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## Jack Kerouac's Artistic Apprenticeship and the Discovery of His Authentic Voice

Nathaniel Botsis

*University of Nevada, Las Vegas*

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JACK KEROUAC'S ARTISTIC APPRENTICESHIP AND THE DISCOVERY OF  
HIS AUTHENTIC VOICE

by

Nathaniel Botsis

Bachelor of Arts in English  
Michigan State University  
2000

Master of Arts in English  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
2008

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**Nathaniel Botsis**

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Department of English

Stephen G. Brown, Ph.D., Committee Chair

John Unrue, Ph.D., Committee Member

Charles Whitney, Ph.D., Committee Member

Giuseppe Natale, Ph.D., Graduate College Representative

Kathryn Hausbeck Korgan, Ph.D., Interim Dean of the Graduate College

December 2014

## ABSTRACT

### JACK KEROUAC'S ARTISTIC APPRENTICESHIP AND THE DISCOVERY OF HIS AUTHENTIC VOICE

By

Nathaniel Botsis

Dr. Stephen G. Brown, Examination Committee Chair  
Professor of English  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Few novels so clearly dramatize an artist's discovery of his authentic voice as does Kerouac's *On the Road*. The publication of the writing that Kerouac did before *On the Road*, and particularly the writing he did before *The Town and the City*, offers almost unprecedented opportunity to study his artistic apprenticeship and trace his development as an artist. To study Kerouac's apprenticeship is to witness him learning how to liberate himself in order to be that which he would become. In addition to shedding light on this unexamined aspect of Kerouac's career, I hope this study might inspire similar breakthroughs and breakouts in other would-be artists.

The dynamics of this developmental process are under-theorized. No one to my knowledge has written of this process as thoroughly as Otto Rank, which is why I've used his theories of artistic apprenticeships to inform this analysis. I used Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* because he founds his philosophy on the same central

question that I believe Kerouac founds his art: the “question of Being.” I wanted to examine Kerouac’s writing before *On the Road* to trace how his psychological artistic development was informed by the philosophical question that would give *On the Road* and his later works much of their power to move people.

Within my study I move from the death of Kerouac’s older brother, Gerard, to the “Joan Anderson/Cherry Mary” letter that he received from Neal Cassady that convinced him once and for all that he could write an artistically worthwhile novel using first-person narration and unabashedly autobiographical material. I cover the broad spectrum of writing that influenced him, from the pulp fiction magazine *The Shadow* to the plotless, first-person short stories of William Saroyan, from the intense, verbose novels of Thomas Wolfe to the underground beauty he found in the work of Fyodor Dostoevsky and Louis Ferdinand-Celine. I examine the influences of football and jazz on his “spontaneous prose” technique. I also look at the influence of his artistic mentors Sammy Sampas, Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, and other Beat Generation figures like Lucien Carr and Herbert Huncke and, finally, at the influence of Neal Cassady himself. I also believe that the deaths of Gerard, Sammy Sampas, and Leo Kerouac, Kerouac’s father, had a profound impact on Kerouac’s artistic development and his ability to impart his feeling of life’s ephemerality into his art. Kerouac’s ability to impart this very feeling is the source of much of his writing’s artistic power.

Jack Kerouac was an artistic innovator who began, like all artists must, as an artistic imitator. Before he wrote *On the Road*, he wrote several books as others had written

them. A critical analysis of his pre-*On the Road* works offers one the opportunity to see a rare thing indeed: the development of an authentic artist in America.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Jack Kerouac has inspired a tremendous amount of critical interest in the past thirty-five years. Over that same period of time, more than a dozen biographies have been written about him. This simultaneous surge of scholarly and biographical interest seems particularly appropriate in Kerouac's case, as he chose to transmit his life into art by writing first-person, autobiographical novels; however, with the exception of Joyce Johnson, Kerouac's most recent biographer, little attention has been paid to the writing that he did before he made that choice. This rather unexamined field offers the promise of new and significant discoveries about Kerouac. By focusing on Kerouac's early work, one finds that his apprenticeship consisted of a long and serious struggle to discover his authentic voice.

Critical assessment of the writing that Kerouac produced prior to *The Town and the City* is almost non-existent. A closer look at this writing promises to enhance appreciation of Kerouac's development as a writer. In his introduction to *The Haunted Life*, (one of Kerouac's early books that has only recently been published), Todd Tietchen spells out the value of focusing on Kerouac's formative years and the writing he produced during them:

A more robust and balanced evaluation of Kerouac's merits might emerge from placing increased critical focus upon his reverence for process (a process that included generative writing, drafting, revision, and redrafting) and contextualizing his art within a richer set of influences and aspirations, both literary and historical. We might begin by being more mindful of the shaping influences of the 1930s

and 1940s . . . for (as we shall see) the cultural and social concerns of those decades cast a long (and ghostly) shadow over the remainder of Kerouac's work.

(7)

In order to provide a contextualization of the literary and historical influences of the 1930s and 1940s, I have taken a largely developmental approach to this study. I have tried to focus strictly on people and events that I believe influenced Kerouac's development of his authentic voice in some way, and to show how I believe those people and events did that. In *Understanding Jack Kerouac*, Matt Theado writes, "One cannot analyze Kerouac's lifework without simultaneously considering his life, as the two are deeply intertwined" (25). We can learn as much about Kerouac's art from understanding what gave rise to it, by analyzing his apprenticeship, or his "life" and "lifework" until his writing of *On the Road*, as we can learn by studying Hemingway's apprenticeship to Dostoevsky, Turgenov, Sherwood Anderson, Gertrude Stein, and Ezra Pound, or by studying Joyce's apprenticeship to Ibsen, or by studying Proust's apprenticeship to Ruskin: Such studies offer us the opportunity of seeing an artist learning how to function as an artist within his society, all the while doing the necessary work to discover and develop the individual talents with which he hopes to make a name for himself in the artistic field of his choosing. I hope to offer new insights into Kerouac's art by taking as the ending point of my study the starting point for most other studies: his composition of *On the Road*.

I have chosen to use Otto Rank's *Art and Artist* and Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* to bolster this analysis of Kerouac's early "lifework" and his "life." No other work to my knowledge does as a thorough a job of explicating the creative urge as does

Rank's *Art and Artist*. Of particular value to this study are Rank's brilliant explications of the artist's relationship to art and life, as well as his revolutionary conclusions about the artist's continually conflicted position between his own individual development and societal pressures. Rank argues that "the basic tendency" of "the artist-type" is "to put oneself and one's life into one's creative work" (46). A study of Kerouac's early writing will show that he qualified as such an "artist-type" long before he wrote *On the Road*, the work in which I will argue that he discovered his authentic voice. Rank also concludes that "Between the two—artist and art—there stands Life, now dividing, now uniting, now checking, now promoting" (59). It is here where one begins to see the value of using Heidegger's *Being and Time* to help explicate Kerouac's artistic development: If, as Rank argues, "life" stands between the artist and art, and if, as he also argues, "the problem of the relation between experience and creation has become an artistic one" for the "artist-type" (46), then a heightened understanding of "life," of "experience," of existence, promises a heightened understanding of "art" and "creation." In "After Me, the Deluge," Kerouac's last essay, he seems to recognize the value of the foundational question of Heidegger's philosophy:

Martin Heidegger says, "Why are there existing essential things, instead of nothing?" Founder of Existentialism, never mind your Sartre, and also said: "And there is no philosophy without this doozie as a starter." Ever look closely at *anybody* and see that particularized patience all their own, eyes hid, waiting with lips sewn down for time to pass, for something to lift them up, for their yesterday's daily perseverance to succeed, for the long night of life to take them

in its arms and say, “Ah, Cherubim, this silly stupid business...What *is* it, existence.” (*The Portable Jack Kerouac* 578)

Indeed, Heidegger begins *Being and Time* by proclaiming “The Necessity of an Explicit Repetition of the Question of Being,” and lamenting that “This question has today been forgotten” (1). Kerouac’s refusal to forget this forgotten question, his willingness to ask it continually and explicitly, would become an essential part of his art, so much so that one can argue that he began his art at the exact same place that Heidegger began his philosophy: with an explicit repetition of the question of being; or, as he puts it, by asking, “What *is* it, existence?” I believe the secret to the most powerful aspect of Kerouac’s writing, its power to move people, rests in his Heideggerian insistence on the explicit repetition of this question.

I have arranged this study into three chapters, reflecting my belief that artistic development is not something that happens gradually, but is rather something that happens in quantum leaps. The first chapter is the longest for two reasons: 1) It covers the most time. 2) It covers the psychological formulation of Kerouac as an artist, which I believe is complete by the time he meets the now famous members of the Beat Generation in chapter two. The rest of his artistic development is purely stylistic. There is never a question about whether or not he will be an artist. He has already decided that. Once he has decided that, his development turns to trying to find a voice with which he can express his artistic soul. In chapter one, I will cover the following influences on his artistic development:

- “The Great Sex Letter”
- His Franco-Canadian household and the influence of *joual*, his mother tongue

- His older brother Gerard's death
- His early introduction to Catholicism, including his initiation to confession
- *The Shadow* pulp magazine
- Junior high school, especially the group of friends that would populate his later novels
- The Lowell flood of 1936
- Sammy Sampas
- Football and his early football novella
- Emily Dickinson
- His first love, Mary Carney
- Jazz
- William Saroyan & Thomas Wolfe
- *Atop an Underwood*
- The Merchant Marine and *The Sea is my Brother*
- The death of Sammy Sampas

Chapter two covers Kerouac's meeting of the Beat Generation in the summer of 1944 through his father's death in May, 1946. This chapter focuses on how his friends influenced his development, and in contains in-depth analysis of some of his early work that has thus far remained almost completely unnoticed. By studying the writing Kerouac did during this time, one can gain valuable insights into the development of his authentic voice. In chapter two, I will cover the following influences on his artistic development:

- Edie Parker
- Lucien Carr

- Allen Ginsberg
- William S. Burroughs
- *And the Hippos Were Boiled in Their Tanks*
- *Orpheus Emerged*
- Celine and *Journey to the End of Night*
- The death of Leo Kerouac

Section three covers Kerouac's composition of *The Town and the City* through his composition of *On the Road*. I focus on the how the death of his father and his befriending of Neal Cassady influenced the composition of both of these books and culminated in the discovery of his authentic voice. I also argue that *On the Road* marks Kerouac's discovery of his authentic voice, and that this authentic voice is first-person, autobiographical narrative written rapidly, from the heart, without second thoughts. He called this technique "spontaneous prose." It is often held by Kerouac biographers and critics that *On the Road* is still a transitional work, and that his even more experimental novels that followed it mark the discovery of his authentic voice. I wholeheartedly disagree. I believe that viewpoint stems from the misguided notion that a work of art increases in value as it decreases in comprehensibility. I do not wish to imply that Kerouac's works after *On the Road* are all incomprehensible, I only wish to imply that his later experiments were also written using the "spontaneous prose" method he first began using when he composed *On the Road*.

I would like to cite Kerouac's famously bold modification of the novel form in his composition of *On the Road* as evidence for my argument that *On the Road* marked the discovery of his authentic voice. In "Fast This Time: Jack Kerouac and the Writing of *On*

*the Road*,” Howard Cunnell proclaims, “The original scroll version of *On the Road* is . . . among the most significant, celebrated, and provocative artifacts in contemporary American literary history” (*On the Road: The Original Scroll* 3). The scroll represents the clearest evidence that Kerouac was trying to do something new with the novel, something neither he nor anybody else had done before. Cunnell observes, “It is clear that the scroll is something consciously *made* by Kerouac rather than found. He cut the paper into eight pieces of varying length and shaped it to fit the typewriter. The pencil marks and scissor cuts are still visible on the paper. Then he taped the pieces together” (24). Kerouac’s creation of the scroll marked the end of years of writing the way other people had written, and the beginning of years of writing the way he wanted to write. In short, it marked the end of his artistic apprenticeship, and the discovery of his authentic voice.

## CHAPTER TWO: PRE-BEAT INFLUENCES: 1926-1944

In March of 1947, as Kerouac neared completion of the first half of *The Town and the City*, he received a letter from his “heartbreaking new friend” (*Visions of Cody* 340) Neal Cassady, whom he had met only a few months earlier, in December, 1946. The letter began like this:

Dear Jack:

I am sitting in a bar on Market St. I’m drunk, well, not quite, but I soon will be. I am here for 2 reasons; I must wait 5 hours for the bus to Denver & lastly but, most importantly, I’m here (drinking) because, of course, because of a woman & *what a woman!* To be chronological about it: I was sitting on the bus when it took on more passengers at Indianapolis, Indiana—a perfectly proportioned beautiful, intellectual, passionate, personification of Venus De Milo asked me if the seat beside me was taken!!! I gulped, (I’m drunk) gargled & stammered NO! (Paradox of expression, after all, how can one stammer No!!?) She sat—I sweated—She started to speak, I knew it would be generalities, so to tempt her I remained silent. (*The First Third* 189)

As Kerouac continued reading this letter, something came over him. He believed he saw the future of American literature in this spontaneous, halting, multidirectional, unschooled prose. In *Memory Babe*, Gerald Nicosia asserts that the letter “might as well have been a masterpiece,” while also holding that the letter’s “only interesting feature” was “the freedom (for 1947) with which Neal used common but literarily taboo words like *blow*, *bang*, and *screw*” (183). Nicosia recognizes that the letter appealed to Kerouac because it represented freedom to him, but he places too much importance on Cassady’s



use of the “literarily taboo” slang words. This is an understandable mistake. Kerouac himself called the letter, “The Great Sex Letter,” and this name has unfortunately caused confusion about why this letter had such an impact on him. It was the unliterary style of the letter that appealed to Kerouac, not merely the unliterary use of slang terms for different sexual activities. The use of these words only appealed to Kerouac inasmuch as they represented freedom from the literary styles of the past. Take this following paragraph for example:

Without the slightest preliminaries of objective remarks (what’s your name? where are you going? Etc.) I plunged into a completely knowing, completely subjective, personal & so to speak “penetrating her core” way of speech; to be shorter, (since I’m getting unable to write) by 2 AM I had her swearing eternal love, complete subjectivity to me & immediate satisfaction. I, anticipating even more pleasure, wouldn’t allow her to blow me on the bus, instead we played, as they say, with each other. (*The First Third* 189-190)

Kerouac saw more in this than a babbling man drunkenly carrying on about a girl he seduced on a bus. He saw a freer way of telling stories. He saw Cassady using first-person narration without a second thought, while he himself labored away using third-person narration on *The Town and the City*, the manuscript of which would balloon to 380,000 words before it was finished. The sexually explicit language was only a part of the letter’s larger appeal to Kerouac. In *The Voice is All: The Lonely Victory of Jack Kerouac*, Joyce Johnson notes, “What struck him particularly was the very thing Neal found it necessary to apologize for—the completely uninhibited and rather disconnected way it was written, as if Neal (who was drunk at the time) had just jotted down anything

that came into his head” (235). The letter’s spontaneity, its uninhibitedness, its use of the first-person point of view in the retelling of a personal experience, all appealed deeply to Kerouac, who was looking for a better way to tell stories and believed he saw one in Cassady’s letter. In *Kerouac: A Biography*, Ann Charters writes, “Neal’s autobiographical style was exactly what Kerouac had been searching for himself in his grandiose plans to be a writer” (125), and Kerouac himself acknowledges, “The discovery of a style of my own based on spontaneous get-with-it came after reading the marvelous free-narrative letters of Neal Cassady, a great writer who happens also to be the Dean Moriarty of *On the Road*” (*Jack’s Book* 87). Kerouac’s search for a style of his own began a long time before he read Cassady’s “free-narrative letters.”

Kerouac was born Jean Louis Kerouac on March 22, 1922, into a lower middle class family in the New England mill town of Lowell, Massachusetts. In *Kerouac: King of the Beats*, Barry Miles describes Lowell as “a grimy working-class town of red-brick industrial buildings with tall, billowing smoke stacks, wooden-frame houses and low, wooden apartment buildings” (11). Two things about Kerouac’s early childhood would have long term impacts on his writing: He was born into a French-Canadian household, and he didn’t start speaking English until his fifth year; and his older brother, Gerard, died of rheumatic fever when Jack was four.

In *The Subterraneans*, Kerouac states, “I am a Canuck, I could not speak English till I was 5 or 6” (3). He offers this information in a very factual manner, but one can guess that it means much more to him than he reveals. Rank makes this important observation: “In an individual who reacts in language, a personal experience first of all finds its rough form in the traditional language-stock, which is thereby permeated by the

personality and individually vitalized” (*Art and Artist* 279). Kerouac’s matter of fact recollection that he was a “Canuck” who “could not speak English” till he was “5 or 6” communicates something of how this “personal experience permeated his personality.” The discovery of his authentic voice coincided in part with his willingness to transmit in written form the rhythms of the first language he ever knew, something he consciously avoided doing throughout his apprenticeship.

In *Jack Kerouac: A Biography*, Tom Clark notes, “His first tongue was the Franco-American *joual*” (3). This language has qualities that Kerouac would one day incorporate into his writing. Clark describes *joual* as an “Anglicized, abbreviated, and musical form of French spoken by the Quebecois...who came down to the New England mill towns” (3). He also makes the important observation that *joual* “is a spoken language, not a written one” (3). Kerouac fought against employing the spoken musicality of *joual* into his writing for years. He looked at it as a disadvantage. Johnson explains, “A fiction writer today, in our multicultural-minded era, would make the most of his hyphenated background and in fact would consider it an asset. But sixty years ago, the label ‘Franco-American’ would have been a liability for an ambitious novelist” (14). It was not the hyphenated background or the “Franco-American” label that Kerouac needed to embrace. It was the improvisational musicality of his first language. For, as Clark notes, “*joual* was the language of Jack’s heart” (3).

In July of 1926, when Kerouac was four, his older brother died of rheumatic fever. In *Desolate Angel: Jack Kerouac, the Beat Generation, and America*, Dennis McNally writes that Gerard’s death “left wounds that would never truly heal” (6). In *Visions of Cody*, Kerouac acknowledges, “I, Jack Duluoz, have not been the same since

my brother Gerard died, when I was four” (359). No other single event in Kerouac’s childhood made a bigger impact on him, and Gerard’s death may have been the impetus toward Kerouac’s drive to become an artist. Rank asserts, “The becoming of the artist has a particular genesis, one of the manifestations of which may be some special experience” (50). If Kerouac had such a special experience in his childhood, it was the death of his brother. Johnson notes, “For the rest of his life he would wrestle with a pervasive awareness of mortality that would make human effort and even love seem meaningless and futile. At times he would sense the presence of God, but his books celebrate life in the shadow of the only certainty—that death is inevitable” (*The Voice is All* 13). A sense of life’s fleeting quality gives his poetical passages much of their power, and his philosophical passages much of their meaning. This passage from *Visions of Cody* is a good example of such a passage:

I’m writing this book because we’re all going to die—In the loneliness of my life, my father dead, my brother dead, my mother faraway, my sister and my wife faraway, nothing here but my own tragic hands that once were guarded by a world, a sweet attention, that now are left to guide and disappear their own way into the common dark of all our death, sleeping in me raw bed, alone and stupid: with just this one pride and consolation: my heart broke in the general despair and opened up inwards to the Lord, I made a supplication in this dream. (368)

He learned to express his own sense of death’s inevitability so well in his writing that it could make readers feel emotion and gain a greater sense of purpose. His awareness of death, (something that most people would just as soon not think about in any meaningful way), and his ability to impart this awareness without bludgeoning the

reader, gives his books the power to help readers live authentic lives. In *On Being Authentic*, Charles Guignon provides this helpful definition of authenticity: “the concept of authenticity is an ideal of *owning* oneself, of achieving self-possession” (7). A heightened awareness of the inevitability of death is a powerful incentive to take ownership of one’s life. His ability to heighten a reader’s awareness of this inevitability gives his writing some of its power to move people to live more authentically.

One can look at Kerouac’s early experiences, and, in fact, at his entire apprenticeship, as a template for what a person must do, and what he must overcome, in order to become an artist in America. His mother, Gabrielle, would work as a skiver in a shoe factory during those times when his father, Leo, couldn’t make enough money to support the family as an insurance salesman, job printer, bowling alley manager, or print-shop owner. Kerouac’s parents knew about doing hard work for little reward, and, after Gerard’s death, they both pinned their hopes for a better tomorrow on their only living son. This passage from *The Town and the City*, in which the father, George Martin, (Leo Kerouac’s fictional representative) tells his son, Peter, (Kerouac’s fictional representative), to “make good,” confirms this idea:

“I’m banking on you to make good, if only because I can go and tell some of these punks around here that my son is a great star and a great boy—and if only because I want you to go on smiling all your life the way you used to do when you were just a plump little tike with rosy cheeks. Sonny, sonny!” he cried unhappily. “Listen to me! Do what your old father says, I know best. Study! Study! Work hard and make good. There’s never anything wrong with a man who always, always tries! I want you to be that way--” He gripped Peter and looked at

him for the first time since he was a child with the tender gaze of an anxious, pleading father: “Be my good boy, Petey, be my own good boy.” (237)

Kerouac’s decision to become a writer did not, in his father’s eyes, qualify him as a “good boy,” no matter how hard he tried at it; and he tried very hard. It was a decision that disappointed his father. Had his father been alive when he “made good” as a writer, well, then, everything would have been different. The decision to become a writer would have no longer been a disappointing one.

Kerouac was called Ti Jean, or “Little Jack,” at home, and Jean at school.

Kerouac’s name lacked the fixity that most people take for granted when it comes to their names. This would play a crucial role in his artistic development. Nicosia points out that Kerouac “was a man for whom nothing was secure, not even his name” (21). Since he had been called by so many different names in so many different places, he did not know what to call himself when he set out to be a writer. He went from Ti Jean at home, to Jean or Jean-Louis at elementary school, to Jacky, Zagg, and Memory Babe in junior high school, to John and Jack at high school. He would vacillate between signing his early work John and Jack, and he published *The Town and the City* under the name John Kerouac. It is only when he developed his “spontaneous prose” technique to write first-person, autobiographical novels that he became Jack Kerouac. Later in his career, when describing several of his novels as “just chapters” of “the whole work which I call *The Duluoz Legend*,” he explains: “The whole thing forms one enormous comedy, seen through the eyes of poor Ti Jean (me), otherwise known as Jack Duluoz” (*Visions of Cody* i). It is interesting to note here that Kerouac, when referring to himself as “me,” does not refer to himself as “Jack Kerouac,” but rather “Ti Jean,” the first name he ever

knew. The division between the man (“Ti Jean” in this case) and artist (“Jack Kerouac”) was something that Kerouac would seek throughout his apprenticeship to objectify, and thereby unify, in his art. As will be seen in the next chapter, he does this in explicit, symbolic form in *Orpheus Emerged*. The reconciliation of these conflicting forces would not occur until he wrote *On the Road*, wherein he switched to using first-person, autobiographical narration.

In September 1928, Kerouac began attending Saint Louis parochial school. He switched to Saint Joseph’s School for the upper grades, but Catholic School education would remain “the center of his life” (McNally 10) for the next five years. Johnson does not paint a pleasant picture of what students learned at this school: “At St. Louis de France, small children received instruction in humility, chastity, and obedience and were lectured on their general sinfulness and unworthiness” (*The Voice is All* 34). This early Catholic school education had a major impact on Kerouac’s development, artistic and otherwise.

As a student in a Catholic School, Kerouac had to go to confession. By all accounts, he did not like it. McNally states, “Confession . . . was a rite that picked at the unhealed scabs of his conscience, reminding him anew of his ‘corruptness’” (*Desolate Angel* 11). Johnson confirms, in even stronger language, “Jack’s four years at St. Louis de France helped perpetuate the inner torment he suffered as a small child” (*The Voice is All* 39). These confessional sessions tormented Kerouac because he felt he had to confess his habit of masturbation to the priest. McNally explains, “Again and again he had to admit in a whisper to the unseen Father on the other side of the screen that ‘*Oui, mon pere, I played with mon gidigne*’ (11). One must give Kerouac credit for telling the truth

about this, but these weekly confessions ingrained in him a deep-seated guilt about sex. Miles elaborates: “Jack was also given a massive dose of Catholic guilt about sex. American Catholicism is Jansenist, despite the fact Jansenius was denounced as a heretic, and it preaches an extreme puritanism. Jack was taught that the body was evil, that to even touch his sex organ in the bath was sinful, and to get an erection almost guaranteed going straight to hell” (*Kerouac: King of the Beats* 10). In addition to making Kerouac feel guilty about sex, confession also trained Kerouac in the habit of self-surveillance.

Cassady’s letters would teach him how to use this training to write in a confessional style, thereby purging him of guilt. Cassady had his own experiences with confession as well, as Kerouac notes in *Big Sur*: “In the book I wrote about us (‘On the Road’) I forgot to mention . . . that we were both devout little Catholics in our childhood, which gives us something in common tho we never talk about it, it’s just there in our natures” (135). Kerouac, who always credited Neal Cassady’s letters as the biggest influence on his decision to switch to writing spontaneously, using first-person, autobiographical narration, would later add that “I remembered also Goethe’s admonition, well Goethe’s prophesy that the future literature of the West would be confessional in nature” (“*The Paris Review Interview*” 208). Rank confirms that “Goethe himself looked upon his works as ‘fragments of one great confession,’ as ‘life’s traces’” (81). Kerouac’s conception and execution of what he called *The Duluoz Legend* could likewise be considered “fragments of one great confession.” Kerouac’s artistic objectification of his habit of confession would become a part of his authentic voice. Johnson notes that Kerouac “believed that the habit of confession, which had been ingrained in him early, had been carried over into his writing” (*The Voice is All* 37).



Kerouac's art embodied Oscar Wilde's saying that, "It is the confession, not the priest, that gives absolution" (*The Portable Oscar Wilde* 150).

Neal Cassady's lifestyle also contributed to liberating Kerouac from some of the guilt he associated with sex. In *On the Road*, he writes of Cassady, "to him sex was the one and only holy and important thing in life" (2). One could ascertain that Cassady has simply internalized and reversed what Miles calls the "extreme puritanism" of the teachings Kerouac received at his Catholic school and turned them on their head, but that would miss the point. Cassady took something that the church considered unholy and elevated it to the status of "the one and only holy and important thing." It is too easy to ignore the importance of Cassady's disobedience in this case by saying that one extreme is just as unhealthy as the other extreme. This reasoning ignores what is important about Cassady's disobedience: the spirit of freedom. In a passage from *On Disobedience: Why Freedom Means Saying No to Power*, Erich Fromm explains the importance of Cassady's capacity to disobey:

A person can become free through acts of disobedience by learning to say no to power. But not only is the capacity for disobedience the condition for freedom; freedom is also the condition for disobedience. If I am afraid of freedom, I cannot dare to say "no," I cannot have the courage to be disobedient. Indeed, freedom and the capacity for disobedience are inseparable; hence any social, political, and religious system which proclaims freedom, yet stamps out disobedience, cannot speak the truth. (9)

Based on Cassady's stance on sex, Kerouac recognized that he had the "courage to be disobedient." This courage means that he can "speak the truth," whereas any social,

political, and religious system that would “stamp out disobedience, cannot.” Cassady, then, represents individual freedom in the face of any societal system that would deny it. It is important to note that Kerouac, as an artist, stands between the church’s “extreme puritanism” and Cassady’s all-encompassing embracing of the erotic as a means of disobeying the church. Rank notes that “the artistic solution” to the conflict between “the individual will” and the “collective” appears “to lie between the religious and erotic solutions” (86). His observations on this point offer particularly enlightening insights on Kerouac’s artistic development:

Finally, in art, which has developed out of the collective consolation-ideology of religion and at whose further limit we find the Romantic artist striving after the complete love-experience, the individuality-conflict is solved in that the ego, seeking at once isolation and union, creates, as it were, a private religion for itself, which not only expresses the collective spirit of the epoch, but produces a new ideology—the artistic—which for the bulk of them takes the place of religion. (86).

Kerouac’s successful creation of a private religion of art in which he would express the “collective spirit of the epoch” would gain him fame and notoriety as “The King of the Beats,” something Kerouac would later objectify in art again in his later work, such as in his passage from *Big Sur*: “I’m supposed to be the King of the Beatniks according to the newspapers, but at the same time I’m sick and tired of all the endless enthusiasm of new young kids trying to know me and pour out all their lives into me so that I’ll jump up and down and say yes yes that’s right, which I cant do any more” (109). Kerouac’s private religion of art, his decision to seek the absolution of confession in art,

had inspired others to do the same, and he went from being the confessor to being the priest, listening to “new young kids pour out all their lives into me,” a role he clearly did not like.

In September 1933, Kerouac had advanced so far as a student that he was able to skip a grade and enroll in Bartlett Junior High School. McNally observes, “for the first time in his life, Jean Kerouac no longer lived in an exclusively French world . . . Jean Louis became Jacky” (*Desolate Angel* 14). Soon thereafter, he met Helen Mansfield, a librarian and English teacher at Bartlett, was the first person to recognize Kerouac’s writing ability. She encouraged him, helping him discover “that he could write as well as read, that in the unfettered world of the written word, he could act as well as be part of the audience” (McNally 15). This encouragement no doubt helped ease Kerouac’s transition into the new school and his new language.

What happened outside of school would have a greater impact on Kerouac’s development as a writer than what happened inside of school. He met George J. Apostolos, Freddie Bertrand, Roland Salvas, and, later, Scottie Beaulieu. Johnson states that the “kids became a regular gang who ran in and out of one another’s houses, played softball together in the field behind the Textile Institute, and exchanged the facts of life” (*The Voice is All* 44). Kerouac discovered what would become one of his greatest subjects: friendship. Kerouac wrote very well about almost anything, but it was writing about friendship that would one day make him famous. His writing gets better when he writes about his friends or when he puts himself in the midst of his friends. He manages to give friendship a redemptive quality that reflects, no doubt, how he felt about it. Though Kerouac would more famously write about his more famous friends later in life,

he left behind no small amount of literature wherein his Lowell buddies take the spotlight. In the passage from *Doctor Sax*, Kerouac talks about this group of friends:

“My old man’s in the grave and no one’s the worse for it.” At 11 or 12 G.J. was so Greekly tragic he could talk like that—words of woe and wisdom poured from his childly dewy glooms. He was the opposite of crackbrained angel joy Vinn. Scotty just watched or bit his inner lip in far away silence (thinking about that game he pitched, or Sunday he’s got to go to Nashua with his mother to see Uncle Julien and Aunt Yvonne (*Mon Mononcle Julien, Ma Matante Yvonne*)—Lousy is spitting, silently, whitely, neatly, just a little dew froth of symbolic spit, clean enough to wash your eyeballs in—which I had to do when he got sore and his aim was champion in the gang. (41)

In *Jack’s Book*, Barry Gifford and Lawrence Lee write, “The same small circle of boys . . . populates all of Jack’s writing about Lowell” (9). Every time he writes about his friends, Kerouac shows a singular ability to transmit their experiences, their conversations, and personalities onto the page. He could do this because he had a natural gift that would impress people for the rest of his life, a gift this same group of Lowell friends was the first to pay tribute to: his memory. Johnson notes that his Lowell friends “were the ones who eventually came up with the nickname Memory Babe” (*The Voice is All* 44).

There is a difference between memory and recollection. In *What is Called Thinking*, Martin Heidegger helps define this difference: “‘Memory’ initially did not at all mean the power to recall. The word designates the whole disposition in the sense of a steadfast intimate concentration upon the things that essentially speak to us in every

thoughtful meditation” (140). As Kerouac developed his writing, he would move away from the conventional reliance on imagination and toward a reliance on this definition of memory. Much of his best writing reads more like a “thoughtful meditation” than a story. This made it difficult for him to sell his writing, but it also helped give his writing its enduring, soulful quality. Heidegger continues, “Memory is imbued not just with the quality of essential recall, but equally with the quality of an unrelinquishing and unrelenting retention. Out of the memory, and within the memory, the soul then pours forth its wealth of images—of visions envisioning the soul itself” (*What is Called Thinking* 140). When Kerouac reached his full development, he poured his “wealth of images” and “visions” onto the page. He went so far as to name two of his books *Visions of Cody* and *Visions of Gerard*. In *Visions of Cody*, he writes a vision of Cody (Neal Cassady) that offers a glimpse of his own theory of vision and memory:

Inside the secret of the dung, and the flit-flies in the drowsiness, Cody saw the possibility that he might have taken that wet cowflap and thus ripened it like an autumn . . . he rolled his hoop past his thought. But there was nothing ridiculous, there were no images immediately and sensationally ridiculous; it was just a matter of believing in his own soul; it’s just a matter of loving your own life, loving the story of your own life, loving the dreams in your sleep as parts of your life, as little children do and Cody did, loving the should of man (which I have seen in the smoke), liling in your own breaks to make them good and bad according to the geography of the day which included (for him) those Santa Fe drive junkyards not far from the overpass surmounting the rooftops of Denver Mexicotown. (307)

This “vision” emphasizes the pleasure of remembering. First he says, “it’s just a matter of loving our own life, loving the story of your own life,” and later he puts “for him” in parenthesis, reminding the reader that this is a vision of Cody’s memory, of Cody’s life, and that it could be read as a guidebook intended to show the reader how to have such visions in his own memories. *Visions of Cody* ties together *vision*, memory, and pleasure in a very explicit way. He also writes, “for as memories are older they’re like wine rarer, till if you find a real old memory, one of infancy, not an established often tasted one but a *brand new one!*, it would taste better than the Napoleon brandy Stendhal himself must have stared at” (*Visions of Cody* 26). The concepts of vision and memory would remain important to Kerouac throughout his apprenticeship and, indeed, throughout his entire career.

