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## 狂欢与对话 ——《在路上》的巴赫金式解读

专业：英语语言文学

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《在路上》是凯鲁亚克的代表作品，为作家带来了名誉和地位，并影响了整整一代人。这本书写于美国社会的转型期，深刻揭示了社会现实，触及到人性深处。《在路上》所纪录的并不是两个社会边缘人漫无目的的流浪，而是其精神追求和成长。本文运用巴赫金的复调理论从《在路上》的狂欢化特点，对话和未完成三个方面对小说进行分析，揭示其叛逆的生活所体现的精神追求和成长。

本文第一章分析《在路上》的狂欢化特点。巴赫金认为在狂欢化中一切社会等级之分都暂时不存在了。“世界颠倒了。狂欢颠覆和嘲弄了所有权威而严肃的事物。”《在路上》描写的是美国先辈们所推崇的自由、独立和民主精神被政治高压和服从所背叛的时期。凯鲁亚克在小说中创造一个颠覆了主流社会的狂欢化世界。狂欢化为文本中不同类型的对话营造了合适的氛围。本章分析《在路上》中的狂欢化人物，场景和写作方式，指出萨尔和迪恩在路上所表现出的叛逆，更重要的是，揭示了他们在这一成长过程中的痛苦和收获。

第二章分析《在路上》中狂欢氛围下的对话。巴赫金眼中的对话不再仅仅是人类交流的方式，而是一种揭示“人类心灵的隐秘”，发现“人身上的人”的途径。本文作者将萨尔视为一名观察

者。通过对话，萨尔审视着他周遭的人和世界，进而逐渐的发现了自我。本章通过分析萨尔同世界，同迪恩，以及同自己的对话，就萨尔是如何成长的这一问题进行了深入的讨论。

第三章在前两章的基础上运用巴赫金的未完成理论证明了小说中那条精神追求之路是永无止境的。在小说中，路被赋予了双重象征。通过这种双重象征，我们看到萨尔在成长过程中的彷徨和痛苦。然而，不管这种过程如何艰难，成长之路始终朝向未来。只要前行，生命的意义将不断被揭示。因此，归根结底，《在路上》讲述的是人如何成其为一个真正的人。

由此，文章结论部分提出：作为一部复调小说，《在路上》描写了一条永不止息的精神追求和成长之路。

关键词：在路上    成长    狂欢    对话    未完成

# Carnival and Dialog

## ---A Bakhtinian Reading of *On the Road*

### Abstract

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*On the Road*, a representative work of Jack Kerouac and of the Beat Generation, brought the author fame and helped define a generation. It was written in a period of social transition in the United States. It is not a book merely about the aimless wandering of two marginalized people but also spiritual quest and growth of the nonconformists. It responds to social reality and touches the deepest core of human nature. This thesis applies Bakhtin's polyphonic principles to the reading of the novel. By examining the carnivalistic features and dialogical nature of the novel, the thesis argues that the character's rebellious life embodies their spiritual quest.

The first chapter focuses on the carnivalistic features of the novel. According to Bakhtin, under the carnival effect everything is free from hierarchies. "Opposites are mingled. Everything authoritative rigid or serious is subverted, loosened and mocked." *On the Road* represents a time in America when the spirit of freedom, individualism and

democracy was betrayed by the political oppression and conformism. Kerouac deliberately created a carnival world in the novel to subvert the mainstream values. Carnivalization makes Bakhtinian dialog possible. By analyzing the carnivalistic character, scene and writing method of the novel, this chapter explores the subversion of the mainstream cultures by the protagonists as well as the pains and gains in their pursuit.

The second chapter analyses the dialogs in the carnival atmosphere. Dialog, as to Bakhtin, reveals the "depth of human soul" and the "man in man". The author of this thesis sees Sal in an dialogical relationship with the world and people through which he gradually develops himself. This chapter discusses how Sal gradually grows by analyzing the dialogs between Sal and the world, Sal and Dean, and Sal and himself.

The third chapter, based on the previous two, applies Bakhtin's philosophy of unfinalizability to prove that the road of quest and growth is never finalized. In the novel, through the two-folded symbolism of the "road" image, Sal's agony and frustration is revealed on the one hand; Yet, on the other hand, no matter how difficult the process is, the road is still leading to the future. And the meaning is continuously unfolded. *On the Road* is at the core a book about how to grow up to be a real man.

The thesis concludes that Kerouac's *On the Road* is a polyphonic novel and that the road of spiritual pursuit and growth will never end.

**Key Words:** *On the Road*      growth      carnival  
dialog      unfinalizability

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## Introduction

The Beat Generation was one of the most important literary schools in the American literary history, whose great sociological and literary impact is strongly felt even today. Jack Kerouac, admittedly "the king of the Beats," was a major writer of the Beat Generation. His masterpiece *On the Road* has been considered as the "Bible of the Beat Generation" and has produced a great influence on the works of the Beat Generation and on American literature in general. Based on the author's personal experiences, the novel describes the life of the Beats who were regarded as the "marginal men" and "outsiders." More importantly, through the direct portrayal of the protagonists' experiences Kerouac shows the contradictions, pains as well as growth in their spiritual pursuit. He applies a unique way to the expression of his emotions freely in the book, and both the content and the form of his novel constitute a challenge to traditional literary writing. When commenting on the novel, Professor Wen Chu'an says, "Although it seems disorderly on the whole, every event of the book is clear, thus constituting a romance of the Beat Generation, which is a true record of the Beats' life and emotion." (Wen Chuan 57) Obviously, a thorough study of *On the Road* is of great significance in our understanding of the life of the Beat Generation and their spiritual pursuit.

Although the Beat Generation has been regarded as an important American literary school with great social and cultural impact, studies of the Beat Generation are still far from enough at home and abroad,



and the Beat Generation has long been "misread" in many ways. *On the Road* was highly praised by Gilbert Milstein in New York Times on its publication. He compared the novel with Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, the masterpiece of the Lost Generation, and considered it as the declaration of the Beat Generation(Milstein 5). Milstein's comment brought Kerouac immediate fame, but it was soon followed by fierce attacks from the mainstream media. Critics did not treat *On the Road* objectively as a literary work, but as a sort of vent for barbaric and irrational discontent to society(Milstein 5). With those attacks and criticism, the outrageous way of life of the Beats was infinitely magnified, while the significance of the novel itself was largely disregarded. On the other hand, the profit-oriented publishers took advantage of the rebellious lifestyle of the Beats and made it a hot sale. They, together with the media, made Kerouac "the King of the Beats" to satisfy the reader's curiosity for the "Beat Generation" instead of highlighting the social and literary values of the novel. Thus, the novel's immediate popularity in fact strengthened the misreading of the novel, but its profound portrayal of life remained buried. This phenomenon also brought about a negative effect on the scholarly study of the Beat generation including the study of the novel *On the Road*. For a long time, the academic study of the Beat Generation in the United States was based on social and biographical criticism with the focus on the life styles and experiences of the Beats. It was not until the 1980s that the focus of the studies of the Beat Generation was shifted more to the text itself, and the profound meaning of the novel was gradually brought to light.

Ann Charters wrote the first biography of Kerouac, *Kerouac: A Biography*, and edited two important readers of the Beat Generation:

*The Portable Kerouac* and *The Portable Beat Generation*. Tim Hunt's *Kerouac's Crooked Road: Development of a Fiction* makes a insightful comparison of the two novels by Kerouac: *On the Road* and *Visions of Cody*. Jim Jones's *Jack Kerouac's Duluoz Legend: The Mythic Form of an Autobiographical Fiction* interprets Kerouac's works from the psychoanalytical perspective. Besides, Regina Weinreich's *Kerouac's Spontaneous Poetics: A Study of the Fiction*, which focuses on Kerouac's writing method is a supplement to the study of Kerouac. As a newly published monograph, *Why Kerouac Matters: The Lessons of On the Road* written by John Leland, is an insightful interpretation of the novel. Leland's study shows that it is "a wry, insightful, and playful discussion" of *On the Road* that demonstrates that the novel "still matters because at its core it is a book about how to grow up"(Leland 7).

The studies on Kerouac in China started in the 1960s from a general introduction of the Beat Generation, and it inevitably carried a strong ideological and political tendency characteristic of the time that made it a social and political study rather than a literary study. The Beat Generation was firstly regarded as a negative example, and studies on this phenomenon were accompanied by the view of bourgeois corruption. Against this special cultural and political background, it was hard for the Beat writers represented by Kerouac to receive an objective comment in China. The proper literary criticism towards the Beat Generation did not begin in China until the mid 1980s. In 1981, the journal *Contemporary Foreign Literature* published an article entitled "Remarks on the Beat Generation" by Zhao Yifan, in which the author examines the Beat Generation by analyzing its social and cultural discourse, developing process, major

works and writing styles. In the same year, the journal *Feitian* published another article by Zhao, giving a rather objective introduction to the Beat Generation. In the monograph *The Beat Generation and the Contemporary Chinese Literature*, Zhang Guoqing comments that these two articles mark the beginning of the reevaluation of the Beat generation in China. In the late 1980s Professor Wen Chu'an translated Kerouac's novel *On the Road*, which gained immediate and lasting popularity. The recent translation of *On the Road* was by Wang Yongnian in 2006. With the booming of the translations, *On the Road* is being widely studied from cultural, political, social, and religious perspectives. The recently-published academic papers on the Beat Generation and *On the Road* include *Rebellion and Exploration of the Beat Generation* (2000) by Xiao Minghan, *A glimpse of the Beat's spirit: A Comment of Dean Moriarty* by Wang Yuanlu, *Rebellion and Compromise: Theme Study* by Lu Yalin, and *The Dilemma of Cultural Identity of the Beat Generation* by Wang Haiyan. In 2009, Chen Jie's *The Authentic Road: A Study of Kerouac's "On the Road" Novels* examines Kerouac's spiritual pursuit represented in his novels *On the Road* and *The Dharma Bums*, which may be the latest development of the Beat Generation studies in China.

Although the academic study on the Beat Generation has made noticeable achievements in China, the research is far from being exhausted. This thesis tries to apply Bakhtin's polyphonic theory to the reading of *On the Road*, in hope of providing some new insights to the masterpiece of the Beat Generation.

