

RE-INVENTING TRADITIONS: JACK KEROUAC AND THE POETICS OF SUBVERSION

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Abstract. Questioning the nature and function of literature, the artists of the Beat Generation translate their experiences into a new code of poetics, and ultimately, of literature. Their quasi-scientific method of discovery through experimentation asks for the dissolution of the boundaries between subject and object, conscious and unconscious, description and explanation. The Beat confession is a complex strategy, a plea for forgiveness in the form of a public disclosure in order to regain acceptance into an imagined community. On the other hand, it is a defiant statement of self-assertiveness that opposes existing cultural conditions. Through poetics, Jack Kerouac gives a political turn to his literary involvement. Since a retreat from the public realm is a precarious way of making his presence felt, he imagines the writer as the one leading by example. Focusing on confessional modes of expression, he tries to establish a relationship between the self and society. His writing is supposed to be a copy of “exactly what it is” and consistent with this creed, Kerouac’s thinking and acting are modeled after the law of nature and its process of infinite transformation.

In the mid 1950s and early 1960s, the artists of the Beat generation chose to invent a tradition rather than to recycle the old one, by creating radically new writing experiences. The result of their avid search for viable symbols resulted in the creation of a new Beat mythology, emerging out of Christian religious symbols, Zen philosophy and mythic tropes. Reconstructing the story of the innocent protagonist engaged in a fight against the merciless society, the Beats rewrite the hero’s journey into the wilderness. But even in their counter-mystic and anti-narratives, the Beats posing as social outcast

could not help but be seduced by the insurrectionary vision of the artist as cowboy, rebel, entrepreneur. And so they used writing to try to negotiate a way out, imagining that writing contained and expressed all they so desperately desired. (Savran 1989: 68)

The Beats’ artistic vision and their interpretation of reality is the result of a syncretic collage of attitudes and metaphysical idioms promoted and elaborated by a series of artists, from Rimbaud to Butler Yeats, from Alfred Korzybski to William Carlos Williams, from Blake to Nietzsche. Their staged revolt is a response to a

crisis situation of private and public dimensions and their collaborative artistic project relies on introspection via personal experience as the ultimate source of authority. The experiment of describing the impact of reality upon the consciousness of the individual made the Beats experiment even further. The result of their quest for “the closest possible approximation to truth or reality” was a nonlinear narrative, made up of multiple layers and collage-like improvisation. This wild form (as Kerouac would call it) or open form (as most critics preferred to term it) dispelled the unity of the authorial/narrative instance. Accepting the abstract expressionist principle that real is “only that which one is in the process of creating”, the Beat texts imagine a form of art removed from the page, “off the page” and “into the sheet”, which articulate a dialogue made up of a reverberation of sounds in which semi-grammatical words are invested with musical qualities. The Beat discourse is striking in its resisting linearity and certitude and compelling in the way it displays the sense of anxiety, ambivalence, distrust of language and assault of linguistic convention. Following in the footsteps of the Surrealists, who intended to bring together two distant realities and overlap them on a non-suitable plane, Ginsberg’s poetic method is a “spontaneous irrational juxtaposition of sublimely related facts” (Ginsberg 2000: 243). The surrealist method of “psychological automatism” or writing from the unconscious imagines a new type of vision produced by associations uncontrolled by the rational consciousness. Writing to preserve and recuperate the unimaginable freedom of the unconscious, the Beats rely on mind-altering drugs that fragment the authority of the intellect and unleash the terrors of hidden and invisible horrors.

The Beats find a hard time reconciling their desire to create American poetry in an American style with the Anglocentric orientation of the New Critics. Therefore their attack against language is conjugated with an assault against the literary standards of the New Criticism. Deploring the bureaucratic efficiency of the contemporary patterns of literary analysis, the Beats stand against the agenda of the New Criticism. The bent toward science, precise and systematic elements leaves no room for the Beats’ inclination to feeling or personal engagement. Interpreting the New Critical approach as “excessive” and prone to exaggeration, the Beats scorn Warren’s technocratic jargon and hail the mystically holistic process of art.

Poetry has been attacked by an ignorant and frightened bunch of bores who don't understand how it's made of and trouble with these creeps is they wouldn't know poetry if it came up and buggedger them in broad daylight . (Ginsberg 1974: 29-30)

Though contemptuous towards the highbrow academic discourse professed by the New Criticism, the Beats nevertheless showed a considerable amount of interest in the psychological practices developed by mid 20th century. As the psychoanalytic jargon and the principles of sociology became increasingly fashionable among the literary intelligentsia, the Beats started to embrace this trend too. Words like anxiety, suppression, repression and nervous breakdown were common tropes of the decade and the magazine *Neurotica* displayed the work of solid artists and reputed intellectuals such as Kenneth Patchen and Marshall McLuhan. The Beats' appropriation of social psychology is notably different from other avant-garde trends since their understanding of the inner contradiction of American society leading to the inevitable "social neuroses" is always projected on a mythical rather than clinical context (Lardas 2000: 145).

