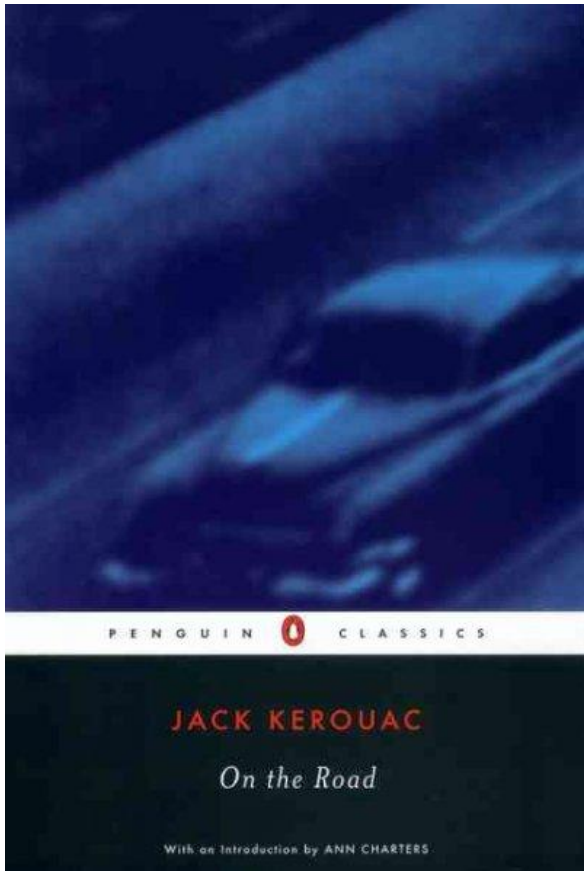


Ann Arbor District Library: Book Club to Go Discussion Guide

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1352123>

About the Book



In 1954 Jack Kerouac had a vision in a Catholic church in Lowell, Massachusetts, that told him that the real meaning of "Beat" was "Beatific," in the sense of converting alienation into spiritual transcendence. *On the Road*, first published in 1957, epitomized to the world what became known as "the Beat generation" and made Kerouac one of the most controversial and best-known writers of his time. Fictionalized as Dean Moriarty, Kerouac saw his friend Neal Cassady as an "archetypal American Man," and rendered his character both "Beatific," in the sense mentioned above, and "Beat," in the sense of being alienated from the mainstream of American middle-class life. In this novel of life on the road, experience for Dean Moriarty and Sal Paradise, Kerouac's fictional alter ego, who shambles along after Dean's madcap adventures, must be intensified to strip one's rational preoccupations with this world and give them a sense of oneness with the All-Knowing God.

In search of the ever elusive "IT," "the moment when you know all and everything is decided forever," the two friends' search for ecstasy takes them back and forth across the United States, and in one final trip down into Mexico, getting their kicks from all-night talk sessions, drunken parties, sex, drugs, an orgy with Mexican whores, and, most importantly, an exploration of jazz. Behind the wheels of numerous automobiles, the two young men zigzag across the continent "leaving confusion and nonsense behind and performing [their] one and noble function of the time, move."

Upon publication, *On the Road* met with both praise and wild enthusiasm from papers as diverse as *The Village Voice* and *The New York Times*, and an equal if

not greater measure of skepticism and critical dismissal by the mainstream literary establishment. Rather than representing "a new trend in American literature," as Kerouac had claimed, *On the Road* was criticized for presenting "uncouth" characters (such as Allen Ginsberg as "Carlo Marx," and William Burroughs as "Old Bull Lee"), and the "frantic fringe" of delinquents (e.g., Herbert Huncke as "Elmo Hassel," the down-and-out Times Square hustler). One of the most sarcastic put-downs came from author Truman Capote, who responded to Kerouac's boast that he had created the original manuscript within a three-week burst of writing, with the snide comment, "That isn't writing; it's typing." In addition, within the avant-garde literary movements on the East and West coasts there was suspicion. Following the 1957 obscenity trial for Allen Ginsberg's poem *Howl* and publication of *On the Road* as covered in *Time*, *Life* and *Newsweek*, many radical artists felt that the sudden fame of the Beat phenomenon as a whole owed much to sophisticated packaging and promotional techniques. In fact, more than a few poets saw Kerouac's friend, Allen Ginsberg, a former adman, as more a crowd-pleasing publicity hound than a serious poet. The neo-romanticism of the beat writers obviously hit sensitive nerves in several literary camps, for different reasons, all at once. Those reviewers and writers who came to Kerouac's novel with a less biased eye, however, could not deny the ecstatic energy of his prose style, with its structural and emotive debt to the jazz music Kerouac so much loved.

What the Beats understood and identified with in jazz, was protest against the white middle-class world. As Sal Paradise observes in part one of the novel, "Every single one of us was blushing. This is the story of America. Everybody's doing what they think they're supposed to do." Kerouac intuitively understood that you can't have jazz without protest, and along with his Beat friends regarded jazz musicians like Charlie Parker and Thelonious Monk as true American geniuses, heroes, and rebels. Just as Sal later thinks Dean "look(s) like God," while high on marijuana bumping along the back roads of Mexico, those jazz musicians who can really "blow" are the "prophets" and "shepherds" come to lead the straying but faithful back to "the golden world that Jesus came from." It is therefore not surprising that many of the freshest and most startling descriptive passages in *On the Road* are of roadhouse juke-joints and wild late-night jam sessions in urban jazz clubs filled with all the vagaries of nightlife one could imagine. In these scenes positioned throughout the novel to punctuate the emotional ups and downs of the road-weary heroes, one encounters Kerouac's most successful rendering of the simultaneity of antithetical images and meanings of both "down-and-out" and "beatific."

To achieve the improvisational creativity of the great jazz players, Kerouac experimented for several years before arriving at what Allen Ginsberg, referring to

Kerouac's poetic sensibility, termed a "modality of consciousness," signifying the aesthetic recreation of jazz improvisation in the creative prose of *On the Road*. To "step across chronological time," so as to temporarily escape the linear road that could only end in death, Kerouac reassessed linearity not only at the level of individual sentences and paragraphs, but in allowing the plot of his novel to zigzag in a spatial, nonlinear relationship of language and form. This way of writing is what Kerouac called "spontaneous prose." Kerouac had not only an amazing ear for the rhythmic and patterned sounds of human speech, filled with alliterative play, but an extraordinary memory for the words he heard—sometimes complete conversations, which he sprinkles throughout his work. Not confined to concrete geographical details, Kerouac's inspired play of sound sets up an impressionistic canvas of forms, a cyclical movement of tropes become "riffs" that are integral to the notion of the hero and to the quest for "IT."

