

## PHILOLOGICAL SCIENCES

## THE ARTISTIC METHOD OF J. KEROUAC IN THE NOVEL “ON THE ROAD”

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**Summary**

The article is devoted to perpetuating the features of “spontaneous prose” in the work of the brightest beat generation representative Jack Kerouac and his novel “On the Road”. The ideology of beat generation is an integral part of world and American literature, that continues to influence modern culture. The novel “On the Road” became a manifesto of this generation, absorbing the most characteristic features of the beatnik era and counterculture. Kerouac's strong connection to his specific time allowed him to describe its character, its reality, its dreams in a way that no one else could, it was made with the help of “spontaneous prose” method – a kind of mantra about everything, in the style and form of which there is an eternal rhythm, piercing jazz and meditative restraint. The writer himself claimed that he developed his style by listening to jazz improvisations of his favorite jazzmen and integrating their music into literature.

**Keywords:** “broken generation”, beat generation, counterculture, “spontaneous prose”, mantra style, eternal rhythm.

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**Introduction**

The period after the Second World War is especially bright in the artistic life of the United States. The war was the product of such a phenomenon as counterculture – a new trend in life and art, which abandoned the dominant social values. It was at this time that a group of young authors declared themselves in the literary arena, calling themselves the “broken generation” or the beat generation. Hipsters contrasted their revolutionary ideology with modernist formalism, and their works were bolder, more desperate, more direct than anything that existed before them. The ideology of beat generation is an integral part of world history in general and American literature in particular, and continues to influence modern culture to this day. The brightest representative of the beat generation was Jack Kerouac. His autobiographical novel “On the Road” almost immediately after its publication became a manifesto of the “beat generation”, absorbing the most characteristic features of the beat-era and counterculture it's became the “spirit of the time”. So the choice of topic is due to the interest in the writer method and work. The subject of the research is to define the peculiarities of “spontaneous prose” in J. Kerouac's novel. The purpose of the work is to identify the artistic features of the author's method in the context of beat generation literature.

### Jack Kerouac: the new Buddha of American modern prose

Jack Kerouac is one of the most controversial artists of the 20th century. His literary works were constantly criticized, and the writer himself was called both a genius and a graphomaniac. Today, as 60 years ago, critics are divided into two camps: some consider him an insignificant writer, while others claim that he became the classic writer of American literature. At the same time, both supporters of the writer's talent and his opponents cannot deny that without Kerouac there would be no "beat" literature or counterculture at all. A guide of freedom, Jack Kerouac broke into American literature in 1957, just as his most famous novel "On the Road" that was published and destined to be the main book of all his contemporaries. Kerouac, however, was disappointed to be famous for what he thought it was the wrong reason: little attention was paid to the perfection of his writing, but to the radically different characters of the novel and its hipster's characteristics, their nonconformist life, jazz, and endless movement. Critics and the press reacted to the novel coolly, sometimes even hostilely. For example, literary critic David Dempsey in his review for The New York Times called Kerouac's work "not so much a novel as a long good joke" (Dempsey, 1957), Phoebe Lou Adams wrote that the novel: "constantly promises a revelation or conclusion, but does not reach it, because Dean, the main character in the novel is more convincing as eccentric than as a representative of any segment of humanity" (Adams, 1957). She also accused the novel of repetition: "Everything Mr. Kerouac had to say about Dean was said in the first third part of the book, and what appears later is a series of variations on the same subject" (Adams, 1957). However, it should be noted that the critic was one of the first to appreciate Kerouac's style, calling it "partly austere simplicity, partly fashionable jargon, partly fireworks in the Baroque style" (Adams, 1957).

The writer was called as "the king of the beat movement" during his lifetime; the artist's self-perception fully corresponded to the feelings of an entire generation. No wonder he was one of the three "pillars" of the beat movement (along with William Burroughs and Neil Cassady) to which Allen Ginsberg dedicated his collection of poems "Howl and Other Poems" (1956), he named Jack "The new Buddha of American prose" (Ginsberg, 2002: 3). Kerouac was the first writer who formulated and proclaimed ideas that were immediately adopted by America's most revolutionary generation of the 20th century: "The world will be filled with backpackers who refuse to obey the laws of general consumption that people must work for the privilege of consuming all this nonsense, in fact, they don't care at all, [...] they are all prisoners of the work-produce-consume system; I have a grand vision of the backpack revolution, thousands and even millions of young Americans traveling with backpacks behind their backs, conquering mountains, praying, making children and laugh, making young girls happier and older ones even happier, [...] writing poems that fall to them to think, because they are good, and by performing strange deeds, they maintain a sense of eternal freedom for everyone, for all living beings ..." (Kerouac, 1986: 97).