This essay intends to identify and analyse some of Jack Kerouac's textual strategies. It makes reference to his affinity for certain themes and elaborates on the compositional structures deployed in his novels.

If we use the development of style as the major criterion in dividing Kerouac's literary productions into periods, then probably Edward Halsey Foster taxonomy is among the most valid ones. *The Town and the City* stands apart in this taxonomy, unframed in any category. The first period comprises the early books, beginning with *On the Road* and the development of his "spontaneous prose". The second period is of a more religious extraction, and features *The Scripture of the Golden Eternity* and *Visions of Gerard*. The last phase lacks both the exultance of the first period and the mysticism of the second; it is a pessimistic period, devoid of hopes and the promise of spiritual healing.

Largely acknowledged as Kerouac's original method of writing, spontaneous prose is hardly his invention. William James's experimental text and Gertrude Stein's literary attempts in Harvard can be rightly considered the first samples of automatic writing. Spontaneous and spontaneity are recurrent terms in the basic tenets of European and American romanticism as well. Emerson in "Self Reliance" (1983: 43) defines the American Sublime as a type of spontaneity that is "the essence of genius, of virtue and of life..., that deep force, the fact behind which

analysis cannot go..." Kerouac's spontaneous writing, with its insistence on non-revisioning is a modality to discover experience in the act of producing a discourse about it. When tracing down the possible influences that might have led Kerouac into adopting this "spontaneous style", critics find themselves at a loss, in between praising Neal Cassady or Burroughs for this idea. The problem of who gets the credit of shaping Kerouac's ideas and style is quite a problematic subject. The sense of rebellion against the political institutions of the bureaucracy, or the idea of resistance against the repressive mechanisms of federal police, so poignant in Burroughs's ideology must have exerted a powerful influence upon Kerouac's discourse when the latter confesses that "something really hard and terrible was coming to America"(Kerouac 1995b:59) .

A season later after the completion of *Doctor Sax*, in the autumn of 1952 Kerouac finished a long sketch which was published with several other short pieces under the title *The Lonesome Traveler*. Drawing heavily on the places and happenings that he encountered during his staying in San Francisco, Kerouac produced captivating stories whose tones range from melancholy to exuberant joy. The sketches deploy rhythmically complex patterns that overlook syntactical rules for the sake of musicality. Analyzing Kerouac's narrative as a multi-stage mythmaking process which brings autobiography into the realm of fiction, Regina Weinreich considers that all his novels make up a powerful narrative string depicting the fall of society in one, grand design. In the first novels, Kerouac imagines a paradise-like location in which the progression of the legend of Duluoz is the extension of the metaphor of the road.

The following novels, dealing with the theme of the spiritual quest, renounce Catholicism and embrace Buddhist philosophy, whereas in the last phase of Kerouac's meditative legend, the reader witnesses the Emersonian proclamation of the self followed by his retreat from the world. Ann Charters identifies this progression into a linear perspective and links the production of every novel to significant events and experience-yielding moments in Kerouac's autobiography:

The Legend of Duluoz begins with Visions of Gerard, his earliest years, continues into boyhood with Doctor Sax and adolescence with Maggie Cassidy, then goes on with Vanity of Duluoz into his college years and earliest encounters with Burroughs and Ginsberg . On the Road picks up when he met Cassady, mid-way into the writing of The Town and the City. Visions of Cody describes the cross-country trips and conversations with Cassady after Jack had discovered spontaneous prose.