Spontaneous prose, in Kerouac's definition, takes on the semblance of linguistic entities unaligned with the conventional subject-verb arrangement of English sentences, thereby, opening up the sense of time and allowing the movement, flashes, and fluctuations of jazz, and by extension, spiritual transcendence. Thus, Kerouac's "endless road" reveals his ultimately ironic stance about America—that it is beat. Tempered through drugs and drinking, sad and mournful, it remains true to Whitman's vision of a secularized heaven on earth, brought forward into the era of Bebop jazz.

In part three of *On the Road*, as all their friends take turns berating Dean for his selfish, reckless, and thoughtless behavior, Sal Paradise suddenly sees his friend Moriarty as "the Saint of the lot": "He was alone in the doorway, digging the street. Bitterness, recriminations, advice, morality, sadness—everything was behind him, and ahead of him was the ragged and ecstatic joy of pure being." Sal Paradise, like the real-life Kerouac, vacillated between the two poles of beat, the secular and the holy, in his search for the elusive "IT." "As we crossed the Colorado-Utah border I saw God in the sky in the form of huge gold sunburning clouds above the desert that seemed to point a finger at me and say, 'Pass here and go on, you're on the road to heaven.'" Soon thereafter, however, gazing out the car window at the Nevada desert landscape, Sal confesses that he's more interested in "some old rotted covered wagons and pool tables," weather-beaten signs with forgotten messages and names "still flapping in the haunted shrouded desert wind." Similarly, and throughout his life, Kerouac moved back and forth between the adventures he experienced with his beat friends, and the domesticity of his mother's home. In the novel, Sal Paradise transitions back and forth between his road trips with Dean and the home of his aunt in Paterson, New Jersey. The search for "IT" becomes the unending quest that both Kerouac in his writing, and Paradise in his spiritual hunger strive for without ever fully attaining—discovering

the "joy of pure being" is experienced, at best, only fleetingly. "Isn't it true that you start your life a sweet child believing in everything under your father's roof? Then comes the day of the Laodiceans, when you know you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, and with the visage of a gruesome grieving ghost you go shuddering through nightmare life."

Source: http://us.penguin.com/static/rguides/us/on_the_road.html

About the Author



Jack Kerouac was born Jean-Louis Lebris de Kerouac on March 12, 1922, the youngest of three children in a French-Canadian family in the factory town of Lowell, Massachusetts. The family lived in French-Canadian neighborhoods in Lowell and spoke the French-Canadian dialect of joul in their home. It was Kerouac's first language, and he spoke it in conversations with his mother, whom he called "Mamère," and lived with on and off throughout his adult life. He spent his childhood in Lowell, attending local Catholic and public schools, and his early adulthood in the East, attending Columbia College in New York City on a football scholarship. It was at Columbia College where he first met Neal Cassady, Allen Ginsberg, and William S. Burroughs.

Following a quarrel with the football coach in his sophomore year, Kerouac left Columbia College, joined the Merchant Marines, and sailed to various Atlantic and Mediterranean ports as a seaman during World War II. In 1944, he was arrested as a material witness, having failed to report a homicide committed by Lucien Carr, one of his friends at Columbia. Believing him to have "disgraced the family name," his father refused to post the \$100 bail. On the condition that Jack marry Edie Parker, an art student at Columbia through whom he'd first met Lucien Carr, his father came up with the money. Jack and Edie separated soon afterwards, however, and Kerouac signed aboard another merchant ship.

His first book, *The Town and the City*, published in 1950, was an attempt to explain "everything to everybody." Kerouac had borrowed the style and structure of Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel* as his literary model for *The Town and the City*, but grew dissatisfied with the conventional result. As he later stated in a note prefacing his collection of poetry, *Mexico City Blues*: "I want to be considered a jazz poet blowing a long blues in an afternoon jam session on Sunday." In a struggle to fashion a method of writing that could capture the freedom and creativity of Bebop in his prose fiction, Kerouac's encounter with Neal Cassady,

whom he would portray as Dean Moriarty in *On the Road*, proved to be pivotal. Cassady was visiting from Denver with his teenage wife, LuAnne, and staying with Hal Chase, a student at Columbia. Having grown up in Denver, living in skid row hotels with his alcoholic father, and serving time in a reformatory for stealing cars and joyriding, Cassady later decided to become a writer by learning how to write from Kerouac and Ginsberg. At first disconcerted by Cassady's tough looks and demeanor, Kerouac's second meeting with Neal early in 1947, described in the opening chapter of *On the Road*, opened him to the world of sex, drugs, and other wild "experiments" of his Columbia friends.

As early as 1948, Kerouac had begun writing and making notes for the book he was already calling "*On the Road*." Following initial bursts of excitement and hope for the project, he ended up dissatisfied, believing his work was too imitative of his models, Theodore Dreiser and Thomas Wolfe, and that his writing failed to capture the spontaneity and freedom of his "road" adventures. Having returned to his mother's home from one of his trips in February 1949, and emotionally shattered by his wild rides with Cassady, he realized his "factualist" attempts at his "road book" could not be salvaged. In November 1950, feeling his life was drifting, Kerouac impulsively married for a second time a woman he had met a short time before in New York named Joan Haverty. Back in Denver, Cassady had begun writing letters to Jack that stunned both him and his new wife, Joan, with their loose, rambling sentences and meticulously detailed observations. Thinking Cassady's letters "among the best things ever written in America," as well as being inspired by the honesty of Burroughs' first-person narratives of his drug addiction, Kerouac finally found the catalyst he needed to break with his earlier literary models, making the decision to "write it as it happened."

In April 1951, taping together twelve-foot-long sheets of tracing paper, and feeding them into his typewriter as a continuous roll, Kerouac completed *On the Road* in a marathon burst of typing that lasted three weeks. Discouraged that his "road" book, along with several other novels and collections of poetry written between 1952 and 1957 were continually turned down by New York publishers, Kerouac gave up on the publishing world and turned to Buddhist practice. In 1953, he began writing reading notes on Buddhism for his friend, Allen Ginsberg. As his Buddhist study intensified, what had begun as notes evolved into an all-encompassing work of nonfiction, incorporating poems, haiku, prayers, journal entries, meditations, fragments of letters, ideas about writing, overheard conversations, sketches, blues, and more. The final manuscript (published as *Some of the Dharma* by Viking in 1997) was completed in 1956, to become part of what Kerouac thought of as *The Duluoz Legend*.

