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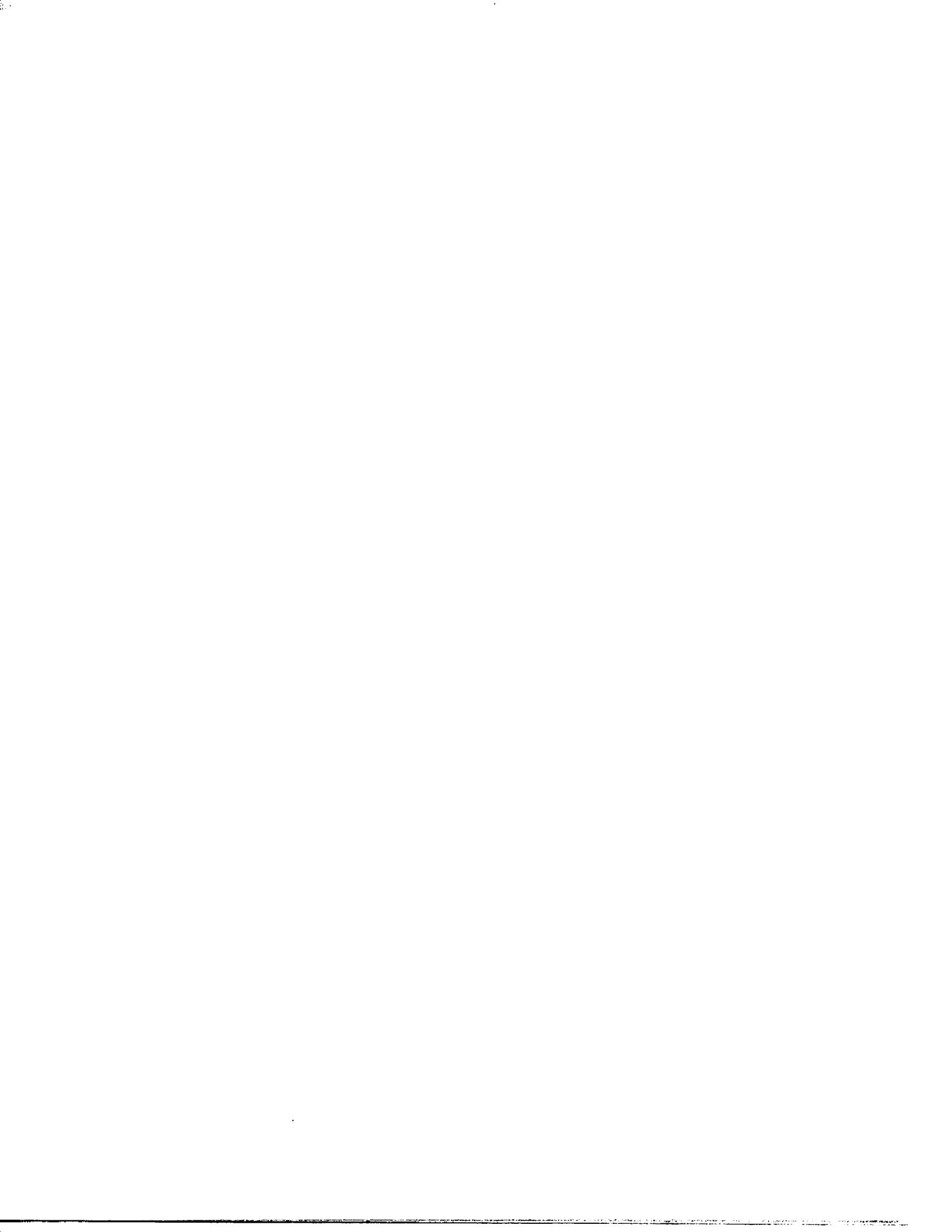
**The nightmare of the road: Jack Kerouac a commodity of the  
Beat Generation**

**Nimmo, Kristi Kay, Ph.D.**

**Lehigh University, 1993**

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The Nightmare of the Road: Jack Kerouac a Commodity of  
the Beat Generation

by

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of Lehigh University

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in

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## Abstract

A Kerouac item on a rare bookseller's list is apt to sell quickly. In 1950, the Harcourt Brace first edition of *The Town and the City* sold for \$3.50, and in 1992, booksellers marketed the first edition of *The Town and the City* for as much as \$500. Literary worth is laden with monetary connotations. The numbers in beat bookseller catalogs are a reminder that for some people the worth of a book is measured by the dollar. *On the Road* may have made the Beat Generation famous, but to Kerouac it brought frustration, disappointment, and effacement.

An informed discussion of Kerouac's writings, particularly a history of *On the Road* as the overblown literary event it became in America in 1958, cannot ignore the impact commercialization had upon the author, his work, and his ability to write, once he realized that he and his novels had been packaged together and were both for barter. The purpose of this study is to show how and why Jack Kerouac became a commodity of the Beat Generation.

## Chapter One

### Jack Kerouac: The Handsome Sailor of 1957

"Four guys does not a generation make. That's why I think the weight fell on them. That's why Madison Avenue got on them. Because they were the guys the same age as they. And they wanted in this generation. They were sort of like excluded, and they had the power game. They had the media. All that. That's why they downed . . . Kerouac."

Gregory Corso, Interview: *What Happened to Kerouac*

In certain instances they would flank, or, like a bodyguard, quite surround some superior figure of their own class, moving along with them like Aldebaran among the lesser lights of his constellation. That signal object was the "Handsome Sailor" . . . With no perceptible trace of the vainglorious about him, rather with the off-hand unaffectedness of natural regality, he seemed to accept the spontaneous homage of his shipmates. (5)

Herman Melville, *Billy Budd, Foretopman*

In 1954, Malcolm Cowley had said about up-and-coming writers that "[t]hey might tell what really happened, and to whom, and how they truly felt about it, not how they had been taught to feel or were expected to feel. Then the form of their writing . . . might . . . be as new as the sense of life it was intended to express" ("Invitation" 41). This was Kerouac's achievement. The literary "I" he created became part of something we call the Beat Generation.

Cowley paid tribute to Kerouac by calling the then unpublished manuscript, *On the Road*, "the best record" of the lives of a group of literary "rebels" known as the "beat generation" ("Invitation" 39). Sal Paradise's story begins the winter of 1947 and ends the winter of

1950. When Viking Press published *On the Road*, in September of 1957, the Beat Generation from Kerouac's point of view had come and gone. But, for many, there were no perceptible differences between Kerouac and the fictional heroes of *On the Road*, and Kerouac became an icon of the Beat Generation.

Within the context of Kerouac's life and writing, beat is a label for a certain group of writers associated with the avant-garde and regional literature of San Francisco. The *Oxford English Dictionary* credits Kerouac for coining Beat Generation: "An expression applied at first to a group of young people, predominantly writers, artists, and their adherents, in San Francisco, later to similar groups elsewhere, adopting unconventional dress, manners, habits, etc., as a means of self-expression and social protest" (34). The definitions for beat span several pages in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Kerouac's use of beat to describe the walk of hipsters and their mien evokes older connotations of beat. As a nautical term in the 17th century, beat meant "to strive against contrary winds or currents at sea; to make way in any direction against the wind" (30). In the United States in the late 19th century, beat was used to mean "to open up or prepare a way" as in "to beat one's way: to travel, or make one's way" (29). And in the mid 19th century beat was colloquial for "[t]o defraud (a person or institution) of money, etc. by deception, blackmail, or other dishonest means" (32). By 1945 Kerouac would have known the meaning of beat as it was applied to the jazz scene as in "to beat it out" (31). Kerouac told Steve Allen that beat meant "sympathetic" (from *What Happened to Kerouac*).

Several biographies have been written about Kerouac, and there are a handful of published critical studies that examine Kerouac's work and significance as an author. Yet, few people have discussed, at length, why Kerouac is read the way he is read today, why we have willingly inherited from the late 50s a certain view, shared by admirers and critics alike, of Kerouac and of *On the Road*. At many different levels of society, *On the Road* is read as a quest story, as a metaphor for the American impulse to go west, or as a novel that made way for the hippies. There is nothing wrong with these readings, but they have limited our ability to understand Kerouac the author. The views we have inherited have led critics sympathetic to Kerouac to disavow the significance of *On the Road*. The very fact that we shield Kerouac's literary reputation from the novel he is best known for writing (critics have used *Visions of Cody* for this end) indicates that *On the Road* might be more important than we are willing to acknowledge.

Why were people made uncomfortable by the Beat Generation, and why does *On the Road* continue to make people uncomfortable? Denouncing Kerouac with glib critical commentary, critics have continued to insist that Kerouac did not have genuine talent. In 1988, George Will complained in *Newsweek* that Lowell, Massachusetts had dedicated a park to Jack Kerouac: "His name--say it aloud--had a crack like a whip: Jack Kerouac. It calls to mind cars, driving, the open road, American restlessness, so it is sweetly incongruous that he should be memorialized in a park, a place of contemplation, something strange to him.

Better they should name a truck stop after him" (84). The landscape, composing the background to such a picture, is as shorn and as worried as are our characterizations of Kerouac. We continue to remember Kerouac as a hipster; we identify him with violent acts, with an existentialist philosophy, and with unintelligence and debauchery. Delineated by competing strands of culture, fragments of history that some critics had tried to forget, the Beat Generation is remembered more as a social movement than a literary group. The impulse to create a scapegoat, the impulse to commercialize anyone and anything, and the need to explain modern day anxieties distorted Kerouac's image. Kerouac alone did not create the Beat Generation. In a very real way, the Beat Generation created the Kerouac we remember today.

In 1958 the social and psychological anxieties of a nation had focused on the enigmatic term Beat Generation. It seemed to the critics of the Beat Generation that those writers of the literary generation called by the same name had escaped, by coming of age in the dark din of theaters, the agonizing terror of human destiny. As Siegfried Kracauer wrote in 1946: "The criminals in *Shadow of a Doubt* and Orson Welles' *The Stranger* settle down in plain small towns, places where no one would ever dream of meeting a killer in the flesh." The ordinary was suspect. "Nightmares are seen in bright daylight, murderous traps are sprung just around the corner. Every day life itself breeds anguish and destruction" (132).

*On the Road* depicted the anguish Kracauer described. Behind the film projector's light, among those "who'd reached the end of the road" and those who had "nowhere to go," Sal Paradise experienced the

quasi-somnolence of a Detroit Skid Row movie house. After watching the same two movies "six times each" Sal mused:

We saw them waking, we heard them sleeping, we sensed them dreaming, we were permeated completely with the strange Gray Myth of the West and the weird dark Myth of the East when morning came. All my actions since then have been dictated automatically to my subconscious by this horrible osmotic experience. (244)

As Kerouac's narrator of *On the Road* suggested, the lines between dream and reality were collapsing.

By 1957, one bad dream had been nearly anesthetized. School children were drilled to duck and cover their heads. In the leisure of a summer afternoon, at the sound of a sonic blast children *coolly* turned their eyes to the sky; they expected to see the gigantic mushroom cloud. Leslie Fiedler observed: "In a world rent by violence, and plagued by disaster, America remains strangely immune at home" ("The Un-Angry" 178). In a similar vein, Norman Podhoretz suggested that Americans had become intellectually dulled by a mundane fascination with the atomic bomb: "The H-bomb is rapidly becoming the last refuge of the lazy-minded: invoke the mushroom cloud and all issues will be settled, all phenomena explained, all idiocies justified" (Letter 476). Neither critic cared much for Jack Kerouac, whose writing seemed not to express man's moral obligations.

If *On the Road* (1957) had not sold as well as it did--first published by Viking and then a year later reprinted by Signet in an affordable paperback edition--it is doubtful that Kerouac would have become the notorious figure of the Beat Generation. *Naked Lunch* might

be considered merely a cult book. And it is conceivable that Ginsberg's *Howl* would be no more than an academic footnote to discussions of contemporary poetry. Despite the persuasive pedantry of the high-brow against Kerouac's second published novel, *On the Road* struck a popular chord, unleashing a fast forwarded version of terror, not of war but of quotidian reality.

There is a scene in *On the Road* that most readers do not forget. Headed for Chicago, on a "straightaway in Iowa," Sal's nerves can no longer withstand Dean's acrobatic driving. Compelled to shield his eyes from the "nightmare day" (234), Sal lies down on the back floor and tries to sleep. Cinematic projections of his life reel by, befuddling his brain:

As a seaman I used to think of the waves *rushing* beneath the shell of the ship and the bottomless deeps thereunder--now I could feel the road some twenty inches beneath me, *unfurling* and *flying* and *hissing* at incredible speeds across the *groaning* continent with that mad Ahab at the wheel. When I closed my eyes all I could see was the road *unwinding* into me. When I opened them I saw *flashing* shadows of trees *vibrating* on the floor of the car. There was no *escaping* it. I resigned myself to all. (234; my emphasis)

A generation weaned on terror accepted Sal's panorama of the road at face value. They unwittingly recognized familiar dreams in Sal's travels and read his story as a narcissistic meandering across America.

In 1955, Fiedler had called Kerouac a "no-talent novelist" ("The Search" 162), a judgment which three years later dimmed Fiedler's view of *On the Road*. "The dream of violence and the fact of security,"

Fiedler wrote, "the dream of failure and the fact of success--here is the center of our new comedy; but it is not yet written, for no one seems to stand at the proper vantage point" ("The Un-Angry" 179). Kerouac had written such a "comedy." But critics had not been able to see beyond the plot of *On the Road* and the character of Dean Moriarty to the preoccupation of Kerouac's novel with America's diminishing belief in retribution. *On the Road* was exalted as a bible of kicks or rebuked as the dogma of an irresponsible and amoral hoodlum.

We have not really left out pasts behind us. The past continues to haunt us and to shape our perceptions. Without knowing why, sometimes we preconceive those objects from the distant and the near past. *On the Road* is one such object. Its author, Jack Kerouac, no less than anyone else, was haunted by his past. He had preconceived his identity as an author, as a Beat, and as a young man in search of self-respect and fame. Recognizing our desire to lose nothing, pursuing truth and traveling a path that led to self-evasion, Kerouac's works, his self-awareness of his struggle to become an artist, represent our struggle to free ourselves from the past.

Jack Kerouac was not forgotten. The youths who came of age in the mid 80s were without a definitive identity, but they might have been called the disengaged. For many of them, their visionary potential was harnessed to Voodoo Reaganomics, a revival of class warfare and the intensification of a cold-war policy, reminiscent of the Eisenhower Era and the youths of 1952 characterized in John Clellon Holmes' essay "This is the Beat Generation": "Pot user[s]" looking for "a feeling of somewhereness" (21, 26). While Bret Easton Ellis' first

novel, *Less Than Zero*, circulated among college students anxious to read about themselves and was touted the new *Catcher in the Rye*, *On the Road*, presented to readers by the Signet trade edition as "the book that turned on a generation," at a mere \$3.50, had survived to its 25th anniversary. Ellis and Kerouac read back to back made strange bedfellows but made sense to a generation characterized by familiarity with Manhattan suites, black-markets of New York City, fast living in Los Angeles, and confidence in the stock market. Even the most nonliterary students were outfitted with ready-made readings of Kerouac's novel, for the legend of Kerouac was passed down to this generation born in the mid 60s, on the down side, a few years before Kerouac died, proving that an old dream (call it the beat dream) flourished.

The last 15 years an interest in beat culture has burgeoned. In 1985, a documentary film called *On the Road with Jack Kerouac* appeared in theaters. Among other places, the award winning documentary played at the Tivoli Theater in St. Louis, Missouri, the city that was once home to Jay Landesman's Crystal Palace and to William Burroughs. In 1990, Kerouac's old Hanover recordings were re-released with some of Kerouac's other recorded materials. The following year, Allen Ginsberg's photographs of the Beat Generation appeared in *Rolling Stone*, and copies of photographs from the original negatives were sold at the Beat Book Shop in Boulder, Colorado. Meanwhile, Ellis' career faltered with the publication of the gruesome *American Psycho*, one of the most talked about and least read books--alongside Norman Mailer's

*Harlot's Ghost*--in recent literature. America had come full circle to the whispers of the furtive; political intrigue was hip but excessive violence was offensive.

Because such expressions as "down and out" have become the domain of the middle class it is not difficult to translate America's current anxieties into the word *beat*. The image of beat is readily apparent in the work of young actors: Val Kilmer as Jim Morrison (the Oliver Stone movie flashed a Kerouac book to show his literary influence on The American Poet), Johnny Depp as Edward Scissorhands, and other young actors labeled in *Esquire* (a magazine historically connected to the dissemination of the meaning of beat) the new James Dean exemplify the beat image.<sup>1</sup> Gilbey's Gin advertises itself as "the drink of the original beat generation." David Cronenberg's screen rendition of *Naked Lunch*, Dan Wakefield's *New York in the 50s*, and the appearance in a Nike advertisement of a Mexican huaraches, the shoes Sal Paradise wore on the road, testify to the resurgence of an interest in beat culture. Today, beat exists as image and style. Its influence is perhaps more profound than some people would like to admit. But, only in deference can Kerouac be called the Beat Generation's most representative icon.

Jack Kerouac died 21 October 1969. He was buried in Lowell, Massachusetts. "Ti Jean, John L. Kerouac, Mar. 12, 1922-Oct. 21, 1969 - He Honored Life" are the words engraved on the flush stone, a modest

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1. See Eve Babitz, "They Might be Giants or Maybe They Just look like the New James Dean," *Esquire* May 1992: 118-121+.

tribute. The road to Kerouac's grave leads visitors to an unshaded marker. People leave behind whiskey bottles, beer cans, cigarette butts, written notes, and flowers. There is no question that Kerouac's presence is still felt by many. To this day, people in Lowell have Kerouac stories to tell. The summer of 1991, one Lowell man talked about Kerouac's funeral. He was proud of his memory and of his newspaper clipping: "It was quite a big thing. People like Ginsberg came. Must have been long ago. . . ." The Lowell man kept in plastic wrappers a first edition of *Maggie Cassidy* and the first Signet edition of *On the Road*. "I might sell these one day," he said.

Kerouac found fame. Fortune did not come with it. His struggle to survive and to outlive the story recorded in the pages of *On the Road* did. Kerouac made a name for himself by appearing to be at odds with a community that seemed to have accepted its losses and had moved onward in search of new definitions by which to judge itself. It is a struggle worth acquainting ourselves with. It is a story about the search for selfhood and a history of the violence a critical community Kerouac belonged to, fearful of loss, can do to the inner life of an individual.

The young Podhoretz, writing from Clare College, 6 June 1951, had commented to Lionel Trilling:

It's [studying abroad] given me a taste of the good life, of what it means to be a social being, of working in comfort and in a relaxed atmosphere; it's making me learn--in your phrase--how much more important it is to be private than public, and it's teaching me what that 'private' implies.  
(NNC)

Podhoretz had learned from Trilling that the spirit of modernism was the Scholar Gipsy. In the Preface to *The Opposing Self*, Trilling said of the Scholar Gipsy: "[H]e is what virtually every writer of the modern period conceives, the experience of art projected into the actuality and totality of life as the ideal form of the moral life" (*The Opposing*, "Preface"). In truth, Trilling and other critics began to doubt the efficacy of moral life to give meaning to their own work. In 1955, the same year that *The Opposing Self* was published, Trilling wrote Podhoretz: "I can't help feeling that criticism, in the way I have up to now conceived of it, is at an end for me." Trilling told Podhoretz that he and others he had talked to carried with them the sense that they no longer had the strength "to find the language for" their "emotions." And besides, "the emotions . . . gave . . . no pleasure or satisfaction." Trilling concluded, "I feel as they do, and I suppose it means something that we represent three different 'generations'" (NNC). This community, of which Trilling and Podhoretz were a small part, viewed the Beat Generation as criminal barbarians, and we have largely accepted this view of Kerouac and his work. As we will discover, this view in of itself is a distortion of Kerouac. What this distortion conceals is what Kerouac's work most fully reveals, our fear of loss and a weariness of our own selves that we cannot shake.

For Kerouac, his fight to preserve his identity as he himself knew it to be was not against a few men but against a whole nation of judges, critics, and readers who had misread *On the Road*. As Kerouac maintained, "I have never had anything to do with violence, hatred,

cruelty, and all that . . . God will forgive in the long end. . . I'm asking about you, America" ("The Origins" 75-76). Here, in the middle of the 20th century, was the voice of Billy Budd resigned to his fate.

Schooled at Columbia University and friendly with Raymond Weaver, Kerouac was familiar with Melville's story about Billy Budd. Billy Budd is the good-natured foretopman, his only defect is a stutter and a beautiful form that evoke John Claggart's wrath. Claggart falsely accuses Billy Budd of organizing a mutiny. When Captain Vere orders Billy to "[s]peak" and "defend" himself Billy is afflicted with his "vocal impediment" (59, 60). An uncontrollable paroxysm is vented in him, he is paralyzed, and when the captain tries to calm him, Billy's "right arm shot out," striking Claggart dead (60). Although Captain Vere knows in his heart that Billy is innocent, he sentences him to death. Billy's last words are: "God bless Captain Vere" (83-84). In a naval chronicle, Billy is said to have stabbed Claggart in the heart, and he is named the leader of a mutinous faction. Melville's *Billy Budd* is a strong undercurrent in Kerouac's literary history. Critics introduced the ideas of mutiny and insurrection to delineate Kerouac's role in the Beat Generation.

The fall of 1968, William F. Buckley interviewed Kerouac on *Firing Line*. Of what the Beat Generation had become Kerouac said: "It's just a movement which is suppose to be licentious, but it isn't really." Of himself he said:

A lot of hoods, hoodlums, and communists jumped on our

backs. Well, on my back, not his [Ginsberg]. Ferlinghetti jumped on my back and turned the idea that I had that the Beat Generation was a generation of beatitude and pleasure in life and tenderness--but they called it in the papers a "beat mutiny," "beat insurrection." Words I never used, being a Catholic. I believe in order, tenderness, and piety. (text from *What Happened to Kerouac*)

When Buckley described the movement as having become "ideologized," "misanthropic," and "generally objectionable," Kerouac responded: "It was pure in my heart." In a time of social upheaval one thing seemed certain to many people: Jack Kerouac, the cynosure of the beat movement, was the Handsome Sailor of America. He was named the leader of the rebels.

The idea of beat mutiny was sensationalized ten years previous to the *Firing Line* interview. In the first issue of *Horizon*, published September 1958, there appeared "The Cult of Unthink." Marlon Brando, James Dean, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Elvis Presley, and Theodoros Stamos were the main attractions of the article. Robert Brustein credited Brando's portrayal of Stanley Kowalski for creating the model Beat Generation hero. Unkindly looking upon Brando impersonators, Brunstein's description of Brando's "tribal followers" was an excoriation:

He peers out at the world from under beetling eyebrows, his right hand rests casually on his right hip. Walking with a slouching, shuffling gait, he scratches himself often and almost never smiles. He is especially identified by the sounds that issue from his mouth. He squeezes, he grunts, he passes his hand over his eyes and forehead, he stares steadily, he turns away, he scratches, then again faces his adversary, and finally speaks--or tries to. (38)

Parody turned into assault on Kerouac and others Brustein believed

were morally defunct "conformists" (38). "Kerouac, Ginsberg, McClure, . . . fling words on a page not as an act of communication but as an act of aggression; we are prepared for violence on every page" (42).

Comparing the beat movie hero to Billy Budd, a character of literature who hardly exemplifies Brustein's depiction of the "hero's violence" and "his antisocial nature" (43), convinced that "[j]uvenile delinquency" and violence were the subjects of *On the Road*, Brustein moralized: "It is not so long a jump from the kick-seeking poet to the kick-seeking adolescent who, sinking his knife into the flesh of his victim, thanked him for the 'experience'" (42). Brustein fixed in the mind of the public the image of the beat artist as an inarticulate and violent individual.

In the Fales Library, New American Library collection, there is a Viking Press release, dated 24 September 1958, that documents Kerouac's response to Brustein's article. Kerouac stated:

When artists are accused of unintelligence by bystanders with nothing to do but make a little talented living off the original material of these others, it's really a laugh. . . . It sounds vaguely with a prurient Nazi ring against the arts themselves.

This business of saying that the 'kick-seeking poet' is one step removed from the 'kick-seeking adolescent' who sinks a knife into someone and says 'Thanks' (kick-seeking cretin, I'd term it)--this kind of thing is the true and really rather sinister anti-intellectualism in America today, and it's coming from the new young critics and their angry repressed mentors. . . .None of my characters travel 'in packs' or are a 'juvenile gang' ensemble or carry knives. I conceived *On the Road* as a book about tenderness among the wild young hell-raisers like your grandfather in 1880 when he was a youngster. I have never exalted anyone of a vio-

lent nature at any time. . . . Dean Moriarty and Sal Paradise were completely spiteless characters, unlike their critics.

Despite what Kerouac said about "The Cult of Unthink," despite his stance against violence and anti-intellectualism, Kerouac and *On the Road* became an inseparable part of Brustein's depiction of the youth with the knife, "much muscle and little mind, often surly and disoriented, prepared to offer violence with little provocation" (38). Two years later, one critic would write: "The beatnik battle is waged by an anti-intellectual, anti-artistic gang of sentimental dabblers and semi-criminal nihilists, devoted to destruction, motivated by pettiness, and equipped with mediocrity" (Butler 91). Critics were often jaded by their own desires and motives, and readers were prepared by articles such as "The Cult of Unthink" to read the work of a generation whose creativity seemed subordinated to themes of loneliness and violence.

In Holmes' literary history, *Nothing More to Declare*, there is a well-known account of how Kerouac coined the words Beat Generation. Holmes and Kerouac had observed in the late 40s something unusual about "the young hipsters of Times Square" (106). Kerouac "described" how the hipsters walked, and Holmes pressed Kerouac to tell him "what was the peculiar quality of mind behind it?" (106).

"It's a sort of furtiveness," he said. "Like we were a generation of furtives. You know, with an inner knowledge there's no use flaunting on that level, the level of the 'public,' a kind of beatness--I mean, being right down to it, to ourselves, because we all *really* know where we are--and a weariness with all the forms, all the conventions of the world. . . . It's something like that. So I guess

you might say we're a *beat* generation," and he laughed a conspiratorial, the Shadow-knows kind of laugh at his own words and at the look on my face. (107)

Being beat, in Kerouac's words, was to be down and out but also confident in knowing that everything would turn out all right. It was the kind of trust Billy Budd put in Captain Vere to make the right decision about his fate. But *Billy Budd*--if read as a story of the artist's struggle--also shows us the risk of that kind of trust and resignation to one's fate; it could end in self-effacement, as it ended for Kerouac.

The Beat Generation Kerouac was named the spokesman for was not a vision but an image, a culture's obsession with personality and style. Kerouac did not condone violence, not even fashionable existentialist violence, he made that clear with his response to Brustein's article. Because Kerouac believed in the truth of his vision of beat, that in fact he was recording its history, emphasizing its dissonance and the failure of beat life to bring happiness, the ultimate realization that after all is done America is an "awful land" (*On the Road* 309), his attempts to clear his own name of the violence attributed to it were obliterated by the pervasiveness of the existentialist plea in society among artists and intellectuals.<sup>2</sup> In Kerouac's writing conflict was unresolved and the "I" persona did not seem to change. Irresolution confounded the critic whose sense of reality was shaped by

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2. Albert Camus' *The Rebel* was published in America in 1954. The *Chicago Review* devoted its Summer 1959 volume to existentialism and literature.

the tradition of art written in--as Lionel Trilling phrased it--"the lucid Dorian mode which sends men into battle with evil" ("Of This" 81).

Foreseeing the position writers such as Kerouac would be put into, in "Of This Time, of That Place" (1943), Lionel Trilling elucidates the position of marginality in relation to the condemnation of the artist to fact. Trilling's fictional character, Joseph Howe, poet and teacher, condemns his most brilliant student Tertan "from person to fact" (105). Tertan's clothes are musty, his rhetoric long-winded and sensational, his appearance singles him out, and his madness seems self-inflicted for the sake of relishing his own separateness. He is in love with Howe, a man of letters, yet his concern is not for himself but for Joseph Howe: "[H]e must be the Paraclete to another aspect of himself, that which is driven and persecuted by the lack of understanding in the world at large, so that he in himself embodies the full history of man's tribulations and, overflowing upon others, notably the present writer, in the ultimate end" (100).

Howe is secretly sympathetic with Tertan. Howe's poetry has been recently reviewed in *Life and Letters* by Frederic Woolley as "precious subjectivism." Criticized for not giving the people what they need most, "the true tradition of poetry," Howe, according to Woolley, is an "evil" and a "self-intoxicated" poet whose verse "turns men's minds from the struggle" (81). Howe's autonomy to make decisions about how he will exercise his own rituals of power as teacher is upset by Woolley's critique. He must decide if he should bring Tertan to the Dean's attention. Should he sell Tertan out? For a moment Howe

believes that he should leave Tertan as he is, a question: "What is Tertan?" (94). But just as he decides this he asks to see the Dean. "[H]e would recall this simple, routine request and the feeling of shame and freedom it gave him as he sent everything down the official chute" (94).

Howe's actions are more poignant as he realizes that another student, Blackburn, is to some degree mad, an insidious madness that masquerades under the protection of institutions and platitudes. Blackburn's academic record is spotless, above average in his achievements, a lackey to academic privilege and power, capable of playing the game, he is "the vice president of the Council, the manager of the debating team, and secretary of Quill and Scroll" (109). Nevertheless, Howe feels forced to fail Blackburn's midterm, whereas he gave Tertan an A-. Blackburn insists upon an explanation for his failed exam. As proof of Blackburn's ineptitude Howe reads from Blackburn's blue-book his commentary about *The Ancient Mariner*, "a world of charm to which we can escape from the humdrum existence of our daily lives . . . in this warm and honey-sweet land of charming dreams we can relax and enjoy ourselves" (102).

Blackburn argues that Howe cannot offer any objective proof that his answer is wrong. Howe outwardly stands firm, but he cannot stand to see Blackburn dribble and offers him the chance to take the exam again. The second time around the exam is no better; in fact, it is worse, but Howe, afraid of Blackburn, gives him a C-. The grade is still not good enough for Blackburn, and he threatens Howe: "[T]he

Dean's opinion might be guided by the knowledge that the person who gave me this mark is the man whom a famous critic, the most eminent judge of literature in the country, called a drunken man" (108). Howe retaliates by giving Blackburn a F. Blackburn falls to his knees and pleads for leniency. The thought comes to Howe: "The boy is mad" (109).

Just before the commencement exercises begin, Howe suffers the humiliation of one arm interlocked with the Dean's who holds on his other side Blackburn's arm. Tertan sees them and remarks, "Instrument of precision" (115), and slips away into the crowd. The Dean proudly tells a horrified Howe that Blackburn is the first student from the graduating class to be offered a job. It was no secret that Trilling based the Tertan character on a student he had taught at Columbia University. The story is remarkable not for any resemblance to the young man who would become the famous beat poet but for Trilling's perception that a unifying force of literary criticism was the power to choose to call an author's reality unreal. In this context, to the question: What is *On the Road*? the answer had been given. It is existentialism; madness of the self-intoxicating kind, and "isolation," Alfred Kazin wrote, "that imagines anything because it has contact with nothing" ("Psychoanalysis" 48).

Kerouac was at the center of a prominently publicized literary group from which he would eventually refuse to be with. In Kerouac's 1969 *Paris Review* interview he told Ted Berrigan about the Beat Generation: "That community feeling was largely inspired by the same characters I mentioned, like Ferlinghetti, Ginsberg; they are very social-

istically minded and want everybody to live some kind of frenetic kibbutz, solidarity and all that. I was a loner" (102). Most readings of *On the Road* have taken for granted that Kerouac was part of the Beat Generation and that his novel is representative of beat literature. Kerouac was an observer, ascribing certain beat characteristics to the hipsters and confidence men of his writings, and he was a benefactor, encouraging writers, such as Ginsberg, to proceed with their literary careers as they saw fit. A member of a small literary group, Kerouac remained outside of the Beat Generation, a literary group that was transformed into a social-commercial movement, as we will see in chapter six.

Upon Gilbert Millstein's request, Holmes wrote "This Is the Beat Generation" for the New York Times Magazine, published 16 November 1952. In this essay, Holmes described the generation he called beat in his first novel, *Go* (1952). According to Holmes, the Beat Generation was made up of a variety of economic strands. It did not matter what a person was: junkie, secretary, mechanic, college student, or lawyer. It mattered that these people had been born into a world that might be destroyed by a bomb. "They were brought up in these ruins and no longer notice them" (23). They had taken the uncertainty of the future for granted. They did not want anyone to tell them that their lives should be otherwise, for they knew no other way to live. "Get off my back" was a popular slogan of the young (Fielder, "The Un-Angry" 170). Without an unifying force among them, they sought among the ruins for something to believe, a hero who would be their God.

Inevitably, Holmes noted, they were forced to turn inward: "[F]or today's young people there is not as yet a single external pivot around which they can, as a generation, group their observations and their aspirations" ("This Is" 26).

Holmes' novel, *Go*, combined writers, intellectuals, and hipsters into one group and used the term "beat generation" to describe them. At the center of *Go* is Paul Hobbes, a writer who is not completely integrated into the eclectic group Holmes depicted. He struggles to write a novel, save a bad marriage, and come to terms with his attraction to those who roam the underground. Most of all, Hobbes strives to accept himself as the essentially intellectualized observer he is. The two men Hobbes finds himself the closest to, Pasternack and Stofsky, are in his words: "'[B]adly educated' but at least not 'emotionally impotent' like so many young men who had come out of the war."

They never read the papers, they did not follow with diligent and self conscious attention the happenings in the political and cultural arena . . . They operated on feelings, sudden reactions, expanding these far out of perspective to see in them profundities which Hobbes was certain they could not define if put to it. (35)

The most interesting and developed character of the novel is David Stofsky, a young Jewish poet who has a vision of God and William Blake as one. Holmes had consulted Ginsberg about his portrayal of Stofsky, and Holmes admits that he wrote a thinly disguised fiction. In fact, the first manuscript contained the names of real people; conversations were sometimes taken word for word from journals Holmes kept (Holmes, Introduction xviii). Within limits, *Go* is a fairly accurate

record of the spirit of a small group of people who became known as the Beat Generation.

Gene Pasternak, another hopeful writer, is the first character in *Go* to use the word beat. For him, beat is a way to describe the people he has seen on the streets. Pasternack's knowledge that something is "happening all over the country, to everyone; a sort of revolution of the soul" is intuitively applied "with peculiar clarity" (36). Echoing Kerouac's words, Pasternak says, "You know, everyone I know is kind of furtive, kind of beat" (36). Later, Hobbes uses *beat generation* as an appositive to "this underground life!" (126). For Pasternak, the words beat generation remain an intuitive attempt to name the spirit of a people. Toward the end of Part Two, Hobbes begins to see beneath the surface of underground life and beyond the physical reality of Times Square. At a jazz club, The Go Hole, Hobbes studies two men and a girl who characterize the "ennui" and "passionless trance" he associates with the hipster (210). That evening Hobbes begins to tell Estelle "about the 'beat generation,' tell her that though he did not know that it existed, somehow he sensed that it was there" (211).

As more people begin to use the phrase beat generation in *Go*, the term takes on a meaning quite different from Pasternack's or Hobbes'. Hobbes' wife, Kathryn, who works at a job she hates so that Hobbes can stay home and write, says of the unemployed Harte Kennedy: "It's been two weeks and I'll bet he hasn't even been looking. That's the *beat generation* for you!" (166). As the actions of the characters become more central to focusing the story--Kennedy steals gas, Cannastra dies

on the subway, Stofsky is involved with criminals and is caught with stolen goods stashed in his apartment--Beat Generation seems to take on the snide and sneering force that Kathryn gave to it.

Holmes' article "This Is the Beat Generation" was a primer for a popularized existentialist explanation for the origins of the beat phenomena, a vision Kerouac had not meant to be articulated by a science or a philosophy but by the fictional people of a novel. In February and March of 1958, *Esquire* printed two articles, the first by Holmes, the second by Kerouac. Holmes' article was titled "The Philosophy of the Beat Generation," while Kerouac's article carried the more definitive title, "Aftermath: The Philosophy of the Beat Generation." The publication of both writers' views provides us with an opportunity to restrict our definition of beat to what Kerouac himself had intended. In the brief editorial that preceded Kerouac's article, the editors of *Esquire* pointed out that Kerouac's "thoughts" "amplify and contrast" Holmes' essay, which had appeared in the February issue (24). Holmes did not read Kerouac's statement until after it appeared in *Esquire*. In a letter dated 26 February 1958, Holmes wrote to Kerouac: ". . . I read your really beautiful thing in *Esquire*, old buddy, a really solid, final statement of the historical curve of this whole thing, and no one of us need to write about it again" (Knight and Knight, *Kerouac and the Beats* 145).

Holmes conceded that Kerouac's point of view was the best explanation about the origin of the Beat Generation. Unlike Holmes' essay, Kerouac's article is without doctrine. It is a description of Beat

Generation as "a vision . . . in the late Forties" that Holmes, Ginsberg, and Kerouac saw "of a generation of crazy illuminated hipsters suddenly rising and roaming America." Kerouac continued:

gleaned from the way we had heard the word *beat* spoken on street corners in Times Square and in the Village, in other cities in the down-town-city-night of postwar America--*beat*, meaning down and out but full of intense conviction. . . . It never meant juvenile delinquents; it meant characters of a special spirituality who didn't gang up but were solitary Bartlebies staring out the dead wall window of our civilization. (24)

It was this vision that Ginsberg wrote about in *Howl*, Holmes in *Go*, and Kerouac in *On the Road*. Of this Beat Generation, Kerouac maintained: "But as to the actual existence of a Beat Generation, chances are it was really just an idea in our minds" (24).

For Kerouac, vision was not only what his imagination produced, it was also a poetic experience, something of extraordinary beauty. The Ghost of the Susquehanna "who'd been looking for bridges in Virginia and Maryland and on this Susquehanna and in the whole Eastern Wilderness for the last forty years as far as I can figure, and on foot too" is this vision of beat man ("The Ghost," ICN, 4). He appears in *The Beat Generation* (an early version of *On the Road*) in an excerpt Kerouac called "The Ghost of the Susquehanna," in *Pic* (218-229), and in *On the Road* (102-107). Kerouac wrote of the ghost:

He'd never find the bridge, never get to Canada between the trees. . . . When the Ghost of the Susquehanna dies he will fall by the side of an obscure road. He will be nothing but a little hump of suit. No one will find him. The weeds will grow and cover him. He will have disappeared into his Promised Canady. Only the Bird of Pure Hope will ever see him. ("The Ghost," ICN, 4-5)

Kerouac saw the spirit of the ghost infused into the post-Korean War youth who "by some miracle of metamorphosis" "had picked up the gestures and the style; soon it was everywhere, the new look, the 'twisted' slouchy look" ("Aftermath" 24). This style Kerouac referred to was reflected in the clothes, drugs, music, and language of the streets. "The bop visions," Kerouac wrote in "Aftermath," "became common property of the commercial, popular, cultural world" (26). What Kerouac saw was the death of the Beat Generation. All that remained of that generation was "the little hump of suit."

For Holmes, by 1958, the search for "kicks," the seeming immoral actions of the Beat Generation, the violence in gangs, in the streets, in the madhouse, and elsewhere were not symptoms of a society that had failed its children and had created monsters but were the outward signs of this generation's longing for value and a return to a primitive state. Holmes' *Esquire* essay led its readers to the view that when art is mystical, rite and magic prevail, and sacrifice becomes the ultimate means to the visionary state and ultimately bespeaks that all of life is art but art itself is not art. This is the creed of the spontaneous. As Holmes wrote, "Literary attitudes, concern about meter and grammar, everything self-conscious and artificial that separates literature from life (they say) has got to go" (Holmes, "The Philosophy" 38). In the final existentialist analysis, those of the Beat Generation live to seek an existence in which every moment lived is emotionally, morally, psychologically, and artistically significant, transcending ordinary day to day existence, becoming the moment

to moment thrill of finding oneself at the center of a vast creative force, a god-head of profundity aching to be. As one approaches the center of the centrifugal force, the hero, the role the tragic beat is to play if he is to escape signifying the slapstick of sentimentality and bruised consciousness, is determined to have the ultimate experience: he must free himself. Only, what he is compelled to free himself from, a primal knowledge, the intuition that he carries on his own being the chains of God's most powerful and darkest angel, is not clear to us or to him.

From such a perspective, this generation was enacting an old story. From the existentialist point of view the Beat Generation knew that a paradise would not be found inside the walls of civilization in which betrayal is always possible, even necessary, if conflict is to play itself out into what the guardians of culture call art. For this reason, there arose this generation's paradoxical urge to seek God through violence, for it was the individual alone who could be redeemed. Life was nasty, brutish, and short, and the name *Paul Hobbes* reminds us of that.

Kerouac did not talk about the Beat Generation in terms of the existential experience, Holmes' basic model for analysis. As Holmes wrote, "This is a tragic age because it has provided no way for a man to be heroic (you cannot be heroic without a faith that transcends reality), and yet men continue to be motivated by their aspirations as well as their conditioning, and these aspirations continue to be crushed by the world . . ." ("Existentialism and" 151). For Kerouac

the meaning of beat was rooted in the notion of making one's way back to the paradise man and woman had fallen out of--"a yearning for, a regret for, the transcendent value, or 'God,' again, "Heaven'" ("Aftermath" 26). To be beat was to be a modern day saint, not intent on leading an entire nation or race of people into the promised land, but intent on leading oneself.

At his talk at the Hunter College Playhouse, 6 November 1959, Kerouac prefaced the article he had written for the *Is There a Beat Generation?* forum with these words: "The question is very silly because we should be wondering tonight is there a world, but I could go and talk for 5, 10, 20 minutes about is there a world, because there is really no world. . . . And you'll find out" ("Is There"). The article Kerouac read at Hunter was published in a revised and enlarged form in *Playboy* (June 1959) as "The Origins of the Beat Generation." Longer than the *Esquire* article and more loosely composed, this is the text that most people refer to when they talk about Kerouac's "relationship to the Beat Generation" ("Is There").

At Hunter College, Kerouac's tone wavered. "And it's a very funny article," Kerouac said, introducing himself to the Hunter audience, but there are moments in the recording his voice betrays the seriousness of his contemplations, as when he said: "Who knows, my God, but that the universe is not one vast sea of compassion actually, (comma) the veritable holy honey, (comma) beneath all this show of personality and cruelty." He read to his Hunter audience: "I am *only* the originator of the term [Beat Generation], and around it the term and the generation have taken shape." Seven months later, people read: "I *am*

the originator of the term . . ." (32). Nor did the *Playboy* article include the two poems Kerouac had used to punctuate the Hunter speech.

"To Harpo Marx" demonstrated that the history of the Beat Generation could not be separated from a conservative outlook that remained hidden in its "spokesman." The poem seemed comical to those who did not understand that the origin of beat was neither in a radical movement, social or literary, nor as the host of the forum said: "[A] symptom of the alienation which many young people experience in trying to adapt to the standards of the problems of our society in this anxious age." Beat was a vision of America's past Kerouac deplored to see vanishing:

it goes back to those crazy days before World War II when teenagers drank beer of Friday nights at Lake ballrooms . . . and our fathers wore straw hats like W.C. Fields. It goes back to . . . the ravings of the Marx Brothers (the tenderness of Angel Harpo at harp, too). ("Is There")

"To Harpo Marx" was a lament for what Kerouac himself was becoming. "Harpo, I'll always love you!" Kerouac exclaimed. A generation could not share in his defilement or vision of his own ineptitude: "O Harpo! When did you seem like an angel/the last time?/and played the gray harp of gold? . . ." His voice was boyishly exuberant and sad.

Harpo, in your recent night-club appearance  
in New Orleans were you old?  
Were you still chiding with your horn  
in the cane at your golden belt?

Did you still emerge from your pockets  
another Harpo, or screw on

new wrists?

Was your vow of silence an Indian Harp?

In December of 1958, Kerouac had read to jazz accompaniment some of his work at the Village Vanguard. Dan Wakefield wrote of the event for *The Nation*: "Jack Kerouac sweats beneath the spotlights of a nightclub to bring his novel back to the bestseller list" (68). Howard Smith wrote for the *Village Voice*: "He must have hated himself in the morning--not for the drinks he had, but because he ate it all up the way he really never wanted to" (72). Parading himself at an expensive nightclub, Kerouac was made to feel guilty for wanting respectability. He seemed fated to disappoint both sides of the political spectrum, neither of which could understand that for Kerouac reading at the Vanguard was not a hypocritical pose. He had written a novel, the sales of which he wanted to increase, not only for the sake of his literary reputation and Viking's commitment to him via Malcolm Cowley but for the future of his mother. In his mother's presentation copy of *On the Road* Kerouac had written:

This book, which will buy you the little cottage you always wanted, where you'll find complete peace and happiness for the first time in your long and helpful life.

From Ti Jean  
your son  
the author  
Jack Kerouac

(qtd. in Charters, *A Bibliography* 7)

Kerouac wrote to Donald Allen: "In recent reading appearance at Village Vanguard I was universally attacked, but all I did was stand there and read my heart out, not caring how I looked or what anybody

thought" ("Letter to Donald Allen" 40). Others could not be so sure of Kerouac's intentions. As Kenneth Rexroth said in 1957: "It is impossible for an artist to remain true to himself as a man, let alone an artist, and work within the context of this society" ("Disengagement" 49).

In February of 1959, Kerouac was to have appeared with Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, and Peter Orlovsky at Columbia University. He was conspicuously absent from the group, not coming to Columbia because he was "in crisis," (224) Diana Trilling remarked. In academic circles, Ginsberg had taken over the literary Beat Generation. He was the leader of that beat group, and it was clear he could and wanted to be accepted by the university and accorded an honored place in literature. According to Diana Trilling's review of the event, Ginsberg had been inventing himself since his days at Columbia (216). He contained within his persona the seeds of Blackburn and Terpin. Adept at chameleonic persuasions and auditions, he could be audacious and humble, if not heard by the actual faculty members at least some of the wives of the faculty came to hear him. Lionel Trilling did not hear the love poem Ginsberg had read for him, "Lion in the Room," but Diana Trilling carried its message back to the professor (230). The presence of "Ginsberg & Co." on the very stage that T.S. Eliot had read from a year before begrudgingly erased that part of Ginsberg's life that seemed misguided and barbaric (224). Kerouac did not always present in public a posed image of himself; and so, critics were not content to talk about his work but insisted on talking about Kerouac.

Of all the so-called beat writers, Kerouac was the least adroit at defending himself. And he was the one writer of the group who was not certain whether or not he wanted to be a personality. Of course, what bothers many critics today about the perseverance of beat literature in culture is just that--beat writers are remembered as personalities. A recent issue of *The New Criterion* (1992) included a review of *The Portable Beat Reader* edited by Ann Charters. Bruce Bawer said that "[w]hat Charter chooses to deem their 'protest' consisted, in the years before they became famous, of hanging out, taking drugs, having indiscriminate sex, and living off money stolen from acquaintances or cadged from friends and family." Bawer brought the history of the Beat Generation from the soft focus of romantic remembrance to the hard-edged conclusion:

Once they'd achieved celebrity status, moreover, they were too busy making the front pages to put themselves on any front line; far from hurling "Howl" against a harsh wall, Ginsberg lobbed it into the appreciative arms of newspaper reporters and magazine editors who were eager for some sign of sensational dissent in America--and into the arms, as well, of a growing population of young people in search of an image to suit their notion that they were a special generation. (61)

We cannot continue to talk about Kerouac and the Beat Generation as if they were one and the same. Regardless of who or what the Beat Generation was, it has yet to be sufficiently articulated. The history of beat literature and a working definition of Beat Generation does not lie in the literature itself but in the literary power of those men and women who shaped the beat circle outside of the realm of the novel. Much of the criticism written about Kerouac's writing draws

upon his fiction to describe events in the author's life and has failed at times to make clear source materials and the difference between fictive and real events. The quality of criticism has suffered and created a weak base for future work. Now more than ever, there is a real threat that Kerouac the *author* will never be discovered by those people who help fashion our sense of what literature is of lasting value.

"We're basically unshockable. . . . This generation has been wooed," Bret Easton Ellis said, "with visions of violence, both fictive and real, since childhood" (qtd. in Mailer, "Children of" 157). The sentiment is familiar but significantly different from similar sentiments expressed in the late 40s and early 50s. We have Kerouac and his work to look back to as proof of the difference. We have *On the Road* to read alongside *Less Than Zero*. We see that the eventual outcome of Ellis' authorship was "banality" (Mailer, "Children of" 222), horrific depictions of rape and murder, and advertisements for clothing and expensive gadgets. For Kerouac, *On the Road* led to works of inventiveness and a commitment to life itself, though this became increasingly difficult for Kerouac as his was appropriated by the media and by the Beat Generation.

*American Psycho* proved that the little hump of suit left unworn can turn into sadism, as many critics feared in 1958. But *On the Road* expresses a genuine concern for the value of life, as it was lived by Dean Moriarty and Sal Paradise. It is a novel yearning for a new beginning. "[W]e have to go on to later phases of our lives," Kerouac

said, improvising lines into a section he read from *On the Road* for *The Steve Allen Plymouth Show*, words he did not write in *On the Road* nor in *Visions of Cody*, but nonetheless tried to express in the image of the moth eaten overcoat Moriarty wore when he "bent to it again. Gone" ("Readings From").

Perhaps we will be able to begin to understand our ambivalence toward Kerouac, whom we have glorified and disdained, once we begin to understand Kerouac's ambivalence toward himself and his writing and recognize that the nightmare of the road is a mirror of the past we have wanted to forget, that there is within each one of us a shrouded traveler. This book is about how and why Jack Kerouac became a commodity of the Beat Generation, as it was preconceived, and is remembered, by a nation haunted by the past.

## Chapter Two

### The Lost Father: *The Town and the City*

From the beginning of Kerouac's writing career, critics, reviewers, and editors had trouble making sense of his work. They had difficulty seeing in Kerouac's free wielding prose the carefully structured scene and deliberate form that is characteristic of his fiction. Carl Solomon, for instance, writing about Kerouac's potential literary dealings with Ace Books, expressed befuddlement, fear, and jealousy, writing to Kerouac in a letter dated 14 April 1952:

First off, let's dispense with the nonsense about me disliking you or feeling jealous. You're my boy, my prize writer, and I like you a hell of a lot and want to be your friend. *I do refuse, however, to be mystified by you or cowed by your mumbo-jumbo.* I am convinced you have a wonderful talent (I don't believe in genius) and that you're farther along on the right track than any writer I know. However, this does not make a special being of you or immunize you against the common failings. . . . What is more I am far younger than anybody in the aforementioned movement ["Kerouac-Cassady-Ginsberg-Hunckey-Burroughs-Horns Bean-O'Higgins"]. I have a movement of my own. Its members are all tough Reform Jews. We'll dethrone you in 5 years. (TxU)

Kerouac was wary of publishers' treatments of his work and their intentions toward him. In their view, he was a marketable personality but an author who needed priming.

*The Town and the City* (1950), Kerouac's first published novel, seemed to many people rather ordinary, traditional, and imitative, too long in its telling and too tedious in its reading. The general critical consensus of *The Town and the City* was that it fell short of originality and did not shed the immaturity of its dramatic persona so

that Kerouac retained the status of a fledgling writer and *The Town and the City* fell into obscurity. Though Kerouac's first novel contained the seeds of *On the Road*, in the actual details of the story itself and in its theoretical problems of composition, to this day many people are aware of only one Kerouac novel: *On the Road*. Or readers choose to study the Duluoz Legend, excluding Kerouac's first novel.

Kerouac explained in the introduction to *Excerpts from Visions of Cody* (1960) that "Dean Moriarty becomes Cody Pomeray, Sal Paradise becomes Jack Duluoz . . . and so on in all of my work from now on, published and unpublished, (with the exception of the 1950 fictional novel *The Town and the City*). My work comprises one vast book like Proust's . . ." Kerouac's own view about his first novel is ambiguous. In the introduction to *Big Sur* (1962) he wrote: "*On the Road*, *The Subterraneans*, *The Dharma Bums*, *Doctor Sax*, *Maggie Cassidy*, *Tristessa*, *Desolation Angels*, *Visions of Cody* and the others including this book *Big Sur* are just chapters in the whole work which I call *The Duluoz Legend*." Whether or not Kerouac wanted to exclude *The Town and the City* from *The Duluoz Legend* may be debatable, but one thing is clear: Something in Kerouac prohibited him from seeing the unity between *The Town and the City* and his proceeding work and prevented him from outwardly recognizing its thematic and stylistic similarities to his other novels.

