YOU JUST GO:

On the Literary Road with Mailer and Kerouac

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Norman Mailer's praise of Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road* is indeed a good place to begin a comparison of the two writers, as well as assess Kerouac's unique creative contributions: "Kerouac's *On the Road* was a classic that captured something hard about late adolescence—the thing about being free enough to travel and take your adventures where they come" (quoted in Lennon 738). Mailer not only met Kerouac but liked him: "His literary energy is enormous, and he had enough of a wild eye to go along with his instincts, and so become the first figure of a new generation . . . . His love of language has an ecstatic flux. To judge his worth, it is better to forget about him as a novelist and instead see him as an action painter or a bard" (*Mind* 74).[1]

Mailer is exactly right about Kerouac. "Ecstatic flux" perfectly identifies the mad bard's subject and style. But the work of both writers defies easy labels. Mailer will be remembered less for his novels than for his achievement as a creative journalist—books like Why *Are We in Vietnam* (1967), *Armies of the Night* (1968), *Of a Fire on the Moon* (1970), and *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* (1968). Biographer Michael Lennon might well have had Kerouac in mind when he described Mailer's use of his own intensely contradictory inner life—the struggle to balance the "angel in oneself and the swine"—to explore and interpret the psychic doubling of humanity as a whole and the good and evil of America in particular. Both writers used their intuitive, speculative novelistic gifts in tandem with self-revelation to perfect new literary forms for which both artists had instinctive literary genius.[2]

My title comes from Laszlo Benedek's landmark film *The Wild One* (1953). The leader of the outlaw motorcycle gang, played by Marlon Brando, ex-

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plains life on the road as something you do "to stay cool." "You don't go to any one special place," he says to the perplexed barmaid. "You just go." When the girl suggests a picnic, super cool Brando replies, "Man, you are too square." When another local girl asks, "What are you rebelling against, Johnny?" a coyly smiling Brando answers, "Whaddaya got?"

Mailer's literary adventures may be more inward than Kerouac's, his rebellion more explicit, but as with the existential quests of American heroes like Huck and Nick Adams, Frederic Henry and Nick Carraway, Kerouac's Sal Paradise of *On the Road* (1957) and Stephen Rojack of Mailer's *An American Dream* (1965) take to the road in rebellion against what Sal calls the dream's "screwed up" betrayals (*On the Road* 11). Each becomes in Mailer's words a "psychic outlaw," or "sexual adventurer," denying "the slow relentless inhumanity of the conservative power which controls him from without and from within" ("The White Negro" 355).

Mailer and Kerouac distinguish themselves less in what they rebel against than in the manner of their rebellion. Mailer is analytical, with a powerful will to change, offering vigorous critiques of society's misdeeds. His towering metaphors and apocalyptic conceits provoke thought and inspire a more expansive and creative perception of life's possibilities. Kerouac's rebellion is less ambitious—less overt and intellectual. His protest is visceral and personal. He has what Mailer calls "that muted animal voice which shivered the national attention when first used by Marlon Brando" ("The White Negro" 373). Mailer prioritizes power; Kerouac is sworn to nonviolence. In Mailer's words, he wants to get out of society more than he wants to change it. Part Hip, part Beat, he takes on the dissipation of drugs in order to dig more life for himself. He looks for action in a bar to which he goes for booze or marijuana ("The White Negro" 374). But both writers reject the conventional moral and social restraints of middle-class life that Mailer calls the super-ego of society. This rejection frees characters like Kerouac's Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty to do what they feel, whenever and wherever possible—a primal battle to open the limits of the possible for oneself. "Yet in widening the area of the possible," Mailer says, "one widens it reciprocally for others as well, so that the nihilistic fulfillment of each man's desire contains its antithesis of human cognition" ("The White Negro"354).

This returns us to my title "You Just Go," the philosophy of "cool" that distinguishes the Hip from the Square. Mailer explains that to "Go" means one has amassed enough energy to escape days or months or years of mo-

notony, boredom and depression. Movement is always preferable to inaction. For Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty it becomes sufficient reason for being. Sal calls it the "one and noble function of their time, move" (*On the Road* 134). In motion, Mailer explains, a man has a chance, his body is warm, his instincts are quick, and when the crisis comes, whether of love or violence, he can make it, he can win, making it more possible to find more people with whom he can swing. "For to swing is to communicate, is to convey the rhythms of one's own being to a lover, a friend, or an audience and—equally necessary—be able to feel the rhythms of their response" ("The White Negro" 350). Only by taking into oneself the implicit rhythms of another—to "swing" with them—can one gain the energy to create (350, 351). I will return later to Mailer's point that swinging requires a fine sense of mimicry, one of Kerouac's special talents. "I was flapping around like Charlie Chaplin" (*On the Road* 64), Sal says.

Both writers hold truth-telling as their highest moral priority. Rojack wants to know what is real, "what is most true" (*An American Dream* 65). One of Sal Paradise's beat friends says, "We're trying to communicate with absolute honesty and absolute completeness everything on our minds" (41). Later he says that if they were honest in the bottom of their souls, the "last thing," an ultimate truth, was their quest. Sal remarks, "The last thing is what you can't get, Carlo. Nobody can get to that last thing. We keep on living in hopes of catching it once and for all" (48). "If you keep this up," he says to his two "crazy cat" friends, "you will both go crazy. But let me know what happens as you go along" (50).

Like their authors, Stephen Rojack and Sal Paradise are spiritual men. Mailer's metaphysical paradigm of a primitive God at war with a technological Devil informs his best work. Kerouac's inherited Catholic instincts cause Sal Paradise to exclaim, "Because I am Beat, I believe in Beatitude and that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son to it" (78). But the Buddhist sympathies of both authors deepen in later life. Robert Begiebing explains, "Mailer's elaboration of reincarnation and Karma in *Ancient Evenings* (1983) climaxes the author's spiritual lessons of a lifetime—death and life as a continuum in which the quality of one's next existence depends upon what one has learned or earned in the previous life" ("New Synthesis" 5). Mailer concedes that souls can't know if they will be reborn but, as an act of existential choice, he hopes so. Kerouac, on the road back and forth from St. Petersburg, Florida to Paris in *Satori* (1966), takes heart

in his imagined Karma, "that when you die you will be elevated because you've done no harm." All culture, all art, he says, is worthless without sympathy, without "the poetry of kindness and Caritas" (88).

For both writers, the truth they seek is found more often in the arms of a woman than in prayer or thoughts of an afterlife. Having "grace," Mailer says, means being closer to the secrets of "that God which every hipster believes is located in the senses of his body—that God who is energy, life, and sex." This is not the God of the churches but the "whisper of mystery within the sex, the paradise of limitless energy and perception just beyond the next wave of the next orgasm. To which a cool cat might reply, Crazy, man!" ("The White Negro" 351). When Rojack argues that to be in love is "the reward for which to live" (208), he has in mind sex with the blond and nubile Cherry. "We met more like animals [than lovers]," he says. "Some cool blond sense of violate shadow lived in the turn of her flesh." He feels their sex as "devotions in some church" (*An American Dream* 114). He likens the bliss of orgasm, "the sweets of her womb," to a "balm" that cleanses him and returns him to life (116). "I could pass the bars," he says (120).

