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Jazz and the Emerging Ideal in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*

An Exhibition of Americana

Jack Kerouac wrote his 1957 novel *On the Road* in an age of unprecedented development. The novel is an autobiographical retelling of his adventures with Neal Cassady from 1947 to 1950. World War Two had just ended and the Cold War was just beginning. The industrial demand during World War Two rapidly urbanized America. Densely populated, industrial cities had already existed, but wartime production needs demanded even more people move to bigger cities. After the war, many of these factories remained in use, typically making consumer goods. The baby boom, population concentration, and efficient manufacturing primed American society for consumerism. The war demands also produced a stable economy. More Americans had a stable income to buy more than just the necessities. A large deal of companies could produce luxury goods in addition to essential items. Luxury was more accessible than ever. This seems harmless on the surface, but there were a slew of criticisms precipitating in American society. Many of such criticisms involved the ethical price of immediate luxury. Marxist ideas brewed. Job specialization in the producing class alienated workers from the product, the act of production, their humanity, and their workers. On the surface, everything seemed quite alright. Underneath, things were falling apart. Kerouac, living in a concentrated New England, went west.[1]

On the Road's invention underscores an exhibition of Americana. Kerouac had taken notes on pocket notebooks during his journeys in the late 40s. These notes are what he drew from to write the novel. He famously wrote the novel on one 120 foot scroll over the course of three weeks in 1951 while high on benzedrine. There were no breaks between sections or paragraphs.

He never edited a word. The piece reads as one long stream-of-consciousness narrative. This experimentation echoes Whitman's free-verse, which is an invention of American English. Kerouac remained adamant about keeping the novel unedited despite publishers' opposition. It took him six years to find a publisher in Viking. He was still dissatisfied with the edition, calling it an emasculation. This act exhibits Kerouac's effort to remain true to himself in the face of criticism, echoing Emersonian and Thoreauvian attitudes of self-reliance and civil disobedience. These transcendentalist sentiments highlight a desire for new Americana. The impractical transcendentalist way of life was inaccessible in Kerouac's disillusioned, postwar society. What America needed was new cultural artifacts representative of the American spirit. Jazz was the answer.

On the Road sees Kerouac fictionalize himself and his rag-tag group of dissenters–Neal Cassady, Allen Ginsburg, and William S. Burroughs. The novel begins with Sal Paradise (Kerouac) meeting Dean Moriarty (Cassady) after a dispiriting divorce. Dean immediately impresses Sal with his free-spirit. Sal writes, "Dean Moriarty began the part of my life you could call my life on the road. Before that I'd often dreamed of going West to see the country, always vaguely planning and never taking off. Dean is the perfect guy for the road," (Kerouac 1). Dean is Sal's catalyst. This sets the track for the novel. The five parts see Sal and company travel out west to Denver, San Francisco, Mexico, and everywhere between. They work odd jobs here and there to fund their vices and make ends meet. Essential to the novel is the jazz scene, which is in a transitory state at this point in time. Sal writes, "bop was somewhere between its Charlie Parker Ornithology period and another period that began with Miles Davis" (Kerouac 12). The jazz scene is the novel's heartbeat. It is a constant object of admiration through the entire novel. This admiration underscores the cultural desire for something uniquely American. American

traditions, such as the Jeffersonian agrarian, were no longer practical and achievable[2]. Jazz happened to be a new American creation that rebranded American traditions. Thus, Kerouac synthesizes American jazz and American English to exalt the jazz musician as an emerging ideal American individual.

There exists scholarly work on the novel's jazz elements, its transcendental connections, and its linguistic fingerprint but no piece has productively combined these perspectives. Scholars such as Douglas Malcolm and David Hopkins are quick to label Dean the novel's hero, while treating the jazz musicians as a band with little discussion about the individual jazz star's role in the novel. The dearth of exploration of the individual jazz star's role has created a breach between Kerouac's application of his transcendentalist roots and their relevance to the novel. Kerouac's jazz star embodies those transcendentalist virtues in a new light, allowing Kerouac to form an underground culture where those virtues flourish. Andrew Madigan briefly touches on this, focusing on Kerouac's works as a whole. Madigan presents this culture as a "countersystem" that resists mainstream Americana. He explains that Kerouac's protagonists exhibit a "new rugged individualism". Madigan's countersystem provides a useful framework for specifically exploring the jazz star's position as an emerging American ideal in *On the Road*. The aim of this article is to close the breach between Kerouac's application of his transcendentalist roots and their relevance to the novel by asserting the jazz star as an emerging American ideal individual. This exploration will shed new light on the novel's place in the 20th century American cannon by establishing a continuity between original American virtues and their presence in an essential mid-century work.