The critical reception of *The Town and the City* and the editorial changes made in his manuscript affected Kerouac's sense of himself as a writer and determined his future attitude toward his publishers

and his writing. *The Town and the City* was perhaps the most heavily edited novel that Kerouac wrote. After all, *The Town and the City* was his first novel to be accepted by a publisher. Yet, with the publication of *The Town and the City*, Kerouac proved himself to be a promising novelist. His artistic production from 1946 to 1948 was slow, often he could not write more than 1,500 words in one sitting, but his struggle to write the history of the Martin family gave him confidence that the fame he wanted was a possibility. For the most part, his emotional state as he neared the end of composing *The Town and the City* was optimistic; he had no doubts about the literary worth of his manuscript. He wrote to Allen Ginsberg, 18 May 1948: "Assured that I have 'matured up to it' all right; how could I miss?--I haven't done anything but write for years and years, and you know I'm not stupid and unintelligent" (Knight, *the unspeakable visions* 5).

Kerouac's literary ambitions originated in youth. His interest in recording on paper his dreams and aspirations began when he was ten years old. He wrote a novel he titled *Jack Kerouac Explores the Merrimac* (McNally 15). He had composed stories at Horace Mann, the preparatory school Columbia University sent him to for a year to be seasoned for the university football team, and he had to his credit newspaper experience with the *Lowell Sun*.<sup>1</sup> Besides having written the novella, *The Sea is My Brother*, which he began in December 1942 and continued in June 1943 aboard the S.S. *George Weems* (Nicosia 103,

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1. "The Brothers" (1939) and "Une Vielle Noel" (1940) were published in *The Horace Mann Quarterly*. See *Two Early Stories* (New York: Aloe Editions, 1973).

107), in the fall of 1941, Kerouac wrote a collection of unpublished stories he planned to call *Atop an Underwood* (Gifford and Lee 28).<sup>2</sup> Kerouac could justly claim that for most of his life he had been practicing his craft. William Burroughs once commented: "Kerouac, when I first met him, had already written a million words, and that was when he was twenty three" (Burroughs, "An Interview With William Burroughs" 34).

By 1950, Kerouac was an accomplished writer with a style of his own, but the Wolfian label used to define this young new writer fated Kerouac for a literary fall. Readers expected from the young Kerouac literature that could be weighed against the work of Thomas Wolfe. One of the better known Beat Generation cultural critics, Seymour Krim, born the same year as Kerouac, recalled in "The Kerouac Legacy," an essay originally published as an introduction to Kerouac's *Desolation Angels*: "I can remember the word being passed around in New York in the late 40s that 'another Thomas Wolfe, a roaring boy named Kerouac, ever hear of him?' was loose on the scenes (and I can also remember the shaft of jealousy that shot through me upon hearing this)" (201). Before Harcourt, Brace accepted *The Town and the City* for publication, to other young New York City writers who wanted fame Kerouac appeared to be something of a literary hero.

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2. After Kerouac completed his short novel *The Sea is My Brother*, he took the manuscript to Raymond Weaver, a professor at Columbia University, to read. Weaver had discovered the *Billy Budd* manuscript. He was interested in Eastern philosophy and gave Kerouac a reading list of Gnostic texts. See Allen Ginsberg's account of this episode in: Barry Gifford and Lawrence Lee, ed., *Jack's Book: An Oral Biography of Jack Kerouac* (New York: Penguin Books, 1979) 42-43.

Kerouac was shy, but he was charismatic, "an irreconcilable division," as Holmes said (Knight, *Kerouac and the Beats* 150), foreshadowing the nature of his battles with the commercialized image of Jack Kerouac, King of the Beats. Most people saw in Kerouac a nonchalant, spirited troubadour. But Kerouac the hard working artist held court to no one but his muse, and lived with his mother in Ozone Park so that he could afford to write. The New York literary games over for the time being until he managed to write another successful work, and with the sales of *The Town and the City* having dropped to almost nothing, Kerouac was divided. As he told Holmes: "I have to make my choice between all *this* and the rattling trucks, where I don't have to explain anything, and where nothing is explained, only *real*" (Holmes, "The Philosophy of the Beat Generation" 36).<sup>3</sup>

Although reviewers did not ignore Kerouac's first published novel, their opinions were mixed. Richard H. Rovere wrote for *Harper's Magazine*, 1950 May: "*The Town and the Country* [sic] is a long, warm-spirited account of small-city life and family evolution. . . . although it contains some skillful characterizations and occasional stretches of powerful writing, has the contrived continuity of a March of Times newsreel" (120). In the *New York Times*, 2 March 1950, Charles Poore called Kerouac "a brilliantly promising young novelist of

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3. In John Clellon Holmes' 1952 novel *Go* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1988), 122, Gene Pasternak, an aspiring writer, says to Paul Hobbes, after a publisher has rejected his novel: "O, I don't really care about it any more. Last night I told myself . . . that I'd have to choose between the drawing rooms full of Noel Cowards and the rattling trucks on the American highways, that's all. I can't have both, and I might as well get used to it."

28 . . . He is a Wolfian, all right, but he brings to his writing an expansive spirit and a sharp eye of his own" (25). *Newsweek's* 13 March 1950 review of *The Town and the City* described the novel as an "almost major work" and likened Kerouac's prose style to the work of Thomas Wolfe (80, 82). For those who liked Kerouac's effulgence, the Wolfian comparison was a gesture of distant admiration, and Kerouac himself had originally been proud that he had written a novel that could be identified with the craftsmanship of Thomas Wolfe. To those who did not like the novel it seemed that Kerouac's writing was unbridled and his theme juvenile. *The Catholic World Review* characterized Kerouac's prose as "verbose, repetitious and inane" and "too precious" (72). According to the *New Yorker*, "Mr. Kerouac's . . . habit of using ten words where one would do inclines the reader to put the book aside until some day when there is absolutely nothing else to read" (15). John Kerouac, as he called himself on the title page of *The Town and the City*, did not make himself famous with his first published novel. He had received a mediocre reception, but the one thousand dollar advance from Harcourt, Brace seemed a fortune to an author, pondering the future of a recently widowed mother.

It seemed to many people that Kerouac had overestimated his talent and his possibilities for success. Perhaps at times his exuberance about his chance for fame did appear an idler's pretentious dream, but Kerouac's perspective about himself was realistic and sometimes, especially in later years, overly disparaging. In his 1968 *Paris Review* interview, Kerouac, tired of the beat label, told Ted Berrigan: "It's our [Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs] work that counts, if

anything at all, and I'm not proud of mine or theirs or anybody's since Thoreau and others like that" (98). In 1951, Kerouac revealed to John Clellon Holmes that he felt that the *Town and the City* had somehow failed to tell the truth (Gifford and Lee 77). And in retrospect, in a letter to Malcolm Cowley, dated 4 February 1957, he called *The Town and the City* "naturalistic."

Kerouac judged what he perceived was a flaw of his early work against an inchoate vision of his plans for a second published novel. In the spring of 1952 Kerouac wrote to Holmes:

What I'm beginning to discover now is something beyond the novel and beyond the arbitrary confines of the story . . . into realms of revealed Pictures . . . *wild form*, man, wild form. Wild form's the only form hold what I have to say--my mind is exploding to say something about every image and every memory . . . (Holmes, *Nothing More to Declare* 81)

The short-lived success of his first published novel caused Kerouac to diminish his own novelistic achievements and push aside his initial judgment about *The Town and the City*. Contributing to our lack of interest in Kerouac's first novel, categorized an apprentice work, disvalued for its indebtedness to Wolfe, he adopted the public's attitude of indifference toward his book.

*The Town and the City* was a young author's experiment in prose. A crescendo of images carries the story forward. We might consider that when Kerouac wrote about "wild form" he conveyed his sense that he had intellectualized his reaction to the extensive editing of *The Town and the City* manuscript. Though for the most part the thematic integrity of the novel was preserved, with certain crucial excep-

tions, as the Northport Public Library's *Town and the City Editors Mss. 1949* shows, there were large deletions of text from the last half of his manuscript. Many scenes of dialogue between George Martin and minor characters were removed altogether. Some details that emphasized the decadence of the city characters were cut, as were other details that might have seemed inappropriate to a 50's sensibility. The line "[Joe] has himself a two-hundred pound sweetheart who lives to see him dive out of her bedroom window in the drowsy afternoons" (15) was removed from the manuscript, as were lengthy descriptions of a few minor characters. Understandably, these kinds of changes could make any author feel as if their story was confined by the arbitrary hand of an editor, but especially for Kerouac, for whom the details of life were the substance of the novel.

Because the life of Kerouac's story depended upon the nonlinear layering of dramatic pictures to give depth to his portrayal of the Martin family, extractions of whole scenes damaged the looseness of lyrical expression he strove to create while simultaneously maintaining the story's focus on the heroic attempt to achieve self-fulfillment. "Wild form" expressed Kerouac's desire to gain control over the text and expand its potential to reflect the awe of ordinary experience that he felt was obstructed by the mechanical and learned grammars of writing and by convention and taste. On the other hand, there were places in *The Town and the City* manuscript, especially in the first volume, that were awkward and benefited from the editorial pencil:

*Manuscript Version*

Take them one by one, the youngsters who are taking in impressions of the world around as though they expected to live forever and bloat themselves into giants, on up to the elder members of the family who are finding assurance everywhere and every day that life is exactly what they had always supposed it to be, and see how they all go through their succession of days, the robust exuberant days, the blistering and bruising and lacerating days of mishap, the days of sudden delight and excitement, the gloomy foreboding musings of a moment, the toothaches and black eyes and measles of the children to the head colds, indigestions, and back-aches of the elders, the days of celebration, the days of dark sickness of heart, all the kinds of days and their moods and happenstances, see how the soul's energy of people burns long and savagely, like rare oil, with a wick that is cunning and hardy. (*The Town and the City* 1949 Editor's Mss. Vol. I, 9)

#### *Published Version*

Consider them one by one, the youngsters who are taking in impressions of the world around as though they expected to live forever, on up to the elder members of the family who find assurance everywhere and every day that life is exactly what they always supposed it to be. See how they all go through their succession of days, the robust exuberant days, the days of celebration, and the days of sickness of heart. (*The Town and the City* 7)

While the edited version is shorter, minimally framing the essential phrase "who find assurance everywhere and every day that life is exactly what they always supposed it to be," except for the removal of the images "bloat themselves into giants" and a "cunning" wick, much of Kerouac's effort to shape this vignette with a sense of continuation and repetition, instilled by the run of short phrases that follow the words "and see how," varying unobtrusively in rhythm and alliteration, probably seemed to him arbitrarily truncated. But editorial parings gave Kerouac the courage, direction, and determination to free

his writing from all editorship.

Such prose would need to be self-contained and unified and rehearsed, at least in the author's mind, so that the essential meaning of any one passage would depend not only upon a few words but also upon the whole of the thought or image.

#### *Manuscript Version*

Everywhere around him is the cool potent heavy-scented magnificent night, the smell of the pine and the pine floor, the reeds swaying in shallow water where toads and crickets make thronging sounds; and that great round brown moon with its sideways brooding, somehow compassionate, sad big face, looking down on him, always on him. . . . (*The Town and The City Editor's Mss.* 1949 Vol. I, 26)

#### *Published Version*

The cool potent heavy-scented magnificent night, the smell of pine, the reeds swaying in shallow water, the thronging sounds of toads and crickets, and the great round brown moon with its sideways brooding, somehow compassionate, sad big face. (*The Town and the City* 18)

Here again, when we compare the published version with Kerouac's 1949 manuscript version we see that for Kerouac sound in itself created parallel structures more naturally than contrived grammatical orderings of words. Images exuberated, melding small forms into a larger unified perception, while preserving the characteristics of individual details.

It is more clear in the original version that a gamut of senses arouse within the "lonely youth" romantic sympathy with the moon. Something of "wild form" is already present in *The Town and the City*. Kerouac was not copying within these pages Thomas Wolfe, but was attempting to express his own relation to the universe without defil-

ing experience that to him was sacred in its origins. Purity of thought, that is, to write in order to re-create the harmony of experience, created out of disordered and dissonant sense impressions, was somehow to make life itself come alive on the page. Kerouac's ultimate aim was to do this without contriving to make words affect liveliness. In a later stage of artistic development Kerouac would call this method of composition spontaneous prose.

*The Town and the City* not only shows Kerouac's development of a writing method, but it also connects us to *On the Road*. The themes and ideas of the first novel often predict and give us insight to the avenues of thought the writer will continue to explore.<sup>4</sup> The similarities between the last scene of *The Town and the City* and the final scene of *On the Road* are too striking to ignore. *The Town and the City* ends with Peter Martin "alone in the rainy night" (498).

He was on the road again, traveling the continent westward, going off to further and further years, alone by the waters of life, alone, looking towards the lights of the river's cape . . . looking down along the shore in remembrance of the dearness of his father and of all life. (498-499)

When Dean Moriarty departs from Sal Paradise, the memory of "the lost father" is utmost in Sal's mind, as is George Martin in Peter's mind.

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4. Although in *Jack Kerouac: Novelist of the Beat Generation* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986), Warren French suggests that more attention should be paid to *The Town and the City*, his reading of the novel narrowly focuses on the way Kerouac wrote himself and his experiences into both Peter and Francis Martin. French treats the emergence of a "personality splitting" in Kerouac "of inestimable value in gaining insight into Kerouac's often tortured and contradictory personality" (xiii, 26).

We might look to *The Town and the City* to gain a more vivid understanding of the meaning of the lost father to *On the Road*. We might ask about *The Town and the City*: What do its farewells and points of departure signify in a world in which loss is the basis for desire and for meaning itself? What is the relevance of loss to Kerouac's later narratives, especially *On the Road*?

"The town is Galloway," wrote Kerouac. The town Kerouac had in mind, when he described the course of the Merrimac River and the "milltown in the middle of fields and forests," in the opening page of *The Town and the City*, was Lowell, Massachusetts (3). But the novel had too much poetry in its voice to be called realistic, as Kerouac imbued the real with ghostly transcendental qualities. This meeting of the real and the imagined was not the "neutral territory" Hawthorne had sought, "somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other." The promise of Kerouac's narrative was that imaginative power would exert itself over reality:

If at night a man goes out to the woods surrounding Galloway, and stands on a hill, he can see it all there before him in broad panorama: the river coursing slowly in an arc, the mills with their long rows of windows all a-glow . . . But he knows that this is not the true Galloway. Something in the invisible brooding landscape surrounding the town, something in the bright stars nodding close to a hillside where the old cemetery sleeps, something in the soft swishing treeleaves over the fields and stone walls tells him a different story. (3)

It is not only that such poetry imparts a dreamlike quality to the story, but it is also an invitation to watch the people of Galloway as

if one too had seen "something" and stood waiting for its meaning to be expounded.

At the center of the first section of the novel the imperative voice quietly commands "the living": "[W]alk down the hillside . . . you will hear the river's ever-soughing rush . . . Follow along to the center of town . . . Look around now . . . It's morning and Galloway comes to life" (4-5). These are fleeting glimpses of life distilled from a picture of what has been, not from what will be. In *The Town and the City* it is time that is poetry itself. Time unites the living and the dead, and human experience is their commonality. Indeed, Kerouac apparently had thought of ending his manuscript with the death of George Martin, in the 1949 editor's version, he typed his name and address at the bottom of the scene that ended with Peter telephoning his mother to tell her and his brother Mickey that George is dead, and Peter says to himself, "'everything'll be all right, in a minute now'" (*The Town and the City* 478). What has been lost is what the narrative grasps firmly, for what has been lost is defined by what is no longer. What remains (actual presence) is the only visible monument to the past.

For Kerouac, words themselves grasped at permanence, housing memories, but the reluctance of words to encompass life and death out of flux was his goad to write and to make words themselves a reality anterior to experience. This anterior reality is symbolized by the Martin home.

Over the years his [George Martin] family gave character to the old gray house and to its grounds, rendering its

shambling air of simplicity, haphazardness, and glass. It was a house that rang with noises and conversations, music, hammer-slamming, shouts down the stairs. At night almost all of its windows glowed as the innumerable activities of the family were carried on. In the garage were a new car and an old car, in the old barn was all the accumulated bric-a-brac that only an American family with many boys can assemble over the years, and in the attic the confusion and the variety of objects were nothing less than admirable.

When all the family was stilled in sleep, when the streetlamp a few paces from the house shone at night and made grotesque shadows of the trees upon the house, when the river sighed off in the darkness, when the trains hooted on their way to Montreal far upriver, when the wind swished in the soft treeleaves and something knocked and rattled on the old barn--you could stand in old Galloway Road and look at this home and know that there is nothing more haunting than a house at night when the family *is* asleep, something strangely tragic, something beautiful forever. (7; my emphasis)

Although a change in tense occurs in other moments in the narrative, the movement from the past tense to the present ("Each member of the family living in this house is wrapped in his own vision of life" [7]) is especially striking because of the change in tense within the last paragraph.

The sense of loss is profound. "It was a house . . ." is a testament to the ravages of time. We are to understand that the family is stilled in sleep no more, their dreams have been severed from waking reality. Because "you" is outside of the memory, the breath of the wind intercedes, an image that represents inspiration as well as a threat to the "soul's energy" (*The Town and the City 1949 Mss.* Vol. I, 9), and it is here between life and death that the family "*is* asleep."

The transformation is not tragic; change, which is elusive, is identified as "something." This unnameable "something" is the same IT that we find later in *On the Road*. The triumph of *The Town and the*

City narrative is not that it succeeds in naming the unknowable, but that it might attempt to break the continuum of time. Poetry as actual presence and prose as the falsifier of that presence must struggle to exist within the conventions of the narrative and within the convention of time. The direction of the narrative is outward, that is, time is not collapsed into a series of singular definitive moments that by succession and juxtaposition give the reader a sense of chronology, but time is syncopated, the accent of a particular image shifts from passage to passage, stirring within us a sense of corresponding modification within ourselves, as we respond to the images and characters.

To Kerouac an individual's position in time is tentative and self-mocking:

The weatherbeaten house is buffeted by winds: and at evening the lights glow warmly in the windows---if you watch, you can see some of the Martins moving about within in that somehow stupid and casual manner that people have at home when you see them from outside in a window. It is unbearable out on the Old Galloway Road in the February night, there are icy ruts sparkling in moonlight; then dry sweeps of cold lashing from everywhere, and across the lorn fields the birch is bantering in bent and bitter misery, demented snow-swirls and wraiths twist across the flats, there's brown darkness above, and white night clouds. Great branches crack above you . . . (*The Town and the City* 1949 Editor's Mss. Vol. I, 31)

Even though this passage is the counterpart of the passage describing the sleeping Martin house, this section was edited out of the 1949 manuscript. Without its inclusion in the published version of *The Town and the City*, this passage which draws our vision outward, away from the house, suggesting that in waking the Martins are protected

from the world outside, the significance of "you" to the narrative is obscured and fragmented. We do not see that without a perfected dream reality to connect the Martins with the exterior world they are a befuddled and awkward people, unaware of the forces that draw them away from the shelter of home. For Kerouac, as long as the Martins are disconnected from the outer world their actions are futile, and their heroism is baseless, a parody of self-fulfillment. This, for Kerouac, is a bitter irony, because the Martins are a people of rare sensibility, and that in itself, to face the world unafraid to feel, is a heroic sentiment.

Marguerite Courbet "reads signs everywhere" (9). "Nothing escapes the vast motherly wisdom of this woman: she has foreseen it all, sensed everything" (9). In her dreams she communes with her dead child Julian, and he tells her that her sick daughter, Ruthey, will recover. "It was such a vivid dream!" (9), she tells her daughter Rose. The Martin children do not firmly believe in the intuitive grace of Marguerite. But it is through her that they have inherited the knowledge "that loneliness is their heritage and their only means of rediscovering men and women" (15). Marguerite was an orphaned child who grew into womanhood gaining a husband and eight children without shedding the "lonely unknowable feeling in her life" (25). Once while she waited for her children to come home to eat, an extraordinary display of "otherworldly red light" fell upon her and made her question and wonder "who she really was, and who these children were who called back to her" (25).

In *The Town and the City* Kerouac is preoccupied with the inner

life of the individual, for it is this inner life that gives meaning and totality to the family. The Martins are touched by the red light that glows upon the windowpanes of Galloway and breaks through the sky at dawn and at dusk, filtering through the change of seasons. The red light is a multidimensional signifier, but at its center of gravity it is a symbol of loneliness. Loneliness gains spiritual dimension as the red light drifts from object to object, from child to child. The Martins are unaware of their sensitivity to this light. Some of them are self-absorbed by the change in seasons. Peter is "filled with unspeakable premonitions of Spring" (15). Mickey forgets where and who he is (14-15). For him, "unspeakable revelations . . . float in the gentlest blue air" (16), and when Autumn returns he is startled by the thud of apples into "joyous terror," arousing in him a heightened awareness "of melancholy and loss" (20). From their mother the Martin children have acquired a sense of separateness and independence. From their father they have inherited enduring sorrow, which they are vaguely aware of existing within him. Awareness of such extremity of emotion in himself has come too late to George Martin: "[H]e wondered and lamented and cried out to himself, and repined in loneliness" (44). In the 1949 manuscript, Kerouac had added, "'This is it," he would think, "this is the way life is; then you die and it's all over, you never come back to it, you don't know what is while you're here, no one else knows, God no one knows, then you die and you never come back" ( Vol. I, 82).

The Martin mother and father are haunted by the depth of feeling that courses in their blood, but they cannot articulate its meaning

and are wearied by premonitions of failure and loneliness that imbue their everyday life with potent Martin tragedy, but it is not tragedy that fulfills the individual or transcends the necessity of self-fulfillment. The children, we are told, will "give brooding rare articulation to the poor things of life, and the rich, dark things too" (15). They will regenerate the Martin heritage. The emphasis on the immediate generation of Martins is put on their challenge to "rediscover . . . men and women" (15). Rebirth is essential to this point. Language is a means to rediscover and generate new meaning, which is unavailable to the Martin parents, making them unwillful agents of nature and social relations. The Martin children must redeem their parents' suffering through suffering and discovery of what is rightfully their life beyond Galloway. Movement from the town to the city, as the title of the novel implies, is a broadening of horizon; the path is circular, and as an agent of spirit, or time, in Kerouac's sense of the word, such breadth of life must encompass, not destroy, and its function is to create intimacy and individual self-fulfillment. When Peter does not allow Red Magee to bully him on the football field and smashes full force into Red, who did not suspect the young Peter's strength, hurting Red's neck, Peter is frightened by this triumph: "[H]e rushed along ignoring the new dark knowledge he now half-understood--that to triumph was also to wreak havoc" (63). This kind of triumph is anti-Kerouacian, because it is antisocial and destructive, but Kerouac also realizes it to be a step toward achieving poetic genesis within the individual.

The child's process of obtaining a self separate from the family

is painful and cannot be achieved without first understanding the meaning of loss and loneliness. Kerouac found its tenor in the metaphor of the road. In *The Town and the City* the road metaphor originates with a child's departure from home. When Tommy and Harry Campbell steal a rowboat and row up river so that everyday might be a Saturday, Peter and Charley follow after them to warn their friends that the adults are coming to look for them. Joe, the eldest Martin boy, leads the way. After the Martin boys find Tommy and Harry, a day of adventure turns sour, as a rainstorm forces all the boys to huddle under a bridge. The shifting winds drench the fire Joe had kindled, and the boys "looked around with frightened eyes at the great desolated woods and the dark river and the whole wilderness of rain around them." The boys feel as if they have "betrayed" "something that had to do with home . . ." (33-34). The sense of disloyalty is keen in Peter Martin, angered when Tommy denies that he had been in tears when his father appeared to take him home, "they walked away from each other and did not speak for six weeks" (34). Inadequately able to judge the significance of life and death, Peter's heroic attempt to warn the Campbell boys of the adult search party does not go beyond play.

Two months later, Peter's brother Julian dies, and he mistakenly tells his father that "Francis is dead!" (35). He is tormented by his mistake. That Julian is gone does not matter to him, what matters is that he cannot renounce his error. He realizes, that even though Francis and Julian are twins and both are sickly, he should not have mistaken their identities. He mourns Francis, not Julian. The imagi-

nary loss is more powerful than his actual loss. He can see only the living twin in the coffin. But the loss of Julian vivifies Peter's awareness of his relation to Francis and serves to emphasize the relative unimportance of death in the Martin family, as opposed to life, for it is life that impresses the individual.

The significance of the elder Joe leading his brothers' search party is made clear in a later scene. Many of Kerouac's cautionary critics have said that his work represents a turn away from the family, tradition, and value. *The Town and the City* makes it clear that the journey away from home is an acting out of the parent's failed dream or unrealized potential. In *The Town and the City* the father represents the desire to live life to its fullest:

On Sundays he absolutely must go driving in his Plymouth, bringing with him a good portion of his family that wants to come along. He drives all over New England, exploring the White Mountains, the old towns on the coast and inland, he wants to stop off everywhere where the food or ice cream looks good, he wants to buy bushels of Mackintosh apples and jars of cider at the roadside stands, and whole baskets of strawberries and blueberries and as much corn as he can carry on the floor of the car. He wants to smoke all the cigars, get in on all the poker games, know all the roads and shores and towns in New England, eat in all the good restaurants, make friends with all the good men and women, follow all the racetracks and bet in all the bookie-backrooms, make as much money as he spends, kid around and laugh and make jokes all the time--he wants to do everything, he does everything. (8)

George's unrealized desires are partly fulfilled by his son Joe.

Joe drives a truck from the East Coast to Portland and makes friends with another truck driver, Paul Hathaway, who is "married to a shrewish worthless woman" (90). Paul is filled with "hate and loneli-

ness," (90) traits that Joe can see and feel in himself. Joe, the big brother, who once led the child search party for the runaway Campbells, is willing to search for Paul's first wife, Jeanie, who now lives in Pittsburgh, and in the midst of a routine delivery, Paul and Joe take the company truck and run across country:

And thus, in this manner, without a second's forethought, Joe and his melancholy wild friend began a mad voyage that was to take them a thousand miles up and down the seaboard and into the middle west, in a truck which was now technically a stolen truck. All of it was done without a moment's reflection and when they would remember it later on they would only recall the wild rushing speed of the truck, the moon meadows along the highway, the shouting and laughter in the high cab, the lunch diners along the road, the music and the madness of the Spring night and the American spaces. They never did find Jeanie in Pittsburgh. (94)

Joe is contrite, when he comes home, and gets a job at a gas station, but then suddenly tells his parents he is going to leave again and go west.

Much was lost in this section of the manuscript, and the editorial decision to cut the following speech shows that to some degree the editors were insensitive to Kerouac's intention: he wanted to make George Martin, the father, the central focus of the story and keep George's relationship with Peter secondary to the plight of the elderly Martin.

"Ah well," said the old man, "you kids have always done what you liked, I never had any say about it, I can't stop you. But if you want my advice, sonny boy, stay home and work here, save your money, you'll have to start working steady *sometimes* you know, here or out west or any place. I see no reason for going a thousand miles just to satisfy your curiosity. 'Course," went on Martin judiciously, reminiscently, "when I was your age I used to want to travel too, I

used to want to go to California -matter of fact I knew two fellers who did go, and in those days you know it really was an adventure---couple of boys from Lacoshua, they went out there---in the days after Horace Greeley was telling young men to go West---I wonder what became of those boys since then. . . . (*The Town and the City 1949 Editors Mss.* Vol. II, 180)

Without this passage, other than the fact that Joe is bored and restless, it is never clear why Joe wants to leave home. His decision to leave home seems cruel and selfish. He tells his mother he is going to the movies, and he takes off for the west. We are not given the chance to see that George Martin is giving Joe permission to leave, and, in effect, telling Joe that he sympathizes with him and regrets that he himself had not gone on the road but remained home. What is unsaid by George dampens Joe's spirits but also gives him the resolve to abide by a code of ethics his father would be proud of.

Joe's characterization is weakened by the deletion of other passages. In the 1949 manuscript, the night before Joe leaves he makes this resolution:

he promised himself one thing that night: that he would not steal again, even if he should find himself in a fix again as he had in Ohio, there was something terrible and sad about it that ruined all the joy, the wild tremendousness that he felt, it was a cheap and furtive thing to do, an unnecessary brutishness in the middle of so much that was beautiful and really great in the world--others could do it, he would hold no brief against what others should do, but he himself wanted peace and joy in being alive, even if he had to work like a dog . . . (Vol. II, 186)

Kerouac intended to make clear to the reader that Joe followed in his father's footsteps and that his journey was an attempt to regain the youth his father had lost. It was not flight from home that Joe

sought.

In a later section of *The Town and the City* we see that these unpublished passages have moral grounding in George Martin's silent ruminations and advise to his son Peter. In a letter to Peter, George wrote: "Keep your chin up and just wait for the best, or the worst, whichever Fate chooses to deal you. But be brave, be gay, be a genuine man whatever you do! . . . Give thanks to the forces of nature that bind us all through life" (262). George's belief in determinism conflicts with Peter's interpretation of his father's letter. Peter wants "life," and his father, having suffered through a number of recent business failures, tells Peter that it's a "living" that counts (271). Peter does not recognize that his father does not mean merely work itself but also freedom from having to fight senseless battles to prove one's worth. He wants to save his sons from the "stupid and violently unreality of things gone mad," (273) that he knows will come to them with the new war. George is afraid that his sons will fall into the same trap that he fell into in 1917 (273). Angered, he writes to his wife that "the poor devils who have to work hard for a living and believe in their families and in a Godly good life" are fighting against "the fools in the world" who believe they are "millionaires living in mansions" (273).

George travels to Chicago to visit his son Francis, hospitalized in a Navy mental-ward. In the meeting between son and father, which lasts thirty minutes, Francis assures George that he is not insane and that the doctors are "fool"s (330). George tells Francis that the most important thing for him to do is to be "humble," (330) and

though Francis sneers at the idea, George holds his ground and repeats his admonishment. He is surprised by Francis' declaration that "[a] man's as strong as his strength and will" (331). Even though son and father cannot agree, George is mystified by the thought that this is the first "real chat" he has had with Francis, and he had to travel "a thousand miles" to have it (331). Francis' response to his father's visit is significant to our interpretation of the Duluoz Legend, for this scene finds its counterpart in *On the Road* when Dean comes across country to see Sal Paradise and then returns home, having barely spent any time with him.

[Francis] realized in a flash of compassionate understanding, and with no little mortification, that his father had traveled a thousand miles to talk to him for thirty minutes, and that it was all over now. And he remembered his father's face and his voice and his big mournful presence, and it was strange to think of it, very strange and surprisingly sad. (331)

To his sons, George Martin is as illusive as Old Dean Moriarty is to Sal. The importance of the motif of the lost father to *On the Road*, as the apotheosis of all that has occurred --"nobody," Sal ponders, "nobody knows what's going to happen to anybody besides the forlorn rags of growing old, I think of Dean Moriarty, I even think of Old Dean Moriarty the father we never found, I think of Dean Moriarty" (310)--is clarified by George Martin's role in *The Town and the City*.

For Kerouac, the father gives his sons a means of finding significance in the drama of their lives. He, in part, is what Peter wants to be: "He began to adopt his father's habit of looking up with stunned wonder when someone spoke to him, yet with a slight differ-

ence, screwing up his face in angry earnestness" (274). The young sons cannot face resignation, as George so simply faces the fate he has been dealt: "There's a long road ahead and all we can do is wait" (274). George is a man resigned, waiting for the end of his life. His inner life moves mysteriously in patterns that are repeated in the dispersion of his family across the United States and in the actions of his children.

George leaves the hospital. Upon returning to the Chicago railroad station, he wonders about all the places he has not seen. "'What is it like in California?'" (332). When George was ten years old he had watched his uncle play cards with a group of circus people. The scene of men playing cards in "an old wooden caboose" (332) triggers in George a memory of an uncle who had worked for the railroads and played cards in such a caboose. Distressed by the "confused desire to live forever," (333) he longs to see and to travel the railroad like the men in the old caboose: "[T]hey've had their whisky and women, and they've had their wives and children too, and they've been everywhere and played a couple thousand poker games, and collected a thousand paychecks, and spent money, and eaten and slept and got drunk and walked around everywhere, and seen all that country" (333). Lamenting the experiences he has forgone, and imagining for himself a different existence, the urge to journey is an explicit expression for the fear of death. This dream to explore the prairies and other vast lands of America is George's last and final attempt to live life, and by relinquishing this dream, returning home on the train instead of adventuring to California as he desires, he is doomed to the existence

he has thus led, and his life must be continued in the living blood of his children: "He was alone in the wide darkness of the world, but he was going home now, and his children were scattered like lights in the land. There was a war, he was on a train, he was old, he was George Martin" (334).

When George Martin takes his small son Mickey to the race track, Martin bets on a filly called Flight. Francis Martin, the one son who despises his family and mocks his father and attempts to make himself into a gallant intellectual, answers Alexander's question: "What's on your mind these days?" with the words, "Flight. I'm getting the hell out of Galloway" (182). Francis' vision of himself is provincial, for he displays in himself what he hates most about the Martins: the blank knowledge of their reality. "'What am I doing here?'" . . . "'Who am I?'" (194) are the questions that haunt him. He is unable to supply himself with an answer that unites him with his family, yet he himself is deprived of feelings for the other Martins and looks at them as if through a microscope.

In one scene, Francis observes of the Martins, "Everybody was doing something--but nobody was *thinking*, nobody was interested in anything finer, more beautiful, more exalted" (115). There is grave judgment in Francis' thought, for the character Francis condemns Kerouac's portrayal of the American family, and, consequently, we must see Kerouac condemning the intellectual who cannot join the experience of everyday with the lofty language and thoughts of philosophers, or in other words, the heart with the mind.

For Kerouac, the greatest sin of man was to turn from one's fami-

ly. And yet, in a very real way, Kerouac himself was guilty of having turned away from his mother and father by the fact that he had chosen to be an author. In their eyes he evaded the responsibilities of life. Kerouac's father did not live long enough to see *The Town and the City* in print; instead, he and Kerouac had the knowledge that his only living son had not finished college, had lost his football career, and had failed to find a job with a steady and substantial income. With this in mind, while Kerouac was writing *The Town and the City*, he had to redeem himself to his family and show to himself the significance of his work and chosen subject. In times of frustration and self-doubt, writing about the fictional Martin family, he must have wondered if he was avoiding the immediacy of human involvement and evading social responsibilities, as defined by society. Was experience as he created it a sacrilegious parody of what he valued the most, life itself?

As the author he must be the dispassionate observer. He must step outside of temporal experience, denigrating the importance of immediacy and self-unity. Because he transforms experience into a representation that is fine and beautiful and exalted, thereby regaining the sense of unity and identity with the experience itself, he must, so that he does not profane the actual experience he bases his art upon, avoid being like the romantic Francis who wants something "finer" and "more beautiful" and "more exalted." In other words, Kerouac did not seek heightened experience, the hedonistic or bacchanalian experience that many critics attributed to the Beat Generation. He sought to combine two distinct activities, deconstructing and reconstructing

time into a single recognizable moment. The apparent paradox in this kind of creativity, in a less theoretical form, was a topic of conversation in a letter Neal Cassady wrote to Kerouac. The letter is dated 27 March 1947.

So lets fall into a potent and true groove in our missives to each other for the next couple of months until I see you. Of course, I'm presupposing you are free enough to move in this, I have your first letter as evidence, all I ask is that in our attempt to fall into a closeness again, you remain as sincere as you have been and just because we're writing instead of talking don't let up in what you have to say to me and please, Jack, don't allow yourself to do what I've been guilty of in the past with other people, that is, you are still sincere, but automatically, the process of writing forces you into a form and therefore, you just *say things rather than feel them*, and the honest attempt to express these feelings is too much so you just, lazily, dash off a newsy letter, or a *pat formal stylelized* letter, or a wild *artificially stimulating* one and so on. These things are for anyone to do, but not us, so to play safe force yourself *to thing [sic] and then write* rather than, think what to write about and what to say as you write. Incidentally, I sense just a hint of the above falseness in your letter . . . (TxU; my emphasis)

Cassady was certain that Kerouac could deconstruct experience in order to reconstruct it as art that might unite individuals, even two people as different as Kerouac and he. Cassady's insistence that Kerouac "thing [think] and then write," was asking Kerouac to deconstruct experience, that is, to experience the loss of self, self-presence, and unity, and *then* reconstruct the experience itself, by moving from the periphery of experience to its center where the sense of unity is enhanced and made more vivid and the illusion of unity seems true to life. Cassady warns Kerouac that he must not take the social relationship for granted; he must be aware of the limitations

of the illusion of self-presence; he must be aware that such an illusion is in itself a falsehood and can destroy the artist.

Cassady continued:

I am most anxious to know how you're progressing in the novel, really, if you don't lick the damn thing soon I will be so upset I'll probably bawl, honestly. Jack, *please* get that thing off your chest, all I can think of when I remember you is this crisis your in and because of that I grieve, rather than find joy when I think of your struggle, if I were just assured than [sic] all you needed was time, I'd forget my concern, however, its been with you so long I fear you must finish it this time, to do you any good, that is to help you grow, so don't become static through the external pressure of time, instead, man, harken back to a while back when you began in the present tense and just wrote, by God! just write Jack, write! forget everything else.

From this letter we understand that Kerouac in Cassady's eyes was guilty of deceit in that Kerouac's apparent concerns about the progress of his novel during this period of composition were about style and ideas. This letter is important because their relationship, as Cassady describes it in 1947, looks forward to the tensions between Dean Moriarty and Sal Paradise in *On the Road*.

By God! Jack, I sure as hell wish you were here, when I'm with you I somehow feel well rounded, completed, at least at peace with myself, rather than busting my head into a lot of negative goddamned crap that means nothing and just frustrates me and in striking out I become even more involved in the whole imposing mess. What I mean by this is that I am dissatisfied with all my social life.

But, Kerouac did not use their relationship literally in order to write an autobiographical novel, as many consider *On the Road*, for he used the tensions in their evolving friendship much earlier than *On the Road*, absorbing Cassady's ideas into *The Town and the City* as a

model for the relationship between Francis and Peter.

When the child Francis slapped Peter in the face, Peter could not understand the reason for his brother's cruelty, and he had prayed for his brother. After George Martin dies, Joe, Francis, and Peter are reunited at a fishing hole, and Peter discerns the significance of that slap in the face. To him, Francis' blow represents his brother's indifference to having fallen from grace. Francis takes for granted the imperfection of man; he is without faith. Peter has forgiven Francis for that slap, for like his father, it is in his nature to forgive. But Francis is too aware of his own fallen state, his dislike of the Martin family, his class hatred, and the falsity of his own self to accept forgiveness.

. . . Francis reddened, "it's just . . . really . . . that the original slap in the face has completely . . . vanished. It cannot be known who did it. It's all wearying--no one knows . . . no one can be blamed. . . . Where is your original annoyed . . . parent . . . or unbelief . . . or whatnot? *Therefore, you see . . .*" Francis leaned forward with the palm of the hand held out. (496)

Francis' awareness of man's fall from grace has blinded him to human suffering. Talk of suffering and "fortitude" is merely sentimentality, a trait he despised in his father (495). Peter's question to Francis, "don't you see those things?" is like a thorn in his side (496). We can understand the difficulty of this question, the guilt it provokes, if we remember that one night Francis had put a drunken Peter to bed and then stood in the darkness of the house and suddenly felt that he had never seen its interior. "'What am I doing here?'" and "'Who am I?'" are questions he cannot answer in the envelope of

his family's "mysterious slumber." In his room, he has the sensation that "he had never seen the room before, not *this* room," and finally, as he stands before a mirror, he knows that the reflection is "Francis Martin," but he is unable to make any real connection between himself and the reflected figure: "[H]e ran his hand through his hair and gaped at himself" (194). At the fishing hole, Francis, realizing that he himself has failed to find inward vision and that his sense of self is fragmented, repeats the words "you see" to Peter twice in embarrassment. Peter's biblical example about "Jesus," who "warned against the sin of accusing any man of madness," (495) suggests to Francis, who is without faith, that Peter's belief in social responsibility, arising out of individual self-fulfillment, is another kind of madness (495).

From the published manuscript the following passage was dropped:

*How he [Francis] is going to live his life and find his work, when he is going to flourish in the fulness [sic] of purpose, what will be his work and goal and life, and in what way he will love--all these things at this time are only hated and avoided, because everything is why and wherefore and blackness everywhere. (The Town and the City Editor's Mss. 1949 Vol. I, 97)*

This unpublished passage, the scene in which Francis gazes at himself in the mirror, and the scene in which the sickly Francis slaps Peter anticipates the confrontation that takes place between Francis and Peter at the fishing hole. Kerouac's own sensitivity to the drama of ordinary life flourished in those creative moments when private experience suddenly and unexpectedly finds its place in the meeting of two minds who struggle to find understanding in their differences.

At the fishing hole, Francis does not strike Peter, but his dramatic pose suggests that he is capable of repeating what he has done once before. That he refrains from slapping Peter signals a change in Francis himself. For the moment, his indifference toward Peter is subdued. "They drifted off into other things, talking warmly, enjoying each other's company with a kind of understanding they had never had among one another before" (496). Peter assumes the role of father, brother, and son. "This was, after all, so much like the action of the man who had been their father" (497). The lingering image of Francis posed to strike Peter reiterates Peter's words: "[L]ike the annoyed parents you see sometimes on the streets slapping their kids around" (496). For the moment, Peter has made Joe and Francis aware of their father's gift of forgiveness so that they are able to communicate as brothers who have been forgiven.

Kerouac's father died before he finished writing *The Town and the City*. Leo Kerouac, his hands stained with printer's ink, had told his son that he must take care of his mother; it was his last request, and it was understood between son and father that Kerouac could not make enough money at his writing to compensate for Leo Kerouac's loss. The spirit of this father, who could foresee his son's success but could not abide the idea of a son who did not make enough money to care for his mother, pervades *The Town and the City*. Kerouac wrote his father's death scene into the manuscript:

He had died from the things Peter knew he would die of. . . . There was his father, the rare flower's image of him in the world, who had come to live, and care, and work,

and die, and go away--leaving nothing now, no seal and mark of his caring anywhere, no monument to his meek figure, no plaque to commemorate his deeds of foolish and woebegone devotion. (477)

This death scene is such a literal passing away of images that the intransigence of words becomes the meaning of death itself; we are to understand that words themselves do not inherently give meaning to life. "Why was he alone with his dead father like this, what had happened? . . . And what was it that had killed his father?" (477).

With the death of the father there is sudden and abrupt discontinuity in life. George Martin does not die at home but in New York City of a cancer he did not know he had. Without his eight children knowing, George had made plans to be buried in Lacoshua, New Hampshire, his childhood home, not Galloway, where he and Marguerite raised their eight children. That his body should not rest in Galloway is disheartening to his children, and it punctuates our knowledge that George Martin's sons will not make the walk to the top of one of Galloway's hills and examine "the names in the old cemetery" (4) and remember, for memories are impossible without a physical world that can recreate the meaning of the memory.

When Mickey suddenly realizes that his father is old, he has this vision at the racetrack during the last race. Mickey convinced his father that the horse, Green Swords, a longshot, would win. George has lost most of his money on the other races, having won only once with money on Flight, and he is ashamed that the promised big day with his son will end without an outing to Boston for food. Mickey can think only of himself disappointing his father. "To Mickey it was

like the last day of the world, the late afternoon of time and destiny, the sad glowing reddish light that he always remembered from his childhood as the companion of hushed and muted wonder" (108). From the future we see Mickey looking back. The memory is important because it signals within Mickey a change initiated by his father's presence and by his mother's presence, symbolized by the red light. The nearsighted father must now rely upon his son to describe the events of each race and Mickey himself must strain to catch sight of Green Swords when the pack surges together. It is the outside voice of the announcer that lets George know that Green Swords is running "next to last" (109). The horses, a "dragging mass," run "in the red light" that reflects in George's face. "Mickey looked at his father with terror in his heart . . . etching every sign of disappointment and rue in his expression, and suddenly he felt like crying" (109).

In this section of the novel George is referred to as "the old man," a subtle repetitious reinforcement of this single moment that is the crux of the scene unites the narrator who knows that George Martin is old with the young boy, Mickey, who is making this discovery for the first time. Before the race is finished, George starts away, but Mickey waits and excitedly reports to "the old man" that Green Swords won. George is disbelieving until he hears the announcer report the same information. Mickey and his father are now free to play out the part of comrades, "punching each other playfully and beaming at everybody" (110). "They swaggered arm in arm" (111). The last image of this scene is of the road to Boston: "The sun sank and the highway lights blinked on along the road in the fogs of dusk in New Hampshire"

(111). The road is an image that is closely associated with the father, just as the red light is an image associated with the mother. These are images the Duluoz Legend will inherit from *The Town and the City*. The history of this legend must be related back to the child's history, the breath of mystery that so far has penetrated the scenes of Kerouac's first novel and will come forward to *On the Road*--where the child has disappeared--in the guise of the more enigmatic IT.

Important to this history is the obtainment of heroism, the status of creator and healer. For Mickey and Peter, "[t]hey had to be heroes or nothing" (121). Peter's dream of heroism is in part the organization man's dream from the outside of the organization:

approaching now the point of immolation in the vastness of all--he saw himself founding families and lines, organizing world events, pointing to necessities and hoisting them into place, arranging, disarranging, revising pitiable errors of others, getting everything fixed to his own satisfaction, standing there grave, powerful, humble leader of men and things--and then suddenly disappearing in a mist of immolation . . . disappearing into the immense haze of the universe . . . (121)

The too muchness of the world requires sacrifice, because alone one cannot find self-fulfillment; by means of immolation Peter envisages that he will be absorbed into the "vastness of all." But sacrifice is pointless without first triumphing "by virtue of his natural unalterable heroism" (121) so that hierarchy is meaningful if it carries with it spiritual dimensions; heroism becomes property of the prophet and organized hierarchy is a kingdom of holiness. In this way, all of life is endowed with inspiration, but not all will fully receive the inspiration, such as Francis, whose lack of a heroic vision of himself

leaves him incapable of reaching beyond the solipsism of his existential pleas. Yet, this heroic vision of life is almost humanly impossible, because this vision is dependent upon a community that understands the meaning of triumph in its otherworldly sense of complete faith. As *The Town and the City* shows, for Kerouac fellowship is an important and a necessary step toward achieving such a vision of life. It is fellowship that we must struggle to obtain, but this struggle can take place only after one has fully experienced the meaning of aloneness.

Although Peter has left home several times in his life, he had never really returned home until the Autumn that precedes his father's death. "Peter went home to his family . . ." (468). His parents had moved to Brooklyn so that it would be easier for their children to visit them, and so that they could find work. But the children do not come home. It has been more than a year since George and Marguerite have heard from their daughter Elizabeth; Peter discovers she has been living in New York City for almost a year and a half. Francis lives in Manhattan. This too was a surprise to the Martins. George meets Francis on the street, and Francis does not introduce his father to his friends. Peter lives with Judie Smith, a girl who does not want to have anything to do with Peter's parents, and when an acquaintance of Peter commits suicide, his parents believe that Peter is a suspect of a murder case.

The tragedy of the Martin family, brought on by the war and the natural dispersion of children who grow up, finally touches Peter with the sadness of the realization that something in life has been lost

and cannot be regained:

A sharp knowledge had now come to him [Peter] of the tragic aloneness of existence and the need of beating it off with love and devotion instead of surrendering to it with that perverse, cruel, unnecessary self-infliction that he saw everywhere around him, that he himself had nursed for so long.

His father was dying--and his own life was dying, it had come to a dead end in the city, he had nowhere else to go. Peter did not know what to do with his own life but somehow he knew what to do about his father, who was now not only his father, but his brother and his mysterious son too. (468)

It is not his lost childhood and home in Galloway that Peter mourns but life itself. "He saw that it was love and work and true hope. He saw that all the love in the world, which was sweet and fine, was not love at all without its work, and that work could not exist without the kindness of hope" (472). Peter has yet to begin to live, a realization made more poignant because his father is dying. But with this new knowledge of life, Peter is able to face his father and find comfort in the old man's fading existence. "They saw that life was like a kind of work, a poor miserable disconnected fragment of something better, far greater, just a fragmentary isolated frightened sweating over a moment in the dripping faucet-time of the world" (472). But now that Peter can endure the idea of "the struggles of life" (472) he cannot face death, for that he is afraid of more than life itself. "What if he should suddenly see the whole terrible bleak enigma as no man had ever seen it, and die of it himself?" (73). One dies as one began life, alone.

We discover, then, something of Kerouac's private vision of the

artist when George's death dream of the old Martin home momentarily transcends the picture of death's finality:

he [George] would look up out of a dream of death to see the mother and Mickey and Peter moving around the house, he would see the slow, somehow stupid motions of the world around him . . . like a drug, some vision would inflame his inflammable brain with its pictures of joy and regret and trembling sad affection, and he would come talking and laughing back to them . . . all these things would flame in his mind like explosions of light, like the powerful flutterings of candlelight near the end. (473)

We are brought back to the beginning of the book, to those two moments in which "you" stands outside of the Martin home and views the inner darkness and inner light of the house. The most vivid and powerful imaginings of life are to be found "near the end," a summation of an artistic credo that death is the true creative force, for only in death can one truly be self-fulfilled, no longer a ward of creative flux but of stillness that signifies all is whole once again.

In Kerouac's world the desire to journey represents the unstated desire to breach the drift between life and death. When Peter watched Liz "going off into the night with her big suitcase" he was overwhelmed "with a crying lonesomeness, he somehow knew that all moments were farewell, all life was goodbye" (234). In the final scene of *The Town and the City* we see a Peter who now must conquer his fear of death, and that we understand is the reason why the novel ends with Peter traveling "westward" in the direction of his father's departed soul, "alone . . . towards tapers burning warmly in the towns, looking down along the shore in remembrance of the dearness of his father and of all life" (499). From out of the night he hears his name called.

Familiar voices ask him "Where are you going, Peter?" He does not answer. There is no answer to life's question but the one answer for which there is no one to hear. "He put up the collar of his jacket, and bowed his head, and hurried along" (499).

Kerouac's subtle but fearless initiative with language, his determination to explore two opposing pictures of self--fragmented or unified with experience--and two opposing states of existence--life and death--is more clearly realized when we examine the lost and altered fragments of *The Town and the City* next to the published version. Had something essential been lost in the hands of editors? This question weighed on Kerouac's mind. Kerouac added an editorial note to a letter Ginsberg wrote him: "Ginsberg 1949 (Discussing "Town & City" Ms. as cut & put out by Harcourt, as against my 1100-page original)". In this letter, Ginsberg wrote:

First thing first (or easiest things to speak of first I) was overly pessimistic before about Giroux's effect. The book is definitely helped in some very important ways - two principally

1. There was hardly any point at which I felt that your prose was exaggerated or overstated beyond sympathy

2. I saw (as I did not see the first time--perhaps this is the effect of rereading) the structure more clearly and was continually pleasurablely surprised by the inevitability of section after section of development of the history of each character, each thing in its turn. It seemed at moments clearly consummately in control. Your manly . . . intelligence emerges and created its efforts in a way of ease and "virtuoso" of craft that I feared to hope for and only half realized was possible anyway--you continually surprised me and led me along.

On the other hand (I speak negatively for a moment) I think it is unfortunate that many beautiful and sometimes necessary solo flights were eliminated. I mean

- 1) and rain sleeps!

- 2) New york and dennison
- 3) The Figure of Waldo
- 4) The "Vulture of the Hades" on pressboxes
- 5) Francis Martin's experience with the three witches at the funeral. (TxU)

Ginsberg attempts to measure what was lost and gained by editorial changes by considering the surface of the text as an entity separate from the author. What bridge Kerouac felt between himself and his work was not expressed outwardly by Kerouac, but he carried with him a sense of irrecoverable loss into later stages of development. For Kerouac, *The Town and the City* had been tainted by the overused Wolfian label applied to it, and he chose to distance himself from this first novel. He agreed that his style was Wolfian. By relinquishing judgment of his work to others, he denied his own originality and blinded his readers to the play of language inherent in *The Town and the City*. When he developed "spontaneous prose" into a public statement of his creative method it was as a badge of honor that would shield him against those first reviews of his work. But that Kerouac carried such a shield signals to us the subsequent loss, not the gain, of creative freedom.