When Cherry, explaining her sordid experience with the criminal Shago, says, "You dig," she intimates the hip nature of sex experienced by Sal Paradise. Whether on the road or in bars along the way, forever looking for girls, Sal says, "A pain stabbed me in my heart every time I saw a girl I loved who was going in the opposite direction" (78). Reminding us of Rojack's existential challenge on the parapet outside Kelly's apartment, Sal feels as if he will fall clear off the precipice of Coit Tower looking for the girl he loves (78). Perhaps he has Frederic Henry in mind as well as Rojack when, consciously imitating Hemingway, he says there is a mountain he must climb in the name of love (78).[3] It is at a moment when he is feeling completely "beat—so lonely, so sad, so tired, so quivering, so broken" (82) that he finds Terry, a girl like Rojack's Cherry, whose lovemaking transports and heals him. "In reverent and sweet little silence Terry took all her clothes off and slipped her tiny body into the sheets with me. It was brown as grapes . . . . I made love to her in the sweetness of the weary morning." Sal believes that like "two tired angels of some kind, hung-up forlornly in an LA shelf," they have found "the closest and most delicious thing in life together" (85).

While Cherry's erotic love is a sufficient creative elixir for Rojack—"I could pass the bars"—a bar is the first place Sal and Terry go "to boogie" with those "who made no bones about their beatness . . . jukebox blowing

nothing but blues, bop, and jump" (85). Not only are Sal and Terry swinging with other cool cats with whom to go to their next adventure, feeling their rhythms, taking them into himself, Sal gains the energy to create. Here it is that in distinguishing the writer Sal Paradise from his shadowy alter ego Dean Moriarty, we may understand not only what Mailer might call the "psychic wilds" of this novel ("The White Negro" 375) but the psychic dynamics of all Kerouac's work.

In a simple reading of *On the Road*, viewing it, say, as modern picaresque in the tradition of Fielding's *Tom Jones*, we might mistake the pure "Hipster," Dean Moriarty, for the "Beatster" Sal Paradise, not Moriarty—the term Mailer gives Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg. Dean's lust for mindless elementary experience approximates Sal's capacity for awe. Both dig the pleasures of the flesh they deem holy—food, wine, sex, jazz. Both "spent hours sopping up the brew" (98), swinging from town to town, looking for pretty girls everywhere. But, as Mailer suggests, a hipster like Dean takes on the dissipation of drugs to get more kicks for himself, while Sal uses drugs and booze, like sex, for creative purposes—to trap them later in works of art ("The White Negro" 373). The beatster, Mailer says, moves therefore on to Zen; the search for a lady ends as a search for satori. That using a drug goes against the discipline of Zen is something he will face later ("The White Negro" 373). Mailer explains that the beatster contemplates eternity, finds it beautiful, and likes to believe it is waiting to receive him. The hipster looks for action, and for a bar where he goes when marijuana has turned him on (*The White Negro* 374). The poet is the hipster's "natural consort, his intellectual whip"—even as the hipster's criminality, potentially psychotic, inspires and instructs his creativity. For years now, Mailer explains, "they have lived side by side . . . their numbers increasing every month as the new ones come to town" (375). But the beatster, "in his own mind-lost way, remains a torch-bearer of those all but lost values of freedom, self-expression, and equality" that inspire his rebellion ("The White Negro" 375).[4]

Does Mailer have the symbiotic personalities of Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty specifically in mind and, if so, to what end? Why is Sal irresistibly drawn to someone he recognizes as con artist and possibly deranged, who, he says, he was becoming more and more like? I suggest that trapping the hipster's psychopathy into art is precisely what Kerouac does in *On the Road*. Sal's allegorical journey in which darkness contends with light mirrors Mailer's metaphysical dialectic of a primitive God at war with a technolog-

ical Devil. Rojack's allegorical contests take him into New York City's criminal underworld where he battles evil within and without. Similarly, Sal struggles with his darker self in a bar frequented by criminals and junkies and hustlers. Knowing that Dean intends for Sal to have sex with Dean's girlfriend Marylou while Dean watches, Sal says, "It was the typical place for Dean to put down his request. All kinds of evil plans are hatched in Ritzy's bar . . . and all kinds of mad sexual routines are initiated to go with them" (*On the Road* 131). Marylou winds up in a man's deathbed, Sal and Dean on each side of her. Sal tries to ignore Dean but realizes he is lurking there in the dark. The scene invites comparison with the rape of Temple Drake in Faulkner's novel *Sanctuary* (1931), when the impotent Popeye kneels moaning at Temple's bedside while Big Red ravages her. "We were making our appalling studies of the night," Sal says, "all the weight of the centuries ballooning in the dark before them" (132).

Headed to another wild party with Dean, "wild bop" urging them into the night, Sal finds that a decision he was about to make just before Dean showed up, one he feels haunted and saddened by and believes he must remember, is driven completely from his mind. He knows it has to do with a dream he had about a strange Arabian figure called "The Shrouded Traveler" pursuing him across a desert, whom he tries to avoid. He assumes it was himself, wearing a shroud. In retrospect he decides that the figure is death; "the one thing that we yearn for in our living days, that makes us sigh and groan and undergo sweet nauseas of all kinds is the remembrance of some lost bliss that was probably experienced in the womb and can only be reproduced (though we hate to admit it) in death" (*On the Road* 124). Dean identifies the figure as a longing for pure death, an idea he says he wants nothing to do with. Sal, however, recognizes the oedipal yearnings as the source of his and Dean's lifelong quest for the bliss of the mother's womb through orgasms, drugs, and jazz—the hipster's Holy Grail.[5]

When Sal hears Dean "blissful and blabbering and frantically rocking," he reasons that only a guy who has spent five years behind bars looking at the legs and breasts of women in magazines "could go to such maniacal helpless extremes; beseeching at the portals of the soft source" for "the softness of the woman who is not there . . . . blindly seeking to return the way he came" (132). Dean had never seen his mother's face, Sal says. "Every new girl, every new wife, every new child was an addition to his bleak impoverishment." Dean confesses to Sal that he went to prison at age 13 for cutting the

throat of a boy who made a crack about his mother—"you know, that dirty word." If the word is "motherfucker," we may imagine Dean's rage on several levels. Where was his father, Sal asks, imagining him as an old bum stumbling down wino alleys at night, expiring on coal piles. Dean had every right to die "the sweet deaths" of orgasm, Sal says. "I didn't want to interfere, I just wanted to follow" (132).

Sal's own oedipal yearnings emerge when he encounters a woman on San Francisco's Market Street who he imagines to be his mother of about two hundred years ago in England. At that moment, he says, death kicking at his heels, he feels that point of ecstasy he has always wanted to reach, the sweet, swinging bliss of satori, orgasmic transport to Buddhist paradise. Mortal time and death become inconsequential, since in the reality of "bright mind essence," he had died and been reborn many times. But the terrified woman says "No," calling him "lost boy," admonishing him for drunkenness and for reopening old wounds, haunting her soul (*On the Road* 172–173). The novel's richly allusive mythic undercurrents—Greek, Buddhist, Christian—remind us that it is neither a simple nor exclusively American road Sal travels, but that of mankind's eternal struggle to balance unruly sexual desire with civic restraint and responsibility. Paradoxically, it is the fertilizing power of Sal's warring inner opposites—Dionysian and Apollonian—that instructs and inspires Sal's art. Mailer explains Sal's courage to travel backward to the source of his oedipal fixations as the "associational journey" that underlies all psychoanalytical method in dreams and fantasies ("The White Negro" 346).