Lonesome Traveler and *The Subterraneans* describe his years working, traveling, and living in New York, filled with the frustration of being unable to sell any manuscripts after his first book. *Tristessa* describes the month in Mexico City before the Dharma Bums, while *Desolation Angels* continues after Berkeley to his summer as a fire-watcher and the publication over a year later of *On the Road*. Big Sur describes his alcoholic breakdown after the assault of fame and Satori in Paris concludes with the loneliness of his final trip to Brittany. (Charters 1973: 217- 8)

The most conventional of Kerouac's writings and the most heavily indebted to Thomas Wolfe's style, *The Town and the City* is dichotomically arranged on two major paradigms—the sentimentality of the provincial town, animated by sublime values like honor and hard work, by the creed of moral uprightness, yet doomed to fail in the face of the economic realities of the Depression Era and the evil yet fascinating New York. Here one may find in embryo a major theme of Kerouac's later work: the destruction of romantic love (as reflected in the homosexual obsession between Kenneth Wood – Lucienne Carr and Waldo Meister –David Kammerer), or in the underground world of drug and sexual experiments. The former American life, “based on tradition and uprightness and so – called morality will slowly rot away, because one must fully realize we are inevitably approaching “the great molecular comedown” (Kerouac 1989c: 370 – 371). The individual can but helplessly watch this” kind of universal cancer”, the best proof that “something evil and awful has happened” (Kerouac, 1989c:423). Though less subversive than the later novels, *The Town and the City* displays the spirit of the counterculture in the making and gives the phrase “Beat generation” a structured definition. Despite its apparent conventional structure and the rather linear, naturalistic fashion of depicting the cycle of the Martin family's ruin and collapse, *The Town and the City* incipiently elaborates on many topics to be found in some contemporary books such as the emergence of youth and the Freudian murder of the father, the replacement of parental values by a new kind of sensibility and the sense of prophetic vision. In the pathetic death of the father George Martin, one should identify the unheroic death of the American tragic hero and with him the disappearance of the family as a solid institution from a disillusioned America, no longer enchanted with the promise of the American Dream. Written in a traditional style and adhering to the conventional strains of the 1940s narrative rigors, *The Town and the City* predicts little of the “natural flow” Kerouac releases in his subsequent fictions (Tytell 1976: 63). Pointing out the correspondences between Kerouac and Wolfe, Regina Weinreich

(1995: 19) considers that both of them deal with the romantic melancholy of sensation and the anxious expectancy arising in youth. They also share the sense of nostalgia for a mythical past and an emotional mode of composition, in which passages are produced at a fast pace and then assembled for the final result. Moreover, there is a strong autobiographic impulse dominating both writers, and the fiction they produce is a romantic version of personal representation. Kerouac's admiration for Wolfe's "torrent of American heaven and hell" (qtd in Charters 1973: 213), and his uncontrolled, almost dangerous forces of ongoing writing, results in Kerouac's flow-like style, equally energetic, yet less aggressive.

If Charter emphasizes the linear pattern of Kerouac's production and the parallel between his biography and its written translation, Regina Weinreich considers that the entire Duluoz legend is constructed on the model of repetitive seriality, in which each novel explores a material already tackled in previous writings. The structuring and restructuring of material is obvious in the recurrence of word groups, phrases, images, figures of style. The intention to explore the potencies of the new language is encountered in *The Town and the City* and its cultural milieu of jazz clubs. Apart from abundant references to jazz clubs, there are numerous attempts to analyze the jazz musical pattern (especially in the sections about Liz and Buddy, the Martin sister and the jazzman). There are many passages in the novel which can be considered the presentation of jazz compositional structures in the form of short discourses between sets of dashes. "I can't save a dollar – ain't worth a cent – but she'd never bother – she'd live in a tent – I got a woman – crazy for me – she's funny that way" (Kerouac 1989c: 222). The lyrics are triggered by the association between a Billie Holiday tune and the process of remembering. "I just remembered a great song today!" cried Buddy. "I'll bet you can't remember it" (Kerouac 1989c: 222). The musical analogies fulfill many other subtle roles throughout the novel and engender the breaking of both structure and form. Joe Martin's self-examining query takes place on a "back and forth" route, back and forth from Boston to here" (Kerouac 1989c: 91) thus prefiguring the cross-country trips undertaken by Dean Moriarty and Sal Paradise.

Musical cadence and a strange sense of rhythm accompany the struggle of each Martin brother in his attempt to inaugurate a new life style, in the absence of parental authority and masculine responsibility. The progress of the Martins involves various stages in which the break from the family followed by the pain of the loss is

eventually ended in a change of consciousness and a transformation in sensibility. The abolition of authoritarian patterns is exposed by Joe Martin's back and forth movement, by his "mad voyage". This act of emancipation is described in a one sentence discourse, made up of clauses separated by commas that give the fluctuation of clauses a flow-like rhythm. Kerouac manages to capture the details and pieces them together in a panoramic enterprise. The lack of full stops is partly compensated by the use of dashes.

So they talked about these things, and ate breakfast down at the Square in the cafeteria where the sun streamed in upon the clean tiled floor that had just been mopped, and everything was brown and gold – strong coffee brewing in the big urns, the fat half-grapefruits in the chipped ice all golden in the sunlight, the brown mahogany panels, the gleaming food counter, and all the men that were there in the morning eating and talking (Kerouac 1989c: 102).

