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B4

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On the Road book review

Jack Kerouac’s second novel *On the Road* is perhaps the most famous book to emerge during the Beat generation. With plenty of references to drug use, sex, poetry, jazz, and other common Beat generation characteristics, Kerouac takes wanderlust readers across America in his recount of his experiences in the late 1940s.

In the winter of 1947, free-spirited Dean Moriarty convinces shy and depressed Sal Paradise (Kerouac) to join him and a few others to go across the country to Denver to meet up with some friends, but Sal does not return home for about the next three years. Instead he takes his last remaining dollars and explores America and parts of Mexico in various ways. Since Paradise is usually always broke throughout his journeys, he takes up odd jobs such as picking cotton in California to get by. Along with working and exploring the diverse landscapes, Paradise falls in love with many women during these three years. The descriptive writing resembles a stream of consciousness, much like Paradise’s voyage, bouncing from place to place, never stopping. Through Kerouac’s words one can easily imagine a California sunset that resembled “a grapy dusk, a purple dusk over tangerine groves and long melon fields; the sun the color of pressed grapes, slashed with burgundy red, the fields the color of love and Spanish mysteries.” (81)

Since this story takes place shortly after World War II, many Americans (more specifically the members of the Beat Generation) are full of energy and the drive to go and do something in the world but do not know where to go or what to do. This reflects in both Paradise’s journey and Kerouac’s writing style. Paradise always feels the need to go somewhere new. Even when all of his friends stay in Denver or San Francisco, Paradise ventures on without them to Los Angeles. Kerouac’s writing seems to jump around from place to place as well in this novel since it is similar to a stream of consciousness.

Kerouac turns the Cadillac used by Sal and Dean to drive to Chicago into a symbol of the Beat Generation going against the American ideal. With Dean’s mad driving and burning desire to bounce from city to city, they end up with a destroyed vehicle at the end of their trip. Since the Cadillac, an American-made car, fits into what almost every American wanted at the time, Kerouac shows the Beat Generation rebelling against American ideals by destroying the car.

Although this book can be quite hard to follow at times, most likely due to Kerouac writing it in three weeks on one long piece of typewriter paper, I enjoyed following Sal Paradise throughout all his new discoveries and experiences. Kerouac’s spontaneous writing kept everything exciting throughout the entirety of the novel. This book can influence one to take all of life’s opportunities, do what a person wants when he or she wants to, and to seek out the earth’s natural beauty and the intrigue of other people from different places.