Mailer's contention that for sexual cripples like Sal and Dean jazz is orgasmic therapy and apocalyptic orgasm their Holy Grail illuminates Sal and Dean's reenactment of their oedipal fantasies in jazz clubs from coast to coast ("The White Negro" 347). One night in the club on Market Street where Sal had fantasized his mother's ghostly presence, he and Dean sway and moan to the music's sights and sounds of simulated sex. Dean fixates on the sax player, whose eyes look straight at him, going down on his horn. Dean rubs his chest and belly as the tenor man jabs at a black woman rolling her bones at his horn. "Stay with it, man," someone roars, letting out a groan Sal says could be heard clear out in Sacramento. The bass player makes his own orgiastic moves, "jabbing his hips at his fiddle with every driving slap, at hot moments his mouth hanging open trancelike." At the murderous beat of the drummer's sticks, the great tenor man draws breath for a final shuddering

blast. Dean's face, Sal reports, was directly in front of the horn, pouring sweat on the man's keys. The tenor man laughs a long quivering crazy laugh and, as the crowd screams and rocks in unison, finally decides to blow his top. "Everything came out of the horn," Sal says, mimicking the cries with made-up sounds of his own (198-199). Later an entranced Dean tells Sal, "I've never seen a guy who could hold so long" (207).

While for both sexually wounded men there is something cathartic in the evening's orgasmic adventure, how they respond leaves Sal more concerned about the warning his intellectually astute fellow beatster had given him to avoid following Dean to California. "Dean seems to me," Old Bull says, "to be headed for his ideal fate, which is compulsive psychosis dashed with a jigger of psychopathic irresponsibility and violence. If you go to California with the madman, you'll never make it" (147). Consistent with Mailer's clinical diagnosis of the hipster as a rebel without a program, psychopathically self-centered from infancy, Dean remains oblivious to the tenor man's sadness outside the club. The tenor man looked at us, Sal says, with an expression that seemed to say, "Hey now, what's this thing we're all doing in this sad brown world?" then stepped away to brood in a way that moved Sal profoundly. Dean's first thought is to ask the tenor man if he has sisters. "All I want to do is ball," he says. "Yeah," the beat tenor man says, "What good's a ball. Life's too sad to be ballin' all the time" (*On the Road* 200). With Sal and the weary tenor man in tow, Dean speeds off to the next jazz bar, oblivious to everything other than the next orgasmic high on which the hipster thrives. Unable to explain himself beyond his categorical imperative *to go*, his speech is psychotically incoherent and his actions erratic and gross: "Ah, man, the things, the things I could—I wish—oh, yes. Let's go, let's not stop—go now! Yes!" Sal sees Dean leaving the bar in the middle of the night, "spinning and spinning in the dark . . . his hand distractedly inside his pants" (*On the Road* 203).

Sal has intermittent insights into Dean's genuine madness—his insatiable need for sensation for its own sake. "This madness would lead to nowhere," he says. Swayed by Old Bull's portentous warning, Sal confesses, "With frantic Dean I was rushing through the world without a chance to see it" (*On the Road* 206). Quietly quiet in a dark movie theater with Dean, Sal contemplates severing himself from his tormenting avatar forever. But remembering the oedipal crisis that binds them, he believes Dean would roam the country until he found him "embryonically convoluted" among the rub-

bishes of his life. He knows what he would say to him from his "rubbish womb": "Don't bother me, man, I'm happy where I am" (246). But a tarot reading suggests that Sal is bound to Dean not only embryonically, sharing the same guilty oedipal desires, but psychically, as the shrouded, death-bound figure in Sal's dream. Displaying the jack of spades, signifying someone egocentric, cunning, and devious, a tarot reader says to Sal, "That's Dean, he's always around" (205).

Sal assumes Zen-like indifference to his fate. "What difference does it make after all," he says. "All in the mind" (*On the Road* 246).[6] Stumbling from their "horror hole," they spend the evening in Negro bars chasing girls and listening to jazz on jukeboxes—a "pious frenzy" that delights the speed crazed Dean but wearies Sal. They wind up at the home of Sal's aunt who condemns Dean's abandonment of his four illegitimate children and his wives on both coasts. Wondering about the senseless nightmare road he travels with Dean—"all of it inside endless and beginningless emptiness"— he nevertheless enlists Dean to drive him into the psychic wilds of Mexico, a Dantesque descent that recalls Rojack's allegorical war with Kelly, facing each other like two hunters in a midnight of a jungle.

Everyone carries a shadow, Jung argues. And the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is, thwarting our most well-meant intentions. In his psychic battle with his darker shrouded self—an existential dialectic Mailer describes as moving forward into growth or backward into death—one must have the courage to access what is buried in one's forgotten experience and so work to find it. One must go back to the source of the pain, or guilt, or desire he knew as an infant and as a child. A psychopath like Dean remains willfully blind to his malevolence, while an artist like Sal can move closer to the secrets of that inner unconscious life which will nourish him if he can hear it ("The White Negro" 351).

Even before they leave for Mexico, Sal has a vision of Dean as an allegorical angel of death, "palpitating" toward him with enormous speed, bearing down on him like The Shrouded Traveler on the plain. Suggesting Freud's warnings of the larger destructive power of the unleashed id, Sal imagines the hellish angel scorching the earth with flames, burning cities, drying rivers. Further suggesting the absent father figure that Sal and Dean search for in vain—the lawgiver whose authority protects the threatened mother from the incestuous son—preparations had to be made, Sal says, for new laws to fit Dean's bursting ecstasies (*On the Road* 259).

But Dean hijacks the narrative, insisting that "Everything is fine, everything is lovely." More as an order than a question, Dean tells his exposed other self, "We know that we are now not worried about a single thing, don't we, Sal?" Upon which Dean becomes frantically and demonically drunk, "like the ghost of his father, slopping down wine, beer, and whisky like water." I couldn't imagine this trip into the tropics, Sal says, where "the great snake of the world was about to rise up." "Well, okay," he says, "I'm always ready to follow Dean" (*On the Road* 264–265). To where is the fateful question: to bars and jazz clubs for more salacious encounters with young girls, and alcohol and drugs to repress the unconscious? Swinging with his shadow self, a crazy cat who really is crazy? Or to consciousness-raising experience in which Sal takes possession of the narrative, moving back in time to revisit incestuous desires, reconciling with the offended mother?

Moving back into unconscious time in the primitive swamps and jungles of Mexico, Sal undergoes Mailer's test for the self-awareness he needs to inform and energize his art—raising to consciousness the character of his frustrated desire and what would satisfy it ("The White Negro" 341). Like the descent of his mythic counterparts Dante and Orpheus, Sal feels that he is venturing into "places where we would finally learn ourselves," a hellish Mexican underworld of ancient shadows and wailing primitive humanity. In Freudian terms, Sal's descent is libidinal—a tight passage through a narrow door whose painful constriction no one is spared who goes down to the deep well.

As they approach the border from San Antonio, the air grows hotter and hotter, the countryside increasingly jungle-like. Thinking of the moment when destruction first came into the world, "when Adam was suckled and taught to know," Sal thinks of girls he has promised Dean in the towns ahead, sensing the "rank smell" of the Stygian river they will have to cross in the night (*On the Road* 280).

