



---

MSU Graduate Theses

---

Spring 2016

## The Need For Neal: The Importance Of Neal Cassady In The Work Of Jack Kerouac

Sydney Anders Ingram

As with any intellectual project, the content and views expressed in this thesis may be considered objectionable by some readers. However, this student-scholar's work has been judged to have academic value by the student's thesis committee members trained in the discipline. The content and views expressed in this thesis are those of the student-scholar and are not endorsed by Missouri State University, its Graduate College, or its employees.

---

Follow this and additional works at: <https://bearworks.missouristate.edu/theses>

 Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

### Recommended Citation

Ingram, Sydney Anders, "The Need For Neal: The Importance Of Neal Cassady In The Work Of Jack Kerouac" (2016). *MSU Graduate Theses*. 2368.

<https://bearworks.missouristate.edu/theses/2368>

This article or document was made available through BearWorks, the institutional repository of Missouri State University. The work contained in it may be protected by copyright and require permission of the copyright holder for reuse or redistribution.

For more information, please contact [BearWorks@library.missouristate.edu](mailto:BearWorks@library.missouristate.edu).

**THE NEED FOR NEAL: THE IMPORTANCE OF NEAL CASSADY IN THE  
WORK OF JACK KEROUAC**

A Masters Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of

Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts, English

By

Sydney Ingram

May 2016

Copyright 2016 by Sydney Anders Ingram

# **THE NEED FOR NEAL: THE IMPORTANCE OF NEAL CASSADY IN THE WORK OF JACK KEROUAC**

English

Missouri State University, May 2016

Master of Arts

Sydney Ingram

## **ABSTRACT**

Neal Cassady has not been given enough credit for his role in the Beat Generation. This paper discusses Cassady's importance on the life and work of Jack Kerouac, especially focusing on his most famous novel, *On the Road*. Cassady lent himself as the hero of *On the Road* and supplied Kerouac with the spontaneous prose style that made him famous. This look at Cassady puts him into the context of the time period in which he lived and in which *On the Road* was written. Cassady is compared to the ideal American male of the day and those traits are used to show the success of his character Dean Moriarty. This paper shows just how important Cassady was in the development of *On the Road* as well as in a new era in American history.

**KEYWORDS:** Neal Cassady, Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*, Beat Generation, America, 1950s

This abstract is approved as to form and content

---

Matthew Calihman Ph.D.  
Chairperson, Advisory Committee  
Missouri State University

**THE NEED FOR NEAL: THE IMPORTANCE OF NEAL CASSADY IN THE  
WORK OF JACK KEROUAC**

By

Sydney Ingram

A Masters Thesis  
Submitted to the Graduate College  
Of Missouri State University  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Arts, English

May 2016

Approved:

---

Matthew Calihman Ph.D.

---

Linda T. Moser Ph.D.

---

Marcus Cafagna

---

Julie Masterson, Ph.D.: Dean, Graduate College

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank the following people for their support during the course of my graduate studies: Matt Calihman, Linda Moser, and Marcus Cafagna as well as my family and Duke Johnson.

I dedicate this thesis to Neal Cassady.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	5
Jack Kerouac, Neal Cassady, and Cold-War America .....	16
Travel Experience Gained by Kerouac after Meeting Cassady .....	33
The Cassady Character in <i>On the Road</i> .....	38
Cassady's Influence on Kerouac's Style.....	44
Conclusion .....	53
Literature Cited .....	55

## INTRODUCTION

I first read *On the Road* not long after my sophomore year in college. I had just gotten back from a long trip abroad that I won't bother to talk about except that it was a wonderful experience and it was the first trip I had ever taken on my own. With this trip began for me a new passion you could call my passion for travel. What book could be better for a young person yearning to travel than Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road*? It tells of a young man's journey across America and his quest to find "it." The descriptions of America, of all the lands and the roads, and the people living in the wake of World War II are breathtaking and inspiring. This novel was fascinating to me because Sal was about my age and he was doing what I wanted to do: travel. I thought the book spoke directly to me; it evoked that desire many young people have to see more than just the town where they grew up. Both Sal and I knew that there was something better out there and the only way to find it was to *go*. But Sal had something I didn't; Sal had Dean Moriarty.

Dean was the hero of *On the Road*. He was the handsome rebel that blew into New York out of the streets of Denver who also wanted to find "it." His character captivated Sal who spends most of the book chasing after his best friend. It was a great story, one that had been a big success upon its release in 1957 and it was still relevant in 2012. For me, at the time naïve to the works and lives of these Beat Generation writers, I thought that was all it was—a story. It was not until I picked up a copy of *On the Road: The Original Scroll* that I found out this book was more real than I could have ever imagined. The scroll was the original manuscript of what would be *On the Road* but it



contained the real names of all Kerouac's friends that he had encountered on his trip.

There was one character that I was surprised to find out was indeed a real person and that was Neal Cassady, the real-life Dean Moriarty.

Immediately, I began to research this man and the Beat movement as a whole. The stories about these writers, primarily Kerouac and poet Allen Ginsberg, seemed too bizarre to be true. But they were. I read with fervor about their lives and the literary works that they had published. I found one person who appeared at crucial moments in both their lives: Neal Cassady. Cassady had befriended Kerouac soon after his father had died and the two became close friends and made their "Road" travels together. Cassady and Ginsberg had a passionate love affair, which sparked in Ginsberg a lifelong love and appreciation for his friend and lover. I concluded there could be no greater influence on these men than Cassady. However, the more biographies I read, the less I felt scholars and biographers saw Cassady in the same way I did.

In most biographies, books, and films, Cassady gets a brief mention. He is attributed with being the basis for Dean and his letters to Kerouac are credited with shaping Kerouac's spontaneous prosaic writing style. Scholars seem to be content with giving just a small amount of credit to Cassady. I decided I needed to look harder and prove that Cassady was much more than a delinquent from Denver who always chose adventure over responsibility and ended up dying alone on a set of railroad tracks in Mexico just before his 42<sup>nd</sup> birthday. So I turned to the scroll to understand just how crucial Cassady was to Kerouac. I read over it and examined his character before looking at what other scholars had said about both Dean and Cassady. I had to find a way to

show Cassady had a bigger role in Kerouac's life than what scholars, biographers, and directors were giving him credit for.

*On the Road* was very successful, not only for Kerouac but for the Beat Generation. It was the novel that brought the views and ideals of this group of men into the public's eye. It had been published by Viking Press, a large and credible publisher, and it got wonderful reviews. This book brought what these men were doing into the popular culture. These men's ideas and writing were no longer teeming below, confined to cold-water flats and New York City cafeterias. This book brought what the Beats revered, a deviation from the status quo as young men scoured the country looking for more than what their parents had given them, and delivered it to the masses. *On the Road* gave America Dean Moriarty, a new American hero.

Much of the book focuses on Dean. Sal is always running after him and the two are going on adventures as they form a bond somewhere beyond friendship and brotherhood. It is in Dean that the book goes beyond a look at America and becomes a story of a new type of American man. What about Dean made his character so appealing? To answer that question, one must look at his real-life counterpart. Cassady's life and personality shaped Dean and left a resounding impact on Kerouac. From the close reading of *On the Road: The Original Scroll*, it is clear that Cassady is the basis for the Dean character—Cassady is the hero of the scroll. Kerouac had said he wrote his stories with the real names and changed them for publication. The fact that he put Cassady in the story is enough to give him the credit for at least being the real-life influence for the published character of Dean. For the purpose of my research, I am giving Cassady the credit for the Dean character, understanding that there is room for

some of Kerouac's artistic license and other inspiration to account for some of the character. Reading about Cassady's life, it is clear that he had the life that would make him extremely appealing to readers who were looking for an adventure that stood outside the status quo. Cassady was unlike many of the men America had seen. During the time when *On the Road* was published, America was in the aftermath of World War II. The country was booming economically and many of the men who had returned from war were establishing the new middle class. They had gone to school on the GI Bill and were now getting high-paying jobs and starting families. McCarthyism was in full force until the mid-1950s and the country was wary of anything that resembled Communism or anything that was not considered patriotic. *On the Road* was released as McCarthyism was receding and Americans were becoming less afraid of the looming threat of being too un-American. Cassady deserves much more credit for his involvement with the beginning of the Beat Generation than scholars give him credit for. He appears in the first successful Beat novel as the hero of the story. His story was introduced to the American public at just the right time. His character was starkly different than the mainstream man of the day as he used his masculinity, his good looks, and his sexuality to get the things other men were going to work for. Cassady's character echoed the much famed cowboys of the American West but he embodied a new type of cowboy, one that used a car instead of a horse. Cassady's success as a character in *On the Road* had much to do with the American culture at the time. Cassady was also the inspiration for Kerouac's new writing style, a style that would make him famous and set his writing apart from the traditional authors of the day. Kerouac's ability to capture the attention of America was because of Cassady as his life was greatly impacted upon their friendship.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

There is not much that is more American than traveling across the country in an automobile. Many people today rent RVs to drive cross country to see America's landmarks such as Mount Rushmore, the Grand Canyon, and Old Faithful. Many people long to go and see Europe, but most Americans feel they want to see their country first. This is not a new phenomenon. People have been traveling across the country for centuries; it is not just for present-day retirees. More importantly, people have been writing about their travels on the roads of America since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ann Brigham has been studying American Road Narratives and seeing why exactly Americans are captivated at seeing their own country. She sees the road trip as the most American activity a person can do, it is an "expression of freedom through the process of incorporating oneself into the country" (Brigham 9). Traveling on the highways represents freedom and liberation, the basis of the founding of America. The government endorsed this kind of travel with the creation of Route 66 and the "See America First" campaign. This mobility is what appeals to travelers because they have the freedom to come and go as they please. Road narratives offer an accessible and personal account of America. Brigham defines road narratives as having "protagonists [who] leave home, cross state lines, and search for America. Often their journeys develop as a change in the scale of identification" (10). These stories bridge the distance between the reader and the road. They are accounts of Americans experiencing their country. The standard American audience reading *On the Road* would have seen the novel as an extension of American patriotism. Broadening Brigham's research, the road narrative has been

around for centuries in English-speaking literature. *Beowulf*, the first English story, is in many ways a road narrative as Beowulf treks to find and defeat Grendel and later a dragon (Anonymous). *The Canterbury Tales* is an even better example of the road narrative because it is the stories told as pilgrims travel to Canterbury (Chaucer).

America had been exposed to road narratives as a form of literature for many years and *On the Road* echoed an already-familiar story line. Part of the novel's success came from Kerouac's nostalgic look at the American country as he traveled by car.

The road is not only for those who are patriotic, but also those who do not exactly fit in with American society. Brigham discusses *On the Road* in her introduction to her book as a way of introducing another type of person who travels the road: the outsider. "Mobility promises to incorporate the outsider," she says, explaining how mobility allows a way for those who do not conform to the current American status quo are allowed into an element of American tradition. The freedom of American travel is patriotic and it allows one to escape from the responsibility that comes with a permanent address. This movement allowed another kind of freedom, the freedom from responsibility while using a socially acceptable mode of transportation. Now there was another way for anyone to see America in a way that was more acceptable than riding empty boxcars. These people were able to live the lifestyle of the rail-riding hobo, but they were now able to do it on their own time and in a vehicle that more and more Americans were welcoming into their garages. *On the Road* would quell the public's curiosity about those who lived that covetable lifestyle, those free from all responsibility that went out on the road and saw what America had to offer.