It is often said that a writer must first be moved by something he reads before he can hope to write something that moves others. It was at this time of his life that Kerouac discovered the first writing that moved him: *The Shadow*. Miles observes, “One of the biggest influences on his imagination was *The Shadow*, the most popular of all the pulp magazines” (18). *The Shadow* was more to Kerouac than just casual reading. It is worth looking into how this pulp magazine inspired him, as it provides important insight into Kerouac’s aesthetic philosophy.

One of the most obvious influences that *The Shadow* had on Kerouac was its influence on the creation of his character, Doctor Sax. Clark relates, “One night after reading a pulp detective magazine called *The Shadow*, Jacky thought he saw some kind of shade ‘flit from station to station’ in the Grotto. This shade, distilled in his imagination, became ‘Dr. Sax,’ the shadowy protagonist of many later reveries and tales”

(*Jack Kerouac: A Biography* 19). Many years later, after he had written *The Town and the City*, *On the Road*, and *Visions of Cody*, Kerouac readied himself to write *Doctor Sax*. As he prepared to write it, he wrote to Allen Ginsberg to explain how he would write it: “I’ll simply blow on the vision of the Shadow in my 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> years on Sarah Ave. Lowell, culminated by the myth itself as I dreamt it in Fall 1948” (*Selected Letters* 355). *Doctor Sax* stands as Kerouac’s most ambitious mixture of memory and imagination. In it, Kerouac remembers his “13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> years,” when he met his Lowell gang of friends, and he also remembers the first time he met “Doctor Sax”:

Doctor Sax I first saw in his earlier lineaments in the early Catholic childhood Centralville—deaths, funerals, the shroud of that, the dark figure in the corner when you look at the dead man coffin in the dolorous parlor of the open house with a horrible purple wreath on the door . . . . The statue of Ste. Therese turning her head in an antique Catholic twenties film with Ste. Therese dashing across town in a car with W.C. Fieldsian close shaves by the young religious hero while the doll (not Ste. Therese herself but the lady hero symbolic thereof) heads for her saintliness with wide eyes of disbelief. We had a statue of Ste. Therese in my house—on West Street I saw it turn its head at me—in the dark. (4)

In *The Shadow* magazines, the Shadow himself would listen in unseen on evildoers. They would notice the strange manipulations in the shadows on the wall, but would always chalk it up to a figment of their imagination, never figuring that they were being watched. The criminals in *The Shadow* worried about crime-fighters. The Shadow did not necessarily focus his efforts on fighting crime, he focused them on fighting evil. This appealed immensely to Kerouac, and to many other readers as well. Kerouac later

explained that one of *The Shadow's* primary appeals to him and his friends came from the mysteriousness with which the Shadow operated in the dark: "it wasn't so much the killing in these stories that we used to feed upon, it was rather the dark and mysterious labyrinthial movement of our heroes, the sibilant hiss of their secret sanctumed laugh" (*Atop an Underwood*, 69). The Shadow's laugh was an important element of his character, as it was the way he made himself known.

Kerouac wanted to live like the Shadow and have his books take on something of the quality of The Shadow's laugh. He didn't want to be seen, but he wanted his books to be heard, to let the world know that he had seen what it was doing even if it hadn't seen him watching. In the conclusion of *Doctor Sax*, Kerouac makes it clear that, unlike the Shadow, he seeks no revenge on the evildoers. His books are not meant to gun down evildoers in a final, climactic showdown. Rather, "Doctor Sax" teaches Kerouac that "The Universe disposes of its own evil" (245). This nonjudgmental, passive stance is a vital component of Kerouac's aesthetic philosophy. Learning how to adopt that stance in his art would become one of the biggest challenges of his apprenticeship.

Another reason that *The Shadow* appealed to Kerouac was that it was set in New York. Like many small town kids, he dreamed of going to the big city to see what more life had to offer. If *The Shadow* did not ignite this dream, it certainly did nothing to dampen it. Johnson writes, "it was also the Manhattan setting of these tales that captured Jack's imagination—a city of yellow taxicabs in the rain and Fifth Avenue mansions and the wood-paneled gentleman's club, where the Shadow, after putting aside his mask, sat calmly playing chess, taking an evening off from pursuing evildoers" (*The Voice is All* 49). Kerouac had big dreams, and *The Shadow* fueled them. Roland Salvas, his childhood



friend, sensed that Kerouac wanted more out of life than Lowell could offer him: “I think Jack wanted to be something out of life rather than just normal” (*Jack’s Book* 10).

Gifford and Lee note, “As it turned out Jack was the only one of the circle to leave Lowell to seek his fortune” (*Jack’s Book* 9). Kerouac’s desire to leave Lowell, and particularly his desire to go to New York, would have a heavy influence when it came time for him to choose where to go to college.

Kerouac references *The Shadow* in a particularly telling passage in *The Town and the City*. In the passage, Peter Martin, a fictionalized representative of Kerouac himself, walks along Central Park: “He walked along the park. In Galloway there was no Central Park, no miles of traffic lights glistening on the pavement, no yellow cabs speeding by with the secrecy and dark luminous mystery of New York at night. He began thinking with peculiar delight of a magazine he used to read as a little boy, the *Shadow Magazine*” (387). Galloway is the fictional representation of Lowell, and as Peter continues to reflect about how he used to read *The Shadow* in Galloway, the intensity of his early desire to go to New York becomes clearer: “Peter used to read those stories and then go walking around the streets of Galloway, and curse his life because it was not New York and there were no yellow cabs and the rainy mysteries of penthouses at night” (387). Peter’s reflections offer insight into how *The Shadow* stoked Kerouac’s desire to leave Lowell and go to New York. This is only the beginning of a reflection that will lead Peter to an existential crossroads.

Peter has made it to New York, and now he walks along the streets in an eerily similar way to the way he walked along the streets in Galloway. Peter realizes that his ambitions have led him from Galloway to New York, but now he begins to question the

authenticity of his earlier ambitions. In other words, he begins to question whether he was more authentic when he was a kid reading *The Shadow* and dreaming of moving to New York or if he is more authentic as a young man walking around New York thinking back to when he was a kid reading *The Shadow* in Galloway. As the passage continues, Peter's understanding turns to anxiety, which, according to Heidegger, is something that must happen in order for one to become authentic.

Peter turns his reflection from his own life to that of his New York friends: "He looked around him angrily. He remembered that Judie and Ken were waiting for him, he suddenly remembered *them*" (388). At the same time that he stops thinking about himself and starts thinking about his friends, he thinks about his parents too: "In that same instant he was riven with awful misty grief as he thought of his mother and father living in Brooklyn just across the dark of the sky" (388). In this passage, Kerouac works to impart something of his idea of existence and what it takes to become authentic. He does not offer universal answers, but instead he offers the sense of anxiety and resolution that Heidegger argues are essential components to becoming authentic. As the intensity of his anxiety threatens to overwhelm Peter, he responds with a highly individual resolution: "I'm going to make a big decision and stick to it, some day soon" (388). Peter's conclusion foreshadows Kerouac's own resolution to dedicate his life to writing. Kerouac's emphasis on the importance of individual resolution in the face of anxiety illuminates the relationship between individuality and authenticity.

In *No Excuses: Existentialism and the Meaning of Life*, Robert Solomon writes, "We are essentially ontological creatures, which means, in Heidegger's view, that we necessarily query the world about our own existence and identity. The being that so

queries the world, the being that each of us is, is what Heidegger calls ‘*Dasein*,’ or ‘being there’” (55). This passage offers a helpful way of unpacking Heidegger’s complex and often confusing terminology. It is important to keep in mind, when encountering in Heidegger’s philosophy the unfamiliar term “*Dasein*,” that it simply denotes “the being that each of us is.” One of the things that Heidegger posits in *Being and Time* is that self-recognition is rare and special rather than philosophically routine (Solomon 59). Kerouac dramatizes this process of self-recognition quite aptly in his art, as the question of being is central to his art just as it is central to Heidegger’s philosophy. In the aforementioned passage from *The Town and the City*, Kerouac does not offer universal conclusions to Peter’s problems, but, rather, Peter’s own individual, indefinite resolution to “make a big decision and stick to it, some day soon.” This resolution perfectly exemplifies the kind of authentic individuation that Heidegger believes results from anxiety. In the following passage, Heidegger explains that anxiety does not arise from, and cannot result in, universal conclusions:

What anxiety is anxious for is being-in-the-world itself. In anxiety, the things at hand in the surrounding world sink away, and so do innerworldly beings in general. The “world” can offer nothing more, nor can the *Dasein*-with of others. Thus anxiety takes away from *Dasein* the possibility of understanding itself, falling prey, in terms of the “world” and the public way of being interpreted. It throws *Dasein* back upon that for which it is anxious, its authentic potentiality-for-being-in-the-world. Anxiety individuates *Dasein* to its ownmost being-in-the-world which, as understanding, projects itself essentially upon possibilities. (182)

While difficult to understand at first, this passage, when unpacked, reveals that Peter's walk along Central Park exhibits this process of individualization by anxiety with startling exactitude. Peter cannot look to the "world" or to "others" to help him discover his "authentic potentiality-for-being-in-the-world," for his anxious reflection is nothing but his realization that he cannot "fall prey" to the "world," but must rather "project" himself "essentially upon his ownmost possibilities." Kerouac's artistic objectification of this complex struggle could only have come about as a result of that same struggle.

*The Shadow* may also have influenced Kerouac's later development of his spontaneous prose technique. Due to the popularity of *The Shadow*, Walter Brown Gibson, the author, "soon found himself delivering two 60,000-word novels each month" (Miles 20). To do this, Gibson set up three typewriters and, when one "got tired," he would move from that one to the next one. He typed until his fingers "would swell and bleed" (Miles 20). Many years later, when Kerouac discovered his own authentic voice, he developed similarly innovative methods in order to write without pausing. Nicosia describes the lengths to which Kerouac would go in order to sustain a free flow of words and avoid the distraction of having to keep putting fresh pages into his typewriter: he reports that Kerouac taped together "twenty-foot strips of Japanese drawing paper to form a roll that could be fed continuously through his typewriter" (*Memory Babe* 343). This innovation, which began with *On the Road*, allowed him to write with the unbridled spontaneity that he grew to believe was the best way to write. Perhaps the seed of that belief can be found in Kerouac's junior-high fascination with *The Shadow*, the author of which typed so fast that his fingers bled.

In fact, Kerouac was already honing a skill that would become essential to his style of writing: typing. Kerouac had access to the typewriter in his father's print shop. Nicosia notes, "Already a speed typist, Jack would sit at the machine on his father's desk and type for hours" (*Memory Babe* 33). These hours of practice would pay off, as Kerouac learned to type with such rapidity that it left an everlasting impression on people who witnessed him in action. John Clellon Holmes, Kerouac's long-time friend, marveled at Kerouac's typing ability.

Jack was a lightning typist. Once, Jack said, "Let's do a letter to Alan Harrington." And I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, you do the first page, dictate to me, and I'll take it down on the typewriter, and then I'll do the same with you." And literally--and I was talking much faster than I'm talking now--he took it down, just exactly as I talked to him. I tried to do it--and I'm a very fast but inexact typist--and I couldn't come anywhere close. (*Jack's Book* 156)

The ability to type fast is an advantage for anybody who writes anything, but it would be especially important for Kerouac, whose spontaneous prose technique relied on fast typing abilities. In the same way that Kerouac would change the point of view and content of his books in order to take advantage of his exceptional memory, he would change his compositional technique to take advantage of his exceptional typing skills.

Kerouac's fledgling ideas about becoming a writer met with no supporters. McNally puts it thus: "French-Canadian Lowell was not a literate place. Save for the newspapers—*L'Etoile*, *Le Citoyen*, *Le Clarion*, the *Sun*—the town's French were uninterested in reading, and Jacky's parents were no exception" (*Desolate Angel* 15). McNally fails to note that "the town's French," and "Jacky's parents" were like most

people in most American towns. They were the rule, not the exception. Heidegger might say that the people of whom McNally speaks represent “the they.” In *Being and Time*, Heidegger states, “the they is essentially concerned with averageness” (123). Kerouac’s parents and the townspeople of Lowell, like most people’s parents and the townspeople in most towns, would not encourage Kerouac’s artistic aspirations. They remain “essentially concerned with averageness.” Kerouac was different in this regard. He wanted to do something that stood out. He wanted to distinguish himself in some way from other people. Around this time in his life, Kerouac began searching for a friend with whom he could share the most authentic part of himself. Kerouac badly needed, and would always badly need, this kind of friend. Nobody he knew would have understood or encouraged anybody to do the things that he dreamed about doing with his life. Kerouac needed a friend to assure him that he was not crazy.

Nobody from Lowell had a greater impact on Kerouac’s artistic development than Sebastian “Sammy” Sampas. Sammy was Kerouac’s only peer who shared his literary interests. McNally states, “Sammy challenged the mundaneness of Lowell with an imagination that was the equal of Jack’s. Their dreams swept them off Merrimack Street and around the world” (*Desolate Angel* 25). It is likely that they met at Bartlett Junior High, but did not become close friends until they attended Lowell High School. Their friendship took time to blossom because Kerouac was not yet ready for Sammy, who was farther along than Kerouac in his artistic development, more sure than Kerouac about what he wanted to do with his life, and less concerned than Kerouac about what others thought about it. Kerouac was not yet ready to commit wholeheartedly to his artistic dreams. In fact, as McNally astutely observes, Kerouac “had another dream, one more in

keeping with the American way: football” (*Desolate Angel* 25). As a young boy playing sandlot football games with the older kids, Kerouac soon realized that he had a talent for the game. Sammy, who Johnson describes as, “small, precocious, acutely sensitive, and a great reader” (*The Voice is All* 48), could not teach Kerouac a thing about football.

There are many advantages for a teenage boy who can play football well. It is a violent game, one risks injury to play it, and by taking that risk a boy can gain respect and admiration from his peers. One can also, if he is good enough, get a college scholarship. None of this went unnoticed by Kerouac. Clark states, “In the sandlot football season of 1935, he found out that this was the one game he could play better than other boys. It was a discovery that he later nominated as the beginning of his ‘vanities’—his struggle to make good in life” (*Jack Kerouac: A Biography* 26). Kerouac showed an immediate talent for football. One of his childhood friends, Scotty Beaulieu, remembers playing football with Kerouac: “Jack was hard as a rock, a great athlete. When I tackled him, or tried to, once, when I grabbed his legs—man, I saw stars! He plowed right through me” (*Jack’s Book* 11). Beaulieu was on Kerouac’s team during a sandlot game in November, 1935, in which Johnson reports the thirteen-year-old Kerouac sent one of his seventeen-year-old opponents “sliding across the field unconscious” on the play after the boy had “punched him in the mouth” (*The Voice is All* 52). Kerouac’s father, Leo, was at the game. He rejoiced. He had already counseled Kerouac to “forget this writing stuff . . . it’ll never pay” (McNally 15) Now he saw that his boy had the makings of a football star. Johnson deadpans: “Now there was an ambition that Leo, as well as most of Lowell, could appreciate” (52). Little did Leo Kerouac know that this football stuff he so encouraged would have a direct influence on the writing stuff he so discouraged.

Leo's disapproval of Kerouac's desire to write bothered Kerouac so much that he went to talk to Father Armond Morissette, the rector of his boyhood church, in search of fatherly approval of his writing ambition. Rank observes, "The more production is an essential means to life . . . the more will this subjective artist-type need individuals to justify his production" (49). Kerouac's meeting with Father Morissette hints that Kerouac was already such a "subjective artist-type" seeking "individuals to justify his production." This meeting also stands as an early and interesting example of Kerouac's power to move others. Johnson states that "Father 'Spike' Morissette would later recall that something had made him take Jack very seriously and speak to him of the great spiritual influence writers could have on their readers" (*The Voice is All* 55). Indeed, Morissette took Kerouac seriously enough to tell him, "let me warn you, you're in for a lot of disappointments." To which Kerouac replied, "I don't mind" (Miles 25). All Kerouac seems to have wanted was somebody to take his writing aspirations seriously.

This meeting remains interesting mainly because of the impact it made on Father Morissette, not for the impact it made on Kerouac. Johnson writes, "There is a feeling of prophecy about this turning-point story that has made it an integral part of the Kerouac legend. But there is not one allusion to it in Jack's writings, or to Father Morissette, who later spoke of Jack as someone who had profoundly influenced his own spiritual life" (56). Not yet in high school, Kerouac exhibited that he had the power to exert the kind of spiritual influence that Father Morissette, (who, just over thirty years later, would preside over Kerouac's funeral, and give his eulogy), told him writers could exert. I find the context of this meeting particularly important, as it was a one on one conversation, and thus Kerouac spoke to Father Morissette in the same way that he would speak to the reader



of one of his novels. Novels are a one on one engagement between reader and writer, and Kerouac would later develop a writing style that would take advantage of one his greatest natural strengths: his voice. McNally notes that Kerouac always told his friends that he was going to be a writer, “and from the beginning he practiced with his mouth” (*Desolate Angel* 23). The meeting with Father Morissette helps demonstrate that Kerouac had already formed an artistic psychology that sought out justification from other individuals, just as it foreshadows how Kerouac would later use his voice to influence other people to live more authentic lives.

Kerouac left the meeting with Morissette more certain than ever that he needed a scholarship to get to college, and that college would be an integral part of his becoming a writer. When Kerouac told Father Morissette that he wanted to go to college, Father Morrisette responded, “You’re from a poor family; you’ll have to try for a scholarship” (Nicosia 46). Kerouac’s desire to get a football scholarship was not so uncommon, but his desire to use that scholarship to get the higher education that he believed was necessary in order for him to become a writer was uncommon indeed. It is also uncommon to have the talent to fulfill such a desire. Many boys grow up playing football; a select few of them get college scholarships. The game of football became an inextricable part of Kerouac’s identity. Johnson notes that, after the meeting with Morissette, Kerouac had “been convinced he couldn’t become a writer without a higher education,” and that “suddenly his whole future seemed to depend upon how well he could train himself to play football” (*The Voice is All* 56). Kerouac’s desire to learn how to play football even had an artistic element to it. Rank states, “The self-labeling and self-training of an artist is the indispensable basis of all creative work” (37). At this major turning point in his life,

Kerouac simultaneously labeled himself a football player and an artist, and began vigorously to train himself to be both. As football became of central importance to his life, he began writing about it. It was a pattern he would duplicate all his life.

One of Kerouac's earliest surviving works is a novella about a wandering football player named Bill Clancy. A look at this work reveals his early interest in topics that he would grow to write about in the elevated prose that made him famous. It also reveals how far away he was from being able to write that kind of elevated prose. Kerouac started out by making the same mistakes that most writers make when they start out. He made these mistakes, and learned to correct them, by himself. It was all part of his self-training. Error, of course, is an unavoidable part of self-training, as Rank observes that "every error" must "mean something," and that "even an error contains a possibility of thought, and every possibility of thought contains a possibility of being" (96). The phrase "possibility of being" has a decidedly Heideggerian ring to it, as Heidegger writes, "Dasein *is* always its possibility. It does not 'have' that possibility only as a mere attribute of something objectively present. And because Dasein is always essentially its possibility it *can* 'choose' itself in its being" (*Being and Time* 42). A study of Kerouac's early football novella reveals not only some of the necessary errors of Kerouac's self-training, but also a fascinating, explicit depiction of him exploring his possibilities and choosing from amongst them. One can see in this early football novella something of a blueprint for the person and artist he would become.

At the beginning of this football novella, (an entirely fictional narrative, told in the third-person), Old Chet Hingham "could hear the tune of 'My Wild Irish Rose' come drifting over the rails" (*Atop an Underwood* 9). It is Bill Clancy whistling this tune, and

this is Old Chet's (and the reader's) introduction to the hero of the story. Kerouac's hero is a stranger coming to a new town, whistling a tune. There is nothing original about the stranger-coming-to-town introduction from a storytelling perspective; the important thing to note is that Kerouac's hero whistles a tune. For the rest of his career, Kerouac would reference music in his stories. Cunnell writes that *On the Road* was "the first book I'd read or heard of with a built-in soundtrack" ("Fast This Time" 1). Kerouac practiced putting a soundtrack to his writing from the very beginning.

In terms of the development of Kerouac's authentic voice, Clancy's story is even more interesting than the tune he whistles. Clancy tells Old Chet that he had played baseball at college, but that he prefers a life on the road: "I stuck it out for a whole year, and then I hit the road. I travel by hitchhiking and hopping freights" (*Atop an Underwood* 11). This passage is fascinating for two reasons: first, it almost exactly predicts Kerouac's own experiences as a college student-athlete. Second, Kerouac's two most famous books, *On the Road* and *Dharma Bums*, feature him "hitchhiking" in one (*On the Road*) and "hopping freights" in the other (*Dharma Bums*). This provides some indication that Kerouac already had a good idea of what he wanted to write about, and how he wanted to live, from the moment he started writing. The major struggle of his apprenticeship, then, would not be the struggle to figure out what he wanted to write about, but rather how he wanted to write about it. At the risk of oversimplifying things and stating the obvious, Kerouac first had to train himself to write better. One who admires Kerouac's mature writing can gain a deeper admiration for it by studying his early writing. Kerouac's ceaseless determination in his quest to become a great writer would serve as an inspiration almost in spite of the results of his efforts; but to see his efforts pay off, to see

him discover a way to write books filled with dazzling prose, alternately poetic and philosophical, is almost enough to make one believe in miracles.

The problems present in the football novella would haunt much of Kerouac's early prose: amateurish overuse of adverbs, overwrought passages featuring questionable word choices, and clunky dialogue. In his early writing, Kerouac has a particularly difficult time with dialogue, often making desperate grabs for variations of the word "said," and just as often attaching an unnecessary adverb to tell the reader exactly how the speaker says what he says. In a short passage from the football novella, Old Chet poses a question to Bill Clancy: "'Well, where is your home?' queried Old Chet suspiciously" (*Atop an Underwood* 10). This sentence seems harmless enough upon first glance, but in it one can see foreboding signs of much poorly written dialogue to come. The word "queried" seems forced and the word "suspiciously" seems unnecessary. It is difficult for a beginning writer to learn how to write good dialogue; the tendency is always to overdo it, to take every precaution against the possibility of the reader misunderstanding. This leads to overwritten dialogue. Such overwritten dialogue would be the rule for Kerouac for many years, often to the point where it becomes distracting. Kerouac was a natural maximalist with an inclination to include everything he could, and it was no easy task for him to tone down dialogue passages so that they began to sound like real people talking. In short, his writing looked like writing. When writing looks like writing it is almost always bad writing, just as when acting looks like acting it is almost always bad acting.

Kerouac shows more potential in the football scenes. Johnson even claims that he "was able to describe the blow-by-blow action on the football field like a professional"

(*The Voice is All* 57). Though that might sound like too extravagant a claim, the following passage reads like vivid sports journalism: “When State’s brilliant blue and white colors came out on the field, worn by two dozen husky football players, the roar went up from the stands. The cavernous maw which had enveloped the players in practice now seemed to be turbulent with life” (*Atop an Underwood* 12). Here one sees that Kerouac wanted to create artistic renderings of reality from the very beginning. He shows a willingness to take chances to achieve the lofty results he desired. At this point, his desires outstretched his abilities. Later, in *The Town and The City*, he would write some of the best football scenes ever to appear in American literature. There he would use his memory to describe his own experiences from a third-person point of view, as he does in this passage describing the touchdown reception that probably sealed his college scholarship:

And now suddenly the crowd rose to its feet with one roaring cry of surprise, explosive and vast, as a Galloway player swept wide around the end, leaped into the air, twisted, and shot the ball several yards over dark helmeted heads, as another Galloway player paused, twisted, reached out for the ball, barely grasped it in his fingers, turned and went plummeting down the field toward the sidelines. The roaring of the crowd surged and grew thunderous, the Martin mother jumped up on her seat to see, and she saw a figure racing down the sidelines, shaking off tacklers with a squirming motion, plunging through others with a striding determination, tripping, stumbling, staggering on half fallen and half running, straightening out once more, plodding, faking, yet suddenly approaching the goal line in a drunken weary run, staggered aside by another lunging figure,

momentarily stopping, then carrying on again, striding to the line falling, with a dark figure smashing into it, now wavering on bent knees, now finally diving over and rolling in the end zone triumphantly.

It was a touchdown at last. (*The Town and the City* 80)

In this passage, Kerouac had the advantage of having had the experience of scoring the touchdown. This allowed him to use his legendary memory. In the early novella, he was drawing only from his imagination. Kerouac's great memory, and his desire to use it, made experience a requirement for his art.

In another passage of the early football novella, Kerouac attempts to do something that would later become one of his greatest strengths. Before a big football game, Kerouac writes, "Bill Clancy, who was to start at right guard, was thoroughly awed by the vastness of the big football scene . . . . The stands continued to fill up, until Bill thought they would burst with corpulence" (*Atop an Underwood* 12). Kerouac would eventually learn how to express the "vastness" of various "scenes" with inimitable poeticism that possesses the rare capability of commingling melancholy and joy, and making the interdependence of these two seemingly contradictory emotions understandable. One can look at this early passage and see that such poetic expression did not come to him without practice, but that he began, like so many other writers, by using on-the-nose writing replete with awkward word choices (even poetically, I cannot imagine how football stands can fill up until they "burst with corpulence").

Kerouac's "spontaneous prose" technique had an unmistakable athletic component. When he used that technique to write a book, it was a workout. His t-shirts would get so sweaty that he could literally wring them dry. He sometimes lost 15 or 20

pounds in a matter of days. Most significantly, his ultimate refusal to revise anything he had written, which was really the extension of his “spontaneous prose” technique to its logical and daring conclusion, introduced a striking parallel between writing a book and competing in a football game. Revision is often considered a writer’s greatest ally. On the contrary, a football player cannot depend on revision. At the end of a football game, a quarterback cannot go back and correct the mistakes he made throughout the course of the game in the hopes achieving a better result. A writer, on the other hand, can go over his work again and again until he gets it just the way he likes it. Kerouac’s refusal of this advantage may seem foolhardy and lazy, but football had influenced him to believe that revision makes things less beautiful, not more beautiful. William S. Burroughs acknowledges that Kerouac believed in his method and made it work for him, even if it might not work for everybody:

Kerouac's method of writing worked for him. That doesn't mean it would work for anyone else. It doesn't work for me at all. I don't write that way. I edit. He always said first version is best. I said, “It may be for you, but it's not for me.” I take three versions at least before I get it into any kind of shape. It is very much, of course, in the tradition of Wolfe. The method of composition was very similar. It's the flow and writing at great speed. (*Jack's Book* 190).

Kerouac’s reliance on “great speed” and his belief that the “first version is best” comes as a direct result of football’s impact on his aesthetic sensibility. Football taught him to believe in the sacredness of the first draft, that when the clock strikes zero the game is over; and, perhaps most importantly, that you do not have to be perfect to win the game.

Kerouac wrote about other sports than football. His early writing about sports provides interesting insight into his ongoing search for his name. One of the earliest things he did was called, "Jack Lewis's Baseball Chatter." Jack Lewis is an obvious Americanization of his given name, Jean-Louis. It is interesting to follow Kerouac's name changes throughout his apprenticeship. He changed his name constantly, ever on the lookout for the name that signified, once and for all, who he was. Most writers do not have to deal with this. They are given a name when they are born, and that is that. Kerouac's search for his own name parallels his search for his artistic identity. Jack Lewis, the name he used at this stop, sounds like a great name for a sportswriter. In truth, it sounds like a great name for anybody. One cannot deny that some names sound better than others. Kerouac's search for the right name for himself had the added benefit of giving him practice at choosing names for the characters of his books.

Kerouac also used his early sports writing to explore themes he would later explore in more profound ways in his novels. In one issue of "Jack Lewis, Baseball Chatter," Coach Bob Chase expresses one such theme when discussing the future of his team: "Well, don't always be too sure about anything; anything may happen to anything, and that's pure, common sense" (*Atop an Underwood* 17). This recognition of the openness of the future always remained an important part of Kerouac's philosophy. He would later expound upon it in more advanced ways, most famously in the powerful closing paragraph of *On the Road*, where he writes, "nobody, nobody knows what's going to happen to anybody besides the forlorn rags of growing old" (307). By then Kerouac could express this philosophy in such a way that an attuned reader could feel its meaning, and it helped many people understand this truth for the first time. In this early



passage from “Baseball Chatter,” Kerouac has his coach say that it is “pure, common sense” that “anything may happen to anything.” He was wrong. There is nothing common about that sense. In actuality, what is called “common sense,” seeks to refute that kind of idea. Heidegger explains, “The self-certainty and decisiveness of the they increasingly propagate the sense that there is no need of authentic, attuned understanding” (*Being and Time* 171). What is commonly referred to as “common sense,” is often only another way to discourage an individual from attaining “authentic, attuned understanding.” Kerouac’s version of “common sense,” on the other hand, actually helps readers achieve more authentic, attuned understanding.

Kerouac’s most prolific output as “Jack Lewis” came as the writer and publisher of *The Turf*, a racing paper he wrote and published. Johnson is the only Kerouac biographer who recognizes the significant accomplishment of these early publications. She writes, “The issues of *The Turf*, precursors of the fiction Jack would later write in which he brilliantly depicted physical action, from football games to Neal Cassady’s driving to the moves of a saxophone player, were works of childhood genius” (*The Voice is All* 51). Kerouac’s dad would take him to the track sometimes. He took losses that he could not afford, and the family would often have to move as a result. Kerouac responded to these changes in fortune with tremendous resiliency. He immediately wrote about these experiences at the track in *The Turf*. Years later, in *The Town and the City*, Kerouac would write a tremendous scene inspired by all the times his father took him to the track. In that scene, as I will show in chapter three, Kerouac creates a beautiful experience where, perhaps, no beautiful experience had been, while at the same highlighting what I

will refer to as an “epiphanous moment” in the relationship between himself and his father.

As Kerouac neared the end of his days at Bartlett Junior High, another experience would change his family’s fortunes and test his resiliency again. Miles explains, “Then, in 1936, came the great flood” (*Kerouac: King of the Beats* 22). Bartlett canceled classes, and Kerouac went to look at the spectacle with his friend, Billy Chandler. Johnson writes that Kerouac observed the flood “as if he had the curious sense of immunity reporters feel when they’re covering a story,” and that it was only later that he and Billy realized “that what they were witnessing was a huge disaster directly affecting people they knew” (*The Voice is All* 55). Kerouac would later recall this flood, which happened just after his fourteenth birthday, in *Dr. Sax*. The distance with which he seemed to observe events did not signify inattention to them. Miles notes that “his long description of the river in flood in *Doctor Sax*, clearly based on personal experience, is masterful” (22). Kerouac excelled at making art based on personal experience, and the flood gave him a perfect opportunity to do this.

The flood’s simultaneous impact on Kerouac’s family’s fortunes and his own inner development led him to a philosophical breakthrough. Philosophical reflection on the relationship between the inner and outer universes became a recurring, often overlooked motif in Kerouac’s writing; and it provides another example of Kerouac’s attunement with one of the most basic elements of the struggle for authenticity in modern times. Guignon observes that “it could be argued that in the modern period the master dichotomy governing all others is the opposition between *inner* and *outer*” (*On Being Authentic* 81). The flood gave Kerouac his first real understanding of this opposition. As

things in the outer world got really bad, with the flood damaging the town and his family, things in his inner world somehow got better. He shed his guilty skin and was able to walk with lighter feet toward the future. It did not make sense. Perhaps the realization that it did not make sense, that the inner and outer worlds do not always coincide perfectly, made him feel more at home within himself, more comfortable with the conflicts that went on inside him. Guignon explains the importance of this inward turn to being authentic: “To be authentic, you must be in touch with what lies within, that is, the inner self, the self no one sees but you” (82). McNally’s interpretation helps make it clear that the flood was the thing that allowed Kerouac to make the first step toward being himself and nobody else. He was learning, and he would go on to document this learning process in his writing. His artistic objectifications of the “inner self” offer his readers a new way of understanding the individual struggle for authenticity, as well as a possible way to deal with this struggle and live a more authentic life. This passage from *On the Road* is a good example of Kerouac objectifying his “inner self”:

Down at 23<sup>rd</sup> and Welton a softball game was going on under floodlights which also illuminate the gas tank. A great eager crowd roared at every play. The strange young heroes of all kinds, white, colored, Mexican, pure Indian, were on the field, performing with heart-breaking seriousness. Just sandlot kids in uniform. Never in my life as an athlete had I ever permitted myself to perform like this in front of families and girl friends and kids of the neighborhood, at night, under lights; always it had been college, big-time, soberfaced; no boyish, human joy like this. Now it was too late. (180)

In the first half of this passage, Kerouac describes a spectacle that is as familiar in America today as it was when he described it: a local softball game. He describes it just enough and no more. The reader can see that softball game by remembering all the softball games that he has seen in his own life; and almost every single American adult has attended at least one softball game. In the second half of the passage, Kerouac objectifies his inner self with the same “heart-breaking seriousness” with which he had never permitted himself to perform as an athlete. A softball game will not inspire everybody to have the same thoughts or feel the same emotions as Kerouac does in this passage; but this passage can teach anybody to better understand the thoughts and emotions that a softball game does inspire them to have. To use Guignon’s phrasing, it can teach people how to be authentic by modeling how to get in touch with what lies within.