As they descend into what Sal calls their road's hottest depths—a horror of swampy darkness, snaky trees, screeching attacking insects, and the smell of rot—Sal thinks for a moment that Dean is understanding everything. The sound of the mad beat of drums Sal calls "the world beat," the heartbeat of Conrad's Congo, causes Dean to shudder and freeze for a moment, "as though seeing the devil." But when Dean closes his eyes, Sal realizes that Dean is literally as well as psychically deaf and dumb to the frenzied drums' message, beating on "like an endless journey in the jungle" (*On the Road*

286). For a long time, Sal confesses, "I lost consciousness in my lower mind of what we were doing and only came around later when I looked up from fire and silence, like waking from sleep to the world, or waking from void to a dream" (285).

"The atmosphere and I became one," he says. Opening himself to the jungle's darkness, he has a repeat warning of Dean as an allegorical angel of death bearing down on him like The Shrouded Traveler on the plain. Signifying the apocalyptic figure from Revelation that precedes and foretells pestilence and death, a mad prophetic rider on a white horse draws near to him in the night. Barking dogs, a mythic symbol of love and protection of the mother's womb, force the rider back into the woods. Just as Dean had resisted Sal's association of The Shrouded Traveler with death, he tells Sal he had the same dream but that a dream was all it was. For the moment Dean appears unaffected, anxious to get on and on, driving like a fiend to Mexico City to resume his quest for booze and girls, kissing young senoritas by dawn. Exorcised of his demon, Sal takes the wheel, reclaiming the narrative, slowing down to take everything in, entertaining reveries of his own.

The world beat intensifies in Mexico City. While Dean balks at the sight of protective parents hovering in doorways to protect their pretty daughters, Sal's encounters are more empathetic than lustful. He worries about the awful grief that has driven an eighteen-year-old Venezuelan girl to whoring. He considers sex with a sixteen-year-old black girl, but the appearance of her mournful mother makes him too ashamed to try. The mythic dog charged with protecting the mother's womb tries to bite him. While the girls he meets are definitely not virgins, he relates to them in ways that suggest Jung's archetype of the elevation of the female to the status of goddess to protect her from erotic desires. Suggestive of Dante's *Divine Comedy*—the image of Woman exalted into the heavenly, mystical figure of the Mother of God, the "Virgin Mother"—the imperious dignity of a dark little girl who excites him keeps Sal from approaching her. Even Dean is reluctant, bowing his head: "For she was the queen" (*On the Road* 289). About the soulful intensity of young Indian girls they see on the road out of town, Dean says, "Look at those eyes. They were like the eyes of the Virgin Mother when she was a child" (*On the Road* 297).

Sal's experience in Mexico City suggests that he has come a long way in raising his shadowy self to consciousness, the existential test that Mailer asks of the maturing artist. Understanding that the story Sal is writing through-

out the novel is the one we're reading persuades us that Kerouac is the matured artist, simultaneously using the troubled psychic twins to interrogate his own unruly passions, while exhibiting the ecstatic flux Mailer identifies as the thematic and stylistic hub of Kerouac's art. Fluctuating ecstasy suggests the ebb and flow of orgiastic emotion that Sal experiences with jazz and sex, his wonder and sadness for suffering humanity, the faux euphoria of drugs and booze, the transporting terror of Mexico's jungles, and most importantly, the magical rapture of Kerouac's prose that makes the story's archetypal descent and creative renewal our own, as ingeniously crafted as any novel of our time.[7]

Like the cryptic possibilities of the jazz man's horn, the dialectic of opposites in the novel's final line—"I think of old Dean Moriarty the father we never found"—puts the reader in the venerable company of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, and Updike's *Rabbit Run* (307). The collective "We" makes the quest for the forbidden mother and absent father as much ours as it is Sal and Dean's. The ambiguity becomes doubly rich when we realize that the line begs the question of the father's identity. Is the search for the father Sal and Dean's common quest, or is Dean Moriarty the demonic father of Sal's death-haunted dreams? In light of Jung and Mailer's argument that the artist must assimilate his shadow, both are true. The moment Sal thinks Dean is gone, he feels him appear in the dark to prophesy his fate. "Go moan *for man*" (303). This is not the psychopathy of Old Bull's warning but the jazz man's polyphonic cry of grief and joy that spurs Sal and his author's rhapsodic vision—a "pilgrimage" of gloom and gaping wonder "on the dark roads around America . . . all that road going, all the people dreaming in the immensity of it" (307). It is who I am, Sal says. It is why I write.

This brings us to my year with Kerouac in Tampa, Florida in 1965-1966 at the Wild Boar pub—thoughts about how *On the Road* precipitates the author's use of fiction as a process of discovery and renewal throughout his troubled career. For me, the main value of the experience was to confirm the strikingly autobiographical nature of the books from first to last—viewing the man and the work as inseparable, so we may trust the honesty of the writing absolutely. He is of course not the first author to write about his own life and times, as witness others in the confessional, openly romantic tradition of Whitman, Thoreau, and Thomas Wolfe, writers Kerouac much admired. One thinks of Henry Miller's remark, "Of what use books if they lead

us not back to life, if they fail to make us drink more avidly of life?" Miller speaks for Kerouac, the elder writer's avowed devotee, when he declares that what so irritates the critics about his work is "all the jumble and confusion . . . the nonliterary character of my escapades which is really the heart of my tale."

But there is something new here—Kerouac's willingness to bear all that caused Kenneth Rexroth to say, "This time we are getting the innocent lost heart straight"—a clarification of Sal Paradise's description of himself as a man of gloom, whose work would be devoted to moaning for man.

For me, a wide-eyed, 25-year-old first-year instructor at the University of South Florida, long hair, full beard, that was the excitement and the beauty of talking and drinking with Kerouac at the Boar; that you felt you were living the novels, hearing first hand everything he felt and thought about everything imaginable—life, death, sex, writing and writers, philosophy, religion, the American scene, and perhaps most important, the fateful drinking. I'm glad to have re-read *Big Sur* (1962) and, for the first time, *Satori in Paris* (1966), the novels he wrote closest to his time at the Boar, because they so emphatically underscore Kerouac's authenticity. "I have renounced fiction and fear," he says in *Big Sur*. "There is nothing to do but write the truth. There is no other reason to write. I have to write because of the compulsion in me. No more can say."

One of those truths was evident in my first meeting with Kerouac: the paradoxical life-loving, self-destructive writer embodied in Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty—joyful to the point of desperation. I had written in the margins of *Dharma Bums*, which I had carried to the pub knowing he might be there, "Thursday night, December 3, 1965, meet Mr. K. at The Wild Boar. Laughing, goofing, and getting roaring drunk. Tossing thoughts back and forth like kernels of popcorn. Just tremendously excited about life." I am reminded of Thoreau saying that he wanted "to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life." I am curious about Graham Solomon's memory of Jack, at whose house he sometimes stayed, growing quieter as the day went on, because what I most recall is his boundless energy and enthusiasm and willingness to engage almost everybody in conversation. Thinking of Wordsworth's adage, "The child is father to the man," nothing defined the Kerouac we watched dance and prance at the Boar more than childlike wonder, openness, curiosity, and spontaneity. We never knew when he would suddenly blurt out non-sensible things like, "I'm piano puzzled," or "Is this

place Boston?" or "My father next to my brother lies"—suggestive of the freedom and honesty of speech he harnessed into a new style of fiction, free-flowing thought unfiltered from the subconscious as rebellion against the increasing conformity and restrictions upon personal freedom of the American 1950s.