Kerouac was thirty-five years old when *On the Road* was published in 1957. The media response was unrelenting, and he was besieged with questions about the lifestyle he had described in his novel. Kerouac was never able to convince his critics that the Beat Generation was "basically a religious generation," and that the specific object of their quest was spiritual. And unfortunately, he never managed to gather all his autobiographical novels together in a uniform binding published with the names of the "real life" people returned to them. He died from abdominal hemorrhaging brought on by his alcoholism on October 21, 1969 in St. Petersburg, Florida, where he had gone to live a year before with his third wife and invalid mother.

Literary Criticism

On the Road remains after thirty years not only the most popular novel by Jack Kerouac, but also the best-known prose work of the Beat Generation. It was not, however, Kerouac's personal favorite among his writings. He preferred *Visions of Cody* and considered *On the Road* as a superseded preliminary version of his efforts to transform his life "on the road" with Neal Cassady between 1947 and 1950 into part of the "Duluoz Legend," a projected fictionalization of his life. *On the Road* was, in fact, the first of four such preliminary efforts to be completed.

These attempts began in 1948, immediately after the completion of Kerouac's first novel, *The Town and the City*, while the events used in the new work were still in progress. Kerouac's estate has denied access to the manuscripts of the first two versions, but Tim Hunt has managed in Kerouac's *Crooked Road* (1981) to reconstruct them from Kerouac's correspondence and other unpublished materials. The third version, narrated by a teenaged black boy from North Carolina, provides most of the text for the posthumously published Pic.

The 175,000-word fourth version, typed on a single scroll of paper during three weeks in April 1951, was rejected by many publishers while it circulated with the title "The Beat Generation"; but finally, through the persistence of Malcolm Cowley, who suggested cuts and revisions, it was published by the prestigious Viking Press in 1957. As early as 1951, however, Kerouac, inspired by his discovery of "spontaneous prose," had begun to displace this text with the very different and much more experimental "Neal Book," which was not published in its entirety as *Visions of Cody* until after Kerouac's death. In it, the story line of *On the Road* is drastically condensed into the final fifth and its downbeat ending is replaced by a more optimistic one in which Ti-Jean Duluoz (Kerouac's alter ego) finally transcends the influence of Cody Pomeray (Neal Cassady's final avatar).

The formally traditional *On the Road* is thus a supplanted version of a work in progress that the author allowed to be published for financial reasons when even his friends considered the Joycean final version of his masterwork unmarketable. Possibly as a result of changes Malcolm Cowley suggested, *On the Road* is a much more carefully structured work than the published components of the "Duluoz Legend." Each of the four parts of this novel based on the experiences of Kerouac (Sal Paradise) and Cassady (Dean Moriarty) during their life on the road follows a repeated narrative pattern that foreshadows the brief fifth section. Each begins with Sal depressed by his sheltered life at home as he is writing his first novel. Energized by the example of Dean, Sal takes to the road four times and each time the action accelerates manically. As each frenzied episode reaches its climax, however, a disillusioning experience dashes Sal's hopes; and he slinks home, dejected and again depressed.

In Part One, Sal makes his first trip to San Francisco (largely by bus), where he ends up as a frustrated guard in a menacing security camp, "at the end of America" with "nowhere to go." During his trip home, Sal establishes with a Mexican girl the one satisfying romantic relationship depicted in the novel; but he abandons her because of what he later laments as his "white expectations." A year later in Part Two he travels with Dean to New Orleans and again San Francisco, where he envisions Dean, standing naked by a window, as someday "the pagan mayor" of the city; but Dean's energies run out, and Sal goes home not caring whether they ever meet again.

By the next spring, however, in Part Three, Sal is drawn back to San Francisco, where he offers to take his "brother" Dean to Italy and support them both, but on this, their wildest cross-country junket, in a borrowed car, Sal ruminates morbidly about his "raggedy travelings," and Dean becomes involved with so many wives and children that the trip abroad is called off. By spring 1950, however, Sal can still generate enthusiasm for a trip to Mexico City as "the most fabulous" one of all; but when Sal becomes seriously ill in Mexico, Dean deserts him and Sal realizes "what a rat" Dean is. The novel ends with a tableau that symbolizes the transparent but impenetrable wall between Sal and Dean. Back in New York Sal rides off to a Duke Ellington concert in a bookmaker friend's Cadillac, while Dean is left outside in the rain. Sal can only wave wordlessly through the back window before brooding that he can see no future but "the forlorn rags of growing old."

Thus, far from being the seductive promotional tract for an irresponsible threat to the traditional American way of life that it has been condemned as, *On the Road* is rather a defeatist cautionary tale about the "endless and beginningless emptiness" of what Sal calls "the senseless nightmare road." Its downbeat ending

foreshadows better than Kerouac's preferred works his subsequent rejection of any responsibility for the counterculture that this novel helped inspire.

Source: French, Warren. "On the Road: Overview." *Reference Guide to American Literature*. Ed. Jim Kamp. 3rd ed. Detroit: St. James Press, 1994. Literature Resource Center. <http://www.aadl.org/research/browse/books>

Akers is a freelance writer with an interest in Beat literature. In the following essay, he discusses the early criticism, cultural impact, and contemporary relevance of *On the Road* and the Beat literary movement.

When it was published in 1957, *On the Road* fascinated America with its seemingly aimless outcasts seeking thrills across the continent. It is the autobiographical account of Jack Kerouac's life in the late 1940s. Kerouac was recognized as the father of the Beat Generation with the publication of his novel. The Beat literary movement actually started with a small group of bohemians living in New York City during the mid-1940s. The group included Kerouac, poet Allen Ginsberg, and professional eccentric William Burroughs. The men were trying to define a "New Vision" in literature, and they discussed and criticized various works of literature and theories of writing. Kerouac met a charismatic drifter from Denver named Neal Cassady during this period. Cassady ultimately inspired the character of Dean Moriarty in *On the Road*, and he inspired Kerouac himself to go on the road. The manic movement of Sal Paradise in *On the Road*, with and without Dean Moriarty, is directly patterned after Kerouac's real-life travel during the same period. The novel shocked many readers of the late 1950s with its depictions of pointless travel, drug use, and promiscuous sex. And although some critics were excited by Kerouac's style, many thought Beat literature was adolescent, even immoral. However, the novel continues to be popular both as a critical subject and with readers (especially college students). It is interesting to review the novel and its early criticism with the hindsight of knowing the impact it had on American culture after its publication.