Americana Lamented

Jack Kerouac grew up in the footprint of American transcendentalism. His hometown, Lowell, Massachusetts, is a thirty minute drive from Walden Pond. He spent much of his youth admiring the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman. Biographer Ellis Amburn writes, "Kerouac was keenly aware of the grand literary tradition of his native New England…Kerouac related to Emerson's mysticism, Thoreau's individualism" (Amburn 27). In 1955, Kerouac wrote to Allen Ginsburg that Dickinson and Thoreau were two of his three favorite authors (Amburn 27). He also expressed a deep affinity for Walt Whitman. "O Captain! My Captain!" was one of his favorite poems from his youth (Amburn 21, 51). Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman composed the foundation of his literary experience and helped form his worldview, as did his Catholic faith. Kerouac also spent his youth in church graduating from St. Joseph's Parochial. He served as an altar boy and was once preparing for the priesthood. He vowed to be "a defender of the Catholic faith" at a young age. Amburn writes, "[t]he sonorous language of the Catholic liturgy…gave him his first taste of great writing" (Amburn 51). There must be no doubt that transcendentalism and Catholicism echo throughout Kerouac's work, as Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman all inspired Kerouac's view of American individuality.

Andrew Madigan explains this inspiration in terms of a countersystem, which explains Kerouac's assertion of the jazz star as an emerging ideal American individual. Madigan argues that Kerouac uses his works to create a community among the characters in which "dominant social ideals, and modern nothingness, are replaced with their own values, beliefs and practices" (Madigan 203). Kerouac's countersystem is not a utopia, but merely an alternative way of living. This countersystem identifies the societal problems at the time and offers a solution. Madigan does this by explaining Romantic and Buddhist ideas present in Kerouac's fiction, as Kerouac faced many issues similar to those of the romantics and transcendentalists. Madigan states,

"Kerouac, then, developed ideas similar to their nineteenth-century counterparts because of commercial and historical similarities, which gives further credence to the argument that economics, not ideas, shapes artistic production" (Madigan 211). He then contrasts Kerouac's desire to experience communities across the country with his desire to be secluded and left alone in the wilderness of the northeast, which is a conflict in transcendentalist literature. This contradiction is, for Madigan, an essential aspect of the countersystem. He calls this type of countersystem "new rugged individualism". The new rugged individual "is a premodern character in a postmodern society. He has more in common with Huck Finn, Hester Prynne and Captain Ahab than with the Stranger, Jack [sic] Barnes or the Underground Man" (Madigan 212)[3]. Kerouac repurposes transcendentalist ideas to exactly define his ideal American individual.

Emerson's "Self-Reliance" identifies the self-authenticity and independence present in Kerouac's ideal individual. Emerson writes, "[t]he virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion" (Emerson 886). Emerson, who is writing to establish a tradition of American philosophy, exhorts his fellow Americans to remain true to themselves no matter the circumstances. He writes, "[n]othing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of your principles" (Emerson 901). What Emerson sees as quintessentially American is perseverance of independence. The entire essay is an exhortation to remain authentic. He complicates practicality when he states, "the objection to conforming to usages that have become dead to you is that it scatters your force" (Emerson 888). This questions the practicality of tradition. How can a people value a tradition that no longer works? The answer is to "do your work, and you shall reinforce yourself" (Emerson 888). For Emerson, doing the duties at hand, and nothing more, cultivates oneself. Note that this does not imply thinking.

Emerson is not exhorting Americans to contemplate the intricacies of life, but to simply act. That is all. Do without thinking.