*On the Road* resonated with the American public after its publication because it created a new kind of character, a new American hero. At the time, the cold war was striking fear into Americans who would not dare to deviate from the “American Dream.” Road narratives after World War II offered a character, a “male protagonist in search of something currently elusive—his country, himself, an authentic truth—in a time of social flux created by a growing consumer culture, the cold war and the atomic age, and racial strife” (Brigham 14). These things that happened in the 1950s created a need for some kind of escape from the daily life of middle-class America, a safe way to deviate from the very strict norm developed and instigated by Joseph McCarthy. Something was missing for many people and Sal and Dean were the ones looking for that piece of America. They saw not only themselves but their country and found a deeper, personal meaning in the road. There was more to life than consumerism and buying a house in the suburbs. This need for tangible things was important to America who was experiencing an economic boom, but road narratives offered the idea that there was something more than a house, a wife, and kids and that the family car could be used in more ways than just going to work and to see grandma and grandpa. Mobility equaled freedom and a way to find oneself outside of what he could buy in the supermarket.

The story of Jack and Neal in *On the Road* walked the line between severely patriotic and extremely rebellious. Brigham says mobility is freedom and freedom is an American right. At a time when more families were affording cars because of a booming economy and a rise in college-educated men who were passing up blue-collar jobs for white-collar jobs, the Sunday drive or the family road trip was a new American past time. This new past time may have been favored because “the private car also seems to isolate

the travelers from the experiences of the road, replacing circulation with insularity...focus[ing] on relations among passengers rather than the encounters with strangers or ‘America’” (Brigham 70). The car isolates the travelers, the middle-class Sunday drivers, from the American road and also creates and reinforces a nuclear family. This Sunday drive, the trip to see family in another state, allows the family to use the road without any sort of worry or fuss. The family car and the nuclear family “are bounded entities that discourage unregulated change” (qtd in Brigham 70). The family road trip is a way of keeping a family together and upholding those values of the middle-class America by reinforcing the family and excluding the outside world. In the middle-class road trip, the family is immune to the outside world. However, other scholars see it differently. Barbara Ehrenreich argues going on the road the way Cassady and Kerouac do creates “two strands of male protest...[one] directed against the white-collar work world [and] against the suburbanized family life that [it] was supposed to support” (qtd in Brigham 71). Taking the car, stealing gas and food, driving recklessly, avoiding responsibility, and most importantly not having a job to support the trip is a strong contrast between the characters of the Beat movement and the idea of a “white-collar work world.” They continue to reject the world they have to live in while simultaneously align to a version of the values of the day. Perhaps these views, of the road trip as being something Americans do as a family, were what allowed *On the Road* to be circulated into American hands. It was Ehrenreich’s idea of the road trip as a symbol of masculinity and rebellion that made *On the Road* stand out as a rejection of the values of the family road trip.

Travel was a big part of Kerouac and Cassady's relationship. Not only did Cassady encourage Kerouac to travel, but Kerouac became famous after writing a book about scrambling across the country after Cassady. Dr. Mary Paniccia Carden, professor of English and Philosophy at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, believes this travel was what really made Kerouac and Cassady's story revolutionary. Her article "Adventures in Auto-Eroticism': Economies of Travelling Masculinity in Autobiographical Texts by Jack Kerouac and Neal Cassady," Carden sees Kerouac and Cassady's adventures "like freedom of movement to the masculine independence and integrity, which they imagine is simultaneously revolutionary and conservative" (2). Carden echoes Brigham's statement that mobility is a way of embracing those who rebelled against the status quo and allowed them to be free from responsibility. They both adhere to the American pastimes by traveling their own country, but also have to abandon other lives and people to do it. In 1950's America, Kerouac and Cassady had the upper hand in society because they were both white and men. However, their lack of jobs and normal families caused them to be seen as outcasts. Their masculinity simultaneously included and excluded them from the norm. Kerouac and Cassady being white males gave them an advantage as they would have had an easier time fitting in to American society if they chose. However, their lack of permanent jobs and nuclear families made them outsiders in their own country. In her research, Carden explains scholars found a link between travel and identity, that travel is associated with "fame, fortune and honor" (qtd in Carden 2). Fame, fortune, and honor are by no means revolutionary terms, but they set the Beats apart. Kerouac and Cassady were living a new American dream that was out of reach and unattainable for the new American middle



class. Carden associates travel to the American identity, when going West was full of adventure and “heavy with promises of new life, progress, and the thrill of escape” (qtd in Carden 3). What Kerouac and Cassady were doing was becoming a new kind of cowboy, an American explorer who was free of commitments and responsibilities in a world where men were going to work and coming home to wives and children. It was a counter culture that had the appeal of the American West, America’s final frontier, and most importantly, masculine freedom. These men’s masculinity is a big part of their appeal. Carden combined masculinity and travel and it gave a deeper understanding to what Brigham touched on in her book. Travel is for men and Kerouac and Cassady epitomized both the patriotism and the rebellion of the road.

The West is a big part of the Kerouac/Cassady relationship. Craig Leavitt’s article “On the Road: Cassady, Kerouac, and Images of Late Western Masculinity” looks at Cassady and his revision of the Western hero. Cassady symbolizes the West, the uncharted land of masculinity and adventure. The West was changing: “like the horse, the six-shooter no longer reigned supreme as phallic projector of western masculine power; the automobile took its place as well...the postwar white male could ‘reconquer’ the West for himself in a car” (Leavitt 214). Cassady had been associated with cars since he was young. He claimed to have stolen 500 cars in his life in Denver before coming to New York City to get a job parking cars at the New Yorker Hotel. He drove the Hudson across the United States multiple times and even tried to end his life in a car. His association with cars only increased his masculinity and power as a white male: “a fast and powerful automobile became the ultimate symbol of manhood in postwar America, especially in the West, where the machine gives man power and dominance over the once

daunting geographical expanses” (Leavitt 214). Cassady’s role as the ideal American male is reinforced by his attraction and association with cars. He is a new American hero of the West. Leavitt sees Cassady as the West and all the freedom that came along with it. Cassady created a new look at the sexuality and masculine freedom and how it fit perfectly into this time of the American middle-class. Cassady is the new sexy American rebel that would echo James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause* (*Rebel Without a Cause*) and even the French hero Jean-Paul Belmondo in *Breathless* (*Breathless or À Bout De Souffle*). This was the new wave of American heartthrobs and Cassady was the prototype of a new generation of rebels.

Much scholarship continues to make a divide between Dean and Cassady. George Mouratidis’ “Into the Heart of Things: Neal Cassady and the Search for the Authentic” was included in the publication of the Original Scroll as one of the selected articles to accompany the 2007 edition. Mouratidis states that the Cassady in *On the Road* was not based on the real person, only a projection of the person Kerouac wanted to be. Although Cassady was mythologized to some degree in the book, it was still the authentic Cassady that Kerouac saw. Kerouac had said, “everything that I wrote was true, because I believed in what I saw” (Burns). Kerouac always believed Cassady was the real Dean and always saw Cassady as a hero. They had become the best of friends, brothers almost, and Kerouac refused to ever see him differently. He was the American West, the final frontier, the American dream. Even when Kerouac heard of Cassady’s death, he refused to believe it because Cassady could never die. He was the hero of *On the Road* and Kerouac himself died thinking Cassady was still alive. Mouratidis thinks “Cassady came to represent a reaffirmation of the life and vital youth whose inevitable

ephemerality Kerouac wished to transcend, a way to challenge and rupture the bondage of Time over the individual” (70). Mouratidis claims that Kerouac put himself into Cassady and used him to capture and reflect everything Kerouac wanted to be. In Mouratidis’ opinion, he was simply an extension of Kerouac’s fascination with the American West and the heroes of the last frontier. Mouratidis sees *On the Road* as a fanaticized account of the kind of America Kerouac wanted to see: “Kerouac’s nostalgia was for an American past he romanticized and mythologized, a pre-war America of the Depression, the Westward expansion, and the Old West, which he imbued with ‘glee,’ ‘honesty,’ ‘spitelessness[sic],’ and ‘wild selfbelieving[sic] individuality’” (73). He credits this to his rather sheltered and boring upbringing in Massachusetts and his wild imagination. Kerouac’s imagination did create new characters. As a child, he created an alter-ego superhero that he would later write about in *Doctor Sax* (*Doctor Sax*). However, Kerouac would not have experienced or written about the American West if it were not for Cassady. Kerouac published his first book, *The Town and the City* (*The Town and the City*), as a story of a family in Massachusetts. His nostalgic view of the West came into his writing after seeing it in person with Cassady. Cassady encouraged him to leave, Cassady influenced his writing style, and Cassady helped Kerouac see much of America.

Cassady, himself, has not said anything about his role in the Beat Generation. He rarely makes an appearance with Kerouac or Cassady after *On the Road* was published. Their lives do intersect many times in their lives, but Cassady’s impact on the Beat Generation, although great, covers only a brief span of the movement. His attempt at writing, his letters, and his short autobiography *The First Third* (*The First Third*) is the

only proof of his literary affiliation with the Beats. His autobiography is only three chapters and spans only the first few years of his childhood. The writings offer no connection to Kerouac's writing as they capture no part of the spirit found in *On the Road*. His writing is not literary and his content seems to focus on the most unimportant aspects of his stories. He goes into great detail about everything, which was in his nature as a speaker and a person to be as detailed as possible. I think that quality of him as a speaker made him so interesting to Kerouac. Cassady gave so much by way of details that Kerouac was able to understand Cassady's background and from that Kerouac could glean what he needed to incorporate into his own writing style. Cassady's letters had a much stronger impact on Kerouac, evident in the "Joan Anderson Letter" ("The Joan Anderdson Letter"). His letters had a stronger resonance to Kerouac's own writing and he was a much better letter writer than he was autobiographer. Kerouac's time listening to Cassady as well as the hundreds of letters the two sent to each other throughout their lives hold the key to Kerouac's new and revolutionary writing style. Scholars rightly associate the "Joan Anderson Letter" with the writing style that Kerouac adopted and adapted as his own. His bop prose set him apart from other writers at the time.

