, the crew of the *Pequod* drowns in the vastness of the ocean. Ahab, Starbuck, and the rest of the crew die at sea, their bodies buried on the floor of the Pacific Ocean. Ishmael survives by floating on Queequeg's coffin in the middle of the ocean until another ship comes along to rescue him. Unlike Sal Paradise, who no longer takes to the road, Ishmael, despite the calamity of the *Pequod*'s voyage, takes to the sea "whenever [he finds himself] growing grim about the mouth" (18). Unlike Ishmael, though, Sal Paradise fulfills his quest for "IT." In a journal entry from December 1949, Kerouac relates "IT" to "Melville's 'inscrutable thing,'" stating that "the thing is central to our existence...God?" (*Windblown* 249). Although he reminisces about Dean Moriarty, Sal finds his "inscrutable thing" in the stability a new wife and a new life provide. Like Ahab, Dean "prove[s] a destructive leader" (Leland 14), and Sal, like Ishmael, must do whatever necessary to survive the voyage. Sal, however, makes the choice that Ishmael never has the opportunity to make. Once the *Pequod* sails, Ishmael has no choice but to follow Ahab; Sal ultimately makes the decision to leave Dean behind.

In chasing the whale, Ahab and Ishmael follow the same quest as Dean and Sal. Each journey begins in the face of trauma: Sal's when his wife leaves him, Ishmael's when his ennui leads him to suicidal thoughts. Neither knows for what, specifically, he is searching, but they each meet a "mad Ahab at the wheel" or helm (*Road* 235). The Ahab's quest then becomes the follower's quest. Ahab wants the whale; Dean wants "IT." Both questers eventually find what they seek, but neither conquers his prey. Rather, their prey conquers them. *Moby-Dick* kills Ahab, and "IT" spiritually crushes Dean to the point where an old friend's new friends refuse to give him a ride, let alone allow him to accompany them to the civilization represented by the Metropolitan Opera House.

Of Kerouac's books, only *On the Road* deals with a broad-sweeping travel quest akin to *Huckleberry Finn* and *Moby-Dick*; the others, however, maintain the quest for self that leads Sal Paradise to join Dean Moriarty on his journeys. Each book in the "Duluoz Legend" stands as an episode or period in the life of hero Jack Duluoz/Sal Paradise/Ray Smith/Leo Percepied, the different avatars of the fictionalized Kerouac. Kerouac's catalogue forms an entire saga based on his life. Kerouac imagined that the complete "Duluoz Legend" would form "a long shelf of [interlocking] books" about Jack Duluoz, complete with revisions that unified the character names (Nicosia 552). Although Kerouac never had the opportunity to reprint his books with uniform character names, he managed to complete the Duluoz saga. When Kerouac wrote *Vanity of Duluoz*, his last completed book, he finally fictionalized his years with the Merchant Marine and his early years in New York, bridging the time between his high school years, mostly detailed in *Maggie Cassidy*, and the events of *On the Road*.

The irony of Kerouac's writing *Vanity of Duluoz* near the end of his life is that he first devised the "Duluoz Legend" during the period covered in the book. Already a long-time admirer of the stories of Eugene Gant and George Webber in Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel* and *You Can't Go Home Again*, respectively, Kerouac immersed himself in John Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga* in his bunk aboard the *USS Weems* while hiding from his personal Claggart (Clark 58). The cross-generational saga of Soames and Jolyon Forsyte so engrossed Kerouac that he decided to create a similar saga based on his own family and life. That book became Kerouac's Wolfean first novel, *The Town and the City*.

The Town and the City stands apart from the rest of Kerouac's work. For instance, Kerouac had begun to think beyond its long, linear narrative prose style before he even finished the book. The characters themselves do not match up to other characters in the "Duluoz Legend."

First and foremost, however, *The Town and the City* is a pure fiction. Kerouac's life, family, and friends became the basis for events in the novel, but a reader would have a difficult task in separating the biography from the fiction. Kerouac even spread the events of his life across the lives of three of the Martin brothers as well as their sister Elizabeth. While members of the Duluoz family are distinctly Kerouacs, the Martins could just as easily be Karamazovs (Nicosia 302), down to the death of the patriarch (although the Martin children feel guilt for leaving their ill father as opposed to guilt for inadvertently causing his murder at the hands of a bastard half-brother).

Appropriately, *The Town and the City* is also separated from the rest of Kerouac's work by time: It was published in 1950, seven years before Kerouac's second published novel, *On the Road*. Despite its apparent lack of place in the Kerouac canon, however, as Matt Theado notes, a reader "cannot truly appreciate Kerouac and the complexity of the themes he would evolve throughout his career without reading his first book," calling *The Town and the City* "a mine that Kerouac would excavate" for his later work (39). His first novel is Kerouac's one stand-alone complete saga written in the vein of Wolfe or Galsworthy, but Kerouac re-shaped segments of it in forming the earlier parts of the "Duluoz Legend": *Visions of Gerard*, *Doctor Sax*, *Maggie Cassidy*, and *Vanity of Duluoz*.

Both *The Town and the City* and *Vanity of Duluoz* end with the main character—Peter Martin and Jack Duluoz, respectively—returning home to see a dying father. The saga of Peter Martin ambiguously ends with the book. Like Huck Finn before him and Dean Moriarty afterwards, Peter Martin "was on the road again, traveling the continent westward, going off to further and further years, alone by the waters of life, alone, [...]" (498). *Vanity of Duluoz*, on the other hand, ends with Duluoz's wife Johnnie leaving him, an event that marks the beginning of

On the Road: “I first met Dean not long after my wife and I split up” (1). Peter Martin’s story ended, but Jack Duluoz’s story as he becomes an adult has really only begun.

Taken successively, the books in the “Duluoz Legend” tell of the growth of Jack Duluoz, each book ending with a life-changing event: the death of his brother, the death of his father and his wife leaving, lost loves (usually involuntarily), or lost friends (by Duluoz’s choice). Kerouac could just as easily have titled his combined series either *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* or *Remembrance of Things Past*, had James Joyce and Marcel Proust not beaten him to the titles. Kerouac himself compared the “Duluoz Legend” to both Joyce and Proust, writing to Malcom Cowley in 1957 that *Vanity of Duluoz* has “a kind of Bloom-Dedalus angle” and that he considered his saga “a running *Recherche du temps perdu*” (*Letters 1957-1969* 55). Like Joyce’s Dedalus and Proust’s narrator Marcel (not to be confused with Proust himself), Duluoz (as well as Paradise, Smith, and Percepied) searches for himself as he tells his story. Joyce, however, distances himself from Stephen Dedalus by narrating *Portrait* from a third person point-of-view. Even though he presents Dedalus as an alter-ego, however, Joyce often appears as his protagonist; like Kerouac-turned-Duluoz, many events in *Portrait* match up with Joyce’s biography. Proust, on the other hand, remains more ambiguous as “he is not quite either the Narrator or Marcel” (Bloom, *Canon* 380). Proust, however, analyzes his *Remembrance* to a much greater extent than either Joyce or Kerouac. As Samuel Beckett stated, Proust “explains [his characters] in order that they may appear as they are—inexplicable” (67). Joyce and Kerouac both avoid the overly-extended analysis and, as discussed later, allow the artistry of the language to provide explanation for characters and situations.

Unlike Joyce or Proust, Kerouac makes no attempt to detach himself or his real-life models from their fictional representations. Kerouac’s original manuscripts contained characters’

real names, and he eventually used his own name for his character rather than using one of his aliases. He does not try to render his characters “inexplicable” but attempts to explain them so that the reader, as well as Kerouac himself, can fully understand them. Unlike Joyce, Kerouac imbeds himself so deeply into the character of Duluoz that his books were a valuable asset in the writing of early Kerouac biographies. Many readers of Kerouac, critics and fans alike, however, mistakenly interpret Kerouac’s overt character-model relationships for pure autobiography. For example, Dean Moriarty exhibits Neal Cassady’s wild spirit but not his intellect; Sal Paradise reveals Kerouac’s shyness, but “[h]e omits or modifies events that would undercut the reader’s impression of Sal’s naiveté” (Hunt 5), thus enhancing Dean’s rebellious, spirited nature while revealing less about Kerouac than many of his fans would like to believe.

Regardless of the position of Kerouac or Joyce in relation to his character, however, the stories of Duluoz and Dedalus parallel each other in many ways. They both focus on an adolescent boy as he deals with maturing into his early twenties. Duluoz and Dedalus each have their first loves in Maggie Cassidy and Emma Clery respectively. They each receive a Jesuit education, learning the catechism as boys and learning Greek classics as teenagers. They even make the same ultimate choice later as they reach their early twenties: to write. *Portrait* ends with Stephen praying to himself in his diary, “Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead” (225). Kerouac, speaking as the forty-five-year-old narrator, addresses the final two chapters of *Vanity of Duluoz* to his wife: “I settled down to write, in solitude, in pain, writing hymns and prayers even at dawn, thinking ‘When this book is finished, which is going to be the sum and substance and crap of everything I’ve been thru throughout this whole goddam life, I shall be redeemed.’” He concludes the book by saying, “Forget it, wifey. Go to sleep.

Tomorrow's another day" (268). Hopeful about his art, young Stephen has not yet adopted the older Duluoz's more cynical attitude.

Like Dedalus, the old artificer, Jack Kerouac/Duluoz created art out of stories. Regardless of what one can say about the themes explored in Kerouac's art or the style which he used to create it (the following chapters discuss both theme and style), Kerouac followed a decidedly American tradition of storytelling. Where Twain and Melville used the river and the oceans to tell their stories, Kerouac used American roads and American towns to stage his episodic quest. Although much of the literary basis for his "Duluoz Legend" came from European sources, *On the Road* stands as a part of "the American literary mainstream" (Ruppersburg 37), and Kerouac's own saga contains many elements of Americana—sandlot baseball, pulp magazines, Thanksgiving Day high school football games, jazz, Wild West Week, pick-up trucks, and Sal Paradise's favorite meal: "apple pie and ice cream" (*Road* 14).