Kerouac takes a similar view through Sal. Sal writes that "the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn" (Kerouac 5-6). This comes just after meeting Dean, that "western kinsman of the sun" (Kerouac 8). Sal's ideal American individual is someone who simply acts without thinking. He never says a boring thing because he is true to himself, always saying what he knows to be true. This extends beyond Dean. It is Sal's view of the jazz musician, too. Sal observes, "[t]he behatted tenorman was blowing at the peak of a wonderfully satisfactory free idea…blasted along to the rolling crash of butt-scarred drums hammered by a big brutal Negro with a bullneck who didn't give a damn about anything but punishing his busted tubs, crash, rattle-ti-boom, crash" (Kerouac 197). Sal notes that these jazz musicians are acting as individuals part of a larger collective. He does not describe them as a collective unit, but as separate individuals. He also notes each individual's will to act only in the moment. Sal describes how these characters act without thinking. The saxophonist is playing a "free idea", an idea true of himself. The drummer's only present objectives are to play with true and visceral emotional intensity and to deliver on his responsibility to contribute to something bigger than himself. These jazz musicians embody that Emeronian tenet of acting out of self-reliance.

Kerouac situates Emerson's self-reliance in a collectivist setting by demonstrating the band members' reliance on one another. Each musician in the band is responsible for his own portion. The entire band suffers if one single member fails to deliver his portion. This, in turn, forces other band members to account for one member's failure and adds a responsibility that

was not theirs in the first place. Additionally, one member's failure to deliver his designated responsibility puts the entire band at risk of failing the audience. The audience has come to the show to see a collective group of craftsmen perform a perfected craft. The band surely recognizes this assumption by stepping on stage. Acting in this manner presents these jazz musicians as non-conformists in Emersonian terms. This illustrates Kerouac's countersystem. Jazz was still alternative and underground at this time. Through Sal, Kerouac underscores admiration of the jazz musician's virtuosity. Sal describes these musicians as being on a bandstand and "blowing over people's heads" (Kerouac 197). These musicians are physically higher than those in the audience. Sal writes, "[h]oly flowers floating in the air, were all these tired faces in the dawn of Jazz America" (Kerouac 204). These sentiments suggest that Sal is asserting the jazz musician as an emerging ideal in underground culture.

While Emerson explains how to act truly, Thoreau explains why to act truly. Thoreau's "Resistance to Civil Government" inspires Kerouac to give power to the individual so that he may simply act without thinking. He writes, "[t]he character inherent in the American people has done all that has been accomplished; and it would have done somewhat more, if the government had not sometime got in its way" (Thoreau 1171). He goes on to state that "we should be men first, and subjects afterward" (Thoreau 1171). He specifically points to dissenting individuals when he states"[t]here is but little virtue in the action of masses of men" (Thoreau 1174). The individual should separate action from principle because "it divides the individual, separating the diabolical in him from the divine" (Thoreau 1176). Thoreau exhorts Americans to act as individuals because the individual has the power. Individual Americans, not other states, compromise the government. For better or worse, the nation's accomplishments belong not to the government itself but simply to Americans. This is why Thoreau values individualism over the

collective. When the collective has grown rotten, the individual can draw back from it while retaining a pure character.

Kerouac does just this with *On the Road.* He draws back from a society he does not want to associate with to create his countersystem. He does not like the collective he associates with so he uses the individual to create an alternative collective. The jazz musician's ascribed characteristics comprise the virtues of Kerouac's countersystem. Kerouac's countersystem celebrates and encourages individuality. No characters in the novel exhibit individuality more clearly than the jazz musicians. Kerouac presents the jazz musician as an individual first and as a band member second. Sal describes the prominent contemporaneous jazz musicians as though he is listing kings' ancestry. He writes that the up-and-coming jazz musicians were "the children of great bop innovators," who played with "elicited birdlike phrases and architectural Miles Davis logics." Sal begins his documentation of kingship with Louis Armstrong. He then mentions Roy Eldridge, describing him as "vigorous and virile". Next he mentions Charlie Parker, applauding Parker's relentless dedication to craft and appreciation for jazz history. Lester Young is "saintly." Sal describes these men as "the children of the American bop night" (Kerouac 241). Sal points to the jazz musician as an emerging ideal American individual when he writes, ""[h]oly flowers floating in the air, were all these tired faces in the dawn of Jazz America" (Kerouac 204). Kerouac identifies jazz America as an emerging reality and specifically highlights the virtuosity of the individual jazz musician. The adjectives "virile", "vigorous", and "saintly" all directly align the transcendentalist ideals found in Emerson and Thoreau. In Kerouac's eyes, this emerging "Jazz America" was heir to the throne of transcendentalist American individualism.