When Kenneth Rexroth refers to Kerouac's "innocent lost heart," he suggests another reason why what we learned of Jack at the Boar is critical to his life's story. His work had always been about a broken heart, or soul divided against itself, evident even in his looks. Much has been made of his paunchiness at this time. But he looked strong, too, nobody you'd want to mess with, as if he lifted cement blocks all day, clomping along the floor of the bar like an old time lumberjack. "I see eyes," he'd say, once calling me over and saying, "Let me see your eyes, Brewer. You have beautiful eyes." He was forever changing names around, like calling me "Brewer" and my colleague and poet Willy Reader "Willy Leeder." He says to Willy, looking intently up close, "You have the eyes of a German submarine commander, Willy Leeder. I would like to suck you Willy Leeder if I had the guts." Perhaps it was Jack's own stricken, kindly eyes that told the story of the tormented contraries in himself and his work—open, hopeful, forever curious, full of wonder and love for the world, yet driven to drink himself to death to escape its sadness.

I saw Kerouac as Walt Whitman reincarnated, a "caresser of life wherever moving," but dressed in Goodwill clothes and drinking all the time. Perhaps Kerouac was inspired by Whitman's "Song of the Open Road": "Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road . . . You road I enter upon and look around, I believe you are not all that is here, I believe that much unseen is also here . . . you express me better than I can express myself." Like Whitman (who Ginsberg calls "my courage teacher") Kerouac is a "witness for all." He asks in *Big Sur* the question asked in myriad ways in *On the Road*: "What are we gonna do with our lives? I dunno, just watch them I guess." (Just "Go," just "dig."). It could as easily be Kerouac as Whitman declaring in "Song of Myself," "To me the converging objects of the universe perpetually flow. All are written to me, and I must get what the writing means." High/low, body/soul, mystical/commonplace, learned/unlearned, pure/impure—Jack was conversant with the work of the world's greatest minds, as likely to allude to Catullus or Shakespeare or Boswell's Johnson as to studies in Zen and Chan and Tao, as likely to listen to a Mozart Mass as piano jazz by Dave Brubeck.

Yet mirroring Whitman's sympathy for common men and women, particularly the have-nots of the increasingly materialistic, conformist years of the 1950's, Jack, like Sal and Dean, was more at home with bums or cab drivers than with literary posers or academics, more comfortable in pubs and pool halls than classrooms or lecture halls. When I asked him what he thought of Hemingway, he said "Look, I don't like him shootin' those beautiful wild deer to prove his virility. I know I'm virile. Look, I'll show you." And he started to remove his pants. Despite telling me that "all that literary stuff was just a drag," Sal's admiration for Hemingway in *On the Road*—imitating the man, praising his art—is obviously Kerouac's own. When I said I was embarrassed to be such an obvious stereotypical academic, speaking in clichés, he let me off the hook. "Clichés are sometimes true," he said. "That's why they're clichés."

One night he found himself being cross-examined by a professor who had entered into the conversation uninvited. I never saw Kerouac looking more vulnerable or forlorn. "Kerouac, you're a joke; you don't think," the professor said insolently. "You have no head." Wearily Kerouac answered, "Man, that's all I do—write and think." "Then why are all your characters brainless bums?" the professor said. "Why don't you write about people who can use their minds?" He was sneering as he said this. "Crap," Kerouac said. "We are not talking clichés." Moving out of the booth, Jack suddenly looked back at his antagonist and asked, "Say, what do you teach, math?" The professor answered "Humanities," and Kerouac grinned down at him, crying triumphantly. "Ha! I create what you profess." Then Kerouac said something truly bizarre, as if he and the professor shared a secret unknown to the rest of us at the table. "Look, don't worry, we want you, see. The Aryans are wise to the Jews. There will be no more ovens or lamp shades or that crap." "Yes there will," said the professor, which drew a concerned stare from Jack.

The professor, Kerouac was to tell us later, was one of those sad academics who are too dainty in their aestheticism, or too hysterically cynical, or too abstract and indoorsy, or too political to hope for anything. The professor would probably never know how to cast off irony, discard the amenities, grow a beard, walk the streets of America, flirt with pigeons, pray to the ocean, sleep on the beach, rapture, or piss in the street "for luck." In *Big Sur*, Kerouac repeats Sal Paradise's remark that "The only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are 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 bright yellow Roman candles exploding, like spiders across the stars." It's why I think quasi-eccentric, unpretentious souls like Jerry Wagner, Larry Vickers, Cliff Anderson, Paddy Mitchell, and Mike Baldwin were Jack's real pals at the Boar, disciples even.

With Kerouac in the Boar, the place took on an aspect of drama it never knew before. Whether he was hallucinating or playing with us you'd never know, which could be annoying to newcomers to the bar, the non-beats, as it were. "Go away," he says to a gussied up couple, "you are not wanted here." One time in his wildness he scared off several respectable-looking middle-aged ladies by mentioning the lusciousness of their nethermost parts. "Those tarts were bored," he tells us. Often he would wander from table to table, suddenly flipping down uninvited and begin to drink with total strangers, staring gravely or menacingly into their astounded, embarrassed faces, all the while sounding like a jazz man from *On the Road*, giving out with little "ahhhs" and "wows" and "yesseess." Not surprising that he would remark just a year later in *Satori in Paris*, "I've outworn me welcome in another bar." That was evidently Jack's fate at The Collage in 1968, the bar built and managed by Joel Mednick just up the street from the Boar, after the Sheriff's office reportedly burned the Boar down.

Like Sal Paradise, Kerouac was a tireless mimic who never failed to bring the house down with his playful imitations. One moment he was the leader of a guerilla warfare unit, a lieutenant marching ahead giving orders, the next dancing like Zorba the Greek, or swaggering in through the door, his fingers hooked in his belt, calling out, "Look, look, John Wayne," making strange noises with his mouth.

"Hey Brewer, look, Gable!"

He did walking imitations of David Niven, Clark Gable, Robert Mitchum, W. C. Fields, and John Garfield, but when I asked him to do Tyrone Power, he said, "Naw! I can't do girls."

One night he left the Boar for a while and came back an hour later looking wild and disheveled, not unlike an escaped mental patient. He hurled himself toward a table in the corner where he sat trying to catch his breath. Cliff and Paddy, who eventually went back to Lowell with him, sat across from him, and he told them his story while the rest of us listened in. "Gawd, those guys was abductors," he said, looking back at the door. There ensued a lively tale of a mad dash through the cemetery after Kerouac escaped from the abductors' Cadillac, and a harrowing chase in which he had barely es-

caped with his life. He told all this with amazing exuberance and attempted to bring every tortured moment of the ordeal back to life. When his audience responded with a laugh, he told them with absolute seriousness, "Man, don't be facetious about abductors," and who knew what to believe? Just then a total stranger came through the door, swarthy and pugnacious, wearing a French beret, and Kerouac waved him over. "That's my bodyguard," he told us. "He's a Cherokee chief. He just got out of the pen. His hand is swollen from hitting one of them abductors." Kerouac looked at the newcomer in awe, as we all did, then greeted him in what he later told us was Medieval French.