Mikhail Bakhtin presents his theory of the polyphonic novel in *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*. The book was first published in 1929, and a much-expanded edition came out with Bakhtin's careful

revision in 1963. In the book, Bakhtin considers that there are two types of the novel--- the monologic and the polyphonic. He thinks that the traditional monologic novel is largely dominated by the ideology of the author. Therefore, in this type of the novel, all thing finally merge into a unity. There is only one voice, one consciousness can be found in it. Bakhtin regards Dosdoevsky as the founder of polyohonic novel. According to Bakhtin, the main characters of Doesdoevsky's novel are the "plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses and the genuine polyphonic of full-valued voices " (Bakhtin 1984 4). This multitude of equal consciousnesses and their worlds brings the novel the possibility of genuine dialog.

For Bakhtin, the core of Dosdoevsky's artistic world is dialog. Different voices and consciousnesses coexist and interact with each other. In a polyphonic novel, the dialog can be found between two characters, among different characters, and inside a certain character. It can be both verbal and nonverbal. Even the actions of the heroes can be called dialog. "Dialog is for him not the threshold to action, but the action itself"(Bakhtin 213). Through dialog, "the person is not only outwardly manifested, he becomes for the first time that which he is." (213) Thus the process of the character's transformation and growing is clearly shown in his dialog with others, the world and even with himself. Dialog reveals the inner man for others and for the character himself.

Since a dialog can be both verbal and nonverbal, a person's idea can also be revealed from the interaction among voices. The idea is dialogic, too. Bakhtin thinks dialogs which carry the hero's idea are conducted by plot. The plot builds the character and only in the plot can his spirit be truly presented. He generates those novels with

carnivalistic plot as calivalistic literature. He believes canival produces possibility for interactions among different voices. Characters temporarily free from classes and social status meet in the world of equality and automatically take part in the action of dialog. Bakhtin puts the theory of calivalization in the revised version of *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics* to strengthen his polyphonic theory.

The world of carnival provides the novel with a sphere of openness and equality for the making of dialog. To be means to interact. Once the dialog is finalized, everything will end. However, the dialog can never be finalized. Bakhtin believes "on the level of the religious-utopia Weltanschauung Dostoevsky carries the dialog over into eternity, thinking of it as an eternal co-rejoicing, unfinalizability of the dialog, or, originally, as the dialog's vicious circle" (Bakhtin 1984 213). It is impossible to completely reveal a person in the existing reality. There is always capacity waiting for people to further explore. People always have capacity for development. The unfinalizability of a novel always pushes the hero toward the unknown future. Therefore, the hero's world is developing, and, at the same time, the meaning of the novel is developing. "In the developing world which the final voice is not uttered yet, every single life is unfinalized" (Bakhtin 1984 594). As the basis of Bakhtin's other theories, unfinalizability is one of his most significant ideas.

In Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, he gives a detailed analysis of Dostoevsky's works from several aspects, and hence puts forward his polyphonic principles. The polyphonic novel as defined by Bakhtin, has "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices." These voices provide the text with features of instability and incompleteness

and thus bring openness to the novels. Moreover, such literary mode may have the carnival features which allow the flouting of authority and subversion of social hierarchies.

Since Bakhtin's theory has such a profound meaning, it has become a very useful method in textual analysis. This thesis is an attempt to apply Bakhtin's polyphonic theory to the reading of *On the Road*. Kerouac's *On the Road* is constituted of a multiplicity of divergent and contending social voices that interact and contradict but never intermingle with each other, thus forming an equal and open context. The equality and openness is not only the unique feature of the novel, but also the new vision the Beats tried to build, which obviously resonates with Bakhtin's polyphonic principles.

This thesis studies one of the representative works of the Beat Writers, Kerouac's *On the Road*, with Bakhtin's polyphonic theory, so that a re-evaluation of the novel's significance will be achieved. By applying Bakhtin's polyphonic principle to the analysis of *On the Road*, the thesis is meant to demonstrate that beneath the rebellious living mode is the unfinalized process of pursuit and growth.

Apart from Introduction and Conclusion, the thesis is made up of three chapters.

The first chapter analyses the carnivalization in *On the Road* through its plot, character and writing method. The carnival atmosphere Kerouac designs in the novel created a possibility for genuine dialog and for the spiritual development of the protagonist Sal.

The second chapter analyses the dialog in *On the Road* from three points, dialog between Sal and the world, Sal and Dean, Sal and himself. It is intended to show how Sal gradually develops during the

journeys.

The third chapter discusses unfinalizability in *On the Road*, so as to reveal the road of growing-up is endless. The discussion is conducted through the explanation of the meaning and unfinalizability of the road.

The Conclusion winds up the whole thesis with a summary of its main ideas, and points out the theme of growth in Kerouac's *On the Road*.

## Chapter one

### Carnivalization in *On the Road*

The Beat Generation appeared in an extremely conservative society which emphasized obedience and coherence. In order to meet the political needs of the Cold War, the American government strengthened their power of rule. The ideological control made the country's mainstream culture self-closed, rigid and repressive. The emergence of the Beat Generation was like a sudden howl in this non-carnivalistic society. The Beats rose against the dominant social norms with their antiestablishment, anti-political and anti-intellectual attitudes and behaviors. They "opposed to the prevailing cultural, literary, and moral values, and in favor of unfettered self-realization and self-expression" (Abrams 42). This cultural and literary movement was like a giant carnival, and the beats were people who enjoyed a carnival life. Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, sometimes called the Bible of the Beat generation, undoubtedly carries many carnivalistic features. This chapter is a discussion of the carnivalistic features in the novel's character, scenes, and writing method in the light of Bakhtin's theory on Carnival.

#### 1.1 Carnival as defined by Bakhtin

Bakhtin's discussion of Carnival studies the carnival celebrations which can be traced back to the ancient Roman and Greek period. After centuries evolution, this celebration developed into a festival season. Such festivals include Bacchanale and saturnalias from ancient



Roman and Greek period. These celebrations have an important position in medieval Europe. It is a season that people gather together to hold a series of celebrations and parades. On these special days, people are released from hard work and celebrate hard-earned harvests by singing and dancing. It is a festival without hierarchy and disparity in social position. The poor can sit and drink together with their owners or masters. Moreover, some activities are held to sneer at the high and mighty, and even the church can be mocked in those special days. "The jolly relativity of all things is proclaimed. Everything authoritative rigid or serious is subverted loosened and mocked" (Seidon, R. 43). Bakhtin has undertaken a thorough examination of the Carnival phenomenon and finds that Carnival is one of the most basic parts of human culture. He says of the Carnival that

"Its roots are deep in the primordial order and primordial thinking of man, its developments under the conditions of the class society, its extraordinary vitality and undying fascination is one of the most complex and interesting problems of cultural history." (Bakhtin 1984 100)

A Carnival sense of the world or Carnival attitudes as are described by Bakhtin has four categories. The first category is the "free, familiar contact among people" (Bakhtin 101). All the people in the Carnival celebrations are participants. They do not perform in it, instead they live in it. "Life turned inside out" (Bakhtin 1984 101). Carnival life penetrates into every part of society. The second category, eccentricity, comes from the familiar contact. "It permits the latent sides of human nature to be revealed and developed in a concretely sensuous form." The third category, "Carnivalistic misalliances," is also connected with familiarization. That is to say, all

the things self-closed, isolated and distanced from one another by the non-Carnivalistic hierarchical view are combined and unified by the Carnivalistic attitudes. Distance among people disappears. People are relieved from social hierarchy. A kind of Utopia human relation is formed. The Carnivalistic destruction of hierarchical attitudes helps form the fourth category---“Profanation: the carnivalistic blasphemies” (Bakhtin 1984 101).

The Carnival attitudes have a strong influence on ancient and modern literature, especially the development of the novel. It was

“decisively reflected in the organization of the plot and the situations of the plot, it determined the special familiarity of the authorial position in relation to the heroes (impossible in the higher genres), it introduced the logic of, mesalliances and profanatory lowering of status, and, finally, it exercised a powerful transforming influence on the verbal style of literature itself.” (Bakhtin 102)

The transforming from Carnival or Carnival attitudes to the language of literature is defined as Carnivalization. Carnivalization is the key word Bakhtin uses to analyze the Carnival literature, although he has mentioned in his earlier works that Carnival is not a literary phenomenon. Bakhtin classifies the “Carnival literature to those genres which have come under the influence—either directly or indirectly, through a series of intermediary links—of one or another variant of carnivalistic folklore ancient or medieval” (Bakhtin 1984 88).

According to Bakhtin, there are three roots for novelistic genres: the epic, the rhetorical, and the carnivalistic. The carnivalistic novel has such a long history that can date back to the ancient Roman and Greek time. It belongs to the realm of serio-comical which can be found early in the Socratic dialogue and the Menippean Satire. The

Socratic dialogues are most popularly known as the dialogues between Socrates and his disciples recorded by Plato. It is originally a genre of memoir. This genre was widely used by scholars and philosophers such as Plato and Xenophon. Bakhtin believes that the basis of the Socratic dialogue is the notion of the dialogic nature of truth and the dialogic nature of human thinking about truth. Syncrisis and anacrisis are two basic devices of Socratic dialogue. Syncrisis is also understood as the technique of juxtaposition. Socrates was a genius of using this technique. He was able to force people to speak and let their falseness and incompleteness exposed. In this way, a dialogical intercourse among people was formed. Compared to the Socratic dialogue, Menippean Satire is full of laughter, imagination, fantasies and eccentricities. After analyzing the characteristics of Menippean Satire, Bakhtin points out that it is the most adequate expression of the characteristics of the ancient Roman and Greek epoch. "While possessing inner integrity, the genre of the menippea at the same time possesses great external plasticity and the remarkable ability to absorb related smaller genres and to penetrate as a component part into other large genres"(Bakhtin 1984 98).

The Socratic dialogue and the Menippean Satire are certainly conducive to the formation of Polyphony. Both of them contain the seed of polyphonic novels. The voices in such genres are set free to speak subversively or shockingly, without the interruption and control of the author. It is just the same as the relation between the character and author in the polyphonic novel. That is why when Bakhtin discusses Dostoevsky's works. He combines the concept of carnivalization and polyphony together.