Walt Whitman inspired the direction and nature of Kerouac's countersystem. Whitman's poem "Pioneers! O Pioneers!" exhorts westward pioneers to hold fast in the face of gruesome

living. Pioneering was a hard, ugly life. In this poem, Whitman is not romanticizing the beauty of the open west, but celebrating the perseverance of the youthful spirit which cultivated it. The poem features two themes which Kerouac features in his countersystem: action and moving west. Whitman writes, "O you youths, Western youths,/So impatient, full of action, full of manly pride and friendship,/Plain I see you Western youths, see you tramping with the foremost" (Whitman 288). Here, Whitman exhorts the pioneers to remain steadfast in their mission to go west. For Whitman, spiritual pursuit ought to concern itself with action above all. These "western youths" will not survive famine and hard weather by thinking. They will only survive by their own will to power. Whitman writes to the pioneer, "[a]ll the pulses of the world, /Falling in they beat for us, with the Western movement beat" (Whitman 290). Pulses and beats call to mind forward propulsion. Beat requires action. It is the beat that moves the song forward in time just as the heart's beat keeps the body alive.

This is the same beat found in *On the Road.* The language of the poem mirrors the novel itself. Dean is that "western kinsman of the sun" (Kerouac 8). Sal and his friends travel out west in search of spiritual nourishment only to be confronted with the harsh reality of forging a new life an a new land. Sal writes, "[a]s we crossed the Colorado-Utah border I saw God in the sky in the form of huge gold sunburning clouds above the desert that seemed to point a finger at me and say, 'Pass here and go on, you're on the road to heaven.'" (Kerouac 181). He continues, "[d]own in Denver, all I ever did was die," (Kerouac 181). Through Sal, Kerouac highlights the difficulties of spiritual pursuits. Sal focuses on his immediate senses when relating matters of the spirit. Sal experiences spirituality through these immediate senses. The serene landscapes and soundscapes of the novel are the objects of his spiritual fixation. Sensory experience is the key that unlocks the world of spiritual experience described in the novel. He seeks for wisdom

through immediate sensory observation, not through intellectual contemplation. Nowhere is this clearer than in Sal's experiences at jazz shows. Sal concerns himself with how the jazz shows made him feel, how the musician's actions moved him.

Whitman also set precedent for Kerouac to experiment. Whitman is the father of American poetry and free-verse is his American invention. Like Kerouac, Whitman's contemporaries rejected him for his experimentation. Emerson was one of a select few who approved of Whitman's work. Perhaps Ginsberg was Kerouac's Emerson. Emerson called *Leaves of Grass* "the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed" (Whitman 737). Kerouac's stream-of-consciousness functions similarly. It serves as a parallel to Whitman's free-verse. Each served to meet a common need–American identity. Emerson called for an American bard who could establish American literary tradition. He believed that an absent literary tradition prevented cultural development in America. Whitman was the bard who answered his call. In his essay "The Poet", Emerson writes of America, "[w]e have yet had no genius in America, with tyrannous eye, which knew the value of our incomparable materials, and saw" (Emerson). He continues, "[y]et America is a poem in our eyes; its ample geography dazzles the imagination, and it will not wait long for metres" (Emerson). Here, Emerson lists two requirements for America's literary tradition. It must be distinct from other nations and it must realize the potential of the nation's geographic features. Whitman created a distinctly American form of poetry, free-verse, and concerned a great deal of his work with America's geographic features. Kerouac is writing in this tradition.