The flood did not damage Kerouac’s house, but his father’s business was not so lucky. Nicosia reports, “Leo’s shop . . . was a few feet below street level and got touched by the tip end of the flood. He did not suffer very much damage, but with his precarious finances it was enough to put him out of business” (*Memory Babe* 37). By all accounts, Kerouac’s father was never quite the same after this. He carried on, he worked for other print shops, he did other odd jobs, but he never again managed to achieve anything approaching the happiness he had or pride he took from running his own business. According to Miles, Kerouac’s father “took to drinking heavily. He was a bad drunk and became maudlin and weepy, and would often have to be carried home by his friends” (23). While Nicosia asserts that “his father’s cynicism was bound to drive young Jack still deeper into himself” (37), it is McNally’s interpretation of Kerouac’s response to the

flood that makes more sense when one considers Kerouac's burgeoning artistic temperament. McNally argues that the flood had a purifying effect on Kerouac: "As the sun came out and the waters eased into summer normality, Jacky's crisis passed too, for reasons as imponderable—and natural—as why a flood stops" (*Desolate Angel* 20). The flood gave Kerouac one of his first chances to do an intense examination of the relationship between his inner and outer worlds. He would master objectifying such examinations when he started using first-person, autobiographical narration in his novels. The flood culminated with his graduation from junior high and his entrance into high school, and its coming and going did indeed coincide with a coming and going of a part of Kerouac. Kerouac could now look ahead, and "ahead lay football and romance and adulthood" (McNally 20). Ahead lay high school.

In high school, Kerouac discovered one writer who gave him a greater vocabulary with which to deal with the inner and outer dichotomy. McNally claims that "Miss Mansfield had no worthy successor" (*Desolate Angel* 22) at Lowell High School, but Nicosia argues that "Jack considered his English teacher, Joe Pyne, the best teacher he ever had" (*Memory Babe* 51). In fairness to McNally, no biographer other than Nicosia makes mention of Joe Pyne; but, in *Vanity of Duloz*, Kerouac remembers Pyne (as Joe Maple) fondly, specifically for introducing him to Emily Dickinson: "Old Joe Maple of Lowell High School had done me well teaching me to appreciate not only Walt Whitman but Emily Dickinson" (34). Kerouac would later give Dickinson's most famous punctuation mark, the dash, an elevated place in his theory and practice of punctuation. He provides his theory of the dash in his essay "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose": "No periods separating sentence-structures already arbitrarily riddled by false colons and

timid usually needless commas—but the vigorous space dash separating rhetorical breathing (as jazz musician drawing breath between outblown phrases) ‘measure pauses which are the essentials of our speech’—‘divisions of the *sounds* we hear’—‘time and how to note it down’” (*You’re a Genius All the Time* 40). McNally claims that “only the inspiration of Emily Dickinson justified his time” at Lowell high (22), but one cannot downplay the importance of the dash in the development in Kerouac’s authentic voice; and there is some evidence that Dickinson’s subject matter also had an influence on him.

In “The Brain—is wider than the Sky--,” Dickinson writes “The Brain—is wider than the Sky-- / For—put them side by side-- / The one the other will contain / With ease—and You—beside.” In *Desolation Angels*, one can see Kerouac echoing both the style and subject matter of Dickinson’s stanza in this spontaneous reflection about “the rivers of America.”

The rivers of America and all the trees on all those shores and all the leaves on all those trees and all the green worlds in all those leaves and all the chlorofic molecules in all those green worlds and all the atoms in all those molecules, and all the infinite universes within all those atoms, and all our hearts and all our tissue and all our thoughts and all our brain cells and all the molecules and atoms in every cell, and all the infinite universes in every thought—bubbles and balloons—. (98)

This passage indicates that Kerouac may have learned more than a unique way to employ the dash from Dickinson; he may also have learned that “the brain is wider than the sky . . . and deeper than the sea.” Dickinson may have been the first writer to show him how to commingle poetry and philosophical reflection.

In spite of his obvious football talent, Kerouac's coaches often hesitated to play him in the games. When they did put him in, he would peel off long touchdown runs, make dazzling punt returns, lead the team to comeback victories, and then get benched for the next game. It did not make sense. By all accounts, Kerouac did not complain or pout about his sparse playing time. (He left that to his father.) He just waited for his next opportunity and let his play speak for itself. Then, on Thanksgiving Day 1938, he experienced the crowning moment of his high school football career. What happened that day changed his life.

Lowell High School played Lawrence High School in what had become a rivalry game. Nicosia informs that "fourteen thousand shivering spectators" showed up to watch the game. The first half ended in a scoreless tie. Kerouac remembers, "Second half they figure they might need me and put me in" (*Vanity of Duluo* 22). Kerouac went on to score the only touchdown, as he would later describe it in *The Town and the City*, in an 8-0 Lowell victory. In his limited playing time before that game, he had already drawn the attention of Lou Little and Frank Leahy, head football coaches of Columbia and Boston College, respectively. Both of them watched Kerouac's second half heroics from the stands that day. Johnson concludes that this game "definitively ended his anxiety about whether or not he would be able to go to college" (*The Voice is All* 58). He had only to choose whether he would attend Boston College or Columbia.

Kerouac's mother wanted him to go to Columbia; she had dreams of following him to New York. Leahy had connections with Kerouac's father's employer, and offered to get him a promotion if he could get Jack to commit to Boston College. This made Kerouac's decision a little more difficult than it otherwise would have been, but there

was no way that he was turning down an opportunity to move to New York. He had dreamed about it since he was a kid reading *The Shadow* magazine. On top of that, Father Morisette had told him that, if he wanted to become a writer, “the best place to go was New York” (Nicosia 46). Between Father Morisette’s advice and the boyhood dreams of the big city, the lure of New York outweighed everything else, and Kerouac accepted a football scholarship from Columbia University.

When Kerouac left for New York City, the first girl he ever fell in love would not be by his side. Her name was Mary Carney. He met her at a New Year’s Eve dance. He would go on to render their meeting and their falling in love in the novel *Maggie Cassidy*. By the time he wrote it, Kerouac had developed his voice to the point where he could leave a distinct imprint on anything he wrote, as he does in this passage about the night he met her:

Never dreaming, was I, poor Jack Duluo, that the soul is dead. That from Heaven grace descends, the ministers thereof . . . No Doctor Pisspot Poorpail to tell me; no example inside my first and only skin. That love is the heritage, and cousin to death. That the only love can only be the first love, the only death the last, the only life within, and the only word . . . choked forever. It was at the dance. The Rex Ballroom; with coat attendants in a drafty hall, a window, coatroom racks, fresh snow spilled on the boards; the rosy girls and handsome boys running in, the boys clacking heels, the girls in high heels, short dresses of the Thirties showing sexy legs. (26)

Kerouac wrote *Maggie Cassidy* after he wrote *On the Road*, and by this time he had mastered balancing the expression of his inner self with the expression of the outer



world. This time, as opposed to the softball scene in *On the Road*, he expresses his inner self first, the outer world second. The artful transitioning between the expression of his inner self and the outer world was not something that he could have done when he met Mary Carney, when he was just another high school kid falling in love for the first time.

Nobody ever forgets the first person they fell in love with, and Kerouac would never forget Mary Carney. Based on her interview in *Jack's Book*, one can see why Kerouac would have fallen in love with her. She says, "There was something deep between Jack and me, something nobody else understood or knew about . . . . Jack was so sweet. He was a sweet, good kid, and the people in Lowell didn't understand him. They never did. Nobody ever reads here" (15). This provides some insight into what it was like for Kerouac to grow up in Lowell, but it also provides some insight into how the first girl that he ever loved felt about him. Everything she says about him is positive. She is also quick to defend her misunderstood lover. Miles describes Mary Carney as "a resolutely small-town girl with no interest in travel or in any of the attractions of the big city. Her only desire in life was to settle down in Lowell and have a family" (*Kerouac: King of the Beats* 23). These traits might have served to make her more attractive to Kerouac, and maybe, as is not uncommon, she became more desirable in equal proportion to his realization that it could never work out between them; but one should not discount the idea that Kerouac fell in love with her because she appealed to the artist in him. Her own concluding words about their relationship are telling: "Nobody would understand anyway, so I'm not going to talk any more. I made up my mind a long time ago I wouldn't, so I'm going to stick to it. Nobody listens anyway" (*Jack's Book* 15). This conclusion sounds strikingly similar to Kerouac's own conclusions in his later novels

about the inadequacy of words and the near pointlessness of trying to communicate with them. For example, in his conclusion to *Big Sur*, he writes, “On soft Spring nights I’ll stand in the yard under the stars—Something good will come out of all things yet--And it will be golden and eternal just like that--There’s no need to say another word” (216).

William S. Burroughs would later have much to teach Kerouac about the disconnection between words and the things they represent; but before there was Burroughs, there was Mary Carney.

Alas, Kerouac would leave her behind. He had achieved his goal. He was going to New York City. As McNally explains, he would not go right to Columbia: “Columbia had decided to hide Jack in Horace Mann Prep School for a year to give him a chance to gain weight and improve his scholarship from L.H.S. to Ivy League standards” (*Desolate Angel* 31). Between September of 1939, when Kerouac began attending Horace Mann Prep School, and September of 1940, when he began attending Columbia, Kerouac experienced an explosion of individual and artistic development. He became the star of the Horace Mann football team, leading them to “the unofficial New York City prep-school championship” (McNally 34), and he began writing articles about sports and jazz for the school magazine. That he wrote about these two things is very telling, for Kerouac was about to make a crucial transition in his artistic development. Football had already made an indelible imprint on his life and on his artistic development, but, at Horace Mann, jazz was about to supersede football as his greatest artistic influence.

Seymore Wyse introduced him to modern jazz. As Miles notes, “Jazz became a lifelong love and was to exert a considerable influence upon his writing. He was introduced to it at a crucial period in its history: the point of transition between the big

bands, with their tight arrangements and powerful rhythm sections, and the small experimental groups where the emphasis was on improvisation” (*Kerouac: King of the Beats* 30). The jazz musicians he heard in the winter of 1939-40 taught him that it was possible to do something new with an old form. In his essays about jazz, one can see Kerouac making clear cut aesthetic distinctions, laying down the aesthetic philosophy that would later inform the way he built his own prose monuments: “Real jazz . . . is music which has not been prearranged—free-for-all ad lib. It is the outburst of passionate musicians, who pour all their energy into their instruments in the quest for soulful expression and super-improvisation” (*Atop an Underwood* 3). Kerouac would come to believe passionately that spontaneous improvisation was the best way to make art. He would also always prefer art that aimed to achieve its effect through passionate emotional outbursts over prearranged intellectual design. Blinded by enthusiasm, Kerouac does not quite accurately describe bebop, which is not a “free-for-all ad lib.” The real importance of bebop jazz musicians was that they were doing something new with an old form. Kerouac would one day do the same thing with the novel.

Kerouac’s early study in jazz reveals more than just his emphasis on the importance of spontaneity, improvisation, feeling and form. Though he clearly believed these were essential qualities of authentic art, he also discovered a quality he deemed equally essential. In “Count Basie’s Band Best in Land; Group Famous for ‘Solid’ Swing,” Kerouac expresses his admiration for Count Basie’s band; and in doing so he defines the quality that makes Basie’s band better than other jazz bands: “Unlike the vacuous phraseology of pseudo-swing bands, Basie’s stuff means something” (*Atop an Underwood* 21). At an early age, Kerouac understood that art without meaning amounted

to nothing more than “vacuous phraseology.” His emphasis on spontaneity and improvisation are, as often as not, held against him, used as reasons to disparage his writing. It is easy enough to disparage such an unconventional approach to composition, to hold it inferior to the more conventional method of meticulous revision. Even if the unconventional approach produces great results, one can still criticize it, arguing that the great results would have been still greater if the conventional technique had been used to achieve them. The pointlessness of this line of thinking speaks for itself. Why argue with great results? It is better to admire them or to learn from them. Kerouac admired Count Basie’s band, and he learned from them too. Their new method gave their music its meaning. If he wanted his writing to mean something, he would have to find a new method too.

It is also important to note Kerouac’s vagueness in regard to what art should mean. He knew that it must mean something, and one can intuit that he did not feel that he needed to know more than that. In a later passage of the “Basie” article, Kerouac writes, “One could pick up a dictionary and cast all the superlatives in existence upon the Basie group, but it still wouldn’t suffice. Words cannot explain the meaning of Basie’s music, both to the listener, and to the good name of swing” (*Atop an Underwood* 21). It is clear that Kerouac is paying a high compliment, perhaps the highest he can think of, to Basie’s music when he says that words cannot explain its meaning.

McNally asserts that the thin line between jazz and the blues is another reason that jazz so appealed to Kerouac’s artistic sensibilities. He points out that Kerouac’s favorite jazz musician, the saxophonist Lester Young, “played the blues.” “The blues,” he observes, “were inspired not by an abstract ideal but by the sound of the human voice,

choked with tears or ripped by rage, but always the voice” (*Desolate Angel* 39). Kerouac would eventually learn how to use his own voice to affect powerful emotions in his readers. At this nascent stage of his development, Kerouac heard an artist who had mastered using his voice as a tool to move his listeners. He writes, “Lester uses a different riff on every chorus, and his enormous store of ideas enables him to take an unlimited number of solos. His phrasing on jump numbers is unequalled, while he is highly proficient when it comes to the blues” (*Atop an Underwood* 22). Kerouac recognized that Lester Young was playing the saxophone in a way that no other saxophonist had played it before. Others played the instrument, but they did not have his voice. According to McNally, “The sound, the beat, and the rhythm of the human voice and experience would obsess him always” (39). Lester Young gave him his first glimpse at the powerful artistic potential of the voice.

If Lester Young taught Kerouac the artistic potential of the voice, Charlie Parker taught him the artistic potential of breathless improvisation. Johnson writes, “from Charlie Parker’s dazzling saxophone cadenzas, his ear picked up a new kind of sentence, a surge of digression and variation spinning off the original subject and taken all the way to the end of breath—the kind of sentence he would be writing in eight years’ time” (*The Voice is All* 147). Eight years seems like a long time, but Kerouac was young, and he allowed the influences of Lester Young and Charlie Parker their time to marinate. Besides, he was learning other things too, things equally important to what he wanted to do as an artist. In fact, one could argue that all of the technical things that Kerouac learned from jazz were of less importance to his artistic development than what jazz taught him about artistically expressing the spirit of the times.

Kerouac's ability to move others to live more authentic lives comes from his recognition that individuality, so essential to authenticity, was slowly becoming extinct. Kerouac felt that there was a growing discrepancy between the way people lived and the way they really wanted to live, yet he also felt that American individualism would not die out entirely, that it just needed a voice to rekindle its flame. Kerouac's position as an artist struggling to discover his authentic voice, his own individual style, put him in an advantageous position to recognize the gap between inauthentic lives and authentic desires. Rank clarifies this in the following passage:

This struggle of world-views, which is represented microcosmically by the conflict between the artist and art, is undoubtedly powerfully forwarded by the strong artistic individualities and leads to the triumph of a new style. But the beginning of the movement is cultural and not individual, collective and not personal—only, through his inner conflict, the artist gains the courage, the vigour, and the foresight to grasp the impending change of attitude before others do so, to feel it more intensely, and to shape it formally. (*Art and Artist* 368)

Kerouac found hope for authenticity in art and life in the bebop jazz musicians who played fast, demanded listening, favored improvisation, and, in short, whose "strong artistic personalities" led to the "triumph of a new style." He must have also sensed he could have an even greater impact on people if he could achieve a similar triumph of style in literature, for, as Rank states, "The word . . . is also artistic material out of which intellectual man can create freely, and consequently the art of words is the culmination of artistic creation" (220). Kerouac did not admire jazz musicians solely for their innovative artistic techniques, but also for the spirit with which they made their art, and the

individualism for which that spirit stood. Johnson states, “It was in jazz rather than in literature that he found the purest expression of the American spirit. He could see the reflection of American individualism in the supremacy of the improvising bop soloist who could drive a standard tune out to the farthest reaches of his musical imagination in a progression of variations and then come home again to the original melody” (*The Voice is All* 213). The correlation between an “improvising bop soloist” and Kerouac’s writing style is a valid and helpful one. *On the Road*, the book for which Kerouac is most famous, and the book in which I believe he discovered his authentic voice, has the structure of an improvising bop soloist driving the tune out to the farthest reaches of his imagination before returning home again to the original melody. Perhaps the highway of *On the Road* is the perfect metaphor for jazz, the vehicle for translating music into words. Theado argues, “Jazz is the beating heart of *On the Road*” (*Understanding Jack Kerouac* 58). The hero of the book, Dean Moriarty, also represents, to Kerouac at least, the purest expression of the American spirit. Jazz had such a profound impact on Kerouac that it made its way into his artistic DNA, and he got his first taste of it during that year at Horace Mann Prep School.

In the summer of 1940, Kerouac was back in Lowell after his freshman year at Horace Mann. At this time his friendship with Sammy Sampas became more important to him than ever. Sampas, an aspiring poet and playwright himself, understood Kerouac’s desire to become a writer better than anybody else Kerouac knew. Miles writes, “Sebastian was involved with a literary round table: a group of idealistic young men mostly with literary pretensions, who called themselves The Young Prometheans and whose avowed aim was the betterment of mankind. The idea appealed greatly to Jack and

he was soon included as a member” (*Kerouac: King of the Beats* 32). Kerouac had not yet discovered a writer who inspired him the way Charlie Parker and Lester Young had. Under Sampas’s influence, that was about to change. Miles writes that Sammy was “better read than Jack and introduced him to two authors who would change his life: one was William Saroyan, whom Jack always loved and admired, and the other was Thomas Wolfe, who was to become the major literary influence upon Jack’s writing and thought, inspiring him to explore America, to go on the road” (*Kerouac: King of the Beats* 33). In Saroyan and Wolfe, Kerouac discovered two writers with whom he shared a complicated vision of America.

In Saroyan, Kerouac saw a writer who had succeeded in spite of facing some of the same disadvantages that he faced. McNally asserts that “the dark-eyed Armenian from Fresno was living proof that someone who wasn’t an ‘American’ could be a successful writer” (*Desolate Angel* 23). More than this, Kerouac sensed in Saroyan’s stories, “the suffering that it took to be an American” (McNally 23). The “suffering that it took to be an American” would become one of Kerouac’s abiding themes. Johnson makes the most important observation of Saroyan’s influence on Kerouac, stating, “His writing changed again as he fell under Saroyan’s spell. For the first time, he experimented with abandoning plot and began to explore the possibilities of an autobiographical, first-person voice” (*The Voice is All* 83). The abandonment of plot, the autobiographical, first-person voice, and “the suffering that it took to be an American” would become hallmarks of Kerouac’s style. This began with Saroyan, and one can find evidence of this in the following passages.



In *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze*, Saroyan writes, “I rolled a cigarette, handed the pack to one of my contemporaries who looked in need of nicotine, and inhaled the dry smoke, thinking of America, what was going on politically, economically, spiritually. My contemporary was a boy of sixteen. He looked Iowa; splendid potentially, a solid American, but down, greatly down in the mouth. Little sleep, no change of clothes for several days, a little fear, etc.” (28). Early in *On the Road*, Kerouac’s fictional representative, Sal Paradise, hitchhikes a ride with a couple of “farmers from Minnesota.” He names two of his fellow passengers as “Mississippi Gene” and “a sixteen-year-old tall blond kid” (23). Kerouac says, “Gene was taking care of him, of his moods and his fears. I wondered where the hell they would go and what they would do. They had no cigarettes. I squandered my pack on them. I loved them so. They were grateful and gracious. They never asked, I kept offering” (28). One can see here a first-person narrator sharing cigarettes with down and out American “contemporaries,” and both sixteen-year-old boys exhibit “fear”; but the similarities do not stop there. Saroyan continues to reflect on the “boy of sixteen,” who he simply refers to as, “Iowa”: “Iowa, I hope you got work in Portland; I hope you are earning money; I hope you have rented a clean room with a warm bed in it; I hope you are sleeping nights, eating regularly, walking along like a human being, being happy” (29). In *On the Road*, Kerouac’s narrator, Sal Paradise, expresses a strikingly similar sentiment to Mississippi Gene and, through him, to the sixteen-year-old boy as well. He says, “I hope you get to where you’re going, and be happy when you do” (30). The difference here is a temporal one. Saroyan and Kerouac both express a wish for the happiness of a down and out American,

but Saroyan expresses his wish reflectively, whereas Kerouac expresses his wish directly, in dialogue.

Saroyan had a more immediate impact on Kerouac as well. For the first time in his life, Kerouac began to think about doing what he really wanted to do instead of doing what everybody else wanted him to do. In an early poem, Kerouac writes, “At 18, I suddenly discovered the / delight of rebellion—and was / drunk with it 1 ½ years, not / knowing how to wield this made / thing, being more or less wielded / by it. Saroyan sparked it-- / indolent, arrogant Saroyan” (*Atop an Underwood* 118). Kerouac was eighteen in the fall of 1940, when he began his freshman year at Columbia. Charters states, “His time there was the turning point in his legendary drama” (*Kerouac: A Biography* 31). The coaches at Horace Mann had featured Kerouac in their offense, and he had shined in that role. The coaches at Columbia, like the coaches at Lowell High School, hesitated to put him in the game. Then, in the second game of the season, after returning the opening kickoff 90 yards, Kerouac broke his tibia during a punt return. The training staff and the coaches did not give him an immediate x-ray. They diagnosed it as a sprain and sent Kerouac out to practice on it, telling him to run it off. As Kerouac deadpans, “You just can’t run off a broken leg” (*Vanity of Duluo* 72). One can imagine how the mishandling of a situation like this would destroy the relationship between a coach and a player. Kerouac says he “saw right then” that coach Lou Little “for some reason I’ll never understand had some kind of bug against me” (72). This situation may have enhanced Kerouac’s rebelliousness; then again, it does not seem too rebellious to disobey somebody who makes you run on a broken leg without so much as getting an x-ray first to make sure it is not broken.

Kerouac's injury gave him leisure time, something that had been almost unheard of for him while he tried to keep up with the demanding schedule of a college student-athlete. During the time he would have been spending at football practice if he had been healthy, he sat eating steak and ice cream at "the Lion's Den," the university's cafeteria, reading Thomas Wolfe. The vastness of Wolfe appealed to his own maximalist artistic instincts. If, as he says, Saroyan had "sparked" his "delight of rebellion," Wolfe did nothing to put out the fire. A year later, in the fall of 1941, Kerouac quit the Columbia football team. In Kerouac's own recollection of this decision, he invokes the name of Thomas Wolfe:

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, dont be pushed around by them or anybody else or any of their goons . . .

The Ivy League is just an excuse to get football players for nothing and get them to be American cornballs enough to make America sick for a thousand years.

*(Vanity of Duluoaz 92)*

This quote can provide inspiration for anybody who faces a difficult decision. Kerouac chose to live his life as authentically as possible by placing more importance on his individual development than on society's wishes, as he makes clear when he says "don't be pushed around by them or anybody else or any of their goons." Guignon highlights the difficulty of making this decision to live authentically: "Because social pressures pull us toward inauthentic role-playing, becoming authentic takes serious effort; it calls for spiritual exercises comparable to those to which religious initiates were formerly subjected" (*On Being Authentic* 5). I find it particularly significant that Kerouac

remembers this moment in his life, the moment when he made the serious effort to quit the inauthentic role-playing society expected of him, as the moment he chose to go into “the Thomas Wolfe darkness.” Rank notes the crucial importance of finding an artistic ideal embodied by the work of a master artist to the development of an apprentice artist: “The spiritual relation of pupil-and-master . . . has remained a more important thing to the creative artist than the juridical father-and-son relation which psycho-analysis seeks to regard as fundamental, whereas it is spiritually of a secondary order” (54). Wolfe would remain Kerouac’s ideal writer for years, and Miles observes that “the Wolfean view of America was dear to Kerouac’s heart” (*Kerouac: King of the Beats* 111).

Kerouac’s decision to quit the football team would not sit well with anybody who knew him, even Sammy, but that did not matter to him anymore. The primary focus of his life was “being an American writer.” He could not let the worries of other people weigh him down or the expectations of other people make him unhappy; and, besides, he believed he could succeed. In his mind, he probably was not even taking that big of a chance, even if, in America, it is almost always a risky decision when a young person decides to pursue a career in the arts. When he could not find a single person who supported his decision, he came to this conclusion: “I realized either I was crazy or the world was crazy; and I picked on the world. And of course I was right” (*Vanity of Duluo* 88).

His parents were the first ones he had to deal with. McNally asserts, “It took tremendous will to leave Columbia and hurt his parents the way he did, to burn down his whole athletic career—in fact, to cut himself off from traditional achievement forever” (*Desolate Angel* 48). While it is true that it took tremendous will for Kerouac to leave

Columbia the way he did, he did not turn his back on traditional achievement forever. He wanted one form of traditional achievement, success as a writer, in the worst way. His parents, however, did not like the idea. They kicked him out of the house. According to Nicosia, Jack's father "told Jack to get out and earn his own living and stop burdening them" (*Memory Babe* 90). This turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Kerouac left for Hartford, Connecticut, where an old friend got him a job as a gas station attendant. He did not have to live in that tumultuous environment anymore. He could get away from all the things that were causing him stress. Sure, there would be other stresses, but those were stresses he had chosen. It is always easier to deal with chosen stresses than with unchosen ones. In Kerouac's own recollection of this move, he points out the most important thing of all: "it was the first time I had a room of my own" (95). Virginia Woolf has already explained the importance of an artist having a room of his own.

Kerouac did not waste any time getting started on a book. In that room in Hartford, Connecticut, during the fall of 1941, he wrote a collection of short stories called *Atop an Underwood*. This book has received very little critical attention. Kerouac's proclamations about it may have something to do with this. He concludes that it is "not worth reading nowadays, or repeating here, but a great little beginning effort" (*Vanity of Duluo* 96). Perhaps the first part of his conclusion, that it is "not worth reading" has chased off the audience that might be interested in discovering what makes it "a great little beginning effort." In *Memory Babe*, Nicosia's 700-page biography of Kerouac, *Atop an Underwood* only merits the attention of one sentence: "In a cockroachy room on Main Street in Hartford, using a rented Underwood typewriter, Jack wrote his first full-length book, a collection of short stories called *Atop an Underwood*" (90). In tracing the

trajectory of Kerouac's apprenticeship, one may be surprised at how close he comes at times to his mature voice in this, his first full-length book.

In the first story of the book, "Go Back," Kerouac explores the "question of being" that would remain central to his art. The story is a deceptively intricate and revealing reflection on time. He begins the story, "One night I sat on the curbstone of a street in the city and looked across the road at a little rose-covered cottage which was rickety, like the fence around it, and it looked old, not Colonial, but old. That's where I used to live, I said aloud to myself in a tone of yearning" (*Atop an Underwood* 24). As Kerouac looks at the house in which he used to live, his thoughts turn toward those who used to live there with him. He thinks first of his cat: "The old cat, I thought, a bundle of bones now, somewhere. The cat who used to sit right there on the porch, placidly enjoying his digestion" (25). This rumination contains the kind of *memento mori* that Kerouac would later use with potent artistic effect. It also contains an awkward, extraneous adverb that detracts from the quality of the passage. Extraneousness would become part of Kerouac's authentic voice. Rather than working to eliminate extraneousness from his writing, he worked to perfect extraneousness. In time, he would develop his spontaneous prose technique. He used that technique to eliminate the awkwardness of extraneous passages. He learned to include things that did not have to be included and somehow make them indispensable. At this early stage of his development, he remained a long way away from being able to do that.

Kerouac gets angry with himself for getting entangled in the rush of everyday things. He recognizes the inauthenticity of this way of being. In the following passage, he recognizes the foolishness of "hurrying": "On the way home, I think about the fool and

the other fools, and myself a fool. Hurrying away the past of tomorrow, like I had hurried away the past of today, in the past” (25). This intense reflection on temporality is nothing less than a reflection on the meaning of being, for, as Heidegger argues, “The meaning of being of that being we call Dasein will prove to be *temporality*” (17). In other words, our lives are made of time, and it is only through a more authentic understanding of time that we can live authentically. Guignon notes that “Heidegger formulates his conception of authenticity in terms of an initial recognition of the gravity of human finitude” (133). Thus, to Heidegger, a more authentic understanding of time can equate to an authentic understanding that we do not have an endless amount of time. Only an authentic understanding of this fact can free us to live our lives authentically. In *Big Sur*, Kerouac offers something of an explication of his frequent reminders of the “gravity of human finitude”: “The reason I yell death so much is because I’m really yelling life, because you cant have death without life” (172). Kerouac does not yell life in “Go Back,” he rather mumbles it, and though it contains similar ruminations to those that would populate his later novels, it completely lacks the exuberant energy of those later works.

After chastising himself for not paying close enough attention to time, Kerouac vows to “hold the present now because someday it will be very precious. Hug it, and hold it” (25). This would become something of an artistic credo for him, as he would base his art on experience and memory, or on his ability to “hold the present.” Just as important, Kerouac’s resolution to “hold the present” demonstrates an advanced understanding of time and how to live authentically in it. The machinations through which Kerouac goes in “Go Back” echo Heidegger’s explanation of what a “being” must do in order to “take over its thrownness and be in the moment.” Once again, Solomon helps to clarify the

meaning of Heidegger's terminology: "Heidegger dramatically announces that we are 'thrown' into the world, suggesting a dimension of involuntariness and fatalism" (*No Excuses* 59). To Heidegger, "Dasein" must "take over its thrownness" in order to become authentic. As evidenced by his decision to italicize this entire passage, Heidegger believed this to be a particularly important conclusion:

*Only a being that is essentially futural in its being so that it can let itself be thrown back upon its factual there, free for its death and shattering itself on it, that is, only a being that, as futural, is equiprimordially **having-been**, can hand down to itself its inherited possibility, take over its own thrownness and be **in the moment** for "its time." (Being and Time 366)*

Once again, with some unpacking, one can see that Kerouac's story explores some of the same things that Heidegger explores in this passage. Kerouac named his story "Go Back," which is almost synonymous with "having-been." In the story, Kerouac reflects about two old houses, his dead cat, and his dead brother. These reflections lead him to chastise himself for not paying attention to time, and he thereafter resolves to "hold the present." Finally, Kerouac concludes the story by saying, "And just yesterday I was sauntering home thinking about the future" (25). This story is actually more philosophical than artistic. It is the story of a being that is "essentially futural," and "equiprimordially having-been," struggling to "take over its thrownness" to learn how to "be in the moment." The philosophy of "Go Back" is too heavy-handed, and, as pure reflection, the story lacks an exhilarating story that can serve as a vehicle for the philosophy. When Kerouac incorporated these philosophical themes into his later work, as he does in *On the Road*, he would have the advantage of a vastly increased store of



experience from which to write his story; but even this reflection about the difference in experience between the nineteen-year-old Kerouac who wrote “Go Back” and the twenty-nine year old Kerouac who wrote *On the Road* makes one think about Kerouac’s resolution to “hold the present,” and its relationship to Heidegger’s idea that such a resolution is how a human being can “hand down to itself its inherited possibility.” In other words, the experiences that Kerouac writes about in *On the Road* might not have been possible had he not “handed down” those possibilities to himself with his earlier resolution to live authentically in the moment.

In “Nothing,” another early story in *Atop an Underwood*, Kerouac writes, “I know someday I will be nothing. (Think hard I say to myself. Think very hard and consider yourself nothing” (*Atop an Underwood* 26). Kerouac here employs first-person narration to begin telling a story with no plot. Saroyan influenced Kerouac to employ first-person narration, but it should be pointed out that Kerouac displays immediate adeptness at first-person narration. When he employed first-person narration, his voice, even at nineteen, was compelling. After *Atop an Underwood*, he would not finish another book in which he employed first-person narration until *On the Road*, almost ten years later. In “Nothing,” Kerouac continues, “I try to think hard and imagine myself nothing, but I am too much alive to think myself nothing so that despite the fact that I know its inevitability, I feel as if I’ll always go on, but I know better” (26). This is an important passage because it shows that Kerouac had internalized one of Saroyan’s teachings. In the preface to *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze*, Saroyan writes, “A writer can have, ultimately, one of two styles: he can write in a manner that implies that death is inevitable, or he can write in a manner that implies that death is *not* inevitable” (12).

Kerouac had clearly decided which style he would choose by the time he was twenty-years-old, and Saroyan's preface would have a lifelong impact on his art. Like Saroyan, Kerouac would not hesitate to stop a story at any point in order to embed philosophy into it.