Both Gilbert Millstein and, to a lesser extent, David Dempsey, wrote favorable reviews for *On the Road* in *The New York Times* when the book was first published. Millstein believed that the novel depicted a quest for spiritual affirmation. The characters behave excessively, he wrote, because "the search for belief is very likely the most violent known to man." Because of this theme, and what he believed to be the beauty of the writing, Millstein insisted that *On the Road* was a major novel. Millstein's colleague at *the Times*, Dempsey, agreed that the novel was a "stunning achievement," but he believed that the characters acted out of a "neurotic necessity" rather than a spiritual one. Like Dempsey, many critics were impressed with Kerouac's raw talent, but still found flaws in the novel.

For example, they noted the lack of characterization. Dempsey wrote that Kerouac's characters "are not developed but simply presented; they perform, take their bows and do a hand-spring into the wings." Gene Baro, in the New York Herald Tribune, also pointed out that the novel's characterizations are "given and illustrated rather than developed." These critics, and several others, considered Kerouac to be a major talent despite the flaws in his second novel.

Of course, there were many who were not infatuated with Kerouac's style. In his book *The Birth of the Beat Generation*, Steven Watson noted that "[a]fter the rave in the *New York Times* [for *On the Road*], the positive reviews were more temperate, and the negative reviews outdid one another in bile." The attack on the novel, and on the Beat literary movement in general, was led by intellectual Columbia graduates Herbert Gold and Norman Podhoretz. In an essay published in *The Nation*, Gold claimed that Kerouac had "appointed himself prose celebrant to a pack of unleashed zazous." Podhoretz, who was Ginsberg's contemporary at Columbia, fervently scorned Kerouac's work. He could be especially vicious in his criticism, as when he stated in his essay "The Know-Nothing Bohemians," first published in the *Partisan Review*, that he believed Kerouac's manifesto to be: "Kill the intellectuals who can talk coherently, kill the people who can sit still for five minutes at a time, kill those incomprehensible characters who are capable of getting seriously involved with a woman, a job, a cause." It should be noted here that Kerouac was never convicted of murder.

The problem with Kerouac's most vehement critics was their inability to criticize *On the Road* strictly on its literary merit. Podhoretz treated *On the Road* as if it were a threat to Western civilization rather than a uniquely stylized autobiographical novel about people on the fringe of society. What Podhoretz really seemed to resent was Kerouac's spontaneity, which, in his opinion, was a lack of control. Podhoretz has been quoted as saying, "Creativity represents a miraculous coming together of the uninhibited energy of the child with its apparent opposite and enemy--the sense of order imposed on the disciplined adult intelligence." In this quote, he indicates that while the exuberance of a child is welcome in the creative process, adult supervision is required. Kerouac certainly did not subscribe to this, as shown by several items on his "list of essentials" in his "*Belief & Technique for Modern Prose*":

1. Scribbled secret notebooks, and wild typewritten pages, for yr own joy . . .
2. Submissive to everything, open, listening . . .
7. Blow as deep as you want to blow . . .
28. Composing wild, undisciplined, pure, coming in from under, crazier the better . . .

Kerouac imposed no restrictions on his creative "child," and this is perhaps what offended Podhoretz more about *On the Road* than anything. Podhoretz was unable to recognize any of the intelligence and poetry of the novel because he not only disapproved of Kerouac's lifestyle, he also found Kerouac's creative philosophy abhorrent. Currently, Podhoretz is a senior fellow at a conservative think tank, the Hudson Institute. It is strange to consider that Kerouac, who became friends with conservative icon William F. Buckley, Jr. and supported the Vietnam War in the 1960s, was closer to Podhoretz in political ideology than in artistic theory.

Despite some lukewarm reviews and the furor of conservative intellectual critics, *On the Road* was a popular success. Several books Kerouac wrote during the 1950s were quickly published and he became a celebrity. Kerouac tried to explain the Beat phenomenon to middle-class America in various print, radio, and television interviews. He emphasized the spiritual dimensions of his work and the word "beat." Kerouac was credited with an entry in the Random House dictionary with the definition of the Beat Generation:

Members of the generation that came of age after World War II, who, supposedly as a result of disillusionment stemming from the Cold War, espouse mystical detachment and relaxation of social and sexual tensions.

Much to Kerouac's dismay, mainstream culture trivialized his work with "beatnik" clichés. The commercialization of Beat culture included several awful "B" movies and many paperback novels with beatnik themes. Perhaps the most egregious example of this fad was in the television series *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis* (1959-1963). One of the characters on the series, Maynard G. Krebs (played by Bob Denver, whose later claim to fame was as the title character in Gilligan's Island), was a perfect illustration of the beatnik cliché. Krebs wore a goatee, used hipster slang, played the bongos, and avoided work whenever possible. The "beatnik" craze in American culture was, thankfully, short-lived. Of course, the passive beatnik evolved into the active hippie. *On the Road* was one part of the social and cultural forces that led to the youth revolution of the 1960s.

However, the continued popularity of *On the Road* can't be explained as mere nostalgia. Recently, the book was ranked number 624 in sales on the Internet bookstore Amazon.com. This is actually very impressive considering that the store has hundreds of thousands of titles. Young people are the book's most avid fans. Thus, Millstein's early praise of the book's "spirituality," embodied in the characters' "search for belief," has proven to be prescient. The search for identity or belief is a universal experience, and it is especially pertinent to young people.

For example, it is hard to deny the youthful energy of the following passage from the novel:

the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars.

It is this yearning, this desire to have "everything at the same time," that attracts so many readers. Sometimes, Sal's search for meaning seems futile, and instead of joy there is melancholy, as when he arrives in Times Square after one of his western sojourns:

I had traveled eight thousand miles around the American continent and I was back on Times Square; and right in the middle of a rush hour, too, seeing with my innocent road-eyes the absolute madness and fantastic horror of New York with its millions and millions hustling forever for a buck among themselves, the mad dream--grabbing, taking, giving, sighing, dying, just so they could be buried in those awful cemetery cities beyond Long Island City.

The strength of *On the Road* is in its vivid portrayal of both the joy and the pain of being young. It is one thing to criticize Kerouac's verbosity, repetitiveness, and sentimentality; it is quite another to dismiss his work entirely because his characters lead unconventional lifestyles, or because his creative philosophy involved using emotion rather than "craft." Even after forty years, *On the Road* remains a vital work.