One may identify a double structure of design, in which the conventional tropes of paternalism and traditionalism are juxtaposed with mock-heroic ones, to connote a despairing sensibility in a moment of crisis. Peter Martin's heroic questions about existence echoing Hamlet's soliloquy send to an impotent reality, and end in his quitting the football team and disappointing both his friends and his family. The same duplicity between mythos and bathos, between solid American values and the transient illusions of the American Dream is evinced by the recurrent and opposed images of red brick and red moon. The former stand for a symbol of solidity, of honest simplicity whereas the latter emphasize the petty values of the shabby American dream. (cf Weinreich 1995: 33)

If *The Town and the City* outlines the essence of the Duluoz legend – the loss of moral and spiritual values and the despair of the soul, *On the Road* extends this idea further, with the soul journeying along the American road, looking for truly enduring American values. Increasingly aware of the limitations of his previous novel and intent on surpassing the label of imitative style, Kerouac discovers in *On the Road* a way to bring the traditional quest romance into the form of twentieth-century discourse.

This book made him famous in the cultural background of the 1950s and 1960s and transformed him into a symbol of rebelliousness and valiant manhood. The aura that still surrounds the book may have started with the actual process of creating it, with the breathtaking, three week feat of typing hundreds of words per

minute, one a single roll of paper, while feeding on the inspiration provided by Benzedrine. It may have been prolonged by the suspense to follow the publishers' refusal to print the book unless extensive revisions were undertaken. There, in the fever of jotting down fast emerging episodes, in the excitement of capturing as much as possible from the intensity of living, are the seeds of "spontaneous prose" to be found. Critics discussing the art of composition in *On the Road* talked much and wrote even more about Kerouac's "teletype" roll (Charters, 1973:129) or his "sixteen-foot rolls of thin Japanese drawing paper" making up a "marathon linguistic flow" (Tytell 1976: 67-8). Yet, few are aware or willing to acknowledge that in order to reach the expectations of his publishers, Kerouac agreed to revise, edit and punctuate the manuscript.

On the Road starts with images of destruction and revival, in a circular pattern of construction and collapse. The narrative begins with the hero's confession: "I first met Dean not long after my wife and I split up"(73). The non-linearity of the plot, reflected by their zigzags round America is also reflected in the musical analogy provided by the text.

Considering the stages through which romance has gone in the tradition of Western literature, Regina Weinreich notices that the old romance of the Gawain and Parzival (which directs the audience's attention to the task of the noble character) is gradually changed into the romance as cultivated by Cervantes (in which both the knight and his squire share the centre of spotlight). Finally, in the hands of Kerouac, the quest romance turns elegiac and while Dean-the knight is consumed by the passion of his quest, Sal-the squire watches amazed the chivalric attitude of his master. If in the first two types of the romance it is the knight who undergoes a radical change, brought on by the rigors of his valiant enterprise, in the elegiac romance, the knight experiences no dramatic transformation whereas the squire fully benefits from the process of "enlightenment". The refinement of the elegiac romance as a modern genre is evinced in the ambiguous relationship between the knight and the squire. Sal's attachment to Dean is at times more instinctual and profound than mere friendship implies. In other instances, Dean reminds Sal of "some long-lost brother" (Kerouac 1991a: 10) and even "the father we never found" (Kerouac 1991a: 310).

The nonlinear modality of composition employed by *On the Road* erupts into a free prose, impressionistic writing and the following novels combine the

potencies of the verse and the loose structure of prose texts. The innovations at the level of style brought on by *On the Road* reveal the attempt to break down the linearity of style and temporal progression as well as to control the narrative from behind a musical metaphor with specific rhythm and cadences. However, *On the Road* is far from being the peak of spontaneous bop prosody, being rather a moment of transition which leads to the discovery of a new definition of language.