If you understand how Jack spent his short, intensely gifted lifetime in a constant agitated effort to reconcile the painful Paradise/Moriarty opposites in himself and the world—constant movement between places, pulls both to a normal domestic life and a life of complete freedom and irresponsibility, voracious intellect yet drawn to the Buddhist concept of complete unconscious fusion with the cosmos, love of nature but addiction to artificial stimulants, beat but politically conservative, fascinated by sex but not deeply touched by it ("The muscular gum of sex is such a bore")—you have the single most important key to the otherwise enigmatic man and writer. More significantly, you begin to understand how the man so in love with life could regularly drink himself into oblivion he called "self-imposed agony," his "battered brain" and abused liver finally giving out at the age of 47. No wonder like his great mentor Whitman he was fond of oxymoron, even in titles to his books like *Desolation Angels* (a desolated or fallen angel) or *Dharma Bums* (bums as spiritual beings following the path of Buddha and rejecting the material world). Life's tormenting contradictions are particularly apparent in *On the Road*, *Big Sur*, and *Satori in Paris*, dualisms evident in such oxymoronic images as "Tortured attention," "Sweet loneness," "happy sadness," "The beauty of lostness," "The heartlessness of wisdom." All three novels feature Jack's life in St. Petersburg and the Wild Boar in Tampa. In *Satori in Paris*, Jack refers to a regular at the Boar, Clifford Anderson, as his pool-playing pal. All three novels constitute a veritable treatise on the enigma of Kerouac's self-conscious, self-destructive drinking.

And that brings me to the question I'm asking here—what Jack's life at the Boar tells us about his last tragic years after *On the Road*. I heard that Cliff and Paddy and others had become Jack's babysitters. His need for them is partly explained by Jack's inherently childlike nature, perpetually open, cu-

rious, and exuberant. Remember that this is a man who never learned to drive a car and, more tellingly (given my Freudian analysis of *On the Road*), a man so devoted to, even emotionally dependent upon, his mother Gabrielle, also an alcoholic, as she was upon him.[8] She was never far from his consciousness in or out of his work. It's of course why he moved to St. Petersburg where the weather better suited his mother, especially after her stroke in 1966, staying close to her in case things went wrong. "You and I are in the same boat," she tells him, "and anyhow no place of our own to call home."

When Kerouac refers to "the first trip I've taken away from my mother's house since the publication of *On the Road*," he thinks first of Gabriel at the death of his favorite cat Tyke. "I'm also depressed because I know how horrible my mother feels." In his brief respite from St. Pete and life at the Boar in *Satori in Paris*, two weeks of "beer breakfasts" and "cognac evenings" (some respite!), he thinks frequently of his mother's instructions about his clothes and money, tying his necktie "tighter than a tied-ass mother's everloving son." He looks forward to being home with her in "good ole Florida." In *Big Sur*, he sought refuge in the woods from endless drunken nights in San Francisco. His mother packed his rucksack with everything necessary for survival—first aid kit, diet instructions, a sewing kit, safety pins, buttons, needles, scissors, a sweater and handkerchief, tennis shoes for hiking, and a "hopeful" St. Christopher medal sewn on the rucksack flap.

But exactly, or as exactly as conjecture may come, how does Kerouac's inherent childhood idealism and innocence, and a romantic disposition to feel life so intensely, explain the tormented soul who regularly narcotized himself with a mixture of alcohol, hallucinogens, and religious orthodoxy, committing what Ellis Amburn calls "slow suicide" and Kerouac himself acknowledges in *Big Sur* as the death wish he wrote into the character of Dean Moriarty? "Sleep is death," he says. "Everything is death . . . We've all read Freud sufficiently to understand something there." The "babbling" in his head, the anguish of too much tortured thinking "am telling me to die." As with fellow romantics like F. Scott Fitzgerald and Keats ("half in love with easeful Death"), it was exactly Jack's Beatster capacity for joyful, rapturous experience, his unquenchable desire for ecstatic life that made conformist, commonplace realities, like settling down, conventional marriage, domesticity, and certainly conventional prose, impossible for him.

As to the impossibility of the commonplace, a passage in *On the Road* reminds us that Kerouac's rejection of literary roads more traveled was a conscious choice, a stylistic protest not only against square America but against the well-worn satire of American middle-class materialism and conformity we associate with John Dos Passos, Sherwood Anderson, and Sinclair Lewis. Literally on the road from Sacramento to Denver, with two anxious passengers in the back seat of their car, Dean interrupts his excited reminiscence of his entranced life with Sal to bemoan the empty lives of the worried couple in the back seat. They need to worry and betray time, he tells Sal, "with false urgencies and unhappy facial expressions to go with it. And all the time it all flies by them and they know it and that too worries them no end." In the style of Kerouac's artful mimicry, Dean parodies what he believes to be the couple's emotional void. Worthy of Mailer or D. H. Lawrence, Kerouac employs a double entendre to suggest the perversion of human tenderness and sexual vitality by mechanical power and greed. Warning against getting gas she's read about with "high-frequency cock in it," Dean's impersonated female passenger says, "I just don't feel like it anyway." While the anxious and whiny couple mop their brows with fright, Sal and Dean continue their ecstatic soul-exploration of life's "innumerable riotous angelic possibilities" (*On the Road* 209–210). The passage confirms Buffon's famous adage, "*le style c'est l' homme*."

Whitman said, "I contain multitudes," to which Kerouac echoes, "How multiple it all is." In *Satori*, wandering around Paris in a "drunken mist," he mirrors Mailer's observation that once the gold of sex deserted them, beats did not age gracefully. "As I grew older I became a drunk. Why? Because I like ecstasy of the mind. I'm a wretch. But I love ***love***." He drank as a way of maintaining a perpetual high, a thought he puts in the mouth of Dean Moriarty: "If you want to live high, get high." In a letter to Ginsberg, the Carlo Marx of *On the Road*, he writes, "When on mescaline I was so bloody high I saw all our ideas about a beatific new gang of world people and about instantaneous truth." Along with Ginsberg, Kerouac's immediate community of literary brothers—those in whom the Beat flame was at its highest—included William Burroughs, Gregory Corso and painters and jazz musicians whose spontaneous neo-Buddhist and anti-materialist art approached his own. Seymour Krim likens Kerouac's creative leadership to Hemingway's in the Paris of *The Sun Also Rises* ("Introduction" 12).

As Keats tells us in his poem "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," the man in love with ideal beauty, goodness, and truth dooms himself to disappointment and torment. This is the basis of Sal Paradise's description of himself as a man of sorrow, whose purpose as a writer becomes "to moan for man." For Kerouac, the pain of not having time to love everyone and everything was overwhelmingly maddening. "It's all too big to keep up with," he says in *Big Sur*, "that we're surrounded by life, that we'll never understand it . . . . all those unread books, all those skid row sages whose stories he will never hear, let alone all those immeasurable star misty eons of universes he will never know—so we center it all in by swigging Scotch from the bottle and when its empty run out of the car and buy another one, period."

Like Whitman, and like Sal Paradise, Kerouac professed sympathy for all of creation. For three weeks in the relative stillness and peace of *Big Sur*'s woods, free of "booze, drunks, binges, bouts with beatniks and drunks and junkies," he marvels at "a whole mess of little joys." In the morning—a glass of ferns on the table, a box of jasmine tea nearby, all "so gentle and human"—he makes "an excellent pan of muffins and tell myself 'Blessed is the man can make his own bread.'" At noon he sits with books and coffee observing the "orange and black Princeton colors on the wings of a butterfly," writing rhythmic sounds of the sea in his notebook as he had mimicked the sounds of jazz in *On the Road*, "Ka bloom, kerplosh . . . raw roo roar, crowsh." Later, pants rolled up above his knees, he wades a "gurgly clear stream," moving rocks to help the water's flow. At night under beautiful flashing stars and luminescent moon, he prepares a "tender rearranging supper" he describes to his mother—"spaghetti with tomato sauce and my oil and vinegar salad and my apple sauce relish and my black coffee and Roquefort cheese and after-dinner nuts, my dear, all in the woods—ten delicate olives slowly chewed at midnight is something no one's ever done in luxurious restaurants."