The carnival attitudes carnivalize language and characters and

jointly provide the quality of openness to the text. The carnivalized text argues for equality-based dialogue and openness. It emphasizes unfinalizability and rejects limit and narrowness. Every character in it has the discursive power that creates prerequisite of dialogue. Just as the carnival attitudes contain the spirit of death and birth, and that of destruction and renewal, Bakhtin believes all the Carnival characters contain two opposite sides such as blessings and curses, praise and blame, young and old, fool and smart, high and low. These various forms of antinomy, however, are not totally separated from each other, but mutually transformed and in constant evolution, which anticipates unfinalizability and provides the basis for dialog and eventually the polyphony.

### 1.2 Carnivalistic character---Dean as a Holy Goof

If the whole book of *On the Road* is a giant carnival square, then there must be many carnivalistic characters in it. There are Bop musicians like Slim and Shearing in countless jazz clubs where "they writhed and twisted and blew. Every now and then a clear harmonic cry gave new suggestions of a tune that would someday be the only tune in the world and would raise men's souls to joy. They found it, they lost, they wrestled for it, they found it again, they laughed, they moaned..."(Kerouac 228). There are drug addicts like Old Bull Lee, who "did all these things merely for the experience. Now the final study was the drug habit" (Kerouac 136-137). In the black ghetto of Denver, "there was excitement and the air was filled with the vibration of really joyous life that knows nothing of disappointment and 'white sorrow' and all that" (Kerouac 170-171). There are also Westerners who live so poorly yet so optimistically that Sal says "I wished I knew

his whole raw life and what the hell he'd been doing all these years besides laughing and yelling like that" (Kerouac 23). There are still many others, let alone the heroes of the novel Sal and Dean, who hit the road for unexpected possibilities.

As can be seen, what is in common among these carnivalistic characters is that they all live a life other than that accepted by the orthodox, dominant middle-class ethics. Therefore, in the eyes of the mainstream society, they are crazy, abnormal, perverse, and eccentric. Yet it is just through this kind of carnivalization that they get themselves more acquainted with the essence of life, and at the same time expose the hypocrisy and meaninglessness of the mainstream values.

Indeed, craziness can be a suitable word to generalize the carnivalistic characters in the novel *On the Road*. In terms of craziness, no one surpasses Dean Moriarty. At the very beginning of the novel, when Sal's aunt first saw Dean, "she took one look at Dean and decided that he was a madman"( 9). And shortly after that, when he was talking "torrentially" on the bus, the passages all turned around to see the "overexcited nut"( 10).

Dean's craziness is almost always connected to the road. In a sense, his craziness is the "craziness on the road." First, he is "the perfect guy for the road, because he actually was born on the road" (7). He has never seen his mother since his birth, and wandered on the streets with his father. He has to live all by himself. This man has a dramatically sad and pathetic childhood. Before he meets Sal and his friends, no one teaches him any rules and regulations of life. The world is totally limitless and free to him. He does not change as he is aging. He has no sense of what he should and should not do.

Everything comes into his mind he makes it into reality. "He was simply a youth tremendously excited with life"(10). Second, he is crazy for cars. He "set a Denver record for stealing cars and went to the reformatory"(39). And he enjoys driving fast. Once he drove with Sal from Denver to Chicago via Ed Wall's ranch, and covered 1180 miles in seventeen hours, at the average of seventy miles per hour, setting "a kind of crazy record"(223). And lastly but the most importantly, Dean is restless. For him, destination is not important; the point is keep going. This is illustrated by his conversation with Sal:

"Whee. Sal, we gotta go and never stop going till we get there."

"Where we going, man?"

"I don't know but we gotta go." (225)

Dean is characteristic of what Bakhtin regards as the participant in the carnival, because for him "carnival is not contemplated, it is, strictly speaking, not even played out" (Bakhtin 1984 101). Indeed, unlike Sal, Dean never stops in order to think. What he needs is stimulation to go. For him, cars, jazz, girls, drugs are all forms of stimulations, which are not only ways to entertain, but more importantly ways for him to live in a carnivalistic life, a life that "turn[s] inside out." (101)

Dean's life style naturally shocks the "ordinary" people, the members of the middle class. The unleashed energy, the raw humanity, the daring spirit, the passionate optimism, the naked expression are all that is lacking in the mainstream culture. But it is exactly these qualities in Dean that fascinate Sal, remind him of the real Western spirit, and lead him onto the road. In the novel, Sal regards Dean as a

“Holy Goof” (Kerouac 183) and as his guide to the new possibilities:

But Dean's intelligence was every bit as formal and shining and complete, without the tedious intellectualness. And his “criminality” was not something that sulked and sneered; it was a wild yea-saying outburst of American joy; it was Western, the west wind, an ode from the Plains, something new, long prophesied, long a-coming (he only stole cars for joy rides). Besides, all my New York friends were in the negative, nightmare position of putting down society and giving their tired bookish or political or psychoanalytical reasons, but Dean just raced in society, eager for bread and love....

A western kinsman of the sun, Dean. Although my aunt warned me that he would get me in trouble, I could hear a new call and see a new horizon....(Kerouac 13-14)

A holy goof is a man of opposite qualities, a man of paradoxes. This reminds us of a more famous “holy goof” and a typical carnivalistic figure—Dionysus. Dean has been considered by some scholars as the embodiment of Dionysus, the god of fertility and wine in Greek myth. There are several key concepts associated with him. One is rebirth after death. Another is the power under the influence of wine. He is the god of everything uncivilized and wild. The festival of Dionysus is one of the most important events of the year for ancient Greeks. It is the time when everybody ignore inhibitions and regulations, and let emotions freely released. This festival is one of carnival festivals, and the spirit of Dionysus has much in common

with the carnival attitudes. Therefore, if Dean is the embodiment of Dionysus in spirit, he can also be the representative of carnival attitudes. He shares the craziness and wilderness with both Dionysus and carnival attitudes.

In Dionysus there lies a combination of two opposite powers: the power to give birth, and the power to destroy. Similarly, in Dean we see these two opposite powers coexisting at the same time. On the one hand, he is the "western sunshine," representing new life in Sal's eyes. He is as natural as the "western wind," as harmless and "pure" as a child: "People were now beginning to look at Dean with maternal and paternal affection glowing in their faces. He was finally an Angel, as I always knew he would become" (248). On the other hand, he is as dangerous and destructive as the "mad Ahab" in Melville's *Moby Dick*, and "behind him charred ruins smoked. He rushed westward over the groaning and awful continent again, and soon he would arrive" (244). In Dean, we see the exhausted life which is too dangerous like death. We see the unexhausted passion which is too vital like birth. We see a man who is as wild as a whirlwind, and at the same time as pure as a child.

Indeed, Dean is a character of paradox. The opposite qualities of construction and destruction in him are transformable. In other words, they provide only possibilities, not solutions. Therefore, Dean cannot be blindly followed. He simply opens a ground for new possibilities, preparing Sal on his road of growth.

### 1.3 Carnivalistic scenes

The Beat Generation came appeared in a particular time and place—postwar America in the mid 1940s and 1950s. The United



States had just gone through the depression of the 1930s and World War Two. It was experiencing the beginning of the nuclear age and lived with the possibility of annihilation by nuclear weapons. Churchill had declare that the Iron Curtain existed and the Cold War was raging. The revolt of the Beats has been summed up by Lewis Mumford: "Since ritual order has now passed into mechanized order, the present revolt of the younger generation against the machine has made a practice of promoting disorder and randomness" (Cresswell 254). *On the Road*, as the Bible of the Beat Generation, records how the Beats behave in this movement. Their wild behavior provides a rich source for Kerouac. The novel is full of carnivalistic scenes. The novel itself becomes a carnival square for the Beats to release their authentic feelings.

One of the carnivalistic scenes appears when Sal is arranged with a job as a guard:

"He arranged to get me the same kind of job he had, as a guard in the barracks. I went through the necessity routine, and to my surprise the bastards hired me. I was sworn in by the local police chief, given a badge, a club, and now I was a special policeman. I wondered what Dean and Carlo and Old Bull Lee would say about this." (Kerouac 62)

Sal as the narrator has an important position in the novel. He travels back and forth across America. What pushes him to go is the death of the past, especially the old rigid life style and value. For Sal, the peaceful and stable life which the middle class loves can never be real life. Life will be wasted in the boredom. He starts his journey to

escape from that kind of life. Paradoxically, he is now a public servant of the government, the guard of the rigid and dead middle class value. This is what Bakhtin discusses in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*—crowning and discrowning, the primary carnival performance. It is a ritual in most of the festival in carnival form. People mock at the king and authority by taking off the crown and dress of an ordinary person who is dressed up to be the king. The ritual reveals the “core of the carnivalistic attitude to the world—the pathos of vicissitudes and changes, of death and renewal.” It is “a two-in-one (dvuedinyi), ambivalent ritual expressing the inevitability, and simultaneously the creativity, of change and renewal, the jolly relativity of every system and order, every authority and every (hierarchical) position” (Bakhtin 1984 102).

The arrangement of Sal, the rebel as a police, is just a sign of crowning. He is “crowned” to be a guard of the government, but even he himself knows he is not cut out for it. He is sent to guard the barracks, but people there do not take him seriously. When he tries to ask the drunkard who is shouting and making noises, they slam the door in front of his face. They obviously ignore him. This ignorance and open contempt is a sign of discrowning. The discrowning is not merely made by others but also by the protagonist himself. While the other policemen are busy arresting someone so as to hit their target, Remi and Sal are busy stealing things from the barracks cafeteria. Instead of being afraid or shamed, they are having fun by stealing:

“Here, realizing a dream of mine from infancy, I took the cover off the chocolate ice cream and stuck my hand in wrist-deep and hauled me up a skewer of ice cream and licked at it. Then we got ice cream boxes and

studded them, poured chocolate syrup over and sometimes strawberries too, then walked around in the kit pockets. I often tore a piece of roast beef and wrapped it in a napkin. "You must know what President Trumen said," Remi would say. "We must cut down on the cost of living." (Kerouac 68)

Here these two policemen who are supposed to represent power and authority become two greedy children thirsting for chocolate and ice cream. They use President Trumen's words to mock the values of the main stream. This is a process of discrowning. The description of upside-down characters and world is full of carnivalistic features. The role as a police is dead while the role as an innocent child is formed.

Also in this section, we see more examples of "discrowning." When Sal is on duty, he puts the American flag upside down. When the old cop tells him to be responsible for his job and keep the laws and orders, he only wants to "go and find out what everybody was doing all over the country" (65). Being a police should have a holy and glorious mind, but what those "genuine" policemen are doing is "to make arrests and get compliments from the chief of police in town." Here, what is holy is ridiculed, and what is authoritative and serious is mocked. The noble status is debased by the jolly description.