CHAPTER 3

SATORI: KEROUAC'S THEMES

From the founding of the original thirteen colonies, mainstream American literature has had three dominating themes: the search for God, the search for self, and the search for truth as it relates to the other two. With the growth of big business that occurred near the end of the nineteenth century, the search for self remained but became more secular, as seen in the novels of Henry James and Edith Wharton, among others. Even the rise of African-American and Native American literature has maintained the quest for self, only from new vantage points. Jack Kerouac's books returned to America's traditional search for the self through God and truth. While Kerouac worked within the thematic framework already established by Mark Twain and Herman Melville, his European influence helped give his work—and his characters—a combination of idealism and nihilism. Like Twain's Huck Finn, Melville's Ishmael, Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, Proust's Marcel, Stendhal's Julien Sorel, or any of Dostoevsky's protagonists, Kerouac's characters, especially Jack Duluoz and Dean Moriarty/Cody Pomeray (the name that Kerouac assigned the Neal Cassady character in later books), search for spiritual truth with the hope that "IT," which Kerouac compares to "Melville's loomings" (*Letters 1940-1956* 461), can be found, but doubt as to whether they actually will find it.

Although Duluoz occasionally ventures beyond U.S. borders—Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty travel to Mexico in *On the Road*; *Tristessa* completely takes place in Mexico; using his own name for his hero, Kerouac's *Satori in Paris* chronicles his trip to France to learn more about his family history—the landscape of Kerouac's books is distinctly American. Despite abandoning the stylistic influence of Thomas Wolfe after *The Town and the City*, Kerouac maintained Wolfe's idea of America. As Matt Theado states, "Wolfe woke him to the idea of

America as a subject in itself” (48). In a 1947 letter to Hal Chase, Kerouac states that, “my subject as a writer is of course America, and simply, I must know everything about it” (*Letters 1940-1956* 107). With this in mind, Duluoz’s search for self and truth occurs along America’s highways and in America’s mountains. *On the Road* alone sets various events in New York, North Carolina, Chicago, Denver, San Francisco, and El Paso. The books in the first part of the Duluoz chronology (*Visions of Gerard, Doctor Sax, Maggie Cassidy*, and parts of *Vanity of Duluoz*) take place in Kerouac’s hometown of Lowell, Massachusetts or his family’s original home in Nashua, New Hampshire. *The Dharma Bums* and *Big Sur* take Kerouac to the mountains of northern California and *Desolation Angels*, with Duluoz working as a lookout for the Forestry Service, breaks through to the Great Northwest, removing the last of the “wilderness [Kerouac] wrote of in *On the Road*” (Theado 146). The narrator of *Vanity of Duluoz* tells his story from Florida. Duluoz’s travels take him through many other areas which the narrator at least mentions in passing and where he occasionally sets an isolated scene.

Considering Kerouac’s (and Duluoz’s) patriotism, the entirety of America provided the perfect setting for Duluoz’s search for himself and for a higher metaphysical truth. Similarly, it stands to reason that Kerouac’s two most dominant characters, Duluoz and Pomeray, would resemble Ishmael and Ahab, the two most dominant characters in the most dominant American novel, *Moby-Dick*. In *On the Road*, the relationship between Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty is patterned as much after that between Ishmael and Ahab as it is that between Kerouac and Neal Cassady. Like Sal Paradise, Ishmael is a “rover-bohemian” who is “alienated from [his] culture” (Dunphy 1). Like Ishmael, Sal Paradise is not the main character of the novel he narrates. Melville scholar Mark Dunphy considers Sal and Ishmael to each be on his “own peripatetic vision quest” (3); however, each man uses his unspecified quest “to escape from life” rather than

to find it (Vopatz 23). The novels each begin with Ishmael and Sal filled with “restlessness” (Leland 13). Ishmael begins his story by saying that,

Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people’s hats off—then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can. This is my substitute for pistol and ball. (18)

Similarly, Sal begins his narrative thusly:

I first met Dean not long after my wife and I split up. I had just gotten over a serious illness that I won’t bother to talk about, except that it had something to do with the miserably weary split-up and my feeling that everything was dead. With the coming of Dean Moriarty began the part of my life you could call my life on the road. Before that I’d often dreamed of going West to see the country, always vaguely planning and never taking off. (1)

Both Sal and Ishmael are depressed with the current state of their lives and need some impetus for change. Ishmael chooses the sea, Kerouac the road, both hoping to find that elusive “thing” that will pull them out of their depressions.

Although Sal and Ishmael both search for something, which they later discover is “IT” or “the inscrutable thing,” they follow a more dynamic character in hopes of discovery. Sal directly states that he would not have taken to the road without Dean’s inspiration; Ishmael, although he goes to sea on his own initiative, quickly becomes awestruck by Ahab’s quest for the whale and

adopts it as his own. Sal and Ishmael each marvel at the greatness, the cult of personality, that he sees in a man already on a quest. At one point in *On the Road*, Sal even refers to Dean (or in autobiographical terms, Kerouac refers to Cassady) as “that mad Ahab at the wheel” (235), indicating his own awareness of the similarities between the two. As *On the Road* progresses, Dean begins to develop a dark side similar to, but not as physically destructive as, that of Ahab. Charles J. Haberstroh posits that *Moby-Dick* “pit[s] the heroic dementia of Ahab against the adventurous deepsightedness of Ishmael” (112). In part four of *On the Road*, Sal begins to see a darker side of Dean Moriarty:

Suddenly I had a vision of Dean, a burning shuddering frightful Angel, palpitating toward me across the road, approaching like a cloud, with enormous speed, pursuing me like the Shrouded Traveler on the plain, bearing down on me. I saw his huge face over the plains with the mad, bony purpose and the gleaming eyes; I saw his wings; I saw his old jalopy chariot with thousands of sparking flames shooting out from it; I saw the path it burned over the road; it even made its own road and went over the corn, through cities, destroying bridges, drying rivers. It came like wrath to the West. I knew Dean had gone mad again. (259)

Carole Vopat points to this section as an indication that “Dean leads not a primitive life of spontaneity and instinct but instead a sorry, driven existence” (404). Just as Ahab has no choice but to hunt the whale, Dean must chase “IT.” Both men are destined always to chase, never to capture. However, Sal and Ishmael have already linked themselves to Dean and Ahab and “must see [the journey] through whether or not a mad captain holds the wheel” (Hunt 45). Ishmael becomes physically free of Ahab only when the *Pequod* sinks; Sal becomes physically free of

Dean when he and his friends leave for the Duke Ellington concert. As indicated by the mere writing of the books, neither Sal nor Ishmael is psychologically free from his leader.

In his book *Genius: A Mosaic of One Hundred Exemplary Creative Minds*, Harold Bloom refers to Ahab as a “vision of the heroic American...the genius or daemon of his nation,” but that he “is not someone we love” (307). Like Dean Moriarty, Ahab is the wild, unrefined hero who leads the great quest, whereas Sal and Ishmael merely accompany the hero, observing the quest second-hand, each making the hero’s quest his own. Ishmael, unlike Sal, could not even qualify as an observational sidekick; he has very little personal interaction with Ahab. Ahab and Dean are the actual heroes of *Moby-Dick* and *On the Road*, respectively. They each represent the American drive to “Go! Go! Go!” and find the great white whale or “IT,” the metaphysical truth that guides the self. The difference between the two is that, as *Moby-Dick* progresses, Ahab appears more and more monomaniacal and megalomaniacal, driven mad by his quest. Dean Moriarty, on the other hand, remains lovable. Ahab shows his humanity in “The Symphony,” but his madness resumes control once the chase for the whale begins; Dean loses his humanity only during the “Shrouded Traveler” passage. By maintaining his humanity, Dean remains open to redemption; by abandoning his, Ahab is literally sucked into the abyss as a result of his obsession. The reader can forgive Dean for leaving a sick Sal Paradise to fend for himself in Mexico. Even though the reader can understand that Sal made the right decision to leave Dean Moriarty for other friends and his future wife, Dean remains a sympathetic figure whom Sal cannot forget, as indicated by the book’s final line: “I think of Dean Moriarty” (307). Like Ishmael of Ahab, Sal cannot stop thinking about his mad Captain.

Unlike the flawed, unlovable Ahab, Dean Moriarty represents the wandering American quester that many want to emulate (often quite literally, as the cultural impact of *On the Road*

shows). Not only is Dean free from the bonds of employment and matrimony, but he actively seeks his own identity and God-consciousness. The model for Dean, Neal Cassady, originally drove from Denver to New York just to meet Kerouac, whom common friend Hal Chase wrote him about. Conversely, Sal/Duluoz relies on others to help him find himself, just as Jack allowed Chase to introduce him to Neal and how Sal only thinks about traveling westward, as opposed to actually doing so, until he meets Dean Moriarty.

Duluoz stays a passive figure through most of the Legend, attempting to find himself while watching others lead the way. In *The Dharma Bums*, Ray Smith (Duluoz) accompanies his friend Japhy Ryder (based on poet Gary Snyder) on a hiking/camping expedition up the Matterhorn but stops one hundred feet from the top of the mountain. Japhy continues to the peak and lets out “a beautiful broken yodel of a strange musical and mystical intensity in the wind...his triumphant mountain-conquering Buddha Mountain Smashing song of joy. It was beautiful” (84). Like Ahab chasing the whale or Dean Moriarty chasing “IT,” Japhy Ryder chases the mountaintop, but, unlike Ahab or Dean, he fulfills his quest while his observer watches from a cave several yards below.

Although the relationship between Ray and Japhy resembles that of Ishmael and Ahab from an observer-agent standpoint, in many ways their friendship has more in common with the relationship between Ishmael and Queequeg, most notably in terms of each man’s spirituality. In *Moby-Dick*, Queequeg is far more sure of his spiritual beliefs than any other member of the *Pequod*. When he and Ishmael share a room at the inn, at one point Ishmael and the innkeeper must break into the room because Queequeg refuses to leave the meditation position he has assumed as he celebrates a holy day. Later, even though he doubts Queequeg’s pagan beliefs, Ishmael joins Queequeg in worshipping his idol. While Ray Smith shares Japhy Ryder’s

Buddhist faith, Japhy, like Queequeg and his faith, has a solid grasp on Buddhism whereas Ray practices Buddhism but still maintains most of his Catholic beliefs.

In a scene prior to reaching the top of the mountain, Ray and Japhy stop along their hike to meditate. The description of Japhy resembles that of a praying Queequeg: “Japhy sat down in full lotus posture cross-legged on a rock and took out his wooden jujy prayerbeads and prayed. That is, he simply held the beads in his hands, the hands upsidedown with thumbs touching, and stared straight ahead and didn’t move a bone” (70). Although Ray also meditates while sitting on another rock, one can certainly assume that Japhy’s focus prevents him from describing Ray’s meditative posture.