Kerouac's strong connection to his specific time allowed him to describe the beat generation, its character, its reality, its dreams in a way that no one else could. To achieve this he invented his own special method of "spontaneous prose" – a kind of mantra about everything, in the style and form of which there is an eternal rhythm, piercing jazz and meditative restraint. In this regard, the classic of American literature Truman Capote said that "Kerouac does not write, but prints" (Grobel, 1985: 32). For some reason, Capote was right – an unprepared reader quickly gets tired with following the author's opinion, who expressively, metaphorically, incoherently describes the surrounding reality. However, Capote's scathing remark can hardly be seen as an insult – for example, the American singer and poet Patti Smith in

her autobiographical book "Just Kids" (2010) mentioned: "Kerouac, drumming on the keys, splashed on rolls of paper his personality" (Smith, 2011: 177).

### Creating the "spontaneous prose"

In 1953, at the request of Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs, Jack Kerouac attempted to explain how he managed to write "The Subterraneans" in a three days. The resulting explanation, which Kerouac titled "The Essentials of Spontaneous Prose," was later published in Black Mountain Review in 1957, it was his personal manifesto for writing. Brevity aside, Kerouac's "Essentials" includes rich descriptions of his spontaneous method. According to it there are a series of tropes central to this form of writing: anamnesis, or a remembering: this focus might be derived from real time or from memory; mimesis, or a mimicking: Kerouac compares his method to a jazz trumpeter – the writer becomes like a jazz musician blowing deeply on his horn, not stopping to pause until he is out of breath; congeries, or word heaps: talk about writing without pause or without correcting, comes from the writer being uninhibited by form and style – just writing what he feels in the moment and writing until he feels satisfied.

The writer himself claimed to have developed his style by listening to the jazz improvisations of his favorite jazzmen – Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie and Miles Davis – and integrating their music into literature. A distinctive feature of "spontaneous prose", which has become the main creative method of all beatniks, is the direct spontaneity of thought. Kerouac believed that the text should lie on paper unpolished, in the form in which it is born in the author's head. According to the writer, spontaneity and continuity of thought allow not only to convey to the reader the necessary information, but also allow information to penetrate into the mind of the reader. Kerouac achieved continuity of thought due to his extremely careless attitude to punctuation; he almost gave up punctuation. He believed that commas and periods were just conventions that deceived the reader and slowed down the flow of speech. He treated dashes quite differently, which, according to Kerouac, lengthen the phrase, allowing it to flow from sentence to sentence, from paragraph to paragraph. "No points for dividing sentences", wrote Kerouac in his essay "The Essentials of Spontaneous Prose", – "The sentences have already happened: they are tyrannically dotted with fake colons and timid, often unnecessary commas. The full right to exist has an energetic long dash that separates the rhetorical breath (so jazz music takes in air in the lungs before falling back into the trumpet)..." (Kerouac, 1958: 72).

The original manuscript of the novel "On the Road", a scroll written in three weeks in 1951, is a legendary example of Kerouac's spontaneous prose: about 37 meters of paper glued together and typed. This allowed Kerouac to write at the fast pace he was so eager to achieve. The writer also hoped to publish the novel as a complete scroll so that the reader would not be burdened with the need to turn the pages of the book, but the publishers did not allow him to do that. Thus, Kerouac's novels are a unique mixture of the torn rhythms of bebop and the continuous flow of the author's consciousness. The preface to the anthology "Atop an Underwood: Early Stories and Other Writings" (1999) lists the question posed to Jack Kerouac: "Who is considered a born writer?" Kerouac answered: "When the question is asked: are they born or become writers? – we must first ask: what is meant – talented or original writers? Because everyone can write, but not everyone is able to create new forms of writing" (Kerouac, 1999: 13). Kerouac felt that he was born to write, and saw himself as a reproducer of life in all its fullness, in the engraving of sincerity. Kerouac did not want to characterize his works, especially "On the Road", as a fiction or the creation of fictional stories. Instead, he said that in his "texts he only allows the imagination to embellish real events from his memory (Dittman, 2004: 11).