Visions of Cody displays in its five major sections innovative attempts at prose writing and is largely considered one of the most experimental of Kerouac's novels. Written at the beginning of the 1950s, but published two decades later, *Visions of Cody* consists of a string of narratives presenting different aspects of America. The first part depicts the affluent America, which lacks both regulating principles and the sense of respectability. It is a series of sketches about railroads, movies, neon lit cities, and a world freed of conventions as well as about the adventures of boy-Cody, the "pure souled" leather-jacketed and a "self-reliant young man" (Kerouac 1991c: 45). Cody becomes both a myth and an obsession for Jack Duluoz, the narrator suffering from an all pervading loneliness that he never learned to accept. The fascination that Cody exerts upon him makes him declare passionately: "I'm completely your friend, your lover, he who loves you and digs your greatness completely – haunted in the mind by you". (Kerouac 1991c: 91) In the novel, the effect of chronology is overlooked for the sake of random order. The reordering of the prose sections also accounts for a new type of narrative form, meant to suggest the interchangeability of written sequences. "The Frisco Tape" part is actually the transcription of a tape conversation between Jack (Duluoz) and Cody Pomeray in which they praise the virtues of natural language over the schooled idiom. This sequence is followed by a tape-like imitation, a literary experiment aimed at erasing the "fiction" of narrative form. The sequence "Joan Rawshanks in the Fog" is inspired from a Hollywood movie set featuring Joan Crawford.

Visions of Cody exploits the experiments of nonlinear writing, refashioning a new idea of time and space at the same time. It also introduces a new theme to the Duluoz legend—the preoccupation / obsession with the writer / self, with the role of outlining the consciousness of the narrative as defined and influenced by language. In the novel, the "free prose" is constantly evinced by the recurrent "I" form. As Regina Weinreich (1995: 61) considers, the three patterns existent in *Visions of Cody* are synaesthesia, synchronicity and syncopation, and they were most probably

imagined and developed during Kerouac's study of jazz music. Weinreich defines synchronicity as the effect of the long breath, syncopation as the modality of intertwining tropes and synaesthesia as the juxtaposition of images. A close analysis of the design pattern of Kerouac's discourse reveals the simultaneous use of these aesthetic effects.

But the general effect is of shiny food on counter – walls therefore not too noticeable – sections of ceiling-lengths mirrors, and mirror pillars, give spacious strange feeling-brown-wood panels with coathooks and sections of rose-tint walls decorated with images, engraved – But ah the counter, as brilliant as B-way outside! Great rows of it-one vast L-shaped counter-great rows of diced mint jellos in glasses; diced strawberry jellos gleaming red, jellos mixed with peaches and cherries, cherry jellos top't with whipcream, vanilla custards top't with cream; [...]
(Kerouac 1993: 10).

The reader is compelled to notice the over-aggrandized language of color and luxuriant details, the panoramic vision and the blend of sound and image. The sense of ambiguity is given by the double meaning which a particular epithet assumes. For example, “glittering counter” suggests a positive and a negative movement altogether. It refers to the standard of cleanliness, yet the idea of glittering seems to have little in common with the environment of a counter. Hence, the idea of ironic contrast, since the excessively “decorative” nature of the object implies unnaturalness and tiresome artificiality. Mirrors convey the impression of a false, inverted image, but they can also hint at a transcendent quality suggested by shiny surfaces. The repetition of the image of the counter acts as an incantatory refrain which is built on a heightening crescendo emphasized by the interjection of pleasure. When enumerating the abundant dishes displayed on counters, Kerouac starts with a general impression followed by a cascade of vivid colors. Syncopation becomes obvious in the heavy use of pauses and glides as provided by the repetition of “jello” and “top't”.

The section “Frisco: The Tape” is generally considered a piece of literary criticism in bop style in which Jack and Cody discuss about the act of writing by making reference to the writers of the past, while constantly exploring the virtues of present-day styles. Jack and Cody “go on talking about these things, thinking about things, and memory, cause we're both concerned about, ah memory, and just relax like Proust...” (Kerouac 1993: 146). The elements of the Beat experience are

mingled with personal reflections of history and philosophy in a discourse in which talk means both rhythm and breath.

Cody. That's just what I've been doing (sic) but I couldn't think of the thought. And I guess the reason I couldn't think of it and why I'm blocked is because I didn't formalize it or I didn't think about it long enough, soon as the thought hit me, why, I didn't think it out, because I was gonna blurt it out. Damn, if I'd have just spoken – (Cody running water at sink, flute blowing, watery flute) your coffee's getting cold. I'll bring it over but I don't know which one it is (really meant, he says, he didn't know whether I wanted cream or sugar or what. (Kerouac 1993: 154).

The third part of the book is a less successful linguistic experiment, a transcription of a discussion with Cassady, in which the dull flatness of natural conversation cannot be disguised by the flow of words and sounds that dissolve each other into a rambling digression of a failed collage. The episode “Joan Rawshanks in the Fog” is possibly inspired from Kerouac's observation of Joan Crawford on a movie set. The sequence plays upon the cinematic rules of the discourse writing and explores the general problem of appearance vs reality.