This lack of focus on Ray’s part is not because of his Catholicism but because he hopes to learn from someone whose faith is stronger than his own. Even in practicing Catholicism, Ray/Duluoz looked to someone else as a model. In *Visions of Gerard*—inspired by Kerouac’s brother Gerard, who died when Kerouac was four—the narrator Duluoz shares the nuns’ amazement at Gerard’s “astonishing revelations of heaven delivered in catechism class on no more encouragement than that it was his turn to speak” (1). Although Duluoz has the same religious background as his brother (in fact, some of the first reading Kerouac ever did was the catechism, written in French), he never has the religious strength of “Saintly Gerard,” who died at age nine. The entire book is narrated through the eyes of the four-year-old Jack Duluoz, who so reveres his brother that Gerard becomes the spiritual pinnacle that Duluoz hopes to reach by chasing “IT” with Dean Moriarty and mountaintops with Japhy Ryder. Harold Bloom describes Marcel Proust—as narrator of *Remembrance of Things Past*—as “neither the Christ nor the Buddha” (*Genius* 218); Duluoz, despite his/Kerouac’s admiration of Proust, strives to fill both roles. However, when he learns “that the truth is ineffable and resides beyond the dominant

images of both Buddhism and Catholicism” (Theado 155), he must continue the various journeys and remembrances written about in the “Duluoz Legend” as well as the images relayed in his spontaneous prose works such as *Old Angel Midnight* and *Book of Dreams*.

In respect to his Catholic heritage, Duluoz shares the idealism of the teenaged Stephen Dedalus of Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The promiscuous Stephen frequents prostitutes, has affairs with married women, and masturbates with the regularity of Joyce’s later hero, Leopold Bloom. After hearing a riveting sermon about the sins of the flesh, Stephen not only confesses his deeds and vows to abstain from them, but he also decides to devote his life to the church and begins preparing himself for the priesthood. Later in the novel, Stephen sees a beautiful woman and experiences sexual desire. Simply experiencing lust serves as the catalyst that causes a near-180-degree change in Stephen’s religious beliefs. Rather than just changing his mind about becoming a priest, Stephen renounces the church altogether, becoming an agnostic. Like Dedalus, Kerouac’s/Duluoz’s “sexual diversions lie in stark contrast to the idealistic relations befitting a morally grounded Catholic” (Maher, *Kerouac* 53). Stephen, however, thinks in extremes that involve only the priesthood or promiscuity, with no middle ground, therefore making the shift from idealism to nihilism, which Duluoz constantly seeks to avoid.

Duluoz, on the other hand, maintains his idealistic outlook while simultaneously losing faith in the things around him. Like Dostoevsky’s Underground Man, Prince Myshkin, and Alyosha Karamazov—from *Notes from Underground*, *The Idiot*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*, respectively—Duluoz loses his faith in society but maintains his hope that he is wrong. Like the passive Duluoz, Dostoevsky’s Underground Man “cannot act” (Fanger xxiv). Underground is “a sick man” (1), sick of a society of deceit and hypocrisy, especially from his so-called friends, who make a conscious effort to shut him out of their lives, even intentionally giving him the

incorrect time for a planned dinner party (79). At the end of *Desolation Angels*, Duluoz experiences the same disillusionment with his friends and society, only—ever the peaceful idealist—he responds with “peaceful sorrow” rather than spite:

Later I’m back in New York sitting around with Irwin and Simon and Raphael and Lazarus, and now we’re famous writers more or less, but they wonder why I’m so sunk now, so unexcited as we sit among all our published books and poems, tho at least, since I live with Memère in a house of her own miles from the city, it’s a peaceful sorrow. A peaceful sorrow at home is the best I’ll ever be able to offer the world, in the end, and so I told my *Desolation Angels* goodbye. A new life for me. (409)

Tired of media attention and friends who revel in it, Duluoz leaves the city for a smaller town where he and his family can avoid the societal ills that cause his sorrow.

As an influence, Kerouac chose Dostoevsky over Tolstoy because “Dostoevsky’s writings evoked Christ while portraying man’s ‘lust’ and ‘glees’” (Maher, *Kerouac* 145). Dostoevsky naturally appealed to Kerouac’s Catholic values; his writing is “steeped in the teaching of the Gospels” (Gide 71). Like Myshkin or Alyosha, Duluoz, especially in the early chronology, has a spiritual optimism for society but finds that the world itself threatens his hope. Myshkin’s innocent idealism is first tested by relatives who try to cast him aside based on his appearance (similar to the *Underground Man*’s associates) and then by the murder of his beloved Nastasya Filippova by Rogozhin, his rival. Alyosha Karamazov first leaves his overly stern father, Fyodor, for the care of a monastery school but must return home when his brother Dmitri is accused of murdering their father, a crime actually committed by their bastard half-brother Smerdyakov, who takes too literally the comments of a third brother, Ivan, that he wished Old

Karamazov were dead. Even when faced with these tragedies, neither Myshkin nor Alyosha loses his hope.

Although he read and praised the more nihilistic works of Balzac and Stendhal, in which “a clever and ruthless scoundrel may achieve the same kind of success as [more] virtuous heroes” (Frye 45), Kerouac preferred the hopefulness of Dostoevsky and “fixed his [post-*On the Road*] identity with Prince Myshkin” (Maher, *Kerouac* 358). Similarly, Duluoz, at this point in his early twenties, does not lose his optimism when, in *Vanity of Duluoz*, his friend Claude de Maubris fatally stabs a common acquaintance, Franz Mueller, for unwanted and increasingly aggressive sexual advances. When Claude confesses to him, Duluoz makes a point of distancing himself somewhat from the crime, denying that he “was Ivan Karamazov to his Smerdyakov” (221). In his naïveté, Duluoz helps Claude dispose of the murder weapon, Claude’s Boy Scout knife—Mueller had been Claude’s Scoutmaster years earlier. Failing to realize the gravity of the situation, Duluoz suggests they go see a movie and get something to eat. Later that night, Claude confesses to the police, who charge Duluoz as a material witness. Duluoz’s response: “For what?” (226). Duluoz is freed on bail (paid by his new wife’s family after he marries her while still incarcerated) and Claude pleads guilty to manslaughter.³ As the middle-aged, near-death narrator of *Vanity of Duluoz*, Duluoz/Kerouac describes the killing with the same simple, idealistic honesty with which he first responded to police:

But the Gospel truth was simply that Claude was a nineteen-year-old boy who had been subject to an attempt at degrading by an older man who was a pederast, and

³ In 1944, Kerouac’s friend Lucien Carr introduced him to his former Scoutmaster David Kammerer and Kammerer’s friend William S. Burroughs. Despite being much older than Carr, Kammerer made frequent sexual advances toward the nineteen-year-old. These advances became increasingly more aggressive, and, in an attempt to fight off Kammerer, Carr stabbed him twelve times in the chest with his Scout knife. The events as described in *Vanity of Duluoz* accurately describe the real-life situation.

that he had dispatched him off to an older lover called the river, as a matter of record, to put it bluntly and truthfully, and that was that. (239)

While Duluoz is hard-hearted towards Mueller for his violent actions towards Claude, he does not lose hope for Claude, whom he believes acted out of self-defense, calling him still “a child of the rainbow” (239).

The commentary that *Vanity of Duluoz* provides on the David Kammerer killing gives insight into Kerouac/Duluoz as he searches for himself: He does not approve of instigating violence but stands behind those who stand up for themselves. Additionally, this scene shows one example of how Kerouac went against what most of society considered taboo. Duluoz does not object to Mueller’s homosexuality but condemns him only for physically forcing himself on a much younger man—in fact, underage when they first met—who did not desire him in return. Like Joyce in *Ulysses* or Louis-Ferdinand Céline in *Death on the Installment Plan*, Kerouac did not shy away from taboo subjects. *Big Sur* features orgies disguised as Buddhist rituals; *Tristessa* serves as an ode to a Mexican morphine addict with whom Kerouac had an affair; *On the Road* originally contained publisher-excised scenes of explicit sex between Dean Moriarty and his girlfriends as well as between Dean and male hitchhikers.

Possibly the greatest cultural taboo Kerouac violated was in *The Subterraneans*. Like *Maggie Cassidy* and *Tristessa*, *The Subterraneans* is about one of Kerouac’s lost loves. The story revolves around a Greenwich Village romance between the Duluoz character, named Leo Percepied after Kerouac’s father Leo and Dr. Percepied (meaning “pierced foot”) of *Remembrance of Things Past*, and his live-in girlfriend Mardou Fox, an African-American. This interracial relationship caused such controversy that the producers of the 1960 film adaptation (released seven years before the landmark *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*) cast very white, very

French actress Leslie Caron as Mardou, effectively destroying a large part of the novel. Kerouac opposed the casting but had no say in the matter.

In an age when many African-Americans, especially in the South, could not use the same water fountain as whites, Kerouac embraced what he saw as African-American culture; the legendary jazz influence on his style will be discussed in the next chapter. Although his views of a care-free African-American lifestyle certainly fell into racial stereotypes, Kerouac never had any malice towards African-Americans, only love and admiration, which can be seen in Leo's sadness when his relationship with Mardou ends:

Cried in the railyard sitting on an old piece of iron under the new moon and on the side of the old Southern Pacific tracks, cried because not only I had cast off Mardou whom now I was not so sure I wanted to cast off but the die'd been thrown, feeling too her empathetic tears across the night and the final horror both of us round-eyed realizing we part— (103)

Kerouac's openness to race-mixing echoes sentiments put forth one hundred years earlier in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Moby-Dick*. A large part of both novels deals with a strong homosocial relationship between a Caucasian and either an African slave or a Pacific Islander. Although Huck often applies racial stereotypes to Jim, the fact remains that Huck's primary goal, in addition to his own freedom, is Jim's freedom. Despite Huck's strong friendship with Tom Sawyer, his bond with Jim is much stronger, regardless of Huck's ignorance of Jim's culture and capabilities. Similarly, Ishmael first approaches Queequeg armed with every anti-Islander stereotype he has, initially choosing to sleep on a bench in the inn's tavern rather than share a room with Queequeg. However, Ishmael and Queequeg quickly develop a closeness that borders on and possibly includes homosexuality, depending on one's interpretation of the scene

where they awaken after spooning together all night. When the *Pequod* sinks, Ishmael mourns only for Queequeg.