Another story in *Atop an Underwood* contains evidence that Kerouac knew how he wanted to write long before he was able to write that way. In "A Play I Want to Write," his description of how he will write his play anticipates how he would one day compose *On the Road*. He writes, "This play of mine will have to be a spontaneous burst of passion which I will develop all of a sudden, then I shall rush to my typewriter and . . . begin writing my full-length three act play" (28). Kerouac instinctively valued spontaneous writing, fueled by passionate outbursts, from the very beginning of his career, when he was still writing in more conventional fashion. He knew how he wanted to write, and he made clear cut aesthetic distinctions along these lines. In this next passage, also from "A Play I want to Write," he explains what he wants to write about: "I will write this play about life as life is and I will wait till it hits me in the face before I write it. Then I will rush to my typewriter and write it. So hold on to your seats" (29). The important part of this passage is Kerouac's emphasis to write about "life as life is." Whether he wrote in first-person or third-person, he wanted to write about "life as life is" from the beginning of his career.

In "The Birth of a Socialist," Kerouac makes many of the same social criticisms that he would make in his later work. Many of these ideas, later associated with the Beat Generation, were there long before he met the literary luminaries that would comprise the rest of the Beat Generation. "The Birth of a Socialist" is about his day working in a

cookie factory. Kerouac saw no heroism in waking up and going to that kind of job every day, as he felt it crushes the employee mind, body, and spirit. He gives no thought to the need to make a living or support a family. He thinks only of individual freedom. This was the root of all his rebelliousness, and this story, one of the best in the collection, very overtly displays ideas that he incorporated into his later novels with more subtlety and effectiveness.

Like many of Kerouac's early stories, "The Birth of a Socialist" has undeniable political implications. Much of this early politicizing was the direct result of Sampas's influence. Kerouac's political concerns, particularly regarding socialism, sprang from practical motives, not abstract ones. Paul Marion notes that Kerouac "imagined social and economic systems that might accommodate his own interest in working as a writer, an artist" (*Atop an Underwood* 85). As he looked for ways to support himself while writing, he must have felt the same way as the starving writer in Saroyan's "The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze": "It made him very angry to think that there was no respect for men who wrote" (24). Kerouac had to find a way to support himself as a writer in America. That challenge is so daunting that most young, aspiring American writers give up writing and find something else to do.

Kerouac's title for the story, "The Birth of a Socialist," does not do justice to the artistic restraint he displays in its telling. His ideas, his solutions, his suggestions, always place responsibility on the individual to accept his freedom. Thus, he does not present the workmen as poor, helpless victims of an uncaring system, trapped doing a tedious, pointless job that gives them no satisfaction and pays them little money. No. He blames the workmen as much as he blames the bosses or the system. This passage exemplifies

my point: “Hundreds of unquestioning fools who get up at five in the morning and rush to a huge, vibrating asylum. In there, they toil in agony and they become old and calloused and unhappy with the era” (*Atop an Underwood* 91). Here, Kerouac sings a sad song depicting the trajectory of an average factory worker’s life. This was a life Kerouac wanted to avoid at all costs. Such a life was, of course, considered respectful and normal.

It is important to note that Kerouac does not suggest that society should change in order to help these poor, struggling individuals. His suggestions, so far as he makes any, are aimed toward the individuals themselves. In this telling passage, Kerouac states, “A man cannot impart the true feeling of things to others unless he himself has experienced what he is trying to tell of. I have experienced a day in a cookie factory, and in this story, I shall do my damndest to show to the readers what it is like to do such a day’s work, what a man thinks about in so doing, and what his conclusion should be if he has an ounce of brains” (85). This passage has immediate and far reaching implications in Kerouac’s work. In it, he makes his plea to an individual, asserting that the story he tells will “show . . . a man . . . what his conclusion should be if has an ounce of brains.” One can see why Kerouac canonized Neal Cassady in *On the Road*, who, when Kerouac catches up briefly with him in Denver on his way to visit his friend Henri Cru in Marin City, tells him, “We’re really all of us bottomly broke. I haven’t had time to work in weeks” (44). Cassady earns Kerouac’s admiration rather than his derision with his nonchalant proclamation that he is “broke” simply because he has not “had time to work.” The workers at the cookie factory probably would not feel the same way about Cassady’s free use of his time that Kerouac does, but Kerouac had begun searching for somebody who used his time freely, like Cassady, long before he met Cassady. He

wanted to study what Americans did in their free time in order to create an artistic representation of the essential American experience.

In the story, “Hartford After Work,” one can see Kerouac searching for a person who embodied his idea of the essential American experience. Kerouac begins the story by telling the reader about a man named “Bob” who gave him a ride home from work:

Bob drives me home in his car and plays some torrid jive on his radio; and the hotter the music gets, the wilder Bob gets, until after a while he is tearing along at the rate of sixty miles per hour, dodging people, swinging around corners with a rhythmic flourish of his arms, hurtling over little lumps on the street floors with a beautiful and hot knee action, whisking and whipping along to the hot music, beating his hands on the wheel with the rhythm, tearing around the city in his car with the music blaring, tooting rhythmically at all the nice looking chicks that walk on the sidewalks with slender stockinged legs, and finally coming to a screeching stop in the front of my cheap rooming house, yelling out rhythmically: “Seeya later!” And then he is off in a blur of jazz and speed. (*Atop an Underwood* 143)

In this passage, Bob exhibits many of the same characteristics and behaviors as Dean Moriarty, the hero of *On the Road*. Kerouac had already decided that the person who embodied the American experience must be a “blur of jazz and speed.” In the long sentence describing the ride home, Kerouac imparts the feelings of his experience to the reader while displaying his natural talent for first-person narration.

In “The Joy of Dulooz,” Kerouac switches to third-person narration, and the same problems that would haunt his writing throughout his apprenticeship return. In the story,

Bob Duluoz, a “drunken writer with a thousand mistresses and an apartment on midtown Madison Avenue,” goes to The Iridium Room with his girlfriend, Diana, and another couple, Kenneth Barton-Bascome and Vera. One cannot help but notice the sudden proliferation of adverbs: “Vera turned fullbody toward a mirror and fawned approvingly,” “Diana strode loosely,” “Sardonically, Duluoz tilted his head,” “Kenneth Barton-Bascome toddled along beside Vera . . . his white collar prominently correct,” and “Vera strode statuesquely with her high hair do. Kenneth toddled unobtrusively” (*Atop an Underwood* 185). All of these adverbs appear on one page of the story. Such overwriting distracts the reader from seeing the very things that the writer wishes to make him to see. This almost defines overwriting. Instead of seeing the thing, the reader only sees the adverbs. All Kerouac had to do to fix this problem was switch to first-person narration, something he would not commit to doing for a decade.

When Sammy came to see Kerouac in that Hartford apartment on Thanksgiving Day, 1941, it “pained him to see Jack in what he considered a fallen condition in a desolate furnished room” (Johnson 110). It was a far cry from Thanksgiving Day, 1938, when Kerouac had scored the touchdown that promised to send him to certain collegiate gridiron glory. Kerouac recalls Sammy’s visit with the characteristic tenderness that he always recalls his friendships: “Ah Sabby, you big old Sabby, I’m glad you come to see me on Thanksgiving Day” (*Vanity of Duluoz* 99). He did not want Sammy’s pity, however, and he was also certain that he had no need of it, telling him, “I’m going to show you that I know what I’m doing” (99). In order for him to show Sammy, and everybody else, that he knew what he was doing, he knew he had to sell his writing.

In a diary entry from December, 1941, Kerouac writes: “I must sell my stuff—it is the only thing that will justify my exhaustive plan for full-time study in 1942” (*Atop an Underwood* 104). The longer Kerouac went without selling his writing, the more intense his need to sell it became. Part of his full-time study included an emersion in the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky. McNally notes, “Over the next two years, Jack would read all of Dostoyevsky’s major works” (*Desolate Angel* 50). Dostoyevsky, like Saroyan, enhanced Kerouac’s understanding about how to objectify in art the relationship between suffering and human existence. This deepened the division between Kerouac and the society in which he lived. McNally explains, “Jack felt that Dostoyevsky was right, that suffering was the only cause of awareness. And because suffering is *not* intellectual, Dostoyevsky and all of the major experiences of his life told him that modern liberal progress—‘civilization’—was not the omega of human existence” (51). In Dostoyevsky, Kerouac found an artist striving to exist in a world not suited for artists. He also found a writer who did things in an unconventional way, a writer who placed as much importance on the inner world of his characters as on the external world they inhabited. Kerouac also found a writer with whom he shared important values. McNally explains, “Only the independent, creative free will meant anything to Dostoyevsky—or Jack—and the bloodthirsty ‘civilized’ society around both of them seemed absurd at best—possibly mad” (51). Kerouac’s study of Dostoevsky intensified his search for a person who represented the madness of American society.

Dostoyevsky had a major impact on how Kerouac viewed himself as a writer. He writes, “I must, I *must* be successful. I suddenly realized that the reason for this desire, partly, is because, as a Dostoevskyan writer, I am *expected* to be a failure in the world of

success and financial status” (*Windblown World* 90). One cannot tell from this excerpt alone what Kerouac means when he names himself a “Dostoevskyan writer,” but the nomination is helpful in tracing Kerouac’s development as an artist. Rank proposes, “The first stage in the growth of an artist is that which we have described as his ‘nomination’ and which marks the subordination of the individual to one of the prevailing art-ideologies, this usually showing itself in the choice of some recognized master as the ideal pattern” (*Art and Artist* 371). By calling himself a “Dostoevskyan writer,” Kerouac makes it clear that he counts Dostoevsky as a “recognized master” whose “ideal pattern” he would like to follow. What, then, is that ideal pattern? Kerouac makes that clearer in a later journal entry:

In 'creative writing' at the universities, we are told that a certain amount of restraint, tempered by modern enlightened education, and a close study of the science of writing--plot presentation, character development, and general thematic treatment--are needed in order to successfully probe and analyze and dissect the human foibles and social surfaces which have come to represent life on earth. Of lyric joy, of poetry, of Dostoyevskyan moral fury, of emotional grandeur, of sweep and architectural earnestness,--not a word in the universities. (*Windblown World* 142)

Kerouac’s words have a poetic quality that leave them open to multiple interpretations. One cannot say with absolute certainty what he means by “moral fury,” but the placement of the phrase in the context of the passage yields some helpful clues. The beginning of the passage points directly to the universities, which symbolize the rational mind, tradition, and the academic way of doing things. The universities



intellectualize artistic creation, something that, to Kerouac, is profoundly emotional. By naming Dostoyevsky as the counterpoint to that rationalized way of creating art, Kerouac reveals that Dostoyevsky, the man many consider to have produced the first existentialist writings, has actually helped awaken the romantic in Kerouac. Dostoyevsky appealed to the romantic and the rebel in Kerouac; he stood as a shining example of an artist who could create great art without doing any of the things that they taught creative writing students to do at the universities.

Kerouac's art would always have a romantic strain. This romanticism became a part of his authentic voice. As Charters observes, "His talent as a writer was not his inventiveness with new characters and plots, but rather his power to dramatize the spirit of his own life into romantic fantasy" (*Kerouac: A Biography* 63). In a society that placed an increasing emphasis on intellectual discoveries, that wanted to know more and dream less, Kerouac's romanticism became rebellious in its own right. Kerouac's rebellion had its artistic and philosophical precursors, as Guignon explains: "Romanticism, the undercurrent of reaction against Enlightenment rationality and mechanization, developed as a backlash against the fracturing and disruption brought about by the modern worldview" (*On Being Authentic* 51). One of Kerouac's goals from the very beginning of his apprenticeship was to find a way to unite the "fracturing" and "disruption" of the modern world view into an artistic whole. Part of Dostoyevsky's appeal must have been his ability to show Kerouac a way to unite the "fracturing" and "disruption" within his own personality the way that Wolfe showed him to unite the "fracturing" and "disruption" in the modern worldview. Guignon's reflections about the "the Romantic mind" offer a way to trace Kerouac's artistic development in three distinct phases:

Instead of trying to say anything about Romanticism, I will limit myself to noting three features of the Romantic mind that continue to be important to our contemporary culture of authenticity. The first is the attempt to recover a sense of oneness and wholeness that appears to have been lost with the rise of modernity. The second is the conviction that real ‘truth’ is discovered not by rational reflection and scientific method, but by a total immersion in one’s own deepest and most intense feelings. And the third is Romanticism’s discovery, at the limits of all experience, that the self is the highest and most all-encompassing of all that is found in reality. (51)

The three features that Guignon lists here mark three distinct stages in Kerouac’s artistic development, with each stage having an accompanying mentor. Wolfe showed him an artistic form by which he could regain the lost sense of oneness and wholeness caused by the rise of modernity. Dostoyevsky showed him an artistic form that allowed him to reject rationalism in favor of a total immersion in his deepest and most intense feelings. Later, Neal Cassady would show him how to live at the limits of all experience, and, through his letters, he would give Kerouac an idea of how to weave those experiences into a compelling narrative.

As Kerouac immersed himself in *Notes from the Underground*, he got a postcard from his father telling him they were moving back to Lowell, where his father had found a job, and that they wanted him to come with them. Johnson reports: “The sojourn in Hartford . . . and the techniques of solitude were over” (*The Voice is All* 111). His time in Hartford had not proved fruitless. His book of stories gave Kerouac immense satisfaction. He remembers, “Then, as now, I was proud that I had written something at least. A

writer's life is based on things like that" (*Vanity of Duluoz* 100). This statement provides some insight on the importance of production to the psychological well-being of the artist. Rank's words are instructive: "compared to the average professional man, the artist has, so to say, a hundred-per-cent vocational psychology" (*Art and Artist* 371).

Back in Lowell, Kerouac caught a break. He got a job as a sports reporter. He applied at the paper to be a delivery boy, but "the owner remembered him as the football hero who'd landed a Columbia scholarship" (Johnson 112). There are some advantages to being a big fish in a small pond. Kerouac could already type fast enough and write spontaneously enough to finish his work in half the time it took other people to finish it. He would spend the second half of the day writing a novel called *Vanity of Duluoz*.

In this early version of *Vanity of Duluoz*, Kerouac attempts to depict one day in Lowell in a similar way to how James Joyce depicted one day in Dublin in *Ulysses*. At this point Kerouac had already settled on using the last name Duluoz as the artistic representation of his own last name. He had not yet decided on the first name to go with it, sometimes it was "Michael," sometimes, "Jack," and sometimes "John," but Duluoz would be the last name. It is interesting that at this point in his development he was closer to deciding on the name he would use for his fictional self than he was to deciding the name he would put on the cover the book. He was nowhere near deciding whether he was Jack Kerouac or John Kerouac. His focus, clearly, was on art. Johnson states, "At nineteen, he was planning to write a Duluoz trilogy" (*The Voice is All* 112). A trilogy would not do his actual accomplishments justice. *The Duluoz Legend* would consist of more than a dozen "chapters" focusing on different time periods of his life.

Kerouac never finished this early version of *Vanity of Duluo*, but in the last novel he would ever finish, also called *Vanity of Duluo*, Kerouac fondly remembers his attempts to write the former novel, and in this fond remembrance he offers some insight about his own artistic development and about the development of writers in general: “It was the greatest fun I ever had ‘writing’ in my life because I had just discovered James Joyce and I was imitating *Ulysses* I thought (really imitating ‘Stephen Hero’ I later discovered, a real adolescent but sincere effort)” (106). Kerouac’s admiration for Joyce largely stems from Joyce’s ability to make artistic masterpieces out of the most mundane material. Kerouac may have been inspired to do this as a way to justify his being back in Lowell; or, as Mayer suggests, perhaps Kerouac did it to show that life in this small American town was worthy of an artistic rendering: “Kerouac related strongly to Joyce’s *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*. As Joyce loved Dublin in his own unsentimental way, so Kerouac loved provincial Lowell.” (*Kerouac: His Life and Work* 94). Kerouac developed the rare ability to make his hometown into everybody’s hometown, just as he developed the rare ability to make his first love everybody’s first love.

In Kerouac’s recollection of this early attempt to model *Vanity of Duluo* after *Ulysses*, he offers his beliefs on how writers develop: “That’s how writers begin, by imitating the masters (without suffering like said masters), till they learn their own style, and by the time they learn their own style there’s no more fun in it, because you can’t imitate any other master’s suffering but your own” (*Vanity of Duluo* 107). Kerouac admits here that he had not yet learned his own style and that doing so required “suffering.” This once again shows Kerouac the apprentice looking for at the artistic

productions of different masters from the point of view of “the likeminded pupil” (Rank 54). Kerouac and Rank both recognize that this such an apprenticeship is essential to the development of the artist. Kerouac had to learn how to turn his personal suffering into exuberant prose so that somehow it could make other people feel better. He was, in essence, writing the blues. Johnson claims that the early *Vanity of Duluo*z has “a grim heaviness about it” (*The Voice is All* 113). Much of Kerouac’s early writing has a “grim heaviness” about it; and it was not until he met Neal Cassady and turned to first-person narration that he began writing consistently exhilarating prose with the power to turn his personal suffering into a healing force for others.

Kerouac had to halt his work on the early version of *Vanity of Duluo*z when the owner of the paper found out that he was writing the novel during his afternoons on the job. Rather than listen to the boss, he quit his job at the *Lowell Sun*. This caused another fight with his father over the direction of his life. Kerouac needed to get out of Lowell. As would often happen in his life, a friend would offer him a place to stay in his time of need. McNally writes “Lowell, Papa, the *Sun* all became insufferable; in March 1942 he caught a bus to Washington, where GJ Apostolakis had a job and a place to stay waiting for him” (*Desolate Angel* 51). This pattern would repeat itself over the next five years. Kerouac would have more opportunity to travel and gain interesting experiences than he would have opportunities to write about them. *Vanity of Duluo*z was not the last novel that Kerouac would leave unfinished. His father had no sympathy for his desire to become an artist, and his disapproval of his son’s choice, and the arguments that resulted from it, would repeatedly drive Kerouac away from the work he had been doing. As Kerouac had discovered in Hartford, a writer needs a place to write; Leo Kerouac had no

intention of providing his son such a place without a fight. According to Johnson, Kerouac's father believed that "an artist was a no-good parasite who relied on others to support him" (*The Voice is All* 56). He constantly reminded Jack of this, and when Jack grew sick of it he would simply cease his writing and leave.

The brief sojourn to Washington, D.C., did not make any of Kerouac's problems at home disappear, nor did they quench his thirst for adventure. He had a desire to take part in the war, and, upon returning to Lowell, he quickly sized up his situation and made the best decision he could make in the limited time he had to make a decision: he joined the Merchant Marine. Joining the Merchant Marines allowed him to make good money, take part in the war, and gain valuable experience about which to write. Mayer adds, "Besides the financial benefits the Merchant Marines could offer him, there was the fresh material he could use to give added dimension to his writing. Clearly the material gleaned from his experiences at Columbia University and in New York City and Lowell had run its course" (*Kerouac: His Life and Work* 98). Kerouac signed up as a scullion on the S.S. *Dorchester* and set sail for Greenland in July, 1942. His experiences on the high seas would serve as an important prelude to his experiences on the highways.

Kerouac felt out of place on the *Dorchester*, but as always he found refuge in his writing. He began working on a novel called *The Sea is my Brother*, and upon seeing that title one cannot help but think of Kerouac's brother Gerard. Kerouac says that he wished to "take part in the war, not because I want to kill anyone, but for a reason directly opposed to killing—the Brotherhood" (*Selected Letters* 23). The search for brotherhood, a part of Kerouac's life since he was four-years-old, would become an important theme of his art as he developed.

In *The Sea is My Brother*, Kerouac focuses on the divisions in his own personality and how he can find a way to unite them. His third-person narration trudges along, and the two main characters symbolize the two sides of his personality that were causing him such deep conflict at the time. Wesley Martin is a wild, adventurous, and rebellious, merchant marine, and Bill Everhart is an intellectual and conventional college English professor. Kerouac has trouble showing how an artist must be wild sometimes and conventional other times, but the effort exhibits his instinctive understanding that this is so. Rank makes the astute observation that “genius needs a strong touch of conventionality” and that “many whose work is of the highest value and who live wholly in their art lead a very simple, ordinary life” (*Art and Artist* 379). Though Johnson believes that “Jack’s awkward and inflated third-person narration and his failure to give his protagonists individual voices” makes it so that “the two alienated men often seem indistinguishable” (*The Voice is All* 131), *The Sea is My Brother* offers an important glimpse at Kerouac’s early preoccupations. He is trying to find a way to incorporate big philosophical ideas into a story; he weighs the balance between wildness and conventionality, trying to figure out when to use which, learning how much of art is actually science. Rank says, “in the need . . . for putting order, meaning, and control into the psychic chaos into which his totality-urge drives him, the artist, even if he is never conscious of the fact, is always a bit of a scientist” (388). The two protagonists in *The Sea is My Brother* represent the two sides of Kerouac’s “totality-urge” that he was just beginning to learn how to objectify in art.

The relationship between Bill Everhart and Wesley Martin has some striking similarities to the relationship between Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty in *On the Road*.

Everhard, like Paradise, finds himself living a stultified existence, trapped under an avalanche of books and self-restraint. The coming of the shiftless, carefree merchant marine, Wesley Martin, like the coming of the “young jailkid shrouded in mystery,” Dean Moriarty, causes Everhart to have a spiritual awakening of sorts, reexamining his own life and recognizing the possibility of other, potentially happier modes of existence.

Though Kerouac had a similar idea behind both relationships, comparing the execution of this idea in *The Sea is My Brother* to the execution of this idea in *On the Road* is like comparing sunlight to moonlight. Whereas Paradise and Moriarty experience friendship at first sight, Everhart and Martin have an adversarial introductory meeting at a bar near the Columbia campus: “Everhart studied the stranger; once, when Wesley glanced at Everhart and found him ogling from behind the fantastic spectacles, their eyes locked in combat, Wesley’s cool and non-committal, Everhart’s a searching challenge, the look of a brazen skeptic” (*The Sea is my Brother* 23). The two men never get any friendlier than this. This makes the adventures they undertake in the story seem unbelievable, as though they undertake them for the sole reason that Kerouac says, “You are in this story and you will undertake these adventures together.”

After Everhart hears tales of Martin’s adventures as a member of the Merchant Marine, he gets the idea that he should ship out himself. He even wonders if he has been a hypocrite all these years as a college professor: “He had never really paid attention to his own life, except to use his own freedom as a means to discuss the subject of freedom. Yes, he was Everhart who had told his classes, one triumphant morning when the snow lashed against the windows, that art was the revolt of the free” (40). Martin’s willingness



to embrace his freedom is what makes him appealing to Everhart; it certainly is not his conversational abilities.

Far from the overflowing, life-altering erudition of Dean Moriarty in *On the Road*, Wesley Martin is tight-lipped and confrontational, like a Clint Eastwood character. He says things like, “Bein’ happy’s O.K. in its place; but other things count more” (38), and “next to the smell of salt water, I’ll take the smell of a highway” (58). These clipped phrases express something of Kerouac’s artistic vision, (very few characters in literary history express fondness for the smell of a highway), but they do not do so in the poetic, overflowing style that would come to characterize his later work.

In fact, *The Sea is My Brother* has a grim, heavy feel. Everhart and Martin both seem incurably unhappy. It rings hollow when Everhart celebrates his decision to ship out with the Merchant Marine: “Hell! I’m glad I did it. It’s going to be a change. I call this life!” (62); and it rings just as hollow when Martin exclaims, “Who gives a shuck-all about tomorrow!” (64). Neither Martin or Everhart come alive in the book. Their dialogue does not sound like real people talking. It sounds like Kerouac makes them say the things they say in order to make it very clear how they feel at each point in the story.

In *The Sea is My Brother*, Kerouac continues his habit of overusing adverbs, particularly when writing dialogue. These following examples all come from a single two page section in the middle of the book: “‘Oh Christ!’ yawned Wesley loudly,” “‘Rain, rain go away,’ Wesley sang softly,” “They smiled enthusiastically at the driver,” “‘Okay?’ he shouted harshly,” and “Everhart jumped down from the high cab and stretched his legs luxuriously” (66-67). Three out of these five examples come from dialogue, where Kerouac could not yet restrain himself from overwriting. None of the

five adverbs listed here add anything valuable or necessary to the prose, not beauty or clarity, and most authors would improve their prose by omitting them. Kerouac, however, would improve his dialogue by switching to first-person narration, and writing dialogue as he heard it, rather than writing it in the contrived manner of a distant, omniscient narrator.

The Everhart/Martin relationship in *The Sea is My Brother* presages the Paradise/Moriarty relationship in *On the Road* in another important way. At first glance it seems that Kerouac scorns the more conventional lifestyle of Bill Everhart, and favors the wild, carefree lifestyle of Wesley Martin. He writes, “Conviction had led Wesley to the sea; confusion had led Everhart to the sea” (76). Kerouac appears to admire Wesley’s conviction more than Everhart’s confusion. As the story progresses, however, one sees that Kerouac identifies with Everhart more than Wesley. The omniscient narrator spends more and more time in Everhart’s mind, reporting his thoughts, feelings, meditations, and the reasons for his actions. After spending most of the novel praising Wesley’s “pioneer spirit,” and his “conviction,” Everhart begins to realize the fruitlessness of Wesley’s shiftless, carefree lifestyle: “He should have realized at first Wesley’s deep-seated irresponsibility and lack of purpose; the man was no more than a happy-go-lucky creature to whom life meant nothing more than a stage for his debaucheries and casual, promiscuous relationships” (115). It is hard to believe that Kerouac wrote this passage long before he met Neal Cassady. These criticisms sound strikingly similar to the criticisms that Kerouac himself would face upon the publication with *On the Road*, when readers and critics alike mistook him for the irresponsible, purposeless Dean Moriarty instead of the soul-searching writer Sal Paradise. In *On the Road*, Sal reaches a

conclusion about Dean similar to the one that Everhart reaches about Martin. Near the end of *On the Road*, Dean abandons Sal in Mexico while Sal is ailing with dysentery. Sal writes: “When I got better I realized what a rat he was, but then 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. ‘Okay, old Dean, I’ll say nothing’” (302). The difference between Sal’s conclusion about Dean and Everhart’s conclusion about Martin is that one can tell that Sal loves Dean, whereas the friendship between Everhart and Martin is never believable.

The friendship between Everhart and Martin is never believable because Kerouac fabricates them in order to examine two different sides of his artistic personality. If he were all Wesley Martin, all wildness and chaos, he would never produce a work of art, and hence could never rightly call himself a writer. If he were all Bill Everhart, all safe institutionalized convention, he would never have anything interesting to write about. The two main characters in *The Sea is My Brother* stand as objectifications of Kerouac’s artistic personality conflicts. Therapeutic as this method of character creation may be, it does not lend itself to the creation of believable characters. Kerouac would continue to use this method of character creation until *On the Road*, when the switch to first-person narration and autobiographical material freed him from the quandary of creating characters out of different sides of his personality. He could then use his memory, one of his greatest natural gifts, to its fullest potential, only relying on his imagination to decide how to shape experience into narrative.

As the focus of *The Sea is My Brother* shifts more toward Everhart’s meditations, one sees that Kerouac concludes that he does not desire experience for experience’s sake, he desires experience for art’s sake. Once the ship leaves the shore, Everhart notes that

“Wesley seemed at home and content now they were sailing, as though leaving port meant the cessation of all his worries, and heading out to sea a new era of peace and amenity. What a simple solution! Would to God Everhart could find freedom in so simple a process as that, could be relieved of vexation by so graceful an expedient, could draw comfort and love from the sea the way Wesley seemed to do” (129). Like Everhart, experience would never be enough for Kerouac; like Everhart, he would not be himself without books and letters, without a means to turn his experience into art. This passage also serves as a prelude to Kerouac’s inability to give himself over to the road experience in the same way Cassady did. Wherever he went, whatever he did, a part of him, perhaps the most authentic part, knew that he must get back to a room of his own to write about it.

Kerouac never finished *The Sea is My Brother*, but one of the final passages he wrote objectifies one of the experiences he must have had while on board *The Dorchester*. In the passage, Everhart goes down to the engine room to look for a shipmate he has befriended. As he descends further, he has a thought: “He tried to imagine a torpedo slamming into the engine room against the hysterical, blind power of the pistons, the deafening shock of the explosion, the hiss of escaping steam, the billions of water pouring in from a sea of endless water, himself lost in this holocaust and being pitched about like a leaf in a whirlpool. Death! . . . he half expected it to happen that precise moment” (143). This realization that death is possible at any moment can send one into a quagmire of depression or it can cause one to live with a greater intensity and purpose, but the realization itself is an important part of achieving authenticity. In *On the Road*, Kerouac writes a similar passage in which Neal Cassady’s daredevil driving antics put him in a similar fear for his life: “I jumped in the back seat and curled up to go to sleep . .

. . Great horrors that we were going to crash this very morning took hold of me and I got down on the floor and closed my eyes and tried to go to sleep. 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” (235). The juxtaposition of these passages shows how Kerouac found meaning in his experiences and put that meaning into his writing. It also shows how his switch from third-person narration to first-person narration allowed him to convey that meaning with greater intensity, urgency, and intimacy.

Kerouac’s fear of imminent death by torpedo, as reflected in the Everhart passage, was no mere artistic or philosophical quandary. Charters reports, “On its next voyage the *Dorchester* was sunk by torpedoes, with the loss of several hundred lives” (*Selected Letters 1940-1956* 29). Kerouac would eulogize the crew members that he knew from his first Merchant Marine voyage in several later novels. One look at any of Kerouac’s remembrances of the *Dorchester* crew makes it clear that no member of that crew made a bigger impression on him than a cook named Glory, one of the first black guys Kerouac ever got to know. In *The Sea is My Brother*, he recalls Glory singing, “Everybody want to go to Heaven, but no one want to die!” (111). This song resonated deeply with Kerouac, who had a similar notion that he explained more philosophically in *On the Road*:

Carlo Marx and I once sat down together, knee to knee, in two chairs, facing, and I told him a dream I had about a strange Arabian figure that was pursuing me across the desert; that I tried to avoid; that finally overtook me just before I reached the Protective City. “Who is this?” said Carlo. We pondered it. I proposed

it was myself, wearing a shroud. That wasn't it. Something, someone, some spirit was pursuing all of us across the desert of life and was bound to catch us before we reached heaven. Naturally, now that I look back on it, this is only death: death will overtake us before heaven. 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 (though we hate to admit it) in death. But who wants to die? (124).

Perhaps Glory made such an indelible impression on Kerouac because of their similar belief that everybody wants to get to heaven but nobody wants to die to get there. Whatever the reason, Kerouac remembers Glory in several books, with his final remembrance of him coming in *Vanity of Duluo*, by way of this simple two-word paragraph as part of his recollection of *the Dorchester* sinking: "Glory disappeared" (143). Kerouac never stopped saying goodbye to Glory, one of the few guys on the *Dorchester* crew with whom he felt a sense of kinship.

Much to Kerouac's surprise, Lou Little invited him back to play for the war-depleted Columbia football team when he returned from his *Dorchester* voyage. Kerouac took him up on the offer, but it was a repeat of the previous year. Little would not give him any playing time, so Kerouac quit again, this time for good. Kerouac reports his decision matter-of-factly: "Monday, snow in my window and Beethoven in the radio, Fifth Symphony, I say to myself 'Okay, I quit football'" (*Vanity of Duluo* 146). Then he learned the difference between being a football player on scholarship to Columbia University and not being a football player on scholarship to Columbia University. His life

suddenly got more difficult; however, he had established an important familiarity with Columbia, and it would remain an important part of his life. Gifford and Lee observe, “Although Jack left Columbia in 1942 the University and its fringes provided an area for his friendships for the rest of the decade” (*Jack’s Book* 61). Those friendships came to exist because Kerouac started dating Edie Parker soon after he arrived back in New York that fall.

Edie Parker does not get the credit she deserves for the pivotal role she played in Kerouac’s artistic development and the formation of the Beat Generation. Without her, the key members of the generation might not have met, and they certainly would not have had the luxury to exchange ideas *ad infinitum* in the apartment that she rented. Her apartment was almost like a New York version of Sylvia Beach’s Shakespeare and Company bookstore in 1920s Paris. Parker herself did not contribute any original philosophical ideas or create any works of art, but she made introductions between people who would, and provided the place for these intelligent, creative people to discuss ways to find joy on the fringes of what they felt was becoming a joyless society, and the importance of art and artists in a society that viewed art and artists with suspicion. She understood these men’s rebellious inclinations. Such inclinations brought her to New York in the first place. Johnson explains, “Edie Parker had grown up in a wealthy, socially prominent family in Grosse Point, Michigan. Too rebellious and wild to stay home, she had come to New York to study art at seventeen and had started dating Jack’s old Horace Mann friend Henri Cru” (*The Voice is All* 129). In many ways, Edie was the perfect audience for the kind of art that the men she provided for would one day create.