Connecticut's Noah Webster, America's original linguist, laid the foundation for Whitman's and Kerouac's linguistic experimentation. Born in 1758, Webster fought in the American Revolution and spent much of his academic career advocating for distinct American

traditions. He identified language as the single most important aspect when establishing a national identity. Webster argued that Americans ought to establish a variety of English distinct from the English variety. He writes, "[t]his country is independent in government; but totally dependent in manners, which are the basis of government" (qtd. in Bynack 104). Webster believed that the creation of American identity through language was the next step in the American Revolution. A common tongue would create order and cohesiveness in society, which Webster believed was the basis for rule. Webster derived this view from the proto-romantic Germans, such as Johann David Michaelis. Webster's nationalistic approach to language is a continuation of the same German approach that "reflected Germany's continuing struggle during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to achieve political unity and cultural self-consciousness as a unified nation" (Bynack 105). The transcendentalists addressed his concerns. Whitman defined the usage of American English and established its use in a literary context. He also asserted geographical landscape as the prime object of American literature. This is the literary tradition to which Kerouac belongs.

Each literary movement is a rejection of or reaction to a previous movement. Kerouac clearly does not reject the transcendentalist movement. He qualifies it. As Cunnell writes, "Kerouac's clattering typewriter is folded in with Jackson Pollock's furious brushstrokes and Charlie Parker's escalating and spiraling alto saxophone choruses in a trinity representing the breakthrough of a new postwar counterculture seemingly built on sweat, immediacy, and instinct, rather than apprenticeship, craft, and daring practice" (Cunnell 2). With *On the Road,* Kerouac takes the basic transcendentalist concerns and perspectives and applies them to his own age. Like Whitman cataloging American landscapes in his free-verse, Kerouac surveys the geographic and sonic landscapes of America and reports his experiences in a distinctly American form,

stream-of-consciousness. His form and content are both derivatives of the transcendentalist tradition. *On the Road* is partly a lamentation of a past American culture, a call back to a time when national identity seemed less fragmented. He identifies the jazz musician as an emerging American ideal individual who embodies the transcendentalist virtues of self-reliance and civil disobedience.

Americana Restored

Kerouac synthesizes music and language to experiment with literary form. This experimentation advances American culture by identifying the emerging ideal individual in an unsure America. The connection between music and language allows the novel to function in this manner. There are three main approaches to understanding this connection: that language succeeded the ability to make music, that music succeeded the ability to speak, and that music and language arose from the same proto-faculty. There are several ethnomusicologists and neuroscientists who support the latter[4]. Also, the latter is most apt to explain Kerouac's synthesis of the two. Music and language share many organizational characteristics when it comes to human perception of sound structures. Marc Jeanin writes, "both systems are made of coded messages belonging to a linear dimension, composed of identifiable units and organized according to typical hierarchical principles (Jeanin 7-8). Levman argues that primal language "was therefore a form of music/speech which they developed to help navigate in the environment and increase chances of survival" (Levman 150). Nadel raises a similar notion. He asserts the possibility that the two were originally undifferentiated, that there was no original distinction between music and language. Nadel calls it "the creative synthesis of the will to expression and the organization of expression" (Nadel 546). This describes Kerouac's use of stream-of-consciousness in *On the Road*. His linguistic form is musical and rhythmic in nature[6].

His stream-of-consciousness mimics the jazz musician's improvisation. Kerouac famously typed this story on one long scroll over the course of just twenty days. He never went back and edited anything nor did he place chapter breaks anywhere until publishers required him to. Only what he wrote in the moment is what made it into the novel. This directly mimics a jazz musician's improvisation. Kerouac explained that "[j]azz and bop, in the sense of a, say, a tenor man drawing a breath and blowing a phrase on his saxophone, till he runs out of breath, and when he does, his sentence, his statement's been made….that's how I therefore separate my sentences, as breath separations of the mind" (qtd. in Malcolm 90-91). Kerouac's prose in *On the Road* clearly emulates the jazz improvisation. Any substantive passage from the novel will prove this to be the case. Malcolm writes, "Kerouac's conception of improvisation relies more on material support than it does on a musical vocabulary. Breathing punctuates his sentences, and the primary structure that controls his spontaneity is the physical dimensions of his writing surface" (Malcolm 91). The pattern of the journey serves as the structure and "physical dimensions" of *On the Road*. Like the jazz musician playing variations on a theme, Kerouac writes variations of his journeys. They are not identical but they follow the same pattern. His prose, like his journeys, have a pattern yet none are the same. There is recognizable rhythm and phrasing in his prose that changes slightly throughout the novel. Kerouac mimics jazz improvisation in his prose to show admiration for the jazz musician. The jazz musician plays without thinking first. Kerouac writes without thinking first. This emulation is the foundation for understanding his countersystem's forward-moving direction.