Joan Rawshanks stands alone in the fog. Her name is Joan Rawshanks and she knows it, just as anybody knows his name, and she knows who she is, same way, Joan Rawshanks stands alone in the fog and a thousand eyes are fixed on her in all kinds of ways;[...]. (Kerouac 1993: 155).

Introduced as a singular identity who “stands alone in the fog”, Joan Crawford is presented in an assembly of tropes of synaesthesia, synchronicity and syncopation, in which the repetition of her name acts as a narrative refrain.

Maggie Cassidy was written in 1953 and published in 1959. Though interesting in its treatment of adolescent memories, the book's fundamental error lies in the insufficient delineation of the titular character. It generally deals with Duluoz's transformation, from the shy country boy, inhibited by the miss-like airs of Maggie to the initiated young man, unable to pull himself out of the fascinating New York. Starting from sentimentalism and innocence, Duluoz changes into a sophisticated man, capable to idealize and pay homage to the provincial habits of his former, adolescent world.

If *Visions of Cody* escapes the linear route imposed by *On the Road* and discovers a style more appropriate to Kerouac's ideas about writing and language,

Desolation Angels deploys a more refined rhetorical style. The climax of his literary achievement in the mid 1960s, this novel is based on Kerouac's journals written from 1956 to 1957, several months before the appearance of his overnight success, *On the Road*. The book captures best the tribulations of becoming a celebrity and the suffering brought about by the act of going public and famous, the "horror and abomination" of being worshipped as the King of the Beats. The first part, originally entitled "The Angels in the World" "recounts the events experienced by Duluoz in the *High Cascades on Desolation Peaks*. At the end of his solitary summer, Duluoz's only wish is to "get a haircut and a new black leather jacket and regain his love of life" (Kerouac 1995a: 5). The second part, written five years later "Beat Traveler" refers to the "complete nausea concerning experience in the world at large" (Kerouac 1995a: 302). This novel combines the experimentalism of an outward journey (*On the Road*) with the narrative technique entailed by a journey within himself (*Visions of Cody*). The result is a circular structure which starts and ends with the description of an intense inner struggle. The sixty-three days spent on Desolation Peak in solitude and awe in front of nature's wonders fail to produce the desired effect on Duluoz and in the end he is left with nothing but the experience of nothingness itself. However, one may notice his marked spiritual improvement in the form of a "peaceful sorrow", since this is the only one he "will ever be able to offer the world" (Kerouac 1995a: 366). Unlike *Paradise* or *Duluoz* of his previous novels, the narrator here is better elaborated, more coherent and self contained, no longer in need of persona catalysts to help his spiritual "coming of age". The significant improvement in the clarity of the novel is also transparent in the circular structure of each book chapter, part, section or division, each introducing the opposition between the "abysmal self" and the "angels" of the vast world. The polarities of Kerouac's thinking are present in the main divisions of the text. The first book, for instance, contains two parts – "Desolation in Solitude" and "Desolation in the World". The second book "Passing Through" contains a transition of four phases, from innocence to experience ("Passing through Mexico", "Passing Through New York", "Passing Through Tangiers, France and London", and "Passing Through America Again"). On top of the mountain, the artist discovers his essence and the sense of fulfillment: "I knew now that my life was a search for peace as an artist, but not only as an artist – As a man of contemplations..." (Kerouac 1995a: 219). The author's inward journey toward spiritual fulfillment is paralleled by Kerouac's voice leading from

exuberance to bitter disappointment. The rhythm of the narrative swings from the excited beat of the short sentences to the long, elaborate descriptions of mundane miseries.

The core novels *The Town and the City*, *On the Road*, *Visions of Cody*, *Desolation Angels* share a common theme – the quest for spiritual fulfillment. Unlike these, the extracanonical ones, *Dr Sax* and *Visions of Gerard* deploy a different type of imagery, emphasizing particularly a nightmare / Christian paradise symbology. A closer look at another couple of extracanonical novels (*The Subterraneans* and *Tristessa*) reveal a more acute preoccupation with love motifs, whereas *The Dharma Bums* and *Lonesome Traveler* repeat the metaphor of the road in Zen staccato rhythms. Continuing the experimentalism of *Visions of Cody*, Dr Sax initiates a program of “deliberately archaic prose” (Tytell 1976: 174) written in sentences of articulated crescendos.