Like Ishmael recapping the voyage of the *Pequod* in order to have a greater understanding of the journey, Ahab, and himself, Kerouac/Duluoz writes his saga in order to better understand his own life and his own self. In discovering his personal views on race, sex, sexuality, God, and spirituality, Duluoz eventually finds himself. Ironically enough, the revelation comes in the only book of the “Duluoz Legend” in which Kerouac uses his own name, *Satori in Paris*, in which Kerouac travels to France to search for the history behind his name (8). He does not learn anything about his family name that he did not already know, but he does experience “a *satori*: the Japanese word for ‘sudden illumination’” (7). Although he never explicitly states what *satori* he experiences, Kerouac states that it was brought about by his conversation with cab driver Raymond Baillet on his way to the Parisian airport. The book ends as Kerouac bids Raymond “Adieu” (118), bringing to mind Kerouac’s other books that ended with departure: the separation of Sal and Dean in *On the Road*; the final words of *Visions of Cody*—“Adios, King” (398); the lost loves of *Maggie Cassidy*, *Tristessa*, and *The Subterraneans*; the death of Gerard in *Visions of Gerard*; the separation from his first wife and the narrator saying goodnight to his third wife in *Vanity of Duluoz*; the death of his favorite cat, Tyke, in *Big Sur*; the departure from his friends that ends *Desolation Angels* and Kerouac’s involvement with the Beat Generation. Kerouac’s books and life, as Samuel Beckett said of Proust’s work and life, are “a succession of losses” (49). Kerouac closes *Satori in Paris* by saying, “When God says ‘I Am Lived,’ we’ll have forgotten what all the parting was about” (118). That is his *satori*. That is his self.

CHAPTER 4

“PROUST ON THE RUN”: KEROUAC’S STYLE

Harold Bloom defines genius as “true originality” that “even in its linguistic origins, has no limits” (*Genius* 21, 7). He distinguishes between genius and talent by stating that “[t]alent cannot originate, genius must” (ix). In all likelihood, Bloom would not consider Jack Kerouac a “genius”: his inclusion of the entire Beat Generation in his book *The Western Canon* consists of calling Allen Ginsberg a “professional rebel” (246) with no mention whatsoever of Kerouac. Interesting, then, that Bloom’s definition of genius originated with Kerouac in his essay “Are Writers Made or Born?,” first published in the January 1962 issue of *Writers Digest* and included in *Good Blonde and Others*, a collection of Kerouac’s essays and short stories: “Let’s examine the word ‘genius.’ It doesn’t mean screwiness or eccentricity or excessive ‘talent.’ It is derived from the Latin word *gignere* (to beget) and a genius is simply a person who *originates* something never known before” (“Are Writers?” 77, italics in original). Kerouac gives the example of a violin virtuoso who interprets Brahms, stating that “the genius, the originating force, really belongs to Brahms; the violin virtuoso is simply a talented interpreter” (77). As Kerouac points out, “[s]ince talent can’t originate it has to imitate, or interpret,” concluding that “[g]enius gives birth, talent delivers” (79). Bloom might have talentedly delivered his discourse on genius, but Kerouac gave birth to Bloom’s ideas more than forty years prior to Bloom’s book.

When he began writing—as a child and teenager—Kerouac mostly imitated the work of his favorite authors at the time: Thomas Wolfe, Ernest Hemingway, William Saroyan, and Mark Twain (Maher, *Kerouac* 54). He was never content to imitate, however, even though that was precisely what he did with his first novel, *The Town and the City*. As such, Kerouac considered *The Town and the City*, widely compared to the work of Thomas Wolfe, his worst book. By the

time he finished *Town*, he had already developed his friendship with Neal Cassady and lived many of the events he writes about in *On the Road*. As Regina Weinreich points out, as Kerouac neared the completion of *Town*, he “was already thinking beyond the Wolfen style” (18). Essentially, Kerouac wanted to finish *The Town and the City* so he could move on to a more experimental type of prose: spontaneous writing.

Spontaneous writing mostly grew out of Kerouac’s correspondence with Neal Cassady. In the spring of 1947, Cassady first wrote to Kerouac that he hoped to “fall into a spontaneous groove” in his writing (Cassady 23). Finally, on December 17, 1950, Cassady wrote Kerouac a letter estimated in length anywhere between thirteen thousand and forty thousand words. Known today as “the Joan Anderson Letter,” the prose of Cassady’s letter amazed Kerouac, who sought to have the letter published; however, most of the letter was lost while in Allen Ginsberg’s possession. Cassady’s spontaneous style in the letter gave Kerouac the idea for his more laborious spontaneous prose, which he first used in writing the scroll manuscript of *On the Road* and honed throughout his career. After completing *On the Road*, a direct linear narrative that shows elements of Kerouac’s later, fully-formed spontaneous prose, Kerouac abandoned the linear structure for a “nonlinear one as he progresses toward the fulfillment of his writing ideals” (Weinreich 58). Kerouac realized that he could not write the truth he sought if he remained confined to a linear structure and, therefore, worked to perfect spontaneous prose, editing only to fix typographical errors.

This editorial style does not mean that Kerouac never revised, just that his revision process differed from the standard method. As George Dardess points out, Kerouac’s “artistic process is no less laborious, but the labor precedes and accompanies spontaneous writing” and that revision occurs “only when the final phase has not been reached before the writing begins,”

meaning that the writer must “pursue the original method more vigorously and conscientiously” (732). Kerouac fully created the scene, dialogue, or idea in his mind before writing. The need to stop or to traditionally revise meant that he failed in this task and should start over. For spontaneous prose to work, Kerouac called for first setting the object “before the mind” as if the writer were sketching the object (“Essentials” 69). To accomplish this, Kerouac worked from what, in his later essay “Belief and Technique for Modern Prose,” he called “scribbled secret notebooks” (“Belief & Technique” 72), the first step in a thirty-point list of “essentials.”

Working from his notebooks—or occasionally his memory—Kerouac wrote in such quick bursts because he considered time to be “the essence in the purity of speech” (“Essentials” 69). In this same manner, Dostoevsky, whom Kerouac admired and studied, also wrote quickly because the story was “already written in [his] head, although nothing [was] down on paper so far” (qtd. in Gide 115). Kerouac called for an “undisturbed flow [of language] from the mind” without pausing “to think of proper word but [allowing] the infantile pileup of scatological buildup words till satisfaction is gained” (“Essentials” 69). He named this phenomenon “blowing” because of its similarity to the music of jazz improvisarios, most notably Charlie Parker.

Despite the media focus on jazz as an influence on Kerouac’s style, he largely based his spontaneous prose on the automatic writing of William Butler Yeats in addition to Cassady’s letters. According to biographer Richard Ellmann, Yeats believed in “the power of a medium or automatic writer to transcend the boundaries of her own mind and knowledge” (197). Yeats’s belief in automatic writing came to fruition shortly after his marriage, when his wife took up the practice. The words first came to her “in disjointed sentences, in almost illegible writing, [and] was so exciting, sometimes so profound, that [Yeats] persuaded her to give an hour or two day after day to the unknown writer” (Yeats 8). Ellmann describes the automatic writing process as

“chiefly a matter of suspending conscious use of the faculties,” resulting in writing that features “many of the characteristics of dreams, being full of images, fragmentary, run together, by turns coherent and incoherent” (225). Many critics have said the same thing of Kerouac’s work, only they used words like “fragmentary” or “incoherent” to denigrate Kerouac’s work rather than praise it as Ellmann does with Yeats.

Kerouac’s description of his writing style in his essay “Essentials of Spontaneous Prose” somewhat resembles the description of Yeats’s method. Kerouac even suggests that the spontaneous writer adopt some of Yeats’s methods: “If possible write ‘without consciousness in semi-trance’ (as Yeats’ later ‘trance writing’), allowing subconscious to admit [...] what conscious art would censor” (70). Kerouac alluded to the influence of Yeats in a 1951 letter to Cassady that Kerouac wrote to show off his “finally-at-last-found style & hope; since writing that I’ve come up with even greater complicated sentences & VISIONS” (*Letters 1940-1956* 326-27). This letter also shows that Kerouac began writing in spontaneous prose in 1951; six years later, the rest of the world finally caught up to the much more straightforward writing of *On the Road*.

This spontaneous writing, not Jack Duluoaz or Dean Moriarty or Japhy Ryder or any of the other avatars of himself, his friends, or his lovers, is the true main character of his books. Essentially, Kerouac wrote about writing. Many of his books call attention to writing, either the writing of other books or that particular book. At the beginning of *On the Road*, Sal Paradise is writing what becomes Kerouac’s *The Town and the City*; the final section of *Desolation Angels* details the publication of *On the Road*; Jack Duluoaz addresses *Vanity of Duluoaz* to his wife. By having his books themselves be his primary subject, Kerouac placed such importance on style that he negated the need to create his own scenes or characters. He created a style that presented

real-life people and events in a way that a typical linear prose never could. As Matt Theado states,

Kerouac used linguistic innovations not only to tell the story but also to convey the appropriate atmosphere [...]. The structures of his sentences, the rhythms and the juxtaposition of images, and the innovative phrases re-create the writer's feeling for the subjects of each work. In so doing, he manages frequently to relate the 'truth' of a story whether or not his episodes adhere to biographical fact. (5)

Rather than using language to provide descriptions of scenes, Kerouac makes language part of the scene. Instead of creating lengthy prose to make a statement, Kerouac makes his statements through unusual syntax, repetition, or neologisms.

Reading Kerouac's books in order of their autobiographical chronology attempts to create a linear form where none exists. Reading them in order of publication creates a false chronology based only on what a particular publisher thought would sell at the time. The only proper way to read Kerouac's books is the order in which he wrote them. André Gide points out that, despite different characters and plots, each of Dostoevsky's books flows into the next: *The House of the Dead* leads to *Crime and Punishment*, which leads to *The Idiot* and so on (113). Similarly, each of Kerouac's books flows into the next, but, whereas thematic elements create the flow of Dostoevsky's novels, Kerouac's books flow from one to another because of his writing style. Not only does reading his books in the order in which he wrote them reveal the progression of Kerouac's spontaneous prose, but it also presents the "Duluoze Legend" in its spontaneous chronology. For example, if the books that comprise "Duluoze Legend" were bound in a single edition, the publication of *On the Road* (part of *Desolation Angels*) would fall before Duluoze/Kerouac's days as a high school football star (part of *Vanity of Duluoze*); the death of

Gerard when Duluoz was four would come several parts after the *Road* trips with Dean Moriarty. Anything else fights against Kerouac's carefully developed technique.