*On the Road* would be Kerouac's most famous book. The novel's was a huge success upon its release in 1957. Unlike his first novel, the book got a wonderful review in the *New York Times*. While his first *New York Times* review by John Brooks was hardly supportive—"a rough diamond of a book," "Mr. Kerouac tends to overwrite," "tend to be overly idyllic in content and wordy, even ungrammatical in presentation" (Brooks)—Gilbert Millstein's opinion of *On the Road* was much more positive. Millstein states, "there are sections of 'On the Road' in which the writing is of a beauty

almost breathtaking” (Millstein). His writing changed dramatically from his first novel and that was due to Cassady. As I will explain later, Cassady’s speech and the way he told stories in long-winded monologues and letters were what inspired Kerouac to write the way he did in *On the Road*. The recently found “Joan Anderson Letter” is one large piece of evidence that supports Kerouac got his writing style from Cassady. Keraouc himself states in the Paris Review, “I got the idea for the spontaneous style of *On the Road* from seeing how good old Neal Cassady wrote his letters to me, all first person, fast, mad, confessional, completely serious, all detailed...The letter, ...was the greatest piece of writing I ever saw, better’n[sic] anybody in America, or at least enough to make Melville, Twain, Dreiser, Wolfe, I dunno[sic] who, spin in their graves ... Neal and I called it, for convenience, the Joan Anderson Letter” (“The Art of Fiction No. 41). Jerry Cimino, curator of the Beat Museum in San Francisco, contests that, “The initial idea for Jack’s decision to write in a confessional style may have come from Goethe or Dostoyevsky, but the true inspiration for Jack’s new spontaneous style of confessional writing came from none other than his good buddy Neal Cassady” (Cimino). The change in style came from Cassady and the first Beat novel was published and promoted and the world has Cassady to thank. Scholars dismiss the extreme influence Cassady had on Kerouac in a crucial time of his life. He came to Kerouac after the death of Kerouac’s father and after Kerouac had failed multiple endeavors he had embarked upon. In Kerouac’s eyes, Cassady saved him and from that grew a huge attachment to Cassady throughout both their lives. If filmmakers give Cassady only a few minutes of discussion in documentaries or represent Cassady without a speaking role in biographical films, Cassady’s influence and importance will continue to go unnoticed. In this paper, I will

start to give the background of Cassady's involvement with Kerouac and show how much he was involved with each successful aspect of Kerouac's life. Over the years, Cassady's name has been seen as a minor character in Beat history to scholars and publishers. Cassady himself was the inspiration for a new generation and possibly the rightful King of the Beats.

## **JACK KEROUAC, NEAL CASSADY, AND COLD-WAR AMERICA**

Kerouac's *On the Road* was a ground breaking book. It was published in 1957 and it was different than other books being read at that time. It is important to understand America at that time in order to realize the impact the book had on the country. After World War II, America consolidated and re-asserted its status as a world power. This time would be known as the "American Century" (Anderson 1) and it was now time for America to lead the world. World War II had been seen as a "good fight"; America had helped saved the world from the Axis powers and now men were returning home as heroes. In that time, most Americans considered their country to be "a beacon of hope, the defender of freedom" (Anderson 2). It was the men who had fought that were these defenders. Those who fought in World War II were seen as heroes. Cassady had wanted to join the army to fight in World War II, but his colorblindness had rejected him from the draft. Instead of admitting his physical ailments to his friends, Cassady would say he was rejected for still wetting the bed or because he admitted to homosexual tendencies (Sandison and Vickers 40). Serving in World War II was seen as a patriotic act and all able-bodied men were expected to enlist. Cassady was not able to go to war and that was one aspect that separated him from the men of his generation. These soldiers highlighted the values of American freedom and success. Once these men returned, they were going to be the protectors of the country and of the family in a quickly expanding middle class. These men were going to school on the GI Bill, and men who came from blue-collar families were now getting white-collar jobs, an opportunity Cassady would not be afforded. The American political and economic systems were changing and a whole new

generation of people would be able to afford homes and property, and many began to have children.

The Baby Boom started after men returned from war. Anderson comments that, “the birthrate had been rather low during the depression and war, but the returning veterans and their new wives quickly reversed the trend....By 1950 there were eight million more children than demographers had predicted” (2). The depression had made it hard to raise children: the stock market crashed leaving many people with little or none of their income, the American economy weakened, and bankrupt companies began to fire their employees. The economy had crashed, and due to the droughts across the Great Plains, there was less food and millions of people had lost their farms and their livelihoods. The New Deal began the comeback of America establishing government agencies that planted trees to anchor soil and purchased land specifically to have land that would not have to produce crops and give the farmland time to recover. The New Deal started to create the jobs that American men needed to get back onto their feet, but this effort to create new jobs and jumpstart the economy was abruptly stopped by the outbreak of World War II. Once again, men were in no position to start families because they were overseas fighting, but once they returned, they made up for the years of declining birthrates. Many jobs had been created by World War II, especially for women and men who were not able to go to war. The American economy began to recover as it produced military equipment and other wartime necessities. When the war ended and the soldiers returned, many of whom would not have had the education or training to acquire white collar jobs, were now being given the chance to go to a university on the GI Bill. This bill allowed those men who had fought in wars to go to school and sometimes



given stipends for room and board as they studied for degrees that would get them the jobs in offices or management. This boom of free education encouraged men who had been drafted an alternative to going back to the jobs they had before the war. Men who had grown up on farms were now given the chance to work in an office and ultimately make more money than they would have if they had gone back to their previous lives. These men were moving to cities and suburbs. The government allotted funds for VA Loans that allowed these men to purchase homes and cars and, along with their white-collar jobs, gave them the financial freedom to have children. Previous generations would have had children in order to work the farm or the land that the family owned. Now children were being born and not expected to work as children since their fathers were making plenty of money to support the family. The suburbs exploded and subdivisions began to pop up seemingly overnight. In the years after World War II and the Korean War, there would be an abundance of homes being built to accommodate the new American family. The New Deal and the economic boost that came from the war, as well as the GI Bill and VA Loans got men back on top of arguably the most powerful country in the world.

This sudden wealth added many things to the home. With an excess of disposable income, we begin to see the things America chose to fill their brand-new homes. The television was one of these brand-new inventions that would bring the family together. The first television sets went on sale in the United States in the late 1940s, with 0.4% of homes owning one in 1948. By 1954, over 50% of homes had a television and over 80% in 1958 (Baughman). James Baughman, professor in the School of Journalism at the University of Wisconsin, Madison states, “no other household technology, not the

telephone or indoor plumbing, had ever spread so rapidly into so many homes. And TV had absorbed evenings that had once been spent reading, listening to the radio, or going to the movies” (Baughman). Television was becoming a fixture in many American homes and was taking control of entertainment in the late 1940s and the 1950s. It became a meeting place for the family and soon, it would be reflecting the family itself.

A definite way to understand a particular time in history is by observing the popular culture. This is particularly easy after the birth of the television because there were many programs that were spreading the culture of the time quickly. Television shows were becoming big business with the increase of television sales. Many popular shows were talk shows such as “The Today Show” which started in 1952 and “The Ed Sullivan Show” from 1948. Later, television began to air scripted shows. Popular shows were “I Love Lucy” and “Gunsmoke,” but the most popular could be “Leave it to Beaver.” “Leave it to Beaver” told the story of the stereotypical post-war American family: June the housewife and mother, Ward the father and breadwinner whose profession was not exactly clear except that he wore a suit (implying he did indeed have one of those white-collar office jobs in a city), there was big brother Wally and, of course, little brother Theodore “Beaver” Cleaver. This show gives an accurate overview of what America felt was their ideal family living in ideal America, establishing and maintaining family and cultural norms. Many people are familiar with the premise, of the good-natured family who worked together and lived in harmony. In a tv.com list of most popular television shows from 1950-1959, “Leave it to Beaver” ranked at number 15 and it was more of a phenomenon than one would expect: “few people know that Leave it to Beaver was the first American television show broadcast behind the Iron Curtain --

perhaps part of the reason for so many references to God, Sunday School, Breaking Bread, etc” (“Most Popular TV Shows for 1950-1959”). This show epitomized the American family and the American ideals of the Cold War Era. It celebrated a middle-class family with two good-looking male children, a handsome father figure that worked all day and made plenty of money, and a perfect, pearl-wearing mother who taught her children to be God-fearing Americans who always learned a lesson and were at the dinner table when their father got home. In the present day, shows like “Leave it to Beaver” are what we look to when one thinks of 1950s America. It’s a reflection of what was considered good and American in terms of early Cold-War America.

Neal Cassady was hardly the picture of American perfection. While Cassady’s history is shrouded in mystery and misinformation, there is a generally accepted history of this man of legend. In David Sandison and Graham Vickers’s biography *Neal Cassady: The Fast Life of a Beat Hero*, published in 2006, they note: “it may seem odd to begin a biography with a correction, but Neal Cassady’s story is one that is shot through with myth and falsehood from the very start” (1). There is not much of Cassady’s early life that is known. All that is certain is that he was born on February 8, 1926. However, the “where” is not quite as certain. Kerouac, in his life-long quest to make Cassady his own personal hero, stated in *On the Road* that, “Neal is the perfect guy for the road because he actually was born on the road, when his parents were passing through Salt Lake City in 1926, in a jalopy [sic], on their way to Los Angeles” (109). So began the legend of Cassady, his birth that would predestine him to be the hero of *On the Road*. Unfortunately, that story is hardly the truth, Kerouac’s version being “one of the romantic inventions that Neal fed Jack Kerouac many years later that were

unquestioningly accepted by the captivated author and woven into the legend of the charismatic Dean Moriarty” (Sandison and Vickers 1-2). The Cassady legend would be created extensively in *On the Road*, the complexities of which I will delve into later. It is important to now establish a history of the man. His story begins in Salt Lake City, Utah in, like many other people, in a maternity ward. There was even some debate over which actual hospital in which he was born. Cassady’s own autobiography claims it to be the LDS Hospital, a church run by the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints when actually he was born in Salt Lake County General (Sandison and Vickers 2). So begins the complicated and poorly documented past of our hero, Neal Cassady.

While Cassady’s birth may have been quite normal, his early life was not. His parents soon separated and Cassady ended up in Denver, Colorado with his father who quickly became an alcoholic, abandoning his trade as a barber, and descending into squalor in which his young son accompanied him. There had been a time where Cassady had lived with his mother and his older half siblings. The habitation ended quickly, as the older brothers would constantly abuse Cassady and his father, Neal Sr. The two Neals ended up at the Metropolitan Hotel, paying 15 cents a night to sleep on one of its dilapidated floors. Cassady was six years old and sharing a “single bed with no sheets” (Sandison and Vickers 16) with his father. Another man occupied their cubicle, Shorty, who was a double amputee and an “inveterate masturbator” (16) and gave young Cassady his first glimpse into the world of sex (however, the young boy was yet to understand exactly what it was Shorty was doing and it would be two years later when he understood sex). During the day, Cassady would go to the Citizens Mission for free breakfast and dinner before and after school. This began Cassady’s Catholic upbringing as these meals

required prayer meetings. Like other children his age, Cassidy enjoyed going to movies, reading books, and sports. His early days were spent filling time between school days where he would skip stones across the river, an “early dedication to skills perfection prefigured Neal’s lifelong obsession with physical accomplishments that demanded exceptional dexterity or hand-eye coordination (tire capping, pit stop wheel-changing, car parking, jackhammer juggling, driving over the speed limit) until he was certain that he had become the best there was, or at least, the very best that he could be” (22-23). While Cassidy’s early life was a far cry from what America would expect from a young boy’s childhood, he was able to hone skills that other boys growing up in stable families would have. Cassidy was physically fit, with an interest in sports, especially running track, and he was also an avid reader and, initially, a good student. Despite his sub-par living situation, he was indeed succeeding as a young boy and looked as though he would become an upstanding young man. That was, until the summer of 1932.