Source: Akers, Don. "Overview of 'On the Road'." *Novels for Students*. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski and Deborah A. Stanley. Vol. 8. Detroit: Gale, 2000. Literature Resource Center. <http://www.aadl.org/research/browse/books>

On the Road Reconsidered: Kerouac and the Modernist Tradition

There was a conference in Boulder, Colorado, in the summer of 1982 to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. In the brochure advertising the week-long multimedia "event," various novelists, poets, and critics paid tribute to Kerouac's literary accomplishments. Not surprisingly, the compliments and claims are hyperbolic. William Tallman asserts that "you've got to get past Jack to get down to writing in our time." James Laughlin states, "I think he was a turning point in the history of modern American fiction." And the poet Ted Berrigan goes so far as to say, "I think that only with the arrival of Jack Kerouac did American fiction become American." These are some pretty extravagant claims for the significance of Kerouac and *On the Road*, even

given the promotional context. Now that we have passed the silver anniversary of its publication, it is appropriate to establish the place of *On the Road* in relation to postwar American fiction, to assess its contribution to the evolution of new narrative forms, to ascertain just how much the "Bible" of the Beat Generation opened new roads for narrative energies, roads that were intended to depart significantly from the closed systems of narrative that predominated in the fifties.

By closed systems of narrative, I refer of course to the other literary narratives of the fifties and, more specifically, to the aesthetic that informed them, an aesthetic that may be termed modernist because it adhered to aesthetic principles formulated by the great modernists and hypostatized by the New Criticism. Some of the tenets of this artistic creed were as follows:

True art is impersonal. T. S. Eliot argues in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" that "the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man that suffers and the mind which creates" (54). A poet must distance himself from his own experiences because "it is not in his personal emotions, the emotions provoked by particular events in his life, that the poet is in any way remarkable or interesting" (57). Elsewhere in the same essay he says that poetry "is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality" (58) and that "the emotion of art is impersonal" (59). Eliot's remarks are about poetry, but they express a point of view that characterized modernist art in general and that called for the necessary separation of art and life.

True art is detached from its subject matter. The artist cultivates an attitude of detachment toward his material, presenting it dispassionately or disinterestedly. Contemporary novelist John Hawkes, describing his own relation with his fictional creations, defines the nature of that detachment and its *raison d'être* as follows:

Detachment does not mean indifference, detachment is a psychic state that one learns in the face of the most overwhelming emotional destructiveness. You can live and create only when you manage to control, to keep at a distance the terrors that exist within the human being.

This detachment might be accomplished by any number of literary devices, including paradox, deliberate ambiguity, "showing" rather than "telling," the adoption of ironic masks or unreliable narrators, or Eliot's own "objective correlative."

The true work of art is, above all, a crafted or made thing. The modernists share an overriding concern or preoccupation with the form or structure of the art work. This fascination manifests itself in a self-consciousness about the how and what of

art but, more importantly, in works that were carefully constructed, "architectonic" objects.

These three characteristics--impersonality, detachment, form--are not the only or even the defining characteristics of modernist art, but they constitute the primary literary pillars that Kerouac and other Beat writers attempted to topple.

As suggested above, the modernist definition of art had been, during the forties and fifties, canonized and given normative force by the New Critics in the universities, who acted as the arbiters of order and taste in the world of letters. The Beats rejected the modernist aesthetic as productive of art that had become, over the years, esoteric, obscurantist, elitist, safe, sterile, dead. Beat poetics called for rebellion against all forms of authority, especially culturally sanctioned authority, like Eliot's "great tradition." It rejected the notion that the artist must distance himself from his material, seeing in it an unhealthy need to control or contain nature, life, people; the Beats preferred to "dig it." Beat epistemology preferred intuition to logical or rational means of cognition as a more valid means of apprehending and comprehending are problematics of experience. For them the more authentic way is an emotive being that is more immediate, more true. Accordingly, the Beats tended to exalt the unique moment and the pure sensation of the experiencing and testifying individual--poetry for them was very much the expression of personality, the "with it" personality, not an escape into impersonality. Where the modernist sensibility preferred its life "cooked," the Beats desired to present it "raw." Where the modernist sensibility leads to and culminates in Wallace Stevens's idea of poetry as the "supreme fiction," the Beats took their lead from William Carlos Williams's dictum: "no ideas but in things" (*Paterson* 1.15).

Kerouac championed the Beat sensibility and its corresponding aesthetic in his literary manifesto, "*Essentials of Spontaneous Prose*." In this piece he specifies how the Beat Generation expresses itself in prose narrative. He calls for a highly personal and confessional narrative, one scribbled down without correction and at a high speed in a quest for spontaneity and, consequently, authenticity: "Never afterthink to 'improve' or defray impressions, as the best writing is always the most painful personal wrung-out tossed from cradle warm protective mind" (532). He thus subverts the modernist emphasis upon impersonality and form and *le mot juste*; he even subsumes the latter two under the word "craft," a word that he uses pejoratively. His own work is interesting just because it is not "crafted." For Kerouac revision is a form of inhibition, a repressive force that muddies the purity of the vision, destroys the immediacy of the experience recounted, dilutes the impact of "felt" life. He admits having been a "craftsman" once, but at inordinate expense to his writing:

And be sure of this, I spent my entire youth writing slowly with revisions and endless rehashing speculation and deleting and got so I was writing one sentence a day and the sentence had no FEELING. Goddam it, FEELING is what I like in art, not CRAFTINESS and the hiding of feelings ("*Art of Fiction*" 541)

The best writing approximates the emotional release of orgasm: "Come from within, out--to be relaxed and said" (Kerouac, "*Essentials*" 533).

This form of writing, Kerouac asserts, will not only convey an emotional charge, it will also come closer to the original experience and thus be more authentic. To write spontaneously is to discard the artistic mask, a mask that for Kerouac is a sign of distance and dishonesty: "If you don't stick to what you first thought, and to the words the thought brought, what's the sense of bothering with it anyway, what's the sense of foisting your little lies on others?" (Jones 500). When one denies the mask, one removes the artificial barriers between art and life and exposes the naked self, regardless of the personal or artistic consequences.