Throughout the day he communes with all manner of animal life—"There's the family of deer on the dirt road at dusk—There's the fly on my thumb rubbing its nose then stepping to the page of my book—There's the hummin bird swinging his head from side to side"—all "universal substance," he says, "so valuable compared to the worthlessness of expensive things." That's the "beat" coming forth, the ecstatic flux, the veritable religion of anti-materialism we associate with Mailer and with the primitive rhythms of Henry Miller, D. H. Lawrence, and John Steinbeck. The liberating intox-

ication of the woods makes him think of Emerson announcing Whitman, the bard's "infancy of simplicity, conforming to nobody's idea about what to do, what should be done." But however joyful these weeks of happy meditation and gentle communion are, they are offset by the almost nihilistic world weariness that threatens Sal Paradise. Unlike Sal, Kerouac can no longer reconcile life's bedeviling opposites as necessary parts of the whole—beauty with ugliness, bliss with horror, or justice with injustice.

As we hear from Sal Paradise, the sadness of nature's cruelty and man's inhumanity fills him with "moans" and "groans," audible expressions of uncontainable grief. The death of Kerouac's "dear otter" fills him with despair. The death of his cat Tyke, "his baby," whom "he loves with all his heart," leaves him inconsolable. Even his inadvertent poisoning of a mouse, he says, "sabotages my plans to be kind to all living beings, even bugs." "All these deaths," he says, "piling up suddenly." "Why do they do that?" he pleads. "What's the sense of all this?" "I'm almost going mad with the sadness of it all." He delights in the thought of a wonderful restaurant in Los Gatos where the pizzas are piled an inch high with mushrooms and meat and anchovies, but the sight of a shivering canyon makes him bite his lip "with marvel and sadness." He relishes the first delicate bite of beautifully prepared fish, but its taste has "all the death of otters and mousses in it." Sinking his teeth into its "mournful flesh," he wonders how this little living being only an hour ago was swimming happily in the sea. "Nothing," he says, "delicious any more on my tongue." What helps is alcohol, no matter how deadly he knows it to be. He's able to rejoice in the beauty of trees and water until he realizes there's no more wine left. In his "soberness," nature becomes heartless, the autumn wind hurrying leaves, "looking human," to their death. "Oh my God," he exclaims, "we're all being swept away to sea no matter what we know or say or do. The sea took Joyce and it will take YOU." He feels death reaching out a "skinny skeleton hand" to him. He is not 70, or even 50. He is 38.

Though Kerouac flirted with the promises of a Christian heaven and Buddhist reincarnation, he brooded constantly over life's failure to fulfill spiritual ideals. Buddhism, Christianity, drinking, sex, and drugs were all temporary answers. In *Big Sur* he decides that "when you make those final statements it doesn't help you. If there is a God, how do you know he doesn't hate what He did?" This typifies Mailer's mystical vision of God and the Devil battling for man's soul, dependent upon human enmity or good will for completion. "God, Kerouac despairs, might even be drunk and not

noticing what he went and done. Maybe God is dead." Reminding us of what Mailer says about the hipster's fatal flaw—that reconciling Buddhist purity with drugs is something to be faced later—"I know now," Kerouac says, "my Buddhism is no help and why Buddha forbade drinking—but I just can't stop." He considers that "all those philosophies and sutras we are talking about" have "all become empty words. I'm sick and tired of whatever they ever said or ever will say." He questions the futility of everything. "What's the purpose of all this?" he asks. Even if the Buddhist notion of reincarnation were true, he imagines himself wretched throughout eternity. "If I had guts," he says, "I'd drown myself in the tiresome water."

Evidently drinking "as slow suicide" was the darker, less visible side of Jack Kerouac's life at the Boar, part celebrant, part self-exorcist. Perhaps Cliff and Paddy or Graham or others who spent more time with him can speak better to Kerouac's own dire description of himself in *Big Sur* as "a fool now and hopelessly lost forever," his "star" increasingly dim, "just a silly stranger goofing with other strangers for no reason far from anything that ever mattered to me whatever that was," feeling good only, as he puts it, "on the strength of that night's booze."

But for me Kerouac's painful, confessional examination of the consequences of his alcoholic malaise to himself and others in *Big Sur* and *Satori in Paris* is the act of a tragic hero, loyal to the very end to tell the truth about his own worst demons. "It's hard to explain," he says.[9] "The thing to do is not be false." We will never get a more self-aware and forthright description of the alcoholic's nightmare than Kerouac gives us here: "I'm just wailing away on my old fatal double bourbons and ginger ale and I'll be sorry in a few days. Any drinker knows how the process works: the first day you is okay, the morning after means a big head but so you can kill that easy with a few more drinks and a meal, but if you pass up the meal and go on to another night's drunk, and wake up to keep the toot going, and continue on to the fourth day, there'll come one day when the drinks won't take effect because you're chemically overloaded and you'll have to sleep it off but can't sleep anymore because it was alcohol itself that made you sleep those last five nights, so delirium sets in—Sleeplessness, sweat, trembling, a groaning feeling of weakness where your arms are numb and useless, nightmares (nightmares of death)." The "innocent lost heart" indeed.

However tragic Kerouac's life, his uncompromised truth-telling earns him a place beside Celine, Kafka, Conrad, Baudelaire, and other writers in his

own French tradition. They understood Kerouac's fierce struggles with hope and despair, his courage to write as authentically about grief as about joy. With my careful re-reading of *On the Road*, I feel closer to him than ever. How I wish I had overcome my timidity the night he asked me to take him home from the Boar. Was I silly to be worrying about going on the road with him the next morning if he asked? "Poof" would have gone my new delicately balanced academic career, a shot of bourbon in the morning to steady my nerves from last night's high, prepping for the new day's classes. I understood that he would allow himself to be turned down only once.

Nevertheless, I'm sure Larry, Cliff, Paddy, and Michael would concur that those madcap evenings changed us forever, helping us all feel more alive and honest in our bodies and souls. Kerouac was to me as Whitman was to Ginsburg, a courage teacher whose wild and honest abandon made me less timid about saying what I really think or feel and more ready to shun those who don't. To this day he tweaks my conscience when I feel my thinking and my writing becoming stilted or unoriginal. I'd love to foil expectations on the softball field as he is reported to have done, suddenly stopping my chase of a long fly ball and doing a series of somersaults or backflips. I do not for a second minimize the tragedy of Kerouac's alcoholism. But if, as accused, he was a perpetual child who never grew up, "hushed in awe," as John Montgomery writes, "in the face of the mystery of the world," we should all be so blessed.