Although *On the Road* served as Kerouac's first attempt at spontaneous prose, it still maintained a linear chronology and lacked the dream-like quality of Kerouac's fully-developed spontaneous prose. Tim Hunt compares focusing on *On the Road*, only Kerouac's second full novel and essentially an "apprentice work," rather than *Visions of Cody* to "passing over *Moby-Dick* to pay homage to *Typee*" (xxxvii). Immediately after finishing *On the Road*, Kerouac began writing the book that he wanted to replace the existing manuscript of *On the Road*, *Visions of Cody*, which Regina Weinreich refers to as "a revised *On the Road*" (60). Even after *Road* was published, Kerouac still sought to replace it with the much wilder *Cody*. As a guest on *The Steve Allen Show*, Kerouac famously read passages from *Visions of Cody* when Allen asked him to read from *On the Road*. Kerouac made this unscheduled change because *On the Road*, despite being Kerouac's most well-known and widely-read book, fails to represent Kerouac's work.

Kerouac "conceived of *Visions of Cody* as a combination of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*" (Nicosia 365). Through his use of spontaneous prose, Kerouac approached a form that at times resembled the work of James Joyce, not just in *Ulysses* or the *Wake*, but *Portrait of the Artist* as well. In Bloom terminology, Kerouac could not escape the anxiety of Joyce's influence. Compare the prose that begins the "Joan Rawshanks in the Fog" section of *Visions of Cody* to young Stephen Dedalus contemplating God in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*:

Joan Rawshanks stands all alone in the fog. Her name is Joan Rawshanks and she knows it, just as anybody knows his name, and she knows who she is; same way, Joan Rawshanks stands alone in the fog and a thousand eyes are fixed on her in all kinds of ways; above Joan Rawshanks rises the white San Francisco apartment

house in which the terrified old ladies who spend their summers in lake resort hotels are now wringing their hands in the illuminated (by the floodlights outside) gloom of their livingrooms, some of them having Venetian blinds in them but none drawn [...]. (*Cody* 275)

It was very big to think about everything and everywhere. Only God could do that. He tried to think what a big thought that must be but he could think only of God. God was God's name just as his name was Stephen. *Dieu* was the French for God and that was God's name too; and when anyone prayed to God and said Dieu then God knew at once that it was a French person that was praying. But though there were different names for God in all the different languages in the world and God understood what all the people who prayed said in their different languages still God remained always the same God and God's real name was God. (*Portrait* 13)

Each passage contains lengthy sentences with the repetition of the name. Duluoz uses the repetition to meditate upon sex (Joan Rawshanks serving as a pseudonym for Joan Crawford) whereas Stephen uses it to meditate upon God. Both are deified: Joan Rawshanks by "a thousand eyes" and God by "all the different languages in the world." Furthermore, either author could have written either passage. Sex and God are dominant motifs in the work of both Kerouac and Joyce. A young Duluoz is as likely to have meditated on the name of *Dieu* (after all, he spoke only French as a young boy) as Dedalus or, more accurately, Leopold Bloom is to meditate on a sexy movie star.

The most well-known section of *Visions of Cody* is a long transcription of conversation during four consecutive nights at the Pomeray (Cassady) household. The use of the tape

transcript in the midst of Kerouac's prose creates the disjointed feeling that the reader has wandered upon a stage play in the midst of the book. Although they do not make use of audio recordings like Kerouac, both Melville and Joyce insert similar sections into their work. In Chapter 40 of *Moby-Dick*, "Midnight, Forecastle," Melville presents a script-like scene of sailors and harpooners of various nationalities yelling in drunken revelry. Similarly, Joyce creates his own dramatic sequence (complete with appearances by Shakespeare, Edward the Seventh, and a disembodied hand) in the "Circe"—or Nighttown—episode of *Ulysses*. All three scenarios—the tape, "Midnight, Forecastle," and Nighttown—when set within lengthy prose (which in the case of Kerouac and Joyce often extends for multiple pages before a single sentence ends) creates a rapid succession of dialogue and stage direction that conveys quick exchanges to a much greater extent than prose could. This allows the author to "study" his subject in a way that traditional prose, no matter how dreamlike, would prohibit (Hunt 214). Kerouac/Duluoz studies Neal Cassady/Cody Pomeray; Melville/Ishmael studies Ahab and the *Pequod*; Joyce studies himself and Dublin.

Gerald Nicosia points out that, in the tape section, "both Jack and Cody slip into a stream-of-consciousness monologue" akin to Molly Bloom's monologue in the "Penelope" section of *Ulysses* (376). Additionally, the long monologues in *Cody* resemble Ahab's meditative speeches to Starbuck in "The Symphony" chapter of *Moby-Dick*. Whether in hectic dialogues or tortuous soliloquies, the influence of Kerouac's masters permeates his revised road novel. Despite the influence of both Melville and Joyce on *Visions of Cody*, the book is ultimately Kerouac's. Had he consciously attempted to write like Melville or Joyce, *Cody* would not be the experimental success that it is. Kerouac's originality and spontaneous prose carry the book.

Conversely, Gerald Nicosia criticizes *Old Angel Midnight*, which he calls “the closest thing to *Finnegans Wake* in American literature” for being too close to *Finnegans Wake*, saying that “it lacks the original conception” of Kerouac’s other books (518). Paul Maher, on the other hand, referred to it as “a startling work of literary experimentation” (*Kerouac* 326). While the concept of a dream-like book, however, might have originated with Joyce, Kerouac’s prose is as original as any of his other writings. As Ann Charters points out in “‘Letting Go’ in Writing,” excerpted as a preface to *Old Angel Midnight*, Kerouac uses “his own mind as raw material” (xi). Unlike the work of Joyce, Kerouac has no H. C. Earwicker or Molly Bloom on whom to base any semblance of a story. He did not even have Lucien Carr, about whom Kerouac originally planned the book, but who refused to allow Kerouac to use him as a character model. Like *Finnegans Wake*, “the work has no plot, is essentially a strung together series of observations, and is most noteworthy for its linguistic experimentation.” Like the *Wake*, *Old Angel* “relies upon the sound of words as much as anything else” (Begnal 212). Despite Nicosia’s assertion that *Old Angel Midnight* is too much of an imitation of *Finnegans Wake*, Kerouac uses his language rather than Joyce’s, even when referencing Joyce: “Like’s legs that goosed the underground schoolteachers & Joyce who always wanted to write blind what the sea said but grinned restoredly in the sea first, himself a gable of coral roan [...]” (29). While this passage shows a Joycean influence, the sound is distinctly Kerouac. Both Kerouac and Joyce emphasized the sound of a sentence, but each had a sound of his own. Like “Joyce who always wanted to write blind what the sea said,” Kerouac, as early as *On the Road*, wrote “train sounds, the push-pull of boxcars, the scream of loud steam-fueled horns” (Maher, *Kerouac* 263). Rather than describing a sound, Kerouac, like Joyce, recreated it in his writing. Kerouac, however, captured the sound of the sea in the poem with which he closes his book *Big Sur*, titled “Sea”:

Joyce----James----Shhish----

Sea-----Ssssss----see

-----Varash

-----mnavash la vache

écriture-----the sea dont say

muc'h actually-----

(227)

While the writing, especially the heavy use of long dashes (as opposed to the shorter dashes of Emily Dickinson, the only female writer Kerouac praised), is distinctly Kerouac, the use of sound recalls Joyce's writing of sound, such as Leopold Bloom's cat in *Ulysses*: "Mrkgnao!" (55). As seen in the above passage, Kerouac makes a point to call attention to his predecessor.

Taken in its entirety, the "Duluoz Legend" also shows the influence *Finnegans Wake* had on Kerouac. Completely circular, infinite in the sense that the reader could perpetually read through the circle without ever coming to an end, the *Wake* begins mid-sentence and ends with the first part of the same sentence. To complete the final line, the reader must start over at the beginning. Similarly, to complete the chronology of Duluoz, the reader must return to the beginning. As stated earlier, a proper reading of the "Legend" occurs in the order in which Kerouac wrote it, beginning with *On the Road* and ending with *Vanity of Duluoz*. In linear terms, however, *Vanity* immediately precedes *Road*. In narrating his early adulthood, the middle-aged narrator of *Vanity* nears the conclusion of his story with the annulment of his first marriage. *On the Road* begins "not long after" the annulment (1). To read what happens after *Vanity of Duluoz*, the reader must return to the first book of the "Legend" and start all over again. In *Finnegans Wake*, the dream is circular; in the "Duluoz Legend," Jack's entire life is circular.

Interestingly enough, Kerouac became motivated to write *Vanity of Duluoaz* (which he had attempted to write much earlier in his career, prior to the publication of *On the Road*) by reading Richard Ellmann's biography of James Joyce. Having slowed his writing pace because of depression brought on by the harsh media portrayal of his work and his life, Kerouac became "[r]ein vigorated by linking his own circumstances with Joyce's." He determined that writing the remaining segment of the "Duluoaz Legend" would create a complete saga that would stand as "no less an effort than Joyce composing *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*" (Maher, *Kerouac* 448). The fact that this final installment created the circular nature of the "Legend" indicates the anxiety of Joyce's influence rather than a conscious decision on Kerouac's part to have his saga resemble the *Wake*.

In his essay at the beginning of *Old Angel Midnight*, simply titled "Jack's *Old Angel Midnight*," poet Mike McClure discusses not only the connection between *Old Angel* and the *Wake* but states that he can "imagine such words in overlooked passages of Melville" (xx). Perhaps McClure had in mind Chapter 122 of *Moby-Dick*, "Midnight Aloft—Thunder and Lightning," which consists entirely of Tashtego saying, "Um, um, um. Stop that thunder! Plenty too much thunder up here. What's the use of thunder? Um, um, um. We don't want thunder; we want rum; give us a glass of rum. Um, um, um!" (385). This passage, which one would more likely expect to have been written in the mid-twentieth century rather than the mid-nineteenth century, has the same sonorous quality as Kerouac's "And I cried 'Window, what you mean?' Said window 'O listen to the spherical brooding moan star music the midnight study the Faust man devil harp in hand, O hum O moan O'" (*Old Angel* 39). Melville's passage would be equally suitable for *Old Angel Midnight* as it is for *Moby-Dick*. The friends, family, and critics who

questioned Melville's sanity might argue that it is even more suitable for *Old Angel* than for *Moby-Dick*.

