

Discovery of life in Jack Kerouac's Novels

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Abstract

The Literature of the Beat Generation was the driving force behind its success in American society. The writers, especially Jack Kerouac captured the real tone and landscape of America and adopted a unique artistic style that best reflected the American cultures through their writings and expressions. Kerouac often focuses on writings about his personal experiences through the newly formulated technique called spontaneous prose. The passages had all the dimensions of life with every image and every memory put down in words. This wild form of writing was "a free association technique" (Charter xxv), which he referred to as spontaneous prose. He made a close study of all the friends he meets on the journey of life, among whom Neal Cassady was the man he dealt much upon in his novels. Cassady's metaphysical study was in close relationship to the general America.

Key words: *Jack Kerouac's Novels, unique artistic style, spontaneous prose*

I. Introduction

This paper highlights the numerous instances where Kerouac finds his influences in adopting his writing technique, 'spontaneous prose'. The Quebec critic Maurice Poteet has argued that Kerouac's heroic efforts to break free of the influence of Thomas Wolfe in his search for his own language and his own technique of spontaneous prose was away to deal with his bilingualism- the riddle of how to assimilate his first and most spontaneous language, joul into a colloquial American prose style (Charters XXV). The technique reflects the cultural set of values which pins hopes upon the individual to come up with some new change in society. This created a literary and social movement which meant to change, evolve and produce more poets, activists and teachers. The writers found refuge with the intelligent beat culture who wanted to find a better life. In the course of their literary pursuit, they neglected their families and partners. The Beat movement was founded by Jack Kerouac who claimed that the name came from 'beatific' to indicate their search for spiritual peace. The co-founders of the movement included poet Allen Ginsberg and novelist Williams Burroughs who started in New York and moved to San Francisco to include more poets like Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Gregory Corso and Richard Brautigan among many other writers and artists. The movement also influenced later figures like novelist Ken Kesey, journalist Hunter S. Thompson and poet, playwright Leroi Jones. The pop figures like Bob Dylan and the Beatles also joined them.

In Literature, Kerouac encouraged to have a free mind adopting spontaneous prose and rejecting the old formal, structured approach in favour of an unpolished style by seeking enlightenment in an array of words that capture the present moment without any past or future. Even famous authors like Norman Mailer adopted Kerouac's free form syntax and other modern culture after the publication of Kerouac's, *On the Road*.

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Kerouac's writing centered around the idea of breath, the breath and timing which achieves emotional and technical harmony borrowed from jazz and Buddhist meditation. In writing Kerouac would not use a full stop instead he would much rather use a long dash that he felt gave his writings a sense of connectedness. The abundant use of dashes made his works sound as if they had a unique rhythm, often influenced by jazz music. Kerouac dismissed the traditional use of punctuation and sentence structure which he believed would constrict his thoughts and hence the inner consciousness to write what he felt would be clearly defined in his writings. *In the Essentials of Writing Prose*, Kerouac outlines a series of components that are most important when writing spontaneous prose and discusses the various techniques which are demonstrated throughout on how to write in spontaneous prose. Kerouac urges the writer to have a "free deviation (association) of mind into limitless blow-on-subject seas of thought as opposed to bounding oneself to selective expression" (Charters 484). Kerouac stresses the need for recording each and every experience as he always does while travelling with his friends. He goes zooming across the land of America like a restless soul representing his obsession with time and writing spontaneously. The spontaneous prose according to him has, "no periods separating sentence - structures already arbitrarily riddled by false colons and timid usually needless commas – but the vigorous space dash separating rhetorical breathing (as jazz musician drawing breath between out blown phrases) – 'measured pauses which are essentials of our speech' – divisions of the sound we hear – time and how to note it down" (Charters 484).

Jack Kerouac always believes that commas and semi-colons will destroy the natural rhythm of the writer's thinking. He emphasises that the writer's creative thought will subconsciously communicate the message without any hindrance to the reader. He states, "... satisfy yourself first, then the reader cannot fail to receive telepathic shock and meaning – excitement by same laws operating in his own human mind" (Charters 484). Kerouac wanted the subconscious mind to convey ideas which is undisturbed by grammar and punctuations. Kerouac recorded his every thought and ideas and instructs the writers in *Belief and Technique of Modern Prose* to "compose wild undisciplined, pure – coming in from under, crazier the better and to work from pithy middle –eye out, swimming in language sea" (Charters 483).