The image of policemen played by Remi and Sal carries two meanings: a powerful law-executor and an innocent child. It is a two-in-one image. It shows the conflict between Beats represented by Sal and Remi and the "ordinary people." The "ordinary people" live only for the sake of orders and regulations. They are afraid of losing their social status. They do not live a life of their own. Yet the Beats are brave enough to stand out and seek for the truth of life. Although

their behavior may appear to be funny and childish, the seeking is significant, and is thus full of hope.

This type of true-to-life portrayal can be easily found in *On the Road*. Kerouac's writing follows the principle of authenticity, especially in emotion. Since the truth in the novel is beyond all the regulations and limitations of their society, it can never be logical and rarely reasonable, if measured by the social norms. Kerouac frequently describes the experiences of nakedness, sex and drugs in the novel. They are not only a revolt against the contemporary social conditions but also a symbolic complete and unlimited freedom. The freedom and liberty which we can find with the participants at a Carnival square is repeated here.

When trying to imply an idea of taking off the heavy burden of the civilization, Dean suggests his friends to take off their clothes and expose themselves. This is one of the most impressive parts of the novel:

“He scurried back to the car and drove on. “Now Sal, now Marylou, I want both of you to do as I’m doing, disemburden yourselves of all that clothes—now what’s the sense of clothes? Now that’s what I’m sayin—and sun your pretty bellies with me. Come on!” We were driving west into the sun; it fell in through the windshield. “Open your belly as we drive into it.”  
(Kerouac 153)

It is not difficult to see that Kerouac deliberately uses the uncommon word “disemburden” to refer to the “burden” of the civilization. Together with the nakedness of their body, their soul is

exposed. No discreetness and affectation. The clothes as the symbol of social rules, status and responsibility are taken off. Nothing is more important than a peaceful pure heart. A perfect carnivalistic scene is created with a vivid comical effect. The reader can feel the inner growth of the character underneath the eccentricity. Here, the naked body is an embodiment of liberation and freedom. This is not only a bold description, but also a call for spiritual truth.

Besides nakedness, sex and drugs are also major themes in Kerouac's works. The characters and their radical behaviors, together with such carnival elements as jazz, drugs, nakedness, sex and mobility, form the giant Carnival square of the novel.

#### 1.4 Carnivalistic writing method --- a carnivalistic catharsis

As a representative of Beats' writing style, Jack Kerouac is well known for his spontaneous writing. This is the writing without stop or pause, without choosing the proper word, and without a well-designed plan. "Remove literary, grammatical and syntactical inhibition." "Blow as deep as you want to blow" (Charters 483). He is crazy about Jazz, and he thinks writing should be free like playing Jazz. Charters wrote in *Kerouac: A Biography*

"For Jack the appeal of sketching was his excitement letting himself go on paper, just as a jazz musician blew riff after riff of a solo following what direction his own mind and immediate emotions led him. As he told Allen, when he sketched, he wrote "with 100% honesty," and sometimes was so inspired he lost consciousness. The original source of sketching, Kerouac was sure, was Yeats' trance writing, and once had begun to sketch, Jack felt it was the only way to

write" (Charters 140).

The draft of *On the Road* was finished within just three weeks. After Kerouac published the novel, a writer named Truman Capote says "That's not writing, that's typewriting" (Hunt xiii). The comment shows his contempt not only to the novel, but at the writing style of the writer. It denies the meaning underneath the writing method. Jack Kerouac says,

Not "selectivity" of expression but following free deviation (association) of mind into limitless blow-on-subject seas of thought, swimming in sea of English with no discipline other than rhythms of rhetorical exhalation and expostulated statement, like a fist coming down on a table with each complete utterance, bang! (Kerouac 484)

The writing method Kerouac uses in *On the Road* is fresh, and it brings a new style to American literature. Compare with works of the traditional writing, *On the Road* is subversive. The novel is criticized for its loose writing and direct expression of feelings under the effect of drugs. The traditional rules which scholars use to interpret a novel are obviously unsuitable for this book. Since the plot and characters are different from those in the traditional novel, the writing method is also rebellious. Kerouac uses his different view of writing in *On the Road*. It is not only the plot and characters but also the writing itself that help him explore the truth of life.

There are many words in *On the Road* with which the writer directly expresses himself. His emotions naturally speak instead of

hiding in the words. It is like what Wordsworth says of the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. Those words provide a strong emotional impact on the reader. Sal says,

And for just a moment I had reached the point of ecstasy that I always wanted to reach, which was the complete step across chronological time into timeless shadows, and the sensation of death kicking at my heels to move on, with a phantom dogging its own heels, and myself hurrying to a plank where all the angels dove off and flow into the holy void of uncreated emptiness, the potent and inconceivable radiances shining in bright Mind Essence, innumerable lotus-lands falling open in the magic mothswarm of heaven. I could hear an indescribable seething roar which wasn't in my ear but everywhere and had nothing to do with sounds. I realized that I had died and been reborn numberless times but just didn't remember especially because the transitions from life to death and back to life are so ghostly easy, a magical action for naught, like falling asleep and waking up again a million times, the utter casualness and deep ignorance of it. (Kerouac 164)

This expression comes when Sal arrives at San Francisco. He has travelled and experienced a great deal since he set off. On the other hand, his journey is a direct result of his meeting with Dean. But deep in his heart the feeling of loss in life and in himself is the real source. On the road while he is seeing and feeling the world, he is reaching himself. He is maturing little by little. He feels the pulse of life and feels a rush to speak it out without any embellishment. The expression has to be natural just like the flow of life. Words with such strong

emotion go deep into the reader and touch the core in the heart.

When the writer let his emotion freely flow, his heart is purified and sublimated. This is a kind of "catharsis," a Greek word which means cleansing or purging. Aristotle uses it to mean the release of emotion in a tragedy that the character or the audience may experience. Through the process of experiencing "catharsis," a kind of balance will be gained. To regain the balance and make one feel at peace is the reason of release. This meets the principle of spontaneous writing created by Kerouac. *On the Road* is obviously not a tragedy, but the exceeding emotion the writer expresses makes it achieve a kind of Carnivalistic "Catharsis". The emotional release is so crazy and wild, that it provides the writer and the reader a chance to get their minds ready and to keep up with the pace.

Craziness, wilderness and eccentricity can be found everywhere in the novel *On the Road*, wherever the writer tries to develop the plot, build a character or express a feeling. It makes the book a Carnival square for the carnivalistic elements to freely play their roles. In this process, death and birth, vulgarity and nobleness, crowning and discrowning come together. "Opposite meets, look at one another, are reflected in one another, know and understand one another" (Bakhtin 148). Carnivalization makes possible for the great dialog to open. In this way, the carnivalized *On the Road* creates a great dialog with the society in which it is produced. Under such circumstances, no matter how childish the characters' behaviors are, their pursuit of truth and meaning of life is precious. In the process of such pursuit, they develop and finally become real men.



## Chapter Two

### Dialogs in *On the Road*

Some philosophers in history believe that philosophical thinking should never be written down, because of the lack of real communication. And they believe written words can not represent the true meaning of the thinker. In order to avoid the misrepresentation of meaning, Plato recorded the words of Socrates in the form of dialog for fear that the meaning be contaminated in other ways. In his view, the only way to keep a written work alive is to put it into dialog. However, besides the function of conveying real meaning, what else can a dialog do?

Bakhtin considers dialog as a way to reveal the "depth of human soul"(Bakhtin 213). When dialog is made possible in the discourse of equality and freedom offered by carnivalization, the text becomes a square for different voices interacting with each other. A Bakhtinian dialog can be shown directly between characters, sections and chapters, or indirectly inside the character, or between the reader and the text, or even the text can become a great dialog. Dialog of such variety makes the text open to multiple interpretations from multiple perspectives.

*On the Road* is a modern polyphonic novel. The novel is full of Bakhtian micro dialogs and these micro dialogs finally constitutes a great dialog--the novel itself. In the novel, the protagonists, Sal and Dean, experience four journeys back and force across the continent of the United States. The experience on the road provides a wonderful opportunity for them to meet different people of different social status. As we have seen from the novel's carnivalistic features discussed in

the first chapter of this thesis, the protagonists' experience on the road provides a possible discourse for dialog. When the protagonists interact with the people they meet, dialogs are automatically being formed. Besides, the road is also a place for the development of the characters of the novel. Therefore, there are many dialogs which show the internal struggle and conflicts of the heroes. In this way, the whole novel is about different consciousnesses and voices standing out and interacting with each other. It is just such inharmonious consciousnesses and voices that bring the novel a feeling of reality and authenticity. Just like the comment Bakhtin made to Dostoevsky's works as a typical example of polyphonic novel:

The intersection, consonance, or interference of speeches in the overt dialog with the speeches in the heroes' interior dialogs are everywhere present. The specific totality of ideas, thoughts and worlds is in each. The object of the author's aspirations is not at all this totality of ideas in and of itself, as something neutral and identical with itself. No, the object is precisely the act of passing the themes through many and varied voices, it is, so to speak, the fundamental, irrescindable multivoicedness and varivoicedness of the theme.  
(Bakhtin 1984 226)

The novel *On the Road* records the pains and gains of Sal and Dean on the road. Dean as a character of wildness and madness is usually considered as playing the leading role in the novel. However, compared with Sal, during the journeys he is the one with fewer changes or less development. No matter how crazy and extreme his behaviors are, his image is flat, without much development. On the

contrary, Sal, who has acted as a follower of Dean, experiences change and growth on the road. Keruoac leaves a great space for his character Sal to act and think to be himself. In fact, Sal, rather than Dean, is the real hero of the novel.

As the protagonist of the novel, Sal's mental and spiritual development is no doubt a prominent theme of the novel. Besides being revealed in the carnivalistic scenes in the novel, it is also revealed in the dialogs. And it is through various kinds of dialogs that Sal's growth is gradually achieved and revealed. When Bakhtin analyzes Dostoevsky's heroes, he said, "In Dostoevsky the self-consciousness of the hero is completely dialogized: its every aspect is turned outward, it is intensively addressed to itself, to another person, to a third person. Outside the living directedness toward itself and toward the other person it does not exist, even for itself." (Bakhtin 213) As a matter of fact, the experience on the road in this way is a process of self-realization. In the process, the dialog associated with Sal is constantly changing, and it shows the transforming of his self-consciousness. The following is going to analyze the dialogs associated with Sal in three aspects: Dialog between Sal and the world, Dialog between Sal and other characters, Dialog between Sal and himself.