Matt Theado states that “[s]pontaneous prose is Kerouac’s foremost literary characteristic and may yet be his chief claim to literary longevity” (6). Spontaneous prose is certainly Kerouac’s claim to literary genius. Although talented enough to have his general prose favorably compared to Thomas Wolfe, Kerouac did not want to showcase his talent as a writer but his genius. By developing spontaneous prose, Kerouac created a new form of writing that built upon the work of past masters Herman Melville and James Joyce but which also opened the door for postmodernism. By exhibiting a firm grasp on his literary predecessors while at the same time “reconfigur[ing]” or “out-invent[ing]” the tradition they set forth, Kerouac fits into his own literary period, which Ronna Johnson dubs “pre-postmodernist” (Johnson 24; 22). As Daniel Grassian put it, Kerouac is “somehow suspended between modernism and postmodernism” (126). This liminal quality is a direct result of the genius of spontaneous prose.

In *The Western Canon*, Bloom states that what makes a work or author canonical “has turned out to be strangeness, a mode of originality” that leaves the reader with “an uncanny startlement rather than a fulfillment of expectations” (3). This holds true for every reader or critic who assumes he knows Kerouac’s work from what he knows of *On the Road*, even if he has, unlike many who claim to know Kerouac’s work, actually read *On the Road*. As with *Finnegans Wake*, *Ulysses*, *Tristram Shandy*, or *The Confidence-Man*, a single reading, or even a few reads, will create more confusion than understanding of the work. Understanding comes as the reader begins to assimilate the work as a whole, which occurs in part when the reader realizes that Kerouac, like Joyce, Sterne, or Melville, does not write linearly and therefore cannot be understood linearly. To understand Kerouac (or Joyce, Sterne, or Melville) the reader must ingest

the work as a whole and realize that the way Kerouac writes a passage is often more critical to its understanding than any narrative (when there is one) that the passage relays. In spontaneous prose, Kerouac created an original style that produces an “uncanny startlement” and that will ultimately stand as the mark of Kerouac’s genius.

CHAPTER 5

THE ROAD GOES ON: KEROUAC'S INFLUENCE

More than fifty years after the publication of *On the Road*, critics and the media still focus on Jack Kerouac as a cultural phenomenon rather than as an innovative author. When speaking of Kerouac's influence on later generations, an Associated Press article covering the fiftieth anniversary of *On the Road* ignores Kerouac's literary influence and mentions only Bob Dylan, Ray Manzarek of The Doors, and a sixteen-year-old girl who "never thought [she] would stay in the same place" (CNN.com). While the article also states that *On the Road* often appears on school reading lists, it fails to note that these reading lists are often influenced by prevailing cultural opinions as much as by literary merit.

Kerouac's influence, however, extends far beyond 60s rockers and restless teenagers, neither of whom entered his mind when he thought of himself as a serious author. Kerouac's influence extends far beyond the other writers of the Beat Generation—although they certainly were the first to model their writing after Kerouac's prose—or even later authors closely associated with the Beats, such as Ken Kesey, Hunter S. Thompson, Charles Bukowski, or Hubert Selby, Jr. Entrenched in his own liminal period that fell between modernism and postmodernism, as described by Daniel Grassian (126), Kerouac not only filled the gap between modernism and postmodernism, but he created the bridge between the two movements. As Ronna Johnson states, rather than "emerg[ing] full-blown," postmodernism grew out of "an era of transition and experimentation that Kerouac marked and embodied" (23). Thomas Pynchon, Kurt Vonnegut, Don DeLillo, and 2007 National Book of the Year Award Winner Denis Johnson all acknowledge Kerouac's influence on their work.

Naturally, Kerouac first influenced the work of his friend Allen Ginsberg, who dedicated *Howl and Other Poems* to Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, and Neal Cassady, calling Kerouac “the new Buddha of American prose” and publicly stating that Kerouac named his most famous poem, “Howl” (3). In addition to using Kerouac’s suggested title, Ginsberg borrowed the bulk of his style from Kerouac. Compare the rhythm of a passage from Kerouac’s *On the Road*—

But then they danced down the streets like dingedodies, and I shambled after as I’ve been doing all my life after people who interest me, because the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue centerlight pop and everybody goes “Awww!” (5-6)

to line 14 of Ginsberg’s “Howl”—

who chained themselves to subways for the endless ride from Battery to holy Bronx on benzedrine until the noise of wheels and children brought them down shuddering mouth-wracked and battered bleak of brain all drained of brilliance in the drear light of Zoo. (10)

Ginsberg’s work received publication first, but he had read many of the early drafts of *On the Road* and obviously borrowed Kerouac’s jazzy, spontaneous style.

Those who perpetuate the myth of Kerouac as a cultural hero, including Ginsberg, fail to recognize that the friendship between the two waned in Kerouac’s later years. Kerouac wanted a pure, peaceful literary movement, but Ginsberg embraced the role of cultural icon and provided the vocal leadership that helped cause the Beat Movement to evolve into the Hippie movement

and the women's and civil rights movements of the late 1960s and 70s. Kerouac's literature had fallen by the wayside in favor of the "major American societal shift" led by Ginsberg (McNally 331). By bringing Kerouac and his work along with him, whether Kerouac wanted to go along or not, Ginsberg helped turn Kerouac into the counterculture hero that Kerouac despised and that attached a stigma to Kerouac's work that has thus far lasted forty years after his death.

William Burroughs, unlike the other two members of the Beat Triumvirate, remained in the background, where Kerouac also wished to be. Of course, Burroughs spent much of the 1950s and 60s out of the country because he was wanted on narcotics charges. Be that as it may, Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*, along with Ginsberg's "Howl," played a major role in current U.S. censorship law when the Massachusetts Supreme Court passed its 1966 decision declaring the book "not obscene" (Burroughs ix). As with "Howl," Kerouac gave *Naked Lunch* its title (Maher, *Kerouac* 299) and much of the prose resembles Kerouac's, especially the early style of *On the Road*. Kerouac even typed up part of the manuscript but stopped because it gave him "nightmares" (qtd. in Berrigan 294).

Kerouac did much more for Burroughs than title his work or serve as his typist. In the 1986 documentary *What Happened to Kerouac?* Burroughs states that he "wasn't interested in writing at all" until he met Kerouac, who "kept trying persuade [Burroughs] that [he] should write." In 1945 they collaborated on a never-published novella called "And the Hippos Were Boiled in Their Tanks," and Burroughs's writing maintained the form of this early work with Kerouac until later in his career when he developed "cutting"—cutting manuscript pages in half up the middle and reorganizing the text with shuffled half-pages. Kerouac's influence on Burroughs notably appears in a comparison of descriptions of Chicago from both *On the Road*

and *Naked Lunch*. The two passages have similar language and both present a darker side of the city:

On the Road: Great Chicago glowed red before our eyes. We were suddenly on Madison Street among hordes of hobos, some of them sprawled out on the street with their feet on the curb, hundreds of others milling in the doorways of saloons and alleys. (239)

Naked Lunch: Chicago: invisible hierarchy of decorticated wops, smell of atrophied gangsters, earthbound ghost hits you at North and Halstead, Cicero, Lincoln Park, panhandler of dreams, past invading the present, rancid magic of slot machines and roadhouses. (12)

Burroughs' description of the city easily could have appeared in *On the Road*, as could Kerouac's in *Naked Lunch*.

Kerouac naturally had an influence on other Beat writers; he was associated with Ginsberg and Burroughs for most of his adult life and they considered him the major novelist of the Beat Generation. As stated earlier, though, Kerouac's influence not only extended to postmodernist writers but played a large part in creating postmodernism. In the introduction to his short story collection *Slow Learner*, Thomas Pynchon described the post-Beat era of literature as "a transition point" between "this new writing" and "the more established modernist tradition" (9). Pynchon writes that "[a]gainst the undeniable power of tradition, we were attracted to such centrifugal lures as [...] a book I still believe is one of the great American novels, *On the Road*," calling it "exciting, liberating, strongly positive": "It was actually OK to write like this!" (7).

In his own work, Pynchon most displays his Kerouackian influence in his novels *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow*. *V.*, as Daniel Grassian points out, “can be read as a critique of the social Beat movement” (126). In this novel, Pynchon said all of the things about the Beat cultural movement that Kerouac had tried to say but no one would listen to. In *On the Road*, the characters are just that, on the road. Sal Paradise travels across the United States and back several times and then to Mexico. The Beats themselves, including Kerouac, extended their travels across the Atlantic Ocean to Tangier, Morocco. Pynchon’s main characters, whom he calls “The Whole Sick Crew,” “misinterpret Beat philosophy” (Grassian 130). They claim to live the Beat lifestyle, but they never actually go anywhere, other than to the sewers to hunt alligators. Essentially, they live the *beatnik* lifestyle rather than the Beat lifestyle. According to Grassian, The Whole Sick Crew’s inability to “live the intense, passionate lifestyle promoted by Beat writers [...] is not because this lifestyle is impossible, but because The Crew’s commitment to life is minimal and self-interested” (136), just like the beatniks who falsely claimed Kerouac as their god.

Stylistically speaking, however, *Gravity's Rainbow* serves as a more definitive example of Kerouac’s influence whereas *V.* mostly offers a critique of the pseudo-intellectual movement that followed Kerouac. The following passage from *Rainbow* not only bears a similarity to Kerouac’s prose in *Visions of Cody* but alludes to Kerouac’s jazz influence by referencing Kerouac’s favorite musician, Charlie Parker:

Down in New York, drive fast maybe get there for the last set—on 7th Ave., between 139th and 140th, tonight, “Yardbird” Parker is finding out how he can use the notes at the higher ends of these very chords to break up the melody into *have mercy* what is it a fucking machine gun or something man he must be out of his *mind* 32nd notes demisemiquavers say it very (demisemiquaver) fast in a

Munchkin voice if you can dig *that* coming out of Dan Wall's Chili House and down the street— (65)

This passage could just as easily have been written by Kerouac as Pynchon. Fast driving and Charlie Parker aside, it features Kerouac's breath-dashes, repetitions, and self-interruptions. Throughout the book, Pynchon uses his trademark references to mathematics and science, but his style is clearly Kerouac-influenced.