One critic summarizes Kerouac's attack on modernist literary "sacred cows" as follows:

The writer was not to revise his original impulses, for revision was a function of conditioning, a concession to standards of taste and propriety. ... Revision was inhibition, the censoring of the purity of the artist's vision, the betrayal of immediacy, the lie in the face of actual experience. (Tytell 144)

In order to breathe life back into art and to bring art back to life, Kerouac felt compelled to abandon modernist precepts and to run the risks of "imitative form." The new narrative idiom more faithfully conveyed the "feel" of contemporary life. The polemical call for a spontaneous prose, then, was at once a rejection of an outdated literary code and at the same time a project for a new, free, more authentic narrative form.

Kerouac felt he had achieved the beginnings of this narrative revolution in *On the Road*. The Kerouac figure in *Desolation Angels* describes the earlier novel in the following way:

I was originating (without knowing it, you say?) a new way of writing about life, no fiction, no craft, no revising afterthoughts, all of it innocent goahead confession, the discipline of making the mind the slave of the tongue with no chance to lie or elaborate.(Tytell 146)

In *On the Road*, then, Kerouac was attempting a new kind of narrative, one incapable of "lying," if only because it tried to tell everything, all at once, to let it all spill out at once according to the peregrinations of a retentive active mind. And in its original form, it certainly was a radically shaped narrative. Kerouac had typed the entire novel in one paragraph on a typewriter scroll 250 feet long, without using any other punctuation than the dash. It is perhaps a measure of his "revisionism" that at his publisher's insistence (after waiting six years for someone to publish it), he agreed to allow the work to appear in well-punctuated, tidy paragraphs, divided into five sections. He even condensed a number of the cross-country journeys in order to give the novel a tighter structure. Allen Ginsberg, for one, insists that we have yet to read or experience the "real" *On the Road*.

It is, of course, the published version that I would like to examine, in order to assess its "newness," its status as innovative or experimental fiction. First, we might consider the setting of the novel. It is almost redundant to say that almost all the episodes in the novel take place "on the road." It would be more pertinent to point out that Kerouac deliberately invests the road with symbolic value, a value it traditionally has had in American road narratives from *Huckleberry Finn* to *Catcher in the Rye*. The road represents an avenue of escape from the limitations, restrictions, conformity, and claustrophobia of society, from the regimentation inherent in mass society and its organizations. To go "on the road" is to enter a kind of interzone where all the "mad" misfits inevitably meet and mingle and where there exists the possibility of growth and choice and spontaneity. To envision the road in this manner is not really to depart from a time-honored American tradition, but it should be noted that Kerouac could conceive of personal freedom only in the form of a flight from an oppressive society and that he necessarily took his show "on the road."

Adhering to another tradition of road narrative, Kerouac adopted the potentially open-ended picaresque mode as the armature of plot. The picaresque mode, with its episodic form and its apparent submission to contingency, conventionally allows life to assert primacy over the aesthetic demands of art. A picaro follows the call of life or chance. In *On the Road*, Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty wander from adventure to adventure, responding to the call of the road, exploring and experiencing the squalid and sensational subterranean zone of American life. Sal and Dean are true picaros, to be distinguished from the quasi-picaresque heroes of two other famous fifties novels that also take place on the road, *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Henderson the Rain King*. Salinger's Holden Caulfield and Bellow's Henderson both go on the road in search of something, although that something may not be well defined. As numerous critics have argued, they are both picaro-pilgrims, journeying through an enigmatic and occasionally hostile world toward some unknown temple of truth. Although Sal Paradise exults about the

possibilities of "visions" somewhere ahead, and although he and Dean seem from time to time to approach asymptotically the elusive "IT," in fact their various journeys are not so much motivated by a specific goal as by a simple need to be on the road. Throughout the novel, various minor characters (like Carlo Marx once he has become "straight") pose the question "Where are you going?" but for Dean and Sal the question is irrelevant. For them the road is not a means but an end. The road is their element: "And [Dean] hunched over the wheel and gunned her. ... We were all delighted, we all realized we were leaving confusion and nonsense behind and performing our one and noble function of the time, *move!* And we moved!" (Kerouac, *Road* 133-34). Their movement, like the novel, has no specific *telos*.

If *On the Road* is a true picaresque novel in terms of plot, it deviates from the traditional picaresque in terms of function. The traditional picaresque serves a satirical function, pointing out the vices, wickedness, selfishness, etc., of the so-called good society through which the picaro moves. The picaro goes on the road ultimately to discover the "way of the world" and to suggest a more ethical alternative. *On the Road*, though it does make the distinction between the world of the Beats and that of the "squares," does not dwell on the conformity, the hypocrisy, the emptiness, of that latter world. In fact, throughout the novel, we remain immersed not in the world of the squares, but in the fringe milieu of the Beats, which Kerouac is at pains to celebrate. *On the Road* is a novel that, like Dean, continually and fervently says "Yes!" It recounts Sal Paradise's love affair with the road, an affair that has its sensual side. The car hugs the white line in the middle of the road, Dean caresses or cradles the steering wheel, the road stretches out in front of them like an object of desire, with more allure than the various women the two men encounter along it.

By way of summary, then, the picaresque mode invests *On the Road* with a degree of formal openness that in itself distinguishes the novel from others of the fifties. The novel also does away with the modernist techniques of impersonality and detachment. In the original manuscript, Kerouac used the real names of his "real life" characters (Jack Kerouac, Neal Cassidy, Allen Ginsberg, Carolyn Cassidy, etc.). He supplied pseudonyms only at the insistence of his publishers, who were worried about possible lawsuits. In effect, Kerouac was trying to tell the "true" story of the way it was on the road in the early 1950s, to erase the artificial distinction between art and life. And there is no irony or detachment in the discourse of the narrator Sal Paradise, from the moment that he first declares his true allegiances:

[T]he only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who

never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars.(8)

Sal's discourse is throughout emotional, impassioned, honest, and open, and it is meant to be taken at face value.

On the Road then is a narrative with a degree of formal openness, a narrative that rejects detachment and impersonality in favor of (to borrow Kerouac's own words) "a wild yea-saying overburst of American joy" (10). But is it a radically different or "new" novel? Reading it twenty-five years after, I would argue that it really does not come across as radical. Even the subject matter does not seem so daring. More important, it seems very easy to read (if a trifle embarrassing in places) just because it invites a "reading." A "reading" is the kind of activity the readerly text (Barthes's *lisible*) elicits from the reader--the formulation of a total, comprehensive vision of the world depicted in the text. *On the Road* invites (one might even say demands) just such a reading.