Jack Kerouac's unique style corresponds to the dynamism and energy of the 50-s of the twentieth century. "On the road" is a hurricane of places, events, characters and philosophical reflections. Jack Kerouac skillfully uses his literary abilities so that the reader can fully immerse himself in the intoxicating atmosphere of America in the fifties and absorb the philosophy of beat generation. The range of J. Kerouac's literary influences is quite wide. The greatest influence on his work was exerted by the novel of American author W. Burroughs "Junkie" (1951–53), the style of which Kerouac admired and adopting it. The writer's desire to keep up with his friend John Holmes, who had just finished his first novel "Go!", also played a great role. (1952). There are also parallels between spontaneous writing and the glorious J. Joyce's "stream of consciousness" and F. Dostoevsky: Kerouac repeatedly referred to the spiritual pursuits of his characters, and considered the writer himself as an prophet. In addition, Kerouac singled out his friend Neil Cassidy, a supporter of open monologue, confessional style of writing. In December 1950, Cassidy sent Kerouac a letter, known as the Joan Anderson Letter. It consisted of one sentence placed on 18 pages, without punctuation and paragraphs. Kerouac realized that this was what was needed. He combined, G. Andreeva said "Neil Cassidy's amazing letters of freedom" with the principles of jazz improvisation, and called his method "spontaneous prose" (Andreeva, 2004: 304).

Kerouac sincerely believed that true art could only emerge when it came directly from experience. He believed that the process of writing should not be a fully conscious action – it should be guided solely by the flow of impressions of what is happening around. Later, in the essays "The Essentials of Spontaneous Prose" and "Belief and Technique for Modern Prose" (1959), the author will develop nine principles of writing: mood, process, method, freedom of action, process interruption, calculation of time, focus of interest, work structure and mental state, and thirty techniques of writing. "The Essentials" is a leading J. Kerouac's theoretical document, as well as a manifesto of the entire beat generation. In it, he outlined his beliefs on how to write works of art. The writer declared: "No points that separate the sentence, and already despotically permeated with false colons and timid, moreover useless commas – only energetic dashes that separate the rhetorical breath" (Kerouac, 1958: 72). The process of writing should not be interrupted by the selection of words and expressions, you need to follow free associations, improvise. The writer bequeaths: "Not the "selectivity" of expression, but the following of the free deviation of thought, in the boundless sea of thought, [...] without any discipline except the rhythms of rhetorical exhalation, [...] like a fist falling on the table with each completed utterance "Bam!" (Kerouac, 1958: 72).

### **Creating the beat generation manifest "On the road" novel**

After the "On the Road" publication in 1960, another novel was published titled "Book of Dreams". In this novel, writer improves his spontaneous style, as well as working to find a new way to describe things and make sense of the world around him. This novel was inspired by the "diary of dreams" that Kerouac was writing during the 1950-s and 1960s. In this book Kerouac tries to continue the plot lines with the characters of his previous novels as he sees them in his dreams, there is also a general writer's disgust to the concepts of traditional literature, such as the unity of the plot. Much more important for Kerouac is the ability to capture, to reflect the dream as it comes (Dittman, 2004: 98).

In addition, Kerouac developed his unique style under the influence of the popular genre of music at the time – bebop. This jazz style, characterized by the fast tempo and complex improvisations, has made a real revolution in jazz-music. Thanks to the groundbreaking

approach of bebop jazzmen – especially Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie – bebop has lost its dancing features and, conversely, was a nonconformist art form, often quite outrageous. Not surprisingly, the beatniks, including Kerouac himself, felt such a strong spiritual connection to bop music: they all felt like strangers in mainstream American life. Almost all of the first generation of bop stars were afro-americans, and many grew up in poverty. Their music symbolized opposition to an empty, faceless capitalist society. The bop musician played for art, not to please the audience – just as hipsters wrote their works not for praise or fame. All that was said above is reflected in the novel “On the Road” – Kerouac not only mentioned the name of a new musical trend or called the names of famous artists, but also introduced into the novel elements and style-forming components of jazz music at the structural level, which is a direct form of realization of the points set forth in the article “Belief and Technique for Modern Prose”.