Kerouac understood that the beauty of jazz lies not in the final product but in the moment of expression, that singular point in time when one band is playing one song . He emphasizes Sal's sensory experience in the moment of expression because jazz, by nature, is best appreciated

in the moment of expression Gioia writes, "[t]he jazz performance, perhaps more than any other kind of artistic event, allows the audience to confront the creative act. The opportunity to watch brilliant musical minds try to create something *ex nihilo* is obviously what draws the audience to the art form" (Gioia 105). This is the exact same form of expression Kerouac tries to emulate in his stream-of-consciousness. He does not emphasize the cohesive totality of his work. Rather, he emphasizes the experience of each individual sentence, each individual thought. Gioia continues, "[t]hese creations are judged accordingly: not by comparison with some Platonic ideal of perfection but by comparison with what other musicians can do under similar conditions" (Gioia 105). In Kerouac's case, the comparative "other musicians" both his contemporaries and the transcendentalists who he calls back to, such as Whitman with his free-verse. Through *On the Road,* Kerouac creates a writer-reader relationship similar to that of the jazz musician and his audience. Kerouac allows the reader to experience art the way he himself, and Sal, experienced it. For Sal, personal experience is the ultimate teacher. He writes, "my whole road experience began, and the things that were to come are too fantastic not to tell" (Kerouac 7). Sal's emphasis on learning through experience explains his emphasis on expressing his sensory experience at jazz shows. He often follows his experience at a jazz show, or with a particular jazz piece, with something he learned from the experience, be it spiritual or physical (Kerouac 125, 127, 140, 157, 193, 197, 204). This creation is both a reflection of mid-twentieth century American society and a cry for the continuation of that innovative American spirit.

Carl Jung explains this contemporary spiritual landscape well in "The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man". Written in 1928, Jung uses the essay to diagnose the spiritual plague that haunted men in the twentieth century. To Jung, the modern man is "found among those who call themselves old-fashioned" (Jung 76). Jung compares modern life to medieval life. Of the

medieval man, he writes, "[f]or him the earth was externally fixed and at a rest in the centre of the universe…Men were all children of God under the loving care of the Most High…Such a life no longer seems real to us, even in our dreams. Science has long ago torn this lovely veil to shreds" (Jung 81). Of modern man, he writes, "[he] has lost all the metaphysical certainties of his medieval brother, and set up in their place the ideals of material security, general welfare and humanitarianism" (Jung 81). Science and the growing absence of faith cause the modern man to become skeptical of the masses. To modern man, science has caused "what was once a sheltering haven" to "become a cesspool" (Jung 82). This skepticism "has chilled his enthusiasm for politics and world-reform; more than that, it is the worst possible basis for a smooth flow of psychic energies into the outer world" (Jung 81). Postwar American society bred men like this. Men in the war and spectating civilians alike witnessed the depravities created by scientific inventions, like the atomic bomb. This created a schism between faith and science. People began doubting religion, wondering why God would allow such atrocities to occur and why political and military leaders would be willing to go as far as they did to destroy their perceived enemies. Sal's disillusionment reflects the sentiments of Jung's modern man, as he becomes keenly aware and skeptic of the "politics and world-reform" of postwar America. Cities were growing as factories used for war production were being repurposed for the world market. These factories needed workers on the floor producing and workers in the office completing managerial tasks. This gave rise to a new American middle-class

Karl Lowith underscores the great decision many men faced during this period in his 1948 assessment of Heidegger and existentialism. Most of the article is historical context, but Lowith makes a shrewd comment towards the end concerning the choice man has. He writes, "one has only the choice of understanding the world and man's place in it either as an immutable