Our sense of Kerouac's struggle to mediate between hierarchies was lost in Kerouac's first novel, and the importance of the father to *The Town and the City* was diminished. Kerouac transformed George Martin into the literal "lost father" of *On the Road*, and Sal Paradise, the author, weaves consciousness and experience into the nightmare of the road in an attempt to reclaim his loss. Although as it was published *The Town and the City* was disembodied, it survived in part in *On the*

*Road.*

### Chapter Three

#### *On the Road: A Map of Loss*

*On the Road* is a very different book than *The Town and the City*. Careful, graceful, and surprising, *The Town and the City* reads much more like a traditional novel. What it most satisfactorily reveals about Kerouac is that the subtleties of life and language joined in his hands are more poetic than dramatic. If we are to judge the novel by the complexity of its prose, *On the Road* seems a more congenial novel, much less intent on impressing the reader: it is a more revealing work. Despite these differences, *On the Road* finds its bearings in *The Town and the City*. There is a certain sense of continuation between the two. Proving to himself that he has developed his sensibilities, his understanding of life, Kerouac has withdrawn from tragedy, avowed his independence, and grasped the essence of his very own creative desire. The most significant comparison we might make is that the preoccupation with loss in both is so striking as to signal to us that we might find it also to be Kerouac's ultimate sense of his originality.

After examining the editor's version of *The Town and the City*, it is clear that George Martin's death was the climatic scene. A blueprint for dealing with loss, those stylistic and theoretical developments Kerouac's writing underwent while he composed *The Town and the City*, is the foundation for his subsequent creativity, more than sketching or spontaneous prose, which exemplify the creative experience of *The Town and the City*. Accounting for our feeling that

Kerouac is torn between his creative desire, to preserve and to find permanence, and its non-actualization in the novel, with the transformation of *The Town and the City* from being about George Martin to being about his son Peter, Kerouac's loss was deepened--he lost his father twice--becoming an emblem for the text itself. Repeatedly, we find Kerouac testing the strength of the bond that binds the lie and the truth of fiction.

Kerouac had yet, in February of 1951, to realize the significance of his road plots. He described his life to Alfred Kazin as "an American Tragedy rooming-house newlywed marriage all soaked in dolors" (Feb. 20, 1951, NN-B). Fearful and desperate, he planned to go to Mexico. He told Kazin that he would spend three years of his life writing novels, as though he thought that if he left the country he could awaken himself to a greater purpose and materialize the vision within himself.

His ideas germinating, grappling with a new novel, centered upon a persona that he could identify with himself, Kerouac's thoughts led him in two directions, back to *The Town and the City* and forward to *On the Road*.

The suitcase containing all my worldly clothes was gripped in my blistered hand. I sweated onward, all anew, to whatever was my life, to a smaller promised life than the life they talk of everywhere. Strange neons overtopped the scene of my own tragic birth. I quivered forward to my own mysterious conclusion. I was convinced something would come of it for me. Faith was a skeleton, and that my rack. Mad under the skies, and had to be, I ground ahead as the moon raced across my eyes with her clouds making a radar screen before her, but not much to my surprise. Every waving grass in the dark plain to my right I understood and whispered with, well indeed. There, where the evening-star sat in her

bed of day-blue, and shed, all drooping flame, her sparkler dims upon the prairie, like as to make wive a second king of myrrhs,, was a beautiful sight I knew from pasts and it did touch the foundations of my heart. I was no child, my madness not infantile, my faith not pride. Faith was willing my old soul . . . .The madness--skies could rush forever, my stone was my load, grown-in and grown from gentlest stuffs I'd say. Rancour, raging, cracking of mad teeth, explosions, poofs of disgust, these were my only way back to best gentility; and that, my only way to the conclusion would always have to come, if I blistered more like this. All tried, I tried it further. . . . (Kerouac to Kazin, Feb. 20, 1951, NN-B)

This 1950 attempt at a road novel continues where Kerouac left Peter Martin. While the closing mood of *The Town and the City* was singular in its portrayal of Peter's determination to meet his destiny, in this early "Road" passage, the prose is more freely lyrical and suggests a conflict of rising emotions, great expectations alternate with hopelessness, stubbornness is dispersed by moments of thoughtfulness. The "I" merges with the landscape, whereas lights and darkness had touched Peter from a distance. "The heat-lightning glowed softly in the dark, and crowded tree-top shores and wandering waters showed through shrouds of rain" (*The Town and the City* 499). Because he uses the first person narrative to convey what he originally viewed from the third person narrative, emphasizing that "I" has left his childhood behind, Kerouac's perspective has changed. He is ready to explore a later stage of life, one in which we understand, as he wrote in *Visions of Cody*, "we're all going to die" (368). But these developments in his prose, coupled with his despondent mood, left Kerouac doubtful. Writing to Kazin, "I even gave this up in despair. At present I'm moving right alone on another tack [sic]," he expresses

his creative desire to find fulfillment and a sense of literary permanence, equivocally translated into the social desire of the individual to find fulfillment--this is Kerouac's reason for going to Mexico. In these creative years, Kerouac realized that the search for permanence and unity in life and in art as mere activity, as spontaneously willed expression, is pointless. The object of desire, in order to further individual creative involvement in life, must remain, like the gold ring in the carousel, out of reach. Tension is developed out of his fine balance between accepting and refusing this "paradox."

"[T]he lost father" exacted Kerouac's sense of loss, uncertainty, and failure and centered his early conception of the Duluoz Legend. In June of 1954, he called this saga "The Legend of The Three Houses." Within the tenth *Book of Dreams* notebook (DR 10 NN-B), envisaging three road stories, Kerouac compiled a list that included, besides characters in *Pic* and the names he planned to use in an early version of the road story, characters of the published *The Town and the City*:

ON THE ROAD  
Ray Smith  
Julian White  
Laura  
Cody Deaver  
Smiley Whik  
Grandpa Wade White - His vision in woods (crickets & moon)  
Ma Smith  
E. Dan White  
Joe White  
Evelyn Schemerhorn Whik  
Henrietta Deaver  
Liz Martin  
Junkey  
Dennison            Peter on Road  
Levinsky  
Pictorial Jackson  
Slim Jackson

In the "NOTES" that preceded this list, Kerouac devised a scenario that he called "A Dream Already Ended":

Visions of everyone on Saturday afternoon -- beginning with the big fat man of W. 13th Street bending to his food & wine at 4 P.M. as I pass in hall, one quick glance, as red sun soaks west side waterfront I see thru dusty hallway window -- bringing us to Pater Duloz & the dolorosa vision of him in Manhattan on Satafternoon wandering around to Times Sq (Lost Father Chapt) - visions of Eternity Railroad, he & I in train at night -- *Port of Shadows* we saw together, how we saw it -- how in childhood I saw movies with him --- (as in deleted Boston Chapter) --Time he escorted me to Columbia & the vision we had of NY --

As long as the father figure, an involuted vision, was without clear meaning, Kerouac's road novels were unsolved riddles. Writing to Neal and Carolyn Cassady, 10 January 1953, he said: ". . . I in 5 days wrote, in French, a novel about me and you when we was kids in 1935 meeting in Chinatown with Uncle Bill Balloon, your father and my father and some sexy blondes in a bedroom with a French Canadian rake and an old Model T. . . . It's the solution to the 'On the Road' plots all of em and I will hand it in soon as I finish translating and typing" (TxU). The union of son and father gave his own life a sense of closure. In 1954, he looked to a ghostly Father Time image not to move himself nearer to the completion of the road story but to come to terms with and to rectify his profound sense of loss.<sup>1</sup> Narrow-

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1. As late as 1954, Kerouac had not quit trying to bring back to life the dead George Martin of *The Town and the City*. His mention of the excised Boston chapter might explain why Kerouac claimed that his manuscript was 1,100 pages long and the 1949 editor's version is only 1075 pages.

ing the gap between life and death, insofar as the ghost was associated with an intermediate existence, the presence of a ghost in a narrative imparted a sense of connection between disparate states.

Kerouac's feeling of loss finds its appropriate setting in Manhattan, for we remember that George Martin became sick in New York City. In "A Dream Already Ended," Kerouac introduces the red light that was a prominent image in *The Town and the City* to signal a change in visual perspective. Forming ideas from pictures Kerouac contained in his mind, his eye saw a scene from a moving plane, and his mind directed these pictures into relationships that created the illusion of time and space. In Mexico, in the journal he kept, Kerouac wrote about his interest in painting: "[B]ought amarillo yellow paint, 21 sheets of drawing paper, & new paint brush." He described his painting that made use of several images: roses, a chamber-pot, twigs, the moon, and a chair (*New Book of Dreams* NN-B; Oct. 15, 1956). And yet, in images themselves, he could not find the answers he sought to his own questions, his own creations intensified his loss, experience seemed fragmented, as if life itself were a dream and the joining of separate images a tattered attempt, like his painting, to find meaning outside the frame of reality.

As we saw in *The Town and the City*, experience for Kerouac is transmutable; reality in the discourse of dream can be transformed into a fiction that convincingly lies about reality. In the introduction to *Kerouac: Pomes All Sizes*, Ginsberg wrote: "That the quality most pure in Kerouac was his grasp that life is really a dream . . .

as well as being real, both real and dream, both at the same time . . ." (viii). Kerouac's writing was not so much autobiographical as it was dream-biography, a narrative of loss, or as he wrote in *Book of Dreams*, an "image of regrets" (157). Kerouac draws upon actual experience to produce a living fiction to parallel life in its outcome, its drama, and its portrayal of people, particularly of his own self. One breaks from this parallel time, in Kerouac's words, "the golden eternity," when asking, "Is that me?" Selfhood is no longer absorbed by the creative flux, and it is forced to re-create itself. Take for example "The Cult of Unthink," in which Brustein saw Kerouac as a puerile barbarian. This construction displaced Kerouac's very own sense of himself: Kerouac was forced, as in the Viking Press release, to confront the fragility of his identity as author and the fragility of the connection between himself and his text and culture's text. From this perspective, it is logical that Kerouac gravitated toward the idea of a legend that would enable his writing to revolve around his personal life experiences so that he could reshape his identity.

In *Book of Dreams*, Kerouac chastised the imperceptive reader with a tone that echoed D.H. Lawrence's occasional outbreak: "[Y]ou've all seen it you ignorant pricks that cant understand what you're reading" (7). Kerouac explained: "As I say, words, images & dreams are fingers of false imagination pointing at the reality of Holy Emptiness--but my words are still many & my images stretch to the holy void like a road that has an end" (157). And in a more suggestive passage, he wrote, "how strange reality of the bleak endless

world which has no destination or meaning or center and the sweet small lake of the mind" (54). In other words, life was too large to understand, but the meaning of life, lived from within the mind, from the boundaries of dream, was the real and the obtainable truth of being.

In DR 12, Kerouac began A DREAM ALREADY ENDED, probably composed in 1954:

And now I know that life is a dream already ended. . . . The world has already come and gone, and everything in it. How can you stand there and tell me that since in seven million million years all this will be completely gone, it isnt gone already? Do you have to wait to understand the truth? It's a dream. The reason it lasts so long is because it is the huge dream of universal self-illusion and seems completely solid only because you're not small enough to walk right through it . . . (NN-B)

In 1953, he contemplated a theory that would explain his own intuition that all of life was a dream:

Mindfall created the world. It was an original mistake full of torment and now remorse. Nothingness was moved and potentialized, phenomena appeared, and because phenomena is subject to a beginning and an end, the arbitrary conception of time appeared, and with it, past, present, and future of all phenomena. Remembrance, or memory, is the future aspect or the future tense of of [sic] that phenomena that because we now have seen it and speak of it, has had its past tense, its appearance; in the brain are filed all the slides that when selected from the filing cabinet therein by some jolt of concurrence and combination, are slipped into the illuminated projector and thrown on the screen we call Memory, and yet these poor slides are in themselves phantasmal and unreal negatives pressed postulating from the original illusion received by the eyeball coming into contact with a piece of phenomena which is all of two things: inner perception of sight perceiving a projection of itself which is emptiness potentializing and accomodating to order, and it is the world equipped with eyeballs looking at itself in

free dispassionate unbroken flow perfectly imitating the complete everywhere-ness of unbeginning unending emptiness. Therefore Memory is the future tense of a false appearance, the mind sore of false birth, the phantom of a phantom in a phantom world, and, perfectly fittingly, is all we have to work with in relating our lives. (DR 9, NN-B)

These dream notebooks reflect Kerouac's concern with his ability to record life as he viewed it through a dream lens. With this kind of private writing, he found a way to focus his novels. These are the fundamental ideas he developed previous to 1958, the year "The Essentials of Spontaneous Prose" appeared in *Evergreen Review*. This essay and "Belief and Technique for Modern Prose," published in the Spring 1959 edition of *Evergreen*, steered readers to assume the underpinning of Kerouac's writing was the practice of spontaneous prose. The writing of *On the Road* was not an exercise in spontaneous prose writing per se but Kerouac's attempt to relate his ideas about dream to life as he had experienced it, transforming actual experience into his purer visionary reality (a mixture of dream and memory), creating the illusion that life and art are one.

From this perspective, Kerouac's development and practice of spontaneous prose writing was not a juvenile experiment. Unlike the young and unpracticed writer who, believing he or she is practicing modernity, decides not to use punctuation or decides not to revise, Kerouac's theoretical developments were defensive measures. In order to protect himself, to create an identity that could not be destroyed, he had to create a text that would be immune to the fiddling of an editor's pen. Obviously, there is a contradiction. Since loss is essential to Kerouac's creative experience, this protective hull

cannot be permanently untrampled. The lines binding reality and dream eventually unravel or wear thin, exposing the divisions within; then another fiction must replace the worn one. As was the case with *On the Road*, popular culture re-created Kerouac and his road story to meet its own demands upon fiction, and for a short while, Kerouac obligingly agreed to this story. Thereafter in self-defense, Kerouac chose to write about a fictional self, to reconstruct a narrative whose central identity was an author by the name of Duluoz, but he did not do this in order to spin mythic yarns about Jack Kerouac but so that he might tell the truth about himself. In the latter part of his career, he wrote about what it was like to be an author in 20th century America. *On the Road* was his beginning point. Because with the publication of this novel an artificial light had forced Kerouac into visibility, because he had been falsely accused and misread, he had the authority to write about Duluoz.

*On the Road* was his and our map of his loss. What preceded *On the Road*--the publication of the disembodied *The Town and the City*--and what followed it--the misreading of *On the Road* and the ongoing crisis of Kerouac's identity--are best understood within these parameters of loss and conflict. Because *On the Road* was Kerouac's most popular work, *On the Road* contains the truest kernel of his identity. It is the book we must be able to read before we are able to read Kerouac. In Lautreamont's words: "We strive to appear to be what we are. We make every effort to preserve this imaginary being, which is simply the real one" (qtd. in Kristeva 219). Because *On the Road* is the one

Kerouac novel most intensely opposed by the critic, who accorded *On the Road* no literary significance, and by culture, which obliterated the originality of Kerouac's novel, absorbing it into mass culture, by definition it is the text by which we must understand Kerouac.

Reviewers approached *On the Road* as a commentary upon America's Beat Generation. Leslie Hannon, writing for the *London Allied Newspaper Sunday Times*, said that "Kerouac is the chronicler--if not indeed the prophet--of the Beat Generation. . . . his picaresque, biting and sometimes mystical book is the required text." To his London readers, Hannon described the Beat Generation as a generation of disillusioned Americans who came of age during the second war and found out that the American dream is a sham (6). Reviewers, expecting a realistic portrayal, found the book incomprehensible and unimaginable. Readers did not recognize that the qualities emphasized in the reviews did not point to a structural fault in the narrative but were a clue to its underlying structure.

Gene Baro, a reviewer for the *New York Herald Tribune*, wrote about *On the Road*, "one feels that the stylistic peculiarities, no less than the attitudes expressed, are those of Mr. Kerouac" (4). To Baro, Kerouac's prose was a white wash of sentiment. Baro felt that Kerouac's narrator was incapable of completing his "visualization" (5). The reviewer for *Best Sellers* said: "The book is hardly a novel. The only plot consists in detailing the dubious adventures of an amoral, thrill-crazy group, as they lash themselves back and forth from New York to San Francisco . . . three times in all." This reviewer suggested that *On the Road* would be of interest only to "students of

abnormal psychology" (186). Although Stanley Tick did not find "great artistic merit" in the novel itself, he valued it for its sincere picture of "protest" (466). David Boroff was amazed by "sheer movement" amassed in the pages of *On the Road*. He admired Kerouac's prose, but he felt that the "sociology of his novel defeats it as literature" (M11). Others, such as John E. Fitzgerald, believed that the Beat Generation was worthy of a novelist's attention but thought that Kerouac's novel lacked depth (28). John Wain summed up one point of view when he called Kerouac's book boring and without resolution or character development (17). The story itself, to Joseph McLellan, seemed fraught with meaninglessness and poor writing, an "almost unbroken monotony" (27). Luther Nichols, writing for the *San Francisco Examiner*, shared some of McLellan's feelings about the novel (10), as did Derland Frost, who wrote: "It roams without pattern as its characters roam . . ." (31).

The reviewers found in Kerouac's novel a monotonous story, aimlessly presented, characters that seemed unreal to them, particularly the portrayal of Dean Moriarty, and they found a picture of life that seemed beyond or below their conceptions of reality. They felt that Kerouac had exaggerated sentiment and actions without clear purpose. It seemed to them that his ideas did not penetrate the cartoon varnish he applied to his characters. With their various appraisals, reviewers delineated Kerouac's novel from the ordinary novel but did not understand the intrinsic nature of his narrative. To them it had failed to convey any significant meaning.

To gravitate away from the kind of reality commonly found in the naturalistic narrative and to adopt the qualities of mind's movement in dream, indicated Kerouac's awareness that the shadow of death lurked beneath the word. On one hand, it was a symbol of human fear, social anxiety that had been heightened by the Second World War, and on the other, it was a sign of Kerouac's individual awareness of his isolation, of his inner ambivalence, and of his desire to represent loss. For Kerouac, this darkness was diffused in *On the Road* as the nightmare of the road.

Resigned to following Sal's path, the reader is also resigned to the nightmare, and then even desensitized to it, just as Sal found himself numbed by the terror he experiences in the backseat of a car driven by Dean (234). The collapse of dream and reality into one text sent a subliminal message to its original reading audience: anything goes, anything is possible, except life itself. If we remember those instances in *The Town and the City* in which the narrator is outside of the scene he is describing, as in those scenes where Kerouac uses the intermingling of dream and reality to measure his sense of loss, we see that this pattern is repeated in *On the Road*.

As a search for truth, the mingling of dream and reality is suited to the road narrative. The choices that Dean and Sal must make in their individuals lives are emphatic gestures in the foreground of the narrative. We discover that when Dean reaches a decision, no matter how complicated his life is, his life goes on; he continues to be; thus, we are distracted from the division inherent to the narrative, and the loss of self is concealed. Although these gestures are signs

that dream and reality cannot totally and once and for all meld, that by definition is death, they succeed in masking the vulnerability of Kerouac's narrative. Quite simply, when one must choose, one must give up something. Loss is necessary to Kerouac's existence as an author, but it is his bane.

In *The Subterraneans*, the narrator, Leo Percepied, a writer, comments: "--and yet why write?" (23). This question is contained in the symbol of his lover's thighs: "the thighs contain the essence--yet tho there I should stay and from there I came and'll eventually return, still I have to rush off and construct construct--for nothing--for Baudelaire poems" (23). Percepied's devised anguish does not end there: "(O the pain of telling these secrets which are so necessary to tell, or why write or live)" (24). The writer, Percepied, is preoccupied with existence, with evolution, the movement toward one extreme or another, life or death, and with the necessity of having to relinquish oneness in exchange for desire, for longing, and for loss. All are his reasons to write:

work was my dominant thought, not love---not the pain which impels me to write this even while I don't want to, the pain which won't be eased by the writing of this but heightened, but which will be redeemed, and if only it were a dignified pain and could be placed somewhere other than in this black gutter of shame and loss and noisemaking folly in the night and poor sweat on my brow--- (25)

Ashamed of his writing, the text itself is a "black gutter" which engulfs Leo's pain, mocking his desire. His pain is not "dignified," but is reduced instead to "shame and loss and . . . folly." These are

the impurities of the narrative, which serve as a bridge between life and death, reality and dream; the narrative cannot exist without them.

In many ways, *On the Road* is Kerouac's most difficult book to speak about, yet it is his novel which is most often spoken of. Difficult to describe with any subtlety, its surface deceptively simple, unlike many of his other works in which the narrative itself is visibly complex, broken by dashes of uneven length that connect strands of words to one another, in *On the Road*, we find a standard use of punctuation; we are missing what we have learned to read in Kerouac, the body of the narrative itself. It is a novel in which Kerouac has left us alone. We do not feel his presence as we do when he is Duluoz, the writer writing. True, Sal Paradise is also a writer, but he has limited his audience from the onset of the story to an individual, to the sympathetic listener, as he is unconcerned with any reality but his own. Indeed, that is the purpose of his story, to find what lies beneath the surface of his reality and to find a response to the question: Why? He is a young author who must work to establish a link between himself and the world at large and his story. It is a link that he can understand only by looking back at what time has glossed over. Self-reflection leads him into outer darkness and inner dissolution. In telling his story, for the first time since he has lived his life on the road, Sal is able to contemplate the meaning of existence and to absorb the activities of life. Unprepared to begin his adventure, he discovers that he is a child, afraid of the wilderness, commitment, love, and success. These are the essential traits of the Kerouac that we will come to know in his later

novels, *Big Sur*, *Desolation Angels*, and *Vanity of Duluoz*.

But, Sal does not long for the past, for what once was, for the people and the things he used to know. His longing is not about nostalgia but about what he has lost. Sal tells his story because he regrets that he abandoned Dean. "With the coming of Dean Moriarty," Sal says at the beginning, "began the part of my life you could call my life on the road" (3). With Dean's final departure in New York City, this part of his life ends. For this reason, Sal does not allow his narrative to be resolved. The elegy at the end of *On the Road* masks our and Sal's realization that something real was lost, demonstrating that, as it is with Leo Percepied, loss is Sal's reason for existence. This point gains force when we remember Sal the published writer turns Dean away. In Sal's final moment, it is his shame and his loss that bridge the distance between friends. Appropriately, there is the suggestion in the closing line that he will retell this story again. "I think of Dean Moriarty."<sup>2</sup>

The notion that the narrator will struggle forward with a new narrative is not unusual in American literature. Walt Whitman had issued nine editions of *Leaves of Grass*, creating a protean text that changed as Whitman grew older and more experienced. That *On the Road* ends with an elegy is appropriate, its ending is evocative of one Whitman poem in particular, "When Lilacs in the Dooryard Bloom'd:"

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2. This line does not have the sense of personal closure that, for example, *Tristessa* exhibits: "I'll write long sad tales about people in the legend of my life--This part is my part of the movie, let's hear yours" (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960) 96.

"When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd,/And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the night,/ I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring." (128). "[T]he evening star must be drooping. . ." , Sal Paradise imagines. At the conclusion of Sal's story, Dean Moriarty, whom Sal identifies as "[a] western kinsman of the sun" (10), is like Whitman's "western fallen star." Whitman wrote: "As I saw you had something to tell as you bent to me night after night . . . Concluded, dropt in the night, and was gone" (130; my emphasis). When Kerouac read from *On the Road* on *The Steve Allen Plymouth Show*, he had added to "bent to it again" (309), words that describe a departing Dean, "gone." It is not by accident that Kerouac chose to end *On the Road* with an elegy. Just as Whitman used three symbols to give shape to his mournful feelings and to find the strength not to fear death, Kerouac finds images that take on a life of their own, transforming the loss he felt after the publication of *The Town and the City* into the resolution to go "onOward."<sup>3</sup>

"With the coming of Dean Moriarty," Sal says, "began the part of my life you could call my life on the road." Kerouac establishes for us the perception that with Dean's arrival time began for Sal. Recalling material Kerouac included in one of his dream notebooks ("[T]he arbitrary conception of time appeared. . . . Therefore Memory is the future tense of a false appearance, the mind sore of false birth, the phantom of a phantom in a phantom world, and, perfectly

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3. The influence of Whitman now and then invaded Kerouac's thoughts. In DR 9 he echoes "Song of Myself" with the words: "I am 'God' as you are who am me as I am you." (1954, NN-B)

fittingly, is all we have to work with in relating our lives" [DR 9, NN-B].), after Sal has described how he was first made aware of Dean by way of letters, he says: "This is all far back, when Dean was not the way he is today, when he was a young jailkid shrouded in mystery" (4). We see that for Kerouac truth must be fashioned out of the past and the future, alternately, life and death. Truth is the mediating point between their union. Because truth lapses in the narrative, if the artist is not to be seen as charlatan or a sentimentalist, having forgone carving a future path for the comfort of nostalgia, this bridge must be rebuilt.

Wearied by an illness and the breakup with his wife, Sal wants to be a hopeful observer of life and tries to hide the "feeling that everything was dead" (3). The journey to reclaim loss is arduous. Claiming that "the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk . . . the ones who . . . burn, burn, burn like fabulous roman candles," his sense of disillusion is intensified, as the image of the splintering of the "blue centerlight" is dissipated by the question for which Sal has no answer: "What did they call such young people in Goethe's Germany?" (8). After the farewell dinner for Dean in "a Seventh Avenue Riker's," and upon seeing him off "on the bus," Sal makes a promise that he cannot keep: "I promised myself to go the same way when spring really bloomed and opened up the land" (9). Sal believes he would do himself a favor if he followed the route west. In truth, he is afraid to leave a home with his aunt and his "stultified" days at the university. His primary reason to go

west is to join the rest of his gang. Marking his departure not by the season but by the completion of the first half of the manuscript he is writing, he has something real to return to. Sal's first trip west is not the beginning of something unknown but the passing of time and the delay of further work, a somewhat unconventional and ill-planned vacation.<sup>4</sup>

Within the first chapter, it is clear that Sal and Dean's relationship and Sal's impression of Dean have altered. Even though these transmutations occurred some time ago, Sal has not forgotten the feelings the change evoked. We are prepared for Sal's eventual disappointment:

Although my aunt warned me that he would get me in trouble, I could hear a new call and see a new horizon, and believe it at my young age; and a little bit of trouble or even Dean's eventual rejection of me as a buddy, putting me down, as he would later, on starving sidewalks and sickbeds--what did it matter? I was a young writer and I wanted to take off. (10-11)

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4. Orm Overland has pointed out that although Sal follows in the footsteps of other Americans, who took Horace Greeley's advice to go west, there is no real substance to Sal's envisioning of the west besides his "hearthside" pictures of cowboys and "'pioneering.'" The reality of the west, once Sal sets forth on his journey falls short of his Hollywood expectations. According to Overland, Sal is unable to reconcile fact with fiction, but he continues to hold onto his "hearthside" dream even after trial and error proves to him that his dream of the west is merely that, a dream. In the last half of the novel, Overland concluded, Sal's illusions about the west are no longer sufficient reason from him to leave the east, but the road itself, his own "restlessness," and Dean Moriarty succeed in making Sal venture forth in a series of trip that finally lead Sal home for good. "West and Back Again." *Jack Kerouac, On the Road: Text and Criticism*, ed. Scott Donaldson (New York: Penguin Books, The Viking Critical Library, 1979), 455, 453, 455, 460-461, 464.

Sal has lost Dean's friendship. That Sal asks the rhetorical question "what did it matter?" indicates his own troubles continue to bother him. As others have perceived, an older and a wiser Sal tells this story.

In this opening chapter, it is not so much Sal's admittance that at one time he believed in his own youthful dreams that makes him older. Sal's demystification of Dean is more impressive and a truer measure of his growth, not in everyday terms of a child growing older, less able to believe in the fairy tales of life, but in terms of artistic growth. Even though Sal hearkens back to a time before loss, he remains outside of this time; he is able to see an unshrouded Dean. When Sal remarks that Dean is no longer the way he once was, that is, "shrouded in mystery" (4), here is evidence that for Sal Dean is no longer a mysterious phantom in a world Sal cannot understand and cannot speak about, as a writer might speak, but is now contained in what Kerouac called "the small lake of the mind." That part of Sal's life that involved Dean as a central agent to the progression of his life has "come and gone." His sympathies are no longer for himself but for Dean. Here, then, is the answer to Sal's question.

Generating forgiveness and allowing one to escape from a state of solipsism, Kerouac's theoretical beliefs about language, as he expressed them in *A DREAM ALREADY ENDED*, have a corresponding social value: "It's a dream. The reason it lasts so long is because it is the huge dream of universal self-illusion and seems completely solid only because you're not small enough to walk right through it" (DR 12, NN-B). This theory of the universe parallels Dean Moriarty's be-

liefs. Dean is obsessed by time, but his obsession is not a maniacal pursuit of something unobtainable, as his obsession is founded on faith and the belief that if the role of time is understood then differences will be reconciled: "And of course now no one can tell us that there is no God. We've passed through all forms" (121). "[T]here's no need in the world to worry . . . Let's forgive" (134). In the repeating patterns of individual lives, such as the hitchhikers he picks up who say they have aunts who will give him money, and his return to Testament, Virginia, with Hyman Solomon, Dean finds continuity and meaning, rooted in a social unit: "[A]ll things tied together all over like rain connecting everybody the world over by chain touch" (138). Similarly, Sal's retelling of this story is an attempt to bridge the breach between their individual lives.<sup>5</sup>

Because Sal presents himself as the dreamer and idealist, we suspect that he would possess this idea of unity in repetition from the start of the story. Instead, Dean, whom Sal portrays as a pragmatist ( " . . . it is absolutely necessary now to postpone all those leftover things concerning our personal lovethings and at once begin thinking of specific worklife plans" [4]) has come to this realization. Dean does not mistake dream for illusion, as does Sal, who admits in chapter two: "It was my dream that screwed up, the stupid

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5. Jack Kerouac's friendship with Neal Cassady helped Kerouac to create and to pattern Sal and Dean's relationship. Writing 25 December 1947 to Kerouac, Cassady said: "Despite our . . . apparent falling into different patterns, I still find a sense of close understanding between you and I which no other gives to me, and to which I respond by symbolizing you as an - - - older blood-brother. . ." (TxU)

hearthside idea that it would be wonderful to follow one great red line across America instead of trying various roads and routes" (13). The difference between Sal and Dean is obvious. After Dean has asked Sal to show him how to write, they go to a bar. There Sal tells Dean, ". . . I know very well you didn't come to me only to want to become a writer, and after all what do I really know about," to which Dean responds, "'I know exactly what you mean . . . but the thing that I want is the *realization* of those factors . . .'" (6; my emphasis). Sal has no concrete literary method; on the other hand, Dean realizes that his own intellectual pretensions are limited to superficial and dogmatic imitations. He wants epistemologies to be connected to life in a way that makes them real.

While Sal lives in the shadows of other lives, Dean tries to draw people closer to him, wanting as Sal reports, "so much to live and to get involved with people who would otherwise pay no attention to him" (6-7). In a parenthetical remark, Sal reveals that this too has changed about Dean in relation to himself: "He was conning me and I knew it . . . and he knew I knew (this has been the basis of our relationship)" (7). With Sal's altered "impression" of Dean, there is a faint note of dissatisfaction with this a phantom of a phantom, once Sal describes as "a young Gene Autry . . . a sideburned hero of the snowy West" (5). Unable to describe the originality of Dean without comparing him to something already known, this phantom perspective is a problem for Sal the writer, as Kerouac explained in DR 14: "When your own individual mind puts out a dream during sleep, and the phantom of self-illusion which is 'you' walks around in self-

invented places and scenes participating as anxiously as in 'real' life, that too is an empty dream but a much shorter smaller one, changing in one night to vanish forever" (A DREAM, NN-B). All of Sal's memories and words cannot keep Dean from vanishing forever. Realizing that the ending of *On the Road* is not a tragic rendering of Dean's departure, we see it as a plea for forgiveness and acceptance. "There is nothing to do but be kind," Kerouac wrote in his notebook.

In the first BOOK OF DREAMS notebook (DR 1), Kerouac recorded a dream about his father, returned to Lowell, Massachusetts.

God this haunted life! Keep hoping against hope against hope he's going to live anyway even tho I not only know he's sick but that it's a dream & *he did die in real life* --ANYWAY--I worry myself sick (When writing T&C wanted to say "Peter worried himself white"--for the haunted sadness that I feel in these dreams (PA - G - X -4327) is *white* -) Maybe Pop is very quietly sitting in a chair while we talk --he happened to come home from downtown to sit awhile but not because it's *home* so much as he has no other place to go at the moment . . . he himself doesnt want to live much longer--That's the point [Kerouac drew an arrow to the margin and wrote, "I myself dont want to live"--] . . . I see now his live soul--which is like mine--*life means nothing to him*--or, I'm my father myself & this is me (especially the frisco dream) --but it is Pa, the big fat man, but frail & pale, but so mysterious & *unknown* --but is that me?  
(NN-B)

Included in the published *Book of Dreams* (1961) (11-12), this dream is not dated but was probably recorded sometime in 1952, for there is a notation about DR 1 in DR 6 that places the composition of the first dream notebook in 1952. The second BOOK OF DREAMS notebook begins

October 25, 1952.<sup>6</sup> What is impressive about this dream is that Kerouac, in a moment of despondency, admits to himself, "I myself dont want to live." (These words are not included in the published manuscript.)

Kerouac does not simply tell his dream. He interacts with the dream from a separate reality that allows him to know that he is in fact dreaming, but the knowledge that what he sees is not "real life" does not keep him from experiencing the trauma of knowing his father has yet to die in the dream. When dream and reality briefly meet, it is a simple matter for Kerouac to state: "I'm my father myself & this is me." The conscious knowledge of reality leads Kerouac to question himself: "[B]ut is that *me*?" We see the interaction of dream with the creative flux of finite experience. The awareness Kerouac achieves while dreaming is temporarily superimposed upon reality itself, heightening the intensity of his emotion and feeling. The "haunted sadness" of the dream becomes part of his knowable reality; hence, he is moved to write, "I myself dont want to live." Sal is very much like the Kerouac of the father dream who realizes that his father in his dream, although alive, has died and will have to die again. Likewise, the tension in the narrative results from Sal's knowledge that Dean has vanished forever, but he wants to refuse to accept this realization. Subsequently, Sal portrays himself as torn between dream and reality.

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6. There is some discrepancy about the specific dates of composition. DR 2 begins 25 October 1952, and in DR 6, Kerouac made a note about DR 1: "Begun Easonburg Aug 14, 1952 / Richmond Hill Aug 14, 1953 / FINIS DR 1"

By describing Dean as "[t]he most fantastic parking-lot attendant in the world" (9), the word "fantastic," derived from the Greek "phantastikos," takes on the meaning of something apart from reality. When Sal says that "the things that were to come are too fantastic not to tell" (9), he clings to the vitality of his memories, a sense that what has occurred is more than real. But in contrast, earlier in the chapter, according to Sal, the vitality of Carlo and Dean is diminished in the future: "They rushed down the street together, digging everything in the early way they had, which later became so much sadder and perceptive and blank" (8). Although Sal suggests that the meeting of two minds isolates one from the horrors of the world, he is on the outside by choice, as he has chosen the role of author, and his very nature inclines him to seek solitude. While his desire to belong leads him to see the blankness of reality, the fantastic palliates this blankness, by keeping him on the outside.

Sal's cross-country adventures make him realize that he is like a "ghost" in the world. He sees himself acting from a place that is suspended above his real presence. "As in a dream we zoomed through small crossroad towns smack out of the darkness, and passed long lines of lounging harvest hands and cowboys in the night. They watched us pass in one motion of the head" (30). When Sal is caught in the rain and in the dark in the Bear Mountain wilderness, he breaks into tears, not merely because he is frustrated that his plan to follow Route 6 across country is not practical, but because he is also afraid of the dark. He is glad to ride with a couple even though they take him further north to Newburgh: "[W]hich I accepted as a better alterna-

tive than being trapped . . . all night." (13). Darkness signifies to Sal the absence of civilization. The cities of his dreams are highlighted with jeweled lights; they are lighthouses in the dark of his solitary existence. In Davenport, Iowa, as the sun sets, Sal is reassured by the familiar scenes of "any town anywhere" (15). Outside of Davenport, Iowa his mood changes: "The sun went all the way down and I was standing in the purple darkness. Now I was scared. There weren't even any lights in the Iowa countryside" (15). Kerouac presents a Sal who is like a child, unable to sleep, because he is afraid of the actualization of his nightmares. He fears that he might be totally engulfed by the darkness of unreality.

Tending toward isolation, to be able to combine dream experience and reality, Sal must first be unafraid to broaden his horizons. He had planned to experience the delights of San Francisco, but he spends the better part of ten weeks holed up in Mill City with Remi and never gets on a ship that will take him around the world: "My life was wrapped in the shack, in Remi's battles with Lee Ann, and in the middle of the night at the barracks" (71). Sal admits outright that the time he spent with Terry before she returned home was an escape from the world: "I finally decided to hide from the world one more night with her" (89). And when Sal returns to Patterson, New Jersey, he withdraws into the comfort of the familiar: "It was October, home, and work again. The first cold winds rattled the windowpane, and I had made it just in time" (107). Sal does not just mean that he is glad to be home before the cold onslaught of winter begins. Sal

expresses his fear that the ghost of a separate reality is beginning to merge with what he had known to be real. Early in *Part One*, in a motel in Des Moines near the railroad tracks, Sal wakes up not knowing who he is: "I was just somebody else, some stranger, and my whole life was a haunted life, the life of a ghost" (17). Sal describes this experience as "the strangest moment of all" (17). As Sal continues across country, he uses the image of the ghost to describe his physical condition and mounting dissolution. Once Sal reaches the west, a place he calls "beyond the darkness" (58), he begins to think more frequently about the experience as a way to relate to himself his own existence: "I was three thousand two hundred miles from my aunt's house in Paterson, New Jersey, I wandered out like a haggard ghost" (59).

Sal wants to fulfill society's expectations and his needs, but he cannot do both. The Mill City "old cop" (66) warns Sal that he will lose his job if he does not make the men in the barracks respect him: "Now you got to make up your mind one way or the other, or you'll never get anywhere. . . . he was right; but all I wanted to do was sneak out into the night and disappear somewhere, and go and find out what everybody was doing all over the country" (67). Sal wants to see everything without becoming involved, for he does not want to lose anything, but this path leads to self-evasion, and he creates a chain of events in his life that seem unreal. He himself dramatizes an affect to create an affect. Upon parting from Terry, Sal says they "walked off down the row. We turned at a dozen paces, for love is a duel, and looked at each other for the last time" (101).

This kind of self-evasion leads to paranoia. When Sal saw Terry at the Bakersfield bus station, he was charmed by the appearance of the Mexican girl. "A pain stabbed my heart, as it did every time I saw a girl I loved who was going the opposite direction in this too-big world" (81). After Sal discovers that Terry is traveling to Los Angeles on his bus, he works up enough courage to talk to her. They share stories about their pasts and make vague plans for the future. Sal wants to love the Mexican girl. His desire for her is not just sexual; he calls her his "kind of girlsoul" (82), reading the promise of his fulfillment in the view from his window: "I looked greedily out the window: stucco houses and palms and drive-ins, the whole mad thing, the ragged promised land, the fantastic end of America" (82). But the "end of America" proves to be a rather ordinary looking Main Street with "the whorey smell of a big city" (82). He is disappointed, and his romantic dream ends and sees Terry as "a common little hustler" (82). In a restaurant, Sal is sure that she is trying to make a connection with a pimp: ". . . I was like a haggard ghost, suspicioning every move she made" (83). Likewise, Terry, whose economic and social situation in life indicates she has also lost much, believes that Sal is a pimp. In the confusion of the hotel room scene, Sal reluctantly threatens to sever the relationship entirely: "'Go on, beat it!' I'd sleep and forget it; I had my own life, my own sad and ragged life forever" (84). His "paranoiac visions" nearly ruin his affair with Terry (82).

Sal is overwhelmed by the feeling that he will be lost forever.

For Sal, it seems that the more one reaches out into the world, the less one is able to reclaim losses. He finds this to be true of his prep school friend, Remi Boncoeur, who attempts to win the admiration of his friends with riches and influence that he does not have: "Somewhere in his past, in his lonely schooldays in France, they'd taken everything from him; his stepparents just stuck him in schools and left him there . . . He was out to get back everything he'd lost; there was no end to his loss; this thing would drag on forever" (70). Lee Ann "took up with" Remi because she thought he was wealthy, and Sal believes that Remi will find a Hollywood director for the story he writes at Remi's shack: "Remi was going to fly down in a stratosphere liner with this harp under his arm and make us all rich" (63). Unlike what the name Boncoeur suggests of Remi--"[h]e had a heart of gold"--Sal tells us that Remi "had fallen on the beat and evil days" (63; 61). At first, Remi was "disappointed" that Sal wanted a job to pay for his cigarettes, but eventually Remi resents Sal's paltry contributions to the household. Near the end of Sal's stay in Mill City, a fight between Remi and Lee Ann ensues, and Sal finds himself caught in the middle. For Remi, the altercation reminds him of how much he feels he has given Sal and Lee Ann, getting nothing but heart-ache in return: "I thought something would come of us together, something fine and lasting. I tried, I flew to Hollywood, I got Sal a job, I bought you beautiful dresses, I tried to introduce you to the finest people in San Francisco" (76). Lee Ann and Sal could redeem themselves to Remi, if they act on their best behavior when they meet Remi's stepfather, the European doctor. Remi asks Lee Ann to pretend

that she is his "girl", and he asks Sal to pretend he is his close friend: "[A]t least . . . try to make a good impression" (76). Sal is touched by Remi's "sincerity" and his determination to be "gentlemanly" (76). But, when Sal appears tremendously drunken in front of Remi's step-father, the evening is ruined, and Sal completely loses Remi's faith. Sal concludes, "Remi and I were lost to each other" (79).

To finalize his stay in Mill City, dangerously confusing his own life with a dream, Sal climbs to the top of a mountain: "I spun around till I was dizzy; I thought I'd fall down as in a dream clear off the precipice" (79). The "madness" of Remi and the events Sal has so far experienced in his journey begin to represent to him the dizzying affect of a dream in which the feeling that things seem to happen at random is exaggerated. This sensation follows him to Los Angeles. He experiences a strange moment like in Des Moines, but this time he encounters fear: "I was tired and felt strange and lost in a faraway, disgusting place. The goof of terror took over my thoughts" (83). Sal nears a total collapse of identity; he is on the verge of madness. "This was all a fit of sickness" (83) that dissipates, then is roused in Sal after he meets the Ghost of the Susquehanna, a "semi-respectable walking hobo" (104). "Then comes the day of the Laodiceans, when you know you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, and with the visage of a gruesome grieving ghost you go shuddering through nightmare life" (105).

Sal is no longer "a man of the earth, precisely as I had dreamed I would be, in Paterson" (97). He is "starving to death" (105), and

his future is as grim as the Ghost of the Susquehanna, who judged from his physical appearance has not had much to eat, yet "talked incessantly of the meals he had" (103). Trying to find the bridge that will lead him to Canada, the Ghost wanders the night in the wrong direction. Sal wakes up in the Harrisburg railroad station realizing that a life of deprivation and lost direction is a "nightmare life." He must find nourishment, but when he hits the road, once again, on the last stretch home, he discovers a different kind of poverty and nightmare, a man, "who believed in controlled starvation for the sake of health" (105). Starvation takes on another dimension of meaning and signifies the spiritual and the emotional paucity of America. The crowd in Times Square is a summation of what Sal has realized on his first trip across America: the world is a "mad dream" in which he has lost everything: "Where Dean? Where everybody? Where life?" (106). At "home" Sal gorges on "everything in the icebox," (107) warding off starvation, until his next trip west, and learns that Dean had come looking for him at home.

"Where Dean?" is answered in *Part Two*, which begins the winter of 1948, one year later. During this time, Sal and Dean have not seen each other, but they have communicated through letters. Sal lets Dean know that he will be in Testament, Virginia, around Christmas and New Year's, but when Dean appears in his '49 Hudson at Rocco's house, where Sal and his aunt are visiting, Sal does not recognize Dean: "I had no idea who it was" (110).

In *Part Two*, Sal continues his journey that in *Part One* brought him to the brink of emotional and physical collapse. Sal says: "It

was a completely meaningless set of circumstances that made Dean come, and similarly I went off with him for no reason" (116). Again, as if Sal is experiencing a dream, he merely lets things happen and is awestruck by events, but he does not try to make sense of the life that carries him away, for he cannot articulate its meaning. Neither does he abandon himself completely to Dean's frenzy. Unlike Ed Dunkel, who blindly follows "Dean's line," and as Sal says, "had no direction," Sal yearns for direction: "This can't go on all the time--all this franticness and jumping around. We've got to go someplace, find something" (123, 116). But what he must do to get somewhere, Sal does not know. He has no real understanding of the world to lead him forth, only his phantom intuition that cannot grasp the intrinsic nature of the "real." As when he rode in the back of a truck, in what he had called "[t]he greatest ride of my life," Sal sees Dean and the road with the eyes of a sleep-walker: "As in a dream, we were zooming back through sleeping Washington and back in the Virginia wilds . . ." (24, 119). Sal retains the experiences of his first trip west, and through repetition of these experiences, he becomes more aware of his own destiny.

In *Part One*, the carnival man asked Sal and Eddie: "'You boys going to get somewhere, or just going?'"(22). In *Part Two*, Carlo Marx asks a similar question: ". . . whither goest thou? Whither goest thou, America, in thy shiny car in the night?" (119). Although Sal had responded to the carnival man's question with wonder--"We didn't understand his question, and it was a damned good question" (22)--the

second time Sal is asked about his journey he accepts his inability to answer Carlo Marx's question with muted irony: "We . . . didn't know what to say; there was nothing to talk about any more. The only thing to do was go" (119).

With a heightened sense of purpose, Sal's awareness of himself in relation to other people is also heightened. At a party in New York City, Marylou and Lucille are attracted to each other's lover. Marylou kisses Sal, and Lucille goes off with Dean to sit in his car. Sal is attracted to Marylou, but knowing that she loves Dean cannot accept her advances. Unlike the Remi, Lee Ann, Sal triangle, in which Sal does not come near Lee Ann, sunbathing naked on "the flying bridge" of an abandoned freighter, Remi below and Sal on the poop watching her (72), the distance between Sal's desire and its fulfillment narrows at the New York party. In *Part Two*, we see that, unable to act upon his desire, Sal gains clarity. No longer dizzied or afraid that he will fall "down as in a dream" (78), he sees the events as mixed up, not himself. "Everything was being mixed up" (125). For the moment, he has awakened and seen a glimmer of reality. Indeed, by the end of *Part Two*, Sal is unable to fool himself into thinking that Marylou will be his girl in San Francisco.

Until Dean's arrival, which reminds Sal of a dream he had about an "Arabian figure that was pursuing" him "across the desert" (120), his own hauntings had receded from his memory; but the forgetting itself is resurrected as a phantom in a dream. The dream makes Sal feel that he "had forgotten" to make a "decision," for it seems that this decision, "real" or imaginary, is directly connected to his dream about

the Arabian, whom he refers to as the "Shrouded Traveler" (124). The "decision," as it is related to the dream, is a choice between life and death. Dean, Sal says, "instantly recognized it [the dream] as the mere simple longing for pure death." The older Sal, who tells this story, accepts this as true:

The one thing that we yearn for in our living days, that makes us sigh and groan and undergo sweet nauseas of all kinds, is the remembrance of some lost bliss that was probably experienced in the womb and can only be reproduced . . . in death But who wants to die? (124)

Sal realizes that the shrouded traveler dream represents the longing for pure fulfillment, but the young Sal failed to realize that to choose to live is to equally choose to die. Sal only sees death as a single moment in time, the conclusion of life, rather than a series of moments, in which his identity is threatened by the onset and the completion of desire. In this sense, the Shrouded Traveler is death. Just as Sal dreams that he is pursued and "overtook" outside of "the Protective City" (124), in *Part One*, Sal reaches the safety of Patterson just before the arrival of winter and his annihilation, and his phantom delusions disappear, yet he had left Patterson because he felt that his "life . . . had reached the completion of its cycle" (9-10). The Shrouded Traveler has no single identity, which is why the dream bothers Sal: "In the rush of events I kept thinking about this in the back of my mind" (124).

Implicitly, Sal does identify life and death as one and the same. On the ferry with Bull and Dean he has his first illumination: ". . .

I knew like mad that everything I had ever known and would ever know was One" (147). That Sal wants to evade death reinforces his longing to evade responsibility, as he had at the Mill City barracks.

Ed Dunkel, who married Galatea for her money and then abandoned her in a hotel, also sees ghosts. First he has a vision of his mother (123), then discovers in Times Square that he himself is a ghost. As with Sal, this realization haunts him across country, "'Yes sir, I thought I was a ghost that night'" (139). But until Sal is starving, Dunkel's ghost visions mean nothing to him. He does not comment on them, nor does Dunkel, who instead quietly muses about them. It is only when Sal must face life alone in San Francisco does he come nearer to articulating in some detail his insight that all is one.

Dean abandons Marylou and Sal, for he is suddenly interested in seeing his wife Camille. Marylou and Sal must fend for themselves. Without money, they had gotten "a room on credit," because Marylou "had been around these people" (171). Trying to find money for food, feeling lost, alone, and betrayed by Dean, Sal wanders around San Francisco. Once again, he is starving.

At Birdland, Sal had almost believed "that everything was about to arrive--the moment when you know all and everything is decided forever" (129), but he does not trust his instincts. He attributes the moment to an illusion brought on by the marijuana he smokes. But later, on Market Street, Sal recalls a past life "about two hundred years ago in England," and time and setting are displaced in his mind "into timeless shadows" (172; 173). He thinks of Ed Dunkel, and in a moment of clarity he gives significance to his Shrouded Traveler

dream. In waking, he had "reach[ed] . . . the sensation of death kicking at my heels to move on, with a phantom dogging its own heels, and myself hurrying to a plank where all the angels dove off and flew into the holy void . . ." (173). It is not the Sal of 1949 who makes sense of this moment: "I was too young to know what had happened" (173). The seeming emptiness of the second trip, forces the older Sal to find meaning in his past life by blaming its emptiness upon his own ignorance. By the end of *Part Two*, Kerouac shows us that for Sal revelation arises out of the mingling of dream awareness with real conscious knowledge that can only be obtained in life itself.

The seeming madness or uncontrollable spontaneity of life acquires significance and meaning through repeated experience, yet once new meaning is generated for Sal, he moves onward with phantom momentum. With repetition, experience becomes a mere afterimage in time, and Sal, as his dream of the Shrouded Traveler symbolizes, is running from the phantom. But in Sal's final trip with Dean, he recognizes that flight is a source of emptiness. A white horse appears to Sal, "an apparition: a wild horse, white as a ghost, came trotting down the road directly toward Dean" (295). The horse glides by the car and by Dean, who is sleeping on the road. As a young boy, while riding in the back of a car, Sal used to pretend that he rode a white horse, "riding alongside over every possible obstacle that presented itself" (208). Dean also remembers having dreamed about a white horse, and Sal thinks that the horse is a vision, "What myth and ghost, what spirit?" (296). After Dean has left Sal, and Sal begins his journey

back to the east, he realizes that perhaps there is meaning in the apparition.

What the horse signifies becomes clear when an old man, bearing resemblance to the horse, appears out of the night:

in Dilley, Texas . . . I heard the sound of footsteps from the darkness beyond, and lo, a tall old man with flowing white hair came clomping by with a pack on his back, and when he saw me as he passed, he said, "Go *moan for man*," and clomped on back to his dark. Did this mean that I should at last go on my pilgrimage on foot in the dark roads around America? (306)

Kerouac makes us realize that Dean and the car are obstacles to Sal's journey. Although the horse was riderless, the old man carried the burden of a pack. Sal must decide if he should get on the white horse of his dream, no longer a childhood fantasy, for even if he sets off alone, he must shoulder some burden. It is when dream images are repeated that Kerouac achieves coherence. Spontaneity gains coherence by repetition, as spontaneity itself is not generated by thought but by the multidimensions of the symbol, directing thought deeper into the imagination.