Jack Kerouac also writes in *Essentials of Spontaneous Prose* about the need to exclude revisions and resist temptations of selectivity. Kerouac's spontaneous prose flows across the pages of *The Subterraneans*. As Leo Percepied feels the love of Mardou after their separation,

You see a vision of the face of the woman who is your mother who loves you so much she has supported you and protected you for years, you a bum a drunkard – never complained a jot – because she knows that in your present state you can't go out in the world and make a livingdeep in the dark pit of night under the stars of the world you are lost, poor, no one cares, and now you threw a little woman's love because you wanted another drink with a rowdy fiend from the other side of your insanity. (88)

John Stephen Larose examines Proust, the artist in his dissertation *Memory, Time and Identity in the Novels of William Faulkner and Marcel Proust* and puts his observation in the following words:

Proust regales his passion for description and observation and each time he does this, the novel is revealed to be a fiction and the nature of reality remains forever hidden to him. Nevertheless, Proust's narrator goes to great effort to remember details of his observations. The hero's memories constitute the substance of the novel, and thus the preoccupation of the

reader, but the style of the narration is also highly significant. Proustian syntax has often been criticized for its incessant asides and parenthetical remarks, but his sentences, while often quite long, seldom stray from the strict hierarchy of classical syntax. Even with the “cascading” subordinate clauses referred to by Coindreau; Proust’s phrases are usually grammatically and logically coherent. (30)

Speaking of the strange syntactic qualities of Proust’s language, Julia Kristeva notes that they are uncharacteristic of French and are thought to be closer to Latin, since the various components of Proust’s sentences are separated by unusual distances as in the following:

The Proustian sentence, which is binary yet expansive, incorporates many subordinate clauses that delay the closure of the logical and syntactic totality, either by returning to preceding themes and linguistic items or by developing the themes and items contained in the sentence itself. What is more, Proust’s sentence contains indefinite interlocking parts that make its meaning difficult to discern.... (291)

There is a close connection between the writings of Proust and Kerouac. Jack Kerouac’s words were undisturbed from the mind bringing in the image of the subject and wanted the reader’s attention to the treasures he thought they might otherwise have overlooked and would repeat a written or spoken language until people finally listened to it and would ask them to hear more. As Gerald Nicosia says, “To Jack an artist was someone practiced in finding beauty and he wanted to lend his professional competence to people he cared about. The point was that these perceptions were of too great a value to belong only to himself” (184). Kerouac was interested in the technical aspects of jazz and would sing paying much attention to the meaning of lyrics. Kerouac’s favourite line in the song from Oklahoma music is, “On the sounds of the earth are like music To Jack there were always images attached to words, and he wanted other people to look for them too” (Nicosia 185). Kerouac loved the spontaneity in his writing style and manywriters like Proust as well as Romantic poets, including Wordsworth and Coleridge was writing by free association extensively. Despite such precedents, Kerouac wanted to write something new like his friend Neal Cassady.

Neal was extremely conscious of the inadequacies of language. Not only did his mind’s flow outstrip the train of words he put on paper, so that what he was writing always lagged far behind what he wanted to say at the moment, but he knew as well as any philosopher that words cannot capture the actual tortuosities of thought and feeling (Nicosia 187). Neal wrote and spoke each time with a new idea to bring in fresh thoughts. The peculiar thing about Neal’s method was its humility, he kept apologising for not saying what he meant. Kerouac was grateful to his friend, Neal Cassady for his open-hearted encouragement of his writing and for his help in Denver. Kerouac started on his life journey, “he was no longer Jack Kerouac the mill town athlete, but some new Jack Kerouac, a seeker of America like London and Wolfe but with two World Wars and a sexual revolution complicating his identity” (Nicosia 189). The writer Jack Kerouac wanted to find his true identity as he kept discovering the many truths in life. While on his journey to Nebraska he had reflections of his own state of being.

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