It is not to my purpose here to supply the full argument for such a reading, but I would like to suggest those elements that point to its existence and define its boundaries. First, there is the structure of the text. The novel is divided into five "parts," each of which centers on one journey across the country and back. In part one, an innocent and romantic Sal makes the journey alone, and the entire circuit is given relatively equal emphasis. In part two, Dean comes looking for Sal, and the emphasis is upon their journey from East to West (where Dean typically abandons Sal). The third part, the centerpiece of the novel, begins with Sal seeking out Dean for the first time, a fact that Dean is quick to recognize as important, and recounts their careening ride alone together (for the first time) from West to East, to New York City. Part four gives us a journey from North to South, to the "end of the road" in Mexico City, where Dean abandons Sal again. In the brief epilog of part five, Dean, now completely tattered and totally speechless, makes a lonely and desolate circuit of the country simply to "see" Sal. There is a pattern, a kind of formal elegance, to the apparently random movement in the text. In part one, Sal journeys alone; in part five, Dean makes the solo trip. In parts two and three, they travel together, but in opposite directions. In part four, they go from North to South to the climactic experience at the end of the road. This five-part structure contains a rhythm predicated upon the number of people on the road, the direction they take, and the inevitable collapse at the end of each journey. Seen from this point of view, *On the Road* is a rather "crafted" narrative.

More important, this structure reinforces the basic thematic thrust of the novel. The novel begins and ends with Dean Moriarty. The first page begins, "I first met Dean not long after my wife and I split up" (3); the novel ends with the words, "I

think of Dean Moriarty" (310). Dean remains the center of attention throughout the novel, even when he is waiting in the wings. Dean epitomizes life on the road for Sal, as numerous passages make clear, and his narrative about road life necessarily evolves into the story of his relation with Dean: "With the coming of Dean Moriarty began the part of my life you could call my life on the road" (3). As one critic has argued, *On the Road* is a love story, chronicling the vicissitudes of a relation between two men (Dardess: 200-06). It is Dean who gives Sal the impetus to go on the road in part one, they go on the road together in part two, and the relationship is cemented in part three, where Sal refers to Dean as his "brother" and where he is Dean's lone defender. In part four, the journey to the end of the road in Mexico, Sal begins to retreat a bit in his hero-worship of Dean, and he refers to Dean's mania in apocalyptic terms. Part five finds Dean on the road alone, tattered, shattered, speechless. The novel ends with a lyric evocation of Dean, one that suggests that he is gone (as is life on the road), but not forgotten:

So in America when the sun goes down and I sit on the old broken-down river pier watching the long, long skies over New Jersey and sense all that rolls in one unbelievable huge bulge over to the West Coast, and all that road going, all the people dreaming in the immensity of it, ... I think of Dean Moriarty, I even think of Old Dean Moriarty the father we never found, I think of Dean Moriarty.(309-10)

The tone here is elegiac; Paradise knows that life on the road is over, but by asserting his attachment to Dean, he affirms the value of the experience, a value implicit in the fact that he tells the story in the first place. Sal never repudiates either the "road" or Dean. To go on the road is for Sal both an end in itself and a necessary stage in life. To go on the road means to become like Dean, to hold intellection and evaluation in suspension and to experience life in the raw. On the road, life is, as Kierkegaard says, "not a problem to be solved but a reality to be experienced" (Jones 503). This is the vision that Kerouac attempts both to enact and to convey in *On the Road*.

I had said that I would not attempt a "reading" of the novel, and I see that that is exactly what I have done--inevitably, I might argue. It was inevitable because Kerouac, like the modernists he rejects, writes essentially in the romantic tradition. That tradition conceives the artist as outsider or pariah, but also as a clerical figure in a prosaic world, as (to borrow from Joyce) "priest of the eternal imagination," gifted with powers to discover order in a world in which the "center will not hold." This romantic belief or sensibility places Kerouac's *On the Road* in a novelistic great tradition and, at the same time, limits its value as a radically new narrative form. In effect, Kerouac's intent is exactly the same as that of the modernists--to interpret the human condition in the light of an achieved (as opposed to "imposed") comprehensive world view. This aim we can refer to as "totalization."²

The novelist attempts to render a "total" vision of reality and to endow public or private life with significance. He or she pulls away the veil and reveals some deeper, hidden truth, however fragile and ephemeral. We might refer to Kerouac's brand of truth-seeking as non-analytic totalization, but he still belongs to the grand Western tradition of the totalizing novel. In the final analysis how really different is the experiencing of IT (so sought after by Sal and Dean) from the Joycean epiphany?

Ihab Hassan, in his study of the fiction of the fifties, *Radical Innocence*, makes the following generalizations about the nature of the fifties protagonist:

Precisely what the new hero stands for, no one can yet define. He is not exactly the liberal's idea of victim, not the conservative's idea of pariah, not the radical's idea of the rebel. Or perhaps he is all of these things and none in particular. ... [F]lawed in his sainthood and grotesque in his criminality, he finally appears as an expression of man's quenchless desire to affirm, despite the voids and vicissitudes of our age, the human sense, of *life!*(6)

Another critic of the fifties, Irving Howe, describes the true subject of fifties fiction as "the recurrent search ... for personal identity and freedom" (203). Neither man is thinking specifically of Kerouac's *On the Road*, but they might be. My point is that, despite claims to the contrary, Kerouac's novel fits very cozily with the rest of the fiction of the fifties, that Sal Paradise could be Augie March's or Frank Alpine's brother, that the creators of such characters see narrative as an act of cognitive self-discovery. *On the Road* is a novel of its time.

Kerouac's writing might best be described as anti-modernist, more reactionary than revolutionary. That is, he rejects modernist techniques and writes with the stated intention of undermining or unseating them, as do certain British writers like C. P. Snow and Kingsley Amis. But at the same time, he remains within the tradition of the totalizing novel, and that fact dramatically reduces the radicalness of his achievement.

Imamu Baraka said of the novel soon after its publication in 1957 that "*On the Road* breaks new ground, and plants new seeds" (Baraka 1x). We can refer to *On the Road* as ground-breaking in a limited sense of the word. That is, it breaks or overturns the ground of an accepted and encrusted literary canon and perhaps even sows the seeds of the new narrative forms that appeared in the sixties, for a postmodernist fiction. For one thing, Kerouac's highly confessional mode suggested new possible relations between art and life. His extensive use of autobiographical material prefigures the non-fiction novel and the work of Mailer, Capote, and Hunter Thompson. His technique of transcribing literally and verbatim

the convolutions of his mind perhaps serves as a model for a novel like Warhol's *a--a* literal transcription of the random conversations in a New York apartment--or even the transcriptional technique that William Gaddis employs in *JR*. The way he confuses or collapses the realms of fiction and autobiography prefigures the works of fictionists like Ronald Sukenick and Raymond Federman, works that highlight the fictionality of reality and the reality of fiction. And the very publication of *On the Road* opened the doors for any number of "fringe" narratives, like William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* (published in 1959), works that were thematically and formally more daring and experimental. I think one can say that *On the Road*, even if it did not itself discover the open road to new narrative domains, at least indicated where that road might be found.

