

The style and times of jack kerouac essay



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Jack Kerouac led a crazy and exhilarating life separated from the normal scope of realm of mainstream American life. Still *On the Road* and *The Dharma Bums* remained Kerouac's only profitable successes, not only through these work, but through many others he changed modern American Literature and culture. Kerouac essentially shaped a life-style dedicated to music, art, literature, and poetry. When the " Beat" movement flourished out of his personal management, he became came to loathe it, and ended up living a lonely, desperate life on the end of what was once a movement he had valued and loved above everything else.

Through this life journey though, he had created a style of writing that incorporated many elements of all the distinguished writers before his time. He created this style through common and swift language, real identities, and the experiences of everyday life. He began reading excitedly in junior high school. During his English classes he succeeded greatly, unlike his social status. Mark Twain and Jack London were two writers that greatly influenced his early writing.

Kerouac developed his own imaginary world in his mind. He then documented this creation in newspapers. The short articles then led to his first novel entitled, *The Town and the City*, which was a based on a summary of a news article in the *New York Times* (Maher 176). One of the other influences on *The Town and the City* was an impressionistic prose writer named, Thomas Wolfe. He was introduced to Kerouac during his early life in high school by a fellow student.

The Kerouac family could not afford to send Jack to college so a local priest recommended that he try out for a football scholarship (Clark 32). To his surprise he was offered two, and accepted the one to Columbia University. He spent the first year of school at the college prep school, Horace Mann School for Boys. The prep school though was full of privileged young adults and Jack could not relate to the other kids. Two years of Columbia led him to make a life altering decision in quitting school.

His decision was fueled by the fact that he learned better out of a classroom setting, and after having arguing with the football coach he quit the team and lost his scholarship. After leaving college he joined the navy, but not long after joining he realized just how demoralizing and disciplined the military was. Jack was not used to this type of treatment so he attempted to appear psychologically unstable. After several failed attempts to appear crazy he finally convinced a doctor to release him on the grounds that he was incapable of submitting to military discipline. Afterwards he was given an honorable discharge for “indifferent character” (Dittman 18). After getting home he joined the Merchant Marine, which was much more liberal in their ways than that of the navy.

Four of Kerouac' closest friends were Allen Ginsberg, John Clellon Holmes, Neal Cassidy, and William S. Burroughs. Three of which were authors themselves. He had to balance his friendships and his family because his family greatly disapproved of his friends. During this period Kerouac and Cassidy were making cross-country trips, exploring the American country. These adventures were what inspired his writing of *On the Road*.

Jack and Neal were only on the road for three weeks, but it took him over seven years to write and publish the book (Maher 111). It was during these road trips that Kerouac discovered several literary differences that would change the way the American Novel was written. The most important insight he had on developing his style was in establishing sketching style of writing. This style was based on the fast tempo music of Bebop, and Jack interpreted it into his novels by writing on the spot. Kerouac later described this sketching style of writing as “ the greatest moment of discovering his soul” (Clark 102).

He would incorporate this style by either writing on the spot or from memory. This took form in his novels in the development of diverse levels of reality and dreams, extraordinary and common feats, and poetry and narrative writing. This was the only way Kerouac knew how to write. The year after Jack Kerouac published *On the Road* he become increasingly strapped for money, so Neal Cassidy arranged for him to get a job at the Southern Pacific railroad as a brakeman (Dittman 49). It was during the long trips along the railroad that Jack developed his second variation to his style of writing. It can be described as speed writing, and Jack was an expert at it.

His close friend John Clellon Holmes describe Jack as being, “ a superb typist, both in speed and accuracy” (Maher 201). Kerouac would close his eyes and transcribe his thoughts through his fingertips onto the keyboard at great speeds. The loneliness that came from the combination of writing and his railroad job led him to write beautifully in a detached way, quite similar to Dickinson. This can be clearly seen when comparing his early work, *On the Road* with later works like *The Dharma Bums* and *Big Sur*. Kerouac focuses

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much more on his self as the subject matter, rather than being able to escape the loneliness and draw from his surroundings. During the period between his finished writing of *On the Road* and getting it published and into the stores Kerouac finalized his style of writing that was spontaneous.

He also began to descend into the underground culture of New York City, and began using heroin, amphetamines, marijuana, and alcohol excessively.

During on of his Benzedrine induced experiences he wrote the short novel *The Subterranean*. It was about his brief love affair, and finished writing the 111 page short novel in just three days (Dittman 55). In 1957 *On the Road* was released and Jack became instantly notorious among the young culture of America. He also was receiving requests from publishing houses, who wanted to publish many of his previously rejected works. The instant fame he received caused him to go into hiding from physically fearing the public.

Six months after he started to feel threatened by his notoriety he moved to New Point, New York to live with and take care of his mother. He continued to live and care for his mother for ten more years before dying from an internal hemorrhage. Jack Kerouac had a very unique style when he wrote in prose, which had a completely different flare to it. When writing prose he composed his work in a completely spontaneous way, not thinking and rethinking what he was going to put down, but just feeling it and letting it flow from him.

This ability to tell a story was what made him great, and this is also why Jack Kerouac was and still is one of the renowned American writers of his time.