Kurt Vonnegut, who once hosted Jack and Stella Kerouac for cards (Maher, *Phantoms* 260n), also incorporated bits of Kerouac into his postmodernist satires, most notably *Breakfast of Champions*. *Breakfast of Champions*, in part, tells the story of Kilgore Trout, an elderly, obscure science fiction writer, as he travels to a speaking engagement arranged by his only, yet highly-devoted, fan. After the event, Trout becomes widely popular and eventually wins the Nobel Prize for medicine. The tale of a misunderstood author's road trip instantly brings Kerouac to mind. Vonnegut expands on the similarities between Kerouac and Kilgore during a conversation that Kilgore Trout has with a truck-driver who has given him a ride (also like Kerouac, Kilgore Trout is not averse to hitchhiking):

Trout sat back and thought about the conversation. He shaped it into a story [...] about a planet where the language kept turning into pure music, because the creatures there were so enchanted by sounds. Words became musical notes. Sentences became melodies. (113)

Between the hitchhiking and the thought of language as music, Vonnegut shows that, although he goes beyond Kerouac's influence (such as a scene where Vonnegut as author introduces himself to Trout as his character; Kerouac never introduced himself to Duluoz), Kerouac's style automatically works its way into Vonnegut's writing.

In addition to Kilgore Trout's plan for a novel in which language becomes music in *Breakfast of Champions*, Vonnegut also references Kerouac's (and Joyce's) style in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. When protagonist Billy Pilgrim is abducted by Tralfamadorians, he marvels at the alien system of reading, which consists of reading an entirety of a book all at once (meaning all parts simultaneously) in order to "produce an image of life that is beautiful and surprising and deep." The Tralfamadorians explain that their books have "no beginning, no middle, no end, (112)" a method similar to *Finnegans Wake*, *Old Angel Midnight*, *Book of Dreams*, or the complete "Duluoaz Legend." Although the main influence for the novel, like the main influence for Kerouac's plots, is Vonnegut's personal experience (in this case, the fire-bombing of Dresden), the passage about Tralfamadorian literature pays homage to both Joyce and Kerouac.

Don DeLillo—winner of the 1985 National Book Award for *White Noise*—creates a Kerouackian road trip in his first novel, *Americana*, similar to that in *Breakfast of Champions*. In DeLillo's road trip, a television executive takes a cross-country trip in order to view American life in preparation for a documentary on the Navajo. Protagonist David Bell is a narcissistic corporate shill, but he finds "the beatific vision" in the reverse circle and loses his job when he does not return from the road (223). The reference to a reverse circle causing a beatific vision alludes to the true origins of Kerouac's use of the term "beat" (as in *béato* or beatific) as well as the circular nature of the "Duluoaz Legend." Later in the novel, DeLillo further alludes to Kerouac—this time his legendary typing method—as Bell narrates his vision of America: "The illusion of motion was barely relevant. Perhaps it wasn't a movie I was creating so much as a scroll, a delicate bit of papyrus that feared discovery" (238). By linking the discovery of America and the scroll together, DeLillo comments on Kerouac's own vision of America. By typing *On*

the Road onto a giant scroll, Kerouac set down an American legend and story of the American landscape worthy of the historic or Biblical connotations associated with a scroll.

Likewise, Denis Johnson, whose *Tree of Smoke* was named the 2007 National Book of the Year, shows in his earlier work a style heavily influenced by Kerouac. Johnson's 1992 collection of interlocking short stories, *Jesus' Son*, is equal parts Jack Kerouac and Lou Reed; the book's title comes from a line in The Velvet Underground song "Heroin." Although on a much smaller scale than the "Duluoz Legend," *Jesus' Son* makes use of a disjointed chronology as effectively as Kerouac. Johnson's nameless narrator (similar to Dostoevsky's Underground Man) has more in common, though, with Pynchon's Whole Sick Crew than with Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty. In the book, he does not go anywhere; the collection begins, however, with his return from parts unknown. The first story, "Car Crash While Hitchhiking," describes exactly what the title indicates. The narrator, "Jesus' Son," like Sal Paradise, has been hitchhiking from one part of the country to another. A drug addict, he safely travels with "[a] salesman who shared his liquor and steered while sleeping...A Cherokee filled with bourbon...A VW no more than a bubble of hashish fumes, captained by a college student" (3) but is involved in a multiple-fatality car crash after he receives a ride from a family of four. He is much safer with Kerouac's "mad ones" than with any form of domesticity. Also like Sal Paradise/Duluoz, "Jesus' Son" searches, throughout the book, for his place in the world, never "imagin[ing] for a heartbeat that there might be a place for people like us" (160). The "us" he refers to consists of the employees and residents of a nursing home but could just as easily refer to all of what he calls "the weirdos" or all of Kerouac's "mad ones."

In addition to his role in the formulation of postmodernism, Kerouac's books, because of their autobiographical nature, opened the door for the non-fiction novel and New Journalism that

came about in the early 1960s. By blurring the line between fiction and non-fiction and writing autobiography as he did, Kerouac allowed others to do the same. Probably the most notable example of this is the “gonzo journalism” of Hunter S. Thompson, who wrote book-length exposés and news articles by immersing himself in his subject matter, regardless of whether his subject was the Hells Angels Motorcycle Club or a rental car full of various narcotics en route to a motorcycle race and a convention on drug prevention. While the road trip segments of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* naturally resemble those of *On the Road*, the most striking similarity between Thompson’s most well-known book and Kerouac’s writing is the chapter “Breakdown on Paradise Blvd.” In the depths of a narcotics binge, rather than writing about his situation, Thompson turns to a recording that he kept running throughout the events of the novel. Like the tape section of *Visions of Cody*, Thompson presents a transcript of the tape rather than a prose summary. Like Kerouac’s use of the tape, Thompson effectively uses rapid-fire dialogue to capture a scene in a way that prose never could⁴.

Other non-fiction novels of the era, such as Tom Wolfe’s *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* and Charles Bukowski’s *Factotum* would probably never have been written had Kerouac not set a precedent for these works. The most poetically ironic recipient of Kerouac’s influence, however, is Truman Capote, who publicly and infamously derided Kerouac’s writing and his methods. Had Kerouac not created the non-fiction novel with *On the Road*, then Capote might not have had the success that he did with his most enduring book, *In Cold Blood*. In another ironic twist to Capote’s statement that Kerouac’s was not writing, but “typewriting,” the publication of Kerouac’s letters and journals reveals that Kerouac already had everything he wanted to say carefully mapped out in notebooks that he kept next to him as he wrote. All he

⁴ Although Thompson wrote *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* in 1971 and *Visions of Cody* was not published until 1972, Thompson associated with Allen Ginsberg and Beat-tangentials like Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters and likely would have heard about the tape section of *Cody*, whether he had read it at the time or not.

lacked was how to tell his story, which he wrote spontaneously. In this sense then, Capote was right; Kerouac's bursts of writing *were* just typing, but only as the final step in an arduous process.

With the exception of his influence on Pynchon, the Beats, and the immediate post-Beats, Kerouac's influence on later writers of the twentieth century has gone largely unnoticed. Dennis McNally discusses Kerouac's influence on New Journalism, including *In Cold Blood* (331), but Capote simply benefited from *On the Road* rather than being influenced by it. Kerouac read and admired Capote's work and even went out of his way to say so to Capote face to face (Nicosia 690-91), but it is doubtful whether Capote ever actually read *On the Road*. Vonnegut's acquaintance with Kerouac has been mentioned only anecdotally; Vonnegut scholarship has ignored Kerouac's influence. In a 1984 *Los Angeles Times* article, Charles Champlin referred to David Bell's trip in *Americana* as a "post-Kerouac pilgrimage" (qtd. in Cowart 606), but that is the limit of the direct critical correlation between the two. Still, though, the critical discussion of DeLillo's relationship to Kerouac extends further than that of Kerouac to Denis Johnson, which consists only of an Amazon.com user review that calls Johnson "an evolution of Jack Kerouac, minus the jazz and plus the confusion" (Weisman, Amazon.com). No professional critic has made the connection between Kerouac and Johnson.

Despite the lack of recognition of Kerouac in these later works, critics have made statements that they could apply to Kerouac just as easily as to their subject. Take, for instance, David Cowart's Sal Paradise/Jack Duluoz-like description of David Bell: "Bell in fact stumbles through life, waiting for some change, some new dispensation, to complete the displacement of the old order, in which the fiction of a knowable, stable identity enjoyed general credence" (602-03). Cowart later mentions DeLillo's description of Bell riding through the southwest as a

passenger in a “speeding Cadillac” (619), a description that recalls Sal and Dean’s mad dash from Denver to Chicago via El Paso in a Cadillac. In the case of Johnson, Timothy Parrish states that “Johnson’s narrator confronts his audience as a way of confronting himself” (19). Parrish fails to notice that Jesus’ son follows the tradition of Duluoz, and Ishmael before him, in narrating his story as a means of coming to terms with his self. Of course, the fact that, as time has progressed, Kerouac’s influence has progressed from more direct allusion (or even direct mention, as is the case in many of Allen Ginsberg’s poems) to a more subtle thematic overtone shows the inescapability of the anxiety of Kerouac’s influence. Like the influence of Melville or Joyce on Kerouac, which would appear in his work even without direct references to *Moby-Dick* or *Ulysses*, the influence of Kerouac appears in the work of his successors; they do not need to specifically allude to Dean Moriarty for this influence to appear.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Say the name Jack Kerouac to most people and they think of fast cars, jazz, and beatniks. Some may even mention bongos, which makes no sense at all. In an appearance on *The Steve Allen Show*, Kerouac read from *On the Road* and *Visions of Cody* to Allen's piano accompaniment, but he never performed with bongos. But that is the impression that many people have of Jack Kerouac. Even those who choose not to buy into fallacious caricatures respond as if Kerouac were not literary enough; he does not fit into their perception of a "classic" author. Many think of Kerouac as an important figure in American pop culture but not in literature. Even authors who try dispel the prevailing myths about Kerouac, such as John Leland in his 2007 book *Why Kerouac Matters*, write to appeal to a mass media audience rather than to an audience that admires Kerouac for his literary greatness above, and sometimes in spite of, all else. For instance, in explaining Kerouac's distaste for beatniks, Leland writes that "Kerouac disdained chin spinach [goatees], especially on white dudes. 'For some reason my name has become associated with bearded beatniks,' he wrote to his future wife Stella Sampas, in a tone suggesting he'd been accused of listening to Michael Bolton" (31). Even Gerald Nicosia, whose book *Memory Babe* was the first Kerouac biography to examine his work from a critical perspective, cannot resist describing Kerouac's one and only meeting with Marilyn Monroe (620). While appealing to a beatnik audience or relaying anecdotes of celebrity sightings might be amusing, such inclusions do little to dissuade those who consider Kerouac only a cultural figure and nothing more.