Before Sal can realize that flight brings him emptiness, he must first realize that his own life, as he lives it, is essentially empty, and must be changed. In *Part Three* and *Part Four*, Sal has internalized the feeling that "[t]here was nothing behind me anymore" (182). Sal cannot be satisfied with his lot; the life he has led is based on a falsity that has brought him nothing but loss: "All my life I'd had white ambitions," Sal concludes in a black neighborhood in Denver, "that was why I'd abandoned a good woman like Terry" (180). Sal

decides to purify his life. He yearns to see Dean again and to show Dean that he has faith in him. Sal goes to Dean in San Francisco. Dean's marriage to Camille and his body is falling apart; nevertheless, Dean's vision of life is pure and simple: "I've never felt better and finer and happier with the world . . . and I know, I know everything will be all right" (186). Dean's clarity, founded on his losses in life--"I knew I loved Marylou, I knew I had to find my father wherever he is and save him, I knew you were my buddy" (184)--is achieved through emotional agility, his willingness to forgive and to recover his loss in the road ahead of him. Sal empathizes with Dean's physical appearance and his scattered and disarrayed words. "I was glad I had come, he needed me now" (188). Sal commits himself to caring for Dean, calling it "probably the pivotal point of our friendship" (189). Three things are decided between them. They will be friends forever, they will go to Italy, and they will find Dean's father.

But Dean's reputation has fallen among the ranks of his friends. Sal is warned by them that Dean is "the worst scoundrel," and he will "find out someday" (196). In the San Francisco night, Sal's ghost returns as Dean, who needs to know the address of the bar from which he telephones Roy Johnson:

his feet carrying him with amazing swiftness out of the bar, like an apparition, with his balloon thumb stuck up in the night, and came to whirling stop in the middle of the road, looking everywhere above him for the signs. They were hard to see in the dark, and he spun a dozen times in the road, thumb upheld, in a wild anxious silence. . . . spinning and spinning in the dark (202)

This scene is more than a literal account of Dean's actions. While Sal has begun to see that the road itself does not hold the answers to life, for "the road is life" (211), Dean is looking for the signs in the road. The signs that lead the way are located above them. The older Sal, who tells the story, realizes that the road as life and the sky as a map of signifiers are interconnected aspects of experience: "As we crossed the Colorado-Utah border I saw God in the sky in the form of huge gold sunburning clouds above the desert that seemed to point a finger at me and say, 'Pass here and go on, you're on the road to heaven'" (182). The young Sal, on his way to see Dean, is not interested in the sky and the road: "Ah well, alackady, I was more interested in some old rotted covered wagons and pool tables sitting in the Nevada desert near a Coca-Cola stand" (182). When Dean and Sal return to New York City, and Dean develops a regular routine that includes work as a parking-lot attendant, Sal, leaving Dean with his plan to move to a farm in Pennsylvania with Inez and have "lots of kids in the next few years," rushes off again to Denver (250).

In *Part Four*, with the bond between Sal and Dean waning, as Sal returns to Denver, Dean confides: "Sal, we haven't talked straight for a long time" (251). For all of Dean's eccentricities he is more sincere than Sal and regrets their diminishing connection. In his own sly way, by looking to the future, Sal actually is pushing Dean away: "[S]omeday we'll be able to live on the same street with our families and get to be a couple of oldtimers together" (254).

For Dean, life is meaningful as it is. Knowing and accepting that

his own life is a phantom life of his father's life, even for all of Dean's disappointments, he has not turned his back on his wino father. After finding out that his father is in a jail in Seattle, Dean tells Sal that he wants to find his sister. When Dean shows Sal a picture of Camille and their daughter, Sal can only think of how their children will see these pictures, "never dreaming the raggedy madness and riot of our actual lives, our actual night, the hell of it, the senseless nightmare road. All of it inside endless and beginningless emptiness" (254).

Dean comes to Sal in Denver not only because he wants to go with Sal to Mexico in order to divorce Camille, but because he seeks reassurance that "everything is lovely and we know that we are not worried about a single thing, don't we, Sal?" (262). Sal does not recognize Dean's apprehension, and instead of answering him with the truth, he decides: "Well, okay, I'm always ready to follow Dean" (262). Their trip to Mexico turns into a disaster for Sal. He is sick in Mexico City with dysentery, and Dean, after getting his divorce, leaves Sal with Stan Shephard. In return, not realizing that he cannot be the most important person in Dean's life, Sal thinks of Dean as "a rat." Later, as he tells the story, Sal concedes with hurt, "I had to understand the impossible complexity of his life, how he had to leave me there, sick, to get on with his wives and woes" (303). We also must understand that Dean is remorseful when he parts from Sal. Standing by Sal's sickbed, he explains that he has to "get back to" his "life. . . . Pray I can come back" (302). Having divorced his second

wife, Camille, he must prove his loyalty to his third wife, Inez, by going to her. For the first time, Dean chooses to act responsibly, and so leaves Sal in Stan's care; he does not abandon him completely, as he had done in San Francisco, yet the decision causes pain to Sal. As the older Sal explained: "I didn't know who he was anymore, and he knew this, and sympathized, and pulled the blanket over my shoulders" (302). But Sal's hurt is too strong, and he cannot forgive Dean right away.

In the final chapter, Dean appears once again in New York City. Sal and his new girl, Laura, want to move to San Francisco. Dean has offered to drive them back in the truck that Sal says he and Laura will buy, but Dean arrives five and a half weeks early. Dean's arrival is an intrusion in their life, and Sal makes no effort to join him, even after Dean tells him: "'Ah, but you see what I wanted to REALLY tell you . . . Long long awful trip five days and five nights just to SEE you, Sal'" (307). In a moment of spite, presumably because Dean had left him in Mexico, Sal turns Dean away and will not even give him a ride to Fortieth Street. What follows, in the last paragraph, is Sal's elegy for Dean, spoken from the perspective of the older Sal, and the novel becomes a plea for forgiveness. Sal has realized that their parting is a symbolic embodiment of their separate existences which can be united only by the lie of fiction, serving as a passage between two identities, bridging the confusion between desire and loss, dream and reality. But even this lie cannot sustain the fiction of oneness, only the memory of that fiction might reveal the momentary collapse of dream and reality. Thus, alone, Sal ele-

gizes: "[W]hen the sun goes down and I sit on the old broken-down river pier . . ." (309).

At the conclusion of *On the Road*, Dean and Sal have failed to remain friends, they did not go to Italy, and Sal did not actively help Dean find his father. By abandoning Dean in New York City, Sal has also given Dean reason to lose faith in him. The elegy at the end of the novel is a summation of Sal's regrets. Sal's judgments of Dean are no longer contained and measured by dream, as he understood dream at the start of his journey. Now he does not mistake dream as an illusion, envisioning "all that road going, all the people dreaming in the immensity of it" (309). Dream has become vision. The Sal of *Part One*, who had dreamed of the west and had set off to find the west of his childhood dreams, is no longer. In the elegy Sal composes, dream no longer signifies the obtainment of desire but the temporal loss of it, its eternal unfulfillment fueled by the unfaltering will to continue onward, the very pattern of existence that Dean embodies and for which Sal the artist must admire him. As the acceptance of loss, vision now signifies the potential for growth and recovery in life and language itself. We learn that for Kerouac dream is the poetry of existence, where one might simply *be* and experience lasting unity, but his memory imposes upon the dream the reality of existence--that life is meaningful because of loss. That is why in Sal's retelling of his life on the road, drawing together elements of dream and memory, his life is represented as the nightmare of the road. The nightmare is a symbol of Sal's own ambivalence about the journey he has taken. Sal

is unwilling to accept loss, but the author Sal will and does conditionally accept it because of his need for forgiveness and regeneration.

The publication of *The Town and the City* seemed to Kerouac to have emphasized the losses he had endured--the death of his father and the editorial alterations and deletions of his manuscript. As his notebook entries and letters indicate, Kerouac had set out to reclaim this loss, and he had searched to find his self-worth through a road story. *On the Road* is a pivotal novel, for it brought Kerouac to realize the importance and significance of his work. He would measure the literary value of his writing, not against some ideal standard, just as *The Town and the City* had been judged against Wolfe, but by its ability to overcome loss.

In a letter, which Kerouac marked "Ginsberg 1948," Allen Ginsberg told Kerouac that once *The Town and the City* was typed he would show Kerouac's work to Mark Van Doren (TxU). According to Ann Charters, one of Kerouac's biographers, Van Doren gave the manuscript to Robert Giroux. Giroux liked Kerouac's manuscript and wanted to publish it (Kerouac 107). After the publication of *The Town and the City*, Kerouac hoped that Giroux would continue to publish his work, but in a letter dated 27 October 1954, Kerouac confided to Alfred Kazin that Giroux was not interested in his "Modern Prose" (NN-B). Kerouac told Kazin, "Giroux isnt fond of my idea, he insists on 'narrative' and 'narrative styles' but the list at Harcourt isnt exactly going to make history," and added, "Giroux hasnt ready [sic] any of my Modern Prose works."

Prior to the release of Kerouac's first novel, Kazin had written "a statement" about *The Town and the City*, but Giroux had chosen not to issue it because Kazin had an "advisory position at H-B" (Mar. 1, 1951 NN-B). In a letter dated 20 February 1951, Kerouac asked Kazin for his permission to use this statement in his Guggenheim application. Kerouac told Kazin that Giroux "was shocked I hadn't used your name as a reference." Apologizing for having overlooked Kazin in his initial application, he noted, "I wanted to round out the list with names of female pundits along with Mark V.D. and Carl Sandburg."

Kerouac realized that he would not be rewarded for his talent alone. At the same time, he assumed a stance toward his patricians that he was afraid would be misconstrued as a political ploy. For instance, after asking Kazin to send a statement that "will 'tend to establish' my case for an award," Kerouac praised Kazin's "Walker in the Streets"<sup>7</sup>:

I can understand the pain of your poor long hesitations and long thoughts. We're not all different. The critic isn't supposed to make a "mistake" when he jumps to the art. But I say he can, I say I can, I say you can. You don't revere Carlyle like I do but he was a man of rich mistakes of which, I think, only the richness is left. Besides I consider you "creative" more than critic as did everyone else in 1948-1949 when you "blew" on Whitman, Melville, Twain, Thoreau and Emerson so marvelously. I myself don't read anything contemporary (you know young punks, and I don't have time or money) but I would read avidly every work of Walker in the Streets --- fiction is become FETID.

Kerouac apprehensively continued, "It would have to be that I only

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7. *A Walker in the City* was published in 1951 by Harcourt, Brace.

wrote this to you together with a request." To overcome his shyness at having expressed his feelings about Kazin, he turned to his thoughts about writing:

But insofar as we can only reach other in just a little moment of the night, after all, like this, the big sad night of American writing, with a one-and-only true statement of feeling that lasts only the moment maybe (of exaltation, of *literary joy*) accept my words; I tell the truth.

During the composition of *The Town and the City*, Kerouac had struggled with the problem of finding truth by means of the written word, and Neal Cassady had warned Kerouac that at times his writing seemed insincere (Mar. 27, 1947 TxU). Nevertheless, by 1951, Kerouac was sure enough of himself to write, "I tell the truth." He also recognized that truth, as words, could be accepted only as a gift, and as such it could be refused. Realizing that ultimately he must write for someone other than himself, the above passage suggests that Kerouac entered a new stage of artistic development. Beginning to articulate what he had inwardly achieved by writing *The Town and the City*, at the same time, the direction he chose to pursue, a course of development in which honesty and truth were the first priority, required that Kerouac dismiss his first novel as a failure. If viewed from Kerouac's perspective, a point of view that was fashioned partly by his peers and his critics, *The Town and the City* was an artificial work; for him, the Wolfian comparison critics had used to describe his novel tarnished its credibility as a truly moving and visionary work. In fact, the critics found little to admire in the novel. Moreover, the voices of Neal Cassady and Allen Ginsberg had sowed seeds of doubt

in Kerouac's mind.

In January of 1948, Neal Cassady, expressing his beliefs about writing, had written to Kerouac:

It is not possible to grasp and express things at all as completely as most people, particularly critics, would have us believe. Most events are inexpressible; they happen in a region into which no word can penetrate: Understanding comes thru the soul. . . .

I have always held that when one writes one should forget all rules, literary styles, and other such pretensions as large words, lordly clauses and other phrases as such, i.e.--rolling the words around in the mouth as one would wine and proper or not putting them down because they sound so good. Rather, I think, one should write, as nearly as possible, as if he were the first person on earth and was humbly and sincerely [sic] putting on paper that which he saw and experienced, loved and lost; what his passing thoughts were and his sorrows and desires; and these things should be said with careful avoidance [sic] of common phrases, trite usage of hackneyed words and the like. One must combine Wolfe and Flaubert, --AND Dickens. (Jan. 7, 1948, TxU)

Ginsberg, like Cassady, responded to Kerouac's uncertain feelings about his craft. But, whereas, stressing the importance of intuition and plain prose, Cassady had emphasized how one should write, telling Kerouac that the subject most fit for the writer was dissolutive experience recorded through the eyes of an Adamic observer, Ginsberg cautioned Kerouac not to assume too quickly that he had found his authentic voice. According to Ginsberg, Kerouac's authentic voice would not be discovered by imitating another writer but would originate in hard work and the meeting up with his spiritual destiny.

A personal idea, a personal voice, is a personal voice, the more personal, the more interesting; the greater, the great-

er it is, according to persons etc. So there are a lot of "immature" writers making artificial imitations of Shelley, and women, of Rosetti and Millay etc. I have put off the most obvious example for fear of offending you, but I do not mean to. That is, the number of writers young and undisciplined (that means they have not found their souls or got a clear idea) Writing about wolfe, I am not talking about you, except that to the extent that your writing uses wolfe as a vehicle and not a master. But that is something which I wont presume to judge now, and is not to the point, for I think your work stands on its own and is you, what withal. (1948, TxU)

Although Ginsberg said he had refrained from judging Kerouac, his words were an augury of Kerouac's fate. Ginsberg had expressed an opinion that was echoed by Kerouac's critics: the text, as they read it, and the author were one. More pointedly, Ginsberg's letter was an inditement of Kerouac's fledgling status as a writer. But, both Cassady and Ginsberg shared with Kerouac their sense that writing approximated the experience of an explorer finding a new world. They knew that it was a new world that Kerouac looked for.

In Kerouac's 20 February 1951 letter to Alfred Kazin, Kerouac painted a picture of himself as the disillusioned student in search of the meaning of life:

In the spring of 1949, after I'd had my advance from Harcourt I began haunting old bookstores on Fourth Avenue to get myself a classical collection. Instead I wound up being depressed at the sight of vast piles of useless and meaningless dusty literature, particularly from the 19th Century . . . . "Ridpath's Life" . . . . "The Military Writings of Abnez Doubleday" . . . . "Puck of Pook's Hill" . . . . "The Works of Samuel Parr" [ . . . ] I had visions of the treatise on Cervicapra arundinaceum used in the alley by old Nebraska One Eye just blown in from Omaha . . . . of rain and urine falling on all of them . . . . And I said to myself, After Shakespeare and Dostoevsky, what? How about the works of J. Russell Mowris--this is the name of an actual 90 year old white haired man I met in the

subway who wrote a considerable number of books and showed me some from his briefcase . . .

What does it matter what WE do? (NN-B)

Kerouac admits that he had lost his sense of direction and purpose. Harcourt, Brace's acceptance of *The Town and the City* should have impressed upon Kerouac the brightness of his future, for upon its acceptance he had proof of his abilities and could redeem himself to his family, but at the back of his mind questions nagged him: What value did his work have and was it significant enough to justify his chosen path of life? On Fourth Avenue, seeing himself and his book in the world at large, he felt that his book was beneath the dignity of Nebraska One Eye, an outsider indifferent to literary artifacts. In Kerouac's vision, only the names of Shakespeare and Dostoevsky are safe from the "rain and urine." Kerouac longed to be untouchable, like the great names and like the insouciant One Eye. But he is neither. His own literariness only makes him a semiliterate outsider and a vulnerable stranger.

The meaning Kerouac endowed his encounter with J. Russell Mowris is made clear once we realize that he transformed Mowris into the old white haired man of *On the Road*, who instills in Sal a sense of inferiority and uselessness: "[A]cross the night, eastward over the Plains, where somewhere an old man with white hair was probably walking toward us with the Word, and would arrive any minute and make us silent" (55). " . . . I would be strange and ragged and like the Prophet who has walked across the land to bring the dark Word, and the only Word I

had was "Wow!" (37). Sal's search for his story does not come easily to him, nor did the writing of *On the Road* come easily to Kerouac, who had to forge for himself a coherent sense of language as it related to his loss. The outcome of this forgery--Kerouac did not relinquish his knowledge that unity was only at best a temporary perception--was a philosophy of forgiveness and acceptance. It was not his purpose to draw our attention to those forces which worked to mask loss, for in accepting the role of artist he had also accepted his need to recover loss, but insofar as loss would become his fundamental tool to retrieve identity, we find in Kerouac the awareness that all appearance of permanence is a temporary illusion. It was this belief that he struggled against and tried to disavow.

The ultimate test of his survival as an author perhaps came too soon, at a point when his identity was too absorbed by *On the Road*, and he failed to make amends of the disparities of self which were created outside of his text much less those that were created inside of it. The majority of critics wrote one thing about Kerouac, and he thought another about himself. They described *On the Road* in one way, and he was sure that he had written something quite different. Kerouac was doubly sensitive to these ambiguities: he had discovered through his first novel that truth is not permanent, and he had learned through the writing of *On the Road* that the author seeks permanency and unity between himself and his text. Indeed, Sal and Dean's friendship is held together only by the nightmare of the road, by the forging of bridges, indicating Kerouac's awareness that fiction is about loss, a creation that in effect destroys its author and

forces him, motivated by his desire to forge a pure identity, to begin anew.

## Chapter Four

### Kerouac and *On the Road*

write as you might live

Jack Kerouac, *Journal During the First Stages of "On the Road"*

Despite that one tenant of "Belief and Technique for Modern Prose" is "[a]ccept loss forever," Kerouac tried to recover the most essential loss, that of self, yet his fear of loss was masked by his very own ambivalence toward the role in life he chose. In this context, it is appropriate that we learn more about Kerouac's struggle to bring the road story to fruition. While his public statements about his writing method, "Belief and Technique for Modern Prose" and "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose," were used to prove that Kerouac was a hipster who did not write but only "typed" his novels, the history of *On the Road* reveals a different Kerouac.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Seymour Krim wrote in "King of the Beats," *The Commonwealth* 2 Jan. 1959: 360

Broken down, this ["spontaneous bop prosody"] means completely spontaneous composition with none of the super-ego restraints formerly enjoined upon the writer; and also, very important to the method, *no rewriting* once the original words and the shape of the sentences are first cast by the mind.

And Norman Podhoretz commented upon Kerouac's writing in "The Know-Nothing Bohemians," *Partisan Review* 25.3 (1958):314

Kerouac apparently thinks that spontaneity is a matter of saying whatever comes into your head, in any order you happen to feel like saying it. It isn't the *right* words he

Although Ginsberg had yet to see *On the Road*--he was in Paris--nevertheless, having read a few reviews, he wrote to his father, Louis Ginsberg, "Jack's book probably lacks a good deal of character development, I think that's probably true. I think he wrote it in about 20 days back in 1951 as an exercise in immediate fast writing without revision" (30 November 1957, NNC). Ginsberg had tried to find a publisher for *On the Road*, which had been rewritten several times, but by 1957, the history of Kerouac's manuscript was muddled. It seemed preferable to believe that indifference to Kerouac kept *On the Road* from publication.

Tending to work on several novels at a time, and to transfer ideas in one to another, as he sent excerpts to his friends, Kerouac's fragmented statements about his work blur the facts. Perhaps just how little others, who wrote their own novels and poetry, paid attention to Kerouac's manuscripts is evidenced by the fact that when Kerouac read from *On the Road* for *The Steve Allen Plymouth Show* few people realized he also read two paragraphs from *Visions of Cody*. As Tim Hunt documented in *Kerouac's Crooked Road*, not until a Kerouac festival in Lowell, Massachusetts, where John Clellon Holmes and Allen Ginsberg viewed the Steve Allen segment, did they comprehend that

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...Continued...

wants (even if he know what they might be), but the first words, or at any rate the words that most obviously announce themselves as deriving from emotion rather than cerebration, as coming from "life" rather than "literature," from the guts rather than the brain.

These two views summarize the general critical consensus about the meaning of spontaneous prose.

Kerouac had fooled them. "Apparently," Hunt wrote, "neither Allen nor his audience knew the book well enough to realize they were being treated to a version of the work other than the one currently the center of controversy" (142).

Kerouac wrote a version of *On the Road* on a continuous scroll, but he never used this text in its entirety, nor was it finished in three weeks. In her memoir, *Off the Road*, Carolyn Cassady quotes from a letter Neal Cassady received from Ginsberg in the spring of 1951: "But Jack Kerouac, however, on the ball, had last week finished *On the Road*, writ in 20 days on one sheet of paper yards and yards long, that he got from Cannastra's apt once [. . .] Jack needs, however, an ending" (144). Slighting *On the Road*, Neal responded: "I trust in his writing, but fear for it because theme of *On the Road* is too trivial for him, as his dissatisfaction shows. He must either forget it or enlarge it . . ." (*Off the Road* 145). In a letter written 20 June 1951 (TxU), Neal invited Kerouac to San Francisco to stay in his attic and write. According to Carolyn, Kerouac did not arrive until January 1952 (*Off the Road* 152).

Carolyn Cassady remembers that during Kerouac's visit, "Jack was trying to finish *On the Road*. I had only read random passages of the manuscript; I was too close to the pain of the events he described" (161). She also recalls that Kerouac wrote "Joan Crawford in the Fog," (171) a sketch in *Visions of Cody*. In fact, a number of additions he made to *On the Road* when he lived with the Cassadys ended up in *Visions of Cody*. The two novels seemed divided by the flesh and

the blood of creative experience. The actual *On the Road* story, that is, the plot--those incidents that were familiar to Carolyn Cassady--and the more poetic writing were the two elements he had struggled to bring together in one story since 1948.

The notebook Kerouac called "Journal during first stages of 'On the Road'" clearly is more an expression of his inner life than a record of his first road manuscript. A dissolute Kerouac, divided by his ambition to devote his life to writing, rather than find work of tangible value to himself and his family, congealing private experience with a permanent representation, sought to prove that he and his work were worthy of public presentation. Ten years before the media created Jack Kerouac, he struggled to purify himself of ingratitude, prodigality, and laziness.

Even before Kerouac found a publisher for *The Town and the City*, he was writing a new novel, which he called "On the Road." In a pocket notebook, he recorded the progress of his manuscript, marking 7 November 1948 as the starting date. Kerouac made his first entry in the notebook 29 November 1948. He remarked that he had averaged "1500 words per day." Kerouac was gratified to be writing with less restraint; *The Town and the City* had progressed more slowly:

Altho this is only the first draft, and I still have no idea where I'm heading with it, I delight in the figures, as always, because they are concrete evidence of a greater freedom in writing than I had in *Town & City*. However, who knows about the quality?

Concerned that his writing lacked the passion of his earlier work, Kerouac commented, "I've had a feeling of emptiness . . . not bore-

dom, just emptiness & even falseness." Unable to rekindle the fervor of *The Town and the City*, nevertheless, making progress, he hoped this was a sign of "'artistic' growth." "I have been sitting down & writing with perfect equanimity, and I hope I can go on like this from now on and write a great many good books all intertwined" (Journal, 29 November 1948, TxU).

Kerouac was troubled about the kind of story he would write. He hoped, that by steadily drafting his manuscript, as his own life would progress, so would his writing: this was his faith, not easily attained, as he was concerned about how his public identity affected his writing. *The Town and the City* completed, Kerouac waited to hear from Little, Brown. His inner life was a source of frustration, his own inevitability a reminder of how little he had expressed in his writing. Bothered that he could not understand the source of his demonic fury, he called his rages "daydreams of destruction" and "paranoiac attack[s]" (Journal, 30 November 1948, TxU).

This journal is a public statement about Kerouac, who portrayed himself as humble and proud, submissive and domineering: "This is not a private diary, I have nothing to hide that is worth hiding." Despite this assertion, he found solace in silence:

it is well to ignore all criticism and to know it for what it is (frustration), and work on in silence, and depend on the support and finally the love of men who similarly engage themselves in your midst. Anything else will lead to a universal disbelief in you, which is as though God had given you up to float in the ocean forever alone. (Journal, 9 December 1948, TxU)

Kerouac had reason to reassure himself of his integrity and of his inviolateness.

David Diamond, a composer, intimated that Kerouac had fallen upon evil days. Kerouac reported that Diamond had said he was one of many callow and impetuous young men, talented but not significant, and not serious enough about his art. To make matters worse, during a creative-writing class at the New School for Social Research, Kerouac's instructor, Brom Weber, unfavorably judged *The Town and the City*. Weber suggested Kerouac keep only certain sections "for future use." Admonished twice, Kerouac was indignant and frightened by the censorious pose of the two men: ". . . I was not only a 'childish adolescent' not worth knowing, but someone who had unsuccessfully tried to write a novel and failed in the end." In this same entry, realizing that an author is attacked on a personal and on an artistic level, he consoled himself by directing his remarks "to young writers of the future":

- (1) Do not believe in what criticizers say of you.
- (2) Because all men who do not criticize are silently watching the criticizer, not you, and can only judge you from the silence of your works but not from the noise of the criticizers and are perfectly aware of what is going on.

However, if the pathos of the situation does not victoriously comfort you, you may bask in the glee of "Every-Knock-is-a-boost." But do not at any time be seriously swayed by words of criticism. The criticizer in the moment of his noise is not what you are in the silence of creation, i.e., a maker instead of destroyer. (Journal, 1 December 1948, TxU)

Four pages later, Kerouac admitted that Brom Weber had a right to his opinions. But Kerouac remembered the scene with Diamond, and in *The*

*Subterraneans*, Leo Percepied, the outcast author, illustrated to two of his friends, who accused him of "makin a horrible reputation," the tendency for people to distort the truth (84):

"I don't care, you remember 1948 when Sylvester Strauss that fag composer got sore at me because I wouldn't go to bed with him because he'd read my novel and submitted it, yelled at me 'I know all about you and your awful reputation.'--'What?'--'You and that there Sam Vedder go around the Beach picking up sailors and giving them dope and he makes them only so he can bite, I've heard about you.'--'Where did you hear this fantastic tale?' (84-85)

This was a period in Kerouac's life that abounded with uncertainties and regrets; his fiction was all that sustained him, for his private life, marked by meetings with many people, each person potentially his connection to a publisher, distressed him. He had no roots: "This is tightrope-walking, I want ground. I want a lot of things, not *this* certainly" (Journal, 1 December 1948, TxU). Fourteen days later, he wrote to Ginsberg, "I'm lost. If my book doesn't sell, what can I do? . . . I am on the verge of falling dead from my chair. . . . It is too much, too close to death, life. I must learn to accept the tightrope" (15 December 1948, NNC).

Kerouac's fury at Diamond and Weber roused his general contempt for intellectual affairs, illuminating his inability to fit into society. At the close of the journal, Kerouac voiced his dissent from "the liberal intellectual *demand* that everyone comply with the rules set down as to how to think and what to do" (Journal, April 1949, TxU). The world seemed against him, a position he was not comfortable accepting, for he wanted to belong to a community, but he did not

want to lose himself to it. His criticisms stemmed from his own sense of alienation and lack of self-worth, a product, in part, of a nation that measured success by profit and productivity. Kerouac was penniless. Without a publisher for *The Town and the City*, he had nothing concrete to show that he worked very hard. Kerouac found himself to be a social misfit in more than one way.

The importance of psychoanalysis to the lives of people Kerouac knew in New York City, reminded him that something was askew in his own life. Denouncing the "neurotic nature of our times," he had written to Ginsberg: "After all my art is more important to me than anything . . . None of that emotional egocentricity that you all wallow in, with your perpetual analysis of you[r] sex-lives and such. That's a pretty pastime, that is! I've long ago dedicated myself to myself" (6 September 1945, NNC) Bartleby was a symbol of his discomfiture:

The hero of that story is really Bartleby's old employer, a man of sympathies and sense. Bartleby is after all a catatonic case, a depressive . . . I am one, too. Even at 16 'I preferred not to' work, I remember that. Well, I don't blame Bartleby . . . but I myself 'prefer' some other line of wilfulness [sic] that is closer to human communication. (*Journal*, 5 December 1948, TxU)

But Kerouac's isolationism did not diminish his belief that a community was the basis for faith in one's own future (*Journal*, 1 December 1948). Even though he disagreed with society's definition of work and success--the only state of health is one of constant and measurable productivity--he could not escape its affect upon his own

livelihood. One day Kerouac remarked, "Feeling physically lost and don't care for much" (Journal, 5 December, 1948, TxU), but nonetheless, the following day, he attempted to get "a longshore job." Failing to find work, he was "depressed" and resurrected his *Doctor Sax* manuscript with the idea of writing "two novels simultaneously." Only more dismal, he berated himself: "But *why?* -when I make no living from it and go on being a 'loafer' in the house" (Journal, 6 December 1948, TxU).

When Little, Brown turned down *The Town and the City*, Kerouac foresaw that at the end of his artistic life he would be a voyeur of the image he had cultivated while imagining success; this unfruitful journey begins with his long search to find a publisher for *The Town and the City* and ends with his withdrawal from the world (Journal, 7 December 1948, TxU). He saw his future as a struggle to present his work to a public that would not "discover" his novels until he no longer cared about fame or acceptance: defined by his struggle to purify his identity in an imperfect world that did not recognize his writing as work, his life was predetermined by his need to defend himself against those who attacked him and by his need to prove his maturity to them. His literary aspirations were marred by reminders that he was worthless:

As an artist I am more and more becoming a vermin. And it is not "American commercialism" that says this, *remember this important fact*, it is all these Diamonds & Webers & Putnams of the American Intelligentsia--and please remember that. American Commercialism isn't bothering me, it's these people who are supposed to be the bearers of the torch against commercialism. I'll remember that if you won't. (Journal, 9 December 1948, TxU)

Emphasizing the falsity of some intellectuals, their pretensions to knowledge of the life of art, and liberalism's tendency to banish outsiders from its small circles of power, Kerouac chose to delineate himself from a tradition of guardianship that he felt promoted false art, that is, art based on "malice." It seemed to Kerouac that affluence and power were permanent backdrops to the intellectual's life: "A Liberal Utopia of Enlightened Individuals?- tonight in front of the 'Leftist' New School, in the cold winds, I saw a limousine waiting" (Journal, 10 December 1948, TxU). The irony of the situation did not escape the unemployed Kerouac.

With worries about money and employment, the appearance of a check from the Veterans Administration gave Kerouac faint hope, yet realizing that his future depended upon the strength and charity of his own circle of friends (Journal, 11 December 1948, TxU), his attempt to find a publisher began to seem even more hopeless and his depression lingered. When Kerouac gave Kazin *The Town and the City* to read, he believed that this was his "'last chance'" to place his novel (Journal, 3 January 1949, TxU).

Plagued by extreme mood swings and an uncertain economic future, his writing was his stability. Even if he managed to write only a few words on a particular day, he had the satisfaction of knowing that he had worked intensely (Journal, 11 December 1948, TxU). Kerouac practiced discipline. Then he sought experience. He looked to the outer world for ideas to write about and for signs of his progress. Although he was disappointed by the first he was surprised by the

second:

Literally speaking, Neal's arrival did not strengthen my naturalistic intentions for "On the Road" (and that part of my soul concerned with such things) but, surprisingly, even "miraculously," my supernatural Godly intentions for Doctor Sax. And listen . . . I foresaw Al in Ray Smith, I even foresaw the Scandanavian [sic] sweater in the story. And I even foresaw that America's young "furtives" (like Ray and Al) are concerned with visions & God. (Journal, 10 January 1949, TxU)

But foresight gave him no satisfaction. He was disturbed by Neal's petty thievery and by a letter from a woman, who had recently broken off with him, that criticized his writing and himself. In his notebook, he quoted from the letter, emphasizing passages that pointed to his dubious goals: "The pity of it all is this, that I can't get you to go out and work. I'd make you work so damn hard the sweat would fall from your brow like the rain you keep talking about. That's the only thing that will save you. Work, Manual Labor." (Journal, 12 January and 15 January 1949, TxU). Angry, regretful, and confused, he left home and traveled west. The record of his trip is excluded from this notebook, but he acknowledged that the journey seemed to have contributed to his development of *Doctor Sax* more than "On the Road": "Now I'm back at school, and forming Doctor Sax swiftly, and writing it. . . . Composing Doctor Sax, which is become a description of darkness." It is clear that Kerouac wanted to meld his experiences with a suitable public representation of his life. Yet, it would be some time before *On the Road* successfully incorporated his desire to link the abstracted fantasies of his inner world with the

reality of the external world in which he was not merely judged by himself but also by others. Because it was in Kerouac's nature to shield himself, even hide from the critical and judging eye, part of his rite of passage as the artist he wanted to be was to accept the fact that he was vulnerable.

In his notebook, Kerouac resumed writing about *On the Road* on 25 March 1949. With a quest story in mind, he decided to shape Ray Smith into a new narrator. After the hero spends a stint in jail, Kerouac would have him set out from New York "with his Pip, his crony" in search of his father. Kerouac named the new hero Ray Moultrie. After Moultrie meets his old western friend, Vern Pomeroy, they find their fathers. In April 1948, Kerouac wrote Ginsberg: "[I]f he [Mark Van Doren] should happen to like my novel, I would get the same feeling that Wolfe must have gotten from old Perkins at Scribner's---a FILIAL feeling. It's terrible never to find a father in a world chock-full of fathers of all sorts" (NNC). The lost father moved the story forward. Kerouac still lamented the death of his own father, and it appeared that he sought a father figure in an editor.

Kerouac worried about the credibility of Ray Moultrie, for he envisioned Moultrie as a talented jack-of-all-trades, a holy jailbird. Most of all, he wanted the hero to represent the men he had met "on ships, in jail, in psycho wards" (Journal, 25 March 1949, TxU). "If they [his readers] wonder, they fail to know man," Kerouac decided.

Kerouac hoped to write "at least 5,000 careful words per week" (Journal, 25 March 1949, TxU). More than "On the Road" he was interested in "Doctor Sax," which he thought was too strange and too

mystical. "Sax requires a slower pace; it is more poetry than prose, and the organization must be water tight, no detail wasteful, no word slack" (Journal, 25 March 1949, TxU). The contrast between the two spurred Kerouac to form new ideas for the road novel and develop the mysticism of Doctor Sax into something more "rational." "I will begin again with a Factualist art, perhaps a la Dreiser-Burroughs- 'On the Road,'" Kerouac wrote to Ginsberg (1948, NNC). Accepting and recognizing death as part of life was a logical step toward proving himself to be a mature artist. Kerouac realized that within himself he was divided, and he had failed to bring to his writing, what he named the "outside world," in part, because he feared failure, and in part, because he used his writing as a defense against mortality:

And in any case half of life is death. . . . it had made me realize that I associate home and mother and farms and Town & City etc. with a kind of childish *immortality* (the "genius," etc., who will be redeemed.)---and that I associate the "outside world" (you and Neal and Bill and wars and work and hitch-hiking . . .) I associate this outside world with "half-of-life-is-death." . . . that I am no better (no more privileged) than anyone else, that I have to earn my bread that I . . . must make my way through "this world" as well as through the "beyond." (Kerouac to Ginsberg, 1948[?], NNC)

Kerouac found that as an author he walked the line between life and death.

In his mind, "childish contrasting is the source of our most precious creation, springing from instinct," but Kerouac did not want his abilities to depend solely "on the pathos of contrast." When *The Town and the City* was accepted by Harcourt, Brace, in late March, it

gave new life to the road novel, connecting Moultrie's life to the New York City characters of *The Town and the City*; he decided to put aside "Doctor Sax" until a later time when he could make it "all phantasy [sic]" (Journal, April 1949, TxU). Kerouac plotted the five "STATES OF RED'S SOUL," developing a conflict in terms of the mystical and "childish contrasting." "All the horror in the world lies before Red's eyes when he can't move on . . . Inhospitable earth, malign struggle. But then gravity returns, & the sorrow in it" (Journal, April 1949, TxU). Emphasizing that the places to which Red travels are "the rockbound spine of" *On the Road*, he planned to use the four seasons as a way of interconnecting geographical places (Journal, April 1949, TxU).

With the acceptance of *The Town and the City*, he dreamed of finding a wife, producing a family, and living on a farm. "This is the turning-point, the end of my 'youth' and the beginning of manhood and its proper absorptions" (Journal, 23 April 1949, TxU). When Kerouac reached Colorado, he continued *On the Road* and sent samples of his prose to Ginsberg: "It is where Rain tends, and Rain softly connects us all, as we together tend as Rain to the All-River Togetherness to the Sea. And the sea is the Gulf of Mortality in Blue Eternities" (23 May 1949, NNC). The same idea was expressed by Dean Moriarty: "[A]ll things tied together all over like rain connecting everybody the world over by chain touch" (*On the Road*, 138).

The early fragments of *On the Road* are raw:

Red watched with dolour [sic] these foolish persecutions of the sheepish kid, till finally when all began to seem like

an affront to his own dreading heart, he spoke directly to the bosun about its and eventually one night on an after hatch, before all the others shouting, fought the bosun down to the canvas in a mad cracking fist fight, amid cries of sea-birds from Cuba off shore, thereby becoming shivering Lord Protector of a child not much younger than himself in years, Angel-Face, a mere scullion, as sad and mad as a bird, and all was settled amid malignant smiles.

(Smitty offers money.)

Penniless Red, faced with the soon pressing necessity of doing something that no one could really help him do, in this case getting money to eat and sleep that very night, so that all things---the streets, people on the sidewalks, the sidewalks themselves with their litter of boxes, barrels, reclining cats and the sheer dust--seemed to say, 'Go, try if you wish, but we are unfulfilled and Red in numbless loneliness and humiliation of his own void capable at first only to gape, received Smitty's information like one remembering an old grace, heartfelt recognition of which was the dear beatitude of his days.

These passages, housed at Columbia University's Butler Library, are undated but probably were written in 1949. From them we learn more about how Kerouac intended to characterize the hero of his story. Red is a robust man who embodies the humilities and pride of a religious figure. But Kerouac's prose is uncharacteristically awkward and does not show his ability in descriptive passages to order his impressions. Instead, he seems to be working at interweaving Red's inner state with the physical appearance of the external world, something he did quite well in *The Town and the City*.

From Colorado, Kerouac wrote Ginsberg and described his manuscript in detail, copying a passage that depicted a jail scene. The prose is more varied and more like *The Town and the City*:

And when the silence increased, then it was possible for Red and anyone else who was awake and listening, to hear the

great sea-roar of New York outside: the rumorous Saturday night stretching its tide far over the wash of the vast eventful plain--with its towering Knight-island, and basins, and outreach[ing] apian dark flats to Rockaway, and to Yonkers cliff, to blue-shawled New Jersey, and the Jamaican reaches that guttered like altar waxes on the hooded horizon--the Saturday night of ten million secret and furiously living souls to which Red, now considering it half-heartedly and half drowsy, would soon return, himself a secret and furious and excited motion in that ocean of life antique. For what reason? . . . (5 July 1949, NNC)

Describing a "vision," using imagery in a movie theater, Red is illuminated with the antics of Groucho and "the myth of the gray West." After "these visions . . . in jail" Red and Smitty begin their journey to California, where they meet up with Vern and "after many dusty travails," find Red's father in Montana:

Finally everybody leaves and Red's alone, and that's where the story ends. This is I. (Also, there's a Mystic Tenorman who hitch-hikes around the country and Red keeps running into him, a wild colored cat, until Red's scared; he even sees him in the middle of the night walking in the Mansion of the Snake, the Bayou of New Orleans, with his Tenor Horn, and steps on the gas. "On the Road" is the name of the opus; I want to write about the crazy generation and put them on the map and give them importance and make everything begin to change once more, as it always does every 20 years. (Kerouac to Ginsberg, 5 July 1949, NNC)

As the story evolved, Kerouac retained in the final road manuscript, several of the original images. He continued to associate Vern, who is transformed into Dean Moriarty, with Groucho Marx and a western hero. There is a ghostly colored man who appears when Dean and Sal drive through the bayou, and with the appearances of the Ghost of the Susquehanna, the fear is intensified. Whereas in Kerouac's early "road" manuscript these appearances are incidental, in *On the Road*

they are thematic. They serve to unify Sal's experiences, in the same way Kerouac had originally intended the seasons to act as one of the "unities" (*Journal*, 5 April 1949, TxU). The search for the lost father is subsumed in *On the Road*, becoming the metaphor for loss that is instilled throughout the story, but in the early manuscript, Red's "Pilgrimage hitch-hiking with benign imbecilic Smitty" is at the start based on his desire to find his father. Kerouac's intense identification with a character who is at the end left alone--"This is I"--is preserved by the conclusion of *On the Road* in which Sal Paradise is alone. If we realize that Kerouac's need to recover loss became for him a truer reason to write than his desire "to write about the crazy generation," in this young Kerouac, we sense that he doubted the value of the individual in literature. While his desire to write an important book, one that will change America itself, is constant, during his early work on the "Road" manuscript he did not fully value "[t]he unspeakable visions of the individual" ("Belief," #9).

Challenged to find a story to write, he tried to invent new scenes and persons to write about, so that naturally, for some time, his excursions away from home were received by Kerouac as potential material for a novel. From Denver he wrote Ginsberg:

I wandered around Denver the other night looking for Pommy somehow. A black gal said "Hello Eddy." I knew I was really Eddy--was getting closer to Pommy. It was a mystic night in the Mexican-Nigger Denver. There was a softball game. I thought it was Pommy pitching. I thought any moment Louanne would sneak up behind me . . . The stars, the night, the lilac-hedge, the cars, the street, the rickety porches. *Down in Denver, down in Denver, all I, did was die.* (26 July 1949, NNC)

This becomes the basis for one of the important scenes of *On the Road*, in which Sal walks in a Denver neighborhood and meets a woman, who mistakes him for "Joe." He watches a baseball game and thinks he sees Dean on the field and Marylou in the bleachers: "It was the Denver Night; all I did was die" (*On the Road*, 180-181). Nevertheless, in the early novel, Kerouac maintained that his story was "completely imaginary." That Kerouac transformed his letter fragment into a fictional scene indicates his ability to draw upon literal experience and turn it into something of symbolic significance: "Only establish, also, the relationships in eternity between all your characters---and *then* manipulate naturalistic material to bear it out. That's all the earth is for, and all the buildings and things and trees, to bear out the relationship between the souls of men and women" (Kerouac to Ginsberg, 26 February 19[?], NNC). For Kerouac "[t]he stars, the night, the lilac-hedge, the cars, the street, the rickety porches" are the details he uses to convey to the reader the appropriate atmosphere of the moment. In this sense, Kerouac viewed his scenes from the visual perspective of one watching a movie. He realized that behind the surface of each object there is the potential for untapped meaning. A director of words, juggling their placement, objectifying surfaces by subjectively emphasizing the quality of each object, he relied upon common experience as the basis for creating a certain mood and upon his visual orientation of images to make the experience unique, firmly believing in the power of objects themselves to evoke change and create a new spirit. In *The Town and the City* he had used

an advertisement, depicting "a man holding his head in despair," sketched on a wall behind the Martins' Brooklyn apartment, to fix George Martin's gaze upon himself and to call attention to his deterioration (343, 344). For Kerouac it was the responsibility of the author to mediate between life experience and the reality of the text. Kerouac was not and did not see himself as Neal Cassady's Adamic observer, pure, untouched, and unfallen. Kerouac strove to make clear the relationship between the impurity and the purity of life; experience in the text was represented as something more lucid than life itself or the memory of experience, as it represented the essential condition of man as he is, a fallen man observing the experiences of a fallen world. As such, there is no immediacy between the author and his subject, only the desire for wholeness exists to compel him to create a vitality, appearing to close the distance between the individual and the world he identifies as his own or another's. To do this, he had to give artistic expression to experience diluted from an imperfect world. The significance of a pure identity and its meaning to Kerouac is compellingly revealed in *Visions of Gerard* (1958).

We find in *Visions of Gerard* that the most explicit desire of the narrator--"could I resolve in me to keep his [Gerard] fixed-in-memory face free of running off from me"--is directly related to Ti Jean's, the narrator, measure of his own purity--"I would deliver no more obloquies and curse at my damned earth, but obsecrations only" (7). This "purity" is a measure of his spiritual condition and of his sense of wholeness and connection to the world. As a young child, Ti Jean's older brother, Gerard, was the world: "[T]he world was his face" (8).

The relationship between the text that functions to unite the author with his subject, Ti Jean with Gerard, is wholly conditional, a conditionality that is reflected in the structure of the narrative itself. The narrative seeks to simulate the impression of unity that can, in actuality, only be known by the child: "For the first four years of my life, while he lived, I was not Ti Jean Duluoz, I was Gerard" (8). The individual, replacing the child, arises from self-reflection. If the narrative must be free to construct a world around its subject, then Gerard must also be freed from the constraints of the child's admiration. Dissonance is more productive to art than is harmony; this is an adult's realization, and it is also Kerouac's cause for pain. "For me," Ti Jean says, "the first four years of my life are permanent and gray with the memory of a kindly serious face bending over me and being me and blessing me" (10). His pain comes from knowing that he has sacrificed Gerard's self in order to recognize his own: "Would I could remember the huddling and the love of these forlorn two brothers in a past so distant from my sick aim now I couldnt gain its healing virtues if I had the bridge" (11). Realizing the falsity of his position as author, he does not fool himself into believing that the adult might return to childhood and be a child (or that a fallen Adam might return to the garden and be unfallen).

The elusiveness of the bridge sustains the poignancy of the narrative, for the bridge serves as a reminder of the loss of Gerard, and thus the loss of unity; but it is also a symbol of the perfect adequacy of language to create a bridge that invites one to cross in hope of

finding complete fulfillment. For Kerouac, the bridge is a reminder of his disillusionment with life and an awareness of his desire to recover loss and his knowledge that "death is the only decent subject, since it marks the end of illusion and delusion----Death is the other side of the same coin, we call now, Life" (123). It was not his intention to divide society by his writing but to unite it: "I am going to become a strong man and give America a true optimism based on the facts and eventually lead a segment of the way to a new regime of spirit" (Kerouac to Ginsberg, 26 February 19[?], NNC). The role of Kerouac's artist was spiritual. We see why it was important for Kerouac to realize in himself a "pure" identity and to conceal fragmentation, in turn, healing himself, the man. But the artist, Kerouac, refused to accept once and for all that particular illusion of life, for it would require he turn his back on his most essential creative impulse.

At Richmond Hill, New York, Kerouac worked on completing his road novel. He wrote to Ginsberg that he felt he had produced "the first modern novel," but he required some distance between himself and his work before he could complete his revisions, mainly consisting of additions (26 February 1950, NNC). By October, he concluded he had finally finished the manuscript, and he called it "Gone on the Road" (Kerouac to Ginsberg, October 1950, NNC). But then, as before, he found himself disappointed in what he had written. The following summer he decided to cut more material from the manuscript and make new insertions. At the time, he seemed convinced these changes would be his last, for he was looking forward to traveling to San Francisco

to write "'Horn' in the bosom of jazz-ness & American Kicks, & Neal" (Kerouac to Ginsberg, 15 July 1951, NNC). These additions to the manuscript focused on the development of Dean Pomeray's character, but Kerouac, although he felt Neal was his model for Pomeray, found that he was really writing about himself; he turned back to his "Doctor Sax" story: "I've decided . . . [to] start on my own downtown red brick neon in Lowell" (Kerouac to Carl Solomon, 27 December 1951, NNC).

Apparently, Solomon had an old version of Kerouac's road manuscript that he could not sell. In his letter to Solomon, Kerouac mentioned that he heard that John Clellon Holmes had sold *Go*. Kerouac wrote to Solomon, "I understand, dont worry . . . why Scribners would Take John's book and not mine." He was glad about the news of Holmes' book for Neal Cassady's sake: "It gives added incentive to Dean Pomeray's [Neal Cassady] own self written book," but as other letters showed, Kerouac begrudged Holmes his success. He felt that the Beat Generation, as a subject for fiction, belonged to him. In his 1948-1949 "road" journal, he had copied a note from a preceding notebook:

My interest in the 'beat':- it must be because they're not only poor, but *homeless*--without the consolations of the poor family man. Their lives have an *exterior* air of pilgrimage (wandering & impoverished) and as in the case of someone like Neal or Al, a kind of mystic signification (which some wino-hoboes seem to lack, of course.) [[Note on "road rage."]] CALIF. 1947, etc. (1949, TxU)

Holmes' novel did not impress Kerouac. Kerouac's Beat Generation differed in an important way from Holmes' fairly autobiographical

account of his life and involvement with some of the same people on which Kerouac would base his fictional experiences. Paul Hobbes, the central character of *Go*, was self-centered, whereas Sal Paradise, a loner, despised himself for being egocentric and selfish; Sal admired Dean Moriarty because he seemed to embody humility, spirituality, and hope. For Kerouac, the Beat Generation was a vision of humility and hope, which he adorned with the free spirit of jazz music, the language that from his perspective, as an outsider, represented the purity of the soul untainted by "white" ambitions. The tension between Sal and Dean was a tangible measure of Kerouac's own inner conflict: Did he or did he not want success? After *The Town and the City* was accepted for publication, Kerouac wrote in his journal: "God preserve my want of your mysterious wishes. Don't frighten me with Your gratuitous heapings of good fortune, as I have been needlessly frightened by the bad" (Journal, 29 March 1949, TxU).

The numerous detours the manuscript sustained, reflected the author's fear and his self-doubt. For a time he found himself encouraging Neal Cassady to write a novel. His friendship with Cassady was a reminder that his writing was torn between the pure necessity of expression and the reality of the falsity of that expression.

During the spring of 1952, his writing was strained by his attempt to make peace with himself. He cited part of the "closing lines of *On the Road*" for Ginsberg, a segment Kerouac used in *Visions of Cody* (389):

Bent over his wheel like a madman . . . shirtless hatless,  
the moon leering on his shoulder, the apex of the night

sweeping back in a fast shroud, he unrolled his old Ford-joint by cracking the door over the humps and billdales of the Panamanian Hiway through the Fold and Void of Earth Old . . . poor Crafeen, he made his mew in a churchyard marble pew. The bowl of old Okiah, flung from the northern lips of stars, caromed from the baldy temple of the Lady King; they brought news of a tune. (12 March 1952, NNC).

Straining to make his lines poetic, Kerouac's writing is characterized by nervous energy and imaginative leaps that are beyond understanding, except as a private chronicle of Kerouac's poetic development, the use of keywords and phrases that eventually become part of his vocabulary of improvisation. He too felt that this road manuscript was divided, a balancing act between self-doubt and self-affirmation and between the desire to write about a generation and an individual. He told Carl Solomon that he could extract a straight narrative story from this manuscript so that Wynn could publish the book in a pocketbook edition. It seems likely that Kerouac's method of revision, which he claimed consisted mainly of additions, detracted from the plot and interrupted the narrative tone he established at the beginning of *On the Road*. In a letter to Solomon, there is record of one of Kerouac's beginnings to *On the Road*:

I first met Neal Pomeray in 1947 but I didn't travel on the road with him till 1948, just the tail end of that year, as Xmas time, North Carolina to New York City again, in 36 hours, with washing dishes in Philadelphia, a teahead ball in Ozone Park, and a southern drawl evening drive in Rocky Mountain in between. And in all that time Neal just talked and talked and talked. We had met in 1947 when he first came to NY from Denver with his first wife, the 16 year old Louanne Sanderson of Denver and LA where her sadistic handsome father divorced from her mother, was a cop; Neal, all bare ass standing in the door, of a cold water pad when we first knocked on the door, me, Ed Gray, Hal King. They were students at Columbia University, close friends of mine, Hal

was a dear close friend at the time; they told me Neal was a mad genius of jails and raw power . . . (Kerouac to Solomon, 7 April 1952, NNC)

Kerouac told Solomon that he could give him 160 pages of this kind of narrative, describing four trips and "40 states."