NOTES

1. In his brilliant introduction to Kerouac's *Desolation Angels*, Seymour Krim suggests that like Hemingway, Kerouac shows the soul of his work in its form, "a shape indivisible from its content" (13). Ginsberg said that in Kerouac's seven part conceptual construct—"Essentials of Spontaneous Prose"—Kerouac had invented "a spontaneous bop prosody"—which meant that Kerouac had evolved through experience and self-revelation a firm technique which could now be backed up ideologically. Kerouac would "sketch from memory a definite image-object more or less as a painter would work on a still-life," then free associate into "limitless seas" of thought (11). Ironically Kerouac's description of his artistic intentions to Ginsberg and Burroughs in *The Black Mountain Review* (1958)—reproducing the spontaneity and breathless rhythms of modern jazz without the restrictions of grammatical conventions—shows that Kerouac's art was theoretically meticulous.
2. Mailer might have had Jack Kerouac in mind when he fretted that he and his contemporaries had written too much about themselves and not enough about the larger American world. As a

New Journalist, Mailer's unprecedented analyses of America's complex psychic life would establish his supremacy as the most sage and incisive social critic of the American 20th Century. As his biographer Michael Lennon explains, Mailer would use himself "as a species of divining rod to explore the psychic depths of personalities as disparate as Marilyn Monroe, Henry Miller, Gary Gilmore, Lee Harvey Oswald, Picasso, Christ, and Hitler" (435), people as divided as himself and with whom he shared existential similarities. Analogous to Kerouac's double-edged nature, Lennon explores Mailer's own internal warfare—what Mailer frequently refers to as the criminal side of his saint/psychopath duality. Mailer's defends his self-acknowledged psychopathic impulses, "the dark side, the rebellious and the demonic" in himself such as stabbing his second wife Adele Morales, as a form of psychic therapy, a courageous and cleansing form of existential risk-taking even if vicious (Lennon 221).

3. Kerouac shares a significant kinship with Hemingway in that both writers wrote of war-weary lost generations. Sal Paradise and Jake Barnes are both war veterans with sexual wounds that complicate their quest for healthy female companionship. Both writers scorned intellectual posers and preferred the company of common men with primitive sensibilities like themselves, resulting in bogus hostile readings of their prose as artless and simplistic. To the contrary, as I have previously argued about the richly symbolic, multilayered meanings in Hemingway's work—particularly his efforts to rescue the buried or denied feminine in himself—much of the *On the Road* story resides beneath Hemingway's famous iceberg and in the circuitous roads and routes of Sal Paradise's "screwed up American dream" rather than "in one straight line" (*On the Road* 11). Too easily missed amid Sal's sad moans and groans is his passion for earthy experience and his poignant descriptions of nature comparable to and probably influenced by Hemingway. Sal's sensual delight in a hearty meal and a good bottle of wine, and his heightened sensitivity to the primitive life around him, is exactly that of Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises*. Sal fills with religious awe on the road to Monterrey, "where the sun rose pure on ancient activities of human life," winding among the clouds of "rose snowcapped mountains" to the great plateau on top. He gets high on the cool mountain air and thoughts of the sensual delights waiting in Monterrey (*On the Road* 278-279). Traveling by car from Bayonne to Pamplona, Jake watches the country, "green and rolling, and the road climbing all the time . . . . with a valley below and hills [that] stretched off back toward the sea . . . . We crossed the top of a Col . . . . and saw a whole new range of mountains off to the south, all brown and baked-looking and furrowed in strange shapes." A big river shining in the sun causes Jake to anticipate the plentiful trout streams at Burguete and Spanish food so shockingly good you had to drink plenty of wine to get it all down (*The Sun Also Rises* 92-93). Sal's writer pal Major, who Sal says "liked good wines just like Hemingway," tells Sal, "If you could sit with me high in the Basque country with a cool bottle of Poignon Dix-neuf, then you'd know there are other things besides boxcars" (*On the Road* 41). Sal praises *Green Hills of Africa* as Hemingway's best book but knows that there is darkness in the hunter-artist that Sal shares. In *Big Sur*, walking at night in the woods, Sal thinks he has found a place to lie down but realizes "it's too sinister there, like Hemingway's darker part of the swamp where 'the fishing

would be more tragic'"(212). It could as well be Hemingway as Kerouac who says, "Death is the only subject, since it marks the end of illusion."

4. My re-reading of *On the Road* in conjunction with "The White Negro" convinces me that one text is indispensable to fully understanding the other. So closely are they aligned that Kerouac complained of Mailer infringing on his territory until he learned that "The White Negro" was published first. Walking the dark mysterious streets of a "raggedy" Denver neighborhood, Sal says that rather than being a disillusioned white man all his life with white ambitions, he wishes he could change worlds "with the happy, true-hearted, ecstatic Negroes of America"(*On the Road* 180).
5. Mailer says, "At bottom, the drama of the psychopath ([Hipster] is that he seeks love. Not love as the search for a mate, but love as the search for an orgasm more apocalyptic than the one which preceded it . . . often as remote as the Holy Grail. Orgasm is his therapy" ("The White Negro" 347).
6. Sal inadvertently answers his own question, implicit in Kerouac's skillful use of metafiction to show reality as a construction of mind like Sal's story, made up. On the one hand, as a master at imitation, a tireless mimic, and an avid moviegoer, Sal is prone to "playacting," especially acting out romantic roles by actors like Gary Cooper and George Raft. In Mailer's terms, he may be tempted to resolve his dialectical struggle with Dean by "transposing weariness and despair into a romantic longing for death" rather than into a "meaningful structure and moral orchestration" ("The White Negro" 342). As a seaman, Sal says he was the star in one of the filthiest dramas of all time. On the other hand, "All in mind" suggests Sal's potential to author his own story—not the fated one of the tarot cards or Old Bull's portentous warning but the story we are reading—what Patricia Waugh calls the "self-begetting novel." Waugh describes this as "an account, usually first person, of the development of a character to the point at which he is able to take up the novel we have just finished reading" (14). Waugh cites two of Kerouac's favorite writers, Joyce and Proust, as major metafictionalists—writers like him interested in the mysteries of the unconscious, deeper levels of meaning whose recovery is equivalent to the Grail search (24). That may serve as the "It" repeatedly referenced in Sal's story and likely identifies the "It" as the object of Harry Angstrom's Grail quest in Updike's novel, *Rabbit, Run* (1960), a novel clearly influenced by *On the Road.*
7. I am reminded of Updike's essay on Proust, with whom Sal Paradise identifies, which describes Proust as "one of those rare men . . . who lost the consolations of belief but retained the attitudes and ambitions of a worshiper" (quoted in Cooper 321). "My work comprises one vast book like Proust's," Kerouac says, "except that my remembrances are written on the run instead of afterwards in a sickbed." Seymour Krim notes that while Proust's "massive spider web" gets its form from a fantastically complicated recapturing of the past, Kerouac's novels are all present-tense sprints, faithful to what he has experienced but less dependent on what has gone before (Krim 14, 15).
8. Sounding very much like Sal Paradise and his author's impossible quest for the perfect wife, a few months before his death Mailer told Michael Lennon, "When in doubt about my motivation, *cherchez la femme*" (124). And search Mailer did, witnessed by countless affairs and six marriages

to beautiful, complex and interestingly different women, none of whom satisfied "the desires of this gallant bucko," this prideful psychic outlaw (171). They weren't Fanny. Mailer relates to Freud's scolding of an apprentice analyst for not being able to focus his errant energies. "You want to be a big man? Piss in one spot" (337). Sal describes his failure to find the wife of his dreams as confused "running from one falling star to another till I drop (*On the Road* 126).

9. Kerouac was the kind of alcoholic Kurt Vonnegut described to me as being in the worst danger, "like Hemingway, who can hold his liquor, whose body does not protest about what he is doing to his liver or brain or whatever. Hemingway thought Fitzgerald was quite the pansy for reeling or passing out or whatever, or simply saying, thick of speech, he'd had enough. So I believe much of what Hemingway wrote or did at the end was due to a brain terribly damaged by all that drinking" (Personal Letter, May 22, 2005).

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