Her relationship with Henri Cru, and how that led to her relationship with Kerouac, reveals another interesting, (and perhaps unflattering), aspect of Kerouac's personality. He had a penchant for falling for his friends' girlfriends, and he had no qualms about acting on his desires. Along with Seymore Wyse, Henri Cru was the best friend Kerouac made in his year at Horace Mann. Quite a character in his own right, Cru plays an underrated role in *On the Road* as Remi Boncoeur. The section where Kerouac (Sal Paradise) visits Cru (Boncoeur) in Marin City stands up to any of the sections featuring Cassady (Dean Moriarty). Kerouac had an eye for interesting people, and Cru was an interesting person. His extroverted, gregarious personality also helped Kerouac to open up. In *You'll Be Okay: My Life with Jack Kerouac*, Edie writes, "Poor Jack was so shy he needed someone like Henri to pry his mouth open" (65). When Cru had to ship out, (he was also a member of the Merchant Marine), he left Edie in Kerouac's care. Edie says, "he might as well have put an ice cream in my hand and told me not to eat it" (88). That was how Kerouac and Edie started dating.

Kerouac would later meet all of his more notorious friends and literary comrades through Edie, but that fall and winter he did little but work on *The Sea is My Brother* and correspond with Sammy as he waited to join the Navy. The epistolary conversation between the two young friends reveals the depth of their friendship and the earnestness of their quests to find meaning in life and to create meaning in art. One cannot read these letters and doubt the sincerity of either man. These letters provide sound evidence of Sammy's importance to Kerouac's artistic development. At this time in his life, Kerouac did not know anybody else with whom he could have serious conversations about art and society.



In a letter from February, 1943, Kerouac tells Sammy, “It seems to me now that my life is writing” (*Selected Letters: 1940-1956* 38). Kerouac had now grown even stronger in this conviction, and part of his struggle in his early life as an artist was the constant need to defend that conviction. No matter what else he said or how else he tried to justify that decision, he always knew that publication was the only defense or justification that most people would understand or respect. Kerouac worked a slew of odd jobs in order to support his writing habit, all the while dreaming of the day that the successful publication of his writing would free him from this necessity. These odd jobs went into the artistic cauldron of his experience, and he would later write about them in a vivifying way, coloring them with his unique philosophical perspective.

One early job would take a particularly important place in Kerouac’s art: that of a parking-lot attendant. He tells Sammy that he works at “the Hotel Garage on Middlesex Street,” and that he only has one complaint about the job: “I am at the beck and call of every customer that comes in in the middle of an intricate theory to have me park his car” (38). Kerouac does not like it when the customers interrupt his reading. More importantly than this, Kerouac provides a description of the job that makes one see it in an entirely new way. He writes, “Parking cars sustains a certain aesthetic satisfaction, the subtlety of giving an inch’s grace to a sleek fender, and exhilaration of jamming on the foot brake within certain disaster” (38). This early experience working as a parking-lot attendant, and practice writing about that experience, provided Kerouac with a background from which to judge Neal Cassady, whose introduction in *On the Road* is highlighted by this description of his work as a parking-lot attendant:

The most fantastic parking-lot attendant in the world, he can back a car forty miles an hour into a tight squeeze and stop at the wall, jump out, race among fenders, leap into another car, circle it fifty miles an hour in a narrow space, back swiftly into a tight spot, *hump*, snap the car with the emergency so that you can see it bounce as he flies out; then clear to the ticket shack, sprinting like a track star, hand a ticket, leap into a newly arrived car before the owner's half out, leap literally under him as he steps out, start the car with the door flapping, and roar off to the next available spot, arc, pop in, brake, out, run; working like that without pause eight hours a night, evening rush hours and after-theater rush hours, in greasy wino pants with a frayed fur-lined jacket and beat shoes that flap. (6)

Kerouac knew what a parking-lot attendant was supposed to do from experience, and he could see that Cassady could do these things very well. More importantly, Cassady's expert, joyous performance of an odd job that involves eight hours of frantic rushing about and produces absolutely nothing serves as the perfect introduction to his symbolic representation of Beat Generation America.

At the time when Kerouac did his own stint as a parking-lot attendant, his letters come far closer to his authentic voice than does his fiction. Writing fast, in the first-person, allows him to express the swiftness and fluidity of his mind, and the suddenness of his changes of direction, not just in topic but in tone, can evoke real emotion because one just does not see them coming. Reading Kerouac's letters from this period puts one in a state of anxious anticipation because of the sheer unpredictability of the prose. This following passage is a good example:

By virtue of my youth and enthusiasm and fire, Yann tells me at night, blondly brooding, sad like Byron, he has been reborn: perhaps! But by virtue of his weary knowledge, his calm wisdom and pent, passive strength, I too have been reborn: I see within the realms of his truly great mind the wry diamond of Shakespeare's visage, the bejeweled heaviness of Beethoven's face, the pale purple vistas of long-ago poetry, long-ago love, trees against the horizon, all the classic meaning of life, pent up in his pale brow like a submissive nightingale: Brahms, Schubert, Milton, the Bard, Donne, Beethoven (the heavy frown, the sneering sag of jowls, the eyes of thunder), Housman, Dante, Wagner, Wolfe, Elgar, Debussy . . . . I see them all. (*Selected Letters* 40)

While nothing happens in this decidedly reflective passage, the prose contains the exuberance and energy that would become inextricable parts of Kerouac's authentic voice. The shock of his transitions make them effective, and the tidal energy of his words gives his prose a seismic quality that he could not yet duplicate in his fiction.

In turn, Sammy's letters to Kerouac reveal his impressive intelligence, as well as his insight into Kerouac's personality. He often takes on the tone of a mentor, never shying away from confrontation and displaying a deep concern to see Kerouac do right. On March 15, 1943, he writes Kerouac, "Your letter has caused me no end of annoyance, either to the defense of your ego or mine. I have asked you to look at things logically and instead you have done just the reverse" (45). In the rest of this letter, Sammy vacillates between calling Kerouac "John" and calling him "Jack." These vacillations display his intimate knowledge of Kerouac's personality. He only calls him "John" twice, and in both cases he does so with disapproval, one time decrying a high and mighty attitude

Kerouac must have exhibited in a previous letter, “The great John Kerouac dissents and the whole issue is forgotten--,” and the other time decrying Kerouac’s increasingly individualistic tendencies and his apparent desire to mimic Thomas Wolfe in all things, “Maybe the picture of being misunderstood and lonely, defying all mankind, appeals to you—it doesn’t to me—Wolfe was at odds with the world—so John Kerouac will be at odds with the world” (46). In this same letter, Sammy refers to Kerouac as “Jack” three times, including once in the closing paragraph, the friendly (yet firm) tone of which signifies his preference of “Jack Kerouac” to “John Kerouac”: “I have not been just in this letter, Jack. I have only attempted to ward off certain tendencies you have—I had to speak candidly and it has hurt you but not as much as it has hurt me” (47). This letter helped Kerouac from falling into the “negative, nightmare position” that he accuses his “New York friends” of having fallen into in *On the Road*, where he writes: “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” (8). In his letter, Sammy warns Kerouac against “putting down society” by being “at odds with the world.” Interestingly, Heidegger’s development of the concept of the self stands in opposition to other existentialist philosophy because of his refusal to “put down society,” as Solomon explains:

Heidegger develops the concept of the self as *das Man*. The ordinary self is not the self of Cartesian reflection. It is not an individual self. It is an “anonymous” self, a self defined by other people. The ordinary self is, thus, inauthentic. When we describe ourselves, we refer to the roles we play or social categories. The *das Man* self is the social, comparative self. Although it is essential to life, it is not

our genuine self. This view harks back to Kierkegaard's and Nietzsche's attacks on the "herd mentality" of contemporary society, but Heidegger doesn't accept the extremity of their rejection of everyday social life. Heidegger's contrasting notion of authenticity comes to play an enormous role in existentialist literature. (59)

It is important to remember that the "*das Man*" self to which Solomon refers is translated as "the they-self" in the English versions of *Being and Time*. The "they-self," the ordinary, everyday self, is the self out of which the "authentic-self" arises. In Heidegger's view, nobody is ever born authentic, and many people live their entire lives as the "*das Man*," or "they-self." It is also important to note that Heidegger and Kerouac both refuse an outright rejection of everyday social life, with Kerouac classifying such a rejection as "a nightmare, negative position."

Kerouac's response to Sammy's letter shows his tremendous awareness of what he wanted to do as an artist, and offers keen insights into how artists must develop in general. At the core of their argument was the relationship between the individual and society. Kerouac writes, "You see, Sam, you have too strong a dependence on the group—yes, we must stick together; but no, we mustn't depend on one another" (48). Kerouac then argues that this "dependence on the group" takes away more from the artist than it gives him: "the arts and sciences require labor, individual integrity, and as in the case of art, a singular love and understanding of mankind and the forces of society. Your understanding and mine of society differ; bring us together, and instead of two original artists, you have one vague jumble of an artist" (48). After making a convincing defense of his position, Kerouac provides Sammy with a progress report about his new novel:

“You also bewail the fact I’m not writing any more. Well, that is not quite true; I am writing 14 hours a day, 7 days a week, before I go into the Navy. You may well read my book next summer, if you’re in America, in published form . . . *The Sea is My Brother*, about the Merchant Marine . . . . I’ve written 35,000 words of it, working night and day and ruining my health, but I must finish it before the Navy gets me” (49). Kerouac wrote *The Sea is My Brother* by hand. That, along with his deciding to use third-person narration to tell the story, helps explain why the novel strays further from Kerouac’s mature voice than *Atop an Underwood*, which he composed on a typewriter, fast, using first-person narration in most of the stories. Had he used those same techniques to write *The Sea is My Brother*, he might have finished the novel.

In late May, Sammy wrote Kerouac a brilliant letter concerning the question of the role of art in the Western World. Though Sammy continues to dissent from many of Kerouac’s arguments, and though Kerouac would never come around to seeing things Sammy’s way, this letter crystalizes Sammy’s role as Kerouac’s first artistic mentor. Sammy writes, “All Western Men seek; if they are not concerned in the same meaning it is not because they do not feel as you feel, but that the form could not reach them” (68). This idea would have a profound impact on Kerouac. Kerouac would seek for a form that could “reach them” for the next eight years, finding it with *On the Road*. Furthermore, the story of *On the Road* concerns Western Men seeking. From the beginning of his conception of the novel, Kerouac wanted the story to be about two men searching for something that they never really find. That tangible thing becomes Dean Moriarty’s father, but there are also many other things that Sal and Dean seek, most of them intangible, as seeking is at the heart of the novel.

As Sammy nears the conclusion of his letter, he argues that “Art is no longer livingly created or experienced” because “people . . . are out of harmony with the pulse-beat of our becoming.” He then quotes from Oswald Spengler’s *Decline of the West* to support his point, stating, “To them it ‘is the hard reality of life, of living that is essential’” (69). Kerouac never agreed with the idea that art is “no longer livingly created,” but one does not need to read much further to see the influence that Sammy’s ideas had on his own art. Sammy proposes that somewhere in America, “In the . . . great open spaces, the uncrowded places, a new soul is in conception. The land is pregnant. A primitive man, crude, raw, unfinished—superb—is shaping in the heart of our land. He does not seek for ‘other.’ The meaning he knows is life. He and all his fellow-mankind are brothers in spirit. In him coarse, rough-hewn, lie all our hopes” (69). Kerouac would echo this phraseology in his own descriptions of Neal Cassady. The definition could also apply to Gary Snyder, who became the hero of *Dharma Bums*. Kerouac offers this impression of Snyder, as Japhy Ryder, reading at the “Six Gallery reading,” one of the first public manifestations of the Beat Generation:

Then Japhy showed his sudden barroom humor with lines about Coyote bringing goodies. And his anarchistic ideas about how Americans don’t know how to live, with lines about commuters being trapped in living rooms that come from poor trees felled by chainsaws (showing here, also, his background as a logger up north). His voice was deep and resonant and somehow brave, like the voice of oldtime American heroes and orators. (14)

Kerouac sought out the kind of people that Sammy describes in this passage in order to write about them, and, when he wrote about them, he incorporated similar ideas

to the ones Sammy expresses here, showing a strong correlation between Sammy's early ideas and Kerouac's later art.

Kerouac's stay in the Navy was a disaster from the beginning. He could not stand the strict military discipline. Johnson explains, "From the moment he arrived . . . he became uncontrollably resistant to the military discipline he considered absurd and enslaving, making no self-protective efforts to go along with the system" (*The Voice is All* 134). Before he had been there a week he was under psychiatric evaluation and in danger of being court-martialed. Interestingly, one of the things that saved him from this fate was his novel in progress. Johnson states that a "team of doctors" analyzed his "handling of duality" in *The Sea is My Brother* and "tentatively diagnosed him as schizoid" (*The Voice is All* 134). Kerouac would remain under observation until June, when he finally received an honorable discharge for having an "indifferent character."

Though Kerouac had an idea of how different he was from the average person, his experience in the Navy showed him that he was even more different than he thought. The gap between himself and the average man kept getting bigger. McNally's words are helpful: "a man who could not submit to discipline was not a normal American by the middle of the twentieth century" (*Desolate Angel* 56). He had begun to reflect on his nature as an artist in *The Sea is My Brother*, but now he would expand his reflections to consider the proper role of the artist in the kind of society in which he lived. Rank asserts that "increasing individualization alters the whole cultural ideology and therefore art with it" (*Art and Artist* 10), but the opposite is also true, that the decreasing of individualization also alters cultural ideology and art. How could the artist, to whom individuality is so important, create something meaningful for a readership to which



individuality was becoming a foreign concept? Kerouac would struggle with that question for years, and his answer, in the name of Dean Moriarty, was that art must have something of a resurrectional quality.

Discharged from the Navy, Kerouac took back up with the Merchant Marines and boarded the S.S. *George Weems* and set sail for Liverpool. His brief stint in the Navy had ensured him that one of the reasons he could not submit himself to military discipline was because it took writing from out of the center of his life. Johnson explains, “By the time he was twenty-one, Jack seemed unable to cope with his life unless writing was at the center of it” (*The Voice is All* 135). His voyage to Liverpool would have important implications in his life as a writer. He read John Galworthy’s *The Forsyte Saga* because he was going to England and hoped to get “a view of British life before I got there” (*Vanity of Duluož* 175). He ended up learning more than he bargained for, as Galworthy’s novel gave him “an idea about sagas, or legends, novels connecting into one grand tale” (175) *The Forstye Saga* planted this seed of an idea into Kerouac’s mind on his way from the United States to England, and it didn’t take long for it to grow into a bigger, clearer idea. Before he departed from England to return to America, Kerouac had an epiphany:

And it was that last morning before we got ready to sail to Brooklyn that I devised the idea of “The Duluož Legend,” it was a gray rainy morning and I sat in the purser’s office over his typewriter, he was having his last drunk I guess, and I saw it: a lifetime of writing about what I’d seen with my own eyes, told in my own words, according to the style I decided on at whether twenty-one years old or thirty or forty or whatever later age, and put it all together as a contemporary

history record for future times to see what really happened and what people really thought. (*Vanity of Duluo*z 190).

This passage gives an indication of Kerouac's aesthetic philosophy, and though it would take him years to fulfill the prophesy he had in his own artistic vision, the moment that he got the idea of what he really wanted to do as an artist occurred on this trip. He concluded that the best thing for him to do as an artist was to write about "what really happened" and "what people really thought." This focus on real events and real thoughts is a clear move toward doing away with fiction, but only an ambitious young writer would set himself the difficult goal of fusing the external and internal realities of his life and times "for future times to see." It is the goal of a writer who wants to be the voice of his generation.

The *Weems* returned to Brooklyn in October of 1943, almost a year after Kerouac had decided to quit football for good. Over the next two and half years, Kerouac would live his life at a blistering pace. He would meet some of the most important people in his life, and he would lose some of the most important people in his life. He wrote about these things as they happened, feeding his writing with life and his life with writing, but he had yet to develop a prose style that would imbue the things he saw with the kind of emotion he felt while seeing them. He did not know how to impart to the reader his sense of the transitory nature of life; he did not know how to offer kind reminders that this was all going to end someday. If he could learn to do that, if he could teach about life and death in a prose style filled with life and consciousness of death, writing about the things he saw while alive, then he would have something. One of the things he would eventually master is the poetic expression of the comings and goings of life.

In March of 1944, Kerouac lost his first artistic mentor and his best friend. Sammy Sampas “didn’t survive the Allied landing at Anzio” (Clark 56). When one reads the letter Sammy wrote to Kerouac the previous May, it makes one sad not just for Kerouac to lose such a friend, but for the world to lose such a person. Sammy was the only person with whom Kerouac could engage in intellectual sparring about the nature of the artist and the role of the artist in society, the very issues that were most important to him at the time. Sammy made an everlasting impression on Kerouac’s life; nobody had given him more guidance in his quest to become an artist.

In true artistic fashion, Kerouac looked for a way to turn loss into art. The ability to produce art even in the face of such difficult circumstances differentiates the artist from the average person. It does not mean that the artist does not feel the same pain that the average person feels, but it means that the artist has the unique ability to discipline his emotions, and to channel them into the making of some objective thing. The artist has the ability to overcome. It is one of his foremost characteristics. Kerouac had already exhibited this ability in regards to his lost brother Gerard, and he would exhibit it again with Sammy. As Maher notes, “Kerouac had lost another important comrade and once again fell into despair. As with Gerard, the memory of Sampas would be sheltered in Kerouac’s mental storehouse of grief and dispensed in his literature” (*Kerouac: His Life and Work* 115). This dispensation would happen haphazardly. Two quick examples help sum up the impact that Sammy had on Kerouac’s art and life. In his introduction to *Lonesome Traveler*, Kerouac pays Sammy as high a compliment as he can pay him, stating, “Decided to become a writer at age 17 under influence of Sebastian Sampas, local young poet who later died on Anzio beach head” (v). Many years after that accreditation,

Kerouac composed *Vanity of Duluo*, the last novel he would ever finish. There, he gives Sammy a fictionalized name, Sabbas Savakis, and remembers him for something besides his artistic inspiration: “Among my souvenirs, by God, is the friendship of Sabbas Savakis” (61).

After Sammy’s death, Kerouac needed friendship that could stimulate him artistically and intellectually. Johnson states that he “needed to find some deep level of companionship to replace what he had lost” (*The Voice is All* 151). In the summer of 1944, Kerouac would meet what he called “the new characters of my future ‘life’” (*Vanity of Duluo* 194). These new characters did not replace Sammy, for somebody that has died cannot really be replaced, (one of the very things Kerouac wanted to communicate in his writing), but they did help fill the hole that Sammy’s death had left within him. They also took up the role of guiding him toward the discovery of his authentic voice.

### CHAPTER THREE: THE BEAT GENERATION: 1944-1946

Kerouac was already a fully committed artist by the time he met the rest of the now-famous members of the Beat Generation. He had already decided that his life was writing, and, with his recent conception of the idea of “The Duluoz Legend,” he already knew exactly what he wanted to do as a writer. He had committed himself to a lifetime of writing about “what I’d seen with my own eyes.” As he focused more intensely on that goal, he sought after experiences and people that would make for more interesting writing. As a writer, he continued to search for the style with which he could express himself in the most authentic way possible. In novels like *Orpheus Emerged*, *And the Hippos Were Boiled in Their Tanks*, *The Haunted Life*, he made important stylistic experiments that would lead him on the way to the discovery of his authentic voice. He also wrote about other key members of the Beat Generation for the first time.

Eddie Parker introduced Kerouac to Lucien Carr in June of 1944. Like Sammy, Lucien was highly intelligent and interested in art. Lucien was handsome, seemingly confident, insouciant, and rebellious, but it was his “New Vision” philosophy that most captivated Kerouac. According to McNally, “the New Vision celebrated the transcendental *act* of making art more than beauty the product” (*Desolate Angel* 66). This idea appealed immensely to Kerouac, to whom writing was more important than anything, a fact that was not lost on Carr: “Jack was—Jack wasn’t just interested in writing. I mean, whatever else Jack was doing, he had to write” (*Jack’s Book* 46). Carr, in other words, recognized that a true artist stood before him. Rank asserts that “For the artist himself the fact *that* he creates is more important than *what* he produces” (*Art and*

*Artist* 59). Lucien had charisma and he talked a good game, but as much as his “New Vision” philosophy appealed to Kerouac, Carr himself did not do any creative work.

Kerouac remembers that Lucien had “language pouring out of him,” and goes so far as to call him, “Shakespeare reborn almost” (*Vanity of Duluo* 196); however, his idea of the New Vision never got beyond its inchoate stage. Kerouac would chronicle this in *And the Hippos Were Boiled in Their Tanks*, but he would do so without chastisement. The New Vision was refreshing to Kerouac even in its inchoate stage, because it gave the artist the highest place in society. Kerouac had never before met anybody who felt such regard for artists. His parents certainly did not feel that way, and even Sammy, who had inspired him to become an artist, did not feel that way. Johnson explains that “whereas Sebastian had despaired of the role of the artist in the future and seen him replaced by ‘primitive man,’ the New Vision restored the artist to primacy” (162). Relieved to finally have found somebody with whom he agreed about the importance of art and artists, Kerouac soon befriended Lucien, who must have been just as relieved to have finally met a real artist.

Lucien’s unconventional behavior also appealed to Kerouac. Nicosia observes that “Lucien was a master of gratuitous acts, like flinging a plate of food over his shoulder, in a restaurant, on an impulse of displeasure” (*Memory Babe* 114). This unconventional, even deplorable, behavior appealed to the side of Kerouac that treasured personal freedom above all else. McNally elaborates: “Lucien danced on the tightrope of his sensibilities not as an entertaining pose but because he—and Jack—sought more from life than the present rules implied was available” (*Desolate Angel* 63). If the New Vision had begun their friendship, the crazy things they did together cemented it. As Kerouac

recounts, “He told me to get into an empty barrel and then proceeded to roll the barrel down the sidewalks of Upper Broadway. A few nights later I do remember we sat in puddles of rain together in a crashing downpour and poured black ink over our hair . . . yelling folk songs and all kinda songs, I got to like him more and more” (*Vanity of Duluo* 196). Lucien had the rare ability to attract people. That ability can be both a blessing and a curse: Sometimes you attract the wrong person.

Kerouac soon met David Kammerer. He remembers him as “a tall man of 6 foot 3 with a huge flowing red beard who looked like Swinburne” (*Vanity of Duluo* 194). Wherever Lucien went, Kammerer followed. He had a fatal attraction for Lucien. Johnson observes, “Despite Lucien’s aura of jaded worldliness, he had no idea how to cope with Dave Kammerer” (*The Voice is All* 157). Lucien had tried moving and mistreating Kammerer, and both of those things only seemed to make Kammerer fall deeper in love with him. One day Kammerer, in search of Lucien as always, brought his friend William S. Burroughs with him to meet Kerouac at Edie’s apartment.

Kerouac’s experiences in the Merchant Marine gave him some prestige among his new friends. It was about this that Burroughs first came to meet him. Burroughs recalls: “I met Jack up at Columbia. I was looking into going to sea and he told me something about getting papers and all that kind of thing” (*Jack’s Book* 48). Kerouac was “awed by Burroughs’s style” (*Charters* 45), and he saw that there was “a great intellect” beneath Burroughs’s “genteel façade” (*Nicosia* 118). Though Burroughs claims “I wasn’t interested in writing at the time” (*Jack’s Book* 48), he would become an indispensable mentor for Kerouac. Kerouac, already a fully committed writer, would become an equally indispensable mentor for Burroughs. Burroughs, who held a B.A. in English Literature

from Harvard University, composed a list of important books for Kerouac to read. One of the books on that list was Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West*.

One idea from *The Decline of the West* would become an important part of Kerouac's authentic voice. Gifford and Lee write, "In the Spengler study, the world's poor, the *fellaheen* (Arabic for 'peasantry') inherit by default the remains of the world for which the great powers were at war in 1944" (*Jack's Book* 45). Spengler gave Kerouac a new vocabulary to articulate some of his ideas. In the last road trip of *On the Road*, Kerouac finds himself driving through Mexico, doing a rare shift at the wheel:

The boys were sleeping, and I was alone in my eternity at the wheel, and the road ran straight as an arrow. Not like driving across Carolina, or Texas, or Arizona, or Illinois; but like driving across the world and into the places where we would finally learn ourselves among the Fellahin Indians of the world, the essential strain of the basic primitive . . . . For when destruction comes to the world of "history" and the Apocalypse of the Fellahin returns once more as so many times before, people will still stare with the same eyes from the caves of Mexico . . . .

(280)

In this passage Kerouac juxtaposes one sense of eternity with another, for surely his "eternity at the wheel" would be part of what is destroyed when "destruction comes to the world of 'history.'" However, besides this sense of decline and the apocalyptic ponderings of what will remain after the bleak eventuality of destruction, Kerouac had another sense of the word, "Fellaheen": one that would infuse his works with much of their vibrant energy. In *Lonesome Traveler*, Kerouac writes, "You can find it, this feeling, this fellaheen feeling about life, that timeless gayety of people not involved in great



cultural and civilization issues” (22). This double sense of the word “fellaheen” uncovers a new possible interpretation of much of Kerouac’s work. Kerouac insists that “you can find” this “fellaheen feeling” of “timeless gayety,” but in order to find it, you must not get involved in “great cultural and civilizational issues.” Kerouac preaches a detachment from civilizational issues, or at least he preaches that joy is not to be found in great civilizational issues. To find timeless gayety, to find joy, one must look in underground places.

Kerouac’s turning toward the underground obviously coincided with his turning away from the “real world” that did not offer him the kind of joy that he wanted to get out of life. In “Beatific: The Origins of the Beat Generation,” he insists that “there is no doubt about the Beat Generation, at least the core of it, being a swinging group of new American men intent on joy” (*The Portable Jack Kerouac* 567). Kerouac’s own participation, as one of these new American men at the core of the Beat Generation, once again reflects the conflict within him between the artist and the man, which would reach its most intense heights during these years. His joy came primarily from his chronicling of his experiences and conflicts during this time. Rank observes, “Although the whole artist-psychology may seem to be centered on the ‘experience,’ this itself can be explained only through the creative impulse—which attempts to turn ephemeral life into personal immortality” (39). By turning to the underground for his experiences and his joy, Kerouac followed his instinctive creative impulse that the American underground was more worthy of artistic immortalization than was the America “real world,” which he defines as the unceasing pursuit of “success.” In *Vanity of Duluoaz*, Kerouac offers his thoughts about the American emphasis on “success”: “You kill yourself to get to the

grave. Especially you kill yourself to get to the grave before you even die, and the name of that grave is 'success,' the name of that grave is hullabaloo boomboom horseshit" (23). For Kerouac, then, the pursuit of the American ideal of success is a sort of living death that steals away the very possibility of joy. It is no wonder that he turned his eye to the underground.

No Beat Generation figure characterized the underground more than Herbert Huncke. Kerouac took credit for naming the Beat Generation, but in his 1959 essay "The Origins of the Beat Generation," he recollects first meeting all the characters of the Beat Generation, and he specifically invokes Huncke's name:

When I first saw the hipsters creeping around Times Square in 1944 I didn't like them either. One of them, Huncke of Chicago, came up to me and said "Man, I'm beat." I knew right away what he meant somehow.

Anyway, the hipsters, whose music was bop, they looked like criminals but they kept talking about the same things I liked, long outlines of personal experience and vision, night-long confessions full of hope that had become illicit and repressed by the War, stirrings, rumblings of a new soul (that same old human soul). And so Huncke appeared to us and said "I'm beat" with radiant light shining out of his despairing eyes (*The Beats: A Literary Reference* 24).

One can even see traces of Kerouac's idea of "Fellaheen" in his confluence of the new soul with the same old human soul. In *The Beats: A Literary Reference*, Matt Theado writes that "Huncke represented the underground contemporary America that fascinated Kerouac and Ginsberg" (25). To Kerouac, this underground contemporary America included Ginsberg himself. In *The Town and the City*, Kerouac gives this thumbnail

depiction of the Beat Generation as he (represented by the fictional Peter Martin) first saw it: “As Peter stood there, he recognized three young men strolling up the street. They were a strange trio: one was a hoodlum, one was a dope addict, and the third was a poet” (364). A hoodlum, a dope addict, and a poet: that, to Kerouac, was the Beat Generation. The hoodlum, interestingly named “Jack,” lacks the qualities that would make Dean Moriarty such a compelling character. The dope addict, modeled after Huncke, and named Junkey, (whose name rhymed with Junky), twice evokes the idea of the fellaheen in his description, when Kerouac calls him “a small, dark, Arabic-looking man” who “moved about with the noiseless glide of an Arab” (364). However, it is unquestionably the poet that is of the most interest to anybody studying Kerouac’s development, or to anybody studying American literature in general. Kerouac modeled his poet, Leon Levinsky, after Allen Ginsberg, and he introduces him thus:

The poet—Leon Levinsky—had been a classmate of Peter’s at college, and was now a merchant seaman of sorts, sailing coastwise on coalboats to Norfolk or New Orleans. He was wearing a strapped raincoat, a Paisly scarf, and dark-rimmed glasses with the air of an intellectual. He carried two slim volumes under his arm, the works of Rimbaud and W.H. Auden, and he smoked his cigarette stuck in a red holder. (364)

Kerouac had not taken an immediate liking to Lucien, and he did not take an immediate liking to Ginsberg, but in this passage he represents Ginsberg as he would always represent him in his art: as a poet. No matter what else Kerouac thought about Ginsberg for the rest of his life, and his feelings about him would fluctuate often, he always respected that Ginsberg was a real poet, an authentic artist.

Kerouac met Allen Ginsberg through Lucien Carr. Johnson explains, “One of Lucien’s most passionate admirers was a nearsighted, gawky-looking scholarship student from Paterson, New Jersey, named Allen Ginsberg” (157). Though they would go on to have a lengthy, literarily important friendship, things did not immediately click between Ginsberg and Kerouac. Kerouac remembers his gut feeling upon first meeting him: “I didnt like him” (*Vanity of Duluoꝝ* 211). It is a testament to Ginsberg’s persistence and to the mutual respect that they had for each other’s talent that they got along as well as they did. Lucien provides some simple helpful insight into why Kerouac never grew closer to Ginsberg: “He never felt at home with Allen” (*Jack’s Book* 64). Then one day something happened that made Kerouac feel a little more at home with Ginsberg.

Kerouac’s reluctance to befriend Ginsberg, an awkward college freshman four years his junior, relented during an incident in which he helped him move from his dorm room. He noticed that Ginsberg said goodbye to the room, the hall, and the stairs. Nicosia remarks, “Jack told Allen that he also said wistful goodbyes to the places he left, and Jack wondered if other people shared their consciousness of how transitory life is” (*Memory Babe* 116). Ginsberg was as surprised and impressed at Kerouac’s response as Kerouac was at his gesture. As Charters maintains, “Allen sensed what he later called a special affinity between them, an emotional reverence for life and its impermanence he felt he shared with Kerouac as with no one else” (*Kerouac: A Biography* 52). This keen awareness of life’s ephemerality would become something that Kerouac (and Ginsberg) would work on communicating meaningfully in his art. Ginsberg remembers that Kerouac “was aware when he was saying goodbye to a place or when he was passing through the world, that it was a melancholy mortal tearful moment, constantly. Saying

goodbye was like arriving or something. I don't know. It was a little poem idea that we had" (*The Beats: A Literary Reference* 19). This "little poem idea" would turn into something much bigger than that, of course, as Ginsberg's "Howl" and Kerouac's *On the Road* would become two of the seminal works of the Beat Generation. Though Kerouac has been criticized for not creating an accurate representation of Ginsberg in his work, Ginsberg's fictional representation in *On the Road*, Carlo Marx, is a vivid, vibrant, and important character in the novel.

As he does with Leon Levinsky in *The Town and the City*, Kerouac introduces Carlo Marx as a poet first and a person second; and one begins to get the idea that Kerouac saw Ginsberg that way. He says that Carlo's apartment "was like the room of a Russian saint: one bed, a candle burning, stone walls that oozed moisture, and a crazy makeshift ikon of some kind that he had made" (47). When Kerouac enters the apartment, there is no time wasted on formalities:

He read me his poetry. It was called "Denver Doldrums." Carlo woke up in the morning and heard the "vulgar pigeons" yakking in the street outside his cell; he saw the "sad nightingales" nodding on the branches and they reminded him of his mother. A gray shroud fell over the city. The mountains, the magnificent Rockies that you can see to the west from any part of town, were "papier-mache." The whole universe was crazy and cock-eyed and extremely strange. He wrote of Dean as a "child of the rainbow" who bore his torment in his agonized Priapus. (47)

Ginsberg's presence adds something very important to *On the Road*: that of a real poet. He even gives Ginsberg one of the novel's most unforgettable lines, and most

important questions: "Whither goest thou, America, in thy shiny car of night?" (119). The novel would lose something irreplaceable if it did not have Carlo Marx asking questions like this. Kerouac might have recognized Ginsberg's poetic potential before Ginsberg himself did. Ginsberg would remain forever grateful for that. For the rest of his life, and especially during the time before he published *On the Road*, Kerouac had no greater supporter and trumpeter of his talent than Allen Ginsberg. Still, it took a turn of unexpected events to move the two young artists closer to one another.