For a while, it seemed that Kerouac had no intention of making any more major revisions. Around the same time Kerouac wrote Solomon he also wrote to ask Ginsberg to prepare the way for Solomon's reception of *On the Road*. Kerouac told Ginsberg that "[his] third novel will be under way immediately [. . .] it will be about Bill sinking into South America . . . as vast as *On the Road*." By the end of April, Kerouac said he would be finished editing and typing *On the Road*, then free "to hit onwards" (8 April 1952, NNC).

In May 1952, he found himself revising his work. Robert Giroux wanted to see his manuscript, and this interest, although Kerouac had yet to show the manuscript to his first editor, seemed to make Kerouac more determined to refine his novel so that an editor such as Giroux would not force him into making changes. "I will not tolerate changes this time," Kerouac wrote to Ginsberg. "[T]he prose is mine." His mood changed from that of a writer who is willing to barter for publication to that of a man with a vision he does not want to see compromised (Kerouac to Ginsberg, 10 May 1952, NNC). The middle of May, Kerouac shipped his manuscript to Carl Solomon (Kerouac to Ginsberg, 17 May 1952, NNC).

For Kerouac, the shape that this version of the manuscript took was nothing short of revolutionary. The new manuscript evolved out of

his discovery of "sketching," a writing practice that he identified the year before in October, a month after Solomon "first ordered the Neal book." Kerouac attributed the idea for sketching to Ed White, who had told him: "Why don't you just sketch in the streets like a painter but with words":

Which I did [. . .] everything activates in front of you in myriad profusion, you just have to purify your mind and let it pour the words (which effortless angels of the vision fly when you stand in front of reality) and write with 100% personal honesty both phsychich [sic] and social etc. and slap it all down shameless, willy nilly, rapidly until sometimes I got so inspired I lost consciousness I was writing. (Kerouac to Ginsberg, 18 May 1952, NNC)

As a result of sketching, he added to the "conventional narrative survey of road trips," "a big multi-dimensional conscious and subconscious character invocation of Neal in his whirlwinds" that Kerouac felt had produced a modern novel of significance. "On the Road is a very great book, but I may have to end up daring publishers to publish it . . . but he who publishes it will make money . . . you'll see why, when." Kerouac hoped that a publishing company like Scribners or Farrar Straus might bring out his novel. He foresaw that Wynn would not want the manuscript, but he was willing to write a "new Road for Wynn," probably a manuscript spun from the 160 page narrative stretch he thought Wynn could use as a pocketbook (Kerouac to Ginsberg, 18 May 1952, NNC).

Acting as Kerouac's agent (Kerouac had promised Ginsberg 10%), Ginsberg was disappointed that Kerouac had not sent his manuscript to him before sending it to Solomon (Kerouac to Ginsberg, 17 May 1952,

NNC). Ginsberg received his copy of *On the Road* in early June, but instead of lauding it he criticized the loose structure of the book, which struck Ginsberg as a difficulty even Kerouac's excellent prose sections could not surmount. In short, Ginsberg said that the manuscript was unpublishable:

I don't see how it will ever be published, it's so personal, it's so full of sex language, so full of our local mythological references, I don't know if it would make sense to any publisher--by make sense I mean, if he could follow what happened to what characters where.

The language is great, the blowing is mostly great, the inventions have full-blown ecstatic style. Also the tone of speech is at times neares [sic] to un-innocent heart speech ("why did I write this?" and "I am a criminal") Where you are writing steadily and well, the sketches, the exposition, it's the best that is written in America, I do believe. I'm not stopping now to write you praise-letter, tho maybe I should . . . but on my mind I am worried by the whole book. It's crazy (not merely inspired crazy) but unrelated crazy. (Kerouac to Ginsberg, 12 June 1952, NNC)

Ginsberg's commentary suggests that Kerouac's May manuscript contained elements of *On the Road* and of *Visions of Cody*. There appeared to Ginsberg to be a plot--"what happened to what characters where"--jumbled by a mythology that he felt was too much part of a personal history.

Ginsberg's immediate reaction may have influenced Kerouac to divide his work into two novels. Although Ginsberg was careful to stress his admiration of some of the prose, he also told Kerouac that he "didn't cover Neal's history," but he had "covered" his "own reactions." That *Visions of Cody* is very much a book about Kerouac's perceptions of Neal Cassady--an imaginative history of that man, and

*On the Road* is, in essence, a book based on Kerouac's reactions to his own life experiences--for instance we have seen how he transformed his record of a walk through a Denver neighborhood into a section of *On the Road*--seems further proof that Kerouac was frustrated by his failure to interweave both into one narrative.

At first, Kerouac refused to concede to others that he had failed to combine the flesh and the blood of his writing into one book. Straight narrative combined with poetic fragments of experience is a technical feat that characterizes Kerouac's writing. Angered at Ginsberg, in a letter dated 8 October 1952, Kerouac responded to Ginsberg's assertion that he would not be able to sell the novel. Kerouac implied that his preceding road manuscript, the one he had "written in 1951," was an act of sound business sense, written in a form appropriate for "pocket book styles and the new trend in writing about drugs and sex." That novel had not been published, because, in part, Kerouac had not been satisfied with the text; he pressed himself to write something better and more significant. This was the thrust of his remark about Holmes: "--why they publish Holmes's book which stinks and don't publish mine because it's not as good as some of the other things I've done?" Kerouac felt that he had achieved something fine and honest and was dismayed and even shocked that Ginsberg called his proceeding *On the Road* "'imperfect' as though anything you ever did or anybody was perfect?" (Kerouac to Ginsberg, 8 October 1952, NNC). But eventually, Kerouac began again.

In the fall of 1952, he rented a room "in Skid Row" and began "writing a big new novel like *Town and City*." He did not describe

the content of this new story, but he quoted a thought that had come to him when he had been alone: "Well, Neal has always been crazy, since the day he put his head in my door at Ozone Park and was making me believe he wanted to learn to write" (Kerouac to Ginsberg, 8 November 1952, NNC). It is likely that during this time Kerouac began to put together his materials, new and revised, for the road manuscript that he finally sent to Malcolm Cowley at Viking Press. We can be certain that by January 1953, Kerouac had finished *On the Road*, for he told Neal and Carolyn Cassady that he had completed three novels, "Road, Sax, and Town & City" and "two novels" were "underway" (10 January 1953, NNC).

Early spring of 1953, Kerouac's literary agent, Phyllis Jackson, of MCA, submitted *On the Road* to Malcolm Cowley, who at the time was an editorial advisor for Viking Press. Cowley was interested in the manuscript and brought Kerouac's work to Viking's attention at an editorial meeting. Although the manuscript received more than one reading, it was rejected. Cowley maintained his interest in the novel, even though Kerouac had reacted angrily to Viking's initial rejection, withdrawing not only *On the Road* but two other manuscripts. Phyllis Jackson wrote to Cowley, "You ask about Kerouac and if he broke with me as well as with Viking. I wish I could answer that. There was no overt break; he simply went away muttering that he didn't want to be published by anyone" (12 May 1953, ICN). Two years later, in June, Kerouac regretted his rash decision to turn his back on Viking, writing to Cowley, "At this late date, of course, I wish I had

listened to your advice in 1953 and published *On the Road* when you wanted to" (1 June 1955, ICN). But Cowley slowly continued to try to create Viking editorial support for *On the Road*.

In November, Helen K. Taylor sent Cowley a memo in which she agreed that Kerouac's novel was "a 'classic of our times.'" Taylor wanted to see the novel "publish[ed] quietly and with conviction."

It's one of those books that "just is." Except for some large-chunk cutting (for it is too long) it needs only the lightly touching pencil, for refinement has no place in this prose. It might be a time-consuming job, but not a difficult one. I am not too much worried about the obscenity. I'm sure the whorehouse scene can get by practically in toto. Not that people won't think it's a dirty book. It's a question of publishing it quietly for the discerning few, with no touting, pre-viewing, or advance quotes from run-of-the-mill names. Not easy, but very challenging. (ICN)

Taylor recognized that Kerouac's book could create a stir in America, but Viking would not want responsibility for any opposition *On the Road* might incur. Kerouac never saw this memo. If he had, he would have certainly remembered the quiet disappearance of *The Town and the City* from the literary marketplace. There had been no major publicity to create sales for Kerouac's first novel. Indeed, Giroux had been out of the country when the novel was released, and Kerouac had never quite forgiven him for that. Kerouac now wanted to be read by many people. He wanted mass recognition, and he wanted to be known for writing a masterpiece. But as he discovered, those two notions seldom go together. He would find fame, as Viking saw to it that his novel was "tout[ed]," but he would be famous for writing a sensational bestseller, not a great literary work. Trepidation about the recep-

tion of *On the Road*--there was perhaps never any question among Viking readers that the book would be a financial success--impeded Viking's decision to publish Kerouac's novel. Malcolm Cowley, committed to his interest in Kerouac's novel, prepared the way.

Cowley had first met with Kerouac in May of 1953. Kerouac wrote to Carolyn Cassady: "I had lunch with Malcolm Cowley as I probably told you, over Doctor Sax, and he turned out to be a thin old Alan Temko semi pendantic [sic] Vermont professor type with a hearing aid and said if I took out the fantasy parts of Sax the just stories of boyhood growing up Massachusetts would make me \$50000" (14 May 1953, TxU). That summer, Cowley assured Ginsberg he was sincerely interested in helping Kerouac publish his works. Cowley wrote:

You are right in thinking that I am interested in Kerouac and his work. He seems to be the most interesting writer who is not being published today--and I think it is important that he should be published, or he will run the danger of losing that sense of the audience, which is part of a writer's equipment.

A cautious man, Cowley warned Ginsberg that the only book he had seen of Kerouac's "with a chance of immediate book publication" was *On the Road*. Impressed by the writing in "the second version" of "ON THE ROAD" (not to be confused with the "Visions of Neal" manuscript) and by "SAX," still he could not foresee their publication except by a small press such as "New Directions or Grove Press" (Cowley to Ginsberg, 14 July 1953, NNC). Cowley thought Kerouac could increase his chances of a large publisher accepting *On the Road* if sections of the manuscript were published in a literary journal. Having found a

literary critic of some influence to champion his work, Kerouac followed Cowley's advice to submit sections of the manuscript to *New World Writing* (Kerouac to Cowley, 21 November 1953, ICN).

Adam Gussow has suggested that Malcolm Cowley was interested in Kerouac because they were joined by a "common sensibility": Cowley had defined a generation with *Exile's Return*, and Kerouac had delineated his own generation with *On the Road* (296). In a letter to Gussow, Cowley admitted that he was "impressed by Kerouac's account of a new generation" (297). Although many critics would say that the Lost Generation and the Beat Generation are vastly different movements, Cowley's depiction of the Lost Generation emphasized movement, vigor, and salvation, qualities Kerouac's manuscript exhibited (Gussow, 297).

Cowley's epilogue to *Exile's Return* summed up his retrospective view of the events he had written about. It indicates his frame of mind, and in terms of a general history of individuals, it frames the similarities between Kerouac and Cowley's vision of two different historical times:

A generation of American writers went out into the world like the children in Grimm's fairy tales who ran away from a cruel stepmother. They wandered for years in search of treasure and then came back like the grown children to dig for it at home. But the story in life was not so simple and lacked the happy ending of fairy tales. Perhaps there was really a treasure and perhaps it had been buried all the time in their father's garden, but the exiles did not find it there. They found only what others were finding: work to do as best as they could and families to support and educate. The adventure had ended and once more they were part of common life. (289)

Kerouac's vivid use of darkness and ghosts created the atmosphere of a

modern day fairy tale, complete with the hero of a western, sunsets, and pearls: "Somewhere along the line . . . the pearl would be handed to me" (*On the Road* 11). Like Cowley's literary history, Kerouac's story ended with Sal and Dean returning to the affairs of the every day. Disillusioned with each other, Sal and Dean parted, Dean returning to his wife and children; and Sal to his familiar world in the east. In the final scene of *On the Road*, which bears a resemblance to the conclusion of Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, Sal pressed his face to the back of the limousine to catch his last glimpse of the travel worn Dean. Whereas Hemingway had used the symbol of a traffic officer, who "raised his baton" (247), and Cowley had chosen Harry Crosby's death as "a symbol of change" (288), Kerouac had made the receding image of the silent Dean Moriarty, with his head bent, Sal's last refuge of hope to evade the common world (309). Like his predecessors, Sal accepted his fate and put his hope in a symbol.

Because a copy of the *Road* manuscript Viking edited has not been made available for study whether Kerouac decided on his own to divide his novel into four major parts and a brief fifth section or if Cowley had suggested this structure is difficult to determine. According to Cowley, when he first read *On the Road*, the text still lacked a cohesive organization, and so he suggested that Kerouac "consolidate" the "episodes" (Gifford and Lee 206).

There is other common ground between Cowley and Kerouac: Cowley's epilogue to *Exile's Return* described the four stages of his Lost Generation, beginning with the writer's "detach[ment]" from his home. Cowley's young writer, disconnected from cultural and emotional in-

volvement with his family, unable to identify with his background, felt that he was an exile in his own home. Dean and Sal were sons of a Lost Generation that had failed to create a homeland for their children. The fabled tinsmith, Dean's father, was a reminder of the rootlessness of the Lost Generation: Dean and Sal inherited the loss those before them endured and created. While the exiles did not recognize what they had lost until they left their homeland, upon their return to their native grounds most of them remained disassociated from their spiritual heritage: "At home they continued to think of themselves as oppressed by the great colorless mass of American society, and they tried to defend their own standard by living apart from society, as if on private islands" (*Exile's* 290), but they found they could not escape their middle class ambitions. In the fourth stage, they felt that political and social struggle could create change "and allied themselves with one or another of the groups" (291). In *Part Four* of *On the Road*, there is no home to return to: Dean has been rejected by his family and friends, and in *Part Five*, Sal does not have the will to reclaim Dean. Loss and displacement become the main tenants of Kerouac's narrative. This is nowhere more clearly stated than in *Doctor Sax*. When the child, Ti Jean, begins a long hike from Lowell, Massachusetts to a small town in New Hampshire, he is overwhelmed with terror:

In the imprint of the trees on the sky in the horizon, I judged I was being torn from my mother's womb with each step from Home Lowell into the Unknown [. . .] a serious lostness that has never repaired itself in my shattered flesh dumb-hanging for the light-- (111)

Likewise, the child's dream of oneness with the world and mastery of its secrets is proven by *On the Road* to be inadequate for the simple reason that society has grown too complicated and too massive. It can no longer afford to sustain the vision of an individual and so gives an appropriate vision to the individual to actualize. One must allow the secret desires of the inner life to rot in exchange for the promise of happiness and security in a society in which consensus is valued and rootlessness is a sign of spiritual illness brought about by the failure to belong. For Kerouac, the choice between belonging and alienation, between security as a "working" man and the uncertainty of his fate as a writer, was not easy to make. Kerouac was torn between social expectations and self-expectations. The temptation to give up selfhood, individual responsibility, for a place in society that promises security and well-being if only one agrees to belong, was only too real for Kerouac. As long as he continued to center his life around writing, he remained fallen from the garden: "The Devil was a charming fool" (*Visions of Gerard* 123). Kerouac finds a transient way to remain true to himself, insofar as he can be true. For Kerouac, to act out the role of the artist, to impersonate the omniscient, is a means of evoking the forgotten. To know the events of the past in one's self is to finally be rooted in life itself and not in the other; by shaping experience, Kerouac shared his memories with people. He unveiled to them a personal vision of himself. By doing so, he did not offer a way of life but the potential for individuals to reclaim their very own visions that had somehow been lost to them.

And yet, Kerouac could not always meet the demands of every day life, or the demands upon himself to be an artist.

More than once, Kerouac found himself confused about whether he wanted fame or obscurity, an audience or solitude. Kerouac's "Jazz of the Beat Generation," an excerpt from *On the Road* that integrated material from *Visions of Cody*, appeared April 1955 in Arabel Porter's *New World Writing*, #7. He was glad of its acceptance. A year before, Kerouac had lamented that Seymour Lawrence of Little, Brown turned down *On the Road* "with the same little tune about 'craftsmanship' he sang in 1948 about 'The Death of George Martin . . .'" He felt that his writing was useless, and he hated shuffling his manuscript from publisher to publisher, for it only made him feel ineffectual. "Book is now at E.P. Dutton's," wrote Kerouac, "--Arabelle [sic] New World Writing is sitting on 4 of my pieces--All the others are in my agent's drawers unread & dusting--what the hell's the use?" (Kerouac to Ginsberg, 1954 May, NNC). When Porter accepted "Jazz Excerpts" in August of 1954, Kerouac was uplifted. There existed in Kerouac the honest belief that he could be famous without sacrificing the purity of the identity he sought to maintain while enacting the role of the author. He dreamed of international success: ". . . I changed the title to BEat Generation of On the Road, hoping to sell it, and also I see 'beatitude' in 'beat' . . . which might make it an international word understood in French, Spanish, most romance langu[ag]es, just think of 'beat'---'be-at-itude'--and 'beat' belongs to me as far I can see---(for use as title of book)." Impatient for

this moment to happen, the tension between his desire to present his work and to refrain from advertising himself welded the breach between *On the Road* and *Visions of Cody*. Kerouac had used this opportunity to include in the excerpt in *New World* sections from his "Visions of Neal" manuscript. He was not satisfied to wait for an appropriate time before "Visions" could "see light in print" (Kerouac to Ginsberg, 23 August 1954, NNC).

Kerouac published "Jazz of the Beat Generation" under the pseudonym Jean-Louis. At the time the excerpt was published, he called his novel *The Beat Generation*. "Jazz of the Beat Generation" gives us some idea of what kinds of editorial changes Viking made to *On the Road*. The *New World* excerpt preserves the stylistic tendencies, for example, the minimalist use of punctuation that Kerouac gravitated toward as he developed a spontaneous writing style:

Out we jumped in the warm mad night hearing a wild tenor-man's bawling horn across the way going "EE-YAH! EE-YAH!" and hands clapping to the beat and folks yelling "Go, go, go!" ("Jazz of the Beat Generation" 7)

Out we jumped in the warm, mad night, hearing a wild tenor-man bawling horn across the way, going "EE-YAH! EE-YAH! EE-YAH!" and hands clapping to the beat and folks yelling, "Go, go, go!" (*On the Road* 196)

Unlike his Viking editors, Kerouac had confidence in the ability of his prose to match the vitality of actual experience. He chose not to use the comma except deliberately to emphasize the beat in the repetition of the word "go." Since a sensitive reader will perceive the placement of the comma as a sign that there is a slight interruption in continuity, the Viking rendition of Kerouac's sentence creates an

artificial impression of orderliness in Sal's observations. The warmth and the madness of the night are in of themselves distinct elements, separated from the sound of the horn and of the crowd. In contrast to the Viking editors, Kerouac sought to recreate the sensation of peaked momentum by way of the order of the words themselves. The noise of the horn and the voice of the people are incorporated with the physical descriptions so that a sense of oneness is conveyed between the crowd, the tenorman, and the actual sounds they produce. Here, Kerouac actualizes a moment of life as living experience. He is able to write a moment into existence by acknowledging reality as his model while seeking to portray his impression of life, his vision of it, rather than the details of life. And as we have seen in *On the Road*, it is the vision that lives.

Kerouac was especially impressed by his description of Lester, a portrait he had taken from his "Visions" manuscript and incorporated into "Jazz of the Beat Generation" (Kerouac to Ginsberg, 23 August 1954, NNC):

you can hear Lester blow and he is the greatness of America in a single Negro musician--he is just like the river, the river starts in near Butte, Montana, in frozen snow caps (Three Forks) and meanders on down across states and entire territorial areas of dun bleak land with hawthorn crackling in the sleet, picks up rivers at Bismarck, Omaha, and St. Louis just north, another at Kay-ro, another in Arkansas, Tennessee, comes deluging on New Orleans with muddy news from the land and a roar of subterranean excitement that is like the vibration of the entire land sucked of its gut in mad midnight, fevered, hot, the big mudhole rank clawpole old frogular pawed-soul titanic Mississippi from the North, full of wires, cold wood and horn . . . ("Jazz Excerpts" 14-15; See also *Visions of Cody* 392)

Kerouac probably felt that *On the Road* lacked the poetic intensity of "Visions of Neal," but more to the point, Kerouac was showing off his literary style when he inserted the Lester sentence into the excerpt. Perhaps, too, he was still reluctant to realize that he had failed to write a manuscript that incorporated traditional narrative with this more self-indulgent and experimental writing. In a letter to Malcolm Cowley, the winter of 1955, Kerouac called this kind of writing "wild-prose," and he told Cowley that Cowley had not yet seen this kind of writing and hinted that he should read "Visions of Neal" (Kerouac to Cowley, 20 February 1955, ICN).

Stanley Colbert of the Sterling Lord Agency was handling Kerouac's work. Knopf had recently rejected *On the Road*, and Kerouac reminded Cowley once again of his early interest: "He [Sterling] has *On the Road* (now re-titled "The Beat Generation" because at that Harvard Club Lunch when Harrison Smith wanted to know what my book was, you said 'It's a book about the beat generation')." This letter served to let Cowley know that not only was Kerouac willing to make concessions to get published, but Kerouac also had business acumen. He also made it clear to Cowley that he wanted to separate his business life from his private life. He warned Cowley that his excerpt from *On the Road* would appear in two months under a pseudonym: "I call myself 'Jean-Louis' instead of 'John Kerouac'--I want to separate my private life from my possible publishing life, for reasons of peace & quiet" (20 February 1955, ICN).

It dismayed Cowley that Kerouac had published "Jazz of the Beat

Generation" under a different name. Kerouac apologized to Cowley and explained that he was afraid that if his second "ex-wife" found out he had recently published work, she would try to make him give her money. He was also afraid that he might be sentenced to a "workhouse for non-support." Although when he last appeared before a judge, he discovered that his "chronic thrombo-phlebitis" made him "not liable to prosecution but 'disabled,'" he was still certain that Joan Haverty would find a way to continue to persecute him with threats. He hoped to be out of the country when she realized that Jean Louis was Jack Kerouac (Kerouac to Cowley, 1 June 1955, ICN).

His physical health deteriorating, impoverished and depressed, Kerouac was anxious for *On the Road* to be published. In the United States, he did not have enough money to buy the "expensive penicillin" he needed, let alone basic shelter. With a "[l]oan" from the "American Academy of Arts & Letters," Kerouac planned to leave the country: "That would take me to Mexico, where penicillin is \$1 a shot right in druggists store and the altitude is good for thick blood" (Kerouac to Cowley, 4 July 1955, ICN).

Cowley immediately responded to Kerouac's 4 July 1955 letter. Kerouac wrote back to Cowley 19 July 1955:

Your letter made me feel good, and warm, and better than anything in years. It was a lamp suddenly being lit in the darkness, like that. It was a selfless gift of kindness, as well as news of a definite gift being made to me, i.e., your efforts to sell Mexican Girl and to get the loan from national Institute. Again and again, thank you, thank you.

Cowley's letter inspired Kerouac to begin a new novel and more impor-

tantly, as Kerouac said, "[T]o control my curve and get it over the plate and communicate." He promised Cowley that he would be "the first to see" his new work. With borrowed money from friends, he left Rocky Mount, North Carolina (19 July 1955, ICN). By August he was settled in Mexico. With news that Malcolm Cowley wanted to write the introduction to *On the Road*, and after a period of frenzied productivity that bolstered his confidence, he returned to the United States in early September. During his sabbatical, he had reevaluated his priorities and concluded:

I see now the whole Cathedral of Form which this ["the *Duluoz Legend*] is, and am so glad that I self-taught myself . . . to write SPONTANEOUS PROSE so that though the eventual LEGEND will run into millions of words, they'll all be spontaneous and therefore pure and therefore interesting and at the same time what rejoices me the most:-*RHYTHMIC*---It's prose answering the requirements mentioned by W C Williams, for natural-speech rhythms and words--I'm not doing a pitch for Kerouac, he doesn't need it any more, he is walking around in ecstasy because his entire life work is beginning to shape up and he knows that all of it (tho eventually it will languish among the ruins) is holy and was a well done thing. Whether I'm published or not, I'll be an old man resting on my laurels and my wreaths---and then the further beauty of abandoning it all as just so much sad, human, and arbitrary poppycock someday & retiring in a sea-side hut to practise [sic] tranquil meditation unto the grave . . . (11 September 1955, ICN)

His writing method, now that it seemed to him to be perfected, also explained the reason for his vulnerability, which on occasion appeared to others as spitefulness and paranoia. Though he seemed to flee from any omen of impending doom, Kerouac demonstrated the actual courage he possessed by continuing to write what he wanted to write, even though he knew it might not ever be published. To him courage

meant being honest with himself and not being afraid to reveal his own inadequacies. Revision, as Kerouac defined it, was the further covering up of the truth. It was the compulsion to bury the first thought that had made further meaning possible. In this sense, spontaneous prose was the unraveling of mind's thought. It was personal revelation that was coaxed from hiding into illumination not only from the grip of self-abnegation but from the threat of condemnation by others and from artistic standards that concealed truth beneath preconceptions of form and content. Kerouac told Cowley, "I foresee a new literature on account of this---but it's hard, it's paradoxical, i.e., it's taken me all my life to learn to write what I actually think--by *not thinking* (11 September 1955, ICN). Personal experience and the fears he had faced on a daily basis had fashioned the foundation for this process, and Kerouac himself had consciously practiced a method of writing that paradoxically, and with self-knowledge of that paradox, he called "spontaneous."

While Kerouac was waiting for notice of Viking's definite acceptance of *On the Road*, he had written *Tristessa*, *Mexico City Blues*, and *Visions of Gerard*. He still had not placed *Doctor Sax*, which he would rewrite, nor *The Subterraneans*. His letters to Cowley gradually grew less congenial. Without word from Viking, Kerouac once again presented himself as deflated. He was compelled to tell Cowley that his new words were proof that Cowley was "not wastin . . . time on no slug-gard." (10 February 1956, ICN).

In late spring of 1956, Kerouac was ready to work on the changes to *On the Road* that Cowley and Keith Jennison, the editor at Viking

Press who was backing Kerouac, wanted him to make: "Please send the list of recommendations," Kerouac wrote, "and I will start on it (the Denver section ect.)" (Kerouac to Cowley, 19 April 1956, ICN). He hoped that he would receive the "recommendations" before he left for his post at a fire lookout in "the high Cascades" on top of Desolation Peak. He wanted to be able to complete the manuscript while he was at the lookout (Kerouac to Cowley, 19 May 1956, ICN). Limiting any danger of a lawsuit against Viking, he had already changed the names of characters and altered potentially libelous details. Unfortunately, Cowley did not send his recommendations, and Kerouac took this as a sign of disinterest and disregard for his manuscript. Demanding a contract for *On the Road*, he wrote Cowley a postcard and told him if he did not have a contract by October he would "withdraw the manuscript from Viking": "Than have it demeaned," he wrote, "I'd rather it were never published" (3 July 1956, ICN). Early September, he had his contract and was on his way to a fate he could not have imagined for himself.

There are as many surmises about the history of the composition of *On the Road* as there are scholars interested in Kerouac, but one thing is clear, according to Kerouac's personal documentation, *On the Road* was not written in three weeks. His notebooks, letters, and relationship with Malcolm Cowley reveal that Kerouac was a complex individual, working towards the completion of *On the Road* in stages. *On the Road* was his most difficult novel to write and to sell, and it tried his stamina in a way that none of his other manuscripts would,

and yet, after its publication he would falter; he would find that he could not write his way out of the public eye only into it.

There is no doubt that for Kerouac writing was an intellectualized process that entrapped him and freed him. He had learned to write spontaneously, by sketching, but the act of writing itself as it was thought out by Kerouac was not spontaneous. The end product he sought, the goal of composition, was the essence of spontaneity, self-generated impulse to define and to preserve the self through the intertwining of impression and thought, or, as Kerouac had called them in *Doctor Sax*, dream and memory (5). The text was a mysterious web, the shroud that he created in order to protect his identity. But, "Belief and Technique for Modern Prose" and "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose" were about how the writer unmasked himself and revealed to himself and others his bare bones--"No fear or shame in the dignity of your experience, languages & knowledge" ("Belief," #24). In this sense, it is more than a theory of writing; these statements were confessions of his failure to "accept loss forever." "Belief and Technique" and "Essentials," as a prescribed method of composition, was an attempt to regulate wholeness, to allow the complete person to speak, and to repair the "shattered flesh" (*Doctor Sax* 111). The "list of essentials" reflected his long-term struggle to free his artistic expression from outside constraints, but he was not free from his inner bonds, for he was a man divided by his own ambivalence, by his desire to find unity, and by his artistic impulse to reveal the illusion of that unity. "Dreams are where participants in a drama recognize one another's death--there is no illusion of life in this

Dream--" (*Doctor Sax* 112). Memory was his means to shroud the dream. It was memory that he employed to reconstruct experience in the various phases of the Duluoz Legend. Certainly, "Belief" and "Essentials" led Kerouac to a revelation about the truth of his existence: The purity of his art depended upon the purity of his existence.

In *Doctor Sax*, this paradox is enacted in the drama of Ti Jean's, the child's, meeting with Doctor Sax, as told by the adult Duluoz. Duluoz attempts to sustain a sense of wholeness of connection between the past and the present and between the child and the adult; his memory inadvertently works to shroud the realization of the dream that one will eventually awaken to death. In this novel, his creative impulse is shown to be a negation of his creative act. The shroud protects the child, as the universe is kept whole by the mystery of Sax who is shielded by a black cape. He appears as a part of the Dracut woods, the Merrimac River, the bushes, as a spectator on a bridge, a surveyor of Snake Hill Castle. He is the source for all the phantoms of Pawtucketville that simultaneously bind the child to the terror of reality and to the comfort of darkness where it is possible, in this world, for his father to be "a man in a straw hat hurrying in a redbrick alley of Eternity" (112).

Ti Jean only knows Sax indirectly: "I didn't know his name then. He didn't frighten me, either. I sensed he was my friend [ . . . ] my old, old friend [ . . . ] my ghost, personal angel, private shadow, secret lover" (33-34). Duluoz cannot abandon his "secret lover," for Sax is the source of poetry gleamed in childhood, the source of

"Eternity." Without his cloak, Sax is ordinary: "I see that I have to die in broad daylight where I go around in ordinary clothes" (246). Unmasked, Sax exposes the illusions of the dream that begin the novel and enwrap the text in the adult shroud of memory, bridging the past and the present with spectral images that haunt Kerouac elsewhere, as in *Mexico City Blues*:

Men know the mist is not their friend--  
They come out of fields & put coats on  
And become businessmen & die stale  
The same loathsome stale death  
They mighta died in countryside  
Hills of dung.  
My remembrance of my father  
in downtown Lowell  
walking like cardboard cut  
across the lost lights  
is the same empty material  
as my father in the grave. (103rd Chorus, 103)

Duluoz fears that the identity he re-creates in the text will be unshrouded, its separate existence exposed. Thus Doctor Sax advises: "[O]ne of the Code laws of the dark, is, never let yourself be seen by shroud or self" (196). But Duluoz cannot resist the attraction of watching himself, as Doctor Sax or as the adult voyeur: "'Take note, take note . . . ' I'm saying to myself in the dream, 'when you pass the doorway look very close at Gus Rigopoulos, Jackie Duluoz and Lousy'" (7). Ti Jean is Duluoz and Duluoz is Doctor Sax. They exist separately, but they are joined by the same destination and the same framing of the self behind the self: the unexpected glimpse of some spectral image, a shadow that seems alive, the sudden realization that something from the past was, indeed, for the moment, at one's back.

Is this an illusion? A memory appearing in the dark cloak of Kerouac's Doctor Sax? Or is it the shrouded realization that one never leaves his or her past behind? that we are all headed to the same end, that "we're all going to die?" These are questions for which no answer is possible without exposing the construct of the author.

The purity Kerouac desires of his authorial identity is confused by his artistic impulse to reclaim loss and by his desire to maintain a vision of self that, protected by his writing, is essentially un-touchable. "I cannot," Leo Percepied wrote, "begin to understand who I am or what I am any more, my love for Mardou has completely separated me from any previous phantasies valuable and otherwise" (*The Subterraneans* 63). In *The Subterraneans*, Leo's textual identity is challenged by his need to rectify an image of himself that will withstand the outside world's view of his own incomprehensibility:

but my heart sank for the Beach has always hated me, cast me out, overlooked me, shat on me, from the beginning in 1943 on in--for look, coming down the street I am some kind of hoodlum and then when they learn I'm not a hoodlum but some kind of crazy saint they don't like it and moreover they're afraid I'll suddenly become a hoodlum but some kind of crazy saint they don't like it and moreover they're afraid I'll suddenly become a hoodlum anyway and slug them . . . (10)

As an artist and as a man, Kerouac's identity was vulnerable to transgression. Oddly enough, it was the world outside of his Legend that most vividly and unknowingly exposed the vulnerability of the identity he sought to shield from his creative impulse to reveal the broken skeleton of his existence. America, like Kerouac, had sought wholeness, and in that search had discovered its own fragility, its own

Doctor Sax. Her own vulnerabilities matched by Kerouac's, he was, in fact, dramatizing a generation's psyche. America wanted to forget and to banish its bane. The hero of the Beat Generation was to have served this purpose. But, Kerouac had remembered and incorporated the bane into his identity. This was the irreconcilable difference between Kerouac and his critics.

## Chapter Five

### Fellow Travelers and the "Image of Regret"

And yet, he thought, perhaps we hate the book because it has so hideous a possibility of being true, and we hate the man who wrote it as in our hearts we would blame the physician who told us of our unknown but suspected disease.

Lionel Trilling, *The Middle of the Journey* (1947)

Kerouac was more than a novelist. With the publication of *Mexico City Blues* (1958) he was also, in his own right, a poet, and on occasion, when his pen turned to the essay he was an uncanny observer of his contemporaries. *Starting Out in the Thirties*, *End to Innocence*, *Exile's Return*, and other literary histories written by America's major critics have been applauded for bringing the intellectual's life into focus, making perceptible to a conventional public the brilliant thinker's and the artist's anxieties, whether personal or political. But Kerouac's fiction, documenting the fate of the writer whose persona was that of Whitman's democratic bard, was judged too autobiographical to be ranked with literary productions deemed representative of a nation's *mature* artistic endeavor.

In 1957, the *Partisan Review* published "The Young Generation." Norman Podhoretz said that along with the attack on "liberalism," as a simplistic ideology, "guilty of a failure to take a sufficiently complicated view of reality," there originated demands on literature to reflect "the qualities of *maturity* against the values of youth" (106, 107). Since World War II, liberalism was disdained for its imprecision, for its belief that human nature could be changed and

controlled, for its simplistic "view of reality," and for its multifarious collection of temperaments fitting "only to the naive, the inexperienced, the callow, the rash: in short, the immature" (107). This attack, Podhoretz said, betrayed "covert self-castigation" and "an assault on the intellectual life of the 30's itself" (108). It was this assault that left its mark on Jack Kerouac.

By 1957, it was commonplace for educators and intellectuals to feel that the fragmentation of culture and value threatened general literacy. Kerouac was a tenebrous timekeeper. Refusing to turn the past away, he was denied passage, forged in part by the Second World War, into the modern world of which America wanted to be the model leader and innovator. A subliminal pastiche, *On the Road* baffles us. Disinherited from its origins, Kerouac's second novel is an example of the "picaresque mode" and "elegiac romance," or a "traditional tale of youth's disillusionment," resembling the narrative techniques of *Huck Finn* and *The Great Gatsby* (Weinreich 34, 37; French 44;). But we have not named the self-alienating quality of the text. Why it is an important work remains to be said. Why did *On the Road* endanger the identities of intellectuals?

Kerouac did not demure voicing his beliefs. When a 37 year old Kerouac wrote, "I say the American Press lies and lies in its teeth" ("The Last Word" 42), it was 1960, the end of a prosperous decade and the beginning of the next nine years in which he found his voice expunged. He had watched his country become adept at fashioning truth out of half-truth. Anticommunist propaganda had controlled the commu-

nications industry, channeling creative freedom into dogmatic political platforms. Kerouac knew firsthand how the media could transform an individual into a personality. Just as Joseph R. McCarthy persuaded Americans to fear that their neighbors might be Communists, the television screen turned Kerouac the writer into a sham: "Clifton Fadiman showing a picture of me on TV with beard typing on a portable aboard a speeding motorcycle ([I] never had either object)" ("The Last Word" 42). An outsider himself, Kerouac realized that when Khrushchev placed a hat on his brow during Eisenhower's speech, he was merely trying to shade his bald head from the hot sun. The press turned Khrushchev and his hat into a symbol of Russia's eagerness to "'upstage'" America (41) and turned Kerouac into a symbol of beat mutiny.

In 1951, Malcolm Cowley wrote, "This is an age of criticism, an age when critics have begun to speak with more authority and influence than creative writers, even though they address a smaller body of readers" ("The New" 7). Designating the intellectuals of the 50s the "conservative contraction," Douglas Miller and Marion Nowak characterized them as "staid, respectable, and conformist" (*The Fifties* 220). As a group, intellectuals had dimmed their revolutionary spirit and quitted the moral proprieties they had established for themselves in the 30s. Choosing to berate people like Kerouac, who expressed a familiarity with blacks and other minorities that from the intellectual's perspective was a naive and an incomprehensible depiction of fellowship, their own evaluations of the 50s seemed myopic, and they drew far from the reality of the people they had once championed.

The country was lonely. Countrymen, once united by the idea of fraternity, denied the existence of that idea. To those who remembered their past beliefs, particularly those intellectuals who had once lived and breathed Communism or its ideal, Kerouac's prose seemed too spiritual, too truth-seeking, too far from the realm of historical materialism, and too indebted to the tradition of American Romanticism. On *Firing Line*, Kerouac told William F. Buckley that the Communists had jumped on his back. Because Kerouac had been drinking, it was easy to laugh off his remarks and to dismiss the author as a bitter paranoid man, who had nothing better to do than imagine conspiracies. But if we are to once and for all relinquish the fantasy that Kerouac was a mere hipster who posed as a writer and if we are to arrive at a more complete understanding of his literary productions and their significance to our readings of literary history, we must take seriously the proposition that the failure of the communist dream emerged in the 50s, as an underlying parable, foregrounding critical inquiry, and very likely, shaped the literary reception of Kerouac himself.

Perhaps Kerouac was right when he said that the [American] Communists had conspired against him. *On the Road* assimilated the emotional experience of intellectuals who had come to maturity in the 30s and the early 40s, and the failure of the communist dream affected the lives of many people, not only certain New York intellectuals but also the "proletariat" they had tried to help. Although Kerouac did not take part in political rallies, he poeticized the "common man," the

hero of his America. Whereas the New York intellectual suffered personal loss and abasement through political experience, Kerouac suffered his losses at the hands of editors, intellectuals, and the public. Whereas New York intellectuals dissented from the communist dream, with his writings, Kerouac affirmed the significance of dream.

Kerouac sought to find vision in dream; doing what a group of people, acting for the masses, could not do, Sal Paradise transformed a dead dream into a vision. In the Foreword to *Book of Dreams*, Kerouac wrote: "And . . . the fact that everybody in the world dreams every night ties all mankind together shall we say in one unspoken Union and also proves that the world is really transcendental which the Communists do not believe because they think their dreams are 'unrealities' instead of visions of what they saw in their sleep," suggesting he strongly identified with a certain aspect of the communist experience. By 1961, when *Book of Dreams* was published, if the reader could not place Kerouac's commentary in a cultural context or establish its relevance to his life, it probably seemed strange, even ridiculous. Kerouac never spells out in any one sentence what he meant by the above statement, but through a few scattered dreams he does suggest that he was somehow held captive by the failed communist dream. In one dream revelry, he alludes that the loss he felt is tied to political loss. In DR 1, he recorded the following dream, probably in the summer or early fall of 1952:

a soldier comes in the strange room to arrest him, the Peasant is just standing there, ----with a sense that not only I but my father is watching the film, & it's in the 42nd Apollo & its like the great lost Lost Father chapter of

now--naturally out of print *Town & City* (NN-B)

In another passage, in *Book of Dreams*, he and his father and the Noble are surrounded by a "mob of men," and Kerouac, upon waking, comprehends that he will be "kicked and beaten & probably killed" (*Book of Dreams* 18).

Kerouac was not unaffected by the government's zeal to illuminate communist sympathies. Intrigued by the televised McCarthy proceedings, some thoughts he recorded in a notebook were called "THE PATHOS OF THE PEOPLE" (DR 10, NN-B). As he watched the hearings on television on 7 May 1954, he reached a decision, requiring he draw a line between all that he had done in the past and all that he would do in the future. He simply wrote: "No, no more fiction for me/TEACHING----". And below this he wrote: "The Army McCarthy hearings are like Hawthorne's Pilgrims--men & women already all gone from this *dead dream* which they hold real--grim, seriously accusative, detailed, self believing" (DR 10, NN-B; my emphasis). Ultimately, Kerouac's feelings about the communist dream, as he saw it acted out in America, and his relationship to it were summed up by the conclusion of *Book of Dreams*:

We all stand for a group photograph in the yard of the great Pine Tree Mansion of the Captors--later we play in the field, a hundred of us, I see Cody giving the rear man's highball sign to a departing freight train & places a little Brakeman Doll in the tracks who also cranked-up tinily gives same sign as the train goes off to the outer world--We're all prisoners of the Communists--Finally they ask us back for that group photo on the lawn leeringly saying "Quite a few faces missing!" which I notice is true as I'm the last one to appear & the ranked standers are depleted--But they wave me away from the picture contemptuously down the dun-

geon steps, I've been suspected of revolutionary or at least bugged tendencies as I yakked in the "Free Field"--Down I go to my doom--An insane attendant down the brown stone steps has me sit temporarily in a cell which has a large pool of brown water in a big pan with a shit floating in it while I'm to be processed by him but he leaves momentarily on a call so I rock the cell ship-like somehow & dump the brown shit water out into the dungeon aisle--But he gets back just as I'm doing it, picks up the "pan" and dumps it on my head and then on *his* head and we stare at each other dripping brown shit-water hair & I realize among other things that the attendants of the Lower Hells are so miserably agonized they want you to be the same as they . . . And the Captor Authorities are forever puzzled--The insane attendant with shit water in his hair doesn't even know what's happened to you after you've been spirited away from his jurisdiction, not to mention the outside Firingsquad Photographers of the "Free Yard" (183-184)

Seeing himself imprisoned by the confusion of ex-revolutionaries that little by little was destroying his Beat Generation, he felt trapped by this "dead dream." With no place to hide--even the "Free Yard" had turned into a menacing menagerie of "Firingsquad Photographers"--he felt the very people who imprisoned him suspected him of being the revolutionary they once were.

Why Kerouac, as he understood himself in relation to intellectuals, saw himself to be a target of the Communists remains unclear. First, we must understand something about the New York intellectuals who had risen to some literary influence during Kerouac's time. This chapter focuses on a history recreated, in large part, through the memories of Kerouac's most powerful critics. The history is in no way complete but tries to recreate the emotional state of people who had turned from the communist movement, in other words, had viewed Communism as a failed dream, or, in Kerouac words, as a dead dream.

The stock market crashed 29 October 1929 and the Great Depression officially began. As Malcolm Cowley wrote in *The Dream of the Golden Mountains* (1964), a memoir of the depression years, there had never been so much to want. People suffered from deprivation while food, clothing, and fuel were not permitted to leave storage. Like a dream one awakens from too late to remember, the depression faded into the tide of historical events but lingered in the reveries of its children. Economic and social failures were transmuted into dreams of emotional and spiritual poverty. Making almost too vivid the spirit of the daring young man on the trapeze, physically and emotionally ravaged, tottering between life and death, Saroyan recorded in his stories the lives of people touched by the depression. In the after-life of the depression, Kerouac wrote of "the too-much-ness of the world" (*Big Sur* 64) from which there was no escape: "We all agree it's too big to keep up with, that we're surrounded by life, that we'll never understand it, so we center it all in by swigging Scotch from the bottle and when it's empty I run out of the car and buy another one, period." (65)

The 30s, a decade of economic failures, is also remembered as a time of intellectual fervor and commitment, though the memory is largely parochial. Students of the New York City depression, writers, university scholars, bohemians, and casual observers of ticket parades and communist gatherings, reminisce about those days with the discomfitures of people partly involved. Sympathetic and hopeful, they were attracted to the magnetic zeal of--if not the communist cause--the

great socialist cause with good reason: the country was divided into those who had and those who did not. The execution of Sacco and Vanzetti lingered in many minds long past 1927. Ignoring the small entrepreneur, Hoover's administration gave the wealthy investor the means to become even wealthier. That seemed a paltry display of economic ineptitude and austere indifference to human suffering (Schlesinger 170). The New Deal and the Fair Deal are part of American textbook history, but the vestiges of lost innocence and the "awakening" to apostasy, as Leslie Fiedler put it, are a "drab memorial; when we were kids becoming a writer seemed, if not synonymous with, at least an aspect of becoming a Communist" (Rahv, "The State of," 871).

Fielder was not the only one to chasten his past. As a means to forge new roots, looking back from the 50s to the 30s, the intellectual often depicted his past self as callow. Cowley found these words to describe his life after the divorce of his first wife and Hart Crane's suicide: "It had been a good era in its fashion, full of high spirits and grand parties, but also, it seemed to me now *inexcusably wasteful of time and emotions*. We had lived in the reckless margins of society and had spent our energies on our private lives, which had gone to pieces" (*The Dream* 81-82; my emphasis). The 30s nurtured the careers of young men who rose, spent and deluded, from the ashes of their follies. A few of these men evolved into critics who despised beat writers, particularly Kerouac. At most a half a generation older than Kerouac, they had experienced the onset of the Great Depression with adolescent eyes. Among those who could identify with Fiedler's

observation that "a generation of writers and critics whose thirtieth year falls somewhere in the forties . . . typically urban, second-generation Jews, chiefly ex-Stalinist, ambivalently intellectual . . . at home with ideas and words" ("State of American" 872) were Alfred Kazin, Lionel Trilling, Norman Podhoretz, and Seymour Krim. These people, Fiedler in particular, made much ado about Kerouac being a juvenile in an adult body ("The Un-Angry" 174). And because Kerouac was identified with Bohemia, he was an easy target of "Couch Liberalism," a term used by Harold Rosenberg in a 1955 essay published in *Dissent*, describing intellectuals, such as Fiedler, who abandoned Communism for the poseur of "the new fake-liberal anti-Communist" combined with "the old fake-liberal fellow traveler to produce a 'liberal' who shares the guilt for Stalin's crimes through the fact alone of having held liberal or radical opinions" (321). It is Fiedler's "The Fear of Innocence," published in 1949, that most clearly shows the depth of guilt and denial of his past beliefs brought into focus through his memories of his friend Hal, a prosperous young author who studied at Harvard, "the other pole to the Young Communist League" (779).

In the middle of this narrative (within the context of the *Partisan Review* it was not clear if "Fear of Innocence" was fiction or autobiography), while Fiedler's life assumes more characteristics of the "pious and bourgeois," he marries, writes a dissertation, publishes "[a]n article in PMLA," and instructs composition to Freshmen, Hal continues to mingle with socialists and plays the role of the "Prole-

tarian even in Eliot House" (804). The tension in their relation is exposed in an exchange of letters in which the foundation of their friendship is their boyhood recollections: "[W]e stubbornly haunted our unreal pastness. . . . We cried to each to himself 'deceived' and 'deceiver' to the other. . . . and we stuttered incredulously, bitterly toward alienation" (805). At the age of 23, Hal dies of cancer, and Fiedler's last letter to Hal does not reach him. Not having received a response from Hal havoc his life. His wife, who recently had an abortion because Fiedler did not want the child, is pregnant again. Recognizing Hal in a picture, she tells Fiedler that before she knew him she had met Hal once and he had kissed her. Fiedler slaps her face, and the next day he leaves for the Navy.

Boyhood friends made Hal into their "scape-hero" (780); by entering Harvard, he had come desirably close to the Movement. Undecided between "the University or the Revolution, success or rebellion, both dear" the Young Communist League demanded that one "Choose!" "[H]ow strait the either-or we proposed and could not escape. *The Movement*, the epithet, all kinesis and no commitment, echoes in the enduring head like a reproach" (779). Deeds cannot be undone or effaced by innocence. Even when shame and distrust of innocence is exchanged for "the undangerous predictions of one who belonged" (799), the mask of conformity guards against the fear of innocence but does not erase the past nor guilt. Even though Hal was the unconventional writer, and Fiedler was destined to be the conventional scholar, envying Hal for his publications and his university, there is no doubt that they are one and the same kind. On a train home, Fiedler says to a WAC,

"You never knew Hal, at least!" . . . "What Hal?" "Any of them. Me, for instance--" (801). After this scene, we understand the enigmatic exchange that took place at the beginning of the story between Fiedler and Dan, "an acceptable ghost" for Hal (783).

"I forgive you the interruption. I was going to say that stridency is not truth; it's not even a guarantee of earnestness, and I can't admire (you brought it up) the sort of cunning that slips across a currently unpopular brand of philistinism."

"You're talking about politics, I suppose."

"Yes, a sneaky kind of politics, literary politics, this business of hijacking bourgeois notions, and proving that it's just as comfortable--and dull, on your side of the barricades. If you only--"

"I (pause) suppose you don't like Steinbeck." He moved his face over against mine until we were mutually quite distinct despite the blackout.

"No."

"Ah--that's the (pause) test. That's the test." (782)

At a time when it was "impossible for anyone politically literate and no scoundrel" to support Stalin, Fiedler showed indifference similar to that which allowed Hal in pro-Party fashion to write Morality Plays, aiding Communist funds (790). Exposing discontent among intellectuals, "the fear of innocence" alienated fiction writers from their intellectual counterparts. Intellectuals seemed to speak in monologue to ghosts. They indulged in secret Philistinism. Guarding against their pasts, they believed that literature was in a state of decay, that it could never again be produced and received without thought to its subtending relation to morality. Above all, "The Fear of Innocence" made explicit a dual relation that had and continued to play a role in many a young writer's and intellectual's life. For

instance, in "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities" Delmore Schwartz had written, "You will be sorry if you do not do what you should do, you can't carry on like this, it is not right, you will find that out soon enough, everything you do matters too much" (9). Kerouac, like Fiedler and Schwartz before him, was haunted by apparitions of the adult world. Whereas Doctor Sax fully dramatized the struggle to maturity, the Shrouded Traveler showed the way.

In *On the Road* the longing for self-fulfillment appears in Sal's dream about the Shrouded Traveler (124). Sal asks Dean Moriarty and Carlo Marx for their interpretations of the Shrouded Traveler. Sal believed that the stranger who chased him is only himself. This interpretation of the dream makes sense; since by his own confession, Sal is an outsider, disconnected from the people he wants to be close to, "I shambled after as I've been doing all my life after people who interest me" (8). Sal takes to the road, and one time he wakes up aware that he "was just somebody else, some stranger, and my whole life was a haunted life, the life of a ghost" (17). But Marx persuades Sal to perceive his dream differently, so that Sal comes to think of the stranger as "something" or "someone" other than himself, "pursuing all of us across the desert of life" (124). Later on, Sal agrees with Dean, that his dream was "the mere simple longing for pure death" (124). All three interpretations represent a fear of the past, as related to one's self and as related to history, and the desire to forget the past in relation to self and history, by uniting the past with the future.

Dean Moriarty is Sal's alter ego. While this is obvious to us,

for Sal it is a painful discovery.<sup>1</sup> In the final scene of *On the Road* the shrouded traveler dream is brought to its conclusion in the cold reality of a New York City street:

"D'you think I can ride to Fortieth Street with you?" he whispered. "Want to be with you as much as possible, m'boy, and besides it's so durned cold in this here New Yawk . . ."

So Dean couldn't ride uptown with us and the only thing I could do was sit in the back of the Cadillac and wave at him. (309)

Sal has decided that he must be respectable; it is a decision that is not without remorse. He had hurt his friend as Dean had hurt him: "Dean's . . . putting me down . . . on starving sidewalks and sickbed" (11). *On the Road* ends an elegy to Dean Moriarty, destitute and wronged by Sal. Dean had come across America, and Sal sent him back "over three thousand miles" (309). Whereas success seems to be at

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1. The desire to live in two worlds, to carry on two lives, has often been fulfilled vicariously by many literary friendships. For example, 31 January 1916 Kenneth Burke wrote to Malcolm Cowley:

You talk of a city apartment and a country villa, with a library in each, and an auto to transport you conveniently from one to the other. I dream of abandoned lyrics, pulsing liaisons, sacred lust, ferocious city life, and then a sudden rushing off into the hills, to live alone, to renounce, to torture oneself with a realization of solitude, and then to fail--to flee from the hills because they are too heavy, and to hate the flowers because they are so inexpressible in their loveliness, and to flee in fear of silence back to the common truths of society. See *The Selected Correspondence of Kenneth Burke and Malcolm Cowley 1915-1981*, ed. Paul Jay, (New York: Viking Penguin, 1988) 20.