## 2.1 Sal's dialog with the world

*On the Road* is basically a book of rebellion. When *On the Road* was published in 1957, it immediately aroused controversy in the society. The so-called unhealthy and abnormal life style recorded in the book shocked the mainstream society. It is not strange that the novel triggered negative comments from those who stuck to the fixed

regulations and rules of the mainstream culture. Among them, Norman Podhoretz was one of the most prominent. "The Know-Nothing Bohemians" he published in 1958 describes the book as "inept parody of Faulkner at his worst" and he "defended civilization against the barbarians." He condemns,

There is a suppressed cry in those books [of Kerouac]: Kill the intellectuals who can talk coherently, kill the people who can sit still for five minutes at a time." "The Bohemianism of the 1950s" is "hostile to civilization; it worships primitivism, instinct energy, 'blood'." "This is the revolt of the spirituality underprivileged" (Podhoretz 305)

As the "declaration" of the Beats' revolt, the novel naturally responds to society in many aspects. Its plot, its theme and its writing method inevitably create many dialog. However, the most prominent dialog is the dialog between the protagonist Sal and the mainstream society. In the novel, there are many descriptions about how this rebellious vagabond feels about and contacts with the society he lives in.

Like other Beats, Sal Paradise witnesses the turbulent 1950s. With the beginning of the Cold War and McCarthyism, the country was under a high political pressure and ideological control. People were living in the disillusionment stemming from the Cold War. Sal sees this clearly when he arrives in Washington D.C:

We arrived in Washington at dawn. It was the day of Harry Truman's inauguration for his second term. Great displays of war might were lined along

Pennsylvania Avenue as we rolled by in our battered boat. There were 6-295, PT boats, artillery, all kinds of war material that looked murderous in the snowy grass; the last thing was a regular small ordinary lifeboat that looked pitiful and foolish.... He kept shaking his head in awe. "What are these people up to? Harry's sleeping somewhere in this town.... Good old Harry.... Man from Missouri as I am.... That must be his boat. (Kerouac 81)

Sal mocks and condemns Cold War fanaticism and McCarthyism in such a humorous tone. However, beneath the tone of mockery, a sense of disappointment and resignation is shown in the writing. In such a society, humanity and individuality meets with cruel and inhumane suppression. The cruel and suppressive nature of society is disclosed to the full extent. As one who deeply feels this, Sal suffers and feels a kind of deadness inside. He frequently uses the word "sad" to describe America, and he considers the American a "self-important moneybag." All this disappoints him, but what makes him suffer the most is that he senses the inhumanity and darkness in society, but he can not do anything to help solving it except by taking a rebellious and radical life style. He says, "All we could do was yell." He is trying to use his behavior and what he feels about the world to tell something. The expression of his disappointment, pain, and sadness he expresses in the book is his way to respond to the world. It is "not only about himself and about his immediate environment, but also about the world"(89). His thought about the world is not only a vain yell like he said, but a dialog with the world.

If the war might described above is directed outside toward the Soviet Union and the Socialist Camp, the "Victorian police" is used to

suppress the American people. Kerouac completely unmask the true face of the American police. The word "police" appears frequently in the novel for as many as thirteen times. To Sal,

"The American police are involved in psychological warfare against those Americans who don't frighten them with imposing papers and threats. It's a Victorian police force; it peers out of musty windows and wants to inquire about everything, and can make crimes if the crimes don't exist to their satisfaction." (82)

As the representative of government's cruel and inhuman control, the police make crimes upon innocent people. They are the "horrible crew of men, men with cop-souls" (63). In order to get accomplishments from their superior, they arrest at least one man in a month. Under such circumstances, the responsibility of police is no longer protection of people, but for some ridiculous selfish interest.

The American people, however, have long cherished their tradition of freedom and individualism. As a civilized white man, Sal feels ashamed. He even wishes to change the world with the black, because "the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy ... not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music not enough night." He is so sick of his "white man ambition", and the values of the mainstream middle class (169). He wishes to live like a Negro, "a white negro" as is termed by Norman Mailer, who "has been living on the margin between totalitarianism and democracy for two centuries" (Mailer 584). In a sense, the Beats are "white Negroes."

The despair in present life and society makes Sal expect a simple life similar to what Thoreau describes in *Walden*. He constantly shows

his respect for labor and the enjoyment in working in the field. In modern society, the fantastic running for money and power does not attract him. To him, people are merely living in mad dreams—"grabbing, taking, giving, sighing, dying, just so they could be buried in those awful cemetery cities beyond Long Island City"(102). He would rather take the job of picking cotton as a life's work. It is simple and tiring, but beautiful. The most important is that this simple work satisfies him. Unconsciously, he is in fact having resonance with American transcendentalism and ancient human traditions. He is having dialogs with those ancestors and old values and, at the same time and more importantly, with the modern life in America. Through his ideas about simple life and modern life, he reminds us of the pursuit which makes a man a man.

Sal's thought about the society and the world can be found everywhere in the novel. These thoughts are not merely complaints about the society, or fantasies about a more wonderful world. For the nature of human thought is dialogical. According to Bakhtin, "the idea wants to be heard, understood and answered by other voices from other positions" (Bakhtin 72). Although his thought about the problem of America is still unsolved, it is still great and precious. This great dialog with the world will never be finalized as the road is extending to an endless eternity. The dialog will bring about different answers and new dialogs will thus be formed. The true value of the Beat Movement "largely lies in its rebellious nature, in its pioneer role to open up a new era in American culture, in its help to shape a new social sensibility of the nation, and in its spiritual quest for values and beliefs that would protest and maintain humanity in an essentially anti-human world" (Xiao Minghan 148). This is the significance of the

quest on the road.

## 2.2 Sal's Dialog with Dean

For Bakhtin, the nature of people's thought is dialogical. That is to say, dialog represents and determines people's thought. Our mind is embodied in the words we utter, spoken or unspoken, and the meaning is recreated in communication. Through the dialog, it is easy to see the consensus and contradictions between the two and more speakers. In the polyphonic novel, the hero is destined to answer the question "Who am I?" and "With whom am I?" and "[t]o find one's own voice and to orient it among other voices, to combine it with some of them and to counterpose it to others, or to separate one's voice from another voice, with which it is inseparably merged" (Bakhtin 1984 201). In the novel *On the Road*, such combination and separation in the dialog between Sal and Dean shows their relationship. And an image of Dean is gradually formed in Sal's mind, which also helps Sal understand himself better.

When Sal first meets Dean, he is deeply attracted by his energy and passion, which are lacking in himself. They quickly become friends, but somehow Sal knows that Dean is using him as a patron. He knows that he is not a real intellectual although he always talks in the tone of intellectuals in a jumbled way. Sal clearly knows that Dean is a con-man; but on the other hand, he understands that Dean "was only conning because he wanted so much to live and to get involved with people who would otherwise pay no-attention to him" (Kerouac 10). He feels fine about the fact that Dean is conning him for room and board. Dean also knows that Sal knows it. In fact, Sal thinks that it is exactly this understanding between them that forms the "basis of their



relationship,” and they “tiptoed around each other like heartbreaking new friends” (10).

The voices hidden in Dean’s mind are quietly understood by Sal. And at the same time, Dean knows that Sal understands them. Through this understanding, their inner voices are turned into an agreement that founds their friendship. This agreement can only be accepted by Sal and Dean. They are destined to be friends and partners on the road. It seems that Kerouac tries to use the dialog between them to form the modern male love. This love is sometimes wordless or even denial but totally admitted by them. In this open or secret dialog, the characters’ mental activities are better shown than directly told by the author. Without Sal, Dean’s character would have been incomplete, and vice versa. This proves what Bakhtin says: “one voice alone concludes nothing and decides nothing. Two voices is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence” (Bakhtin 1981 226) .

In the early part of their journey, Dean is the mentor of Sal. From Dean, Sal learns how to act naturally, how to enjoy life, and how to be authentic. Dean moves unbridledly on the road and Sal follows. However, Sal grows during the journeys, and the freshness from Dean gradually turns into sensible realization. He notices Dean’s naivety and weakness. He understands that the aimless indulgency in life is not always constructive. Sometimes it is just this kind of “having fun” that kills life, and stops them from moving forward. Sal’s maturation causes the switch of the role between them. Dean, the mentor, is replaced by Sal. The last two journeys are mainly led by Sal, the previous follower. The change of role is represented by the alternation of the dialog between them which Kerouac vividly reveals in the novel.

When Sal approaches Dean before their third journey, Dean's life is in chaos. He wants to end up such a mess but he is reluctant to go. This is just like what Sal has experienced before he meets Dean. The free and venturesome Dean begins to think about a stable family life:

Sal, we are growing older, each of us, little by little,  
and are coming to know things. What you tell me about  
your life I understand well, I've always dug your  
feeling, and now in fact you're ready to hook up with a  
real great girl if you can only find her and cultivate her  
and make her mind your soul .... (176)

However, the old Sal is no longer there. He is willing to go, and he has to go. This time, facing the depressed Dean, he has to stand out and act like his father. He says; "I realized it was up to me. Poor, poor Dean – the devil himself had never fallen farther; in idiocy, with infected thumb, surrounded by the battered suitcases of his motherless feverish life across America and back numberless times, an undone bird" (Kerouac 178). The image of a fearless Dean, who once walks nakedly under the sun, suddenly transforms to someone totally haunted by secular life, while Sal begins to shoulder the responsibility to save Dean by pushing him to go:

"Come to New York with me; I've got the money."...Now his eyes were blank and looking through me. It was probably the private point of our friendship when he realized I had actually spent some time thinking about him and his troubles. Something clicked in both of us. (178-179)

The switch of their role is vividly revealed in the dialog both verbal and nonverbal. Dean's voice echoes the previous Sal's voice. He is like the childish Sal, facing problems and feeling panic. However, Sal's voice does not echo anyone but creates a new Sal. By learning to take responsibilities, Sal moves step by step towards maturity. Meanwhile, their friendship shown through the change of voices also grows from the mutually beneficial relationship to a relationship of trust and understanding. In the dialogs, sometimes Dean's voice is bigger; sometimes Sal's voice is dominant. But "neither can ultimately defeat the other" (Bakhtin 218). Only in this way, a dialog cannot be finalized, and neither can their friendship.