Everything would change for all of these new friends on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1944. Kerouac remembers, "At dawn I'm woke up from my sleep at the side of Johnnie [Eddie] . . . and there's Claude standing over me with his blond hair in his eyes, shaking me by the arm. But I'm not really asleep either. He says 'Well I disposed of the old man last night.' And I know exactly what he means" (*Vanity of Duluo* 221). Lucien had killed Kammerer and dumped his body in the Hudson River. He told Burroughs first, and Burroughs advised him to get a good lawyer and call it self-defense. Lucien then went to Eddie's apartment and told Kerouac, who spent the day with him and helped him dispose of Kammerer's glasses. Then Lucien turned himself in and they all waited for what would happen next.

Kerouac and Burroughs were both arrested as material witnesses. Burroughs's father immediately bailed him out; Kerouac's father declined to do the same for his son. Johnson relates, "Leo had always had his suspicions about Jack's friends and worried about their influence on his son" (*The Voice is All* 170). Now, his worst fears confirmed, Leo made it clear that he would not help Jack out of the trouble that he had warned him he would get into. Eddie happily offered to help him where his father would not. The

probate judge insisted that Kerouac and Edie get married before she could bail him out. So, in order to get out of jail, Kerouac married Edie on August 22nd. He promised Edie he would pay back the bail money, and, fresh out of jail, he headed with her to Grosse Pointe, Michigan where her father had secured him a job in a ball bearings factory.

He only stayed in Grosse Pointe long enough to pay back his bail money. Being a married man with a nice house in the suburbs and a steady job did not appeal to him. Lucien, who had helped bring about Kerouac's predicament, understood this about Kerouac: "Anything that tended to trap Kerouac, whether it was a woman, or a job, or a jail sentence—it was something he didn't want to get involved with" (*Jack's Book* 55). Johnson confirms, "He couldn't stand the whole idea of any safe and predictable life that wouldn't feed his fiction" (*The Voice is All* 176). The word "writing" would be more accurate than the term "fiction" here; for Kerouac remained as determined as ever to write, but as he accumulated increasingly fascinating experiences, he worked only to develop an increasingly fascinating style with which he could transmit these experiences in writing.

Kerouac returned to New York five weeks later, in October, 1944. The events of that month exemplify the human impossibility of knowing for certain what constitutes good luck and what constitutes bad. Kerouac planned to sail to Italy with the Merchant Marine, but he was sexually harassed by his new bosun, (a situation that must have been particularly troubling to him in the aftermath of the events between Carr and Kammerer), and he jumped ship in Norfolk, Virginia to return to New York. This was no easy decision for him to make. The Merchant Marine offered him financial independence, solitude, and adventure. Jumping ship would take that all away from him, and he knew it.

He struggled much more with this decision than he did with his decision to quit the football team at Columbia, although it would make more sense to most people to quit a job under the threat of rape than to give up a college football scholarship in order to become a writer. Finally, after he “really pondered the problem,” he decided that he “had to get away from the horrible bosun” (*Vanity of Duluo* 254). After he jumped ship, the consequences were exactly what he expected. Johnson reports that he “was blacklisted by the NMU for the rest of the war, a disaster for his finances” (*The Voice is All* 178). Thus ended Kerouac’s days as a Merchant Marine.

Though it seemed like terrible luck at the time, that “horrible bosun” forced Kerouac back to New York, where he took refuge in Ginsberg’s dorm room. With Carr in jail and Kammerer dead, Kerouac grew closer to Ginsberg. He also found himself with more time to write. Theado notes, “In the year following Carr’s murder of David Kammerer, Kerouac’s output as a writer greatly increased” (*The Beats: A Literary Reference* 39). Indeed, Kerouac’s commitment to art took on an almost frightening intensity. According to McNally, “Jack hurled himself at art on both emotional and intellectual levels—‘Self-Ultimacy,’ he called it” (73). This period of self-ultimacy brought about a real change in Kerouac’s artistic consciousness. Rank’s explication of the totalizing psychology of “the artist-type” helps explain the “Self-Ultimacy” period of Kerouac’s development:

The artist-type, with his tendency to totality of experience, has an instinct to flee from life into creation, since there to a certain extent he can be sure of matters remaining under his control; but this totality tendency itself, which is characteristic of the really productive type, in the end takes hold of his creation



also, and this totality of creation then threatens to master the creative artist as effectually as the totality of experience. (385)

Kerouac fled from life into creation by holing himself up in Ginsberg's dorm room and writing. In order to flee from the totalizing effect of creation, Kerouac began burning his artistic productions in an intense dramatization of what Rank calls "the artist's fight with art." Kerouac reflects about this dark time in his life in a surprisingly lighthearted tone in *Vanity of Duluoaz*:

Artistic morality, that was the point, because then I devised the idea of burning most of what I wrote so that my art would not appear (to myself as well as to others) to be done for ulterior, or practical motives, but just as a function, a daily duty, a daily scatological "heap" for the sake of purgation. So I'd burn what I wrote, with the candle flame, and watch the paper curl up and squirm, and smile madly. The way writers are born, I guess. (257)

One cannot deny that the counter productivity of this method of discipline borders on the insane, but Kerouac believed that it would make him a better artist somehow. He recognizes the craziness of burning his writing when he affirms that he would "smile madly" at the burning paper, yet asserts his vague belief that it would help him improve by saying, "The way writers are born, I guess." His search for artistic purity would eventually be rewarded, as Clark astutely notes: "It was not until several years later that Kerouac discovered a more direct method of attaining purity or sincerity: writing straight from the heart, without second thoughts ('spontaneity')" (*Jack Kerouac: A Biography* 67). What the future might bring brought little relief or joy to Kerouac at the time, when he spent his days writing words he would burn at night.

Ginsberg let Kerouac carry on like that for almost two months, evidence of the bottomlessness of his support for Kerouac and of the limitations of bottomless support. Ginsberg was not yet equipped to guide Kerouac; he was four years younger and in awe of him physically. In fact, it was at this time that Ginsberg “came out” to Kerouac. McNally writes, “Sitting in Hartley Hall, he had told Jack, ‘You know, I love you, and I want to sleep with you, and I really like men.’ Jack sighed, covered his face with his hands, and half-smiled, half-moaned, ‘Ooooooh, noooo.’” (*Desolate Angel* 80). This serves as an example of Kerouac’s ability to help others live more authentic lives. Their friendship did not get better or worse as a result of Ginsberg’s admission, but it must have helped Ginsberg breathe a little easier, to become a little more comfortable in his own skin. Unfortunately, at that time Kerouac needed somebody to guide him out of the quagmire of self-pity into which he was sinking, and Ginsberg, in need of guidance himself, could not do that. It was Burroughs, not Ginsberg, who stepped in to rescue him.

Burroughs found Kerouac’s self-destructive behavior unnecessary and offered to help in his own inimitable way. According to Maher, “Burroughs found Kerouac’s quest for Self-Ultimacy absurd, seeing no use for self-destruction as a means of achieving high art. Burroughs recommended instead a ‘bang of morphine’” (*Kerouac: His Life and Work* 130). Burroughs’s idea that a “bang of morphine” was a cure for self-destructive behavior reveals a lot about the man who would become Kerouac’s next mentor.

Kerouac and Burroughs would not have become the writers they became had they not known each other. According to Johnson, Burroughs “found something infectious in Jack’s passion for writing. In fact, he later thought Jack had been far more of an influence on him than vice versa” (*The Voice is All* 181). Spurred on by the infectiousness of

Kerouac's dedication to his art, though unimpressed by the results of that dedication, Burroughs thought up a practical exercise that could help both of them: to co-write a novel about the Lucien Carr/David Kammerer murder.

They called this novel *And the Hippos Were Boiled in Their Tanks*. Burroughs wrote the chapters from the point of view of "Will Dennison." Kerouac wrote the chapters from the point of view of "Mike Ryko." McNally observes, "The dark iron taste of Dashiell Hammett permeated the book's style" (*Desolate Angel* 77). Burroughs wanted to use Hammett as a model to help break Kerouac of his tendency to overwrite. Johnson claims that "the minimalistic *noir* prose came naturally to Burroughs, but even though Jack was a good mimic, it was apparently a struggle for him to write in a voice that was the antithesis of his own" (*The Voice is All* 181). The evidence of this struggle is not self-evident. Kerouac's chapters in the *Hippos* show vast improvement over his previous work, and they are worlds better than *Orpheus Emerged*, another novel he composed at about this time.

Each chapter in *And the Hippos Were Boiled in Their Tanks* goes by the title of the character narrating it. Burroughs wrote the opening chapter, in which Will Dennison introduces Phillip Tourian and Ramsay Allen, the fictional representatives of Lucien Carr and David Kammerer, respectively. Dennison describes Phillip as "the kind of boy literary fags write sonnets to," and he means that as a compliment. He says Ramsay Allen "looks like a down-at-the-heels actor, or someone who used to be somebody." He also says that Ramsay is "a very intelligent guy but you wouldn't know it to see him now. He is so stuck on Phillip he is hovering over him like a shy vulture, with a foolish sloppy

grin on his face” (*And the Hippos Were Boiled in Their Tanks* 4). At this point, the scene has been set. The chapter ends with Mike Ryko passed out on Dennison’s couch.

Kerouac’s Mike Ryko chapters employ a similar Dashiell Hammett style prose, but they focus more on people’s frustrated desires, their inner world, than do Burroughs’s chapters. They show people spinning their wheels fast, but only sinking deeper into the mud as a result. In chapter two, Ryko comments that he and Phillip had talked along for a while about the New Vision, which Phillip was then “in the process of trying to work out” (13). He does not condemn Phillip for not having it all worked out. Rather, Kerouac seems to have a built-in admiration for “the process of trying to work it out.” In his own process of trying to work out his writing, Kerouac makes notable strides in *Hippos*. Under Burroughs’s watchful eye, the useless adverbs and thesaurus-like searching for synonyms for “said” begin to disappear. The result is much improved dialogue, as evidenced by this three-way conversation between Ryko [Kerouac], Phillip [Lucien], and Janie [Edie]:

“When are you shipping out again, Mike?” Phillip asked.

“Why,” I said, “in a couple of weeks, I guess.”

“The shit you are,” Janie said.

“Well,” Phillip said as we crossed the Square, “I’ve been thinking about shipping out myself” (13)

This passage sounds like real people talking. It is all very clear to the reader, down to the dynamics of the relationships. Following on the heels of Burroughs’s opening Will Dennison chapter, the reader knows that Phillip is thinking of shipping out in order to get away from Ramsey Allen, who hovers over him like a “shy vulture.” The

clarity and realism of this dialogue marks an important improvement for Kerouac. He would regress at times to excessively flowery dialogue in *The Town and the City*, but the lessons he learned while composing *Hippos* with Burroughs were never forgotten.

Kerouac continues to use dialogue to clarify the tension between Phillip and Ramsey. Ryko says to Philip, “If you want to get rid of the guy, just tell him to get off your tail and stay away,” to which Philip responds, “That wouldn’t work. He just wouldn’t stay away” (15). Though the problem becomes clear, the solution remains elusive. In this book, there is a lot of talking, but nothing gets done. The characters know that something must be done, but they do not know what to do or how to do it. This same pattern of talk for talk’s sake can be seen in this exchange about the New Vision:

“Why can’t you write poetry and work out your New Vision in New York?”

Philip smiled. “Because Al’s around, and he’s a dead weight on all my ideas. I’ve got some new ideas. He belongs to an ancient generation.” (17)

Once again, the problem is defined: The ancient generation, represented by Ramsay Allen, is a dead weight on Philip’s supposedly new ideas. Thus, a New Vision is necessary. Philip is sure of that and Ryko seems to believe it too; but neither of them knows how to enact the change or what the change should even consist of. They remain “in the process of trying to work it out.”

Less forgiving than Ryko, Dennison gets annoyed and frustrated when the other characters come to him with the same old problems that they remain eternally unable to solve. In chapter three, Ramsay Allen comes to talk to him about Philip. This does not surprise Dennison, who reports, “I’d been hearing about it since I met him” (26).

Dennison does his best to talk some sense into Allen: “Do you want to know what I

think? I think this whole Phillip complex is like the Christian heaven, an illusion born of a need, floating around in some nebulous misty Platonic nowhere, always just around the corner like prosperity, but never *here and now*,” to which Allen responds, “No, no, it’s not true!” (27). Burroughs exhibits strong natural talent as a writer in this scene. This must have impressed Kerouac, who, although he had been writing for years, had to write better than he had ever written before if he wanted his chapters to match the quality of Burroughs’s chapters. Burroughs demonstrates his talent by showing that the conversation between Dennison and Allen, which should be dramatic, is just another episode in the ongoing saga of Allen’s obsession with Phillip. Allen tells Dennison, “I do want to sleep with him. But I want his affection more than anything. And I want it to be permanent” (27). Dennison assures him that this is impossible: “I’m going to say it again and I’m going to say it slow: Phillip isn’t queer. He might sleep with you, which I doubt altogether, but anything permanent is impossible.” Undeterred, Allen replies, “I want him to love me,” after which Dennison concludes, “You’re nuts” (28). He tries to drop the subject and they go out to eat. Before they even get their food, Dennison reports that Allen “started rehashing the Phillip question.” This time Dennison does not take the bait. He says, “I ate my food and said, yes, why not, no go ahead, and stopped listening to him. Like I say, I’d heard all this for years” (29). Burroughs handles narrative effectively in *Hippos*, but his excursions off the beaten path of narrative would have a more profound influence on Kerouac.

Dennison tells one story about three cops who, unprovoked, beat up a fifty-year-old man at the bar and get away with it because they are cops. The scene does not move the story or expand Dennison’s character in any way. It is simply a chronicle of

something that Dennison saw with his own eyes. It was exactly the sort of thing that Kerouac was looking to do. Kerouac paid close attention to this, learned from it, and would later make it a part of his own style. In addition to chronicling what he saw, Burroughs incorporated commentary on what he saw happening in America with the same disregard for storytelling rules of any kind. This following passage is a good example of such commentary:

I had the feeling that all over America such stupid arguments were taking place on street corners and in bars and restaurants. All over America, people were pulling credentials out of their pockets and sticking them under someone else's nose to prove they had been somewhere or done something. And I thought someday everyone in America will suddenly jump up and say "I don't take any shit!" and start pushing and cursing and clawing at the man next to him (104).

Kerouac copies this technique, even employing very similar verbiage, in this memorable passage of *On the Road* when Kerouac, who has landed a job as a security guard in a barracks, is coerced by his partner into actually making arrests: "We went to the offending room, and Sledge opened the door and told everybody to file out. It was embarrassing. Every single one of us was blushing. This is the story of America. Everybody's doing what they think they're supposed to do" (68). One can see that Burroughs's commentary on what was happening "all over America" encouraged Kerouac to incorporate some of his own commentary in telling "the story of America."

Later in *Hippos*, Kerouac offers the reader another snippet of conversation about the New Vision. As Philip tries to explain the New Vision to his girlfriend, Barbara,

James Cathcart, a freshman at Columbia, and Ryko himself, one sees that the theory does not stand up too well to questioning:

“The ultimate society has to be the completely artistic society. Each of these artist citizens must, during the course of his lifetime, complete his own spiritual circle.”

“What do you mean, spiritual circle?” Barbara wanted to know.

“I mean the circle of one’s spiritual life. You complete the cycle of experience, in an artistic sense, and by means of art, and that is your individual creative offering to society.”

“Just how is such a society to be attained?” Cathcart wanted to know.

“I don’t know,” Philip said. (39).

Phillip’s quest for the New Vision seems half-baked and nonsensical, and maybe it is; but that is not the point. Kerouac was listening, and he includes this glimpse of the New Vision because it did indeed change his aesthetic philosophy. The quest for knowledge becomes just as important to him as the having of knowledge. In “Into the Heart of Things: Neal Cassady and the Search for the Authentic,” George Mouratidis writes, “Kerouac underscores the significance of the *process* of authentication itself—the journey rather than its end—thus demonstrating that that which would be deemed most authentic is actually a *becoming* rather than a being” (70). In his own quest to become an artist, Kerouac recognized that he must respect the process of perpetual becoming, respecting his own development as a journey rather than an end.

Kerouac’s Mike Ryko does not get the last chapter of *Hippos*, as Burroughs’s Will Dennison handles the ending. In his last chapter, the penultimate chapter of the book, Kerouac does manage to write something that anticipates his later work. The final



exchange between Philip and Ryko is melodramatic in a cinematic way, but not at all poorly done:

“Well,” said Philip, “here we go again. See you behind bars.”

“I’ll go and see you,” I said.

“Bring me good books and all that.”

“Yeah.”

We shook hands and patted each on the shoulders and leered at each other, smiling. Then he said “So long” and I said “So long” and he turned and went into the lobby, and I walked toward Columbus Circle where two big trucks went by that made me want to travel far. (179)

Kerouac here expresses his feeling that the ending of one thing has to be the beginning of another, and that sheer kinetic movement is his preferred way of warding off heartbreak. He expresses this succinctly in *On the Road*, saying, “The only thing to do was go” (120). This same philosophy would become the philosophical backbone of his spontaneous prose technique, the breakthrough that signified that he had at last found his authentic voice as an artist.

One other notable thing in regards to Kerouac’s artistic development is his use of profanity in *Hippos*. He shies away from using profanity in a way that Burroughs does not. Oftentimes Kerouac’s avoidance of profanity causes awkward passages like this one, in which he reflects upon the possible reasons that Philip and his girlfriend Barbara do not have sex: “I wondered what prevented them from ever copulating. Sometimes they would neck all night long on the couch without actually copulating, sometimes even in their underclothing. That sort of technical virginity was a pain in the neck” (42). Though

Cassady's letters, particularly "The Great Sex Letter" and "The Cherry Mary Letter," are often, and rightly, credited with freeing Kerouac from literary inhibitions and helping him trust that using everyday words for sex acts does not automatically eliminate all literary quality from a piece of writing, one should not overlook Burroughs's influence in this area. While Kerouac has his Mike Ryko awkwardly meditate on why Philip does not "copulate" with Barbara, Burroughs has his Will Dennison write in dialogue what he must have heard Kerouac say at some point: "Ryko said from across the room, 'You've been necking with her for months. Why don't you just up and fuck her?'" (128). Burroughs, as he would throughout his career, uses profanity fearlessly. This not only helped usher Kerouac along to his authentic voice, where he did use profanity, (although there is not much profanity in the originally published version of *On the Road*), but it would also allow any future American artist who dealt with words to use profanity without fear of persecution. This is one of the most important parts of the legacy of the Beat Generation.

At the same time that he composed *Hippos*, Kerouac was also at work on two other novels. In August of 1945, he wrote Allen Ginsberg: "It may surprise you to know that I have been writing in prodigious amounts. I am writing three novels at this very minute, and keeping a large diary to boot" (*Selected Letters* 92). In addition to *Hippos*, Kerouac was working on *Orpheus Emerged* and *The Haunted Life*. *The Haunted Life* has much in common with *The Town and the City*, and I will explore its most important connection to the development of Kerouac's authentic voice later. Right now I am going to discuss *Orpheus Emerged* and its connection to Kerouac's authentic voice.

*Orpheus Emerged* is the worst thing Kerouac ever wrote, and that includes his letters, journals, diaries, novels, sutras, and poems. If this novella was a football game, then Kerouac's team would have been blown out. It is worthwhile reading for aspiring writers. It will help them understand that in order to get good they are going to do some bad writing along the way, that in order to get good they are going to have to risk being bad, to put themselves on the line. The poet Robert Creeley recognizes that in his exceedingly kind introduction to the novel.

In truth, Creeley's kindest words are for Kerouac's effort. He writes, "No one's told him how to write other than what he's got from books as best he can. There's no definite tradition for such as he is, no social habit sustaining him. He's gloriously making it up as he goes along but trying with such moving determination to be a real writer; an encompassing writer, a great writer" (*Orpheus Emerged* 13). These things are true, although it is difficult to tell from these comments if Creeley had actually read *Orpheus Emerged* or not. It is hard to look at *Orpheus Emerged* as an isolated thing and get the idea that Kerouac is "gloriously making up" anything. Creeley's specific comments about the book do not give one any more confidence that he actually read it. He states, "In the awkwardness of that time, drinking, it appeared, eased the male confusion, made inarticulate feelings far simpler to accommodate, and let one feel an unaccustomed comfort in the increasingly blurred surroundings . . . . So, in this poignantly fledgling novella what males do, along with write and talk, is *drink*" (*Orpheus Emerged* 11). The drinking in *Orpheus Emerged* is rather tame in comparison to the drinking in *Hippos*, where Ryko and Philip exhibit an inordinate and alarming thirst. Male drinking is not the thing that most stands out about *Orpheus Emerged*. It seems that Creeley had to say

something about the book, so he said that. One thing was pretty much as good as another. Nobody can blame him too harshly if he did not finish reading the book. Clearly empathetic with Kerouac's struggle, Creeley makes this astute observation: "In America one has to find one's own way, step by difficult step. At any time there is much to be learned, much to be discarded, much to be engaged and contested" (14). Creeley concludes his introduction with this kindhearted wisdom. His introduction is the best thing about the book.

In *Orpheus Emerged*, Kerouac once again divides his protagonist into two different characters, Paul and Michael. These two characters very obviously symbolize two different sides of Kerouac, and *Orpheus Emerged* is very obviously about Kerouac's desire to unify these two sides. Along with *Hippos*, this book does contain some of Kerouac's earliest writing about the characters of the Beat Generation. Lucien, Ginsberg, and Burroughs all have their fictional representatives in this book. For these aforementioned reasons, Maher believes, "The work is critical in the Kerouac oeuvre for his first extended attempt to use his friends as pseudonymous characters as well as for incorporating elements of himself into various personas" (*Kerouac: His Life and Work* 134). This would be easier to agree with if the unification of Michael and Paul at the end of the story would have been the end of Kerouac's efforts to people his stories with various characters that represent different sides of his personality. This did not happen, however, as he divides himself into even finer pieces in *The Town and the City*, creating five Martin brothers, each representing a different side of his personality or a different time in his life. His incorporation of his friends as pseudonymous characters would be better if Kerouac managed to make them seem like friends. Much like in *The Sea is My*

*Brother*, (which is, it should be said, a far superior early effort), Kerouac's characters do not seem to like each other, and one could very well wonder why anybody would like them.

*Orpheus Emerged* begins in a bookshop. Paul (Kerouac) peruses some books, and Leo (Ginsberg) knows he will find Paul there because Paul always goes there and peruses "Nietzsche's complete works, a novel by Stendhal, Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*, *Ulysses*, *The Oxford Book of English Verse*, and many others of this kind" (18). Kerouac's fictional representation of Ginsberg is rather unflattering: "Slim, dark haired, wearing blue horn-rimmed glasses, the boyishly ugly Leo hurried along the shop and slapped Paul on the back" (18). Leo has heard that Paul has lost his job and asks him if it is true or not. Paul ignores the question, making Leo shout, "You have!" Then, "The other waved his hand and sent Leo stepping back. 'Don't annoy me,' he hissed sharply. 'It's my affair. Don't start asking for details. Please shut up'" (18-19). Awkward third-person narration, stilted dialogue, and inert, unlikable characters help get *Orpheus Emerged* off to an inauspicious beginning from which it never recovers.

However, if you like blatantly obvious foreshadowing, *Orpheus Emerged* does not fail to disappoint. Kerouac writes this about Paul as he hurries with Leo toward a lecture on Nietzsche: "Despite his haste, he looked like a loafer of some sort, for his clothes were those of a tramp, and his shoe soles flapped rhythmically as he walked" (20). After briefly explaining that Paul had mysteriously appeared on campus from "the road" just a couple months before, Kerouac then introduces Michael by way of this conversation that he has with Arthur (Lucien):

Of Paul, Arthur had this to say one day to Michael, who lived on the campus with his mistress and was himself some sort of loafer: “Paul has something in his past that drives him like a madman. He’s daemonic man personified! I wonder what it is?” And to this, the laconic Michael only answered, “Yes, I suppose so. It must interest you a great deal. But as for me, I can’t stand him.” “It’s because he’s so much like you,” Arthur had been quick to remark.

So, Paul looks “like a loafer of some sort,” and Michael “was himself some sort of loafer”; and Arthur instantly knows that Michael cannot stand Paul because Paul is so much like him. Could Michael and Paul actually be the same person? One gets the idea that they just might be.

Later, when Michael goes on a trip for no apparent reason other than to leave his poems unguarded against their possible theft by Paul, Paul steals Michael’s poems in order to critique them to Leo. Unsurprisingly, Paul finds much fault with Michael’s poems, and he ridicules them mercilessly before Leo: “Don’t you see, in order to speak with God—as he puts it—he’s trying to dehumanize himself. Claims here October moves him more than news of human tragedy” (80). It is a good thing that the Michael side of Kerouac did not listen to the Paul side of Kerouac, for he would go on to make his love and renown for the month of October famous in *On the Road*, where, as he boards a bus after his first life-changing, cross-country road trip, he writes, “I was going home in October. Everybody goes home in October” (101). Numerous biographers and critics have seized upon those lines, wherein Kerouac draws a simple but poetic connection between a certain time of year and a feeling. Many people, from Kerouac’s friends to those that never knew him but in his writing, think of those lines in relation to the fact

that he died in October. In “Gone in October,” John Clellon Holmes writes, “I’d thought it was apt that Jack had gone away in October, which was his favorite month” (*Representative Men* 153). Kerouac’s line about October works because it makes people feel something, and it will go on making people feel something for as long as there are homes and Octobers. Maybe Michael was on to something when he wrote that October moves him more than news of human tragedy.

Paul continues his ruthless critique of Michael’s poems: “Is he panting after the new vision too, like all the others? Ha ha ha” (81). Kerouac was indeed looking for a new vision. Lucien had started him in that direction, and part of what he does in *Orpheus Emerged* is work out his own idea of what the new vision means to him. In this completely fictional conversation between Arthur (Lucien) and Michael (Kerouac), Kerouac presents a discussion of the New Vision, with some not-so-veiled digs at Lucien for inability to create anything:

“I’ve been thinking something out,” Arthur said, making himself comfortable on the bed, propping a pillow under his arm and leaning on his elbow. “I want your opinion on these matters. I’ve prepared a sort of manifest, let’s say, or an essay of a sort. It’s on the subject of the artist...”

“That’s a nonsensical pursuit,” smiled Michael.

“Not theoretically. You must admit that much of modern thought is centered around the problem of the artist and society, of the artist and himself—as in Rimbaud, for instance, in his case...”

“Yes, I know,” admitted Michael disconsolately, but so many artists are preoccupied with the question, they can’t find time to create” (96).

Isolated, this passage does not have much to recommend it. In the context of Kerouac's artistic development and his place in the Beat Generation, this passage is of some interest. Kerouac would go on to become "the King of the Beats," (a phrase which Gifford and Lee are quick to point out, "he thoroughly detested" (254)), in part because of the attitude that he expresses in this passage. An artist must first find time to create before preoccupying himself with questions of any kind, even those directly related to him, like the "problem of the artist and society." An artist who would preoccupy himself in such a way would never find his authentic voice. He would never even get started in that direction. Guignon writes, "The opposition between social existence and actual life provides the framework for the response envisioned in the ideal of becoming authentic. What is required is the ability to disengage oneself from society and its pointless ritual and game-playing, to recoil from all that hypocrisy and pretense, and to turn inward into the innermost self" (*On Being Authentic* 72). If an artist is to become authentic, he must have the ability to disengage from the society and turn toward his innermost self, as his innermost self is the productive artist. As Arthur continues his symbolic theory of the artist, Michael takes the bait and counters with his own symbolic theory:

"Look, Michael . . ." and Arthur extracted a sheet of paper from his pocket. "Here I've worked out a symbolism, a modern one that is . . . ah, applicable to my system. It's Prometheus! The artist, Prometheus, steals fire from the gods—the fire, the secret, of creation—and brings it down to earth . . . You! You, for instance, fit into the symbolism—as Prometheus, the thief of divine fire."

"I, Prometheus?" asked Michael almost angrily. "When I could be *Orpheus!* Have you ever looked into that? There's a symbol for you!"



“What do you mean?”

“Well, you say that the artist—in this case, myself—you say that I am a plausible symbol of Prometheus. Prometheus the artist, when I could be Orpheus, the *artist-man*! Do you understand what I’m trying to say? When I could be the whole artist *and* man. Unchained!” (97)

Indeed, this symbolic uniting of the artist (Michael) and the man (Paul) within him is what Kerouac tries to do in *Orpheus Emerged*. These two sides of him war throughout the novel. In one scene, clearly imitative of Stephen Dedalus shattering the chandelier with the ashplant in *Ulysses*, Michael tries to hit Paul with a floor lamp, only to miss him narrowly. In the penultimate chapter, after a fiery argument during which Michael claims he does not want to go on living because there is no “beauty” on “human terms” (142), Paul and Michael are united by the mysterious, beautiful, and symbolically named Helen: “Helen pressed both their hands tightly and only smiled . . . And in this manner; amid the happy endearments of the woman, and the silence of thought and imagination, the miracle of wholeness was renewed” (147). Though this was not the case for Kerouac, as his own artistic “miracle of wholeness” would not happen until six years later, when he switched to first-person narration in *On the Road*, at least he never wrote anything like *Orpheus Emerged* again.

As Kerouac continued to make his way through the list of books and writers that Burroughs had given him to study, he came across a novel that would give him more confidence that one could produce something of literary value using an informal, profane, and first-person style. That novel was Louis-Ferdinand Celine’s *Journey to the End of Night*. In this novel, Kerouac saw a narrator that was alienated from society, yet at the

same time capable of making sharp observations of it and also of making his way along in it without drawing too much attention to himself. Celine, like Saroyan, seemed to thumb his nose at the very idea of literary decorum. As Johnson observes, “Celine communicated with the reader in a frontal, outrageously comic way that was seemingly artless; his voice . . . appeared to be the language of the streets” (200), and she concludes that Kerouac “caught a glimpse of the writer he wanted to become in the unlikely fusion of Wolfe and Celine” (201). No other Kerouac biographer has credited Celine with having this significant an impact on Kerouac’s development. McNally acknowledges the likelihood of Celine’s stylistic influence, stating that Celine “wrote as people talked, putting spoken language into print with his famous ellipsis” (*Desolate Angel* 85). This breach of standard punctuation would have pleased Kerouac, who would go on to make such breaches part of his style; but Johnson goes further. She also credits Celine for planting the literary seed that would later grow into the Sal Paradise/Dean Moriarty relationship in *On the Road*, claiming that Kerouac made that relationship under the influence of Celine’s Ferdinand Bardamu and Leon Robinson in *Journey to the End of Night* (202). An examination of *Journey to the End of Night* credits Johnson’s claim that this novel influenced Kerouac’s approach to *On the Road*, but the Bardamu/Robinson relationship has only superficial similarities to the Paradise/Moriarty relationship.

Celine’s Bardamu, in fact, has a decidedly more pessimistic outlook than the wide-eyed, wow-saying Sal Paradise. He says, “When the grave lies open before us, let’s not try to be witty, but on the other hand, let’s not forget, but make it our business to record the worst of the human viciousness we’ve seen without changing one word” (Loc 305). Kerouac would make it his “business” to “not forget,” and “to record,” but he

tended to gloss over, forgive, or soften “human viciousness” in a way that Celine refused to do.

Kerouac’s introduction of Dean Moriarty is a far cry from Celine’s introduction to Leon Robinson. Kerouac writes that Dean’s “dirty workclothes clung to him so gracefully, as though you couldn’t buy a better fit from a custom tailor but only earn it from the Natural Tailor of Natural Joy, as Dean had, in his stresses,” and that even “his ‘criminality’ was not something that sulked and sneered; it was a wild yea-saying overburst of American joy” (7). Celine writes that Robinson “had a lowdown, ungrateful nature” (loc 6635). Kerouac writes that, for Dean, “sex was the one and only holy and important thing in life,” and that “he didn’t care one way or the other, ‘so long’s I can get that lil ole gal with that lil sumpin down there tween her legs, boy’” (8). Robinson could hardly have a more different opinion on the subject:

“‘You know,’ he said, ‘I can get along fine without women, their big asses, their fat thighs, their rosebud lips, their bellies that always have something growing in them, if it’s not a brat it’s a disease . . . Their smiles won’t pay your rent for you! Take me in my pad; if I had a woman, it wouldn’t do me a bit of good to show the landlord her ass on the fifteenth of the month, he wouldn’t reduce the rent!’” (Loc 4732)

Though Robinson could hardly be more different than Moriarty in personality, the relationship between them and the first-person narrator of their respective novels helps connect what would otherwise be disconnected novels. Because of the strength of book two, the early section from which Dean Moriarty is largely absent, *On the Road* is a better, more connected novel than *Journey to the End of Night*. Both novels do share the

similarity of introducing a memorable character, only to have that character disappear for an extended period of time.