Sal's life more than Dean's is a paradigm of this dream.

Sal's fingertips--the ride uptown hints of prosperous days to come-- Dean is left to run from death, this time alone, for Sal has chosen solitude and civilization over nightmare and love. As Sal explained, he "wanted to know Dean more" not only because he was in search of "new experiences" to write about, but also because, "in spite of our differences in character, he reminded me of some long-lost brother" (9, 10). But they are not united in the nightmare life. As with Hal and Fiedler, the fear of being the betrayer or the betrayed comes between Sal and Dean. At the end of the novel there can be no doubt that Sal has been impressed by his very own belief that in his dream he himself is the Shrouded Traveler.

Sal evades the nightmare by rejecting Dean, who with his bent figure and overcoat represents the Shrouded Traveler, departing from his own life. But by rejecting the nightmare, Sal has also rejected part of his life, essential to his development and search for self-fulfillment: he has turned from his past, the history of the road and of himself. He is divided within by his failure to unite himself with Dean and he is divided without by circumstances. Maturity is defined in *On the Road* as the ability to accept one's past. Sal retells his story as an attempt to accept the nightmare: coming to terms with his past actions and his relationship with Dean, he is able to forgive Dean and to ask him for forgiveness.

In *Visions of Gerard* (1958) Kerouac wrote: "I curse and rant nowadays because I dont want to have to work to make a living and do childish work for other men . . . but'd rather sleep all day and stay it up all night scrubbling these visions of the world" (62). Because

Ti Jean does not want to starve to achieve his ambition, his father looks down upon him: "I wanta write----I'm an artist----'Artist shmartist, ya cant be supported all ya life----" (62). After arguing with his father, Ti Jean thinks of his brother, Gerard, who died nine years old:

And I wonder what Gerard would have done had he lived, sickly, artistic----But by my good Jesus, with that holy face they'd have stumbled over one another to come and give him bread and breath----He left me his heart but not his tender countenance and sorrowful patience and kindly lights---- (62)

Ti Jean's artistic struggle is attenuated by the memory of his brother's angelic nature. Certain that Gerard's kindness and physical attributes would have been enough for him to acquire patronage, Ti Jean believes Gerard would have forgone the necessity of work and would have been able to commit himself completely to artistic production. In a similar manner, Sal is jealous of Dean and in awe of him. For Dean it is a simple matter to become a writer, and with non-chalance he commands the attention of women and men, who even fight over him. There is no certainty about Sal or Dean's fate, but in the short view, Dean's life seems more fulfilling to Sal than his own, for Dean represents a kind of American holy spirit, the Natty Bumppo of the 20th century, who has a chance of reaching the protective city of Sal's dream.

By 1948 there was no guarantee for a young writer that he would find a place to publish or that he could make a career out of writing, that possibility was becoming rarer, imposing new kinds of restric-

tions on literary production itself, further defining, making less ambiguous the choice between rebellion or success. Kerouac had inherited a literary heritage that was not so vastly different from his critics that he should have been alienated from their sympathies, but this is a history of comparisons and contrasts and of an audience that has suffered tremendous personal guilt which *On the Road* absorbed into an enigmatic text that was denied its force when it was fashioned and subsequently obscured by mass culture intellectual cliches. Many readings of *On the Road* are complex responses that find their distorting mechanism in the history of Communism in America. The imagination threatened the intellect, the writer threatened the critic, and this division of self from self would become among sociologists and literary historians in the 50s a recurrent theme of loneliness.

In the words of Malcolm Cowley, Communism had been an attractive alternative to writers as a group because it gave to them what was largely lacking in their own lives: "[T]he comradeship in struggle, the self-imposed discipline, the ultimate purpose, the opportunity for heroism, and the human dignity" (*The Dream* 43). In Cowley's view, the promise of Communism, not its flaws enacted day to day, inculcated in writers a naive faith and trust in Communist leaders. In general, writers believed that they should let the actual political struggles unfold in the hands of political leaders while they themselves from an appropriate distance "cooperate" and are faithful to the party. This was the meaning of the term fellow traveler. But the need to reach the transcendental goal of Communism imprisoned fellow travelers in a

moral paradox as they found themselves identifying with a group that consistently destroyed "human values" in order to profligate the larger world-wide movement. Looking back on history, one finds the intellectual's role was confined to the role of a well-behaved child, betrayed by his parents, led astray, and chastised for the sins of the patriarch (49-50). As the 30s ended, Communism began to look more and more like a youthful fantasy, and its dreamers became apprehensive about fulfilling the revolutionary promise in a world in which people were asked to stand, as Cowley said, "[a]gainst war and fascism" (34). There could be no unqualified certainty that history was on their side, that "'the workers'" were "the vital class," that self-sacrifice and destruction of their "middle-class identity" would make them saints, or that ideals unfolding in a culture, assumed to be on the verge of "violent decay," would outlast capitalism or strife within the Communist party. What or whom one served was not clear (315). Eventually, the radical found himself disenfranchised from the god-head in which he had invested his emotions.

Kerouac did not find self-fulfillment by writing works that would make him a radical intellectual, and he did not dream as Alfred Kazin dreamed, that as a nineteen-year-old, that he "found . . . a form, a path to the outside world" in writing criticism (*Starting* 10). Nor did Kerouac entertain, as did Kazin, "the possibility of creating a new society," a sentiment that fueled the "ideologues" and the John Chamberlains of the day (9,8). In *On the Road*, the intellectuals from Sal's perspective still carried with them an aegis of elitism. It was this quality that characterized the abstract thinking Stalinists of

Kazin's world depicted in *Starting Out in the Thirties* (139-141). As Sal said, "all my New York friends were in the negative, nightmare position of putting down society and giving their tired bookish or political or psychoanalytical reasons" (10). Indeed, part of Sal's attraction to Dean Moriarty is that Dean seems to represent the human side of intelligence. Kazin had distinguished himself from his peers by searching for a balance between imagination and ideas.

*Starting Out in the Thirties* ends in 1940. Kazin is surrounded by the *Partisan Review* enclave, for whom "personality" was everything and "[c]reative imagination they unconsciously disdained as simple-minded" (157); Kazin repeated this formulation in *New York Jew* (1978), saying that the "mere writer" was disdained (44). His was not a limited observation. For example, Jack Kahane had counseled Henry Miller to write a "critical study of Lawrence or Joyce" before Obelisk Press released *Tropic of Cancer*. Kahane felt an experimental or controversial work of fiction had a better chance of being congenially received if its author was also thought of as a "serious thinker" (Hinz and Teunissen 11). According to Kazin, intellectuals who were passionate in the 30s about ideas and politics but not about emotion were the people who would one day make "the cultural rites of television and the slicks" their business (*Starting Out* 157). The attenuation of emotional capacity is also dramatized in Lionel Trilling's novel, *The Middle of the Journey* (1947), which was written to depict, "some of the moral and intellectual implications of the powerful attraction to Communism felt by a considerable part of the American intellectual

class during the Thirties and Forties" (vii). Of John Laskell, a liberal sympathetic to Communism, who made his career by writing a book about public housing, Trilling wrote, "he knew that he could not act as lovers had once acted, he could not weep and curse, but only feel a kind of hard empty sternness to meet the sternness of the world" (40). Such a display of emotional tumescence finds its way into Kazin's 1945 epilogue.

Underscoring the story of Kazin's friend Harriet, who worked as a writer for *Times*, Kazin wrote that when confronted with the first newsreels showing the emancipated victims of Nazi concentration camps people tittered "in embarrassment" in theaters (166). Harriet had adopted the *Times'* style of somewhat sensational and disaffected prose. Composing a story about a worker who had fallen under his machinery, Harriet wrote that he "had been pressed to death." After she completed the article she discovered herself upset by her very own callousness, "describ[ing] the victim as so flattened out that he could have been pushed under a door." She turned in the piece to her editor (112-113). But any doubts she might have had about handing in a story written in poor taste was assuaged by the exuberant response of the editor. Kazin used the word "delighted" to describe the editor's reaction to Harriet's description of the victim (113). The concentration camp newsreels and Harriet's article, although eight years apart, were interconnected responses. What happened in the world, no matter how grotesque, could slip between the cracks of sensationalism, defrauding the imagination of its human ability to feel empathy. It was no wonder, in the late 40s and in the 50s,

people characterized more or less by their political associations would look back with guilt to the carelessness of their youths, whose romantic notions had let, as Kazin recalled of himself, "German Socialist maps of Hitler Germany" seen as early as 1934 fade into the recesses of the *New Republican* office: "I thought," wrote Kazin, "of how long and continuously I had lived with those names [Oranienburg and Dachau]" (11). It was no wonder that they turned their mature, moral, Oedipal eyes to circumscribe the imagination of Kerouac and others.

When Kerouac arrived on the literary scene, it was no longer "understandably" fashionable, as Kazin observed, to "flourish . . . experience," "hardknocks," "life on the road," "days on the picket line and in the hiring hall" in the tradition of Farrell, Dahlberg, Roth, Wright, Miller, and Algren (17). It might have even seemed to some people that Kerouac's literary types were newly revved eccentrics who 20 years ago could be found sitting on the reading benches of the *New Republic*. The "Village bum," Joe Gould, prefigured the yes saying Dean Moriarty's optimism, energy, and sexuality (*Starting Out* 17). Kazin wrote of Gould, "[w]hile the others glumly waited and sized each other up, Joe Gould bounced up and down, rushing up to the elderly secretary who coyly cultivated all of us . . ." (18). To write in the style of jazz was not new either. Otis Ferguson, another of Kazin's associates, "feared and despised high culture" and wrote criticism that according to Kazin had the energy of jazz and made the reader feel as if he had been "listening to jazz" (30). In archetypical beat

fashion, Ferguson even joined the Merchant Marines; he died on tour. And in *New York Jew*, the "disaffected radicals" lived with their memories of Isaac Rosenfeld sitting in his orgone box (43, 51-52), before Old Bull would do the same in *On the Road* (153). But even among the disaffected, people sought brotherhood; they did not want isolation.

Obfuscated in Kazin's memories of his cousin Sophie, the girl-woman who could not find a man to marry her, loneliness was rooted in the drama of his family. As Kazin wrote, when Sophie was swept from the City and Kazin's mother, she was taken away by a con man. When he left her she went mad. Kazin's writing was at its best when he wrote about the suffering and estrangement of his own family, but he was also ashamed of dramatizing it. He wrote of Kerouac's novels in the essay "The Alone Generation": "[H]is novels . . . depend upon a naked and unashamed plea for 'love,' understanding, fellowship, and are read and enjoyed only because this pleading so answers to our psychological interest in fiction that we indulge Kerouac without knowing why" (209). The intellectuals and Kerouac were united, then, in two ways. They both feared innocence and loneliness. But, Kerouac permitted their unabashed expression in art.

Writing in 1954, Irving Howe had found that the experience of loneliness, covert or not, was connected with the disappearance of bohemia. Howe believed with the disappearance of bohemia, communities of writers were also lost. Instead of writers living together, they migrated into the suburbs or the country. Abandoning the creative unions they had formed with daily associates, the move from the

city made them lonely for creative partnerships ("The Age of" 10). To complicate matters, it was axiomatic that if one believed in Communism then one should not be lonely; and yet, people found in retrospect that they had been politically and morally alone.

For this reason, *The Middle of the Journey* was an unpleasant novel, stirring in its readers, those who could identify firsthand with the Grooms or even with John Laskell, a fear of the Gifford Maxims of the world, a man who had privately betrayed himself: "'As a revolutionary I was wholly professional. But now the results do not please me. The present results and the inevitable later results. Its not what I bargained for'" (143). Because Maxim abandoned the underground he fears for his life. His decision to go back, that is, to leave the Party, affects not only Maxim's life but the lives of several people in Crannock. Realizing that Nancy Croom has betrayed her husband--contrary to his wishes, she secretly accepts mail for Maxim--Laskell discovers that his friendship with the Grooms is not as intimate as he led himself to believe. As this historical novel expressed so well, for many intellectuals there was no escaping the Party once one had taken the first step forward. And, as the novel suggests, the only way to escape the vengeance of the Party, once one left, was to make oneself an existence and admit publicly to guilt, as had Whittaker Chambers. It was no longer reasonable to assume a community of radical thinkers would remain a community undivided by changing loyalties. The most logical recourse was to admit to having made youthful mistakes and mature quickly into conformity, which is

what many intellectuals and writers tried to do.<sup>2</sup>

In 1952, the *Partisan Review* devoted three issues to a symposium entitled "Our Country and Our Culture." The aim of the symposium was to discover what relation existed between America and her intellectuals and writers. The editors themselves stressed the fact that alienation was no longer fashionable (204), arguing that an "affirmative attitude" toward institutions had taken hold (204). In short, they believed that "more writers have ceased to think of themselves as rebels and exiles" (284). In response to the first symposium question: "To what extent have American intellectuals actually changed their attitudes toward America and its institutions?" (286) Newton Arvin said that the inclination to deny and reject the validity of one's own country and culture was no longer "relevant or defensible" as long as "from without" its existence is endangered. A "positive relation," Newton said, was necessary to preserve "the culture we profoundly cherish." According to Newton, "Anything else suggests too strongly the continuance into adult life of the negative Oedipal relations of adolescence--and in much of the alienation of the twenties and thirties there was just that quality of immaturity" (287). Phillip Rahv also found himself looking at a picture of intellectuals

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2. Obviously, there was also those intellectuals who fought against this state of conformity. The editors of *Dissent* began their first issue, Winter, 1954, with this editorial statement: "The purpose of this magazine is suggested by its name: to dissent from the bleak atmosphere of conformism that pervades the political and intellectual life of the United States: to dissent from the support of the 'status quo,' now so noticeable on the part of many former radicals and socialists".

different from the picture of the past: "[T]he intellectual bohemian or proletarian has turned into a marginal figure nowadays, reminding us in his rather quixotic aloneness of the ardors and trauancies of the past" (306). Norman Mailer felt as if "[e]verywhere the American writer is being dunned to become healthy, to grow up" (299). Furthermore, Mailer saw American writers as being more alienated than before, because now they had no idea what they were "alienated from" (299).

Many of the *Partisan Review* respondents believed that intellectuals had become conformists. Delmore Schwartz spoke for others when he wrote, "It is in the light of this darkness that the will to conformism . . . reveals its true nature: it is a flight from the flux, chaos and uncertainty of the present, a forced and false affirmation of stability in the face of . . . instability" (594). Although the responses varied, one thing was certain, most people felt as if conformity had taken over, alienation was less important to artistic production, and they were at a turning point in culture. They believed that historical events had forced them to mature. Seven years later, Alfred Kazin wrote that drama had been replaced by mere "situation" ("The Alone" 208). Novels are about "herd of aloners" (207). The new urge to maturity had made its imprint on literature. A new pose was established. Norman Podhoretz, in an especially insightful moment wrote, "Since this is a generation [those born between 1925 and 1935] that willed itself from childhood directly into adulthood, it still has its adolescence to go through" ("The Young" 111).

Instead of succoring a more complex system to evaluate the artist's position in society, in the 50s a sedate conformist patriotism

merely guarded against an antagonistic past. Intellectuals became conservative and former Communists became witch-hunters. Adaptability, transience, indifference, and passivity were part of the patriotic character. To admit to loneliness was in itself an act of rebellion. To act as if one was alone was to be a rebel. Before we can realize that *On the Road* did not attack culture, we must realize that the work itself contained a problem of culture that Kerouac had accepted as normative. As a writer his conflict with society was not willful, as many critics of the Beat Generation liked to think at the time. About "Advance-Guard Writing," Paul Goodman wrote: "[I]t takes the side of what it attacks and suffers the conflict through, and it prepares the integrated normal style of the next generation" (361). Loneliness, adaptability, transience, and indifference were problems artists besides Kerouac were working out in their texts.

William Inge's Pulitzer Prize winning play *Picnic* (1953) and the movie *Picnic* (1955) found in a small Kansas town the perfect setting to make a fatherless drifter a threat to a small community of women. In the movie it was clear that the town and its citizens prided itself on propriety and the sanction of a community bond with the image of power and money centered in the surrounding grain elevators. With the play, the central story was Rosemary's, a school teacher and border at the Owens'. Virile and charming, Hal Carter wandered into this small matriarchy on Labor Day, and he sets into motion a series of events that change Rosemary's life. When the play was adapted for the screen, Daniel Taradash lengthened Inge's script, he also changed the

ending and moved the acts from the Owens' yard to the picnic grounds, adding a pageant in which Madge Owen's is crowned queen. Hal's character is made more vivid and his plight to find success or patience, flight or a home, and Madge's need to become something more than beautiful, shares center stage with Rosemary's story. Hal originally wants to obtain the small town dream, saying, "You know, there comes a time in every man's life when he's gotta settle down. A little town like this, this is the place to settle down in, where people are easy goin' and sincere (91)." But ultimately Hal represents a vision of a possibility and a way out of the small town. Hal's dream is to become the big boss of an organization, and he comes into town hoping that an old college buddy, Alan, will find him a job in his father's grain company. In contrast to the play, the movie makes clear that Madge has fallen in love with Hal and will follow him to Tulsa. He wants Madge to keep him from his pursuit of loneliness. Telling her of his truant past, he says: "I *stole* it [a motorcycle]. I stole it 'cause I wanted to get on the damn thing and go so far away, so fast, that no one'd ever catch up with me" (117). Madge accepts who he is and finds with him a sensual passion that is absent from her relation with the wealthy Alan.

Hal Carter and Dean Moriarty are in essence the same man: riding boxcars, pumping gas, eating Mrs. Pott's cherry pies; they're college dropouts or self-educated goofy intellectuals, beautiful men who are football heroes, lissome athletes--who will save small town girls from the tedium of wiping the counters of dime stores--they lived on ranches or dreamed about horses and cattle and grazing land, drifters in

search of a place in the world, outlaws with guilt laden memories of dead drunken fathers, they ride the highways in borrowed cars in search of their futures glimpsed in grain elevators or the high-rises of Manhattan. Hal Carter epitomized the man in transition. Caught, in David Riesman's words, between an "inner-directed" and an "other-directed" state, he was in many ways the perfect motion picture model of what it meant to be beat in a time when the model organization man took precedence among most Americans.

William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956) is a classic representation of the aspirations of America's middle class: "They are the ones . . . who have left home, spiritually as well as physically, to take the vows of organization life, and it is they who are the mind and soul of our great self-perpetuation institutions" (3). The organization man was the middle man. His life was vacant and lonely, but he pursued the American Dream nonetheless, and in reality, would probably never reach the top of the hierarchy he aimed for, or even come close to the top, for once he achieved the title he dreamed of, junior executive, he would move papers at the same desk for years. Unlike Hal Carter, the organization man was willing to work in the rat race to get to the top. Because he firmly believed in the Protestant Ethic, in his own mind, he retained his individualism (5). To him, those qualities that traditionally defined the rugged individual defined the organization man: ingenuity, pursuit of higher goals, and a willingness to work hard, and even to suffer, if need be, penury as the price for getting somewhere. Sloan Wilson had created in his

novel, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1955), Thomas R. Rath, an organization man, who must decide for himself if he should give up honesty in order to gain his boss' approval: "I should quit if I don't like what he does, but I want to eat, and so, like a half million other guys in gray flannel suits, I'll always pretend to agree, until I get big enough to be honest without being hurt. That's not being crooked, it's just being smart" (202). Rath settles for truth, but he also decides that he has no greater ambition than living happily with his family and rectifying the mistakes he made during the war. Rath's lack of passion for his work was typical of a new breed of men Paul Goodman described in *Growing Up Absurd*.

Like Whyte, Goodman believed that harmoniousness was not suited to human nature, that conflict was immanent and even necessary if people were to be propelled to find a place in society (*Growing Up* 11). The "Social Ethic," Whyte said, the gestalt imperative, the belief that "man and society" are not irreconcilable but harmonious counterparts that by nature tend to gravitate toward synthesis was the lie of the organization (7). The Social Ethic was pragmatic. The "here and now" mattered most, not the ideal community. Sentimentality was banished from the corporation: The "organization transients have put social usefulness at the core of their beliefs," wrote Whyte. "Adaptation has become more than a necessity; in a life in which everything changes; it has become almost a constant" (392-393). In contrast to the organization man, whose only destiny was the suburbs, the beat man fled the creep of suburbia; his direction was into the inner city and then out again into the wide open spaces of America. It is against

this herculean migration of the middle class, and even of intellectuals, that rebellion and mutiny came to represent a threat to America itself.

In Herman Wouk's *The Caine Mutiny* (1951) the story of the mutiny and the court-martial itself made clear to many people that disrupting an organization for the good of a small group, in the overall hierarchy of the organization, was not a moral victory but an act of rebellion that was a threat to the liberties of the people. The movie more than the novel itself emphasized this point. On screen, the story concluded with Barney Greenwald's drunken speech that condemned the mutiny he had defended in court. Greenwald lambasted Tom Keefer, the pseudo-intellectual and writer, for inspiring Maryk to keep a record of Queeg's idiosyncratic behavior and then cowardly denying his part in the mutiny. To Greenwald, a Jew, men like Queeg had defended his ancestors and deserved the unquestioned loyalty of his officers. Again, the point was made that there was no place in the system for radicalism and intellectualism when human and political atrocities threatened the nation.

As had *The Caine Mutiny*, *On the Waterfront* (1954) represented a dichotomous moral victory when Terry Malloy, the ex-prize fighter, stands up against nefarious union leaders. Although Terry testified against Johnny Friendly, the leader of the waterfront union bosses, as the waterfront priest told him after he was beaten unconscious by the mobsters, he had not won the "war." As long as Terry's defiance seemed to the longshoremen to be an act of personal significance

only--Terry had fallen in love with the sister of Joey Doyle, a longshoreman who had talked to investigators and was "knocked off"; Terry had set Doyle up; and Terry's brother, a mobster, was murdered by the men he served--the longshoremen would not honor Terry for breaking the worker's code, that is, to remain "Deaf and Dumb." Not even when Terry fought Friendly on the dock, in front of all of the longshoremen and was beaten by Friendly's henchmen did he inspire the men to unite against the crooked union. Only when he stood up, and walked past the men in a symbolic journey to another boss where the union could be run honestly, do the men followed him. The story itself, to the end, condemns Terry for testifying and for playing the part of loner. Yet, the story ends with Terry, no longer merely a "bum," bought for a price, but a man of significance. Terry Malloy plays the role of redeemer who is not himself. As the priest had said after the murder of K. O. Doogan, "And every time the mob puts the pressure on a good man, tries to stop him from doing his duty as a citizen it's a crucifixion. And anybody . . . who keeps silent about something knows happened shares the guilt of it." Terry's story must have struck deep into the conscience of intellectuals who had severed their Communist ties.<sup>3</sup>

In *The Middle of the Journey*, after breaking with the Communist Party, Gifford Maxim writes a review of a nonexistent costly limited

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3. In *In Our Times America Since World War II* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1987) 78-79, Norman and Emily Rosenberg suggest that Budd Schulberg and Elia Kazan had parabled in *On the Waterfront* their own willingness to aid anti-communist investigators.

edition of *Billy Budd, Foretopman*. Maxim paraphrased the little known story and then proceeded to say that "the modern mind in its most vocal part, in its radical or liberal intellectual part" (173) will not be able to understand the story in any other way than as an example of the "oppressed" and "foolish" proletariat worker condemned by "a 'company man,' weakly acquiescent to the boss" (173). Maxim himself spoke out against historical materialism and emphasized the primacy of "Spirit" over "Law" and "Necessity." To him "Spirit understands the true kinship." With his reading of *Billy Budd*, Maxim indirectly sought spiritual relief from his break from the Communist Party:

As long as Evil exists in the world, Law must exist, and it--not Spirit--must have the rule. And Vere's is the suffering, his is the tragic choice of God the Father, who must condemn his own son to death. But not as in the familiar transaction of Christian theology, as a sacrifice and an atonement, but for the sake of the Son himself, for the sake of Spirit in humanity. For Billy Budd is not only Christ, he is Christ in Adam, and is therefore imperfect, subject to excess. But we cannot understand Vere's suffering choice because we do not understand tragedy. And we do not understand tragedy because we do not understand love. (175)

In this context, the Malloy character was an apotheosis of the frustration of fellow travelers, for Malloy represented the guilt and loneliness of choosing to depart from one's political origins, turning away the protection and benefits it had once given. This is quite possible why intellectuals were so enraged by the image of Brando as beat man, and why they resented his so-called imitators and followers.

Furthermore, it seemed to many observers in the 1950's, as David

Riesman said in *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), "that many educated young people saw only two possible roles for themselves: that of the well-heeled organization man (other-directed), and that of the well-shod cowboy (inner-directed)" (xliii), so that an interpretation of *On the Waterfront* that explored the critic-chosen ideal image of beat man as a struggle between two identities was almost socially and critically unimaginable. Thus, Edmund Fuller, writing *Man in Modern Fiction* (1958) had discovered to his dismay that "contemporary fiction and non-fiction" portray to its readers only two "behavior paths" (133): one could either be an organization man or a hipster.

Fuller called Kerouac "the foremost prophet of hipsterism" (134), thereby suggesting that a history of hipsterism had yet to be articulated and its starting point would be Kerouac's writing. Although Fuller, in passing, mentions George Mandel's *Flee The Angry Stranger* (1952), he does not recognize that a literary history of hipsterism existed in American literature, and though it was possible to identify hipster with beat in the 30's and early 40's, by the mid 1950s to do so was to distort Kerouac's view of the hipster.

In general, literarians showed a diminutive awareness of the real meaning of hipster, deferring its jazz origins to Norman Mailer's representation of the hipster. In part, the fear of the past seemed to have led to the deracination of the hipster. Writing in 1955, Norman Podhoretz said in "The New Nihilism and the Novel" that "five, or even three, years ago the Beat Generation would simply not have been noticed" (163). Clearly, for many critics, the actual existence of a Beat Generation depended upon the existence of beat literature in

mass culture, where the emphasis on the artist's plight in America, his alienation, could be deemphasized and replaced with the plight of the juvenile delinquent, gangs, violence, and crime--for it was in this realm that liberals could safely voice their opinions. As Kerouac had made clear in "Origins of the Beat Generation" and in "The Philosophy of the Beat Generation" what he meant by beat was historically defined. The hipster was not his invention; it was the mass media that had made a caricature of hipster, a man of the 30s and the 40s, and gave him a life of his own. In this way the critics had effaced the historical roots of *On the Road* and attributed the hipster caricature to Kerouac himself, thereby separating Kerouac from the tradition of artistic struggle *On the Road* identified him with and demeaning his work as artist. "Hipsterism is practicing solipsism" (160), Fuller wrote. "Hipsterism is disease . . ." (160). The hipster's "wonder is deformed and one-dimensional" (162). The meaning of hipster from a white man's point of view had been effectively cut off from the past and reinvented to suit the present mood of covert disillusionment.

*Really the Blues*, published in 1946,<sup>4</sup> was one of the first books to explain the meaning of hipster and to show that the hipster's language was the idiom of the artist struggling to survive and remain true to himself. Above all, the hipster was a part of black culture that could be shared with other races. Mezz Mezzrow, a white Jew from

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4. The author would like to acknowledge James P. Musser for suggesting and locating this book.

Chicago's Northwest Side, began his musical career at the Pontiac Reformatory. He had been sent to reform school because his friend, Sammy O'Brien, had lured him into a borrowed Studebaker and then ditched the car to escape the police, leaving Mezzrow to take the blame. "In those days, when automobiles were still a novelty, we got a big kick out of joyriding in somebody else's car," (7) recalled Mezzrow, who several times in his life would find himself in jail for crimes he did not commit. But in this autobiography, written with the help of Bernard Wolfe, Mezzrow tells us that at reform school he learned to find a way to express about himself what he could not put to words: he was an outsider. At the reformatory he knew he was an outsider because he found comfort in the company of blacks, especially the black boys who played the blues. Mezzrow joined the Pontiac Reformatory band and learned to play the flute and saxophone. Mezzrow discovered that he and his friend Murph had a natural ability to play the blues like the black musicians played. When the Southern white boys ganged up against the black division, Mezzrow wrote, "it was just like I'd seen a gang attack on my own family" (16). He leaves the reform school with the acquired ability to give significance to past experiences and find solace in understanding especially one event: he and some other Jewish friends rode the train into Cape Girardeau, Missouri and were not allowed to eat at a lunch-counter. The owner told them, "'We don't serve niggers in here'" (18). After leaving Pontiac, Mezzrow concludes that he fully identifies with blacks and he is "one of them" (18): "I went in there green but I came out chocolate brown" (18).

Mezzrow wanted his music to speak the language of unity, which for him meant a complete sympathy and understanding between players, white or black. The language of jazz, it seemed to Mezzrow, contained this possibility. "Maybe there's a parable here for the world. Two guys, complete strangers, face each other . . . One feeds harmony while the other speaks his piece on his horn . . . You speak the same language, back each other up. . . .When that happens, man, you know you've got a friend" (82). This state of togetherness was to be in the know, to be hip. Thus jazz was the hipster's language, it was a social vision of outsiders coming together to create an interracial community. "The hipster's fraternal order isn't just an escape valve, a defense mechanism; it's a kind of drilling academy too, preparing for future battles" (223). Mezzrow finds this community among the musical friendships he forms: "somebody like Bix comes along and you know the same millennium is upon him too . . . That gives you the courage of your convictions--all of a sudden you know you aren't plodding around in circles in a wilderness" (83). Mezzrow showed that the vital hipster was the jazz artist who stayed true to himself and his craft. Music was his moral rod, so his music had to remain pure.

When Mezzrow's Austin High Gang decides to leave Chicago for New York City, Doc Poston, who played with Jimmy Noone, on the gang's farewell night, turned the Austin Gang's parting moment into preaching blues, music ordinarily reserved only for black people. "Doc was saying to hell with the money and the fame, just fly right, hew to the line, stick with it" (163). The hipster, in the original, was the

true proletariat who had not given up. He took risks on a daily basis. He may have been slow to articulate his desires and the compassion he felt for others in need, for those who were beat, but he eventually found an outlet, through jive or through jazz, the language of action, as Mezzrow described it in *Really the Blues* (223). Because Mezzrow was white but found his identity through black culture, because his story was the story of an artist who could unite people, his portrayal of the hipster is especially important to our understanding of Kerouac's use of the hipster in *On the Road*. For this reason I quote the following passage from *Really the Blues* at length:

he's *solid*, which is short for *solid as the Rock of Gibraltar*, and describes a man who isn't going to be washed away so easy; he's *got his boots on and they're laced up all the way*, meaning that he's torn himself away from the insane-asylum of the South, where the poor beaten Uncle Toms plod around in the gallion barefoot, and only the white bossman wears boots; he's *righteous*, in the Biblical sense of having justice on your side, and he's *ready*, like a boxer poised to take on all comers, and he's *really in there*, as a prize-fighter wades into the thick of it instead of running away from his opponent; he *really comes on*, like a performer makes his entrance on the stage, full of self-confidence and self-control, aware of his own talents and the ability to use them; or he *really gets off*, that is, is so capable of expressing himself fully that he gets the load of oppression off, the load that weighs down poor broken people who are miserable and can't do anything about it, can't even put it into words; and he's *groovy*, the way musicians are groovy when they pool their talents instead of competing with each other . . . and finally, he's a *solid sender*, he can send your spirit soaring and make you real happy, because no matter how heavy his burden is he still isn't brought down, he keeps his sense of humor and his joy in life, and uses them to make you feel good too. (227)

Here are the original defining features of the hipster, and these are the features that describe the hero of *On the Road*. Kerouac's hip-

ster was this man and not the cult beat figure that critics tried to make of him. The Beat man was not indifferent to the social good but was committed to life; he valued independence and was prepared to fight for his beliefs; he was an artist who studies life itself. He was expressive and energetic, but contemplative, as a defender of liberty and happiness of all people.

The critics' characterization of hipster, in the 50s, was a myopic encoding of Kerouac's characterization of Dean Moriarty and Sal Paradise. In short, the critics' characterization of the hipster was a parody of themselves, a vision of self that had been distorted by their fear of the past. The hipster, an immoral delinquent, was a picture of what they feared most they had been. The original hipster had achieved what the communist intellectual had failed to do. The hipster, endemic to the 30s and 40s, apart from dogmatic politics, had integrated his art into a mass proletariat movement, and he had redefined racial boundaries and the creative potential of the marginal individual, making his work a powerful tribute to the imaginative artist's social contribution.

Perhaps what is most remarkable about *On the Road* is that it has survived the assault of its critics. *On the Road* has allowed us to forget in part such works as *The Middle of the Journey*, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, *Picnic*, *Really the Blues*, and *On the Waterfront* by unwillfully radicalizing their conservatism. *On the Road* allowed the intellectual to forget his past by turning his old world upside down, allowing the truth to be inverted--in this sense, *On the Road* was a forgiving story, because, like Kerouac's fictional counterpart Billy

Budd, he too was forgiving. As *On the Waterfront* and *The Middle of the Journey* showed, it was exactly that kind of story intellectuals had been waiting for to redeem them. Kerouac said it well in *Mexico City Blues*: "Charley, Parker, forgive me --/Forgive me for not having answered your eyes --/ . . ./-- Charley Parker, lay the bane,/off me, and everybody" (241st Chorus).

Kerouac used memory and dream to create a philosophy of forgiveness, and at times, forgiveness was his only means of self-preservation. In stark contrast, some New York intellectuals turned against what they had once been; through forgetting and self-effacement they found self-preservation. Figuratively, but in a very literal way, New York intellectuals had lost a father. They had been betrayed by Stalin and the movement to which they had devoted their time and emotions. In general, they did not, as Kerouac had done through his writing, find for themselves a philosophy of forgiveness. Instead, they turned against what they had once been and lashed out against those very qualities they had once seen in themselves. In *On the Road*, the older Sal Paradise, who tells the story, in effect, says that he was wrong to lose faith in Dean. Realizing that self-discovery is connected to the discovery of humanity in its pure form, his road, from this perspective, should ultimately lead to a selfless pursuit of his dreams. At the conclusion of the novel, we feel that Sal is headed in the right direction.

New York intellectuals had abandoned their political commitments, in some cases as an act of self-preservation. When the movement became life-denying, they abandoned their call to become true prole-

tariats. It had been understood amongst writers, with some disapproval, that the Communist Party allowed writers to exist in order to propagate the objectives of the movement, but their position was temporary and would have to be phased out. Self-preservation was also an important theme in *On the Road* and was Dean's ultimate goal; thus, it is possible to interpret Dean's abandonments of Sal and Sal's turning from Dean as acts of self-preservation. But Kerouac also made clear that Sal's departure from Dean was, in Sal's mature eyes, wrong. As we have seen in a preceding chapter, through a narrative that is based on remembering, Sal makes a plea for forgiveness.

Of course, some New York intellectuals did not want to remember what they left behind, and *On the Road* certainly would have at least on an unconscious level reminded them of their own follies and of the people they had once wanted to help. The latter part of Sal's journey is guided by his renewed interest in life that comes partly to him through his desire to be like the Blacks, Mexicans, and Indians he encounters in Denver and Mexico. For Sal, this empathy and interest in these peoples' lives is based on a disillusion with his own life, and finally, it is motivated by his desire to find the secret of humanity.

Sal's impression of Denver "Negro[s]" is based on an absence in his own life. He admires the close knit community he sees on the street, the hints in his surroundings of the existence of families, such as the houses with "rose arbors" and "ancient rocking chairs" (180). He feels that he is trapped by his "white ambitions," and up to this point in his life, his dream for a future has been based on a

future that has already been planned for him because he is white: "At lilac evening I walked with every muscle aching among the lights of 27th and Welton in the Denver colored section, wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night" (180). Without a dream that he can believe in, Sal admonished his own world: ". . . I was only myself, Sal Paradise, sad . . . wishing I could exchange worlds with the happy, true-hearted, ecstatic Negroes of America" (180). By this, Sal does not mean that the Negroes he sees have a lot to be joyful about: He means that their inner strength and joy comes from the union amongst themselves as a people. Sal is exasperated by the white world he knows:

The old Negro man had a can of beer in his coat pocket, which he proceeded to open; and the old white man enviously eyed the can and groped in his pocket to see if he could buy a can too. How I died! (181)

Nevertheless, Sal does not idolize the people he wants to be like. In San Antonio, at the hospital, the destitution of the "Mexican women, some of them pregnant, some of them sick or bringing their little sick kiddies" makes Sal "sad" (172), not merely because he is reminded of Terry, the Mexican girl he left behind, but because the fortitude of these people remind him of what he himself does not have. Once he is in Mexico, he observes: "The sun rose pure on pure and ancient activities of human life" (278).

For Dean, his attraction to the Indians comes from his desire to find his father and to settle his affairs. Dean had spent a good part

of his boyhood on Larimer Street in alleys with his wino father. The Mexican huts to him are wondrous sights:

I am digging the interiors of these homes as we pass them--these gone doorways and you look inside and see beds of straw and little brown kids sleeping and stirring to wake . . . and the mothers cooking up breakfast in iron pots . . . (278)

This is better than what Dean had as a child: "They're never alone. Nobody's ever alone in this country" (28). Dean epitomizes loss and loneliness. He has no real heritage or community to return to. His cousin, Sam Brady, speaking for the rest of the clan, makes it clear that no one wants to have anything to do with Dean or his father:

"Now look, Dean, I don't believe you any more or anything you're going to try to tell me. I came to see you tonight because there's a paper I want you to sign for the family. Your father is no longer mentioned among us and we want absolutely nothing to do with him, and, I'm sorry to say, with you either, any more." (216)

Dean's loss is very real, and he turns to his belief in the purity of people, who are set apart from the white world, the purity of which a failed political movement, infected by violence and hatred, had caused some New York intellectuals to doubt.

The efficacy of a philosophy based on acceptance, purity, and forgiveness haunted Kerouac, perhaps, because he was familiar with the history and the lives of some intellectuals, but more clearly, because he was in truth torn between wanting success and merely wanting to write. As he wrote in *Book of Dreams*: "Only yesterday I was feeling guilty for writing *Doctor Sax*, *On the Road*, a sheepish guilty idiot

turning out rejectable unpublishable wildprose madhouse enormities" (208). His feeling that he was imprisoned emerged not merely in relation to Communists but also in his dreams about the publishing world: "I was foraging for my stories and paper--earlier I was in a room, working for a man as secretary, he was a masquerader, a fraud--and an evil pulp magazine crook genius leader of some evil--My mother visited me as if I was in jail" (*Book of Dreams* 9). Self-preservation as it related to his own authorship, led him to develop and market himself in relation to his spontaneous prose method.

In a letter, dated 27 October 1954, Kerouac wrote Alfred Kazin, wanting to know if he would read "two of" his "five unpublished masterpieces." Malcolm Cowley had liked *Dr. Sax* and *The Subterraneans*, but according to Kerouac, Cowley could not "persuade Viking to take them."

What I only want, is for you to see these examples of my new theory of Literature, of Prose rather; I've invented a new prose, Modern Prose, jazzlike breathlessly swift spontaneous and unrevised floods . . . it comes out wild, *at least* it comes out pure (NN-B; my emphasis)

Of course, Kerouac obviously wanted to see these two works published, yet he insisted that retaining the purity of his writing was more important: "I don't mind not getting money from publishers and being completely unpublished even, but *somebody* besides myself's got to read these things, don't you think?" Part of Kerouac viewed the publishing world as a threat to his integrity and the purity of his vision as he saw it unfold on the page, yet his very existence as an author depend-

ed upon the acceptance of his work by such people as Kazin, Cowley, and Robert Giroux.

For Kerouac, the thought of writing a bestseller was a distraction, something at the back of his mind, for money was a lure but also sacrilegious. Sometime in 1953, in DR 8, Kerouac recorded his waking thoughts:

I wake up realizing the Jazz Century I'm in & the thousands of dollars *On the Road* which Phyllis Jackson lost, is worth--The big issue jazz will be, bop & how Holmes has already begun to capitalize on it at my expense (using my anecdotes, phrases Etc. & in fact further battening on the sufferings of junkey musicians)--I feel horrified & fear my Blake humiliaties which I can stand will become unbearable if worth millions to stealers like Holmes, as it is just like, "Christ & his thorns pounded into a golden Chalice, the Bible in Bestseller--The Agony in the Garden a smash hit! Bitch! Poseur sloth, top & cheat-misty! (NN-B)

Kerouac honestly felt as if something that belonged to him had been stolen. He believed he was writing for the people, that is, the common man who does not rush out to buy the next bestseller and will probably never know about Kerouac or his books. The "they" Kerouac wrote about in *Book of Dreams*, saying that "they're stealing my ideas, getting published, being feted" (8), the writer and the intellectual, were guilty of intruding upon the lives of the very people they had intended to serve. About Robert Frank's photographs, Kerouac wrote: "As American a picture--the faces don't editorialize or criticize or say anything but 'This is the way we are in real life and if you don't like it I don't know anything about it 'cause I'm living my own life my way and may God bless us all, mebbe' . . . 'if we deserve it'" (6). This is, in effect, what Kerouac wanted to say about himself,

his writing, and the Americans he admired, but he would find himself not only on the inside torn by his pure vision of the Beat Generation but also on the outside by its commercialized image.

## Chapter Six

### The Beat Generation

I'm so sick and tired of being insulted by critics I've just about decided not to publish anymore, except for already written VISIONS OF GERARD and DESOLATION ANGELS. . . . They make me sick with their Jew talk. . . . They'll go around vaunting their Philip Roths and Herbert Golds and Bernard Malamuds and J.D. Salingers and Saul Bellowses, whilst the best selling is being taken care of by Micheners and Wouks, and my only clientele are kids who steal my books in bookstores.

Jack Kerouac to Carolyn Cassady, 21 October 1962, TxU

It is not easy for us to separate authors from their work, and if a story is told from the view point of the first person, sometimes the line drawn between fiction and reality ruptures, and the author's identity, reinvented, becomes a free signifier afloat in the marketplace. In August of 1957, The New American Library of World Literature, Inc. paid \$4000 to Viking Press for the right to reprint *On the Road* "in its Signet Series," to be released "not earlier than one (1) year nor later than two (2) years after publication" of Viking's "trade edition" (contract, NNU). Impressed with Kerouac's grasp of "the restless, rootless feel of younger people," Truman M. Talley, Editorial Vice President of NAL, sent a memo to NAL editors:

Keith Jennison still wants to sell this [*On the Road*] to NAL and nobody else. He said they are going to trim a *minimum* of 70 ms. pages; this will bring the book down to 192 pp. for us.

Keith believes there'll be great attention given the book for a number of reasons beyond the book itself (San Francisco, Ferlenghetti [sic], Allen Ginsberg, new avante [sic])

garde, etc.) (1 February 1957, inter-office memo, NNU)

Another editor at NAL had a hunch that "Kerouac [was] destined to become a big 'talk' item":

*Evergreen Review* (Grove Press) will publish a complete short novel by Kerouac in their issue that comes out in June. They are trying to drum up a lot of publicity for *Evergreen* and Kerouac and are showing people at *Time* magazine a piece by Eberhart on Ginsberg and Kerouac, etc. The *Atlantic Monthly* is to run an article on the "San Francisco Group" shortly. *Life* magazine has photographed two poetry readings on the West Coast, apparently attended by Ginsberg, Kerouac, etc. And *Life* will also photograph another West Coast "do" called "The Poets' Follies." (4 February 1957, inter-office memo, NNU)

By October, with 14,000 copies purchased, Viking "had . . . gone back to press for the third time" (2 October 1957, inter-office memo, NNU). In May of 1958, NAL prepared to release their 50 cent Signet edition.

Into the eighth month of publication, *On the Road* remained a bestseller, and a NAL dopesheet indicates that Sterling Lord, Kerouac's agent, gave them reason to believe that by the first week of April a movie deal would be finalized (29 May 1958, NNU). Kerouac wrote to Neal Cassady, "Main thing, is, movie sale, Marl [sic] Brando definitely interested, soon's he crawls outa bed and reads ROAD he buy it, meanwhile Paramount and Warners bickering----gossip columnists report that Slim Gaillard will play himself in movie version!" (29 October 1957, TxU). Nothing came of the rumor, but talk about Kerouac's book as movie material continued. Kerouac received a "letter from big producer who wants big socko ending where Dean crashes &

dies, utilizing myth of James Dean on ROAD story, I dont care" (Kerouac to Carr, 16 January 1958, NNC). *On the Road* belonged to the public, and its myths, used to NAL's advantage, superseded his own.

The NAL editorial dopesheet highlighted the social significance of *On the Road*: "This is the book that has become the bible of the 'beat' generation--the novel that started a furor last fall concerning its unconventional author, the 'T'-shirted Zen barbarians it describes, the book's wild electric style itself." Persuading us of the meaning of Kerouac and of a literary movement named the Beat Generation, in effect, NAL supplied us with a reading that once rooted created a national myth:

A new order has sprung fully-armed from the underbelly of the western world, composed of "hip" and "winging" revolutionaries. These are the non-violent subterraneans who do not accept the modern universe--a stark industrial world where man's deepest impulses are stifled by conformity to class, clothes, color-lines and industrial consumption. The novel's narrator and its James Dean-like hero start out on one of the wildest pilgrimages in modern literature. By car, bus and foot they cross and recross America--from New York to San Francisco, from Chicago to Mexico City--searching for Experience, Sensation and the mystic moment of Awareness when, in late-at-night bull-sessions and "tea" parties, the mind approaches total comprehension and beatific truth. Their day-to-day search for identity and purpose--with girls, wild parties, cohorts; pod [pot], jazz, Zen-add up to the newest chapter of youth's oldest odyssey. It's an engrossing catalogue of adventures that's hard to put down, filled as it is with the stuff (neon-lit and macadamized) of 20th-century life itself. (29 May 1958, dopesheet, NNU)

Advantageously touting *On the Road* as the kind of novel in which one might expect a fictional James Dean to appear, NAL planned to release the Signet edition of *On the Road* in September of 1958, one year after

the Viking edition. Kerouac's *Dharma Bums* was also scheduled for release by Viking, and Evergreen Press was to publish *The Subterraneans*. As Talley noted 10 September 1958, what would become of the author himself was no longer in Kerouac's control. Talley wrote Charles Bolte at Viking: "Kerouac has the call. He sees the Vision and he has a piece of the Truth. THE DHARMA BUMS is a clear step forward. It puts him clearly apart from 99% of his hopped-up adherents--*though that won't save him when the general reaction sets in*" (NNU; my emphasis). Talley pitied Kerouac as he realized that he would be viewed as a spokesman for an entire generation. Others were envious of Kerouac's position and tried to downplay his significance. Depersonalizing Kerouac, depleting him of his right to assert his individual difference from the commodity Kerouac, as a commodity, he could be used and disposed.

In *The Dharma Bums*, Kerouac wrote about Japhy Ryder, a free-spirited semi-hobo. *The Dharma Bums* was important to Kerouac because he thought it contained "goldmines of poetry . . . accurate descriptions of a new thing in American culture ultimately a hell of a lot more important than 'beatness' altho it is beatness but not 'hipness' at all, just good oldfashioned early-Christian John the Baptist wilderness tough sensitivity" (Kerouac to Cowley, 9 December 1957, ICN). Certainly, the relative conservatism of the late 50s made *The Dharma Bums* seem offensive and indecent to some readers, but time did not lessen Kerouac's shock value. In the mid 80s, the cover of the Signet edition of *The Dharma Bums* said of Kerouac: "[T]he man who launched the hippie world, the daddy of the swinging psychedelic generation."

"Here are the orgiastic sexual sprees, the cool jazz bouts, the poetry love-ins, and the marathon binges of the kids who are hooked on Sensation and looking for the high." This was not Kerouac's vision of John the Baptist but a 20th Century view of Thomas Morton at Merry-Mount.

From the late 50s onward, imposing on society the prospect of social demise, for commercial purposes, Signet billed *On the Road* in a way that stirred and evoked commonplace criticisms of Kerouac and the Beat Generation. The change in the characterization of the patrons of Greenwich Village from ebullient free-thinking artists to somber racists and violent onlookers symbolized to some the inherent difficulties of the country itself. In the same issue of *Escapade* in which Kerouac's essay "The Last Word" appeared, Carl Winston wrote of "The Decline and Fall of Greenwich Village": "[G]enerally speaking, the Four Horsemen currently trampling the Village into a shambles may be defined as Racism, Hooliganism, Degeneracy, and Racketeering" (55). Admitting that some of the safer spots in the Village were "'Beatnik' joints," all the same, he made it clear that it was not beatnik virtue but beatnik "apathy" that kept the peace. Winston warned, "[I]t's advisable for him [a visitor in the Village] to keep his mouth shut, no matter what he sees or hears, at the risk of running afoul of male or female members of the teen-age, leather-jacketed JD set after he leaves" (55). (A few critics, to be sure, had delighted in noting that the initials of one of Kerouac's narrators were JD--Jack Duluoz.)

In "The Last Word," Kerouac commented that he had known the "joy" of writing until he was "defamed . . . in the American Press." His

inner tranquility was stolen, Kerouac said, "when *Time*, *Life*, TV and the paper reviewers were done depicting" Beats "as hoodlums, violents, cheerless wretches . . ." (72). Defamed and trapped by a fictional identity in a generation of which he had been said to be the originator and spokesman, Kerouac expressed his frustration. Because he was thought of as a member of a generation, his reputation as a hipster was contingent upon the actions of others who called themselves beat.

Holmes' essay "The Philosophy of the Beat Generation," according to Kerouac, degenerated the meaning of beat, and in 1958, angered by Robert Brustein's "The Cult of Unthink," Kerouac wrote to Ginsberg:

Did you see new Horizon magazine where you and me raked over coals agains by another columbia trilling funk? But every knock is a boost and we sure gets boosted knocked raked and everything in this. Once more accused of fomenting teenage murder atrocities. That, my friend, you can lay back to Mr Holmes who said in Esquire that it was extremely "significant" that a little nigger cretin pulled the knife out of Michael Farmer's chest and said "Thanx, man, I wanted to see what it was like." How a man can make irresponsible statements like that from his cloistered position I shall never know but anyway it appears these Trillingers seem to think WE said such a silly thing and that's 2 critics now lay murder at our feet . . . (8 September 1958, NNC)

In fact, according to the editor's note, with "This Is the Beat Generation," Holmes had planted the seeds of the Beat Generation five years prior to the publication of *On the Road*. Kerouac's vision of beat did not establish the prominence of the Beat Generation, nor was it a vision that critics of the Beat Generation shared. Characterized by an "attitude," the Beat Generation was cast with "heroes" and "published" authors before Kerouac's arrival.

Kerouac seriously considered what Holmes wrote for *Esquire*.

Kerouac's reputation as the man who had written the book that defined a generation was under scrutiny. His vision was public property, and he contended with others, by mere association, speaking for him. It was with much irony that Kerouac was called "spokesman for his movement" (Holmes, "The Philosophy" 35). While most readers were probably sophisticated enough not to take Holmes' essay as the gospel truth, and if they read Kerouac's essay about the Beat Generation, published in the March issue of *Esquire*, they probably discerned the differences between the two men; nonetheless, the subject of violence assumed a primary role in the Holmes essay and confirmed the worst fears of Kerouac's critics. Holmes wrote:

Even the crudest and most nihilistic member of the Beat Generation, the young slum hoodlum, is almost exclusively concerned with the problem of belief, albeit unconsciously. It seems incredible that no one has realized that the only way to make the shocking juvenile murders coherent at all is to understand that they are specifically moral crimes. The youth, who last summer stabbed another youth and was reported to have said to his victim, "Thanks a lot, I just wanted to know what it felt like" was neither insane nor perverted. There was no justification for his crime . . . His was the sort of crime . . . which the cruel absence of God made obligatory if a man were to prove that he was a man and not a mere blot of matter. . . . in actuality it is the *longing* for values which is expressed in such a crime, and not the hatred of them. (37)

As was discussed in chapter one, young people, as Holmes saw it, were rebelling against a "hostile environment." They had created a code of ethics by which they thought it possible to comprehend a life that seemed void of value. Hence, there appeared tribal units, the small gangs. For Kerouac, murder was simply murder. The hipster he wrote

about was in essence an artist, that is, he used his destructive rages towards creating a new self, a new society, or a new art form, his god was not absent from life. Holmes' differentiation between juvenile delinquent and hipster too unclear, Holmes reached the conclusion in "The Philosophy of the Beat Generation" that "this almost primitive will to survive gives rise to the hipster" (38). In effect, Holmes' Beat Generation sprung from seeds of violence, and that seed by the logic of his own writing, he had attributed to Jack Kerouac. To Kerouac Holmes was untouchable, and he was not. If Kerouac, in his letter to Ginsberg, seemed hostile towards Holmes we see it was with good reason: there was no turning back for Kerouac.