What is noticeable in their relationship is that in the depth of their friendship, Sal gradually grows. He learns a lot from Dean; however, while Sal is learning and making progress, Dean is still that innocent "holy goof." Sal, no matter how dreadful and depressed the situation is, always owns a crave for faith, which finally leads him to surpass Dean. His final view of Dean is from the backseat of a Cadillac, with Dean standing on a cold New York street, "ragged in a motheaten overcoat." In due course Sal learns and dispenses many lessons, and leaving is one of them. "It's too-huge world vaulting us, and it's good-bye. But we lean forward to the next crazy venture beneath the skies"(Kerouac 87). But no matter how mature he is, Dean will still be an important part of his life. For him, Dean is no longer a good friend, but a very important symbol of the past, a period of dream and quest.

### 2.3 Sal's dialog with himself:

Growing-up is a process full of pains and frustrations. Problems such as dealing with other people and the outside world appear at

every stage of the process, but among them the most difficult is to deal with oneself. Each time when a person is facing a crucial moment in his life, when he is having doubts and confusions, there is a kind of dialog taking place inside him. Everyone must experience the dialog with himself like Hamlet's question and Sophie's choice. He will suffer, but at the same time, he will grow by questioning and talking with himself and thus will know better about himself and the world.

*On the Road* is such a novel about how to grow up. The novel is full of dialogs within Sal. During the five trips on the road, he sees and experiences the people and the world, and his experience automatically transforms into dialogs inside him. Those dialogs gradually push him to know more about the world and himself. Unlike Dean, his "reasons" of hitting the road "are those of a novel, to be developed over the course of the work, not in advance of it"(Leland 7). The following section will analyze how the dialogs inside make Sal grow and reach his maturity.

The journeys in the novel are taken mostly by Sal and Dean together, but the first is different, which is taken by Sal alone. It begins in a sense of failure: "everything is dead"(Kerouac 7). He has failed in the past and he finds life almost dead. In despair, he feels not only the pains but, more importantly, the true self. Those problems and frustrations push Sal to change and start a new life, a life diversified. This makes his journey so different from the trips merely for fun and relaxation. Bakhtin believes that in a polyphonic novel the hero knows his destiny at the beginning of the story. Here, even at the very beginning of his first quest Sal knows that "there'd be girls, visions, everything...the pearl would be handed on me" (14).

The road begins with great expectations and he dreams to

experience different colors of life, and live freely and widely like his idol Dean. The journey seems full of imagination and romance. Even Kerouac himself describes it as pursuing a kind of heroism. Sal is excited like a child and he intends to experience America according to his research of the map months ago. He tells himself confidently, "If you drop a rose in the Hudson River at its mysterious source in the Adirondacks, think of all the places it journeys but as it goes out to sea forever- think of that wonderful Hudson Valley"(15). Unfortunately, right after he takes Route Six, there is no car and train coming down. He begins to blame himself: "What the hell am I doing up here?" "I looked like a maniac, of course, with my hair all wet, my shoes sopping...Damn fool that I am" (16). The world is totally new in front of him, and he is in panic. After a short while, he gets use to it. When he arrives at Iowa, he wakes up in a shabby small hotel. He "was far away from home, haunted and tired with travel." He does not panic this time. He tells himself, "I was just somebody else, some stranger, and my whole life was a haunted life, the life of a ghost. I was halfway across America, at the dividing line between the East of my youth and the west of my future, and may be that's why it happened right here and then, that strange red afternoon"(20).

Through Sal's inner dialog, it is easy to see the development in his mind. He changes from a scared and panicky child to a man who can adapt to the world which is inconstant. He grows, and the process of his growing up is shown more clearly and vividly by the dialog in the hero's heart. Bakhtin believes that "it is impossible to master the inner man, to see and understand him, by making him the object of an impersonal, neutral analysis, nor is it possible to master him by merging with him or by feeling one's way into him. No, he can be

approached and revealed, or, rather, he can be caused to reveal himself, only dialogically, by means of communication with him" (Bakhtin 213). The moment he blames, encourages, and communicates with him, he find his own route to adulthood. Those inner dialogs which help Sal "see and understand" the inner self can also be found in the following chapters.

When Sal communicates with himself, quite different from Dean, he always asks questions. Where to go? How to get there? What is this for? He is sure the journey will bring him something significant, but he is not very sure how he can achieve it. He takes Dean as a guide or goal in the beginning. Dean's world of carnivalization is a huge attraction to him. But later he realizes that he cannot follow Dean forever. Sal's world misses a father to lead him, but Dean is only a child. Somehow, he knows that he has to find his own route.

Right after they arrive in San Francisco Dean ditches him. Suddenly he has to face the world all by himself. He is lonely, and the loneliness and insecurity arouses the inner man. "I looked out the window at the winking neons and said to myself, where is Dean and why isn't he concerned about our welfare?...Now I had nobody, nothing" (Kerouac 162,163). Just at this saddest moment a realization comes into his mind. As a writer, Kerouac does not deprive the hero's right of speaking and telling. In stead, he lets Sal think and speak for himself, like every real person in the real life. This is how Sal's inner self talks to him:

It suddenly occurred to me this was my mother of about two hundred years ago in England and that I was her footpad son, returning from gaol to haunt her honest labours in the hashery... "No," that woman seemed to

say with that terrified glance, 'don't come back and plague your honest, hard-working mother, my first husband.'... 'You are no good, inclined to drunkenness and routs and final disgraceful robbery of the fruits of my' umble labours in the hashery. O son! Did you nor ever go on your knees and pray for deliverance for all your sins and scoundrel's acts? Lost boy! '...I realized that I had died and been reborn numberless times but just didn't remember especially because the transitions from life to death and back to life are so ghostly up again a million times, the utter casualness and deep ignorance of it. (163-164)

Dean's departure gives him an opportunity to recreate himself. Without Dean, he talks to himself and asks himself for a reason. His vision of himself of a fish-and-chips woman's reincarnated son takes him out of the boundaries of identity. Later he realizes the secret of life and death which is the natural circle of destiny. He escapes an identity, and now he is free to choose a new one. Life is widely open in front of him with infinite possibilities will be given. Leland says, "If the book's first journey was about Sal learning to negotiate myth and mystique, and the second about the fall from grace, the third is about Sal giving up his identity in order to invent himself anew" (Leland 83). Kerouac does not directly tell how the hero feel and what he realizes. In this part, he divides the hero into three identities which are his past, present and future. Those three voices meet and interact in his mind, and finally let the hero achieve his self-realization. It gives the reader such a vivid and touchy vision of a person's process of inner maturation.

In fact, Sal's dialog with himself can be found everywhere in this novel. His search for a girl to form a stable family and have a normal

happy life constantly fight in his heart against his perpetual desire of going. These two voices often confront and never die out. The inner contradictions that are shown by inner dialogs help him understand himself better. Kerouac's design of this character is just like what Bahktin considers as "to contemplate themselves in the mirror"(Bahktin 39). A comprehensive image of a character can never be displayed merely by the description of the writer. Kerouac puts everything into the hero's field of vision, throwing it all into the hero's self-consciousness. What matters is not the problem "who he is," but how he achieves self-awareness. "The important thing is not how the hero appears to the world, but, most importantly, how the world appears to the hero and how the hero appears to himself"(Bahktin 38). Sal's journey of quest in the novel, like his route to adulthood, can never be finished. Each time he confronts his consciousness or his inner self, he surpasses his past. In this way, the meaning of the journey is never an escape from the real life. On the contrary, it is a direct interaction with life and himself, and he grows in this process.



## Chapter three

### Unfinalizability of the Road

The dialog, for Bakhtin, is the concrete embodiment of the self at any given moment in time and place; it is a manifestation of the link between life and self, between the chaotic, contingent, social forces that pull outward on the individual and the forces that pull inward, toward internal consistency. Bakhtin believes no dialog is absolutely finalized even if the addressor is dead. That is to say, the self which is embodied by dialog is also unfinalized. The unfinalizability of the self is a product of the constant linger between the internal world and the external world. The pure unification is an unrealizable goal because of the brevity of human life and the conversation between internal consistency and external dynamism. The human, in his or her brief lifetime, only has the privilege of living a very small part. Though death is inevitable and is always tragic because it denies people more time to deal with their complexities, it is the only type of "resolution" that can ever fully be gained from human experience because this dual valence is the essence of personhood. To resolve the human conversation is impossible, but in the wake of death, previously spoken words take on new life as they occupy, anew, the same struggle, a continuation of the same, shared breath of life. Life keeps moving forward, without any stop even if the body has ceased to exist. This ceaseless process of one's self-realization and self- growth is conducted between the internal world and external word. Especially, for people who choose to fulfill it on the road. It directly brings them face the real world.

*On the Road* uses the experiences of two drifters as its subjects. As a new version of the picaresque novel, the novel did change much from tradition, but no matter how much it changes, the setting of the novel is the same. After all, it is the road that attracts the character to explore. When the protagonist Sal decides to get away from the life that is already dead and start a journey, he is in some way reborn. The old problematic life is dead, but it is somehow continued in a different way. Right after he starts the first journey, Sal is forced to face the world he barely knows in his earlier life. The hardship and unexpected difficulties disappoint him. The conflict between his internal world and external world pushes him to develop. He is constantly maturing in the conflict. The process will never end, because the road which symbolizes the process of maturation will never end. The following chapter will discuss why the process of Sal's growth, which is made possible by carnivalization and dialog, is unfinalized. The explanation will be given through the analysis of the meaning and the unfinalizability of the road.