Time itself almost could almost qualify as a character in each novel. Celine's Bardamu muses, "Everyone has his own way of mourning the passage of time" (Loc 801). Indeed, this is another of the key differences between *Journey to the End of Night* and *On the Road*: A sense of mourning permeates *Journey to the End of Night*. Though it has some uproariously funny parts, it has the overall feel of a lamentation. *On the Road*, on the other hand, has the overall feel of a celebration. That is due in part, no doubt, by Kerouac's explanation that "I didn't write 'On the Road' to be malicious, I wrote it with joy in my heart" (*Selected Letters* 377). If Celine is right in his assertion that everyone has his own way of mourning the passage of time, the guys in *On the Road* mourn it by having fun. It does not follow from the fact that time is passing that there is no such thing as a good time. On the contrary, the fact that time is passing should compel one to make the most of his time, and that is one of the lessons that *On the Road* tries to teach.

Paradise befriends Dean immediately, is perfectly willing to inconvenience himself to go on spur-of-the-moment road trips with him, and wholeheartedly believes that Dean has something important to teach him about life. Bardamu gets repulsed at the mere thought that Robinson will show up again. He states, "You'd have a hard time talking me out of the idea that Robinson wasn't mostly to blame for my trouble starting up again . . . . He was bound to come back again and make me think about his rotten life. Actually everything conspired to make me think of his repulsive substance" (Loc 4055). Paradise would never think of saying something like that about anybody, let alone Dean

Moriarty. The Bardamu/Robinson relationship has only structural similarities with the Paradise/Moriarty relationship.

Celine certainly proved to Kerouac that a worthwhile novel could be written in the first-person. Some of the highlights of the novel are the times when Bardamu lets you in on his thoughts in ways that seem tailored to first-person narration, such as this quip about the boss that hired him to do yet another low-paying, dead end job: “He took me on at a very low salary but with a contract a mile long, full of clauses entirely to his advantage. In short, a boss” (Loc 6181). Celine’s use of first-person here increases the connection to the reader; it does not decrease it. Anybody who has been hired for such a job, or who has ever put his name on any contract that he knows to be entirely advantageous to the person who wrote the contract, knows exactly what he is talking about. Another such offhand quip late in the novel, uncharacteristically positive, might have caught Kerouac’s attention: “Think of the saving, getting all your thrills from reminiscences . . . Reminiscences are something we’ve got plenty of, one can buy beauties, enough to last us a lifetime” (Loc 7093) This passage must have resonated with Kerouac, who had already decided to base his art on reminiscences, from which he hoped to give himself and readers “thrills” and “beauties” to last “a lifetime.”

Dean Moriarty steals cars for joyrides. Kerouac classifies this criminality as an “overburst of American joy.” One could certainly take issue with that classification, but most people would agree that Robinson is far more devilish character. *Journey to the End of Night* changes when Robinson agrees to kill an old lady for money, something Dean Moriarty would never do, and then muddles up the attempt and winds up blinding himself instead. He makes love to Madelon, the woman who cares for him while he is blind, only

to leave her when he regains his sight. Madelon knows all about how he blinded himself and she tracks him down at the end of the novel with the purpose to win him back or turn him in to the police. He calls her bluff, stating that she would go to jail with him, at which time she breaks down and protests her love for him. Robinson then launches into this speech:

“If you want the whole truth . . . everything, absolutely everything! Disgusts me and turns my stomach! Not just you! . . . Everything! . . . And love most of all! . . . Yours as much as anyone else’s . . . You’re satisfied repeating the rubbish other people say . . . You think it makes sense . . . People have told you there’s nothing better than love, they’ve told you it’ll go down with everybody, everywhere and always, and that’s good enough for you . . . Well, I say fuck their love!” (Loc 7228) (Ellipsis Celine’s)

Upon his refusal to go back to her, Madelon shoots Robinson twice with a revolver in a taxi. The taxi-driver, more concerned about trouble with the police and blood staining his seats, does not stop until the next assigned traffic stop, when Madelon gets out and runs away, leaving Bardamu to nurse Robinson, who is not dying fast enough in his opinion. Bardamu, in spite of having finished medical school and begun a practice as a doctor, finds himself too spiritually empty to help Robinson die: “We’re short of practically everything we’d need to help someone die. All we have left inside is the things that are useful in everyday life, a life of comfort, a life all for ourselves, a life of viciousness” (Loc 7466). Celine had set out at the beginning of the novel to record the worst of human viciousness, and at the end of the novel he finds himself with the challenging task of recording his own. He concludes, “There was only me, just me, me all

alone, beside him, the genuine Ferdinand, who was short of everything that would make a man bigger than his own bare life, short of love for other people's lives. Of that I had none, or so little there was no use showing it. I wasn't as big as death. I was a lot smaller" (7474). Kerouac uses a similar technique of connecting the beginning of *On the Road* to the end of it to affect an emotional, powerful, and thematically cohesive conclusion. Having already obtained a sense of the effectiveness of such a technique from the bebop jazz musicians he loved to listen to, he now saw Celine execute beautifully this circular compositional technique in *Journey to the End of Night*.

Kerouac would soon have his chance to learn if he had anything within himself that could help someone die. In August of 1945, Leo Kerouac was diagnosed with stomach cancer. Kerouac nursed his father while his mother went to work at the shoe factory, and then took Benzedrine so he could stay awake to write at night. His father's sickness actually increased his resolve to write something that would endure. Rank provides some insight into how Kerouac could maintain such steadfast resolve in such trying circumstances: "The real artist regards his work as more important than the whole of life and experience, which are but a means to production—almost, indeed, a by-product of it" (50). Kerouac's view of himself as a "real artist" intensified during this time, as he wrote Ginsberg that September: "After all my art is more important to me than anything" (*Selected Letters* 98).

No matter what happened in his life, Kerouac kept his focus on his art-problems. He elaborated about this to Ginsberg: "Until I find a way to unleash the inner life in an art-method, nothing about me will be clear" (*Selected Letters* 98). Having finished *Orpheus Emerged, And the Hippos Were the Boiled in Their Tanks*, and worked

extensively on *The Haunted Life*, he knew he still had not found the “art-method” for which he sought. Johnson confirms that he still felt “a long way from finding his own method—his own voice” (197). This feeling does not seem to be accompanied by any frustration or panic. Kerouac had a reverence for the process, for becoming, and he firmly believed that if he continued writing he dedicated himself to the process of continual artistic production then he would become the artist he was wanted to become. One of the reasons he had not yet discovered his full artistic powers was because at that time, even after having read Celine, he “rejected the whole idea of writing a directly autobiographical novel” (Johnson 198). As he looked at the writing he had done over the past year, *The Haunted Life*, his Wolfean depiction of life in Galloway (Lowell), would become the template for the next book that he would write.

Leo Kerouac died in May, 1946. When he returned from the funeral to start work on *The Town and the City*, and though he decided to style the novel after his most beloved writer, Thomas Wolfe, he undoubtedly had his father on his mind as well. As Charters notes, “He had taken Thomas Wolfe as his model, but his book was really writing for his father, to prove to the memory of Leo Kerouac that Jack could write a book that would sell, that he could be a creative writer” (*Kerouac: A Biography* 62). Rank’s explanation helps clarify the complex relationship between Kerouac, his father, and Kerouac’s first novel: “The frequent occasions when a great work of art has been created in the reaction following upon the death of a close relation seem to me to realize those favourable cases for this type of artist in which he can dispense with the killing of the building’s victim because the victim has died a natural death and has subsequently, to all appearances, had a monument piously erected to him” (*Art and Artist* 49). There is no



doubt that Kerouac wanted to write something that would be a monument to his dead father. There is also no doubt that one of the reasons he could write such a novel was because his father was no longer there to prevent him from doing so. The amount of writing Kerouac did between *Atop an Underwood* and *The Town and the City* is even more impressive when one considers that he did not have a room of his own in all that time. Now, with Leo gone, Kerouac would have a room of his own again. And he went to work. As Brinkley states, “Leo always wanted his son to ‘get a job,’ and that’s what the twenty-four-year-old Jack Kerouac did: he stayed home and started writing *The Town and the City*” (*WindBlown World* iv).

CHAPTER FOUR: *THE TOWN AND THE CITY AND ON THE ROAD: 1946-1951.*

On August 26, 1947, Kerouac wrote a letter to Neal Cassady while working a shift as a security guard in Marin City. More than a year after his father had died, and two-thirds of the way through composing *The Town and the City*, Kerouac still grieves his father's death. In expressing these deep-seated personal feelings to Cassady, Kerouac reveals how his father's death has changed his perception of him:

I don't know what others have felt. But those who reveal their feelings to me reveal things that are nowhere nearly as intense, perpetually agonized, loving and maddened, as my feelings were and are for my father. It's incredible. I cannot forget him one bit. I never never will. And my mother also, living and later dead. And all of us dead. Can't you see it? And all this has been transferred to other intimate human friends . . . . And while my father was alive, all this. Lying unconscious in me, was covered over with stupid intellectual malices and stupider worldly malices. The hatred I had for his face!—and now, what a terror it is to learn that this hatred for his face was a mad love for it. (*Selected Letters* 118)

Kerouac's newfound love for his father inspired him to write a novel that would not only prove to his father's memory that he could become a great writer, but would make his father a hero in the process. His decision to make George Martin, Leo Kerouac's fictional representative in *The Town and the City*, the hero of the story would obviously have a profound impact on the entire novel. Edie Parker offers a helpful observation about the complete reversal of how Kerouac felt about his father both before and after he died: "Jack used to tell me how all the old women of Lowell would talk to

one another over their picket fences and complain about how rotten their husbands were. Then, after they died, the same men became saints to these women. But then I thought, didn't Jack do the same thing with his brother and father, Gerard and Leo?" (*You'll Be Okay: My Life with Jack Kerouac* 34). Edie's observation offers some evidence to support Rank's theory that the death of a loved one often inspires an artist to erect a monument to the deceased. As will be shown, Kerouac himself gives some idea that he meant *The Town and the City* to be such a monument to Leo Kerouac. It is also worth reflecting on Rank's observation that the master-and-pupil relationship is of more importance to the artist's development than the father-and-son relationship. That was obviously true in Kerouac's case while his father was alive. Because of his profound disapproval of his son's chosen vocation, Leo Kerouac, in life, served as more of an impediment to Kerouac's artistic production than an inspiration for it. Upon his death, the impediment removed, Leo suddenly became Jack's inspiration. If one compares the fictional representation of Leo Kerouac in *The Haunted Life*, written while Leo was alive, with the fictional representation of Leo Kerouac in *The Town and the City*, written after he died, one sees two very different Leo Kerouac's indeed.

Kerouac's fictional representation of his father changed dramatically after his father died. Just two years before he began *The Town and the City*, Kerouac opened *The Haunted Life* with this paragraph:

"America isn't the same country anymore; it isn't even America anymore." Mr. Martin drew on his cigar with nodding and angry finality. "It's become a goddamn pesthole for every crummy race from the other side. America isn't America anymore. A white man can't walk down the street, or go in a restaurant,

or do business, or do anything for that matter without having to mix up with these goddamn greasers from the other side.” (29)

For this Mr. Martin to be the hero of a story, he would have to undergo an Ebenezer Scrooge-like change. Leo, on whom Mr. Martin was based, never underwent such a change. The only thing that changed was Kerouac’s perception of him. Kerouac’s introduction of George Martin in *The Town and the City* offers the reader a softer, if not necessarily a saintly, representation of Leo Kerouac:

George Martin had gone into the printing business and made a great success of himself in the town, first as a job-printer and later as a printer-publisher of small political newspapers that were read mainly in City Hall swivel chairs or at the cigar stores. He was a scowling, preoccupied, virile-looking man, big, genial, eagerly sympathetic, who could suddenly break out into a booming raspy laugh or just as easily grow very sentimental and misty-eyed. He knitted his brow in a kind of fierce concentration over a pair of heavy black eyebrows, his eyes were level and blue, and when someone spoke to him he had a habit of looking up with a startled air of wonder. (*The Town and the City* 6)

The George Martin of *The Town and the City* certainly makes a better first impression than the Mr. Martin of *The Haunted Life* in that he is not downright offensive, and Kerouac’s writing shows improvement as well. Edie believes that the Mr. Martin in *The Haunted Life* bears a closer resemblance to Leo Kerouac than does George Martin from *The Town and the City*: “Leo was much different than Jack described. To me anyway, he was a tyrant and a bully” (34). Kerouac’s refusal to excoriate his father in print, his softening of the man’s rough edges, is admirable in some respects. He took up

an impossible task, however, when he endeavored to make a loveable hero out of a tyrant and a bully. In *The Haunted Life*, Mr. Martin works well as the tyrannical parent that you root for the kid to break away from. In *The Town and the City*, in spite of all of Kerouac's best efforts, George Martin is not loveable, not likeable, not particularly interesting, and is never somebody that you want to cheer for. This is the primary reason the book, which contains some truly excellent writing, so often gets overlooked in critical discussions of Kerouac. Nicosia observes that "even Jack's friends failed to realize that he intended the father, George Martin, to be the 'greatest hero' of the book" (*Memory Babe* 308). Most critics, whether they praise the novel as the work of a promising young author, or decry it for its obvious debt to Wolfe, complete with bloated passages of Wolfean overwriting, also fail to realize that Kerouac intended George Martin to be the "greatest hero" of the book. Perhaps they do realize it, they just cannot believe it. Kerouac's decision to make his father the hero of his novel was akin to a captain of a ship throwing an eight-hundred pound anchor into the water and then trying to set sail.

The good news about Kerouac's decision is that it offers a profitable way of reading the novel, and one that has not been much explored before. A good understanding of *The Town and the City* is crucial to having a good understanding of *On the Road*. In *Understanding Jack Kerouac*, Matt Theado argues, "One cannot truly appreciate Kerouac and the complexity of the themes he would evolve throughout his career without reading his first book" (*Understanding Jack Kerouac* 39). In addition to enhancing one's appreciation of the complexity of Kerouac's themes, reading *The Town and the City*, (which, as I have pointed out, is not Kerouac's first book), enhances one's appreciation

for Kerouac's dedication to his art, and for how much he continued to improve as a result of that dedication.

To better understand *The Town and the City*, it helps to find a way to read the relationship between Kerouac and his father. Kerouac makes this difficult by creating multiple characters to represent different aspects of his personality. Peter Martin, Joe Martin, Francis Martin, Mickey Martin, and Charlie Martin all represent different sides of Kerouac's personality (Julian Martin, the sixth son, died in childhood, an obvious representation of Gerard). As evidenced by the journal Kerouac kept while composing this novel, this method of separating himself into different characters, which he had done in the later, third-person stories of *Atop an Underwood*, and throughout the entire narratives of *The Sea is My Brother* and *Orpheus Emerged*, was finally growing tiresome to him. He realized that he was not giving his material the point of view that he wanted to give it: "I wish I could write from the point of view of one hero instead of giving everyone in the story his due value—this makes me confused, many times disgusted. After all, I'm human. I have my beliefs" (*Windblown World: The Journals of Jack Kerouac* 9). Kerouac stuck with this third-person narration in spite of his own wishes and against his own natural inclinations, and he still wrote very well. McNally even declares that Kerouac, in *The Town and the City*, "had written as brilliantly as his master Wolfe" (*Desolate Angel* 103). Ginsberg was also blown away by the novel upon first reading it, and in his recollection of his first impressions of the novel he provides a blueprint for reading it profitably: "It seemed immortal, that book, in the sense of having recreated his whole childhood and his whole youthtime. A lot of our conversation around then was recollections of childhood, recollections of epiphanous moments of childhood" (*Jack's*

*Book 47*). It is possible to read *The Town and the City* as the kind of conversation that Ginsberg mentions in this quote, searching for “epiphanous moments,” particularly those involving the father, George Martin. This kind of reading prepares the way for a greater understanding of both *The Town and the City* and *On the Road*.

An early paragraph about George Martin shows that Kerouac could cram an amazing amount of material into a single paragraph even before he started imitating saxophone soloists. He could now write paragraphs of great length and density--full artistic representations of life as he knew it, as he does in this early paragraph describing a typical day in George Martin’s life:

The Martin father is a man of a hundred absorptions: he conducts his printing business, runs a linotype and a press, and keeps the books. In the midst of this he plays the horses and places his bets with a bookie in a downtown back-street, Rooney Street. At noon he carries on a shouting conversation with insurance men, newspapermen, salesmen and cigar store proprietors in a little bar off Daley Square. On his way home to supper he stops off at the Chinese restaurant to see his old friend Wong Lee. After supper he listens to his favorite programs, sitting in his den with the radio on full-blast. After dark he drives over to the bowling-alley and poolroom which he supervises, in order to bring in a little extra money. There he sits in the little office talking with a congregation of his old friends while the billiard balls click, the alleys roll and thunder, and everywhere there’s smoke and talk. At midnight he finds himself in a big poker or pinochle game that lasts long into the night. He comes home exhausted, but in the morning he’s off again to his place of business trailing cigar smoke behind him, shouting good

mornings to his associates in the shop, eating a hearty breakfast in the diner by the railroad tracks. (8)

In this paragraph one sees Kerouac at work on one of the narrative attitudes that he would perfect in *On the Road*: that of the narrator who is outwardly impressed by everything. He could create this attitude using the third-person or the first-person point of view. This description of George Martin's "hundred absorptions," which sounds so impressive at first, can also be seen as a depiction of an inauthentic man in action. Heidegger explains: "Tranquillization in inauthentic being . . . does not seduce one into stagnation and inactivity, but drives one to uninhibited 'busyness'" (*Being and Time* 171). This is the perfect introduction for George Martin, who, as the story progresses, represents the embodiment of inauthenticity. The exquisite detail of this writing often goes unnoticed because the reader has seen a million George Martin's. Trying to differentiate this George Martin from the rest is like trying to differentiate between one leaf and another. *On the Road*, by comparison, begins with an introduction of Dean Moriarty, and the reader knows immediately that he has never seen anyone quite like him before:

Dean came to the door in his shorts. Marylou was jumping off the couch; Dean had dispatched the occupant of the apartment to the kitchen, probably to make coffee, while he proceeded with his love-problems, for to him sex was the one and only holy and important thing in life, although he had to sweat and curse to make a living and so on. You saw that in the way he stood bobbing his head, always looking down, nodding, like a young boxer to instructions, to make you think he was listening to every word, throwing in a thousand "Yeses" and "That's right."



My first impression of Dean was of a young Gene Autry—trim, thin-hipped, blue-eyed, with a real Oklahoma accent—a sideburned hero of the snowy West. (2).

In *On the Road*, Kerouac has switched to the first-person point of view from the third-person point of view he employed in *The Town and the City*. He can capture and transcribe detail with equal ability regardless of which point-of-view he uses. One does not immediately see the advantage of his switching from third-person to first-person narration; one sees it as the novels progress. In *The Town and the City*, he creates five living sons of the Martin family to represent different sides of his personality and experiences of his life. This places quite a strain on the reader, making it difficult to follow which Martin brother is which. In *On the Road*, everything is seen through the eyes of a single narrator: Sal Paradise. The first-person narration thus becomes an organizational tool as well as a way to establish a more intimate connection with the reader. The most important thing to note in these introductory passages, however, is the difference between George Martin and Dean Moriarty. George Martin blends in; Dean Moriarty stands out.

In one of the most important, and best, scenes in *The Town and the City*, George Martin takes his youngest son, Mickey, to the track. The scene at the track focuses entirely on the feelings, responses, and thoughts that rise up in Mickey during a day at the track with his father. Kerouac manages to subtly depict the tension between him and his father while simultaneously providing an important revelation about him, one that certainly qualifies as an “epiphanous moment.” The scene is a story within the story, and it is Mickey’s story from the beginning:

Early one morning in May, Mickey Martin sat at his little desk by the window of his bedroom with his chin resting in his hand. He gazed outside at the misty green fields across the old road, brooding out the springtime dawn. It was the morning of a big day in his life. He was going to the races at Rockingham with his father, and then in the evening to dinner in a big restaurant and a show in the big Boston places. (*The Town and the City* 98)

After Mickey manages to wake his father and set him into the motion of his morning routine, and get out of the house where, as they drive away, the mother “was standing in the kitchen doorway with her arms pressed to her shiveringly, calling out every last-minute instruction and suggestion she could bring to mind, looking up at the sky to see if it was going to rain, warning them not to eat too many hotdogs, and so on” (101), Mickey feels a strange jubilation come over him, a jubilation Kerouac captures in a single, one-sentence paragraph:

“It was morning, and the boy was with his father” (102).

This short paragraph captures the feeling of wonderment that Kerouac felt, and would always feel, when he hopped into a car with somebody he cared about and drove away from home. It expresses the feeling of liberation that comes when riding in an automobile. It also demonstrates Kerouac’s increasing adeptness at pacing his writing to have a greater effect upon the reader. Before he began to use first-person narration so that he could do this more naturally by replicating in prose the intonations of his voice, he did it the old-fashioned way, by varying the length of his paragraphs. A short paragraph can have a great impact on the reader when it follows a long paragraph. It is like a one-two combination in boxing. A boxer does not always throw the jab in order to land it and

inflict damage on the opponent. Sometimes he throws it in order to blind the opponent so that he will not see the next punch coming, and that next punch is the one that is meant to make an impact. Skilled writers compose their paragraphs using a similar technique. It is a basic but effective method of impacting the reader.

After leaving the house, George Martin decides, “We’ll spend the morning at the shop and see what kind of figures we can get. I think I can spot a couple of long shots today” (102). The shop to which Martin refers is an integral part of his identity and very important to his happiness. It is also at the heart of another “epiphanous moment” later in the novel. At the shop, “Old John Johnson” comes in and says, “You know, if you two boys can’t figure out how to beat the races, I don’t believe anybody will” (102). This gives George and Mickey a chance to show off. George jumps at the chance:

“What have you got there in the eighth race, Mickey?”

“Green Swords!”

“Green Swords? I never heard of that plug.”

“He’ll win the eighth race! He’s a chestnut gelding out of Sickle!” blurted Mickey eagerly.

“He’s a what? You see that, John? This kid even knows the sires and the whole stud line. He don’t care about the figures, he’s got his eye on class! Ha, ha, ha!”—and the old man tousled Mickey’s hair gleefully—“that’s my crazy kid!” (102)

Kerouac does two things here. First, plot wise, he sets up the rest of the story about the track. Second, he communicates the pride that Mickey feels when his father calls him “my crazy kid.” One will see later the tenuousness of George Martin’s affection, and how whether he doles out affection or abuse has nothing to do with the

behavior of the child, and everything to do with his mood. Such arbitrary dispensation of rewards and punishments is, of course, bad parenting 101. Kerouac shows some signs of his authentic voice in this descriptive presentation of what Mickey saw, and he felt, upon arriving at the track:

Rockingham was like any other race track on a warm drowsy afternoon, but to Mickey it was all gold and magic. In front of the gates there were the cries of hawkers and tipsters selling their tips—"The Kentucky Clocker" or "Lucky Morgan's Green Card"—and there was the flutter and furl of flags atop the grandstand air, hot sunlight on the gravel, and that feeling of lazy excitement which a racetrack evokes when people are entering at the gates and the vast unseen presence of the great track itself awaits them beyond the grandstand with its sudden far-spreading acreage of green infield, its sweeping turns, toteboards, distant barns, and bright striped furlong poles along the rail a mile around (103).

While continuing to perfect his stance as the continuously awed narrator, Kerouac also demonstrates his fascination with an underground place like the track. Objectively, good things do not usually happen to people who regularly go to the track. Kerouac does not concern himself with that objective reality. He focuses instead on Mickey's subjective response to that reality. It does not matter that "Rockingham was like any other race track." It matters that "it was all gold and magic" to Mickey. It matters that race tracks can "evoke" a "feeling of lazy excitement." Kerouac would become a master of describing underground places and underground people, and the emotions they felt while doing unsanctioned, unencouraged, and even unhealthy things.

Kerouac captures the optimism of arriving at the track with the line, “It was always glory before the first race” (103). For George Martin, on this day, the glory lasts a little longer. He bets on a horse named Flight who wins the race going away. Kerouac writes, “On that first race Martin won thirty-six dollars clear” (105). Then he starts to lose and lose some more. Finally, Kerouac writes, “After the seventh race the old man had only ten dollars left and he was disgusted. He had thrown away his papers and figures, he was growing angrier by the minute, and finally he wanted to go home” (107). This sets the stage for the ending that Kerouac had foreshadowed during the morning conversation at the shop:

“Let’s watch the last race!” Mickey begged him anxiously. “I wanta see Green Swords. I don’t want to go home, Pa,” he cried.

“Pretty sad, hey?” the old man snorted. “Here we were going to have a big feed in Boston and then go see a good show and enjoy ourselves, now look what your silly old man has done—lost all his money like a damn fool.” He tore up and threw away the tickets for the seventh race, and kicked the bits away with a vicious, rueful swipe of his foot. “Who’s this Green Swords you’re always talking about?” he asked curiously. (107)

It is at this point, having lost all but his last ten dollars, that George Martin considers listening to Mickey. After determining that Green Swords is running “way below his class,” and that, “If we’re going to lose we might as well do a job of it,” (108), Martin bets his last ten dollars on Green Swords, who is a big underdog in the race. After he places the bet, one can see that George Martin has no faith in Mickey’s selection.

Before the race begins, Martin takes a look at the horses lining up. He tells Mickey that Green Swords “looks like he’s half asleep.” Then, “throwing a kiss with the tip of his fingers,” Martin says, “good-bye ten bucks!” (108). It requires little interpretive skill to see that George Martin has zero confidence in the “plug” that Mickey has persuaded him to bet on. Though the primary “epiphanous moment” of this scene is not the tension between him and his father caused by his father’s lack of faith in his decisions, it is there nevertheless. The most important “epiphanous moment,” the unforgettable realization of a previously unknown truth, happens during the race itself.

Kerouac captures the intensity of the emotional experience of betting on a horserace with surprising acumen. Early in the race, the announcer has Green Swords running eighth. Martin says, “Hear that? Eighth, next to last! And that’s the way they’ve been running for me all day, all day long!” (109). The dialogue of the disgruntled gambler is funny to everybody except the disgruntled gambler himself. He does not think it is funny at all. It is funny because all disgruntled gamblers say the same things when they are losing. After this statement, Kerouac writes a telling passage about Mickey’s emotional response to his father’s outburst: “Mickey looked at his father with terror in his heart, he saw the light of the red fading sun glowing in his face and in his eyes, etching every sign of disappointment and rue in his expression, and suddenly he felt like crying” (108). A close reading of this passage reveals that Mickey has an epiphany after looking at his father. One look at his dad’s face changes his emotions completely. When he first looks at his father he has “terror in his heart,” but after looking at him he “felt like crying.” This change represents the defining “epiphanous moment” of this scene: Mickey

sees for the first time that, for all his bluster, George Martin is a beaten man. This realization makes him feel “like crying.”

George Martin stops watching the race when Green Swords gets boxed in, and he stomps away in disgust. He does not see what Mickey sees:

Green Swords seemed to sink lower in the mud and drive harder, he crept up, they all swept to the sixteenth pole, and passed it, and just before the wire the leading horse faltered bobbing his head, slipping a hoof in the mud, other horses surged up in a phalanx of straining necks, and Green Swords suddenly flashed low past all of them and was forerunning across the wire a half a length ahead of the dense moiling pack and the jockey sat up jubilantly. (110)

Mickey runs off to tell his father that Green Swords has won the race. He father says, “He did not.” Mickey says, “He did! There! They’re putting up the numbers. Number eight! Green Swords!” (110). George Martin cannot see the toteboard, but the announcer says, “The winner, number eight, Green Swords, by half a length” (110). When Martin hears the official announcement, Kerouac writes that “He took his boy and embraced him wildly, yelling ‘Waa-hoooo!’ and shaking him deliriously. He was out of his senses with joy. He cried: ‘Poor little kid, poor little Mick, I didn’t believe you! To think that I didn’t believe you!’” (110). It is also important to remember that Martin calls Mickey, “poor little kid.” In the search for specific “epiphanous moments” that serve to exemplify Kerouac’s relationship with his father, these words would hold great significance, as a later scene in the novel reveals. At the close of this day at the track, however, it is the disappointment etched on his father’s face that has made the most indelible impression on young Mickey.

George Martin wins some money. Kerouac writes, "Martin had bet five dollars to win and five to show, and he collected one hundred and seventeen dollars in all" (110). Armed with these winnings, the father and son move to complete their big outing in Boston. Kerouac says, "They swaggered arm in arm out of the track and drove off towards Boston, triumphantly hungry and gleeful" (111). This is the last time in the story that George Martin is truly gleeful. He is the opposite of the Hemingway hero: even in victory, he is defeated.

The next important "epiphanous moment" involving George Martin happens when he loses the shop where he and Mickey had spent that fateful morning going over the racing forms. When juxtaposing George Martin's response to a key scene in *On the Road*, one gets an idea of why Kerouac's second published novel had the impact on people that he hoped his first published novel would. Kerouac writes, "George Martin was on the verge of losing his business. When he saw that bankruptcy was a distinct possibility, he suddenly didn't want to do anything about it and stood back, watching with mingled horror and delight" (*The Town and the City* 195). George Martin is unable to take possession of himself in action or in inaction. He just drifts along and lets things go, the very depiction of an inauthentic man in inaction. When Martin realizes with certainty that he will lose his business, he thinks, "I'm just disgusted with the whole thing, I've had my fill of it! By God, I wish I were free to pack up and leave the whole shebang, go off and follow the ponies or something, that's what I wish!" (195). George Martin is perfectly free to do what he wishes. He simply refuses to accept his freedom. He gets paralyzed when faced with the reality of this freedom. In this way he is not very much different from the workers at the cookie factory who Kerouac criticizes so harshly



in *Atop in Underwood*. Once again, George Martin is like many other people. Neal Cassady is not.

Cassady's willingness to embrace that same freedom that Martin so fears and shuns makes him a compelling character and gives him heroic qualities to those who feel enslaved by their very freedom. The difference between George Martin and Dean Moriarty is the second most important difference between *The Town and the City* and *On the Road*. Only Kerouac's decision to write the latter novel using first-person instead of third-person narration made a bigger difference between them. One passage from *On the Road* shows Cassady's ranting against the very fear of freedom that Martin exhibits when he claims that he wishes he were free to leave the whole "shebang" and "follow the ponies."

During a trip from California to New York, Dean Moriarty and Sal Paradise stop in Denver, where Dean tries to convince a Denver acquaintance of Sal's, a woman called Frankie, to buy a car. Kerouac writes that she "was finally about to buy a jalopy as she had been threatening to do for years, and had recently come into a few bucks toward one." Dean accompanies her to the dealership and picks out a car for her, but Kerouac observes, "She was afraid to part with her money when they got to the car lot and stood before the salesman." This infuriates Dean, who exclaims, "For a hunnerd you *can't* get anything better!" When he cannot persuade Frankie to buy the car, he goes on a tirade in which he decries Frankie's inability to act: "Oh these dumb dumb dumb Okies, they'll never change, how com-pletely and how unbelievably dumb, the moment it comes time to act, this paralysis, scared, hysterical, nothing frightens em more than what they *want*—it's my *father my father my father* all over again!" (*On the Road* 216). The genius of this

tirade, and Kerouac's careful inclusion of it, is that Neal's complaint applies to everybody's father, or mother, or brother, or sister. Everybody knows somebody who lives in fear of getting what they want. Neal Cassady embodies the idea that you do not have to live that way, that you can actually be free and pursue your desires. Indeed, Cassady gave Kerouac himself the courage to "pack up and leave the whole shebang," as his father had wanted to do but never done, and *On the Road*, in that sense, is one long thank you letter to Neal Cassady.

Kerouac was at work on *The Town and the City* when he met Neal Cassady. Clark observes, "It was from Hal Chase and Ed White, two friends of his who were Columbia students from Denver, that Kerouac first heard of Neal Cassady" (*Jack Kerouac: A Biography* 72). In December of 1946, Kerouac heard that Cassady was in New York and went to meet him. Since Kerouac had adopted Wolfe's method of making personal relationships central to his artistic vision, he wanted to form personal relationships with as many interesting people as he could; but Cassady quickly became more than an interesting person to him. Kerouac saw something poetic in his frenetic movements, movements that seemed aimless, pointless, and sociopathic to others. Kerouac saw Cassady's movements as a metaphor for America. His artistic vision expanded instantly. Frenetic energy, aimless motion, pointless haste, all central components of Cassady's existence, came to represent something distinctly American to Kerouac. Here was the embodiment of the jazz soloist, the last vestige of American freedom, down to the way he talked. Johnson notes, "His ear began picking up Neal's unique boplike way of speaking the American vernacular, veering off his initial subject or the narrative line of an anecdote into a series of riffs or even riffs upon riffs, punctuated by percussive

exclamations” (*The Voice is All* 228). Cassady appealed to Kerouac’s love of the human voice, to his search for the essence of American freedom; but Kerouac nevertheless remained reluctant to get close to him or anybody else, preferring instead to stay holed up in his mother’s apartment, working on his novel. It was Cassady who made the first move. One day he showed up at Kerouac’s apartment to ask if Kerouac would teach him how to write.