This marked Cassidy’s first road trip, from Denver to Unionville, Missouri to visit Neal Sr.’s sister (25). In 1932, the automobile became a fixture in the American home thanks to companies such as Ford and Oldsmobile. A road trip to see family was a very common trip people took. Unlike most families, even those without cars who would have taken trains, the Cassadys “missed the freight train that Neal Sr. had intended to hop for the first leg of their journey, and instead picked up a ride with a driver on his way to Cheyenne, Wyoming” (25). This was possibly the beginning of Cassidy’s true slip from becoming like most other boys his age. From what scholars have said about his early life until this point, he seemed to be adapting well to his living situation and there seemed to be no reason to think he could not have been able to continue this trajectory to fall into a

blue-collar profession and certainly no reason to think he would have become the legend he did. The trip took an unexpected turn when Cassidy was separated from his father on a speeding train. The two were reunited the next morning and returned to Denver (27). Not long after their trip, Cassidy's mother died which led to a court meeting to discuss his living situation. He briefly lived with his brother and his wife, but the couple "were not equipped to raise a gutsy young survivor with an adventurous spirit that would lead him into perpetual conflict with the law" (34) and Cassidy went back to living with his father. This first event possibly marked his love for travel and adventure and his changed his life forever.

Cassidy's adolescent years were diverging from the life one would expect of a future Ward Cleaver: "According to Neal's own account of his eventful adolescence, he stole his first car in 1940 when he was only fourteen years old....He later claimed that by his own definition he had 'borrowed' some five hundred vehicles" (35). His high-school years were full of debauchery. At first Cassidy's school work was some of the best in the class. His grades were good and he was a good athlete. He seemed to be participating well enough. But after Cassidy was returned to his father in 1939, he began to be a concern to the school and social workers assigned to his case. So began the next element of Cassidy's life that would separate him from the "upstanding" men of his time, his obsession with sex.

Cassidy was the epitome of physical masculinity. He was handsome and athletic and his sex drive was apparently exceptional; it was rumored that he masturbated six times a day as well as having sexual intercourse (Watson 80). Cassidy's sexual appetite was that of legend. He was quite the ladies' man, and his sex drive was sparked as a

young boy: “in the communal barn, during a riot of drinking, smoking, and cursing, [one of Neal Sr.’s drinking buddies] the German’s oldest sons launched themselves into the systematic gang rape of their sisters. Neal wrote in the posthumously published autobiographical novel *The First Third*, ‘I soon followed the leader in screwing all the sisters small enough to hold down—and those bold enough to lead’” (Sandison and Vickers 33). Cassady was eight years old at the time. The next episode of Cassady’s young sexuality was a story he had told many times of sleeping with his father’s women. Cassady told his good friend Jimmy Holmes the story years after the incident, and Holmes recalls, “His father brought a woman home one night, and they slept in one bed. Neal was in the bed, you know, and they made love and all that stuff, and got up the next morning and [Neal’s father] went to work...and Neal was there with the woman, and Neal was pretty aggressive and I guess he got the woman to...I’m sure it wasn’t the other way around...anyway they made love” (qtd in Sandison and Vickers 36). Adding a bit of humor to the story, Cassady said he had had the woman as a teacher a few years later. Perhaps all this was simply a story a young boy tells to his friend in the beginnings of puberty. Cassady’s depiction of his entire life follows the pattern of his sexual drive dictating many aspects of his life. The story goes to show, even if it is not true, that Cassady valued sex and his sexual conquests enough to let that be a big part of the man he portrayed to others.

Later, in 1956, Cassady was described only by his sexual appetite in Allen Ginsberg’s poem “Howl.” Ginsberg referred to Cassady:

who went out whoring through Colorado in myriad  
stolen night-cars, N.C., secret hero of these  
poems, Cocksman and Adonis of Denver—joy  
to the memory of his innumerable lays of girls

in empty lots & diner backyards, moviehouses'  
rickety rows, on mountaintops in caves or with  
gaunt waitresses in familiar roadside lonely pet-  
ticoat upliftings & especially secret gas-station  
solipsisms of johns, & hometown alleys too  
(145-153).

In one of the most famous poems in American literature, Cassady is described only by his sexuality. This stanza refers to Cassady specifically, the N.C. spelled out in some versions as Neal Cassady. Ginsberg harkens back to Cassady's youth, the youth of his budding sexual prowess, using his history of car theft and his Denver days to set up his sexual encounters. The poem itself was banned for its strong use of, at the time, shocking language and even more so, the content and more specifically, the sexual content. While Cassady is only specifically mentioned in this stanza, his influence is part of why the book was banned. Beat writing would be known for its new and radical style as poets and writers turned to a more organic and less academic writing style. The poems and the novels from this period would be known for their experimental qualities as well as their taboo content. Lawrence Ferlinghetti, owner of the San Francisco bookstore City Lights and publisher of *Howl and Other Poems*, described the book's threat: "The 'Howl' that was heard around the world wasn't seized in San Francisco in 1956 just because it was judged obscene by cops, but because it attacked the bare roots of our dominant culture, the very Moloch of our consumer society" and that "'Howl' became the catalyst in a paradigm shift in American poetry and consciousness" (Ferlinghetti xi, xii). Of course, Ginsberg's own sex life was written about explicitly in "Howl," but Cassady's own sexuality should get some mention. While Cassady was not Ginsberg's first sexual partner, the two did have a very passionate, brief love affair. From the letters Ginsberg wrote at the time, the affair with Cassady was extremely impactful on his own lifestyle.



Before, he was to some degree ashamed of his homosexuality. His previous encounters had been with strangers and Cassady was the first person with whom Ginsberg enjoyed having sex (*Allen Ginsberg: Beat Poet* 83). This encounter had aided him in accepting his homosexuality and after this encounter, his personal life and his poetry began to evolve into the sexually and biographically charged poetry that he is known for. Of all the Beat writers, “Ginsberg...made his sexuality an integral part of his public image and his poetry.....Ginsberg...celebrated it [his sexuality]” (Mehrotra and Mishra). After his passionate affair with Cassady, Ginsberg began to use his sexuality as an asset in his poetry and his life. This would not be the first time, or the last, that Cassady would use his sexuality as currency to get the things he wanted. He acted on his sexual desires frequently and sometimes without inhibition.

His sexuality also separated him from the masculine image of the day. He had sex with many women, from prostitutes to schoolgirls, as well as men. The 1950s favored a more conservative look at sex and sexuality. Cassady’s outward expression of his sexuality was extremely shocking compared to the sexual mores of the Cold War Era which were centered on the repression of sexual urges. In a letter to Ginsberg, Cassady claims, “I love all sex—yes all, all sex. Anyway I can get it. I need it, want it, shall have it—now. I wanta [sic] fuck” (qtd. in *Allen Ginsberg: Beat Poet* 104). His desire perhaps crossed the line into obsession as sex was a way he got nearly everything he wanted. He wanted to learn to write poetry, so he embarked on a sexual relationship with Ginsberg who was more than willing to accept his physical advances. When he got what he wanted, he broke off the affair (*Allen Ginsberg: Beat Poet* 81-84). When Cassady needed money, he hustled the streets of Denver, picking up men. During Cassady’s high

school years, a wealthy philanthropist Justin Brierly had begun picking bright young male students who had come from rebellious backgrounds and educating them in order to turn them into upstanding citizens. He took him under his wing, because: “he saw in Neal the great energy that would someday make him not a lawyer or a politician, but an American saint. He taught him how to wash his teeth, his ears; how to dress; helped him get odd jobs; and put him in high school” (*On the Road: The Original Scroll* 141). While Brierly was getting Cassady interested in academics and renewing his love of reading, he was also introducing him into another kind of culture. Sandison and Vickers state, “Brierly was most likely also a closet homosexual, and it was probably through him that Neal Cassady would first discover and explore gay sex and serve as a hustler in Denver’s gay community” (41-42). Cassady’s economic state was still exceedingly poor, as his father had maintained his decline in alcoholism, and it was up to Cassady to start making a living. He would turn into a life-long con man, conning everyone he knew into getting the things he needed. Yet another turn from a life that would keep him from the path of the successful father and man the Cold War Era favored. He would partake in homosexual behavior only to get money, claiming in a letter to Ginsberg, “I, somehow, dislike pricks & men & before you, had consciously forced myself to be homosexual” (Letter to Allen Ginsberg). There were many times in Cassady’s life where he used a homosexual act to get whatever it was he needed. In *On the Road* he hustles for a ride: “Neal tried everything in the books to get money from the fag, submitting finally to his advances while I hid in the bathroom and listened....Neal proceeded to handle the fag like a woman...and gave him a monstrous huge banging” (*On the Road: The Original Scroll* 307). He used his sexuality to excess; it seemed he could not pass a woman

without at least considering having sex with her. Cassady's letter to Kerouac, the infamous "Joan Anderson Letter," talks about Cassady's attraction to all the women he sees, making statements like, "The ward nurse cautioned me not to excite her (how can one prevent that?)" and "Soon after returning to Denver I had the rare luck to meet a 16-year-old East Hi beauty... I ripped into her like a maniac and she loved it" (The Joan Anderson Letter). Cassady was extremely handsome and it aided his confidence in his sexual endeavors. Over his life he would have sex with many women and men and those encounters rarely adhered to the sexual mores of the time. Cassady met Diana Hansen, a woman that would be his third wife, on a trip to New York City. After she fell in love with him and began to support him as he lived in her New York City apartment, he attempted to get a divorce from his second wife in order to marry Hansen. Carolyn tried to get the divorce, but oddly enough it never went through and Cassady married Henson while still being legally married to Carolyn. In a time where divorce was uncommon, Cassady had one true divorce from his first wife and was also involved in a bigamist marriage. Comparing these relationships to that of Ward and June Cleaver, Cassady is in no way reflecting what would have been the American ideal of the time.