### 3.1 Meaning of the road

*On the Road* is a lasting topic of controversy. From the moment it was published in 1957, it aroused a heated debate. Among the pros and cons, what the protagonists are searching for on the road was the focus. Kerouac had intended to name the book "The Beat Generation," but later he decided to use the name "On the Road." At the very beginning of the novel, he tells his readers that it is a book about "my life on the road." Obviously, the word "road" has some particular meaning that he did not want his readers to miss. In other words, the meaning of the road is a central question for the understanding of the novel. Only

three days after the novel was published, David Dempsey, a conservative critic, commented in the *New York Times Book Review*:

As a portrait of disjointed segment of society acting out of its own neurotic necessity, *On the Road* is a stunning achievement. But it is a road, as far as the characters are concerned, that leads nowhere and which the novelist himself cannot afford to travel more than once. (Miles 228)

Even in the novel itself, the characters themselves ask the same question. Carlo asks Dean, "What is the meaning of this voyage to New York? ...Whither goest thou?" (Kerouac 114) Bull says to Dean, "Now, Dean, I want you to sit quiet a minute and tell me what you're doing crossing the country like this." (Kerouac 138) For the question, there is no neat answer from the protagonists. When Sal asks Dean "where are we going?" Dean replies, "you are asking something imponderable." The meaning of the road is "imponderable," because its deep significance is beyond the reach of any concrete words.

On the superficial level, of course, the road provides the Beats an opportunity to escape from the dominant mainstream lifestyle, which they hate and of which they refuse to be a part. The escapist attitude is best represented by Dean.

The road means much to Dean. As is said at the beginning of the novel, Dean is "the perfect guy for the road." He was born on the road. He spent most of his life drifting from one place to another. He is the one with a great deal of energy and is so curious about and passionate for life. It is him who leads Sal onto the road. For him, the road is a way to escape from the present dull, problematic, and meaningless life:

‘Whoeee!’ yelled Dean. ‘Here we go!’ And he hunched over the wheel and gunned her; he was back in his element, everybody could see that. We were all delighted, we all realized we were leaving confusion and nonsense behind and performing our one and noble function of the time, move. And we moved! (127)

His present life provides nothing but “confusion and nonsense,” and, therefore, he wants to experience the real taste of life. For Dean, stillness and stagnation mean death, and only keeping moving can give the feeling of life.

From the passage quoted above, we can see that even for Dean, “road” means more than a way of escape. It offers a hope of a new life. In other words, “the road is life” (199). This meaning of the road is better represented in Sal.

As we know, the motivation for Sal to get on the road is that “everything is dead.”(1) In another place in the novel, Say also says that “there was nothing behind me any more, all my bridges were gone.” Since there is no meaning or hope in the present life, the only way out is to explore a new way of living on the road. There is nothing to lose, and there is hope. They feel the “whole country is like an oyster for us to open, and the pearl was there” (131). In a sense, road symbolizes a rebirth for Sal. It should not be neglected that all the journeys taken by Sal are westward. That is to say, the possibility of a new life lies in the West. The first time he crosses the dividing line between the east and west, he undergoes a kind of transformation:

I woke up as the sun was reddening; and that was

the one distinct time in my life, the strangest moment of all, when I didn't know who I was-I was far away from home, haunted and tired with travel, in a cheap hotel room I'd never seen, hearing the hiss of steam outside, and the creak of the old wood of the hotel, and footsteps upstairs , and all the sad sounds, and I looked at the cracked high ceiling and really didn't know who I was for about fifteen stranger seconds. I wasn't scared; I was just somebody else, some stranger, and my whole life was a haunted life, the life of a ghost. I was halfway across America. At the dividing line between the East of my youth and the West of my future, and maybe that's why it happened right here and then, that strange red afternoon.(19-20)

Life in the east is stagnant and meaningless, while life in the west is vigorous and full of hope. In the old life, he is just alive; in the new life, he is living. Road provides him with this opportunity to live and grow. However, this is not the whole meaning of road. Apart from the hope of life, the road also foresees death.

As we know, it is Dean who leads Sal onto the road. When we look closely at the image of Dean in the novel, we can see the other side of the road as is shown by Sal:

Suddenly I had a vision of Dean, a burning shuddering frightful Angel, palpitating towards me across the road, approaching like a cloud, with enormous speed, pursuing me like the Shrouded Traveller on the plain, bearing down on me. I saw his huge face over the plains with the mad, bony purpose and the gleaming eyes; I saw his old jalopy chariot with

thousands of sparking flames shooting out from it; I saw the path it burned over the road; it even made its own road and went over the corn, through cities, destroying bridges, drying rivers. It came like wrath to the West. I know Dean had gone mad again. There was no chance to send money to either wife if he took all his savings out of the bank and bought a car. Everything was up, the jig and all. Behind him charred ruins smoked. He rushed westward over the groaning and awful continent again, and soon he would arrive. (244)

Now, Dean, "the perfect guy for the road", has become a "mad Ahab at the wheel"(221). The feeling of death is always with Sal, just like the feeling of real life.

Just about that time a strange thing began to haunt me....It had to do somewhat with the Shrouded Traveler...I proposed it was myself, wearing a shroud. That wasn't it. Something, someone, some spirit was pursuing all of us across the desert of life and was bound to catch us before we reached heaven. Naturally, now that I look back on it, this is only death: death will overtake us before heaven. The one thing that we yearn for in our living days, that make us sigh and groan and undergo sweet nauseas of all kinds, is the remembrance of some lost bliss that was probably experienced in the womb and can only be reproduced (though we have to admit it) in death. But who wants to die? In the rush of events I kept thinking about this in the back of my mind. (118-119)

The feeling of death and Shrouded Traveler frightens Sal, but

more than that, it also attracts him. Besides the fear and despair, one can feel a strong excitement for and curiosity about death. He is even willing to die to leave the life of nightmare and struggle. At the beginning it is just the feeling of death that pushes him to go, but he does not totally avoid it. The road does not offer a terminal solution for his problems, but only a short-term comfort. Although he chooses to leave the ordinary life he has and to go for an unclear destination or result, the hope to stop and enjoy simple life like a common man constantly bothers him. He is eager to find a proper girl to get married and have a normal family life. He cannot be a radical rebel to disregard all the regulations and social moralities without any hesitation. But at the same time, he can not stand to live the normal family life for ever. The stable and peaceful life sometimes brings him the feeling of death and boredom. When he feels it he cannot wait but set off again. This is the biggest contradiction of Sal, which is clearly represented in the paradox of the road. The experience of the road is the combination of death and life. It continuously pushes him to keep going till he is dead. The ultimate truth of life can never be acquired, just as the road will never end.

Sal's struggle between death and live is a universal problem for everyman who tries to find an eternal meaning for life. Life is finite because of the final death. On the other hand, life is infinite its the meaning and truth is perpetually produced in it. This has been discussed for centuries by many scholars and philosophers. German philosopher Immanuel Kant discussed it in his theory of antinomy. The first antinomy is the limitation of time and space and the infinity of time and space. He believes that space is the attitude of the external form, while time is the attitude of the inner consciousness. Everything

one feels and understands must be in the causality of time. The existence, excession and extension of everything must be in the master of time. People can only understand the world in time. The importance and limitation of time makes people think that one can master time to create and fulfill his dreams. After Kant, Martin Heidegger, the leader of existentialism believes that we can only understand the phenomenon of time from our mortal or finite vantage point. Fulfillment means "[h]aving the entity present in its intuitive content so that what is at first only emptily presumed in it demonstrates itself as grounded in the matters. Perception, or what it gives, points out, demonstrates. The empty intention is demonstrated in the state of affairs given in demonstration" (49). The highest level of fulfillment is achieved when all the partial intentions are fulfilled and the intuition presents the whole matter in its entirety. Death proclaims the limitation of existence. According to Heidegger, this finiteness is the most essential character of human being. People are anxious for the finality of life, but only in this feeling of finality, they face authenticity. It is this unique authenticity that makes the life endless and eternal. It is the feeling of death that pushes one to face the real self and, in this way, makes the being the time.

The issue of time is also one of Bakhtin's profound ideas. He argues it in the study of the novel. He believes that once we find the meaning in a limited life, it will not vanish. The meaning will not be finalized even if the character is dead. The character lives, acts and experiences in the meaning discovered by him, but not in the infinite time. That is because the meaning he found surpasses time. The meaning or the truth proves the character's spirit. Once the spirit is separated with the truth, paradoxes automatically appear. People may



head into the condition of self-denial, and the illusion of self-deception. Under such circumstances, one's life is finalized even though he is still alive. Bakhtin considered it as a "ridiculous and unreasonable finalizability which implies the fact that one is ashamed of seeking his truth or meaning" (Bakhtin 222). On the contrary, the life of a character with a certain meaning or truth is unfinalized. In this way, the existence of the character means the unfinalized process of discovering the truth and meaning. Living in this world, people have to face the problem of life and death everyday. The limitation of one's life always pushes them to the final death. In order to struggle with the limited time, people try to find value and meaning of life in life, and thus create an inner temporality. This inner temporality is a new meaning of time. It breaks the limitation of the original one and creates the eternity. In a word, this makes our life in an unfinalized process.

To sum up, the road is a paradox, symbolizing both life and death. The two sides coexist and mutually transformable. The inner tension of the simple invites a constant dialogue between life and death in an experiencing soul. It is a question of to be or not to be, or construction or destruction. The symbol of road touches the deepest essence of human life. Therefore, like any philosophical question of life, it is "imponderable" and unfinalized.

### 3.2 Unfinalizability of the road:

The term unfinalizability frequently appears in Bakhtin's writings. Bakhtin illustrates it by analyzing Dostoevsky's works. He divides the works into two types which are monological and polyphonic. In a monological work, the writer or one character takes the right to speak. There is a dominant voice in the novel, and that will ultimately make

the novel finalized. While in a polyphonic work, each character as well as the writer has a voice and speaks for himself, distinct from others. So, the characters are engaged in a dialog which makes them unfinalized, the plot unfinalized, and finally the whole work unfinalized. This idea of polyphony is closely connected to the ideas of unfinalizability and self-and-others. It is the unfinalizability of individuals that creates true polyphony. On the one hand, Bakhtin considers the world to be answerable, and that is the basis of art. On the other hand, the world is also dialogical. There are always new answers or ideas coming out through the dialog. Therefore, the process of answerability is never complete. The world is open and free. Everything is still in the future and will always be in the future. For Bakhtin, the quality of unfinalizability is essential to a polyphonic novel. With Bakhtin, not only is the literary work open, but the world it creates is never to be completed. In *Dostoevsky's Poetic Problems* Bakhtin states, that "Nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future" (214).

What can ever be fully finalized in life? Everything quickly starts over when it comes to a tentative end. The universe is infinite. Even though a person is dead and finalized, his work lives and is continued by others. That makes his life unfinalized. Individual people cannot be finalized, completely understood, known, or labeled. This conception reflects the idea of the soul. Bakhtin's philosophy is strongly rooted in Christianity and in the Neo-Kantian school led by Hermann Cohen, both of which emphasize the importance of an individual's potentially infinite capability, worth, and hidden soul.