natural order - that is, with the eyes of Greek contemplation - or as divine creation - that is, with the eyes of Jewish and Christian faith' (Lowith 368). For Lowith, "[t]he one is revealed and intelligible only to faith; the other, too, is revealed, though not by historical revelation but in and by nature itself to the nature of man" (Lowith 369). The problem for Jung's modern man, as Lowith explains, is choosing how to understand the world. The greatest danger comes in refusing to choose, which is a choice itself. Refusing this either/or created a world of possibilities outside of the allowed options. This choice and its consequences is new to Western society, and was even newer to Kerouac. What plagued Kerouac's time, as Jung explained, was the unsettlement of faith by science. This created disharmony between the two. The two were incompatible in mainstream discourse. Individuals had to pick a side to participate in mainstream discourse. Attempts to reconcile the two created even more disharmony. People stuck in the middle lived with little direction. Those who chose a side had to contend with the anxiety of choosing the wrong side. This contention was again the product of the unsettlement of faith by science. This is the very dilemma Sal found himself in. His personal convictions were in conflict with common postwar doubt concerning the political and religious institutions that worked for centuries. He also refused to follow the given path of a decent-paying, managerial job with good benefits. As Lowith states, "[w]e cannot choose not to be modern, if it is true that modernity has, since Descartes, rested on the choice of a standpoint and viewpoint" (Lowith 369). In this sense, Sal is not modern. He is, instead, Jung's "old-fashioned" man.

This is the decision Sal refuses, and this refusal causes him to recognize the jazz musician as the emerging ideal American individual. He writes of his new beat friends, "[t]hey were like the man with the dungeon stone and the gloom, rising from the underground, the sordid hipsters of America, a new beat generation that I was slowly joining" (Kerouac 54). Sal refused to stay

and fall victim to the false dichotomy Lowith articulates. Realizing he could refuse this dichotomy, as Sal notes, opened a new pallet of experiences to be had. He writes, “I realized these were all the snapshots which our children would look at someday with wonder, thinking their parents had lived smooth, well-ordered lives and got up in the morning to walk proudly on the sidewalks of life, never dreaming the raggedy madness and riot of our actual lives, our actual night, the hell of it, the senseless emptiness” (Kerouac 253). Here, Sal becomes disillusioned with the presented reality. The industrialized American economy and the rise of the American middle class presented the illusion that the financial comfort of a decent-paying job with good benefits would dissolve disharmony in other aspects of life. This is part of the “politics and world-reform” Jung articulates. Sal continues to look forward in life, to always progress. Despite disillusionment, Sal maintains a healthy dose of optimism about the plethora of possibilities in the future. He writes, “[b]ut why think about that when all the golden lands ahead of you and all kinds of unforeseen events wait lurking to surprise you and make you glad you're alive to see?” (Kerouac 135). Additionally, he questions, “[w]hat is that feeling when you’re driving away from people and they recede on the plain till you see their specks dispersing?” (Kerouac 156). Literally and metaphorically, Sal “was halfway across America, at the dividing line between the East of my youth and the West of my future” (Kerouac 15). Sal follows the path of the sun to its end, illustrating his disillusion-induced optimism. He looks forward to a future outside of the system created by “politics and world-reform”. Kerouac’s countersystem is a reaction to this system, seeking to establish a new spiritual landscape.

Kerouac’s fictional countersystem also mirrors the jazz counterculture of the early to mid twentieth century. Disenfranchisement and segregation in the south had driven many black people north. St. Louis, Chicago, and Harlem were popular destinations for them, each for their

own reasons. These cities became centers for black culture. White culture had already existed in these cities, too. They left the land they had lived on for decades for different lands and cities northward. The individuals left the old collective for a new collective. Migrants from the south often went as far to disavow their southern culture for approval of northern natives, black and white. Consequently, black and white culture fused. Ted Gioia writes of the conflicts this fusion created, focusing primarily on Harlem and its renaissance. He writes, "Harlem in the late 1920s was a society precariously balanced between two extremes" (Gioia 85). Towards one extreme lied the culture of high art and "intellectual current" (Gioia 85). Towards the other extreme, Gioia writes, lied "harsh economics, low salaries, and looming rent payments" (Gioia 85). Gioia argues that this torn Harlem primed culture for a booming underground of jazz. Lower-class blacks living in Harlem organized rent parties where jazz musicians would come to play. The money would help pay for the entertainers' rent. Middle and upper class black people, who were typically natives of Harlem, looked down upon lower class black migrants. This created an underground culture in which "[t]he piano was often the battleground" (Gioia 87)[5] .