Kerouac's first biographer Bernice Lemire, who—with Kerouac's assistance—wrote a graduate thesis on Kerouac's youth and early influences, concluded that "[i]t is obvious Jack

Kerouac never made any intellectual attempt that demanded sustained effort on his part” (83), a claim that is completely false. Admittedly, however, she had no way of knowing otherwise at the time. Even though Kerouac assisted her, he told her only about his elementary school teachers and authors he read as a child. Although he mentions his love for Joyce and Proust, his letters to Lemire do not contain any of his lengthy dissertations on either (*Letters 1956-1969* 338-42). In fact, not until the publication of Kerouac’s letters and journals did anyone fully realize the depth of Kerouac’s intellect and disillusionment with the Beat Movement or the vast amount of work that went in to writing complete books in three days (as he did with *The Subterraneans*). In interviews, Kerouac and his friends tried to convey his intellect but were ignored. As mentioned in the Introduction, interviewers disregarded Kerouac’s quoting of *Ulysses* as drunken ramblings.

Perhaps Kerouac’s intellect went undiscovered because it, like many of the works he studied, was ahead of its time. Kerouac loved Shakespeare and Dostoevsky, but he also loved *Ulysses*, *Finnegans Wake*, *Remembrance of Things Past*, *The Confidence-Man*, and *Tristram Shandy*, which virtually every biography or late interview notes that Kerouac was reading in the final months of his life. Of these, only Laurence Sterne’s work was widely popular during its author’s life. Like Kerouac, Joyce struggled to get his work published and did not earn a great deal of money from his writing. Melville was so obscure at the time of his death that his *New York Times* obituary misspelled his name (Delbanco 319). During his lifetime, Melville earned just over five hundred dollars for American sales of *Moby-Dick* (178); *The Confidence-Man* was reviled by both critics and family (247). Each of these works, like many of Kerouac’s books, often gets labeled “unreadable,” even by literary scholars. But Kerouac understood them.

In a 1952 letter to Carl Solomon discussing the as-yet unpublished *On the Road*, Kerouac wrote about the general state of experimental fiction:

Ulysses which was considered difficult reading is now hailed as a classic and everyone understands it. Even *Finnegans Wake* is beginning to be understood. [...]. When something is incomprehensible to me (*Finnegans Wake*, Lowry's *Under the Volcano*, *Delilah* by Marcus Goodrich) I try to understand it, the author's intellect, and passion, and mystery. To label it incoherent is not only a semantic mistake but an act of cowardice and intellectual death. Between *incomprehensible* and *incoherent* sits the madhouse. I am not in the madhouse. The masses catch up to the incomprehensible; incoherent finds its way to an intelligently typewritten page. (*Letters 1940-1956* 376; italics in original)

Scholars have misunderstood Kerouac's work for so long because few have actually tried to understand it or Kerouac's intellect, passion, and mystery. Fans and critics read his books and dismiss him (or deify him) as a wild hipster or a raging alcoholic mired in rambling, incoherent prose. However, in numerous letters to his editors and publishers, Kerouac carefully details exactly why he chose particular words or put (or chose not to use) various punctuation marks in certain places. Writing to Helen Taylor of Viking Press about necessary revisions to the galley proofs of *The Dharma Bums*, Kerouac states that "when [he] came across a period and wanted to insert a comma and then a lower case (restoring to original), I made a mark like this: /" (*Letters 1957-1969* 150). That attention to detail shows that Kerouac lacked the madness that so many attributed to him.

Additionally, the overall conception based on *On the Road* that Neal Cassady and Jack Kerouac totally embodied Dean Moriarty and Sal Paradise is as fallacious as disparaging remarks about Kerouac's intellect. While the events in *On the Road* did happen, Dean and Sal represent only one facet of the personality of each model. The full truth, as described in an

undated BBC interview with Carolyn Cassady, would likely not have made for as entertaining a novel. Few people would want to read a novel about a man, his friend, and his friend's wife who spend most of their time sitting at home and discussing Proust and reading passages aloud or reading Shakespeare aloud with each person taking a different part (O'Hagan 25). But that is the reality behind *On the Road*, captured in part by the tape section of *Visions of Cody*. This was the Neal Cassady that Kerouac so admired: the one with the passion for literature and for writing; the one with deep thoughts on Proust and Joyce and Shakespeare; the one who drove cross-country, not for "kicks," but because a friend had written him about Kerouac's early prose and he wanted Kerouac's help in starting a novel; the one who wrote Kerouac a several-thousand word letter that inspired the spontaneous prose that Kerouac later mastered; not the one who later served as the acid-dropping driver of the Merry Pranksters' bus *Further*.

Even Kerouac's famous line from *On the Road*—"the only people for me are the mad ones [...] who never yawn or say a commonplace thing" (5)—is not inspired by a hipster lifestyle, but by Proust. In Chapter 1 of *The Guermantes Way* part of *Remembrance of Things Past*, Proust writes, "In the entertainments which she gave, since I could not imagine the guests as possessing bodies, moustaches, boots, as making any utterance that was commonplace [...]" (Vol. 2 9). Many Kerouac fans often use the quotation from *On the Road* to represent their own Kerouac-influenced carefree, rebellious lifestyles. While the line does, in fact, evoke a sense of freedom, for Kerouac that freedom was more intellectual than cultural. Although a fan of Charlie Parker, Kerouac studied Proust extensively. His statement about those who "say a commonplace thing," especially his use of the word "commonplace" directly alludes to Proust; not only does Proust's "utterance that was commonplace" mean exactly the same thing as Kerouac's "say a commonplace thing," but Proust emphasizes the word "commonplace" "by repeating it several

times throughout that section of *The Guermantes Way*. That was Kerouac's influence. Proust. Joyce. Melville. Twain. Dostoevsky. Shakespeare. Sterne. The list could go on and on. Those are the "mad ones" who never "say a commonplace thing." In the passage from Proust, the narrator discusses party guests who, like him, want to avoid common language. Like Proust, as well as his other influences, Kerouac avoided "commonplace" writing. He sought and developed a prose style that helped distinguish his writing from other authors of the twentieth century—even those he admired, such as Wolfe, Fitzgerald, or Hemingway—whose writing had become, at least in Kerouac's estimation, "commonplace."

Kerouac built upon the genius of his influences and added his own once he developed spontaneous prose. In spontaneous prose, Kerouac created a way of writing that no one had done before. All the while, though, he could not escape the anxiety of influence passed on by his literary predecessors. In Bloomian terms, they "contaminated" him, just as Kerouac has contaminated those whom he preceded. His close associates like Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs draw attention to Kerouac's influence on the work. Thomas Pynchon notes its presence in his novels. With other authors, however, Kerouac's influence is not quite as obvious without careful study of both works involved. Unlike Ginsberg and Burroughs or post-Beat writers like Hunter S. Thompson, Kurt Vonnegut, Don DeLillo, and Denis Johnson do not specifically point out Kerouac's influence on their work, but it emerges regardless of whether they consciously intended to write like Kerouac or about similar themes and topics. But that is what Harold Bloom means when he says that "the poetic father has been absorbed into the id, rather than into the superego" (*Anxiety* 80). Bloom states that "[t]he anxiety may or may not be internalized by the later writer" (xxiii), meaning that the influence of the earlier author shows itself in the work of the later author with or without the later author recognizing that fact. That is

the strength of Kerouac's influence, both of his style and his themes and stories; he appears in the work of later authors even if they do not realize that he does.

Several articles or books on Kerouac have concluded by saying something about how Kerouac's literary genius will not go unrecognized for much longer. In the conclusion of his article on Kerouac's spontaneous prose, George Dardess says that "Kerouac's mastery of voices surely won't go unrecognized much longer" (742); in discussing *Visions of Cody*, Tim Hunt states that "[p]erhaps the time has come to recognize this talent and this achievement" (252). Dardess's article appeared in 1975; Hunt's book was first published in 1981. Almost thirty years after Hunt penned his conclusion, Kerouac's ability as a writer is still obscured by his status as a cultural icon.

Even those who praise Kerouac see him as a cultural figure rather than a literary genius, lauding him with "inordinate praise" (Jones 25). For example, in the 1999 Beat documentary *The Source*, an unnamed interviewee heralds Kerouac by saying, "[h]e's not looking for universal meaning to life, but he's saying, 'Fuck you, I'm gonna make my own meaning and if you don't like it, you can kiss my ass.'" This exemplifies many Kerouac fans. This statement, however, is completely inaccurate. Kerouac was, in fact, "looking for universal meaning to life"; he took to the road and wrote his books in order to find that meaning. He certainly did not adopt a "kiss my ass" attitude when publishers, critics, and the media failed to accept him; he instead fell into the depression that led to his early, alcoholic death. In fact, Kerouac sought "Academic recognition [...] NOT the temporary admiration for the wrong reasons coming from the wrong thinkers" (*Letters 1957-1969* 313). By "wrong thinkers," Kerouac meant those who shared the "wrong reasons" of the young man in the documentary and those who wanted to consider Kerouac a beatnik even though he disliked the movement, its ideals, and those involved with it.

Although past Kerouac scholars have incorrectly predicted the nearness of proper critical appraisal of Kerouac, interest in the phenomenon of the Beat Generation will eventually subside. When that happens, only the literature will remain and Kerouac will finally begin to receive the literary recognition he deserves. Critics will then cast aside Kerouac's biographical anecdotes simply as points of interest and focus on his work. They will look at his work and pay attention to the influence of Joyce rather than the influence of jazz. Articles will write of his influence on the major authors of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries rather than his influence on psychedelic rock bands. Critics will look past his lack of a linear narrative (or, at times, lack of any kind of narrative) and appreciate his use of language to form books in ways that linear narratives never could. They will see that Kerouac created a prose that, like the poetic maxim of Archibald MacLeish, who praised Kerouac's work in his classes at Harvard University (*Letters Vol. 2* 117n), could simply "be" rather than "mean"; that, like Jackson Pollock creating a "dance in color," Kerouac created a "dance in language" (Hunt 144). Eighteen years after James Joyce's death, Richard Ellmann wrote that "[w]e are still learning to be James Joyce's contemporaries" (3). Thirty-nine years after Kerouac's death, that sentiment holds true for him as well.

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Presentations

Literary Criticism

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Scientific

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Organizations

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