In *On the Road*, there are many times the protagonists find the journey boring meaningless and dead when he stays at a certain arrived destination. The excitement of arriving a place is quickly declined. Problems and frustrations gradually come while they are staying. Sal says,

"I love the way everybody says 'LA' on the coast, it's their one and only golden town where all is said and done" (81).

And four pages later:

"I never felt sadder in my life. LA s the loneliest and most brutal of American cities: New York gets god-awful cold in the winter but there's a feeling of wacky comradeship somewhere in some street. LA is a jungle." (85)

Leaving for a new destination seems to be the only way to change it. The desire for a new travel quickly lightens them up. The next destination wherever it may be is quite inspiring, but it soon overdosed in that as well, and leaves again:

Norman Mailer considers the beats and hipsters as "the white negro." He compares the Beats with the Negro for both of them lives in the margin of society. Both of suffer and work hard to look for a way to freedom. They are much alike. Norman Mailer's view of beats' life will help explain why they were so rapt with the life on the road, no matter how bored they feel about the destination. They live in the life "where a man must go until he is beat, where he must gamble with his energies through all those small or large cries of courage and unforeseen situations which beset his day, where he must be with it or doomed not to swing" (Mailer 584). In fact, the loneliness and

brutality has nothing to do with the nature of LA. It is the inadaptation of the stationary life, the passion of "just going", and the desire for the next trip push them all along. This life will never be finalized. That explains the meaning of the vagabond life taken by those Beats. The desire for the next destination will never be ceased. The meaning will always be the other side of the road. The life on the road is unfinalized, and this unfinalizability makes it eternal.

Dean once describes the passengers they meet on the way to Denver:

Now you just dig them in front. They have worries, they're counting the miles, they're thinking about where to sleep tonight, how much money for gas, the weather, how they'll get there-and all the time they'll get there anyway, you see. But they need to worry and betray time with urgencies false and otherwise, purely anxious and whiny, their souls won't be really at peace unless they can latch on to an established and proven worry and having once found it they assume facial expressions to fit and go with it, which is, you see, unhappiness, and all the time it all flies by them and they know it and that too worries them no end. (196-197)

For those passengers whom Dean points out, road is only the way to a certain destination. They are the typical middle class which Dean and Sal look down upon. They have lots of worries. The peaceful and stable life they pursuit is unreal and boring. Those fake dreams make them always worry. Their life is full of such kind of worries, and that stops their life. Each time they try to find something meaningful for

their boring life, they worry even more. They can not relieve the heavy burden and be true to themselves. While they are worrying about everything they might lose, their life is finalized and is thus hopeless and boring. Dean is destined to be a vagabond. He loves the life on the wheel of the fast car from somewhere to nowhere. When he is riding he is like a jazzman playing his solo: "The magnificent car made the wind roar, it made the plain sun fold like a roll of paper it cast hot tar from itself in deference an imperia bloat. I opened my eyes to a fanning dawn; we were howling up to it. Dean's cocky dogged face as ever bent over the dash light with a purpose of its own" (322). It is evident in this description that none of the confusion or worry is shown. On the road, he has only one pure intention that is to move. It does not matter where to go or stop, the process itself is the purpose. Every end of a journey means another beginning. Life is continuous and thus makes it is comparism with that of those passengers, an unfinalized one. His passion to life not only makes himself a unique figure in the book but also influences his companion Sal.

Before Sal meets Dean, his life is that of those passengers: "everything was dead"(1). It means that his life is stuck, without meaning and hope. A profound feeling of despair overwhelms him. The word "death" for Bakhtin is a way to let the character be finalized. In a novel, the writer always uses death to end a character or a thing. On surface, the word "finalizability" means the fulfillment of a goal or the result of a plan. However, Bakhtin's idea of "finalizability" means more than this. It symbolizes the end of a process. The most important thing here is obviously the result but not the process. It shows a neglect of the process.

The appearance of Dean totally changed it. Sal compares Dean

with his friends: "Besides, all my New York friends were in the negative, nightmare position of putting down society and giving their tired bookish or political or psychoanalytical reason, but Dean just raced in society, eager for bread and love; he didn't care one way or the other" (14). What Dean brings to him is not only friendship, but a brand new life. When he chooses to start the journey with Dean, it also means a farewell to his past ordinary life. The life he used to have is dead and finalized. He is not sure what the life will bring him, but he has no choice. He has to go, and the decision to find the real meaning of life is a chance of self-transcendence. In this way, Sal goes with the feeling of frustration and anxiety to pursue the value of life.

In the book, Kerouac expresses frustration in the resistance to "the American Dream." Simultaneously, however, he uses mobility as part of a search for his own reconstructed America. His writing shows a great empathy with the country. Sal and Dean are "American angels," "travelers of the American road" and "new American saints." And the road represents a search for an American essence. The vision of America according to them is full of nostalgia and memory of the heroes of the past. When Sal and Dean are in the flashes of joy on the road, they seem near to the past and the American soul. They feel the "whole country is like an oyster for [them] to open, and the pearl was there" (131). The pearl is the essence of America and all the transition and movement is just a searching for something permanent and transcendent. The trip may end in the story; however, the road is still there. The desire of going and search will still be there even if the person who experiences it is old or dead. Just as Sal once mentions in the book;

I realize this were all snapshots which our

children will look at someday with wonder, thinking their parents had lived smooth, well-ordered, stabilized-within-the-photo lives and got up in the morning to walk proudly on the sidewalks of life, never dreaming the raggedy madness and riot of our actual lives, our actual night, the hell of it, the denseness nightmare road. All of it inside endless and beginningless emptiness. (239)

The road of pursuit is never easy. In the end, Sal finds Laura, the girl he dreamed of. Professor Xiao Minghan concludes that "Sal's pursuit for a wonderful woman to live with is a symbol of Adam seeking his Eve. The whole travel is a reconstruction of the Garden of Eden" (Xiao Minghan 68). The name Sal Paradise implies "Salvation" and "Paradise." It also implies he is searching for the revival of humanity. The belief of seeking something meaningful and profound pushes people on the road. The meaning of "on the road" is never about what they find, but about the road and the process of pursuit. It is the process of life-creating that matters. The significance starts from the moment Sal chooses to set off. This is the choice of courage. The pursuit of human being has never been thoroughly completed. It is a road without a certain destination. However, one has to step on that road external or internal to become a real man. At the end of the book, Sal sits on the river bank thinking about his old friend Dean, but rather he is thinking about his past life on the road. "Nobody knows what's going to happen to anybody besides the forlorn rags of growing old" (Kerouac 291). A looking for the road must have been aroused in his heart. A sense of continuity and unfinalizability of the road is shown. Exactly, how much should one sacrifice to get the final

meaning of life? Perhaps, the poem written by Bob Dylan has the answer, and it will be a good conclusion for this chapter:

How many roads must a man walk down  
Before you can call him a man?

...

The answer, my friend , is blowin' in the wind,  
The answer is blowin' in the wind. (Dylan 371)



## Conclusion

As the Bible of the Beat Generation, *On the Road* is a book of great significance. Not only because it has been greatly popular with generations of young people and has long been one of bestselling books in America and Western Europe. In the nineteen fifties and nineteen sixties, countless young people threw themselves in the Rucksack Revolution, serving Kerouac or his characters as their role model. It is even not because the novel has now become a literary classic, attracting the worldwide attention of literary critics. But it is also and mainly because it is controversial. The controversies rose from the day of its publication, and remain unsolved till today. Just as Bakhtin's polyphonic theory suggests, *On the Road* itself is a carnival square which forever invites dialog and is not and will not be finalized.

Besides the rebellious life style the book presents and the social influence it produces, *On the Road* is more about the pains and gains of spiritual growth. Ann Charters once claims that "*On the Road* can be read as an American classic along with Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* as a novel that explores the theme of personal freedom and challenges the promise of the American dream" (Kerouac 1991 xxix).

*On the Road* is always considered as a model for people who want to escape from the dehumanizing mainstream culture or who are tired of the typical middle-class principles. The novel provides a scene for those "mad ones". Dean is "a kinsman of the sun"; Carlo is a "sorrowful poetic con-man with the dark mind"; and Old Bull Lee is "a Kansas minister with exotic, phenomenal fires and mysteries." All of

them gather and freely behave in the book, and thus make a "mad swirl" (Lelond 44) which this thesis sees as the world of carnival. Rebellious, weird and unbridled they may seem, an atmosphere free from social ranks and normal regulations is formed. It is this equal atmosphere that makes a possible the dialogs in the novel.

Kerouac once says that his writing is teaching. Despite the purpose of teaching others, *On the Road* is mostly a novel about how the protagonist Sal teaches himself. After he put himself on the road of teaching, everything appearing in front of his eyes immediately creates dialogs within him. Compared with Dean as a doer, Sal is always an observer and thinker. He constantly talks to himself about how he feels about the outside world, about his companions and, most importantly, about himself. The dialog reveals his self-contradiction, uncertainty, infantility, and confusion. Unlike Dean who refuses to grow up, Sal grows gradually on the road despite all the setbacks.

Bakhtin asks in his discussion of dialog---where is the end of dialog? It is almost the same question the reader of *On the Road* is likely to ask---where is the end of the road? According to Bakhtin, finalizability can only be granted by god (*deus ex machina*). Here, time is neither tickling in the chronological sequence, nor in the mathematical sense. It is the time with the connotation of emotional value. Being organized by this type of time, everything is unfinalized. Bakhtin's unfinalizability owns the duality of deconstruction and construction. This duality can also be seen in the pursuit of the Beats. In such a society where ideological and high pressure controls prevail, they can do nothing but take those extreme actions to regain their identity. Kerouac himself once said, "I have never had anything to do with violence, cruelty, and all that horrible nonsense ..." (Charters

366). The meaning of the road is not how extreme people like Sal and Dean can behave on it, or what they finally find at the other side of it. The road itself is the meaning, and the experience on the road is what counts. The meaning emerges the moment Sal takes the first step, and it continues producing new meanings in the process. Self-development or self-fulfillment is an endless road. In this sense, every one of us is on the road. Go search for meaning, for truth, for faith. Go where the road leads to and beyond.

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