Doctor Sax: Faust Part Tree was written in 1952 and published in 1959; the volume resembles in many ways a book of initiation and contains the lessons of joy and sorrow which an adolescent needs to learn in order to move from childhood to maturity. These adolescent fantasies with hallucinatory backgrounds feature mysterious men dying out of unknown and inexplicable causes, flooded rivers threatening to overrun their banks, giant snakes, moving statues, count vampires and, above all, the mentor /protector/ initiator Doctor Sax – who shows Duluoz the root and essence of evil in the world. The message of the novel is quite optimistic, with the vision of Judgment Day when the “Implacable Bird “of the good carries the defeated Evil represented by the Great World Snake “into the Unknown”.

Visions of Gerard blends the Christian perspective of sin with the Buddhist interpretation of the Nirvana. The idea that “sin is sin and there no erasing it “(Kerouac 1991c: 56) is completed by the idea of “Nirvana, Heaven, Our Salvation is There and Now” (Kerouac 1991c:113). Gerard's death is the element around which the novel revolves, being ‘the only decent subject, since it marks the end of illusion and delusion” (Kerouac 1991c: 123), and puts notion such as life, the finality of life, into a different, more meaningful perspective. The novel capitalizes on the fantasy-like perspective of a child and gives an emotional account of Gerard’s death at the age of nine. The elegiac tone of the book, filled with images of hope and redemption is also suffused with Buddhist and Catholic undertones.

Kerouac once declared that his sole intention was to create a large epic of Duluoz, an account of his quest for passion and inner tranquility. If *Visions of Gerard* is the beginning of such a massive narrative, then *Desolation Angels* can be its end, in which the myth of the west and the open road are abandoned. It is the ending of a life style, the taming of a wild spirit and the abandonment of a hipster's ideal. As Eduard Halsey Foster (1992: 70) put it, "the book is the record of a man crucified by his recognition that he cannot escape suffering, that the best he can expect is the solace offered by the home and the values from which years ago he had fled".

Completed in three days only, *The Subterraneans* is among Kerouac's best reputed novels. It is a subjective record of Leo Percepied's intimate perceptions about his love affairs and social relationships. The object of Leo's affection is Mardou Fox, a self-reliant woman. Unlike other female figures of his stories, Mardou is not treated in an excessively sentimental tone, nor is she reduced to the status of "chick" like so many other female figures encountered in the Beat prose. She is a passionate woman, who asserts openly her sexual desires and does not fear to force the men around her to reach a decision. But Leo Percepied is undetermined and equivocal in his sexual orientations and unsure whether true orgasm is reached with female or male partners. He spends a night "studying" a friend's homosexual pornography and even sleeps with a homosexual writer. Mardou asks Percepied to choose between her and the "beautiful faun boy", but their relationship fails partly because of his mother's intrusion and desire to dominate her son's sentimental choices, partly because Mardou's sexual experience with Gligoric (Corso) and finally, due to the fact that Leo values his work more than this relationship. The ending of the novel presents Leo Percepied totally engulfed in his work, able to sublimate the essence of his love into "big word constructions". In this perspective, Mardou's wild spirit turns into "the background for thoughts about the Negroes and Indians and America in general". (Kerouac 1992: 68)

In terms of style, *The Subterraneans* is probably among Kerouac's few productions written in unrevised language. Deeply influenced by jazz rhythmic cadences, the novel "builds on improvised digression", "using what blues players call <<landmarks>>, repeated images that help to unify, and <<scat calling>>, using the voice as an instrument" (Tytell 1976: 199). Leo Percepied's voice ensures the narrative continuity of this novella in the form of a long narrative discourse and a

series of dramatic monologues. In discovering his irresistible attraction to underground individualities such as addicts, he also explores the roots of Mardou's blackness. Though passionate and profound, love is doomed to fail in *The Subterraneans*. The obsession of romantic idealism succumbs to the ephemeral character of love as addiction. The procedure behind the novel is common to many of Kerouac's writings. The crisis in the novel's plot is paralleled by a fractured syntax and bop prosody. Arguing that this book is probably one of the most successful attempts at spontaneous writing, Foster explains that the expressionist transformation effected by writing is never self-conscious, since the words must be "immediate, unpremeditated expressions, spontaneous and improvised". The order

derives instantly from intuitive recognition rather than from reflection. Words are consciousness itself rather than an effort to articulate what consciousness has revealed and the text consequently merges present and past into a single fluid line (58)