An aspect of the Cold-War-Era family was to be the head of a household. Cassady was the "head" of three households as he was married three times. His first wife was sixteen-year-old LuAnne Henderson, whom he took across the country on his first trip to New York. They soon divorced, and he met with Carolyn Robinson, the daughter of a wealthy southern family, who fell madly in love with Cassady. She would be the mother of three of his children and bear the heartache of Cassady's promiscuity and constant searches for adventure. She remained in love with him, continued to support him

as best she could, and raised their three children. He then married Henson who was the mother of one of his children. His families were unconventional and plentiful. He was no breadwinner, but he did try hard to keep a job while in the early years of his marriage to Carolyn. The Cassadys had few months of the domestic bliss that grew out of the 1950s culture of middle-class success. At the time, Cassady was working and earning a paycheck, and coming home to Carolyn and the children. At this time he was indeed trying to be the husband and father Carolyn wanted him to be. During their initial years (1955-58) in their home in Los Gatos, the Cassady family resembled the Cleaver household. Carolyn says, "This first year may have held some of Neal's happiest times....He was proud of his home, and although not accustomed to care for one as had been the men in my family, he tried to help out to the best of his ability" (*Off the Road* 241). After this short-lived episode of happiness and conformity with the American standard, Cassady returned to his life of thrills and adventure but "through it all, Carolyn kept faith in the idea that, at heart, Neal was happiest when earning an honest living and providing for his family" (Campbell). The few months living the American Dream were not enough to tame wild Cassady. Carden says "True masculinity, for Cassady, resides outside the social hierarchies and familial restrictions represented by the bourgeois woman. His refusal of a male identity rooted in class status and enforced by women, however, depends on and reinforces conventional relations of gender, power and capitalist modes of consumption" (5). The sort of masculinity that adhered to societal construction completely went against everything Cassady wanted in life and hindered him from embracing his idea of his own manhood and identity. His attempt to be the father and breadwinner failed, and the temptation of adventure and other women was

much stronger than any need to conform to any societal norm set in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s.

According to scholars of post-war American culture, there was another type of masculinity that emerged. The automobile created an image that exemplified being a man. Today, there are more than one billion cars in the world and account for 70% of journeys not made on foot (“Seeing the back of the car”). The film *American Graffiti* (*American Graffiti*) shows a 60s American teenager, “his friends and their vehicles through a late summer night in early 1960s California: cruising the main drag, racing on the back streets and necking in the back seats of machines which embody not just speed, prosperity and freedom but also adulthood, status and sex” (“Seeing the Back of the Car”). This image is what many people associate with car culture in the 60s when families had the disposable income to buy their children cars. In the 1940s and 1950s, cars replaced the six-shooter as phallic symbols of a new era in the cultural imagination: “It was no longer necessary for the Euro-American to battle Native Americans to dominate the wide-open spaces of the West. That deathly work had been done, and now the postwar white male could ‘reconquer’ the West for himself with the car” (Leavitt 214). Leavitt also remarks that car advertisements still prey on the “self-images of young men who feel constant pressure to reaffirm their masculinity” (214). In Cassady’s time, cars were becoming more of an affordable luxury. The first car produced for mass consumption was the 1901 Oldsmobile followed by the Ford Model T released in 1903 and by 1920 Ford had sold over one million cars. The car gained popularity in the following years, “became increasingly popular among the general population because it gave travelers the freedom to travel when they wanted to and where they wanted. As a

result, in North America and Europe the automobile became cheaper and more accessible to the middle class” (“The History of the Automobile”). Other factors influenced America’s turn to the car including the building of highways and the affordability. Cars became even more affordable after World War II when companies that had been making tanks and army vehicles had the machinery to make civilian cars and while “automobile motors, fuel and tires were in short supply [and] there was an unsatisfied demand when the war ended and plenty of production capacity as factories turned off the war machine” (“The History of the Automobile”). Also, people who had been saving money for the war effort were now able to spend it on something like an automobile. Muscle cars, hot rods, and the V-8 engine crept into masculine identity, and soon the automobile became the symbol of being a man. The car was used to take girls on dates and to “Lovers Lanes,” and young men raced cars they built to establish dominance. Cassady fully embraced the automobile and was a notorious car thief: “I stole my first automobile at 14 in 1940; by ’47 when swearing off such soul-thrilling pleasure to celebrate advent into manhood, I had illegally in my possession about 500 cars—whether just for the moment and to be taken back to its owner before he returned...or whether taken for the purpose of so altering its appearance as to keep it for several weeks but mostly for joyriding” (*The First Third* 170). Cassady’s short piece “Adventures in Auto-eroticism” discusses his love of cars and how he used them to entice a local “bad-boy” as well as pick up a “school girl” in order to get the adventure Cassady so desperately needed throughout his life. He had begun to use a symbol of American stability and middle class to aid him in his debauchery and sexual proclivity. Many Americans were buying cars to commute from the suburbs into the cities and take their families on trips on the newly developed

highway system. Cassady was stealing cars to get the thrills he would never be able to get from a middle-class lifestyle. His deviation from the stereotypical norm was becoming increasingly wide and there did not seem to be any way that he would be able to live a lifestyle of conformity.

Cassady's personality was radical in Cold War Era America. He had some of the necessary attributes of normal behavior—for example, his good looks and his virility—but he ventured outside the realm of what was socially acceptable by his unconventional sexual encounters and lack of moral character. His attraction to the automobile, however, was an attractive and acceptable outlet of masculinity as he adapted the power of the car to fit his needs. He used the car like many young men did as cars became more accessible to the population and with the construction of the interstate highway system and the affordability of what was once a luxury for the rich. "...the car in America," writes professor of visual arts at Lancaster University Nigel Whiteley, "became a prestige commodity to possess with pride....it was a potent symbol for Americans and, as postwar affluence enabled widespread ownership, the symbolic importance of the car increased and became the *objet sans pareil* of American consumerism" (Whiteley 6). Cassady used the automobile as a true phallic symbol and enticed young women with flashy shows of danger and libido. Cassady's behavior was shocking to America in 1957 upon the release of *On the Road*. He rejected many of the values established by the middle class in the most extreme way. However, he used some of the symbols of the culture, especially the automobile, to perhaps form a connection with the reader that allowed Dean Moriarty into the homes of Cold War Era America.

## TRAVEL EXPERIENCE GAINED BY KEROUAC AFTER MEETING CASSADY

Kerouac and Cassady met in New York City in 1946. Cassady had just come in to New York from Nebraska with his wife LuAnne. He had heard of Kerouac and Ginsberg from friend and former reform school student Hal Chase. Chase had listened intently to Cassady's stories about his delinquencies over the years and had related them to the group of Columbia students who would become the Beats. Cassady wanted to come to New York to learn to write, and the soon-to-be Beats wanted to meet this rebel and rascal from the pool halls of Denver. After a disappointing meeting between Kerouac and Cassady at a party, Cassady showed up at Kerouac's home in Ozone Park, where he was living with his mother, and more formally asked Kerouac to teach him how to write. To Kerouac's mother's displeasure, she allowed him into the home, and Kerouac began to teach him to write, even though Kerouac suspected it to be an elaborate con (*Jack Kerouac, King of the Beats* 127–30). In the Original Scroll of *On the Road*, Kerouac remarks on their first meetings: "In all, what Neal was, simply, was tremendously excited with life, and though he was a con-man he was only conning because he wanted so much to live and also to get involved with people that would otherwise pay no attention to him. He was conning me, so-called, and I knew it, and he knew I knew (this had been the basis of our relation) but I didn't care and we got along fine. I began to learn from him as much as he probably learned from me" (112). Kerouac went into their relationship knowing most everything that Cassady did was a con of some sort, but he overlooked it because there was something about him that drew the two together. Here Kerouac cites Cassady as a teacher. He states he learned much from



Cassady and I believe that includes a new writing style and a new way to describe a new kind of American hero. Kerouac was always learning from Cassady and perhaps this influenced him to follow after him across America. Perhaps he followed Cassady because Kerouac regarded him as a substitute for his late brother Gerard who had also been his teacher and guide as a child, or that he was simply too fascinating for Kerouac, as a writer, to ignore. Whatever the truth was that drew them together; their impact on each other and the Beat Generation would be tremendous.

Before his first meetings with Cassady, Kerouac had not ventured out of the North East. He was born and raised in Lowell, Massachusetts, born to two French-Canadian parents. The Kerouacs were devout Catholics, and Jack's interpretation of Catholicism would play a strong role in different phases his life. Cassady, too, was a Catholic (at least in certain phases of his life), and perhaps that was an element of Kerouac's attraction to him. The first time Kerouac left Lowell was to go to New York City to Horace Mann prep school before going to Columbia University on a football scholarship.

Kerouac appeared to have many traits of what, at the time, was considered to be an all-American boy. Barry Miles describes him as perhaps "...the all-American boy: he ate prodigious numbers of hamburgers, drank ice-cream sundaes, played baseball on a sand lot with local kids, and was passionate about sports....he began to excel on the track at school and it looked as if he was all set to become an athlete, one of America's thick-necked heroes, glorified by parents and the media, and worshipped by cheerleaders and younger boys" (*Jack Kerouac, King of the Beats* 21, 23). His inclination to sports helped him to get his Columbia scholarship. Young Kerouac would embark on the path to the American Dream—going to school, getting a well-paying job, getting married, and

having children. Going to an Ivy League university would help ensure him a white-collar job and entry into the middle-class. Going to Columbia would be the first time Kerouac would leave his parents' house and be away from his mother. Before he could enter Columbia, he would have to get his grades up by spending time at Horace Mann.

Kerouac's athletics got him out of his small home town and into the big city of New York, football leading his way to success at Columbia. However, Kerouac's time at Columbia was not as successful as one could imagine. He soon got into arguments with his coach on the Columbia football team before an injury would remove him permanently. In protest against his coach, he dropped out of Columbia and went back to Lowell. He had attempted to travel to the South and had made it as far as Washington, D.C., but got nervous about such a trip and returned home to face his father's anger (*Jack Kerouac, King of the Beats* 37). He could not find the courage to travel far from his own family and the people and places where he was comfortable and secure. It seemed he felt more comfortable with his parents. His brother was dead and his sister had moved out leaving him as the only Kerouac child and now the sole object of his mother's affection.

Kerouac attempted to leave the Lowell home again. He would sign up for the Merchant Marines after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. He also contacted and apologized to his Columbia coach and asked to come back to school. Kerouac would return to Columbia after taking his Merchant Marine service. However, he would always return to his home in Lowell soon after his first few trips. He was not cut out for the service and eventually gave it up. He was honorably discharged from the Navy as well, due to diagnosed schizophrenia (Miles 47). All of Kerouac's attempts at careers and adventures failed, and he always came home to his family in Lowell. He had attempted many times

to leave Massachusetts and New York and even made it across the Atlantic Ocean, but he always came home, and none of his adventures produced any real literary acknowledgement. His first published novel, *The Town and the City* (1950), would mainly deal with his family and his life in Lowell. It seems all his travels before meeting Cassady were conversation pieces, failed attempts to be a successful man like he had been bred to be. Nothing Kerouac had done up until meeting Cassady had resulted in a success. *The Town and the City* had poor reviews: "The early scenes in Massachusetts tend to be overly idyllic in content and wordy, even ungrammatical, in presentation" (Brooks). He had not finished his degree at Columbia even though he had been given another chance after quitting the football team. His attempts to join the merchant marines and the navy were failures as well. Before he met Cassady, he had moved back to New York City to live with his parents in an apartment in Ozone Park. He had no job and no real prospects except his novel *The Town and the City*. True, he did finish the novel and get it published, but this was after he met Neal who had encouraged him to write.