Thoroughly entrenched in a literary generation identified with violence and rebellion, he set out to redefine the critical perceptions of Beat Generation. Although his own *Esquire* essay, "Aftermath: The Philosophy of the Beat Generation," failed to generate the critical response of Holmes' essay, his letter to Ginsberg indicated his sense of impotence and alienation from a movement described by such critics as Robert Brustein. Responding to criticism, Kerouac wrote two more essays about the Beat Generation. The second of these, an unpublished essay, is more defensive than the *Playboy* essay, "The Origins of the Beat Generation," published in June 1959, which he presented to the Hunter College Playhouse, 6 November 1958. Judging from the format of the unpublished essay, Kerouac intended to read this paper at the Columbia forum, held 5 February 1959, led by Allen Ginsberg, and included Gregory Corso and Peter Orlovsky.

When Kerouac decided not to appear at Columbia University, es-

tranging himself, he seemed to have washed his hands of the generation question. But the essay he wrote in preparation for the Columbia event shows us how much he wanted to be a part of the Beat Generation, if it could be seen through his eyes. Indeed, his account of the origins of the Beat Generation is generated not from any sociological or psychological impulse to find release for anger or frustration, but from a vision that Herbert Huncke, whom Kerouac called a hipster, had shared with him:

Huncke . . . had perhaps brought the word ["beat"] from some midwest carnival or junk cafeteria. He appeared to us in 1944 and said "Im beat." with radiant light shining out of his despairing eyes. We didnt ask him, we knew what it meant right away. It was Huncke who later told us of his vision of the sun revolving in the sky over Chicago, as seen thru a french window, as 2 girls passed in poppy red dresses. he was 14 then. and knew that his doom was sealed. [ . . . ] The word beat therefore must include the revolving sun. (unpublished essay, *The Beat Generation*, NNC)

In the *Esquire* essay, Kerouac said that the Beat Generation was "a vision that we [Holmes and Ginsberg] had" (24); he had not made reference to Huncke's vision that had indelibly impressed upon him the "element of supernatural imagination." Huncke's vision was the essence of "beatitude."

Kerouac did not defend Huncke, the grown hipster, against the "commentator[s] on the subject": he protected "the astounding angelical nature of the heart of this youth what I have chronicled as 'beat'" (NNC). In Kerouac's eyes a moment of transition from child to adult epitomized the meaning of beat, so that when he discovered that many Americans were unable to understand its significance, he

blamed their blindness on "[t]he problem of philistinism," which he wrote, "has been complicated in our age by the instruments [sic] of mass communication, radio, tv, newspapers, magazines, movies, in which the invidious misinterpretation of one bad critic" are reproduced "in the mind of a nation," relying on "mass media for all its" beliefs (NNC):

there are, eighty million people who have opinions about the Beat Generation founded exclusively on the hack interpretations of severals handful of journalists article writing opportunistic college instructors out to make a buck for their uncreative opinions, and gamey employees of fashion magazines---to say nothing of goofy comic strip cartoonists. How are we to defend ourselves from wicked opinions? The only concern of the poet is to write prophecy: let him who will listen.

Kerouac defended himself against those who defined "great" literature in order to shield their own hatred of art. "[C]harges [against the novelist] of obscurity, amorphousness, amorality, decadence, self-willed isolation, oddity" and puerility, were "construct[s]" Kerouac felt rankled against contemporary authors. He concluded by self-moralizing: "Always have pity for people you think are oppressing you."

Once again, Kerouac might have seemed, if he had appeared at Columbia and read this speech, paranoid and bent on self-aggrandizement; but he clearly saw the direction literary criticism against the Beat Generation would take if the commercialized idea of Beat Generation was propagated. For example, in the 1961 novel, *The Magic of Their Singing*, Bernard Wolfe examined the reasons why young

people from wealthy society families, well-educated and good-looking, might be attracted to the life-style and unscrupulous activities of hipsters. When Penelope is caught shoplifting, she and her friend, Marga, escape into the New School for Social Research. They find themselves at a lecture on "'Beat and the Poetic Muse'":

a clattering new spirit is afoot in the esthetic pockets to thumb their collective nose at the standards and stances of the square ingroups. Their rallying cry is hipness. Their new manna is pot and peyote. Way-outness is their credo. High on their list of enemies, indeed, first among their targets of choice, are work, sobriety, ambition, the gray flannel suit, nine-to-five enterprises, programmatic heterosexuality, congenital optimism, the armored musculature, science, the atom, government, patriotism, manners, the daytime, sunny weather. Their primary sound effect is the rattle of bongos. Their favorite meeting hall is the paddy wagon. Their field of operations is the night and their M.O. is total anarchy. All their transactions are carried out in the coffee house, in the shadow of the espresso machine. Their emblem and badge of merit is the scraggly beard . . . For uniform they wear the blue jeans once a sign of the laboring man but now made the costume of the dedicatedly unemployed. . . . From their disheveled ranks has come a wild surge of poetry, an inspired, battering babble. (118-119)

Wolfe successfully compressed the prevailing critical and cultural perspective on the Beat Generation into a synopsis that in of itself is a relic of culture. The Beat Generation, as a movement that had effected the lives of young people, too young to have been "on the road" in the late forties, emerged in the early 60s as a cultural movement that had little to do with Kerouac. (The obit in the *Harvard Crimson* said of Kerouac: "We don't know exactly why it's [his death] such a shock. We never really read him much" [qtd. in Holmes, "Gone in October" 181].)

Wolfe taught that one cannot pretend to be disaffiliated. Just how far the Beat Generation slipped from its artistic foundation, Wolfe indicated with his portrayal of the half-insane hipster, Lewellyn Period. About the "beats" Period maintained:

For the most part, what he heard from the mouths and pens of the beat esthetes made him laugh.

When a histrionic young poet memorialized the best thinkers of his generation, who it appeared were forever buggering each other in paddy wagons, Lewellyn laughed because it was obvious to him that smart buggerers, devoted buggerers, ones who wanted real elbow room for their buggering exercises, would wise up enough to steer clear of cramping paddy wagons. When an advanced and angry novelist stated his conviction that no American can become a writer until he had had one homosexual relationship and spent a year in jail, Lewellyn doubled up with laughter. (175-176)

Kerouac could not have failed to realize what the inter-office memos of NAL indicated: that the literary events of the West Coast set the stage for the reception of *On the Road* and created an image of the Beat Generation. In chapter two of *The Dharma Bums*, through Ray Smith's eyes, Kerouac described "the reading at Gallery Six," "the night of the birth of the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance" (13). This short scene is interesting for two reasons. Kerouac plays down the importance of Alvah Goldbook's reading, even though Goldbook's nonfictional counterpart, Allen Ginsberg, who read "Howl" that October night at the Six Gallery is remembered by literary historians as having made the greatest impression upon the audience. Instead, Kerouac makes Japhy Ryder's poetry the central focus of Smith's first person account of the Gallery Six reading, demonstrating that Kerouac shaped events to serve his fictional purposes. Because Japhy Ryder is

Smith's hero it makes sense that he uses the scene to illuminate early in the novel why Smith is attracted to Ryder. Smith likes the way Japhy draws upon his logger background, his studies of Indian mythologies and "Oriental literature," as well as his own special humor and "anarchists ideas" to express American optimism:

His voice was deep and resonant and somehow brave, like the voice of oldtime American heroes and orators. Something earnest and strong and humanly hopeful I liked about him, while the other poets were either too dainty in their aestheticism, or too hysterically cynical to hope for anything, or too abstract and indoorsy, or too political, or like Coughlin too incomprehensible to understand . . . (14)

Because Ray searches for hope, understandably, he is drawn to the poet who expresses what he most desires. Using Ryder's difference from the other poets to make Smith's relationship with Ryder more credible, Kerouac establishes the fundamental differences between the poets themselves.

Michael Davidson, author of *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-century* (1989), wrote of Kerouac's depiction of the Six Gallery reading, "even in its self-described inaugural moment, the San Francisco Renaissance was diverse, relying for its unanimity on a spirit of camaraderie and fellow-feeling more than on shared aesthetic beliefs. It was this spirit that Kerouac caught and passed on to later chroniclers" (4). This is not completely accurate, as Kerouac's view of the Six Gallery reading, at least as he portrays it through Ray Smith, is jovial only insofar as Ray is actually involved in the event--he collects money for drinks and he shouts

out "little wows and yesses" of appreciation while the poets read--but when Ray assesses each poet and characterizes the individual styles, he is critically distant and only admires Japhy Ryder. The only similarity Ray finds between the poets is their "strong Buddhist . . . feeling" (14). While Davidson's study of the San Francisco Renaissance is unique among literary histories on this period, for it describes the disparities between the poets of this community, he did not read chapter two of *The Dharma Bums* independently of Kerouac's belonging to the fabled literary Beat Generation.

By 1955, in many respects, Kerouac was an outsider to the Beat Generation. Instead of reading from *Mexico City Blues*, Kerouac preferred to remain in the audience of the Six Gallery reading. Orchestrated by Gary Snyder and Allen Ginsberg, Ginsberg billed the reading as a collective experience:

CELEBRATED GOOD TIME

POETRY READING

Either you go home bugged or completely enlightened. Allen Ginsberg blowing hot; Gary Snyder blowing cool; Philip Whalen puffing the laconic tuba; Mike McClure his hip high notes; Rexroth on the big bass drum.

Small collection for wines and postcards.

Abandon Noise Strange pictures on walls

Oriental music Lurid poetry

Extremely serious

TOWN HALL THEATRE

One and only final appearance of this Apocalypse

Admission free

Kenneth Rexroth, a well-known poet, joined Michael McClure, Philip Whalen, Philip Lamantia, Allen Ginsberg, and Gary Snyder, who were reading in public for the first time. Rexroth's name made the event serious (Maynard 55-57; Davidson 3), and the evening of 13 October

1955 turned into their apprenticeship for fame. But it is what happened after the reading was over that set into motion a large-scale attempt to make the Beat Generation into a commodity. The commercial future of the Beat Generation fell into the hands of man who was not at the Six Gallery Reading.

Lawrence Lipton had been communicating with Kenneth Rexroth by letter for several years. They had worked together on the "Escalator Manifesto," and when Lipton tried to find a publisher for his book of poems, *Rainbow at Midnight*, writing a series of letters about his views on literature and politics, he reestablished his contact with Rexroth (Maynard 43). But Rexroth remained distant until he read Lipton's "Secession: 1953 (The State of the Arts on the West Coast)." Lipton wrote several other essays, and he coined the term "disaffiliation" to describe the artist who had repudiated "the 'Social Lie'" (51). When he heard about the Six Gallery reading, Lipton was jealous that Rexroth had gathered a group of poets under his wing and had not told him about it (57). When Lipton moved to Venice, California, he associated with a small group of bohemians in his neighborhood: he wanted to be the founder and no less the creator of a generation of poets. As John Arthur Maynard has said, in his history of Lipton's career, Ginsberg's arrival in Los Angeles the summer of 1956 was "a turning point" that implanted a vision of the future in Lipton's scheming mind (59).

Advertised in *Evergreen Review* #8 as "the complete story of the 'beats'--that hip, cool, frantic generation of new Bohemians who are

turning the American scale of values inside out," *The Holy Barbarians* was released June 1959. Lipton said very little about Jack Kerouac, but he made several references to conversations with Allen Ginsberg and Gregory Corso. Ginsberg and Corso's Los Angeles reading were the main subject of Chapter Ten, entitled "The New Apocalypse."

Lipton opened chapter ten with Ginsberg's arrival upon the San Francisco scene. Billing Ginsberg as a modern day Christ and those who accompanied him as his apostles, Lipton wrote, "A prophet came to town. Rumor had preceded him. He went about in an aura of wine and marijuana with a retinue of disciples at his heels, all of them drunk or stoned out of their minds with poetry and pot" (193). In language that was clear and compelling, it was Lipton's style to sensationalize, to inflate, and to dramatize. Despite the fact that Lipton introduced his novel as a sociological study, *The Holy Barbarians* was a quick read.

In *The Holy Barbarians*, Lipton produced a firsthand account of the Los Angeles reading that took place at the Hollywood boarding house:

I was not unprepared for Allen Ginsberg's visit to Los Angeles, since he had written me from San Francisco, but when he got to town Nettie and I were so exhausted from all the poetry-reading parties we had been throwing for visiting poets that I was relieved when the editors of *Coastlines*, the L.A. quarterly, offered to sponsor the reading. I knew they had no use for the sort of thing Ginsberg was writing or what we were doing in Venice West (in fact, much of their magazine is devoted to attacking it), but now that it looked like it might be attracting wide public attention they wanted to get into the act. (*The Holy* 194)

By this time Lipton was well aware of Ginsberg, and he had conceived a role for himself he would play as the creator of a new movement in

the country. Lipton was careful to appear to present his material objectively. In the introduction to his study, he had set the tone of *The Holy Barbarians*: "I have chosen Venice, California, as the scene, the laboratory as it were, because I live here and have seen it grow up around me. Newer than the North Beach, San Francisco, scene or the Greenwich Village scene, it has afforded me an opportunity to watch the formation of a community of disaffiliates from its inception." With the keen mind of a man who knew how to write a novel that sold, he planned to shock an audience merely by reporting what he had seen and heard. Thereby Lipton retained the illusion that he himself had maintained a respectable distance from the people he entertained in his house at Venice West and patronized for the sake of preserving high culture and the oral tradition of poetry. Moreover, because he was a poet, he had been on both sides of the line of objectivity that he narrowly walked. Lipton confirmed this perspective to his more discerning reader when he described the Los Angeles reading.

As Lipton tells the well-known story, the *Coastlines* people "had offered to sponsor" Ginsberg and Corso. Lipton agreed to head the event. Contrasting the "Left Wing bohemian collective household" to "the imaginative and original decor of the beat generation pad, even the most poverty-stricken" (194), Lipton found the boarding house, to his taste, to be "atrociously" decorated. Ginsberg's arrival further exemplified the differences between the "Left Wing bohemian" and the beat as the stark formality of the evening was immediately enlivened. Ginsberg appeared and smelled inebriated. "Refus[ing] to begin his

reading until Anais Nin "arrived" (195), Ginsberg created something of a scene, but this was a minor infraction of impropriety compared to Ginsberg's strip act.

According to Lipton, a drunk, "someone who had drifted in," heckled Ginsberg and then Corso (196). The drunk's assaults took a more severe turn when Corso began his reading:

"Think you know it all, don't you? I know your kind. It's punks like you that are to blame for all this--all this--" he sputtered, unable to make up his mind which of the crimes punks like this were to blame for were equal to the enormity of the occasion. He tried again, gave up . . . ending with, inevitably, an invitation to "step outside and settle this thing like a *man!*" (197)

Corso challenged the drunk to "fight with a *man's* weapon--with words" (197), but as the drunk neared the poets, Ginsberg took charge: "'All right,' he said, 'all right. You want to do something big, don't you? Something brave. Well, go on, do something *really* brave. *Take off your clothes!*'" (197). Then Ginsberg undressed. The audience, silent during the exchange, erupted into "nervous applause, cheers, jeers, noisy argument" (198). The *Coastlines* people were outraged, and Lipton "rapped for order." Lipton tells us that Ginsberg put his clothes back on--other historians say that Ginsberg did not--and Corso continued reading. In the section that followed this scene, Lipton suggests that Ginsberg was an entertainer who lacked the sincerity of, say, a Robert Duncan. Partly, this was a matter of regional conflict. Ginsberg was the "barbarian from the north," and Duncan came from San Francisco (200). Lipton's message was that Venice West was the real thing.

But was the Venice West Lipton portrayed real? Yes and no. It was real to the extent that Lipton actually had recorded in his book word for word conversations that took place between Venice West residents. He described where a few people lived and how they lived, but he also took pains to give the reader the impression that this community was of a large-scale, when in fact, it was only a small group of people no more of a generation than the few poets that constituted the Beat Generation poets. Documenting a type, he chose phrases readily identifiable with literature and art, popularized at the time and under attack, and created the sense that his community was a vast movement, dispersing into regions beyond the West Venice limits, absorbing and being absorbed by popular culture.

In *The Holy Barbarians*, Gilda Lewis utters, "out on the open road and *going* somewhere. Preferably *with* someone, *away*. It doesn't matter much where *to* as long as it's *away*.'" (95). And Barbara Lane, a "refugee from Squareville" who lives two lives, one "at the office," where she does not reveal her Venice West identity, and another in Venice West, where she plays the part of "hipster," knowingly tells Lipton: "I learned a lot in Mexico. I didn't have much money so I lived in a small town on the west coast. It was like dying and being born again. The only things I've found to like about America I found first in Mexico, strangely enough."

I mean jazz music, good books, uninhibited sex, relaxed living. Like Jack Kerouac says in *On the Road*, Mexico is a whole nation of hipsters!" (103)

About Kerouac, Lipton was unenthusiastic. He criticized Kerouac's prose, for its tendency to pander to a commercial audience: "It would set back not only Kerouac but other novelists working in this field, if he permits himself to be touted off the style of *The Subterraneans* . . . as he shows signs of doing in *The Dharma Bums*" (250). Lipton also felt that Kerouac painted a myopic picture of beat life, by which he meant that Kerouac's story was not the story Lipton had to tell. Lipton's "beats" were not "twentieth-century Thoreau[s]" nor were they all writers or jazz musicians: "Writers and jazz musicians are a part of the scene, but only a small part" (251). Moreover, Lipton felt that Kerouac misinterpreted Zen, "In short," Lipton argued, "Kerouac has still to master his idiom." Lipton esteemed Kerouac no more than did Kerouac's critics. In a letter to Ginsberg, apparently having read *The Holy Barbarians*, Kerouac defended himself:

If Irving Layton or whatever his name is, I mean Lawrence Lipton knew how hip it is to be hip like you . . . ah, shit, that book is awful, all about his run barefooted bearded non-working art friends who dont write but just talk and show off and the things about us who started it all are pejorative. Holy Barbarians is the first fullscale attempt by the communist party to infiltrate the beat generation, and please tell everybody I said so, if you want. I dont want to have anything to do with no communists: tell them to leave my name out of it. (19 May 1959, NNC)

The Beat Generation was a vision based on a shared memory that Kerouac, as an artist, individualized in *On the Road*. But instead of sharing in that vision, people like Lipton appropriated it as a commodity. Subsequently, the Beat Generation did not evolve into a communal vision, but into a common property, an object of disdain and

loathing that, gave critics a means to forget their own involvements in the past. As a commodity, the beat vision separated the individual from society and from history. In this sense, as a commodity, the Beat Generation was rightly perceived to be a "lost" generation. But those critics who attacked the Beat Generation, by implication and by their will to subvert or to reshape the commercialized vision, which they mistook to be Kerouac's vision, were also a part of the Beat Generation; they were just as lost and confused as the commodity they wanted to destroy. Being "beat" was about being vulnerable. And this is Kerouac's true connection to the Beat Generation. He was not only vulnerable from within as an artist but also from without, defenseless against capitalism. Kerouac had opened new wounds with *On the Road*. He had perforated the placid stillness that seemed to envelop the late 50s with his beat vision, its origins in a moment in time: a young boy looks out of his window and recognizes his own vulnerability, and thereafter he does not look at the world in the same way as he had before that moment; he is awakened to his own inevitability; he ceases to be a boy. The vision finds its power in the moment of transition, when awareness of one's difference is the temporary bridge between life and death; it is a vision that characterizes the internal structure of Kerouac's prose and Kerouac himself. But "civilization," after a series of wars and political events obscured the identity of America, and sensing Kerouac's vulnerability, could not risk seeing itself as "beat," for that would have forced the individual to recognize the extent of his own failures. And yet, judging by *The Holy Barbarians*, Kerouac was an unimportant beat author. From Lipton's

point of view, Allen Ginsberg was the primary figure of this literary generation. If Kerouac was widely known as the leader of the Beat Generation, to Lipton he was only its token leader. A relatively unknown author found himself with a reputation forged out of the trends of culture itself.

In the early 50s, critics' expectations for the future of American literature prejudiced their own reception of popular literature. Granville Hicks had asked: "[W]hat are the prospects for American fiction?" (1). Hicks turned the eyes of American readers back to Joseph Warren Beach's anthology of fiction, published a decade prior to Hicks' "Our Novelists' Shifting Reputations." The only author who had died among the eight showcased in the anthology, *American Fiction, 1920-1940* (1941), was Thomas Wolfe. Of Wolfe, Hicks remarked:

The remarkable thing about Wolfe's reputation, it seems to me, is that it has not been clarified by the passage of time. Although some critics find him unrewarding, if not actually unreadable, he is still greatly admired by others, and he continues to exert a considerable influence on young writers. (1)

That Kerouac's first novel had been called *Wolfian* was clearly not a good thing to have happened, and that Kerouac admired Wolfe meant to critics that he was patterning his image of authorship upon an author appreciated by other writers. Moreover, in appearance Kerouac was an outsider to the cultural gentry, his hair was unruly and he did not often wear a suit, and he had not finished his education at Columbia University. Kerouac had a second strike against him: *On the Road* was received by many readers as a false glorification of adolescence, and

the actions of beat writers themselves, their publicized carousing, intensified this perception. Kerouac's disposition further removed him from the mainstay of authors that critics adore because they are "readable," that is, writers who say what their critics want to hear, the shrewdest finding it in their power to convince the critics that they have read what they wanted to read, namely, the truth. Summarizing the scope of his essay, Hicks confirmed this view of the changing relationship between the critics' demands upon fiction and the author's ability to fulfill those demands: "If some of the older novelists mean less to us than they once did, and if most of the newer novelists fail to satisfy us, it is because we have an increasingly sharp sense of what we want" (7).

As critics grew older, and contemporary authors younger, an imbalance of knowledge arose between the two. Critics were losing interest in "institutions" and alternatively focused on "man's fate," his "destiny" (7). Hicks admitted that the great author had to keep up with the times, and his works had to stay ahead. Either a novel upon re-reading had to be able to absorb the changes the reader brought to the pages of the book and lend new meaning to the reader's life--as, Hicks and most other critics agreed, Hemingway and Faulkner's works had done--or the prophecy of the novel had to be so alluring that upon each reading the reader garnered the illusion that man was nearing his destiny. *On the Road* offered hope to some who felt trapped by the life they led, but most critics did not share this sentiment, and if they did, they realized that Kerouac's heroes had not found freedom by

meandering across the United States. In this respect, *On the Road* was dangerous novel because of its appeal to the discontent. It was a novel that revealed a secretive side of some Americans who were, disenchanted and restricted by the very social institutions that had given them the right to pursue happiness. With the urbanization and industrialization of the country the dream of liberty further evaded one's grasp.

Leslie Fiedler expressed a sentiment similar to Hicks:

There are certain books in a tradition which, after awhile, everyone stops reading but no one can stop writing. The less aware a novelist is of these books, the more he is likely to submit to their pattern; and this is one of the best reasons for insisting that writers be educated. (*An End* 183)

As in his review of *From Here to Eternity*, Fiedler bridled against a contrived lack of complexity which made the novel common property. Fiedler criticized Jones for making his art too accessible at the expense of creating "a style which at once speaks and assures us that its message is unsayable . . . that only a stutter can convey any sense of it" ("Dead-End" 190). Kerouac was not the first one attacked for the inarticulateness of some of his characters--for the number of "wows" and "yeses" that spot the pages of *On the Road*--nor the first to be disliked for creating a work of art easily and quickly absorbed in the American consciousness, like a subliminal piece of advertisement. Fiedler wrote:

Any book they can 'understand,' whose language is no more precise or whose feeling no subtler than their own, this public will use for their own ends; and what *From Here to*

*Eternity* has become in their minds the moving-picture versions reveals--at once mawkish and "hot," an orgy of vicarious passion and self-pity. This kind of fate only a high art can escape; and such an art must pass beyond simplicity and nature, beyond the range of perception of those for whom essentially it speaks. (190)

The author discovered that the critic, upon which judgment of his life work depended, was fickle. "Year by year," Fiedler wrote in "Adolescence and Maturity in the American Novel," "we have greeted new works with enthusiasm, we have remembered them fondly; but looking back for them over our shoulders we have found them inexplicably turned to dust" (191). Looking back over his shoulder, Fiedler saw in the pose of America's authors, the well worn and tiresome masks of adolescents unable to metamorphose into maturity. Like Hicks, Fiedler thought Thomas Wolfe's works had worn thin with time:

Thomas Wolfe appears to us now as appallingly overblown, a writer still to be responded to enthusiastically, but only at the one moment of adolescence to which his frantic rhetoric is appropriate; certainly he is not a writer for the mature. (192)

Demanding maturity of the very novelists they admired in their youth, ashamed or fearful of their pasts, critics decried the hints of bacchanalia that at one time seemed to promise exiles the riches of bourgeoisie bounties. The early self-driven deaths of authors pushed the critics further from the past into a future that they antagonistically defined by what the novel presently was not.

What were critics looking for in their novelists? They wanted to find a symbol of America's respectable man, and the myth of the road was the respectable man's way out. The early 50s, from the vantage

point of such writers as Robert Lowry, was a time of malcontent for many thirty-something young men, who had everything--a wife, a house in the city and a house in the country, children, and a secure job (Lowry, 18). The dissemination of culture into the homes of persons who could afford a copy of *Life* or *Time* kept the writing of the novel from being the act of a desperate man; novel writing, Lowry suggested, was no longer a clear expression of an individual's discontent and alienation, as there was a large enough audience, schooled in the art of letters, the novelist's audience was not restricted to the few he imagined might understand him. Art was being "sold-out" even when the artist did not want it to:

Now that Left is Right and Right is Left; now that T.S. Eliot is a *Time* cover boy . . . now that Jackson Pollock's technicolor spermatozoa get double-page spreads in the million-copy picture magazines and *Nightwood* is a *New Directions* bestseller . . . is it any wonder that *Underground Man Model 1950* find himself embarrassed. ("Is This the Beat Generation?" 19)

Lowry's article suggested a necessary absolution from a past that had made rebellion de rigueur. Lowry continued, "the myth that if a man is not particularly dangerous or particularly unusual he is not worth the dust on the top of a copy of *Das Kapital* or the heels off a pair of Gertrude Stein's old brogans" had to be undone (20). The underlying message of Lowry's essay was that it was time we grow up and adjust. Adjustment was the main character trait of Whyte's *The Organization Man*. How well one adjusted to social pressures and to change was a measure of one's mental health and maturity. With the

advent of this social attitude, there arose an increasing concern about the direction of rebellion in young people.

While ordinary youthful rebellion was still considered normal, delinquency was perceived as a sickness. In *Time* magazine, the psychologist Robert Lidner "reached," according to *Time*, "the startling conclusion that the youth of today [1954] is suffering from a severe, collective mental illness" (64). This illness, *Time* maintained, was brought into being because "man is forced from without to conform and from within to rebel" (65). Conformity and rebellion--these were terms that the mass media brought into homes. They were the tools by which one could analyze books, movies, and music. They were the main context for understanding self-expression in contemporary society, in a social order that was re-creating itself after the war.

Identities were fragile. Advertisers knew this, and politicians, and literary critics. Any sign of disruption was seized by the media as an opportunity to exploit every American's secret desire to be a rebel without a cause, careless and free, a new kind of American hero. In reaction to the popularization of the young rebel-hero, some critics devalued the romanticization of inner strife and denied its centrality as a measure of individual worth. Disagreements about the definition of self-worth revealed one reason why people wanted to find something unique about the young generation, causing so much ado.

The apparent indirection of this generation, which Podhoretz in 1957, said consisted of people between 21 and 31 years of age, was a crisis of "collective identity" ("The Young" 105, 106), a battle between the public and the private self, the need to choose between

adolescence or maturity, force or docility, conformity or the underground, Henry James or James Jones, *The Cambridge Review* or *Life*. Reconciliation between opposites seemed a contradiction of terms, that if attempted, left one defenseless and open to speculation about the strength of one's moral character. This "Young Generation," Podhoretz wrote, "for all the dispatch with which they have taken their places in society, for all their sophistication, for all their 'maturity,' know nothing, stand for nothing, believe in nothing" (111). Clearly, part of the critical community was disposed to misread *On the Road*, as the cultural context in which Kerouac's text was situated predisposed readers to see Sal and Dean's activities as actions directed against society rather than as an attempt to reconcile differences and to reclaim loss. *On the Road* illustrated a path that was inconceivable to many, who could only imagine reconciliation to end, at worst, in a stalemate; thus, there was the tendency for critics to find in *On the Road* signs of existential despair.

A prelude to Kerouac's introduction to the literary world at large, seven months before the release of *On the Road*, Kenneth Rexroth's essay "San Francisco's Mature Bohemians" appeared in *The Nation*. Even though Kerouac was not a native of San Francisco, Rexroth included Kerouac in "the contemporary San Francisco group" he called mature bohemianism (161). Ironically, Rexroth did not depict Kerouac as a "mature," serious, and rational author:

Sometimes he lapses into pages of terrifying gibberish that sounds like a tape recording of a gang bang with everybody full of pod, juice and bennies all at once, Mile Davis or

Perez Prade on the phonograph and crazy people beating on the floor. (161)

It did not help Kerouac's image that Ginsberg, who was also mentioned in Rexroth's article, was the subject of M. L. Rosenthal's review, printed below Rexroth's essay, called "Poet of the New Violence" (162). In fact, pejorative reviews and essays about the Beat Generation prefaced Kerouac's literary reception. Even if readers of *On the Road* did not come into contact with these early commentaries, those critics who wrote about the Beat Generation after the publication of *On the Road* were familiar with the San Francisco literary movement. In *Harpers*, the winter following the release of *On the Road*, "The New San Franciscans" were introduced in the pages of "Among Our Contributors." Drawing upon the names of writers in the Grove Press anthology, *San Francisco Scene*, *Harper's* suggested that despite its "only some twenty members" (21), and Kerouac its "only popularly known writer," and with Kenneth Rexroth and Henry Miller as the generation's "mentor[s]" (21), the San Franciscans were an important literary group. *Harpers* quoted at length from Miller's essay that was published in *San Francisco Scene*:

Today it is not communities or groups who seek to lead "the good life" but isolated individuals. The majority of these, at least from my observation, are young men who have already had a taste of professional life, who have already been married and divorced, who have already served in the armed forces and seen a bit of the world. [. . .] Utterly disillusioned, this new breed of experimenter is resolutely turning his back on all that he once held true and viable, and is making a valiant effort to start anew. (21)

*Harper's* depicted the main objective of the members of this generation

to be cultural revisionism; (21-22) a protest against what Lawrence Lipton called the "Social Lie." But the "generation" nomenclature made it difficult for people to consider the differences between the writers.

What bonded the authors were superficial constructs, social observations about their behavior, attire, music, and personal habits, rather than discussions of prose or poetic style and the content of the work. If Ginsberg was branded a poet of "new violence," then it seemed logical that Kerouac too represented violence. As Miller described it, beat literature was thematic with motifs adopted from *On the Road*: "Starting anew, for this type, means leading a vagrant's life . . . (21) roaming about in our midst like anonymous messengers . . . (22)." This metaphor itself gave rise to ideas of the disaffiliated, the misfit, the outsider, the displaced character types, accessible to the most unimaginative, for these types existed in popular culture. They were projected to mass culture in the powerful medium of film--*Picnic*, *Rebel Without a Cause*, and *The Wild One*, box office hits, depicted a violent or explosive nature as an integral part of this type. There was within all three protagonists the potential for self-destruction and willed hurt of others, and the originality of a beat author was subsumed under this predefined character type. Popularization of these kinds of images, alluring because the actors themselves were charismatic and highly visible figures--to this day James Dean is an American hero--established a marketable context in which *On the Road* was popularized and feared.

*On the Road* was the product of several years of work, predating the James Dean phenomena, yet it was associated with the rebel without a cause story. Literary and social critics were not immune to the influence of the movies, and some critics, depending on what organ they wrote for, went out of their way to invoke images that anchored the Beat Generation to fashionable institutions: "[T]he Beat people live a frantic life of alcohol, jazz music, sex and, for some, dope, in search of thrills, kicks and a new approach to life," one writer wrote for the *New York Daily News* (Klein 179).

In the spring of 1958, in the *Partisan Review* appeared Podhoretz's pivotal essay, "The Know-Nothing-Bohemians," a take off from his "know nothing" Young Generation essay. Podhoretz recognized that those dwelling in the suburbs were attracted to novels like *On the Road*:

Bohemianism is not particularly fashionable nowadays, but the image of Bohemia still exerts a powerful fascination--nowhere more so than in the suburbs, which are filled to overflowing with men and women who uneasily think of themselves as conformists and of Bohemianism as the heroic road. (306)

Contrasting the Bohemia of 1920 and 1930 to "Bohemianism of the 1950's," Podhoretz believed the Beats of the 1950s had repudiated the gentility of earlier Bohemia. Arguing that the earlier movement tried to create a society "in which the fruits of civilization" were accessible "to all," Podhoretz claimed that contemporary Bohemianism was "hostile to civilization" (307). Podhoretz' greatest contention about Kerouac was "that [Kerouac's] primitivism . . . was . . . a cover for an anti-intellectualism so bitter that it makes the ordinary Ameri-

can's hatred of eggheads seem positively benign" (313). Assuming that Kerouac was writing about himself, Podhoretz criticized him for creating fictional worlds that did not include an arena of conflict grounded in society: "*On the Road* and *The Subterraneans* are so patently autobiographical in content that they become almost impossible to discuss as novels" (315). Podhoretz found the incidents in *On the Road* trite, void of "dramatic reason," unimaginative, and unresponsive (315). To be opposed or in favor of the Beat Generation was for Podhoretz a moral issue, not merely because he felt the Beats hated intellectuals but also because he felt that this line of, what was in Podhoretz's view, un-thinking was tied to "ideologues of primitivistic vitalism" (318). "History . . . teaches," Podhoretz wrote. It was clear that he saw in Kerouac's creed of spontaneity something of Fascist Germany that made good on propaganda against the Jews. For Podhoretz violence was a subtext in Kerouac's work:

Even the relatively mild ethos of Kerouac's books can spill over easily into brutality, for there is a suppressed cry in those books: Kill the intellectuals who can talk coherently, kill the people who can sit still for five minutes at a time, kill those incomprehensible characters who are capable of getting seriously involved with a woman, a job, a cause. . . . Being for or against what the Beat Generation stands for has to do with denying that incoherence is superior to precision; that ignorance is superior to knowledge; that the exercise of mind and discrimination is a form of death. It has to do with fighting the poisonous glorification of the adolescent in American popular culture. It has to do, in other words, with being for or against intelligence itself. (318)

Perhaps *On the Road* offended Podhoretz in this manner because he was barely aware of its nightmarish qualities. "Now and again there

is a reference to gloom and melancholy, but the characteristic note struck by Kerouac is exuberance" (306). He did not see *On the Road* as the dramatization of the symbol of the nightmare itself. Instead, he was repelled by what he felt was injudicious emphasis placed on "emotional intensity" (307) that in "The New Nihilism and the Novel" he called artifice. Contrasting J.P. Donleavy to Kerouac, Podhoretz wrote that "he [Donleavy] never simulates feelings that he does not in fact feel, he refuses to make excuses, and he will not hide behind empty pieties" (169). Eugene Burdick echoed a similar sentiment in an article that recognized that the Beat Generation was "really a private vision," "invaded," copied, and "suffocated" (30). Nevertheless Burdick turned on Kerouac:

Kerouac is a bad writer and often a silly one, and his good reviews are only a reflection of the faint hearts of critics. He is like a sensitive eyeball that sweeps and perceives but is not connected to the brain. (30)

Kerouac was the only author in the article for whom Burdick expressed clear disdain. Those Burdick considered "intellectuals of the hipsters," fared better. Kerouac spoke too plainly, came too near to being ordinary, and was a representative of a generation that according to Burdick had negated "rationality" (33). Sam Hynes made similar observations about Kerouac and the beat movement:

Though Beat is widely regarded as an activist movement (it is, after all, full of violence), it is in fact static and incapable of development, fixed forever in a gross and banal Romantic gesture of self-alienation, self-pity, self-destruction, and windy confession. (560)

In 1958, the fundamental line of attack against Kerouac had emerged: he was loathed because critics said he glorified the adolescent, encouraged acts of violence, stimulated artificial emotions, disavowed intelligence for mysticism, and he had exchanged his disenchantment about the American way of life for solipsism. Since in their view he was not an artist (Podhoretz in "Where Is the Beat Generation?" called Kerouac's prose, "literary fakery" [230-231]) but a charlatan, with a flair for James Dean's dramatics, who wielded a pen instead of a hot rod, he was suspect of undermining the social good. These were value judgments, and the reading of Kerouac's work became a way for literary critics to demonstrate what they believed was a decline in the intrinsic value of literature itself. As the commercial worth of literature rose, critics felt that the value of literature to America, as a means of eking out a new path of existence, one more rigorously defined than in the past, one which elevated civilization, fell into the abyss of commonality, vulgarity, and immorality. This conflict between literature as commodity and literature as art for art's sake only more completely revealed the country's uncertainty about its own identity and the direction it would seek to take in history. The publication of *On the Road* exposed America's official sense of itself, as unified and self-contained, as a shield against the inner-divisions within democracy and its failure to satisfy a community.

"Has Kerouac made a contribution to American literature?" *The Commonweal* asked at the onset of 1959. Calling Kerouac the "King of

the Beats," Seymour Krim suggested that Kerouac was important because his literary method, "letting some of the real experience of our decade escape into his pages in crude, free-swinging, even shapeless form" had forced us to confront the real ways in which people lived. Krim said that it was no longer true that "bohemia" was a closely-knit circle with little or no effect upon "images of bourgeois respectability," but the subversive influence had begun to shape the reality of middle-class America (360). It was no longer possible, with certainty, to know that the man in the gray flannel suit could be trusted. Although in Norman Mailer's *Deer Park*, film producers, celebrities, and those suspected of Communist ties were the ones who drank too much and abused drugs, in the late 50s it could also be the man in the gray flannel suit who lighted up his roach in his suburban home. Here was a disparity of identities that frightened critics, who wanted to be certain this time around in history who their enemies were. But little did some realize that in *On the Road* their fear was Sal's fear. After all, who was the Shrouded Traveler? But the significance of the nightmare eluded them and "details of the frantic modern scene" for which Krim hailed Kerouac (360) became the focal point of media attention. Even critics like David McReynolds emphasized the "lost faith in ourselves":

In the nineteenth century we had substituted for faith in God a faith in the inherent goodness and rationality of man. This faith was mortally wounded by World War I, and then buried by the senseless murder of millions of Jews under Hitler and by the bloody miscarriage of the Russian Revolution. ("Youth 'Disaffiliated'" 217)

Kerouac was further implicated as one of many hipsters "desperate to find some meaning in Life" (217) if only because Kerouac had been called the King of the Beats, and critics had extracted violence from Mailer's philosophical treatise about the hipster and applied it to Kerouac. Kerouac's work, some critics felt, had made way for the uprise of the hipster in popular culture, which meant he was to blame for hoodlums on the street.

In an article written by Wolfgang Fleischmann for a 1959 issue of *America*, Fleischmann said of the Beat Generation that their rebellion is against artists and "critics" writing for the popular market, against the sophisticated literary machines such as the *New Yorker* and the *Atlantic*, against the cultivated academic organs such as the *Kenyon Review*, and against the writer--novelist, critic, and poet--who sacrifices truth and journalistic integrity in order to gain the popular vote of the "bourgeoisie" (767). Fleischmann felt that the "New Romanticism" of the Beat Generation, lacking the traditional frameworks of the humanities to serve as its foundation, could not carry the weight of "experimentation" (768). It seemed to Fleischmann that the Beat Generation writers had vulgarized literary tradition by replacing the literary text with "personality" and by replacing creative genius with borrowings of symbols, images, and words from a stock of "approved" writers--Whitman, Guillaume Apollinaire, Dos Passos, Shakespeare, Hart Crane, Keats, Artaud, and Rimbaud (766-767).

When Leo Hines wrote that Adlai Stevenson had found an alliance with "beatniks" at the Democratic Convention in Los Angeles ("Stevenson and" 465) readers of *Commonweal* reacted with horror and dismay.

"Is it fair or even sane to equate hot-rod delinquents with artists and with idealistic young students?" one reader asked (Chase 71). Another reader who attended the convention felt that the media had used the beat-ploy to undermine Stevenson's campaign. "Of course, Mr. Hines did spy in his picture tube . . . a bearded boy . . . no doubt courtesy of some enterprising cameraman who searched thousands of faces before he managed to find that beard" (Haskell 70). This same reader felt that the connection Hines made between Stevenson and the Beat Generation was irrational. In his opinion the beats were apolitical (71). Hines' essay was faulted with generalization, but he had managed to connect Neo-Romanticism, bohemianism, and existentialism--traits the media identified as beat--with a two party system that was becoming increasingly apolitical itself.

At best, *On the Road* was viewed by some as an author's reaction to "the positivism of a society huddled desperately around its nuclear experts" (Sisk 76). And yet, even if a critic found it possible to find in Kerouac's work an engagement with society, the reading of *On the Road* itself remained virtually unchanged:

they [*On the Road* and "Howl"] give us back as in a distorting mirror the anarchism and antinomianism, the dream of utopian freedom and innocence to be found in a commitment to instinct and feeling, that have always been elements in American culture; and which, if they are not consciously confronted and controlled, will, as they have often in the past, muddle our efforts to live effectively as a society in a complex world. (Sisk 77)

In general, novels that appeared after the Second World War were trapped by the cultural context from which they emerged. With the

emergence of mass culture, the life of the novel itself, its use of language, its depictions of its subjects, and its moral stance, appeared murky and unrecognizable. Forced into anemic exhaustion, the novel seemed to remain afloat, as Irving Howe put it, in the "malaise" of the "sentiments," but unable to clearly express even the sentiment of malaise ("Mass Society and" 430). At the same time, *Life* identified the "Beats" with those who had

distributed pamphlets for the Communists in the 1930s, or muttered of anarchism and cadged drinks in the speak easies of the 1920s, and then as now thirsted cunningly for the off-beat cause which could provide them with some sense of martyrdom and superiority. (O'Neil 119)

In a real way, the Beat Generation threatened the overall image of intellectualism--which explains in part the origins of such attacks as Podhoretz's--for as O'Neil noted, "there are few Americans today [1959] to whom the word Beat or the derisive term, Beatnik, does not conjure up some sort of image" (116). *Life* itself had, prior to the publication of O'Neil's "The Only Rebellion Around," taken pains to capitalize on Lawrence Lipton's *Holy Barbarians*. In September of 1959, for example, an eight page photo spread appeared in *Life*. The layout compared the people of Hutchison, Kansas with the bohemians of Venice West. The Venice West people appeared somewhat squalid, their every day routines consisted of artistic endeavors and contemplation while the people of Kansas were impressively neat and familial.

In the *Saturday Review*, in February 1960, John Ciardi called the Beat Generation an "essentially adolescent movement," and Ciardi like

O'Neil made reference to the washed-up Communist movement:

By now, however, it seems clear enough that the rebellion has gone for kicks, that what offered itself as intellectual refreshment has turned out to be little more than unwashed eccentricity, and that once more Parnassus has turned out to be a grimy dive not much different from the speakeasy or the back room of the Communist cell meeting. (11)

The reader of "Epitaph for the Dead Beats" could not have missed noticing that the violence he associated with the Beat Generation was tied to the intellectuals of the 30s. He had reminded intellectuals of their own immaturity and violence, unwilling as it may have been and indirect, that they had tried to forget. The Beat Generation had not only become a way for people to explain the rise in and increasing focus on juvenile delinquency in America, intimating that postwar anxiety and the threat of a nuclear death had destroyed the young generation, but it was also a political scapegoat for those critics who wanted to forget the past, cut their losses, and move onward. In this sense, the Beat Generation, to which capitalism had succeeded in attaching Kerouac's name, was a construct of the American psyche, an abstraction, given dimension by the media, that allowed people to find an object for their anger, fear, and regrets. O'Neil wrote:

Beatdom's year of emergence must be set at 1953. This was the twelvemonth when Ginsberg and a good many other bohemians followed Kerouac (who had begun his western visitations in 1949) to San Francisco, decided this was the place, and began scratching away at works which set much of the tone of the Beat world and steered American bohemianism toward the west. (119)

The flesh and blood of the Beat Generation was more or less an imita-

tion of Lipton's variety of beathood.

The conventional meaning of beat, as it was fashioned by the media and beat imitators and as it was explained by sociologists and philosophers, masks the integrity of Kerouac's work. The 35 cent Avon Book, *Beat Girl* (1959), advertised on the back cover with the allure of a "lonely and promiscuous" wealthy young woman, Chloe Longtree, who meets the "crude and sensual" Shelley Spivak, "one of the Beat Generation." The story of the protagonist, a wealthy 17 year old girl, begins with the loss of her mother to cancer. The opening of *On the Road* reflected a similar mood of weariness, sense of loss, and expectation that life would get better once the protagonist set off on a journey. As does Sal Paradise, *Beat Girl's* Chloe Longtree leaves much of her past unsaid. Her journey first takes her to England to live with her Aunt Maude. (Sal also lived with his aunt.) Chloe has a brief affair with Pritch Allyn; then, believing herself to be pregnant, she returns to New York City where Chloe and Pritch are wedded. Chloe naively believes she will live happily ever after. As it turns out, Pritch demands a divorce. Predictably, Chloe is swindled by her beat lover, Shelley. He steals her jewels, abuses her hospitality and money, and meets his drug connections at her home. Chloe does not mask her naivete, nor does she conclude that she has learned any particular lesson but sums up her experiences with her friend Avery's words: "'You're the end!' . . . And I thought to myself that I might very well be" (158).

*Beat Girl* is typical of a popularized notion of what beat literature is about. This novel was not so different from the more "liter-

ary" writings found in *The Beat Generation & The Angry Young Men* (1958), one of the first anthologies of beat literature. Except for *Beat Girl* being published after 1957, an excerpt from Golightly's novel could have been included in Feldman and Gartenberg's anthology of beat literature.

Introducing a collection of fiction with this note about "[c]ontemporary history": " $E=mc^2$ , the key to the atom" (9), Feldman and Gartenberg felt that the acceptance of the uncertainty of one's future and the possibility that the world might be suddenly destroyed was the palisade surrounding the beat "credo" (12).

[T]he man who is Beat knows that he is alone, and that his problem is to learn to live with this knowledge. . . . his concern is primarily one of self-exploration, of perceiving the self in terms of its connection with immediate experience. Not capable of the act of faith required by a belief in tomorrow, the Beat Man values relationships only as they tend to reveal the truth of his present existence. . . . He has no future which rests on a connection with some person or group. Therefore no other human being can be important to him outside of the moment. . . (12)

Feldman and Gartenberg's analysis of the basic beliefs behind beat literature reflects the kind of literature represented in the collection, which has the effect of being highly crafted and emotionally shallow. Such writing as R.V. Cassill's "Fracture" (1950) are composed in order to illustrate man's precarious borderline position between madness and sanity, between the ordered life of the well-kept bourgeoisie home and the cockroach infested apartment of a drunk. Anatole Broyard's "Sunday Dinner in Brooklyn" (1954) is more adept at developing a character who expresses the sorrow of having to masquer-

ade in front of his parents. Paul's loyalties shift back and forth between the life he lives in the Village and the life he had led in Brooklyn. A family dinner and some small talk with his father send Paul home earlier than he had planned. His parents' unconditional acceptance of their son's comings and goings makes his departure significant even to himself: "I said, 'So long, Mom,' and she answered, 'So long, Bud,' slipping unconsciously into my old nickname again. The sound of it moved me more than I would have thought possible . . ." (32). George Mandel's "The Beckoning Sea" (1950) describes the dissolute attempt of a young man to throw himself at the mercy of ocean and hail, but there are no reasons given for his masochistic enactments: "Letting mud ooze through the clenched red fingers formed the turrets and crude gables of his castle, his memorial to the torture of his being. Now each pain was canonized" (49). To the girl he chases after on the beach he offers a list of disassociated cliches that to her sound like poetry: "'Unproduction is death. . . . Insensitivity and cruelty are death. Inhumanity is death. . . . And hate is death, and injustice, black calamity, futility . . ." (53) The story ends with the boy and the girl having sex on the beach.

Two sections from Holmes' *Go* were included in the anthology, followed by a long excerpt from *The Town and The City* (1950), which the editors titled "The Time of the Geek." The selection of Kerouac's work is prefaced with an editorial comment that disconnects it from its source and reads like a generic description of a beat novel:

Kerouac's characters are not impinged upon by the society

around them: they have fully succeeded in making their own world, with places to go to, things to do. And when they're not on the move, there's always the big kick: the jazz combo whose beat is beyond mind or reason, the hell-bent party that promises there'll be no end, or the stick of tea that will bring one back to the lap of God. (79)

Taken out of context "The Time of the Geek" misleads the reader--including Feldman and Gartenberg--into thinking that Kerouac's main interest is the New York hipster and that Kerouac is to be identified with Levinsky, rather than Peter Martin who is even embarrassed by Levinsky's antics on the subway. Concealed from the readers of the anthology is that Kerouac's main perspective in literature, though his observations range across broad social strands, is conservative. Levinsky tries to prove to Peter that "the atomic disease" is taking over the world and soon everybody will be insane (93): "Everybody in the world has come to feel like a geek" (88). But Peter does not believe Levinsky and replies: "I don't think I'll buy that" (88).

Other selections in the anthology included the beat standard *Howl* (1956), an excerpt from Burrough's *Junkie* (1953), and "Report from the Asylum" (1950). The excerpt from Chandler Brossard's *The Bold Saboteurs* (1952) was included in order to illustrate the editors' decree: "Hipster gives place to mobster, and the struggle between Rebel and Society, Outsider and Insider, becomes a sordid dance . . ." (119).

Norman Mailer's essay, "The White Negro" (1957) was included in part three of the anthology, an appendix of criticism and commentary on the Beat Generation. For the most part the selections included in the Beat Generation section of the anthology were not beat literature but literature about the hipster. In Norman Mailer's "The White

Negro" the hipster was defined within an existentialist framework in which the fear of "instant death," resulting from war, "the state", and "conformity," leads people "to encourage the psychopath in oneself" (343, 344). Because with his use of visionary language, Kerouac fell into the category of mystic, his work within the context of the anthology substantiated Mailer's claim: "The real argument which the mystic must always advance is the very intensity of his private vision . . . no rational argument . . . no skeptical reductions can explain away what has become for him the reality more real than the reality of closely reasoned logic" (347).

By 1960, there was a beatnik generation. Herbert Gold observed in "How to Tell the Beatniks from the Hipsters":

He exists in too, too solid flesh on the persons of those lads who wander about Greenwich Village, North Beach in San Francisco, the Near North Side in Chicago, and other selected drill fields, wearing turtleneck sweaters beneath the free-form silver crucifixes pendant from ribbons around their neck, dark glasses, and a world-historical pout on the face . . . (163)

The images of "beats" that appeared in American magazines were sufficiently prominent and striking to be publicized in Russia. In 1958, a Russian writer described to his audience a photographic layout showcased in *Look*, a magazine in which several of Kerouac's travel essays were printed, "a portrait of a man in dark spectacles, a felt hat and a blanket draped over naked shoulders," portraying a typical member of America's Beat Generation (Tusgusheva 4; my translation). And Nikolai Anastas'ev wrote in 1962: "It is difficult to surmise if truth illu-

mines Kerouac of communist ideas . . . But . . . he understands the wisdom of courageous Americans, openly declaring their dissent with an aggressive political government . . . Such faith, such wisdom enriches the talent of Kerouac, and no one doubts that his talent is alive with the juices of a real and great life" (306: my translation).