In *The Subterraneans* and *Tristessa*, the myth of redemption is changed for the promise of happiness, of a "bliss achieved", even though only temporarily. The two novels draw on the courtly themes tackled in *On the Road*, with similar resources but slightly altered strategies. Leo Percepied (the squire) undergoes a spiritual refinement in the course of his quest while at the service of his knight – Mardou. An analogous situation is presented in *Tristessa*, in which the heroine – a heroin addict is raised to the status of Madonna. Written in a circular formula, with references to *Tristessa* that open and end the novel, the writing displays several narrative strings, that range from the keen observations about Mexico City to the emotional description of Duloz's father. The narrative is in fact a juxtaposition of reflections and descriptions, alternating between melancholy and exhilaration. The central symbol at the heart of the novel is Duloz's love for the one lost in terrible sorrow – Tristessa. One can identify two ways of decoding the meaning of *Tristessa* corresponding to the two stages in which the novel was produced. The first part, written under the strong influences of Buddhist ideas imagines Tristessa as a symbol of suffering and Buddhism as a way of escaping that anguish. The second part, written a year later, decodes Tristessa as sadness, a symbol of the inherent tragic character of the human nature. If in the first part a strange mixture of religious ideas represented by "The Buddhas and the Virgin Marys" gives the solid proof that"

everything's alright". (Kerouac 1992:16), the second part conveys only the sense of morbid despair and the inescapable fear that a present, compassionate God can no longer alleviate the suffering.

The story of Kerouac's voice develops throughout the various stages of his legend: from the lost paradise of his narrative Lowell Massachusetts, to the escapism provided by the transition on the road from the Buddhist philosophy and the denial of Catholic tradition to his ironic retreat from society. This last aspect of his prose is particularly relevant in *Big Sur* – a book written in ten nights. Death and madness are the main reasons for Duluoz's retreat in the wilderness. Exasperated by being called a "beatnik", enraged by drunken visitors who steal his manuscripts, Duluoz hitchhikes to California in search for solitude and peace. His agglutinative technique, reminiscent of Whitman at times, offers large catalogues of dash-joined images in rapid succession.

But there's moonlit fortnight, the blossoms of the fire flames in the store – There's giving and apple to the mule, the big lips taking hold – There's the bluejay drinking my canned milk by throwing his head back with a muffle of milk on his beak. (Kerouac, 1992: 37)

Written as a story of his life and dedicated to his wife, *Vanity of Duluoz* was published in the 1968 as an elaborate dramatic monologue about fame and professional success. In a funny and self-mocking style, Kerouac recycles many of his earlier themes prefigured in *The Town and the City*. Images like Thanksgiving dinner, his passion for football, life at sea, his studies at Columbia University are recurrent in Kerouac's narrative writings. The uniqueness of this novel consists in his ability to recreate fascinating events from the Beat history (the killing of Kameron, his first marriage) and translate them into mythos. Unable to solve the questions raised in *The Town and the City*, Duluoz prays for redemption and finds the best method of salvation in the holy act of writing.

I settled down to write, in solitude, in pain, writing hymns and prayers even at dawn, thinking, "when this book is finished, which is going to be the sum and substance and crap of everything I've been thru throughout his whole god dam life, I shall be redeemed (Kerouac 1994: 213).

To Kerouac, the world is revealed through accidental experience. It is a world made up of many bits and pieces, a huge puzzle still in need of reconstruction.

Describing the pace of Kerouac's writing, Allen Ginsberg notices "a definite rhythmical squiggle", a "funny body rhythm", "a breathing rhythm and a speech rhythm"(qtd in Miles 1989: 190), which help him acquire a subjective, personal viewpoint. Kerouac's production becomes an authentic stream of consciousness flow, in which interruptions with dashes, paragraph-like parentheses and agglutinated details mingle in disorderly syntactical order.

The details of experience follow the pattern of line-by-line divagations, in the free association of thought and feeling.

... ah, loved it all, and the first might finest night, the blood, railroading gets in yr blood" the old hogshead is pulling at me as he bounces up an down in his seat and the mind blows his striped cap visor back and the engine, like a huge beast is lurching side to side 70 miles per hour breaking all rulebook rules, zomm, zomm, were crashing through the night and out there Carmelite is coming, Jose is making her electricities mix and interun... (Kerouac 1989a: 78)

Kerouac's secret mythologies rise from the depths of their personal experience, from the intimate recollection of daily facts and human interaction. Their work combines confessional honesty with a personal presentation of America and follows the pattern of mythologizing and self-mythologizing. From Ginsberg to Bob Dylan, Kerouac taught the writers to leave the flow of images uncensored, to shape their rhythm of story-telling in accordance with their breath and allow the cascading details build-up within the mould of memory. The act of digging (which in Beat jargon means to allow an experience to fill one's time consciousness) is no longer a transcendental act, or a process occasioning experience, but a barren experience in itself.

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