Kerouac's life had begun to establish a pattern of failure. He could not write a successful novel, he could not complete his education; he could not leave his mother's house. Upon meeting Cassady, he continued and changed his writing style, he left home and began to see there was more to life than what his mother could tell him. The introduction of Cassady into his life yielded tremendous results by way of lasting success for Kerouac.

*On the Road* was prompted by Cassady. The journals Kerouac kept during his travels were turned into a draft of a book that would later be published called *Visions of Cody* (*Visions of Cody*) (originally titled *Visions of Neal*). It was not until 1951 that Kerouac would write about his travels, and it would take even longer, until 1957, for the

novel to be published. Kerouac would go on the road July 17, 1947 at the age of 25 after a disappointing road trip with his mother. He felt he could not be satisfied with this form of travel at his age, and he would have to travel himself. He decided he would hitchhike across the United States and finally get the experience he needed to be a writer and a successful member of the intelligentsia to which he felt he belonged. Kerouac wanted to be a writer but he had nothing to work with. His home-life material got him very little by way of recognition or success. There was one event that perhaps truly sparked the need to travel. On May 7, 1947, Kerouac and Ginsberg took Cassady to the Greyhound bus station to see him off. According to Miles, "Neal left for Denver at 6.30 in the evening and Jack and Allen walked home with wildly different dreams in their heads....Jack was thinking that he too must go to Denver. He knew a lot of people from there and felt naive and inexperienced as he listened to their tales of travel all across the United States" (*Jack Kerouac, King of the Beats* 132). Miles credits Cassady with putting the idea for travel in Kerouac's mind. Of course, he had traveled before, but this trip to Denver would be the first that was a success and not one that would end suddenly due to homesickness. Miles also goes on to give more credit to Beverly Buford, a girlfriend of Kerouac's Columbia friend Ed White, in encouraging his need to travel as she had told Kerouac about her travels across the country by plane. The two had become close, and Miles sees her as another reason for Kerouac to take to travel. However, Buford makes no great appearance in Kerouac's writing and can be seen as just another one of the many friends he had in New York. The strongest influence in Kerouac's desire to truly travel across the country came from Cassady, and the novel would start and end with him.

## THE CASSADY CHARACTER IN *ON THE ROAD*

*On the Road* begins and ends with Cassady. The 1957 edition starts, “I first met Dean not long after my wife and I split up” (*On the Road* 1). This had been changed from the original scroll that is more accurate, that Kerouac, “first met Neal not long after [his] father had died” (*On the Road: The Original Scroll* 109). This is one of the many changes made between the original manuscript and the published version that editors and publishers thought would be better suited to the American climate at the time. The Cassady character, Dean Moriarty, came to be a new folk hero of the time, a hero full of mystery and awe. Cassady possesses almost angelic qualities in *On the Road*. The first sentence continues to say “I had just gotten over a serious illness that I won’t bother to talk about except that it really had something to do with my father’s death and my awful feeling that everything was dead. With the coming of Neal there really began for me that part of my life that you could call my life on the road” (*On the Road: The Original Scroll* 109). Within the first few lines, Kerouac establishes Cassady as a hero in more than one aspect. He will presumably be a character that Kerouac will accompany throughout the novel since he cites his first meeting with Cassady as the first line of the book. But more importantly, he establishes Cassady as his own personal savior. The phrase he uses, “with the coming of Neal,” echoes biblical stories, such as the First and Second Comings of Christ when Jesus initially came and will return to earth. The language perhaps comes from Kerouac’s Catholic background as he would be familiar with the Bible. The time that Kerouac is referring to after his father’s death did spark a time of depression for Kerouac. His father had told him Kerouac had not lived up to his father’s expectations as

a man before his death which accelerated his questioning of his own masculinity. This would have been a dark time for a man prone to mental illness. The first lines suggest Cassady had saved Kerouac from himself and with Cassady's help he was able to be born again and his life was to begin again as a life that would be spent on the road.

Kerouac would become a follower of Cassady, traveling the United States and Mexico in order to find him. His time spent in the early pages of the novel is looking for Cassady. His first big excursion was to Denver. Hitchhiking from New York, he eventually ended up on a truck headed for California. Kerouac was excited for Denver: "tingling with kicks at the thought of what lay ahead of me in Denver---whatever, whatever it would be and good enough for me" (*On the Road: The Original Scroll* 134). Denver was his first destination and Denver meant Cassady. Upon arrival in Denver, Kerouac has some time going around the city and meeting up with friends, but soon he ends up asking "Where's Neal?" (144). He met up with Ginsberg and after briefly catching up and Kerouac again asks "And where is Neal?" (145). Cassady is Kerouac's first priority in Denver and in many of his excursions. Throughout the book, Kerouac creates the myth and legend of Cassady, one that readers would be captivated by for years to come.

A famous quote from *On the Road* comes in the early pages: "the only people that interest me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones that never yawn or saw a commonplace thing.. [sic]but burn, burn, burn like roman candles across the night" (*On the Road: The Original Scroll* 113). This describes Kerouac's attitude towards his friends and the people he is interested in that would make him an excellent observer and recorder of the time. He

captured Cassady's essence and turned him into an "American saint" (141). Kerouac stops to "set the stage about Neal" (140) and goes on to describe him by his rebellious nature. He talks about Neal Sr. the alcoholic, Cassady's time in reform school and his car theft, his brief encounter with Brierly and his attempt at reform, and every so often including a story of one of Cassady's sexual encounters. This is the reader's first background of Cassady and he is made out to be a fascinating bad boy. I think the key to the success of Cassady's character comes from this description. Kerouac goes into great detail about Cassady's attempt at reform and his intellectual strengths. He exploits Cassady's potential "he saw in Neal the great energy that would someday make him not a lawyer or a politician, but an American saint...but Neal immediately stole the principal's car and wrecked it" (141). Considering the time period where adherence to rules and social conventions was extremely important, Kerouac lets the reader see that he had some redeeming qualities. The 1957 version cuts out the references to Brierly, maintaining the references to his troubled childhood and also his sexual prowess. Kerouac had justified his character to himself in the original manuscript and it would go to help him establish Cassady's character throughout the scroll and as Dean Moriarty. Kerouac saw past the rebel that Cassady was and wanted to show the world the man who had become his savior and hero.

Throughout the novel, Kerouac creates the Cassady legend. He describes his sexual prowess many times. While in Denver, Kerouac tells the true tale of Cassady's busy schedule where he was sleeping with his current wife, having an affair with his future wife, and then off to spend time with Ginsberg. When Kerouac finally meets up with Cassady in Denver, "Neal opened [the door] stark naked....[Cassady said] 'Jack is

here, my old buddy from New Yor-r-k, this is his first night in Denver and it's absolutely necessary for me to take him out and fix him up with a girl..[sic]" (*On the Road: The Original Scroll* 146). Cassady was always thinking of sex, not always just for him. Many occasions he tries to find women for his friends and many times he ends up taking them for himself. His masculinity, his physical attractiveness and his sexual desires and overall his extreme confidence, allowed him to be popular with women, which made him the envy of many men. It is another part of his character that could have been seen as desirable. Cassady was also the life of many parties, the most energetic of all Kerouac's friends. Part of his energy was attributed to drugs, but it was also just a part of his personality that required him to keep going and looking for the next adventure. He had to keep going or he would die and that aspect was conveyed in the novel. Cassady went so hard, from keeping his busy schedule with his women to traveling the United States and driving all night, and Kerouac was satisfied to sit by and watch: "I slouched in a nearby chair and saw all of it" (150). Cassady's character was one that people had to see to believe and reading about such a rambunctious man would have been a thrill in itself.

Cassady has a few personal and redeeming moments. Kerouac describes him once as, "a monk peering into the manuscripts" (*On the Road: The Original Scroll* 215) while driving in the snow across the United States. Similes like this show him in that biblical light once again and the reader can think of him differently than when he is having sex with women and driving dangerously. Kerouac balances Cassady's rambunctiousness with such innocent and holy images that it allows the reader to see that there was more to the Cassady myth, that he was indeed a pious man, albeit in an unconventional sense. Cassady harkens back to his Catholic upbringing while describing



America, saying, “‘now you see Jack, God exists, because we keep getting hungup[sic] with this town, no matter what we try to do, and you’ll notice the strange and biblical name of it, and that strange biblical character who made up stop here once more, and all things tied together all over like rain connecting everybody in the world over chain touch...’ Neal rattled on like this; he was overjoyed and exuberant” (239). Cassady is a man who can get excited over God’s beauty of the world implying he is more than just a deviant. His moments of religious and spiritual clarity and insight go far in redeeming him. Later in the book, Cassady is again put in a savior role. After the high of the road had worn off, Kerouac says he felt “the sensation of death kicking at my heels to move on...and myself hurrying to a plank where all the Angels dove off and flew into infinity. This was the state of my mind. I thought I was going to die the very next moment. That was the way Neal found me when he finally decided I was worth saving” (274). Once again, Cassady is saving him from thoughts of death and despair. Kerouac was so depressed after being without Cassady and wondering how he could go on living when Cassady comes back and takes him out on the road yet again. Cassady’s most redeeming features in *On the Road* is the way he helps Kerouac see America and encourages him to keep going. At these moments in Kerouac’s early life, his sorrows are remedied by Cassady and he is able to keep on going.

The novel’s last lines talk about Cassady. Kerouac has returned home from his adventures and is living in New York City again, Cassady far away in California. In a passage about America’s beauty, Kerouac reflects on all the places he has seen, the states and “that raw land that rolls in one unbelievable huge bulge over to the West Coast, and all that road going, and all the people dreaming in the immensity of it” (*On the Road: The*

*Original Scroll* 408). He shows his newfound love and appreciation for all of America, not just the North East where he had grown up. He reflects on the uncertainty of life, how “nobody knows what’s going to happen to anybody besides the forlorn rags of growing old” and it is here that he says “I think of Neal Cassady, I even think of Old Neal Cassady, the father we never found, I think of Neal Cassady, I think of Neal Cassady” (408). Cassady had turned out to be the most influential character in his life during his travels. He has left a resounding impact on Kerouac’s personal and even spiritual life when he helped him through the roughest parts of his life. His character is exaggerated and mythicized in many aspects, but the Cassady portrayed in the novel is the Cassady Kerouac saw and needed in his life. The reader understands the importance of Cassady as a larger than life character but also someone who can be a hero despite his past and rebellious proclivities.

## CASSADY'S INFLUENCE ON KEROUAC'S STYLE

Kerouac was very much influenced by some of the best writers of his time. He was especially drawn to Thomas Wolfe and his style and descriptions of American life had a profound impact on Kerouac. Kerouac wrote *The Town and the City* in a style that evoked that of Wolfe but it was not well-received by the public. After his time with Cassady, Kerouac's style changed drastically. One of the most groundbreaking and revolutionary elements of Beat literature was its style. The poetry of Ginsberg and others such as Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Gregory Corso was new and deviated from the norms set by the academies of the time. Ginsberg's book *Howl and Other Poems* was brought to trial for obscenity due sexual content. During the trial, the book was analyzed by scholars of the day and the content and the style was taken into account upon deciding if the poem had any redeeming social importance. The poets of the movement were writing about the government and their disillusionment of the state of America after World War II. They were upset over many things, including drug control and sexual repression. Kerouac is seen as one of the only novelists of the time, along with William S. Burroughs and John Clellon Holmes. The novels of the Beat Generation, especially Kerouac's, their form was just as radical as their content. Kerouac's new kind of writing was what ultimately brought him fame.