Cassady’s ostensible desire to learn how to write formed the original basis of their friendship; but Kerouac learned more about writing from Cassady than Cassady learned from him. Kerouac was already a willing student and dedicated practitioner. He gave Cassady the best writing advice he had to give: “You’ve got to stick to it with the energy of a benny addict” (*On the Road* 3). Though this advice sounds vague and unhelpful at first, upon second thought it is probably the best advice to give a young writer. A writer must learn how to finish something before he can learn to write something good. If he cannot learn how to “stick to it,” and see a project through from the beginning to the end, then nothing else he learns will matter. (It should be noted that Cassady never could follow this first and most important piece of advice that Kerouac gave him. He never finished a book, leaving behind only fragments of writing posthumously collected and published as *The First Third*.) Kerouac’s advice to “stick to it” puts the emphasis on the one thing that a writer can control: whether or not he finishes what he has started. This had been his focus for years, going back to the arguments with Sammy Sampas and Lucien Carr about the artist’s role in society. In Kerouac’s view, the artist could not expend too much energy worrying about that. He just had to “stick to it.” He had to make art. Clark concludes, “The ‘educational’ benefits Cassady got out of these visits came

from kibitzing enthusiastically over Jack's shoulder as Jack typed away at his novel" (*Jack Kerouac: A Biography* 73). Kerouac's own remembrances of these visits indicate that while Cassady may not have received much education from them, Kerouac did.

In *On the Road*, Kerouac remembers that Cassady "watched over my shoulder as I wrote stories, yelling, 'Yes! That's right! Wow! Man!' and 'Phew!' and wiped his face with his handkerchief. 'Man, wow, there's so many things to do, so many things to write! How to even *begin* to get it all down and without modified restraints and all hung-up on like literary inhibitions and grammatical fears" (4). These words obviously made an impression on Kerouac, as he deemed them important enough to quote in his novel. He might have realized that he had indeed been "hung-up" on "literary inhibitions and grammatical fears," and that these hang-ups and fears had hindered his progress, and would forever hinder it unless he overcame them. Then Cassady said something that would forever alter Kerouac's artistic vision: "That's right, man, now you're talking" (4). That seemingly innocuous praise would inspire the single most significant stylistic change in Kerouac's writing career: the switch from third-person to first-person narration.

Before Kerouac could enact that change, he first had to take his own advice to "stick to it with the energy of a benny addict," and finish *The Town and the City*. Kerouac remained determined to finish at least the "town" part of his novel before he would allow himself to depart from it. He continued to work on the novel that spring. That March he received "The Great Sex Letter" from Neal Cassady, and got his first glimpse at the style he would adopt in four years' time. Awed and envious at Cassady's letter's lack of inhibitions and grammatical fears, Kerouac carried on writing *The Town and the City* "in doubt and anguish, flagellating himself for the slowness with which he was working,

although his average output of fifteen hundred words a day would have satisfied almost any other novelist” (Johnson 231). Still, as he worked, he could not stop thinking about Cassady penning such a letter while waiting at a bus stop. His artistic vision began to expand. He started to see new possible ways of being an American writer. He wrote Hal Chase: “My interests have been undergoing a startling change” (*Selected Letters 1940-1956* 107). His reading list reflected these changes. He offered Chase a catalogue of his reading that spring:

Parkman’s *Oregon Trail*, another book concerned with that trail and also every other important trail in the country (don’t ask me why: I’m crazy about this kind of reading now), a history of the United States, a biography of George Washington, a history of the Revolutionary War (campaigns and maps included)—and last but not least, I have begun a huge study of the face of America itself, acquiring maps (roadmaps) of every state in the USA, and before long not a river or mountain peak or town or city will escape my attention. (*Selected Letters 1940-1956* 107)

Cassady had intensified Kerouac’s interest in America. As he worked on *The Town and the City*, he realized that the novel was essentially about his own life. He knew that his next novel must be about more than that. It must have broader horizons. He wrote Chase, “My subject as a writer is of course America, and simply, I must know everything about it” (*Selected Letters* 107). Long infatuated by the blues, Cassady inspired Kerouac to go out and live so that he could actually write the blues. Nicosia states, “Blues singers memorialized in song every place they went and everything they did. In their world, you hadn’t been anywhere, or done anything, unless you sang a blues about it” (Nicosia 217).

Kerouac began to understand what this meant. His artistic drive had been too totalizing. He had to live in order to write and write in order to live.

Kerouac saw in Cassady what Sammy had prophesied to him long before, that somewhere in America, “In the . . . great open spaces, the uncrowded places, a new soul is in conception. The land is pregnant. A primitive man, crude, raw, unfinished—superb—is shaping in the heart of our land. He does not seek for ‘other.’ The meaning he knows is life.” (*Selected Letters* 69). Kerouac believed Cassady was that man, and that he could learn from him the meaning of life. In *On the Road*, Dean tells Sal, “Furthermore we know America, we’re at home; I can go anywhere in America and get what I want because it’s the same in every corner” (121). Here was the essential American he had been looking for since Bob gave him a ride home in “Hartford After Work,” the combination of jazz and speed he had prophesied in his own early fiction. For Kerouac, Cassady became entwined with America. The two became one, as he makes clear in his prelude to *Visions of Cody*:

*Visions of Cody* is a 600-page character study of the hero of *On the Road*, “Dean Moriarty,” whose name now is “Cody Pomeray.” I wanted to put my hand to an enormous paean which would unite my vision of America with words spilled out in the modern spontaneous method . . . . This is a youthful book (1951) and it was based on my belief in the goodness of the hero and his position as an archetypical American Man. (i)

Nobody had a greater impact on Kerouac’s artistic development than Neal Cassady. Along with ushering Kerouac through the final stages of his artistic development, he expanded Kerouac’s artistic vision: the combination of an exhaustible

man in an inexhaustible land, Cassady in America. Though the two men had not yet become close friends, each recognized something authentic about the other. As Nicosia observes, “More than anything else Jack admired, and was envious of, Neal’s confidence in dealing with a world hostile to his values. Similarly Neal was as humiliated as he was awed by Jack’s ability to sit down and write for several hours at a stretch—something Neal rarely had the concentration to achieve” (*Memory Babe* 178). Kerouac recognized an authentic man living in a society that not only discouraged authenticity, but was becoming hostile toward it. Cassady recognized an authentic artist toiling away in a society that had no respect for authentic artists. Kerouac’s chronicling of their friendship in *On the Road* derives much of its power from his ability to portray the vastness of America in comparison to the littleness of two people trying to make friends within that vastness. As John Clellon Holmes observes, “In my time, only Jack had found a prose commensurate to the dimensions of the continent as they weighed on the human consciousness. Most writers no longer even *tried* for that kind of range anymore” (*Representative Men* 168). Kerouac’s work on *The Town and the City* was teaching him something about vastness. He labored through the spring and halfway through the summer before he finally finished the “town” section of the novel.

On July 19, 1947, Kerouac finally headed west on his first road trip. His chronicling of this trip would become part two of *On the Road*. When he returned in October, he began working on the “city” section of the novel. Brinkley proposes, “The last third of *The Town and the City* can be seen as the beginning of the Kerouac ‘road’ genre that would win him legions of devoted admirers around the globe” (*Windblown World* xx). This is an overstatement. From the standpoint of writing quality, the “city”

section of *The Town and the City* shows no notable improvement over the “town” section. Kerouac remains true to the third-person narration with which he began the novel. The “city” section is more interesting than the “town” section only because it features Kerouac’s Beat Generation friends. Allen Ginsberg appears as Leon Levinsky, Lucien Carr appears as Kenny Wood, Edie Parker appears as Judie Smith, David Kammerer appears as Waldo Meister, and William S. Burroughs as Will Dennison. This lessens the focus on George Martin, and offers a much needed counterpoint to him. It is during this section, also, that Peter Martin clearly emerges as the primary fictional representative of Kerouac himself, tightening up the novel’s focus.

The next “epiphanous moment” involving George Martin also includes a glimpse into Peter Martin’s (Kerouac) relationship with his girlfriend, Judie Smith (Edie). In the following passage, Judie is sassy and forthright in her disdain for Peter’s parents. In this passage, one can see that part of his unwillingness to commit to Janie stems from his unwillingness to de-commit from his parents:

“When are you going to grow up, Mister Martin! You disappear for days, and expect me to sit around and wait for you.”

“I went home for a while, that’s all.”

“You went home,” she mimicked sarcastically, “home to those damn parents of yours who don’t do anything but criticize all day long. Well, you can have ‘em, brother!” (*The Town and the City* 424)

At this point in the novel, it is almost impossible not to agree with Judie. It is difficult to figure out why anybody would want to spend any time with George Martin or his wife, Marge. Still, Peter insists, “My folks are coming over late this afternoon, I



invited them.” To which Judie responds, “I’m not going. I don’t want to see them” (425). As their argument escalates, Kerouac offers a personal look into his relationship with Edie. This next exchange is particularly poignant:

“I want to marry *you*, not them.”

“Nobody’s asking you to marry them. Where I come from young married couples get along with their folks--”

“I don’t care where you come from, small towns and poor people with all their silly rules. I’m going to live the way I like and I don’t care what anybody thinks. You’re getting to be just like your old man, just a stuffy old goat always worried about something or other. You *love* to worry! Why don’t you just try to enjoy life—like my father used to do before he died,” she added contemplatively.

“When I first met you, Petey, I thought you were just like him—your smile and the way you did things, a great athlete, and the way you liked to eat and make love and—just be! But now you’re just like your father. Oh, I hate him!” she cried angrily. (*The Town and the City* 425)

Kerouac must have noticed that Edie warns him against becoming like his father by simultaneously suggesting that he become more like her father. Perhaps nobody better understood Kerouac’s tie to his parents than Edie. She would later write, “Imagine living under your mother’s roof to the age of fifty-seven, a life spent as a captive of both your family and your dreams. Money has always been my center of gravity—a sad, but true fact. My mother held the money, even when Jack Kerouac captured my imagination, and I was unable to reconcile the two” (21). Like Edie, Kerouac was unable to reconcile his desire to get away from his parents and his desire to stay with them. Like Edie, he never

got away. When he died, at age forty-seven, he still lived with his mother. His third wife, Stella Sampas, sister of his first artistic mentor Sammy Sampas, also lived with them. He married her after his mother had a stroke and he needed help taking care of her. However, if one came to this novel as an innocent reader, without any knowledge of Kerouac's life, or Edie's life, it is difficult to imagine anybody siding with Peter in this argument. The last thing anybody would want to do is become like George Martin.

When George and Marge arrive, Kerouac writes, "Peter was happier at that moment than he could ever recall" (426). This happiness does not last long. A cop shows up just minutes later to take Peter "downtown" because Waldo Meister (Dave Kammerer) committed suicide by jumping out the window at Kenneth Wood's (Lucien Carr) apartment, and they have to take Peter downtown as a formal part of their investigation. Kerouac and Burroughs had buried *And the Hippos Were Boiled in Their Tanks* upon Carr's request, and here Kerouac changes Kammerer's death from a murder to a suicide. Judie, however, when she hears that Meister is dead, says, "Oh, is *that* all! It's just as well. And I hope Kenny did it himself!" (427). This causes George Martin to fly off the handle, and the thin veneer of civility drops from the scene. George yells at Peter, "If you'd have stayed home and minded your business, or made decent friends, you wouldn't be getting in awful jams like this! Well, you didn't listen! Goddammit, you asked for it!" To which Judie replies, "Ain't it nice to say I told you so!" (428). Peter immediately and unquestioningly takes his parents' side, yelling at Judie to "Shut up!" Then Peter's mother breaks down crying. Judie gets disgusted and puts on her coat to leave, yelling:

"I'm sick and tired of all you damn serfs. I'll come back to my house after you're all gone. Do you know something? It's just typical of poor people, always afraid

of everything. Well, that's not for me! If you get in trouble and you need money to get out of jail, *I'm* the one who can get you out, not *them!* So I'll see you later, fool." (429)

This is George Martin's last scene before he gets sick with cancer, and he gives this parting shot to Judie before she rushes out the door: "Listen, my young lady, you can always spray your nose with perfume, it will lessen your own odor!" Kerouac took this line directly from a line that Leo Kerouac had written on a note he had found from Edie to Kerouac (Johnson 300), and that helps account for its shocking awkwardness. The most important part of this scene, though, is that Peter unflinchingly chooses his parents over Judie, and one can only wonder why.

George Martin is so unsympathetic a person that the saddest part of his illness and death is that it is not very sad. At the beginning of his illness, Kerouac writes, "George Martin sat dying and brooding and thinking, with a blanket over his legs, an old bathrobe over his back, his antique silver-rimmed glasses magnified and skeletal in his lank face" (*The Town and the City* 445). Kerouac then renders several "epiphanous moments" of Martin "dying and brooding and thinking." These "epiphanous moments," when strung together, without the interludes and conversations involving the rest of the Martin family, reveal nothing less than the dying and death of an inauthentic man. Kerouac does not do this maliciously; indeed, quite the opposite. The profound impact that his father's death has on him is quite evident throughout George Martin's dying process.

Peter Martin comes home to take care of his father during his last days, as Kerouac had done for Leo. Kerouac writes, "Now they both knew that the end was coming and their arguments were fewer and fewer, they were no longer arguments. They

laughed together more than they had ever done. The father was very happy that his closest, saddest, most serious son had come back to him at last” (*The Town and the City* 469). In one of George Martin’s first confidential revelations to Peter, he laments about what he could have done in life:

“Ah Petey, life isn’t long enough, there’s so many things I could have done!” cried Martin in the morning. “If I had done the right thing, invested my money carefully in something good, in a home or a farm or something like that, just think how different it would be now, maybe I wouldn’t be sick and your mother there wouldn’t have to be working in a shoeshop in my dying day.” (469)

One gets the feeling that if Martin were magically cured at that very moment of his utterance, that he would not change in any way, and that he would go right back to doing things exactly how he had done them before, and that he would forget everything that he had just said. Kerouac listened closely to these words, internalized them, and stored them for later use. It is more or less universally held that nobody wants to die brooding over what he could have or should have done, and how things would have been different if he had done those things. Leo Kerouac’s lugubrious reflections about the things he could have done fertilized the seeds in his son’s artistic garden. In fact, George Martin’s reflections have a seed-like quality, in that, if left to his tending, they would never flower into any meaningful action. A seed is not a flower. An inauthentic person will die dreaming seed-like thoughts of what it might have been to be a flower. Kerouac might have heard this and wondered what caused this inability to blossom, and whether or not this cause could be removed.

Martin's next lamentation brought Kerouac closer to the answer he sought. Kerouac must have heard it and recognized that many people died with thoughts like this on their minds. Kerouac writes about the "strange nights" when George Martin "woke up" and "talked to his own mother and father long dead." He writes that George Martin "talked to God, sometimes with heated familiarity"; but, most importantly, he writes that George Martin "talked to the lone self that would die with him for always" (470). In one of these talks with himself, Martin realizes and reveals the reason that he had never become the person that he might have been:

"All your life went through your fingers and you laughed it off because you thought you had all the time in the world. You had all the time in the world, all right, all the time it gives you and no more. And I was always sore when something went wrong, and all the time it was just *me* that was wrong. George! why the hell didn't you do what you were always just about to do!" (470)

Near death, George Martin realizes that his biggest mistake had been thinking that he "had all the time in the world." This opened Kerouac's eyes to a mistake he had been making as a writer: thinking that most people shared his understanding of life's ephemerality. Kerouac and Ginsberg became friends because of this shared understanding, and Miles reports that they both "assumed that any sensitive person would have an awareness of impending death and think somehow along these lines." (*Kerouac: King of the Beats* 83). Kerouac suddenly recognized that imparting instruction of death's inevitability could give his writing the kind of power he wanted it to have by giving his readers a more authentic understanding of time. This newfound understanding would teach readers how to live more authentic lives. George Martin represents all the people

who do not learn the secret to living authentically until it is too late to live authentically. It is out of this background that Neal Cassady emerges.

In *On the Road*, Neal Cassady races across the country constantly reminding his co-travelers that “We know time.” This phrase reverberates in one’s mind after finishing the novel, partly because of Kerouac’s effective use of repetition and partly because of its esoteric message. The meaning of Cassady’s “we know time” becomes clearer when one juxtaposes it with Leo Kerouac’s “you thought you had all the time in the world.” This marks the difference between Cassady’s conception of time and Leo Kerouac’s conception of time: Cassady knows that people do not have all the time in the world. In *Visions of Cody*, Kerouac offers a brief but important elaboration on Cassady’s conception of time: “Cody now says ‘Time—goes—by—*fast!!*—you don’t realize or notice or come to tell how *fast—time—flies!!*’ Beware, he is saying, time is flying; he’s not saying later than you think, or Life begins, or the hour is struck, he just says that time is passing us all by this very minute” (296). The word “beware” stands out here. It communicates that Cassady’s conception of time contains a warning: a warning that, had George Martin heard it and heeded it, could have saved him from facing imminent death thinking, “all your life went through your fingers.”

In *The Town and the City*, Peter is alone in the apartment with George Martin when he dies. After the initial shock of seeing him dead, Peter considers his father’s death in a way that reveals his artistic nature: “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 new, 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). One gets the feeling that Kerouac knew instantly that he would create this monument himself. This once again points to the artist’s unique ability to overcome the trauma of a loss by objectifying that loss, and its pain, in a work of art. Rank states, “The artist’s reaction is thus distinguishable from the neurotic by an *overcoming* of the *trauma* or of the potentiality of inhibition resulting therefrom, no matter whether this is achieved by a single effort or is spread over the whole work” (64). *The Town and the City* would serve as a “single effort” to help Kerouac overcome the trauma of his loss. His loss would be felt in the background of *On the Road*, though the latter novel would serve as a similar monument to the life-affirming presence of Neal Cassady. Near the end of *The Town and the City*, Kerouac begins the transition between the two novels, introducing the philosophical underpinnings of Cassady’s refrain, “We know time.”

In this dense, descriptive paragraph about George Martin’s funeral, Kerouac begins making explicit the perils of ignoring the passage of time:

They all stood before the bier of the dead father, before the mother who was kneeling and whispering softly over her rosary beads. All these young people, flushed and excited with life, bursting with a thousand things to tell each other, saw, in that silence and brooding candlelight, how all their endeavors and glees and absorptions would end. Yet the stillness that crawled into their hearts was not convincing. Yes, death had happened, but somehow it would not happen to them. It was their own father, and their own bending repining, rosaried mother, but somehow they themselves would be fathers and mothers who would never end, who would never die, who would never bend and pray over the sad sweet consummation among flowers that they saw there. But when they thought: “This

is my father, this is the man they called George Martin, this is the George my mother called in the house, this is him so sad and excitable and full of fun and arguments, so near now, still alive, I can still see him, I can hear him, where is he? Where is he? This is Pa!” When they realized that, they looked at each other and knew that they would all die too. (*The Town and the City* 484)

Kerouac loads this warning with all the heaviness of death itself. Cassady, on the contrary, manages to issue the same warning with a lightheartedness that is absent from this passage. It is like the difference between the setting sun and the rising sun. Cassady says, “We know time. We know the sun will set, but we have the whole day ahead of us; and it is what we do with that day that counts.” That is authenticity. Kerouac, haunted by his father’s death, cannot focus on anything but the fact that the sun will set. This is why Cassady’s conception of time changed his life; and why Kerouac recognizes this change and bestows upon Cassady’s friendship the power of resurrection, and seeks to duplicate that power in his artistic representation of that friendship.

Kerouac recorded this in his journal when he finished writing *The Town and the City*: “I started writing this story in March of 1946, and now, around May 24, 1948, it’ll be all finished. So that’s big work well done, and a lot of misery, and I’ll just forget it and look ahead” (*Windblown World* 82). It would actually take him less time to publish the novel than it took him to write it. Less than two years later, the book was on the shelves. Kerouac could hardly wait to let his friends read his novel.

Ginsberg, who had long supported Kerouac and touted him as a genius, was nevertheless caught by surprise the first time he read *The Town and the City*. Nicosia explains, “For a long time Allen had simply imagined *The Town and the City* to be



another book of poetic impressions like *The Sea is My Brother*. But early in 1948 Jack let him read the nearly finished manuscript, and Allen was overwhelmed by the power and scope of it. *The Town and the City* seemed the purest combination of poetry and prose he had ever read” (*Memory Babe* 211). Having known Kerouac for four years, and having been intimately acquainted with his writing, Ginsberg was a first-hand witness to Kerouac’s improvement. His support for Kerouac, and his belief in him, had played an important role in this improvement; and after he read *The Town and the City*, their relationship became even tighter.

Reading *The Town and the City* also made Ginsberg more aware of his own artistic desires and possibilities. Ginsberg recalls, “I was astounded when I read the whole thing, ‘cause it seemed like a reproduction of life as it was. It turned me on to being an artist, too . . . really take myself seriously as a poet . . . to accomplish something, I realized that it was within ourselves to write something immortal, I guess” (*Jack’s Book* 46). As Kerouac moved closer to finding his own authentic voice as an artist, his writing began to exhibit the power to move other people toward their own authentic discovery of their inner selves.

Kerouac was understandably frustrated during the first year of inevitable rejections that his novel received. He writes, “Even if I have to go off and starve on the road I won’t give up the notion that I should make a living from this book: because I’m convinced that *people themselves will like it* whenever the wall of publishers and critics and editors is torn down” (*Windblown World* 130). Kerouac’s words once again have a prophetic quality. He did go off and starve “on the road” after he had written *On the Road*, and finally, when the “wall of publishers and critics and editors” was torn down, in

1957, the people themselves did like that book, even when critics occasionally lambasted it. That would not be the case with *The Town and the City*, but Kerouac offers this intuitive understanding of what he needed to do in his next novel that he had not done in *The Town and the City*: “Thus—my new diary begins. And its purpose, simply, to rediscover my *real* voice which is yours too, all our real, one voice, that’s so often drowned by criticism and fear” (*Windblown World* 159). Kerouac recognizes that he has not yet find his real voice and that he must do so if he wants his writing to resonate with readers.

Kerouac wrote madly in search for his real voice. Alas, he could not find it. He met John Clellon Holmes at a party in the summer of 1948. The two struck up a friendship that would last the rest of Kerouac’s life. Holmes’ recalls, “All through the getting *The Town and the City* published, in the next couple of years while it was being typed and handed around from person to person, he was thinking about the next book and talking about the next book, which he always called *On the Road*” (*Jack’s Book* 76). Kerouac still could not commit to writing a first-person, autobiographical novel. It was literally the last thing he would try, but during the thirty-five months between finishing the first draft of *The Town and the City* and finishing the first draft of *On the Road*, Kerouac accumulated the experiences that he needed to accumulate in order to write *On the Road*. The reason he could not write the book is because he had not yet lived the book.

Kerouac knew he must write something that would stand out, and in his journal he actively explores for ways to do that. In April, 1949, he writes, “I think one of the best rules for prose-writing today is to write as far opposite from contemporary prose as

possible—it's a useful rule in itself . . . actually" (*Windblown World* 185). This entry reflects Rank's belief that "a non-contemporary outlook on vital problems is always essential to the artist, an outlook which deviates more or less from the prevailing ideology and its art-style" (72). However, Kerouac had great difficulty putting his theory into practice. In "The Straight Line Will Take You Only to Death," Joshua Kupetz observes, "The many false starts Kerouac made in the late 1940s and in 1950 . . . suggest that Kerouac struggled putting theory into practice when writing the early drafts of *On the Road*" (*On the Road: The Original Scroll* 88). Kerouac continually fell short of his goal to find his "real voice" and "write as far opposite from contemporary prose as possible." He did not want to write another novel like the one he had just written. He knew something had to change. Then, just a day after Christmas, 1950, something did.

Kerouac received the best belated Christmas gift of his life when he went to the mail that day. Nicosia writes, "As before, it was Neal Cassady who finally gave him a clear answer. Jack received a 23,000-word typewritten letter from Neal, which Jack pronounced 'the greatest story' he'd ever read by an American writer" (336). If after he read "The Great Sex Letter" Kerouac thought that writing first-person autobiography could work in a novel, then after he read "The Joan Anderson/Cherry Mary Letter" he knew it could work. Charters states, "The 'Joan Anderson' letter literally overwhelmed Kerouac . . . Jack was most impressed by what he called 'the muscular rush' of Neal's narrative style, the excitement of the prose, even better than Dreiser, Thomas Wolfe and Melville. Neal had discovered a new way of writing that exposed everything in a mad rush of frenzied ecstasy" (*Kerouac: A Biography* 124). Unfortunately, the letter does not

survive in its entirety, but an examination of the surviving fragment can provide a clue to what got Kerouac so excited.

The “Joan Anderson Letter” contains the most memorable thing that Neal Cassady ever wrote: “To have seen a specter isn’t everything, and there are death masks piled, one atop the other, clear to heaven” (*The First Third* 146). The rest of the letter does not live up to the hauntingly rhythmic cadence of this opening line, but it is a very impressive piece of writing nonetheless. It is racy and free, unrestrained by literary inhibition and grammatical fears. Like Celine, Cassady takes full advantage of the flexibility of first-person narration, interjecting digressions, asides, and reflections any time he feels like it. Also like Celine, Cassady has no problem writing about things that other writers would just as soon not think about, let alone write about. This following passage is a good example:

Gorged with the big meal, I retired to the bathroom as the women did the dishes and the old man read the paper. (By golly, it seems everything I write about happens in a bathroom, don’t think I’m hung up that way, it’s just the incidents exactly as they occurred, and here is another one, because--) A knock on the toilet door and I rose to let in my resurrected beauty . . . We did a bit of smooching, then, seated on the edge of the tub she asked if I wanted to see her scar. I kneeled before her to observe better as she parted the bathrobe to reveal an ugly red wound, livid against her buttermilk belly, stretching nearly from naval to clitoris. She was worried I wouldn’t think her as beautiful, or love her as much now that her body has been marred with the surgeon’s knife performing a Caesarean. (*The First Third* 150).

It was clear to Kerouac that Cassady was closer to writing as far opposite contemporary prose than he was. He was writing about things people would not write about, he was writing about underground love, about people's fear of being abandoned due to their ugliness, ugliness where beauty had been before, the degradations of time, of love as the only hope against those degradations, and, perhaps most importantly, he was writing about "incidents exactly as they occurred." Kerouac was immediately and forever altered by this letter.

Charters notes, "The day after receiving Cassady's 'Joan Anderson and Cherry Mary' letter, Kerouac sat down 'to write a full confession' of his life to Neal . . . . This attempt to 'proceed into the actual truth' of his life for Cassady was the foundation for all of Kerouac's subsequent books, beginning with the successful completion of *On the Road* three months later" (*Selected Letters* 246). Kerouac bombarded Cassady with a novella's worth of letters over the next two weeks. This would serve as important practice for him in the art of rapid word production. He started to like it, to believe in that method of production, even as he recognized that the letters were still more ponderous, more "hungup" on literary inhibitions than the "Joan Anderson and Cherry Mary Letter." At the same time he recognizes his problem, he recognizes what he has to do to solve the problem. He tells Cassady, "I have renounced fiction and fear. There is nothing to do but write the truth" (*Selected Letters* 248). After more than a decade of writing, of trying to find his real voice, of searching for a way to connect with his entire generation of readers, and to future generations too, Kerouac believed he had it in this new "spontaneous prose" technique that predicated itself on the renunciation of fiction and fear, and depended on the truth for art. He could not know if he had it until he tried it.

Kerouac could not write a novel using his “spontaneous prose” technique until he invented a way to keep from having to switch sheets of paper in the typewriter every few minutes. So he carefully cut and taped together Japanese paper to make a scroll he could feed into his typewriter. Now he could type as fast as he wanted, and allow the sheer speed of his composition to outrace any literary inhibition, any doubt, any fear whatsoever, and, as he told Clellon Holmes, “forget all the horseshit” and “write it as it happened” (Nicosia 343). He had tried everything else he could think to try, and none of it had worked. If it did not work this time, he was in real trouble, and he knew it.

On April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1951, he sat down at his typewriter, hoping it would work this time. He began, “I first met Neal not long after my father died.” On April 22<sup>nd</sup>, he had finished *On the Road*, all 125,000 words of it.

It worked.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Few novels so clearly dramatize an artist's discovery of his authentic voice as does Kerouac's *On the Road*. The publication of the writing that Kerouac did before *The Town and the City* offers almost unprecedented opportunity to study his artistic apprenticeship and trace his development as an artist. To study Kerouac's apprenticeship is to witness him learning how to liberate himself in order to be that which he would become. In addition to shedding light on this unexamined aspect of Kerouac's career, I hope this study might inspire similar breakthroughs and breakouts in other would-be artists.

The dynamics of this developmental process are under-theorized. No one to my knowledge has written of this process as thoroughly as Otto Rank, which is why I've used his theories of artistic apprenticeships to inform this analysis. I used Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* because he founds his philosophy on the same central question that I believe Kerouac founds his art: the "question of Being." I wanted to examine Kerouac's writing before *On the Road* to trace how his psychological artistic development was informed by the philosophical question that would give *On the Road* and his later works much of their power to move people.

I believe that artistic development happens in quantum leaps. Rank writes, "As long as there is in man an impulse to create, he seeks and finds artistic expression in the most varied ideologies, and yet these have always been in some way traditional and collective" (389). I have tried to show how Kerouac sought and found artistic expression in traditional and collective ideologies until he made his famous modification of the

novel form in order that he could switch to writing first-person, autobiographical, spontaneous narratives to express what Rank calls his “soul-language.” Kerouac’s “soul-language” was “spontaneous prose.” Upon discovering “spontaneous prose,” Kerouac could no more go back to making art as he had made it before than a person that has grown six inches can go back to being six inches shorter. Just like that newly tall person can think back to when he was a short person, an authentic artist can think back to when he was an apprentice looking to find that certain thing, that artistic technique with which he could objectify his “soul-language.” Kerouac remembers this about his artistic productions before his discovery of “spontaneous prose”: “I spent my entire youth writing slowly with revisions and endless re-hashing speculation and deleting and got so I was writing one sentence a day and the sentence had no FEELING. Goddamn it, FEELING is what I like in art, not CRAFTINESS and the hiding of feelings” (“The Paris Review Interview” 207). Kerouac’s seeking and finding of his own voice, and its resultant discovery in the form of “spontaneous prose,” inspired many of his readers to do some seeking and finding of their own. Bruce Cook remembers:

It is difficult, separated as we are by time and temper from that period, to convey the liberating effect that *On the Road* had on young people all over America.

There was a sort of instantaneous flash of recognition that seemed to send thousands of them out into the streets, proclaiming that Kerouac had written their story, that *On the Road* was their book. (*The Beats: A Literary Reference* 47)

I would argue that it is not difficult to convey *On the Road*’s liberating effect. The novel still has a similar effect on many of its first-time readers today. The importance of this “instantaneous flash of recognition” that sent “thousands” into the streets is that



Kerouac had envisioned just such a thing happened when he wrote in his diary his belief that his real voice was “all our real, one voice, that’s so often drowned by criticism and fear.” Much later, writing in a novel rather than a journal, Kerouac wondered if anybody would try to understand how difficult it had been to find his “real voice”: “Does it matter to five thousand sneering college writing instructors that I wrote seventeen novels after a youth of solitary practice amounting to over two million words, by the window with the star in it at night, the bedroom window, the cheap room window, the nut ward window, the porthole window, eventually the jail window” (167)? As Kerouac endured that youth of “solitary practice,” looking out the “window with a star in it,” he dreamed that one day he would become a great writer and that his writing would make a difference somehow. Something of this dream found its way into *On the Road*, and it did so because he found the “real voice” for which he had so long been seeking.

I do not wish to argue that Kerouac was the first person to write in the first-person, the first person to prefer spontaneity in art, or the first person to make art out of autobiographical material. I only wish to argue that *On the Road* could only make such a profound impact on its generation and on later generations of readers because Kerouac had dedicated himself to finding his authentic voice, believing that if he found it that he could produce art that would mean something. Rank observes that “The work of art, for all its personal dynamic expression, always strives to make an impact on others” (*Art and Artist* 95). When *On the Road* sent thousands of young Americans into the street, proclaiming that Kerouac had written their story, it was clear that Kerouac had found his authentic voice and produced a work of art that meant something. In remember the impact of *On the Road*, William S. Burroughs says, “Sometimes, as in the case of

Fitzgerald and Kerouac, the effect produced by a writer is immediate, as if a generation were waiting to be written” (Clark i).

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VITA

Graduate College  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Nathaniel Botsis

Home Address:

10737 Ackers Dr  
Henderson, Nevada, 89052

Degrees:

Bachelor of Arts, English, 2000  
Michigan State University

Master of Arts, English 2008  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Thesis Title: Authenticity and Love in *The Sun Also Rises* and *On the Road*

Thesis Examination Committee:

Chairperson, Dr. Stephen G. Brown, Ph.D.  
Committee Member, Dr. John Unrue, Ph.D.  
Committee Member, Dr. Charles Whitney, Ph.D.  
Graduate Faculty Representative: Dr. Giuseppe Natale, Ph.D.

Dissertation Title: Jack Kerouac's Artistic Apprenticeship and the Discovery of His Authentic Voice

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Chairperson, Dr. Stephen G. Brown, Ph.D.  
Committee Member, Dr. John Unrue, Ph.D.  
Committee Member, Dr. Charles Whitney, Ph.D.  
Graduate Faculty Representative: Dr. Giuseppe Natale, Ph.D.