Source: Malmgren, Carl D. "On the Road Reconsidered: Kerouac and the Modernist Tradition." *Ball State University Forum* 30.1 (Winter 1989): 59-67. Rpt. in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Ed. Linda Pavlovski and Scott T. Darga. Vol. 117. Detroit: Gale Group, 2002. Literature Resource Center.
<http://www.aadl.org/research/browse/books>

Discussion Questions

1. At the beginning of the novel, Sal Paradise admits to having ambivalent feelings about Dean, at first thinking him to be a little too tough, a real streetkid. Later, his feelings toward his friend change, though still mixed, as he calls him an "idiot," and an "imbecile," but also a "saint," and finally "the HOLY GOOF." Do you think Sal's opinion about Dean's character and intelligence is ever completely resolved? Why? Why not?
2. During Sal's first road trip west, he laments that "Boys and girls in America have such a sad time together." How does this observation, early in the novel, set the stage for the relationship between Sal Paradise and Terry, his Mexican girlfriend? Why doesn't he ever mention Terry's last name?
3. How does Dean Moriarty's obsession with sex and women compare to Sal's experience? Does Sal look upon his friend's "success" in bed with admiration, envy, or something else?
4. What part do women play in the core emotional relationship between Sal and Dean?
5. Though many of his poet and artist friends were gay, Kerouac, as revealed in his personal correspondence and journals, considered homosexuality to be a fault, a sin, a vice. In *On the Road*, Sal's friend Carlo Marx (based on

Allen Ginsberg) is openly gay. What is the attitude of Sal Paradise toward gays and lesbians in Kerouac's novel? What is Dean's attitude?

6. At the end of every adventure with Dean, Paradise returns home to his aunt, in Paterson, New Jersey. Is Kerouac's novel a convincing demonstration that mainstream middle-and-working-class values are inherently incompatible with the Beat lifestyle and philosophy of the road?
7. Whenever Sal and Dean have the chance to hear music, they choose jazz. What explains the dedication these characters have for this sophisticated African-American urban art form? What does Kerouac believe the jazz musician represents?
8. Almost every time that Paradise waxes poetic about heaven, God, and the road, shortly thereafter the topic of Death rears its head. How does Kerouac imagine the relationship between what Sal thinks of as heavenly bliss and the finality of death?
9. At one point on the road, Sal wonders, "for what's heaven? what's earth? All in the mind." What is heaven for Dean Moriarty and Sal Paradise? Do they share the same ideal, believe in the same kind of "heaven"?
10. Some critics have claimed that the world Kerouac depicts in *On the Road* glorifies the deeds of uneducated, criminal young men leading irresponsible lives, committing sacrilegious acts. Given today's low tolerance for youthful rebellion, particularly drug use, do you find the behavior of Dean Moriarty and Sal Paradise repugnant and totally inappropriate? Do you think Kerouac is approving or critical of his characters' behavior?
11. Why do you think *On the Road*, after more than forty years since its original publication, still maintains a magnetic hold on American youth culture? Is the novel's significance to your generation different from its significance to younger and to older generations? How has the meaning of *On the Road* changed for you since your first encounter with it?

Multimedia

'On the Road' at 50 (Radio Broadcast)

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=14112461>

NPR's coverage of the fiftieth anniversary of *On the Road*.

Jack Kerouac's Famous Scroll, 'On the Road' Again (Radio Broadcast)

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=11709924>

A discussion on NPR of Kerouac's writing process, and the scroll of paper he used to write *On the Road*.

Further Reading

Jack Kerouac's American journey by Paul Maher

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1296882>

(Call number: 813.07 Ma)

From one of today's top Kerouac scholars comes a riveting, behind-the-scenes look at the true adventures that spawned one of the greatest American novels of all time, as well as the real lives of the key characters of the novel—Sal Paradise, Dean Moriarty, Carlo Marx, Old Bull Hubbard, Camille, and others.

Book of dreams by Jack Kerouac

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1183842>

(Call number: 921 Kerouac)

Spontaneously written in a series of notebooks between 1952 and 1960, the *Book of Dreams* is Jack Kerouac's autobiography as told through dreams. Each morning, immediately upon waking, Kerouac would scribble down everything he could remember about his dreams.

A Different Beat: women of the beat generation by Richard Peabody (ed.)

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1133099>

(Call number: 810.992 Di)

Includes selections from Carolyn Cassady, Joyce Johnson, Jan Kerouac, Margaret Randall, Laura Ulewicz, and Anne Waldman.

Read-Alikes

The Awakener by Helen Weaver

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1355221>

(Call number: 813.54 We)

Twenty years in the writing, Weaver's memoir of her life in New York City in the 1950s and 1960s is worth the wait. With a cast of characters including Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and Lenny Bruce, the book recreates a time of radical change and great possibility—especially for a young woman escaping a repressive upbringing. While the author's account of her romantic relationship with Kerouac (she appears in Kerouac's *Desolation Angels*) takes up a substantial part of the book, it's far from the only good story she has to tell.

Not Fade Away by Jim Dodge

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1210740>

(Call number: Fiction Dodge)

This energetic and inventive novel reflects America's fascination with rock 'n' roll, automobiles, and the open road. After a highway accident, a California man is aided by George Gustin, who, with his tow truck called the Ghost, drives around providing "one of the few free rides in life." George relates the story of his life and its central adventure: a wild odyssey to deliver a stolen 1959 Cadillac to the Big Bopper, the rock singer who died in the plane crash that also killed Buddy Holly and Richie Valens. George's journey takes him from the beat hangouts of San Francisco to Texas, where the Bopper is buried, and finally to Iowa, where he hopes to find the site of the plane crash. Along the way, George encounters a variety of characters, both salt-of-the-earth types and genuine eccentrics. His ride, fueled by drugs as much as by gasoline, turns into a quest for salvation.

Summaries from AADL.org Catalog

Extra!

Go around the group and have each person tell a story about a significant road trip or vacation they have taken in the past. Maybe even plan one together!