Kerouac's biggest influence before Cassady was Thomas Wolfe. *The New York Times* reviewed *The Town and the City* and made a rather important and telling interpretation of the style: "One gets the feeling that the author grew spiritually and improved technically while writing 'The Town and the City.' The early scenes in

Massachusetts tend to be overly idyllic in content and wordy, even ungrammatical, in presentation. On the other hand, Mr. Kerouac's somewhat Dostoevskian view of New York City life is certainly exaggerated in another direction, but it is powerful and disturbing" (Brooks). The majority of Kerouac's works more closely followed the style created in *On the Road* rather than *The Town and the City*. Brooks' look at Kerouac's style as "wordy, even ungrammatical" did not change in his future books. *On the Road* was written as one continuous paragraph and is full of what one might call grammatical mistakes. The Original Scroll is full of misspelled words and run-on sentences. Part of the "ungrammatical" elements, the run-on sentences and the misspellings, comes from being high on Benzedrine during his marathon writing session. Another part comes from the jazz of the time, the music that Kerouac would fall in love with and use as not only content but an aide to his style. But the most important influence on the style and voice of the novel comes from Cassady.

With the 2014 surfacing of the notorious "Joan Anderson Letter," new attention has been placed on Cassady's stylistic influence on Kerouac. In an essay by Davis S. Wills, the importance of this letter in particular is discussed:

The story goes that the letter was a breakthrough for Jack Kerouac, who, when it was composed, was struggling with the genesis of what would become his most famous work, and one of the most important novels in American history, *On the Road*. On December 17th, 1950, Neal Cassady wrote Kerouac a letter that Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg would later refer to as "the Joan Anderson letter" due to a passage within that referred to a woman Cassady had slept with. The confessional style of Cassady's writing was influential over the recipient, who would put down the "original scroll" version of *On the Road* only a few months later, in April, 1951. When, in 1965, he was asked about the origins of the book's style, Kerouac explained, "I got the idea for the spontaneous style of *On the Road* from seeing how good old Neal Cassady wrote his letters to me, all first person, fast, mad, confessional, completely serious, all detailed, with real names" (Willis).

This new way of writing was just what Kerouac needed. The letter would become the reference point for the spontaneous prose Kerouac was known for. The “Joan Anderson Letter” would be referred to continuously in not only scholarship but also Kerouac’s own writing. In an unpublished manuscript written by Kerouac, he set out to write an anthology of Beat writers. In the section where he writes about Gregory Corso, he cites the “Joan Anderson Letter” as the most influential work of prose: “this [Corso’s 16,000 word letter written in 1958] is the greatest piece of prose written by an American in some time (comparable to the great lost 30,000 word letter of Neal Cassady in 1950)” (*Kerouac’s Papers for a Beat Anthology*). This letter was definitely prized and in Kerouac’s mind; it was the most influential letter that had ever been written. Kerouac later said to Cassady, “Just a word, now, about your wonderful...letter about Joan Anderson and Cherry Mary. I thought it ranked among the best things ever written in America....I say truly, no Dreiser, no Wolfe has come too close to it; Melville was never truer” (qtd. in *Charters* xviii). Kerouac’s love for this letter would definitely leave a resounding impact on his writing. Kerouac praised the letter and Cassady and his influence would have to be seen in his literary works. Reading the letter, one can see the similarities between the writings of both Kerouac and Cassady. They both use a rambling style that echoed Cassady’s “Western twang” that he was famous for. There is a strong use of conversational language in both *On the Road* and the “Joan Anderson Letter.” Both men are telling stories as they write and they are writing to each other as friends. This familiarity disregarded any need for formality. Cassady does something in the letter that Kerouac would do in *On the Road*. In the letter, Cassady writes, “by golly, it seems everything I write about happens in a bathroom, don’t think I’m hungup[sic] that

way, it's just the incidents exactly as they occurred" ("The Joan Anderson Letter"). He establishes his long-winded and conversational tone by using the phrase "by golly," something writers would not be incorporating into their novels. He also disregards grammar by combining hung up into "hungup," another thing Kerouac would do as he wrote the scroll. The most important piece of evidence this line gives us is that Cassady says "it's just the incidents exactly as they occurred." That is how Kerouac wrote *On the Road: The Original Scroll*. He kept notebooks of his travels and recorded every event as it happened. He used those notebooks to remember the events that he typed in the scroll. The novel has a chronological order that aligns to his years he spent traveling. He wrote exactly what had happened. His first novel, *The Town and the City* was of fiction, although loosely based on his own family. *On the Road* was based on true events exactly as they occurred. The "Joan Anderson Letter" inspired Kerouac's new prose style, but it also gave him the idea to write things exactly as they happened.

Cassady's son John Allen has discussed his father's influence on Kerouac. In the 2011 documentary *Love Always, Carolyn*, Cassady's second wife speaks about what it was like to live with and in the wake of the Beat Generation and her husband. Allen is a Beat scholar and spent much of his life trying to preserve his father's name. In the film, Allen tells the filmmakers, "Jack wrote like Neal talked because Neal had such a love of life and so much energy, Jack would just sit there and write down some of the passages when Neal was driving. He wouldn't write it verbatim, of course, but I think he really documented my dad well" (*Love Always, Carolyn*). This process of recording had been a trait of Kerouac's throughout his writing career. He carried notebooks with him all across the United States, and he would write his observations. Allen states that Kerouac

wrote down much of what Cassady had said on their long car trips together and that this practice would have undoubtedly been of great influence to Kerouac's writing style.

Johnson was right when she said it was Kerouac's own artistry and unique world view, but the evidence of Cassady and Kerouac's history needs to be taken into account.

Beat Scholar Ann Charters was one of the few students who were able to interview Kerouac before his death in 1969. In her introduction to the 2003 edition of *On the Road*, she talks about Kerouac's style: "[Kerouac] was most taken with the wildly exuberant letters written to him and Ginsberg by Neal Cassady, particularly Cassady's style of combining loose, rambling sentences with meticulously detailed observations regarding his sexual exploits with various girlfriends in Denver" (xvi). This reflection of Cassady's writing and speech is definitely seen in both the Original Scroll and the published version of *On the Road*. The scroll itself was written in less than three weeks on 120 feet of typing paper and was more or less one long paragraph. The published version also contains much of those rambling sentences and focuses on sexual exploits. The written and spoken Cassady was crucial to the writing of *On the Road*.

Joyce Johnson, one of Kerouac's wives, thinks Cassady has been given too much credit for his influence on Kerouac's style. She feels Cassady was hardly the reason behind the stylistic success of *On the Road*. Johnson feels that "what gets lost in all the discussion about the importance of the letter is the real story of the many years of grueling work and abandoned trial efforts that led the way to the writing of *On the Road*. While Cassady definitely deserves some credit, he is given far too much, and Kerouac, as usual, is given far too little for his artistry, imagination and dedication" (qtd. in Wills). It was Kerouac who did the writing, and regardless of influence, it was the way his own

experience and mind filtered what he saw and heard that resulted in his style. However, he would not have come to the same style without Cassady. Johnson goes on to say that it was while Kerouac was writing the precursor drafts of *On the Road* that he had finally decided to write one in French. She claims that it was through this version that he had found that “direct, conversational voice that was strikingly similar to the one he would give Sal Paradise” (qtd. in Wills). Perhaps this edition was what finally unlocked the narrative voice of Sal, Kerouac’s own character, but would not necessarily affect Dean, Cassady’s character. Johnson is, I feel, overemphasizing the amount of credit Cassady has been given by scholars and the public when it comes to the character of Dean. Many scholars attribute the style to Cassady, as they should. But in much scholarship, Cassady’s role on the influence and creation of the main character Dean is minor. “Dean was Sal’s brother,” Charters says, “buddy and ‘alter ego,’ a larger-than-life projection of Kerouac’s heightened expectation of what life could offer” (xx). For Kerouac, Cassady represented the freedom of America, what he could achieve out of life. He had found his best friend and wanted desperately to follow him, and perhaps he could absorb some of his rebellion and his freedom. Cassady had always been free. He picked up and left as he pleased and had no regard for any repercussions of his actions. Kerouac mirrored some of Cassady’s actions. He, too, left his wives and would abandon children, even fake illnesses to avoid paying child support. Kerouac’s writing centers around Cassady as the man Kerouac maybe wished to be: ““my interest in Neal is the interest I might have had in my brother that died when I was five”” (*On The Road: The Original Scroll* 2007 317). He needed an older brother in his life, and even though Cassady was younger, he still had the authority and skills of an older man. What seem to be the best years of



Kerouac's life were spent having a lot of fun with Cassady, and his most successful novel is a testament to the man that revitalized Kerouac's life.

Kerouac's life was changed after he befriended Cassady. He had never before met anyone like Cassady. "Cassady," writes Mouratidis, "was thus immediately established in Kerouac's mind as the consummate 'outsider,' an embodiment of uncompromising individuality, someone who appealed to Kerouac's own sense of sociocultural displacement" (72). Cassady was everything Kerouac was not, good with women, full of energy, the life of the party, and eager to meet and befriend new people. Kerouac creates the Cassady character, Dean Moriarty, to exemplify the characteristics of not only what he saw best in Cassady but also the types of characteristics that were becoming mythical in America. Kerouac created a saint out of Cassady, and *On the Road* was a hagiography of his best friend. The whole novel is in search of Cassady, chasing after Cassady, sleeping with his women, and trying to perhaps become him. However, I do not feel Kerouac's character he made out of Cassady was a representation of who Kerouac wanted to be. While Cassady is accepted as the basis for the Dean character, I feel they do not give Cassady himself enough credit because he possesses many if not all of the characteristics Kerouac gave to Dean. I do not believe Dean is, as Mouratidis claims, just a projection of how Kerouac imagined he wanted to be. Dean is modeled after Cassady and less of "Kerouac's gradual separation of the *real* Cassady from his romantic version of him" (70). I think Cassady was very much the template for the character published in *On the Road* and while Kerouac may have added some details, the overall character is Cassady himself. His influence is seen in the character and the writing style and the novel would not be the same without this influence. The wild

prose would be found in other poets as well, especially Ginsberg. With the success of *On the Road*, Kerouac was seen as a new look at America after World War II and the new kinds of people who inhabited it. But Cassady's story, or the story Kerouac told, was what got him fame and what gave millions of Americans a look into the lives of those living through the freedom of Cassady.