Much of America was in a state of disillusionment in the years succeeding World War 2. Society was rapidly changing at the advancements of science. More Americans were internally migrating to urbanizing cities, hoping that the grass would be greener. Others, like Kerouac, grew weary from the mass migration and the unprecedented faith in science and decided to journey westward, escaping the pressure cookers that were cities. This is the situation in which Kerouac observes the jazz musician as an emerging ideal individual. Most jazz musicians playing in local clubs had little to no money and were playing for their livelihood. Their sheer virtuosity, relentlessness, and competitiveness in the face of perpetual hardship impressed Kerouac. He also admired their embodiment of Emerson's principle of self-reliance and

Thoreau's principle of civil disobedience. The main expectation for internal migrants was that they were moving to find a new job. Like Sal, jazz musicians purposefully declined this expectation, and, in the process, created the underground artistic scene described by Gioia.

Required Revisions

Sal, and Kerouac by extension, became disillusioned in the same sense the jazz musician had. Neither Sal nor the jazz musician agreed to the terms given to them by the previous generation or those in positions of power. They wanted a different life than the one proposed to them and disagreed with their respective societies' structure. Creating a new countersystem was the answer to their remedies. Kerouac looked backwards upon the bedrock of American literature, which had its origins not far from his hometown. He rebranded transcendentalist values to create an underground society that contrasted mainstream American culture. Emerson's self-reliance and Thoreau's civil disobedience are on full display in the novel, though they look slightly different. Whitman's experimentation with American English inspired Kerouac to follow suit. Kerouac's New England origins and days spent reading the transcendentalists influenced the creation of this countersystem. On one hand, *On the Road* is a reflection upon the Americana that Kerouac grew up with and loved, a lamentation of virtues that seemed lost. On the other hand, it is a restoration of these same virtues, infusing contemporaneous American culture with an alternative way of life that reflected those virtues. Jazz musicians in early 20th century Harlem looked backwards upon the culture of jazz to create their countersystem. They pulled from a rich, decades long, cultural tradition to create a new, underground society that represented their values and beliefs.

These two creations merge in *On the Road*. Kerouac depicts the jazz countersystem within his countersystem. The two systems agree with one another because the values of the jazz

musician's countersystem aligns with those of Kerouac's countersystem. Kerouac asserts the jazz star as an embodiment of those transcendentalist virtues. The jazz star present in *On the Road* is both self-reliant and civically disobedient. Kerouac accomplishes this presentation by emulating the jazz star's way. His prose is an experimentation in American English that parallels that of the jazz star's solo. It is free-flowing and spontaneous yet ascribes to a theme and rhythm that holds the narrative together, that theme being the exploration of Americana. This emulation enhances Kerouac's appraisal of the jazz star because it proves the jazz star's artistic methods are applicable across artistic endeavors. The merging of these two creations in the jazz star demonstrated Kerouac's approval of the jazz star as an emerging ideal American individual. The jazz musician represented Kerouac's rebranded transcendentalist values. For this reason, he was Kerouac's emerging ideal American individual who presented timeless virtues with a new look, a look that contrasted the preferred look of the masses.

Notes

1. See Eric Rauchway's *Blessed Among Nations,* Glenda Eliz Gilmore's *Who Were the Progressives*, and Lara Vapnek's *Elizabeth Gurley Flynn: Modern American Revolutionary* for information concerning globalization and the rise of communism in early twentieth century United States.
2. Lisi Krall's "Thomas Jefferson's Agrarian Vision and the Changing Nature of Property" and Lee Ward's *The Politics of Liberty in England and Revolutionary America* will clarify this perspective.
3. The Stranger from Albert Camus's *The Stranger*, Jake Barnes from Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, and the Underground Man from Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground.*
4. Jeanin, Levman, and Nadel all reference the historiography of this position, documenting the progression of this assertion over time. Jean-Jacque Rousseau seems to be one of the earliest to set the notion forth.
5. Rauchway's *Blessed Among Nations* and Gilmore's *Who Were the Progressives* deal with internal migration in the early twentieth century.
6. A reading of the novel, and other works by Kerouac, will make this clear. Kerouac often read his work over jazz music. Videos of these readings are available on YouTube and elsewhere.

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