As it was portrayed by the media, the Beat Generation assumed the characteristics of a mass movement, reshaping the American way of life. In a radio broadcast, "The Cool Rebellion," Howard K. Smith's interviews and commentary shaped the identity of a generation with the idea that people wanted to change their attitudes about money and live their life simply. One woman said that "the personal issue of living" was the foundation of her rebellion. Malcolm Cowley, who was called upon by Smith to comment on the Beat Generation, summarized what was at stake for those young people who called themselves beat: "[W]e can become meaningful individuals." For Smith, "war," "materials," and "the increasing pace of the rat race" had provoked this new attitude that echoed the voices of the bohemians of the past. But the Beat Generation had also been shaped by its fictional identity, for after the publication of *Go*, it was associated with a way of life that was portrayed in popular hipster novels such as *Marijuana Girl* (1951) and *Blowtop* (1948).

The hipster novel usually found its setting somewhere near or in New York City. Greenwich Village was frequented or mentioned by the characters. When the hipster novel began to be billed as a story about the Beat Generation, the West Coast was also an appropriate setting for the author to write about. Usually, an artist of some

kind, musician, writer, or painter, was a major character. There was the use of drugs, there might be a sex scene or two, though not always explicit (in the earliest hipster novels the scenes are no more graphic than *Peyton Place*), and criminal activity. For instance, in *Marijuana Girl*, a high school girl, Joyce Taylor, falls in love with her boss at the local newspaper. Frank Burdette is an older married man who introduces Joyce to jazz musicians and to her first pot. After he ends his affair with Joyce, a rich girl who has a history of abandonments by her jet-set parents, she leaves for New York City. She is befriended by the musicians she had smoked pot with, and a black woman, a talented singer, named Ginger, lets her live with her. But Ginger is hooked on coke and Joyce eventually ends up with the "monkey" on her shoulders. When Ginger is arrested by the police, Joyce must fend for herself. Without any money to buy her "horse," she begins a life of prostitution. This novel, written by N.R. de Mexico, subtly suggests why a girl like Joyce is vulnerable to addiction in order to educate its reader about the dangers of drug addiction. But by 1952 publishers had begun to describe these kinds of novels as portraits of the Beat Generation.

*A Cry of Children* was first published in 1952 by Harper's & Row, and Bantam republished John Horne Burns' novel in 1953, hailing it: "A merciless novel of America's 'beat generation'" and included a blurb by John Clellon Holmes' about the Beat Generation, which was reprinted from *Vogue*:

behind the excess of drink, promiscuity and speed exhibited

by many young people today there lies, not just a jaded appetite craving a new sensation, but rather the fumbling, earnest search for a moment of warmth or meaning or joy which might redeem the blackness of reality.

Burns' novel was a love story about a wealthy pianist, David, recently returned from the war, who "keeps" a poor Irish girl, Isobel. Isobel must abort her child when she is abandoned by her lover for another woman. Isobel's friends are cynical young people who seem to be destined for a future of meaningless drinking sprees and a total negation of their parents' lives, including the abandonment of the belief in God in exchange for a few aphorisms by Marx and the joviality of the latest published play. More than just a love story, the book also was a study of the generation gap that would begin to widen in the late 50s, a phenomena that the publishing industry began to capitalize upon before the publication of *On the Road*.

By 1959, those novels that were called Beat Generation novels, meaning that they were novels mirroring its commercial image, were often times not serious literature but the hipster formula novel taken to its limits of superficiality. One of these better known novels *The Beat Generation* (1959) was based on the movie of the same name. The novel emphasized the violent and perverse nature of beat life. It is a novel about a rapist, Stan Belmont, and the detective, David Culloran, who like Belmont (he was abandoned by his mother) hates women. Culloran's hate for woman is revealed to him over the months he spends trying to track down Belmont, a wealthy young man whose beach house is a gathering place for Beats who worship him. Of the Beats, Albert Zugsmith, the author of *The Beat Generation*, wrote:

They had in common their creed: The world is full of dinglebodies. The crumbbums who go to work, eat, sleep--and just vegetate. All dinglebodies were walking dead who didn't go. (21)

*The Beat Generation* borrowed more than just the word "dinglebodies" from *On the Road*. One girl, Meg, lamenting that she must return to the East Coast, turns to Belmont for comfort. He says to her, imitating one of Dean Moriarty's famous phrases and adding a bit of sociological philosophy: "'You've got to go, everybody's got to go, go, go! He can't stand still and wait for the next mushroom cloud. Dig me?!'" (23). There is mention of investigating the murder of a man who was stabbed to death in a candy store--an allusion to Mailer's "The White Negro"--and Belmont's activities served to ingrain in the reader the mindless violence of a generation of which they believed Kerouac was its representative.

Zugsmith reverted to the atomic bomb theory as a partial explanation for Belmont's criminal behavior:

But the elect vibrated with the beat. Laws were passed for them to flout. Social taboos existed for them to reject. The past was hoary with laughs and lies. The future promised H-bombs or hideous mediocrity. There was only now. To learn the beat you had to suck the last drop of juice from the present. (22)

Indeed, the hipster, Mailer said, arose out of the tempering of Western thought--the collapse of the illusion of self-presence by "contradictory popular culture" ("The White" 348). Such tendencies, either acted out in language or in man's existence have, as we have seen in

history, generated questions about where this line of thinking leads; Mailer saw in these tendencies the birth of the hipster, the rebel without a cause, the experience seeker, and "the philosophical psychopath" (348).

This kind of fictional and commercial context was so pervasive that it overshadowed Kerouac's personal identification with "beat," fabricated new meaning for his old meaning, a mass vision for an individual vision, sociology for poetic truth, and violence for Kerouac's visions of beat. The Beat Generation belonged to America, not to Kerouac.

## Chapter Seven

### The Nightmare of the Road

I'm on the verge of [a] nervous breakdown or death (stomach cramps, horror of visitors, confinement with mother, Eastern heat, diarrhea, nightmares, insomnia, never happened to me before because I was never probably hate[d] before & then "sought after" by sightseers).

Jack Kerouac to Lawrence Ferlinghetti (CU-BANC, 2 July 1960)

And fame kills all

Jack Kerouac to Lawrence Ferlinghetti (CU-BANC, 1960)

Kerouac's story is a history of the struggling artist, but not in the ordinary sense. Certainly, there were times Kerouac was near starvation, times he did not know if he would find a publisher for his work, but that aspect of his life was the least of his difficulties. For Kerouac, to be a struggling artist in America meant that he had to fight for his identity as a writer against his identity that had been fashioned into a commodity of a hipster. This was the tightrope that Kerouac walked, and it is the horror that Jack Duluoz faced in *Big Sur* (1962) and in *Desolation Angels* (1965). At the end of Kerouac's career, with the publication of *Vanity of Duluoz* (1968), the author tried one last time to explain himself, to tell who he had been before he was King of the Beats.

After *On the Road* was published, Kerouac was hounded by strangers. Nearing a nervous breakdown, in 1960, he wrote to Lawrence Ferlinghetti that he wanted to steal away to Ferlinghetti's Bixby cabin in Big Sur: "My trouble is that my name is so . . . used everywhere people think they sh[oul]d merely SEE me and thats all they need (not read

the books, nothing, not ask my opinion about letters, Ono, just SEE me, some write and say they want to TOUCH me which makes me shudder . . . "(CU-BANC, 1960). While the public encroached upon his personal life, Kerouac upheld a vision of himself as a serious author. He was hurt and amazed that people knew him as Jack Kerouac, "King of the Beats," that guy who "dug" America in a hot rod, not as the author of several books that contributed to America's literature a modern appraisal of the author's life. He was disgusted and terrified when Ferlinghetti wrote to him that he was seen at a John Birch Society rally in San Diego. Kerouac responded, "I've never been to San Diego except passing through . . . Really, how could you think of me as sneaking to California and not seeing you or Neal, or worst of all, of me making a statement about possible plastic bomb thugs . . ."

Will you do me a favor and tell me where you saw this news item, send it to me, my lawyer is very much interested . . . Because also last month there was an item in Cholly Knickerbocker's "Smart Set" column that a certain Jack Kerouac went into a fancy haberdashery in Fifth Avenue and bought a \$12 necktie and walked out wearing it for a belt---Somebody or certain numbers of guys are evidently impersonating me Kerouac (I know of one harmless impersonator in Vienna who calls himself Jack Kerouac and sent me his photo) (CU-BANC, 28 April 1962)

By 1960 Kerouac's identity was irrevocably fragmented, he had been abused by critics, the press, and betrayed by others who thought it was a good joke to pretend to be Jack Kerouac. Who was Kerouac? Who was this man the press called a king of barbarians? These questions haunted the author of *On the Road*. From *Big Sur*, *Desolation Angels*, and *Vanity of Duluo* we learn about the author's search for his iden-

tity after he has achieved fame, and he found himself irrevocably lost, engulfed by America's Beat Generation.

The nightmare of the road, as a symbol of the individual's fear that he will not be able to reclaim what he has lost, that the illusion of self-fulfillment and self-preservation will be exposed beyond the limit of rectification, is actualized and conveyed in *Big Sur* by the disintegration of Kerouac's alter ego. For Duluoz, Raton Canyon is the end of the road. The night he steps out of a taxi at the start of the Raton bridge with only a dim brakeman lantern to light his way on the path below the bridge through the thick fog--"I sense something wrong . . . I can see the bridge but I can see nothing below it"(9)--he cannot conceal his loss of self-confidence or his physical degeneration. He has become a heavy drinker who cannot rid himself of sorrow, paranoia, and pain. What he has gained, in trade for fame, is the loss of privacy. Duluoz has lost his identity to the public; he has lost faith in his writing; he has lost control of his life. From within he is cracked: "I've got to escape or die" (8).

The Pacific Ocean, a symbol of loss, of aging, and of doubt, is Duluoz's stage for tragedy. Jack Duluoz is akin to T. S. Eliot's Prufrock. He is King Lear. He is the Fool. He is Nick Adams in search of a clean, well lighted place. Madness, his cure for loneliness, is Duluoz's companion. He is haunted and amazed by his own existence that seems to him to have no signification. His own self is stifled, rendered lifeless out of fear and discontinuity.

*Big Sur* concludes with a record of the sounds of the "Sea," the

poem Duluoz wrote while he sat upon a cliff at night to listen to the waves. Duluoz hears his own voice in the ocean, and it asks: "Have you sent men/here for this cold clown/& monstrous eater at the/world? whose sound/I mock?" (233). Like Lear who was reduced to the crippled facade of a monarch who could only lament at the death of his daughter--"She's dead as earth. Lend me a looking glass"-- Duluoz has failed to actualize himself in his writing; the worldly kingdom he created out of his fiction has made his very own self the exile:

The face of yourself you see in the mirror with its expression of unbearable anguish so haggard and awful with sorrow you cant even cry for a thing so ugly, so lost, no connection whatever with early perfection and therefore nothing to connect with tears or anything . . . (8)

The nightmare of Sal Paradise's road has become Duluoz's reality. For Duluoz there is no link between what he has become and what he had been. The bridge between the past and the future, between life and death, the bridge which is the essence of Kerouac's role as the author, has become more difficult to envision. Duluoz's vision is blurred, so that Duluoz, the author, must bring himself to forge a new bridge and be willing to cross to the other side, even while knowing that it will bring him back to the same precipice. It is that knowledge which partly is Duluoz's pain and his anguish. For as the artist he is both Adam in the garden and the voyeur--not of lost innocence--of self-fulfillment and oneness with the world. As the author of his world, to lose what he had created from himself is to be utterly self-aware: "[A]nd therefore nothing to connect with tears or anything."

Three thousand miles away from the home Duluoze shares with his mother, he wakes up in a hotel room on San Francisco's Skid Row. "[A] moan caused by a big roaring Whoo Whoo in my head that had shot me out of my pillow like a ghost" wakes Duluoze from his drunken sleep (6). The church bells are ringing the tune of "Kathleen." Unlike Sal, who could evade the phantom that kicked at his heels, Duluoze has become the ghost itself. Jack Duluoze is an older Sal Paradise who has found his uptown success. But with success, he now doubts his reason for existence:

and here I am a perfectly obvious fool American writer doing just that not only for a living (which I was always able to glean anyway from railroad ship and lifting boards and sacks with humble land) but because if I don't write what actually I see happening in this unhappy globe which is rounded by the contours of my death skull I think I'll have been sent on earth by poor God for nothing--The being a Phantom of the Opera why should that worry me? (167)

Kerouac exposes Duluoze's vulnerabilities, and we see the raw wounds that an overeager, crude, and insensitive public has thrust upon the writer who is famous for writing "On the Road." One woman, back east, came to his door and said, "I'm not asking if you're Jack Duluoze because I know he wears a beard . . . I want a real beatnik at my . . . party" (5). And while Duluoze is away from home, "some silly beatniks" "broke the windowpane in the front door trying to get in" (53). His mother is so frightened that for "the rest of the summer" she piled "furniture" against "the door" (52).

If *Big Sur* is read merely as a thinly disguised autobiography, the meaning of the broken windowpane needs explaining. Recalling that

Jack Duluoz is the identity Kerouac is trying to deliver from the dead life outside of the novel, his own vulnerability as the real author of *On the Road* is revealed to us. The irony is not lost on Kerouac, who prefaced *Big Sur* with an often quoted note about his writing: "The whole thing forms one enormous comedy, seen through the eyes of poor Ti Jean (me), otherwise known as Jack Duluoz, the world of raging action and folly and also of gentle sweetness seen through the keyhole of his eyes." For Kerouac, the broken glass in the windowpane at Duluoz's mother's home is a different kind of keyhole, but a keyhole nonetheless. Through this keyhole Duluoz is invisible not because he is the one looking through it but because he is the object of the other's gaze. Like Duluoz, Kerouac is invisible, in the sense that people see him not as a serious author but as a hipster. At the same time that he is a victim of the follies of others, he is also a victim of the folly he saw through "the keyhole of his eye" and recorded in his *Legend*. Thus, Duluoz begins to see something sinister about his own writing, and in the paranoia of his breakdown he tells Billie, the girl he thinks is trying to kill him: "But dont you see they've all became empty words, I realize I've been playing like a happy child with words words words in a big serious tragedy, look around" (187). There is tragedy, for Duluoz, in misunderstanding and misrepresentation, which he is partly responsible for creating with regards to his friend Cody Pomeray: "Oh the horror of Cody's knowledge of the world when all is said and done" (143). But Cody, unlike Duluoz, has quietly accepted his fate, his two years in San Quentin, his recently lost

job, even Duluoz's distance from him. Prior to Duluoz's breakdown, his relationship with Cody strained, he realizes: "I can see from glancing at him because life is so holy for him there's no need to do anything but live it, writing's just an afterthought or a scratch anyway at the surface" (141). Duluoz feels as if he has failed to create anything that can equal life itself. As it has turned out, his writing has crippled his and Cody's life.

After the first three weeks at the cabin, Duluoz had gone back to San Francisco and then returned with a group of people to Raton Canyon. Ron Blake, a young man thrilled to be associating with Duluoz, stays behind after all the others leave. Duluoz has to entertain Blake, who "actually believes that there's something noble and idealistic and kind about all this beat stuff" (109). In part, Duluoz himself has constructed the fiction that has made people believe he is Sal Paradise or that he is Ray Smith. For that reason he humors Ron Blake and goes down "to the beach" with him even though Duluoz wants to be alone. On the other hand, Duluoz resents the use of his fictional constructs by the "newspapers" to make him, and not his writing, an object of national interest:

Like those pathetic five highschool kids who all came to my door in Long Island one night wearing jackets that said "Dharma Bums" on them, all expecting me to be 25 years old according to a mistake on a book jacket and here I am old enough to be their father . . . (109-110)

He is divided from within and from without. The descent into darkness is his rite of passage; it is his means of accepting responsibility for what he has created. By using his art to "forgive them and ex-

plain everything" (216), it is a way of purifying himself of the sinister image that was cast upon him. That is, he explains his follies and the follies of the world on the other side of his, Jack Kerouac's, keyhole.

Writing, then, becomes an activity of revision, of give and take, of rectifying the artist's role as both observer and object of the world. The descent into madness, his summer spent at Raton Canyon, is not a battle of evil against good, as some critics have read the imagery in the novel, but is Duluoz's recognition of his vulnerability. It is his realization that writing cannot protect him and cannot secure him a place of uninterrupted solitude; his breakdown is ultimately a sign that he has become the mature author, aware of his identity as author, as hipster, and as a man, like Cody, really no different from those people he has chosen to observe.

Duluoz does not simply blame an obtrusive and ignorant public for his drinking problem and eventual breakdown. He also blames himself. The question of why he has failed as an author and succeeded as a commodity is what haunts him:

Because he looks up at the blue sky and there's nothing there but empty space making a big face at him---He looks at the world, it's sticking its tongue out at him and once that mask is removed it's looking at him with hollow big red eyes like his own eyes . . . (112)

In the back of his mind, the past is serried, and he cannot shake the penumbra of guilt that fills the void of his inability to see why he has failed. For, perhaps, there is no explanation. The inevitability

of his fate, his fear of death that culminated in the rejection of Jack Duluoz by himself and by the media, made him flee to the "cell" on Skid Row (7).

The fact is that Duluoz seeks self-annihilation in drink. Feeling as if he is nearing his end, he leaves his hotel room and escapes to Big Sur where the physical world is disorientating: "The sea roar is bad enough except it keeps bashing and barking at me like a dog in the fog down there, sometimes it booms the earth but my God where is the earth and how can the sea be underground!" (10). The large bridge that extends the highway between two bluffs is ominous in the foggy night, even the frequently encountered sight of "a white line runnin down the middle . . . highway like" is distorted by the "awful roar of surf" (9).

Below the towering bridge, Duluoz sleeps by a creek. At daybreak, he awakens to see "this awful thin white line of bridge" and beneath it the chassis of a car that "fell 1000 feet straight down" (15). This view is one of the most striking scenes in Kerouac's canon. The metaphor of the nightmare of the road impinges upon Duluoz's world as a rusty chassis and a shrinking white line. The white line of the road signifies to Duluoz that he will recover his loss ("The eyes of hope looking over the glare of the hood into the maw with its white line feeding in straight as an arrow" [176]) and portends the eventual ineffectuality of the dream-search for freedom, its demise reflected by the sprawl of civilization into the "prune fields and vast beet fields" (62). The "fine white clean line in the middle of the road" cannot help cure the "adulthood disaster of the soul" (62, 117).

Because there seems to have been no survivors of the old canyon crash, the white line is no longer a reliable measure of security and destiny itself. Duluoz's descent into the canyon has become a struggle against creative death:

it comes over me in the form of horror of an eternal condition of sick mortality in me----In me and in everyone----I felt completely nude of all poor protective devices like thoughts about life or meditations . . . I see myself as doomed, pitiful----An awful realization that I have been fooling myself all my life thinking there was a next thing to do to keep the show going . . . *Eh vache*, I hate to write----All my tricks laid bare, even the realization that they're laid bare itself laid bare as a lotta bunk----The sea seems to yell to me GO TO YOUR DESIRE DONT HANG AROUND HERE----For after all the sea must be like God, God isnt asking us to mope and suffer and sit by the sea in the cold at midnight for the sake of writing down useless sounds . . . (41-42)

Duluoz has realized that man's essential nature precludes his ability to act spontaneously in life or in the creation of art. Despite his attempt to keep next to the white line that appears to lead him straight forward into life, his destination is his own death: "[T]he constant reminder of death not the least of which was the death of my peaceful love of Raton Canyon now suddenly become a horror" (107).

At last, Duluoz realizes that he has tried to keep this realization from himself by craft. He has made the ultimate realization that meaningful creativity is not spontaneously generated by passively absorbing the activity of life; his own interaction with the world is the final measure of his individual value. He has missed out on life; preempting "the ghostliness of existence" (164), he had been evading

the "nightmare of death." Searching for the bridge that would bring art and life together merely took him further from life: "I'm clutching at the drapes of the window like the Phantom of the Opera behind the masque" (165). Describing himself as the "traveling stranger" (178), Jack Duluoz has become the Ghost of the Susquehanna in search of the bridge that will take him to the promised land.

Readers of Kerouac's works, will remember Sal Paradise's Shrouded Traveler dream, and they will recognize that in *Big Sur* Kerouac has made the final authoritative interpretation of Sal's dream. Sal is the shrouded stranger pursuing himself through nightmare darkness. Duluoz, like Sal, is driven from within by the fear of and the desire for death:

All summer you were sitting here writing the so called sound of the waves not realizing how deadly serious our life and doom is, you fool you happy kid with a pencil, dont you realize you've been using words as a happy game----all those marvelous skeptical things you wrote about graves and sea death it's ALL TRUE YOU FOOL! Joyce is dead! The sea took him! it will take You! (182)

But if Duluoz accepts death, he then must also accept that the role the artist enacts is not pure. He himself is an enactment of life. As the artist evades the truth of life, the mask of fiction serves to mute his awareness of death in language. That is the artifice that Duluoz shrinks from; it is his shame, his red badge of courage.

Shame is the burden Duluoz must carry with him, if he is to be an artist and not simply an imitator, a charlatan. He must bear his shame with reticence; it is his and his only to know: "[T]he miracu-

lousness of the silence of the girls and the sleeping boy and the silence of Dave Wain in the fields----Just a golden wash of goodness has spread over all and over all my body and mind----All the dark torture is a memory" (216). This is Duluo's way out of the nightmare, to accept the fact that he is alone no matter from what end of the bridge he stands or on what side of the keyhole. He must make the best of aloneness and the eternal condition of temporality, and so Duluo writes in his "Sea" poem: "For me, for us, the Sea,/the murdering of time by eating/lusty cracks of lip feed wave/at aeons of sandy artistry/till nothing's left but old age" (236-237). As long as Duluo remains self-aware, it is a courageous struggle for him to live. The public's misrepresentation of Duluo only serves to remind him that he has no control over his fate. Every word he writes, draws him to the end of life, yet there is nothing unexpected about that, for it is the natural order of things for the individual to die. As Kerouac knew, it is the generation that is remembered, the spirit of life; the author, as he writes in *Desolation Angels*, is only "the passer-through-everything" (39). From the lookout at the top of Desolation Peak in the Northern Cascades, Duluo had realized: "My life is a vast and insane legend reaching everywhere without beginning or ending, like the Void . . . My life is a vast inconsequential epic" (*Desolation Angels* 11, 12).

Although *Big Sur* was published before *Desolation Angels*, *Desolation Angels* documents Duluo's life prior to his breakdown at Big Sur. Kerouac wrote *Book One* of *Desolation Angels* the fall of 1956, and *Book Two* was composed the Summer of 1961. *Book One* primarily reveals

Duluoz's sense of himself as an author whose fame is not yet monumental, but he is still known and recognized by other published authors, for he has written one published novel that was admired by his poet friends, and they have read his "Road" manuscript. *Book Two* documents Duluoz's withdrawal from a notorious literary life. Duluoz desperately desires self-affirmation. His life is in shambles, and he struggles against his desire to give up everything, his identity, his old friendships, and his dreams about his future. "Only thing now," Duluoz says, "is Where's Jack Going?---Back to Florida or New York? ---For further emptiness?" (365).

Believing that if he spent time alone he could discover why he tortures himself with his own misery, Duluoz had gone to Desolation Peak for the "fire lookout job" (4). Hoping that he "will come face to face with God or Tathagata and find out once and for all what is the meaning of all this existence and suffering and going to and fro in vain," he is naked before himself: "I'd come face to face with myself, no liquor, no drugs no chance of faking it but face to face with ole Hateful Duluoz Me" (4). The only way that he can bear his pain is by imagining what it would be like to be "the Void, inexhaustibly fertile, beyond serenity beyond even gladness, just Old Jack (and not even that)" (5). This method of self-preservation does not involve flight but acceptance of his essential condition: "[T]he Void is the crystal ball itself" (5), which in the context of Duluoz's fear and what we know about Kerouac's struggle to accept the "paradox" of his creative act, implies that Duluoz, as an author writing about

life, is society's tangible vessel of death. The intangible disorder of life itself seen through the eyes of the artist is the "ungraspable image in a crystal ball" (5). For us and Duluoz to confuse the self-reflecting vessel of emptiness with the ungraspable image is communal self-denial not self-affirmation. To further human activity by making tangible to society the "ungraspable image" rather than the Void is to further the ostentatious lie of art. Duluoz tells himself: "Hold still, man, regain your love of life and go down from this mountain and simply *be---be-----be*" (5). Duluoz is guilty of having, in his creative life, disguised the meaning of death to his art; he cannot accept the fact that we are born and then we die and that is the end. The body lives on borrowed time, in a borrowed reality, and it is merely an itinerant traveler through God's universe--this is the emblem of the Ghost of the Susquehanna. This is the meaning of Kerouac's "Desolation Angels."

But Duluoz's desire to live truthfully is complicated when he leaves the mountain. As an American artist of the 20th century, it is nearly impossible for Duluoz to simply "be." As long as he publishes his work, people will demand that he explain himself. Duluoz cannot tell them that he refuses to answer their questions and turn his back to their probings, not merely because he is not sure how to respond ("Even I cant understand how to explain myself-- When my books became notorious [*Beat Generation*] and interviewers tried to ask me questions, I just answered with everything I could think of--I had no guts to tell them to leave me alone. . . [229]), but because of what the mature author Duluoz represents to himself he has accepted the respon-

sibility of his actions; nevertheless, he cannot also accept the responsibility for a generation:

It's easy enough to understand that as an artist I need solitude and a kind of "do-nothing" philosophy that does allow me to dream all day and work out chapters in forgotten reveries that emerge years later in story form--In this respect, it's impossible, since it's impossible for everybody to be artists, to recommend my way of life as a philosophy suitable for everyone else-- In this respect I'm an oddball, like Rembrandt--Rembrandt could paint the busy burghers as they posed after lunch, but at midnight while they slept to rest for another day's work, Old Rembrandt was up in his study putting on light touches of darkness to his canvases-- The burghers didnt expect Rembrandt to be anything else but an artist and therefore they didnt go knocking on his door at midnight and ask: "Why do you live like this, Rembrandt? Why are you alone tonight? What are you dreaming about?" So they didnt expect Rembrandt to turn around and say to them: "You must live like I do, in the philosophy of solitude, there's no other way." (220)

With respect to society, Duluoaz feels that the author's burden has become too great to shoulder. Consequently, as a "way of life" and as a way of writing he tried "to see the world from the viewpoint of solitude and to meditate upon the world without being imbroglio'd in its actions, which have by now become famous for their horror & abominations" (220). The real horror for Duluoaz is that he must cut himself off from the world in order to numb the pain of his burden, but to admit this only intensifies his self-horror. Duluoaz also knows that his pain is no greater than any other individual, no different from the pain of his father and his mother or from the Indian woman who crawled on her knees with her child in her arms to the alter in a church in Mexico (344). ". . . I see the big sad invisible wings on all the shoulders," Duluoaz laments in *Desolation Angels*, "and I feel

bad they're invisible and of no earthly use and never were and all we're doing is fighting to our death---" (67). Writing as a struggle against death is pointless, but writing as a means of self-purification, a reminder of one's falseness, of one's hidden fears, of one's need to ask a question, even knowing that it is unanswerable, is a human activity, and that is its worth. As such, for Duloz, his writing can be valued only from the individual's viewpoint: "I know there's no need to tell a story and yet I know there's not even need for silence--but there's an aching mystery--"

Why else should we live but to discuss (at least) the horror and the terror of all this life, God how old we get and some of us go mad and everything changes viciously--it's that vicious *change* that hurts, as soon as something is cool and complete it falls apart and burns-- (67)

In *Part One* of *On the Road*, Sal Paradise had experienced the nightmare of the road in full force. His fear of the dark, his paranoia, his starvation, his unrealized dream to travel the world, and the return home to everyday life and work was traumatic, but it was "the horror and the terror" of individual lives, other than his own, that compelled him to traverse the country.

The comradeship Sal found on the road was rooted in the unspoken and ungainly terror of individual lives that matched or exceeded his own terror. "The greatest ride" of Sal's "life" was in the back of a truck he got onto in Nebraska. There are other riders in the flatbed, including Montana Slim, who "was all insinuation," and the two hoboes, Mississippi Gene and the young kid, escaping from "some kind of trou-

ble" (28):

Although Gene was white there was something very much like Elmer Hassel, a traveling epic Hassel, crossing and recrossing the country every year, south in the winter and north in the summer, and only because he had no place he could stay in without getting tired of it and because there was nowhere to go but everywhere . . . (28)

There is a feeling of tribulation in this particular scene of *On the Road* that is not directly expressed. Sal's parting words to Mississippi Gene, "I hope you get where you're going, and be happy when you do" (32), underlie the charity in Sal's viewpoint, not his inability to realize the severity of these people's situations in life. The best Sal can do is buy Gene and the boy each a pack of cigarettes and share his bottle with Montana Slim. The combined horror of their lives is understated, and we cannot fully realize its potency until Sal is utterly dissolute, for the horror is masked by the sense of community and oneness between the men on the truck and the outer rim of darkness they pass through "[a]s in a dream" (30). This shrouded symbol of horror, which Sal seems to represent to us as a gleeful ride, is intensified by the completion of the scene with rows of "lounging harvest hands and cowboys in the night. They watched us pass in one motion of the head" (30). As Sal's journey progresses, the horror of the world is more vividly exposed, and Sal's very own ghostly existence is revealed.

Duluoz is driven to express the horror of knowing that self-preservation, even through writing, is impossible to achieve: "[B]ut now that we live what shall we celebrate, what shall we say? What to

do?" (67). Duluoz has seen himself face to face. His desire to create life has been mollified, for he has confronted the impossibility of creating a lasting reality. His writing is a series of impressions seen through the eyes of one who is merely "passing through" (5), and his art, which he had sought to use as a way to find self-fulfillment and to protect himself from the outer horror of a world that looks at him through its own spectacle, has become for Duluoz an obvious reflection of his very own transience. "That which passes through everything has passed through me and always through my pencil and there is nothing to say" (64). At its best, fiction is a dream from which we do not awaken:

Like a happy child lost in a sudden dream and when his buddy addresses him he doesn't hear, his buddy nudges him he doesn't move; finally seeing the purity and truth of his trance the buddy watches in wonder--you can never be that pure again, and jump out of such trances with a happy gleam of love, being an angel in a dream (46)

And yet, a small but essential part of Duluoz wants there to be awakenings: "Dreams of a kid, and this whole world is nothing but a big sleep made of reawakened material (soon to reawake)-- What could be more beautiful--" (43). In the flash of recognizing the difference between dream and awakening, there is for Duluoz a conception of the possibility of freedom: "[I]nto the gloom of the foreknown globe, the vision of the freedom of eternity is like a bulb that's suddenly come on in my brain . . . reawakening" (65). But Duluoz cannot bring this vision down with him from Desolation Peak, for the mystery and joy of reality is dimmed by the physical terrain, by the limiting forces of

the tangible.

After Duluoz meets with Cody, Raphael, Irwin, and Chuck Berman, a series of chance passings, Duluoz is excited by the mysterious connections that seem to shape his life, and he is suddenly aware of his prisonlike existence: "But it's only simple morning in the world, and the waitress only brings simple coffee, and all our excitements are simple and will end" (132). The end is always in Duluoz's sight. Because he cannot grasp it, a swell of inner strength that makes him determined to convert the tangible into the intangible, gnaws at him from within. ". . . I suffer, we all suffer, people die in your arms, it's too much to bear yet you've got to go on as though nothing was happening, right? right, readers?" (171). Duluoz wants an answer. He turns to us as an author who faces his final judgment day. Duluoz knows, as does Kerouac, that there are limits to self-awareness, and that art survives, in the end, because of these limitations. If Duluoz could not bear his pain, if we could not bear his pain, he would quit writing and we would close the book. But books are meant to be read to the end and so is life. And this is life's parallel to art. The novel is necessary to our existence because it is a reminder of just that--we must go on. Even if we cannot forgive each other, we must go forth: this is Duluoz's inheritance and his need to write. It is the foundation of Kerouac's creativity and the beginnings of his publishing career with *The Town and the City*. Thus, we come to see that for Kerouac writing was a matter of life and death. It was a serious endeavor to which he endowed his entire existence. But to be immersed under the immensity of such a weight, day after day, has

taken its toll upon Duluoz, who when he looks at a picture of himself realizes that he no longer has broad shoulders.

In conversation with a young poet, Simon Darlovsky, Duluoz is frustrated by Simon's "idealisms." "I ben through all that!--all over again I gotta go through all that?" (175). Duluoz does not have the energy or the desire to continue abstract conversations. He cannot share with the young poets his vision or burden of the responsibility he has taken upon himself. They are too insensitive to understand, and Duluoz is too fragile to explain:

"But it's real, it's truth!" yells Simon. "The world is a place of infinite charm! Give everybody love and they'll give it right back! I seen it!"

"I know it's true but I'm bored!"

"But you cant be bored, if you get bored we all get bored, if we all get bored and tired we all give it up, then the world falls down and dies!"

"And it's as it should be!"

"No! it should be life!"

"That's no difference!" (175)

Gently, to the reader, Duluoz censures the younger poets' actions, proving to us that he has moved beyond their realm of activity, beyond their limited view of reality, and beyond the need to assert that he is a vital human. After visiting a bar, Simon urinates on the street. Aware that he is leading the "pack" of fellow poets who are amused by Simon's desecration, Duluoz is "disappoint[ed]" (204) by their actions. They go into a cafeteria for coffee, and the poets are unruly. Arguing amongst themselves, they create a spectacle, and Duluoz is aware of the irony of Simon's previous words, which were about truth and love:

Me with my cross, my rucksack--Irwin with his beard--Simon with his crazy look-- Anything Raphael does, Simon'll watch with ecstasy-- He notices nothing else, the people horrified, "They've got to learn about beauty," says Simon to himself decisively.

Even Cody, the great hero of Duluoz's "Road" story is ashamed of Duluoz's entourage. Duluoz says of Cody that he "hates the thought of taking Raphael and the gang on the train---Says to me 'At least comb your hair" (205).

When Raphael, Simon, and Irwin leave Duluoz--they plan to meet him in Mexico--Duluoz retires by the pool side in the backyard of Cody's house. Duluoz's final dissolution, his awareness that he is on the outside looking in at himself, is acted out by Duluoz in the silent drama of the writer's contemplation. Alone again, posing as a "movie director," by Cody's pool, Duluoz draws the readers' eyes from himself to the "surrealistic swimmingpool" to "the kitchen door and the "darkness" out of which "[d]ark men" with holy icons around their necks "materialize," and then vanish. "How glittering are those shiny things in the dark!" (213). It is this particular vision that Duluoz brings with him to the second half of the novel. In *Book Two*, Duluoz asks: "What is the *Light* that bears us down-- The *Light of Falling*" (230). He realizes that all people are fallen angels, meaning that they have lost contact with the physical, sensual world; they are divided from themselves and each other. With pointed irony, Kerouac shows that the poet has, perhaps, the dimmest vision, the least connection to reality.

In Mexico, Irwin Garden chastises Duluoz for sleeping too much: "[H]ow can you sleep all day and never see anything, what's the sense of being alive?" Duluoz responds, "You invisible bastard I can see right thru you" (237). Duluoz's words are echoed later on by William Carlos Williams who advises Duluoz, Simon, and Irwin: "*There's lots of bastards out there*" (290). Moreover, Kerouac, writing *Book Two* after the culmination of his notoriety and his critical banishment, has Irwin, plotting his own rise to fame, prophetizes about Duluoz:

"And you can come and have your publications arranged at once, those incompetents are stalling out of just stupid confusion. 'Road' is a big mad book that will change America! They can even make money with it. You'll be dancing naked on your fan mail. You can look Boisvert in the eye. Big Faulkners and Hemingways will grow thoughtful thinking of you. It's time! See?" (254)

For those readers who know Kerouac's life story, Irwin's words are like an echo in an empty room. The falseness of the prophesy and the dubiousness of Irwin's last name, Garden, along with our knowledge that Duluoz has recently descended from a mountain, intensify the emotive force of this scene. We cannot help but think that Kerouac has likened Irwin Garden to Milton's Satan, who tempted Eve to eat the forbidden fruit.

With *Desolation Angels*, the strength of Kerouac's fiction is that it is based on fact, yet it is not fact, but it is an honest account of the demise of an American author ("I therefore realize that I am an imbecile poet trapped in America with a dissatisfied mother in poverty and shame. It makes me mad I'm not a renowned man of letters living

in a Vermont farmhouse with lobsters to broil and a wife to go downy with, or even my own woods to meditate in." [253]), and it is a glorification of Duluoz; the ruin of his reputation and the defamation of his vision are no less significant or memorable than Hester Prynne's scarlet letter. Within *Desolation Angels*, Kerouac's narrative is the blurry image in the crystal ball, and Kerouac is the crystal ball itself. He is the Void. Kerouac has passed through himself; he has turned himself inside out; he has exposed himself, not by spontaneous prose writing, not by "blowing," but by the honest portrayal of his anger, his disappointment, his ambivalence, his desire, his follies. Thus he is real to us, for these things cannot be bought and sold, for they are in themselves free signifiers that remind us of the tragic and the not so tragic end of Kerouac's life. With Kerouac's death in reality and with his emblematic death in fiction there can be no doubt that at his final hour he was an individual, not a commodity, that he was vulnerable, not impregnable, that he could be destroyed by time, by popular culture, and by the people who called themselves "beat."

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 (366)

Duluoz had written of his own death, but he has to experience it alone: "[T]hey wonder why I'm so sunk now" (366).

That language cannot preserve life only sustain it, is the truth of Kerouac's fiction. With the final line of *Desolation Angels*,

Duluoz and Kerouac speak together: "A new life for me" (366). These are the words of an artist who is not defeated, merely divided by what he knows to be true and by his desire to prove it to be false. It is this division that makes him whole. To find complete self-fulfillment and to preserve his identity is his desire, his reason to write; it is the foundation for poetic language that bridges life and death, being and non-being. But as Kerouac knew, this desire was also the mystery of his art, his "paradox," for only at the conclusion of life can desire be actualized, and although it is the function of art to lead people to this end, it is not the function of art, as poetic language, to merge life with death. In *Vanity of Duluoz*, this "paradox" essential to Kerouac's creativity is absent, signaling to us his creative decay. The disintegration of desire makes way for "vanity," signifying Kerouac's final state of self-eclipse, the individual subordination to a social order in which movement between life and death is prohibited. We discover that Kerouac's artistic path, the development of the artistic inner life in conjunction with his objectification as an author, an object of contempt in 20th century America, has paralleled the story of man's fall from the garden and his consequent deindividualization. Because desire originated from "Original Sin" (the broken link between hierarchies) for Kerouac there cannot be purification through art without desire. In *Vanity of Duluoz*, unlike the Duluoz of *Big Sur* and *Desolation Angels*, Duluoz does not even possess the power of a fallen angel. He must toil the earth until the end of time. His search for self-fulfillment has been interned in culture's portrayal of Kerouac as the hipster.

Did Kerouac want to remain an impoverished author, writing only for himself to the end of his life, his vision of himself kept intact by the individualization of his struggle to define himself, unhampered, untouched by his foes, the critics, the media, and the restraints of culture? Or did Kerouac want literary fame, his identity and his destination determined by circumstances outside of his artistic life? This uncertainty is a negating force that structures the voice of the 45 year-old Duluoz: "You kill yourself to get to the grave. Especially you kill yourself to get to grave before you even die, and the name of the grave is 'success,' . . ." (24). Kerouac's very own ambivalence and his vulnerability, once a foil for his creative desire, have become a self-reflective chapel for "Original Sin" (274). Within the legend, success had destroyed Duluoz. Within himself he is utterly fragmented. He no longer has the means to preserve the pretense of unity, and from without he lies in his grave. He is in limbo, incapable of signification.

At the end of Kerouac's career, with the publication of *Vanity of Duluoz*, Kerouac had gone astray from his path, his quest for language and death. He had failed to find a place for himself. Duluoz's history was a history of the American artist's struggle to unify society and its value with the individual and his moral awakening. Kerouac had attempted to find this singularity in thematic unity, but his own insistence upon unconscious representation of his subject had exposed the lie, the temporality, of that union. For that reason the opening of *Vanity of Duluoz* is both frank and sardonic:

All right, wifey, maybe I'm a big pain in the you-know-what but after I've given you a recitation of the troubles I had to go through to make good in America between 1935 and more or less now, 1967, and although I also know everybody in the world's had his own troubles, you'll understand that my particular form of anguish came from being too sensitive to all the lunkheads I had to deal with just so I could get to be a high school football star, a college student pouring coffee and washing dishes and scrimmaging till dark and reading Homer's *Iliad* in three days all at the same time, and God help me, a W R I T E R whose very "success," far from being a happy triumph as of old, was the sign of doom Himself. (Insofar as nobody loves my dashes anyway, I'll use regular punctuation for the new illiterate generation.)  
(7)

This tough, hands-off attitude of Duluoz cannot conceal the fragility of Duluoz's identity within the Legend itself. He has become fully self-actualized, and self-awareness is his decline. As the conclusion of *Vanity of Duluoz* indicates, he has embarked on a path that will lead to forgetfulness:

Forget it, wifey. Go to sleep. Tomorrow's another day.  
*Hic calix!*  
Look that up in Latin, it means "Here's the chalice,"  
and be sure there's wine in it. (280)

This is the final indication that Duluoz's aspirations as a young man have degenerated into abject spiritual and physical poverty, exemplified by the middle-aged Duluoz's self-parody of the "BLOOD" he had written with on a card in Dalton Hall at Columbia, "as reminder of my new calling" (264). Duluoz's last words to his wife are a defamation of the sacrament of writing, what in his youth he had spoken of as: "Artistic morality, that was the point, because then I devised the idea of burning most of what I wrote" (267).

In the beginning, art saved Duluoz from "doom" (15). With pre-war enthusiasm and innocence he had desired to be a Bing Crosby college boy, an insurance man with a wife, a house with paneling and hunting trophies on his walls (15). But he had become a writer instead, in order to redeem himself before his father, who was disappointed by his son's failure to become a football hero. Moreover, Emil's own livelihood as a printer was taken from him because Duluoz chose to attend Columbia and not Boston College. Writing so that Duluoz could strike back at those people, like Lu Libble, who had kept him from having a chance to prove himself on the football field, this is a different Duluoz than we have seen before, one who has lost faith in himself. His writing style is aimed at an "illiterate generation," and the tone of the narrative is self-mocking, a compliant reflection of the image of the Wolfian imitator culture invented for Kerouac early in his career. He is no longer reinventing himself: Duluoz is Kerouac. The fictional and non-fictional man have merged completely. The individual has been lost to Kerouac's private consumption of his past. He has outlived the usefulness of his legend.

Retelling Peter Martin's story through the eyes of Duluoz, we find that Kerouac has returned to *The Town and the City* as a source of inspiration. But now, the Columbia days, the friendship with his wife's brother, the football career, the stint in the merchant marines and the navy, and the early days spent in New York City are empty of Kerouac's struggle to define himself. Now he struggles to prove himself. After Lu Libble, for a second season, refused to start Duluoz on the football team, Duluoz tells us that he left school and

bought a bus ticket to go South. He had told himself: "Ah shucks, go into the American night, the Thomas Wolfe darkness, the hell with these bigshot gangster football coaches, go after being an American writer, tell the truth" (94). His father tells him, "No Duluoz was ever a great writer" (97). An oracle of wisdom, his father, who was not an artist, spoke the truth without Thomas Wolfe's darkness.

The end of *Vanity of Duluoz* brings Kerouac back to the memory of his father's death. Through Duluoz eyes he remembers his Uncle Vincent's words after his father's funeral: "But there you have it, and him, and I'm dying myself, and you'll die someday, and all this, *ca s'en vas* [[all this, poof, it goes]]. He made a Breton Gallic shrug at the empty blue sky above" (279). Duluoz cannot feel loss, only emptiness. "[P]eople have changed so much . . . in the past thirty years to such an extent that I dont recognize myself as a real member of something called the human race" (7). His vitality is not as an author but as a ghost who lives in his body of the past. At the end of *Vanity of Duluoz*, Kerouac writes:

But I still was a victim, went back to Ozone Park with Ma . . . 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 gaddam life, I shall be redeemed."

But, wifey, I did it all, I wrote the book, I stalked the streets of life, of Manhattan, of Long Island, stalked thru 1,183 pages of my first novel, sold the book, got an advance, whooped, hallelujah's, went on, did everything you're supposed to do in life.

But nothing ever came of it. (279)

With *Vanity of Duluoz*, Kerouac's search to recover his identity

has come to an end. The nightmare of the road has become Kerouac's reality. He is now the voyeur of lost innocence. There is no bridge between the past and the future, for Kerouac's narrative bridge that began with the conception of *The Town and the City* and was strengthened in *On the Road* has completely vanished. He cannot come face to face with himself as the Duluoz of *Desolation Angels* had, for he is no longer real to himself. As an icon of popular culture, there is no way for him to begin anew, except by "accepting loss forever"; his very own desire has become a nightmare of perversion, and we must in turn accept that Kerouac has been lost to us. This does not mean we cannot share with him the nightmare of his road, that we might not begin to rebuild the bridge between us and the author, that we might not reconstruct Kerouac as he recognized himself against how America saw him: a symbol of brutality, moral collapse, and delinquency.

Elliott Erwitt, who photographed Kerouac for the book jacket for *The Town and the City*, recalled, "He was quite 'unfamous' at the time." Erwitt's most vivid memory of the photo session was that Kerouac "was wearing a tie . . . when he got famous he no longer wore ties" (Erwitt to author, 5 February 1992). Kerouac has changed in more than one way. Looking back at one of Erwitt's photographs on the cover of Ann Charter's biography of Kerouac, the intense conviction of the 28 year old writer is captured in a single frame. But there are other pictures that show over time the wash of blankness shrouding his features, the despair that had entered into his life because to many people he was now unrecognizable in those pictures that Erwitt had taken.

It seems reasonable, then, that after the publication of *Big Sur* and *Desolation Angels* that Kerouac reached to his past to the origins and beginning of his writing career to a time before the publication of *On the Road* had made him into a commodity. But this is no portrait of an artist. *Vanity of Duluo* is a passive examination of Kerouac's past. It is a work of nostalgia. Its force is muted by the helplessness of the Duluo who presents these vignettes of his past. Kerouac and Duluo, in Kerouac's own mind, have become inseparable. Kerouac gave himself up to the commodity, Kerouac, and his journey as a vital author had come to an end. But it was an end without desire: Kerouac was rendered lifeless; the commodity remained behind. And it is that, a sign of artificial intelligence and life, which must be put in its place before John Kerouac, the author, might be resurrected and understood.

In a letter dated 17 April 1959, Kerouac wrote Carolyn Cassady:

Too much adulation is worse than non-recognition, I see now, except on the economic level. "Too much adulation" means also the disgusting abuse from critics, which has caused my family in Lowell to announce, for instance, that I have disgraced the name of Kerouac, when all the time the disgrace emanates from critics and press. (TxU)

For Kerouac, to be a beat writer meant that he believed personal moments of transition are expressible. Whereas the jazz musician lifts the weight off the shoulders of the oppressed, the beat author makes that moment of lifting vivid and thereby significant. He makes others feel the moment of transition. At the same time, granting us the illusion of self-fulfillment, he brings us back to ourselves, the

individual life, forcing us to take responsibility for who we are, letting us see, perhaps, for the first time, who we are--that is, all of us are caught in time--moving from birth to death, all of us are on the same road. The beat writer makes the bridge between the past and the future and allows us to face the uncertainty of time. Having seen who we were and who we are and who we might be, the gift of clarity is not without cost. The moment of transition itself is always oblique, distorted by unwillingness to see the individual in relation to the past for fear of what we might see. That we are divided and torn from our origins in history and in self is what Kerouac struggled against, weighing truth and freedom of expression, the illusion of unity, against his willingness to be vulnerable and to be beat and to accept all loss forever.

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CU-BANC--Berkeley at Bancroft

Jack Kerouac to Lawrence Ferlinghetti, 1960  
Jack Kerouac to Lawrence Ferlinghetti, 1960  
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ICN--The Newberry Library

Phyllis Jackson to Malcolm Cowley, May 12, 1953  
Jack Kerouac to Malcolm Cowley, Nov. 21, 1953  
Jack Kerouac to Malcolm Cowley, Feb. 20, 1955  
Jack Kerouac to Malcolm Cowley, June 1, 1955  
Jack Kerouac to Malcolm Cowley, July 4, 1955  
Jack Kerouac to Malcolm Cowley, July 19, 1955  
Jack Kerouac to Malcolm Cowley, Sept. 11, 1955  
Jack Kerouac to Malcolm Cowley, April 19, 1956  
Jack Kerouac to Malcolm Cowley, May 19, 1956  
Jack Kerouac to Malcolm Cowley, July 9, 1956  
Jack Kerouac to Malcolm Cowley, Dec. 9, 1957  
"The Ghost of the Susquehanna." Jack Kerouac/Malcolm Cowley  
Correspondence.  
Helen K. Taylor to Malcolm Cowley, Viking Memo, Oct. 22, 1953

NN-B--Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection, The New York Public  
Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

*Book of Dreams* uncatalogued 13 notebooks [DR 1-14] with holo-  
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Jack Kerouac [B.T.L.S.] to Alfred Kazin. 454 West 20th St., New  
York, Feb. 20, 1951. 11.; March 1, 1951. 1p.; 94-21  
134th st., Richmond Hill, New York, Oct. 27 [1954] 3p.  
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*New Book of Dreams*; Lucien Midnight. Holograph notebooks,  
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NNC--Butler Library, Columbia University

Malcolm Cowley to Allen Ginsberg, July 14, 1953  
Allen Ginsberg to Louis Ginsberg, Nov. 30, 1957  
Allen Ginsberg to Jack Kerouac and William Burroughs, June 12,

1952

Jack Kerouac to Lucien Carr, Jan. 19, 1958.  
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Jack Kerouac to Allen Ginsberg, May 23, 1949  
Jack Kerouac to Allen Ginsberg, July 5, 1949  
Jack Kerouac to Allen Ginsberg, July 26, 1949  
Jack Kerouac to Allen Ginsberg, Feb. 26, 1950  
Jack Kerouac to Allen Ginsberg, Sept. 8, 1950  
Jack Kerouac to Allen Ginsberg, Oct. 1950  
Jack Kerouac to Allen Ginsberg, July 15, 1951  
Jack Kerouac to Allen Ginsberg, March 12, 1952  
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Jack Kerouac to Allen Ginsberg, May 1954  
Jack Kerouac to Allen Ginsberg, Aug. 23, 1954  
Jack Kerouac to Allen Ginsberg, May 19, 1959  
Jack Kerouac to Carl Solomon Dec. 27, 1951  
Jack Kerouac to Carl Solomon April 7, 1952

Prose Fragments and Notes, [1949]

"The Beat Generation" unpublished essay by Jack Kerouac

NNU--Fales Library, New York University

Truman Talley to Charles Bolte, Sept. 10, 1958  
New American Library Dopesheet, May 29, 1958  
New American Library Editorial Files/Kerouac.  
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New American Library Inter-Office Memo, Oct. 2, 1957

TxU--Humanities Research Center, University of Texas

Neal Cassady to Jack Kerouac, Mar. 27, 1947  
Neal Cassady to Jack Kerouac, Dec. 25, 1947  
Neal Cassady to Jack Kerouac, Jan. 7, 1948  
Allen Ginsberg to Jack Kerouac, [1948]  
Allen Ginsberg to Jack Kerouac, [1949]  
Allen Ginsberg to Jack Kerouac, [1951]  
Jack Kerouac to Carolyn Cassady, Apr. 17, 1959

Jack Kerouac to Carolyn Cassady, May 14, 1953  
Jack Kerouac to Carolyn Cassady, Oct. 21, 1962  
Jack Kerouac to Neal and Carolyn Cassady, Jan. 10, 1953  
Jack Kerouac to Neal Cassady, n.d.  
Jack Kerouac to Neal Cassady, Oct. 29, 1957  
Carl Solomon to Jack Kerouac, Apr. 14, 1952

"Journal during first stages of 'On the Road,'" 1948-1949

ViU--Alderman Library--University of Virginia

Jack Kerouac to Marshall Bean, Dec. 7, 1965

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