In Johnson's opinion, Kerouac made his final and most successful attempt at writing in 1951. This would have been a year after he received the "Joan Anderson Letter." She claims it was when he got away from writing *On the Road* that he could find the voice he needed and that he was therefore able to write the book without the use of the letter. Her claim seems overcome with bias towards her husband. Kerouac and Cassady had started their friendship in 1946, and he had his most meaningful trip with him that ended in 1949. The crucial time he spent with Cassady came long before he had sat down to write *On the Road*. Johnson's claim feels invalid once the bigger picture is put together. Perhaps, as his wife, she wanted to make sure that he was praised for his work and did not want anyone else to be able to take credit for his work. True, his writing is exceptional, and it was indeed his writing that got published, but it is doing the external elements of Kerouac's life a disservice by imagining no one else could help Kerouac become the writer he was.

This was not a book, in my opinion, that Kerouac wrote to fulfill his childhood fantasies and create the man he wished he could be. The man he wished he could be was Cassady and not just an element of Kerouac's own imagination. The two share some vital core traits, such as their fatherlessness and their Catholic childhoods, but it was only after their trips together that Kerouac realized that Cassady was exactly the man he felt

was the perfect hero for a new America. Dean's character becomes a new type of American hero and it was Cassady himself that embodied the aspects Kerouac favored. They did not just come from his imagination; they were standing before him and in the car seat next to him. Cassady was the real-life Dean and without his influence, Dean would not have been the hero that was published in 1957. In current documentaries, Cassady is mentioned as a passing character, as if he had only spent a few days with the Beats and instead focus on the time he spent with Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters. Many biographies, even those written by Barry Miles, have only a few nonconsecutive pages about Cassady (however, *Jack Kerouac: King of the Beats* does include a chapter about Cassady, but he seems to more or less fall away afterwards). The 2010 film *Howl* which documents the life of Ginsberg only dedicates a few minutes to Cassady, even though they spent many hours and days together over the course of his life leading up to the writing of "Howl." Cassady was integral to the lives of the Beat writers, especially Kerouac's. It is hard to believe that Cassady should get such little credit since the voice of Kerouac's character and style of the novel as a whole would not be as it is in its present form if it were not for his friendship with Cassady.

## CONCLUSION

In 1999, Sony Music released a Johnny Cash greatest hits album. The album, *16 Biggest Hits*, contained just that; sixteen of Cash's biggest hits of his career. This album contained his most famous songs: "I Walk the Line," "Ring of Fire," and "Folsom Prison Blues." These songs, written by Cash himself, were not the only ones on this album. Other songs were included, songs that were rooted in folk tradition rather than being songs about Cash himself. Cash began his career creating his Rockabilly style and made his big-time debut in 1956 with his hit album *Folsom Prison Blues*. Over his career he would blend his own songs with folk songs that had been written years before. America loved his songs of "The Legend of John Henry's Hammer" and "The Ballad of Ira Hayes" as well as his rendition of "Will the Circle be Unbroken" that he incorporated into his song "Daddy Sang Bass." Cash was celebrated for his return to a nostalgic time in America. He sang songs of folk heroes as well as the songs from Christian hymnals that had been sung in America for generations. Since the late 1950s, America has been ready to accept another folk hero into their stereos as well as their books.

Cash's song "The Legend of John Henry's Hammer" makes me think of Cassidy. John Henry, according to Cash's song, tells the story of a young man who uses his strength and his hammer to overcome his life of poverty. The man becomes a legend by using the opportunities afforded to him by his masculinity. He works on the railroad and he hammers so well that he beats any man-made machine that threatens him. Cassidy had a hammer and during his time with Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, he was frequently seen tossing his hammer in the air; a symbol of his physical strength. In his drives across the country, he drove a few cars into the ground, wearing out the cars that

could not keep up to his wild pace. His resemblance to heroes does not stop at John Henry. *Life* magazine journalist Paul O'Neil described him in 1958 as "...a Beat saint...the Johnny Appleseed of the marijuana racket" (qtd in Babbs 5). Cassady's life echoed a time that America could no longer experience in the late 1950s. His feats of strength and adventure were beginning to resonate in the American culture at the time, a culture that was welcoming other rebels and jailbirds like Cash himself. Cassady's story came onto the market at just the right time. America was getting ready for a hero like Cassady upon the publication of *On the Road*.

America celebrates its folk heroes but over time they forgot to celebrate one. Cassady has fallen from American history, seen now in only a few minutes of archival footage in documentaries such as *The Source* and *Whatever Happened to Kerouac?* Of course, his name will forever be printed in *The Scroll* as the real Dean Moriarty and scholars will discuss him in articles. They will chose to remember other writers of the Beat Generation better. In San Francisco, there has been a plaque laid to commemorate Ginsberg's first reading of "Howl" at the Six Gallery. There is a plaque outside Kerouac's apartment in Queens that lets passersby know where *On the Road* was written. But there is no plaque outside Cassady's home on Russian Hill in San Francisco. Cassady has lost his rightful place as muse to Kerouac and Ginsberg. His personality and character established the famed hero of *On the Road* and America loved him, or the idea of him. Perhaps one day historians will welcome Cassady back into the articles and documentaries in the entirety he deserves. Cassady was more than a footnote or idea. He was one of the most important members of the Beat Generation.

## LITERATURE CITED

- Anderson, Terry H. *The Sixties*. New York: Longman, 1999. Print.
- American Graffiti*. Dir. George Lucas. A Lucasfilm Ltd/Coppola Co. Production, 1973. DVD.
- Anonymous. "Beowulf (modern English Translation) - Poetry Foundation." *Poetry Foundation*. Trans. Frances B. Grummere. Poetry Foundation, n.d. Web. 16 Jan. 2016.
- Babbs, Ken. "Introduction." *Spit in the Ocean: The Cassady Issue*. Pleasant Hill: n.p., 1981. N. pag. Print.
- Baughman, James L. "Television Comes to America, 1947-57." Illinois Periodicals Online Project, Mar. 1993. Web. 15 Jan. 2016.
- Breathless or À Bout De Souffle*. Dir. Jean-Luc Godard. UGC, 1960. DVD.
- Brigham, Ann. *American Road Narratives: Reimagining Mobility in Literature and Film*. Charlottesville, VA: U of Virginia, 2015. Print.
- Brooks, John. "Of Growth and Decay." Rev. of *The Town and the City*. *The New York Times* 5 Mar. 1950: n. pag. Print.
- Burns, Stan. "Episode #5.7." *The Steve Allen Plymouth Show*. NBC. 16 Nov. 1959. Television.
- Campbell, James. "The Mad One." Rev. of *Neal Cassady: The Fast Life of a Beat Hero*. *The New York Times* 19 Nov. 2006: n. pag. Print.
- Carden, Mary Paniccia. "'Adventures in Auto-Eroticism': Economies of Travelling Masculinity in Autobiographical Texts by Jack Kerouac and Neal Cassady." *Journeys* 7.1 (2006): 1-25. Print.
- Cassady, Carolyn. *Off the Road: My Years with Cassady, Kerouac, and Ginsberg*. London: Black Springs, 2007. Print.
- Cassady, Neal. *The First Third & Other Writings*. San Francisco: City Lights, 1981. Print.
- Cassady, Neal. "The Joan Anderson Letter." Letter to Jack Kerouac. 17 Dec. 1950. MS. N.p.
- Cassady, Neal. Letter to Allen Ginsberg. 30 Mar. 1947. MS. Columbia University Special Collections, New York City, NY.
- Charters, Ann. Introduction. *On the Road*. New York: Penguin, 2003. Vii-Xxx. Print.

- Chaucer, Geoffrey. "The Canterbury Tales." *The Canterbury Tales*. Trans. Ronald L. Ecker and Eugene J. Crook. English Department at Florida State University, n.d. Web. 16 Jan. 2016.
- Cimino, Jerry. "Neal Cassady's "Joan Anderson Letter" Found!" *Kerouac.Com*. The Beat Museum, 23 Nov. 2014. Web.
- Ferlinghetti, Lawrence. "'HOWL' at the Frontiers." Introduction. *Howl on Trial: The Battle for Free Expression*. San Francisco: City Lights, 2006. Xi-Xiv. Print.
- Ginsberg, Allen. *Howl, and Other Poems*. San Francisco: City Lights Pocket hop, 1956. Print.
- "The Impact of the Automobile on the 20th Century." *The Impact of the Automobile on the 20th Century*. CU-Boulder, n.d. Web.
- Kerouac, Jack. *Doctor Sax: Faust Part Three*. New York: Grove, 1959. Print.
- Kerouac, Jack. *Kerouac's Papers on a Beat Anthology*. N.d. MS MS 15 KI. The University of Kansas Libraries Kenneth Spencer Research Library, n.p.
- Kerouac, Jack. *On the Road*. New York: Penguin, 2003. Print.
- Kerouac, Jack. *On the Road: The Original Scroll*. New York: Viking, 2007. Print.
- Kerouac, Jack. *The Town and the City*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1960. Print.
- Kerouac, Jack. *Visions of Cody*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book, 1960. Print.
- Leavitt, Craig. "On the Road: Cassady, Kerouac, and Images of Late Western Masculinity." *Across the Great Divide: Cultures of Manhood in the American West*. New York: Routledge, 2001. 211-30. Print.
- Love Always, Carolyn*. Dir. Malin Korkeasalo and Maria Ramström. Perf. Carolyn Cassady, John Allen Cassady. WG Film, 2011. DVD.
- Mehrotra, Mahu, and Geetanjali Joshi Mishra. "Many Loves." *Beatdom* (n.d.): n. pag. 19 Apr. 2011. Web.
- Miles, Barry. *Allen Ginsberg: Beat Poet*. London: Virgin, 2010. Print.
- Miles, Barry. *Jack Kerouac, King of the Beats: A Portrait*. London: Virgin, 2010. Print.
- Millstein, Gilbert. "Books of the Times." Rev. of *On the Road*. *The New York Times* 5 Sept. 1957: n. pag. Web. 16 Jan. 2016.
- "Most Popular TV Shows for 1950-1959." Tv.com, n.d. Web. 15 Jan. 2016.

Mouratidis, George. "'Into the Heart of Things' Neal Cassady and the Search for the Authentic." *On the Road: The Original Scroll*. London: Penguin, 2007. 69-81. Print.

*Rebel without a Cause*. Dir. Nicholas Ray. Warner Bros., 1955. DVD.

Sandison, David, and Graham Vickers. *Neal Cassady: The Fast Life of a Beat Hero*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Review, 2006. Print.

"Seeing the Back of the Car." *The Economist*. The Economist Newspaper, 22 Sept. 2012. Web.

"The Art of Fiction No. 41." Interview by Ted Berrigan. *Paris Review* Summer 1968: n. pag. Print.

Watson, Steven. *The Birth of the Beat Generation: Visionaries, Rebels, and Hipsters, 1944-1960*. New York: Pantheon, 1995. Print.

Whiteley, Nigel. "Toward a Throw-Away Culture-Consumerism, 'Style Obsolescence' and Cultural Theory in the 1950s and 1960s." *Oxford Art Journal* 16.2 (1987): 3-27. *JSTOR [JSTOR]*. Web.

Wills, David S. "Reconsidering the Importance of the Joan Anderson Letter." *Beatdom*. N.p., 16 Dec. 2014. Web.