“Musicality” is manifested in almost on all levels of the text. It is also important to note the conscious convergence of the text with the jazz form, as Kerouac himself wrote, calling this style “bop prosody” (*Leland, 2007: 122*). The language of the novel is characterized by a special, fragmentary rhythm, expressed by the author's punctuation, namely – a lot of exclamations, three dots and Kerouac adored long dashes. A striking example of “torn” jazz intonation is the following fragment of the novel: ““Ah—ah—you must listen to hear.” We listened, all ears. But he forgot what he wanted to say. “Really listen—ahem. Look, dear Sal—sweet Laura—I’ve come—I’m gone—but wait—ah yes.” And he stared with rocky sorrow into his hands. “Can’t talk no more—do you understand that it is—or might be— But listen!”” (*Kerouac, 1976: 275*). The novel intertwines literary and musical aspects of teaching, which gave the work liveliness, energy, and became its artistic feature. Justin Trudeau says that “the novel is best understood as a recording of spontaneous plots, rather than the realization of spontaneity as such” (*Trudeau, 2006: 220*). However, in “On the Road” the writer obviously honed his skills, and it is impossible not to note the impact of his creative pursuits on the style of writing the novel.

Kerouac's style denies revision and correction of writing, calls for ““dirty” (“scatological”) and “continuous” (“uninterrupted”) presentation of thought, severely criticizes grammatical correctness and encourages literary flexibility (*Kerouac, 1958: 72*). The subject matter of the work is determined by the writer himself and is based on what the writer knows, from his own experience. Moreover, with his spontaneous method, Kerouac challenges the dominant grammatical practices, arguing that the writer must be independent of stylistic devices, literary conventions and forms; instead, he should enter a state of “semi-trance” that would allow him to express his ideas openly and freely.

The novel “On the Road” pulsates with the America of the 50's: jazz, love, drugs and the desperate thirst of the new generation for a new, passionate, violent experience. The call of nature, the painfully powerful desire to get in the way, the search for maximum moral satisfaction – all these are aspects of American national self-knowledge. Sal Paradise, the protagonist of the novel, is the most vivid embodiment of this spiritual quest. To resolve his existential conflict, he chooses a traveling lifestyle. Sal appears as a rebel who goes on a journey to the American outback, waiting for the road to meet his fate. In search of fate, Sal is helped by his friend Dean Moriarty – passionate, impulsive, unbridled, and it is he who pushes Sal on a journey to change his existence.

The first time Sal sets out, he seeks to start his life anew. After graduating from college, he sees in Dean the opportunity to learn what has always interested him. At the beginning of the novel, he hopefully announces: “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, and believe it at my young age...” (*Kerouac, 1976: 6*). As critic C. Vopat notes: “Kerouac's

heroes go on a journey not to find something, but to leave everything behind: emotions, maturity, change, decisions, goals, and especially – in the best American tradition – responsibility” (Vopat, 2004: 5).

Sal has a terrible unadorned look at things, without exaggerated emotions, and he idealizes almost every place and all the people he meets on the road. Most of all Sal exaggerates the simplicity of minorities’ life, he says: “I wished I were a Denver Mexican, or even a poor overworked Jap, anything but what I was so drearily, a “white man” disillusioned. [...] I was only myself, Sal Paradise, sad, strolling in this violet dark, this unbearably sweet night, wishing I could exchange worlds with the happy, true-hearted, ecstatic Negroes of America” (Kerouac, 1976: 180) In addition to Mexican Americans, Sal romanticizes both Mexico itself and its indigenous people: “These people were unmistakably Indians and were not at all like the Pedros and Panchos of silly civilized American lore—they had high cheekbones, and slanted eyes, and soft ways; they were not fools, they were not clowns; they were great, grave Indians and they were the source of mankind and the fathers of it” (Kerouac, 1976: 280) Although Sal rejects the typical American idealization of the Indians and he creates his own. Sal also idealizes African Americans and their way of life: “Negroes were working in the hot afternoon, stoking the ferry furnaces that burned red and made our tires smell. Dean dug them, hopping up and down in the heat” (Kerouac, 1976: 141). The essence of the novel is the inevitable feeling of resistance and protest that arise from the unwillingness to obey the ideals of a “society of prosperity”.

The road has always been a symbol of spontaneity for Kerouac. Thus, in a letter to Neil Cassidy about the composition of the novel, Kerouac explains that he “moved fast because the road is fast”, and that he “unfolded [the manuscript] on the floor and it looked like a road”. (Charters, 1995: 315). Kerouac's spontaneous method helps to achieve the maximum degree of truthfulness, reducing the distance between the author and the reader, between art and life. Life appears as a series of alternating meetings, conversations, feelings. They are shown in fragments, abruptly, but they are all intertwined, in an infinite and complex interaction with each other.

## Conclusions

Kerouac's novels argue that the style of “spontaneous prose” is much larger and deeper than just the “printing” as Truman Capote so despised (Grobel L., 1985: 32). The speed with which Kerouac sometimes wrote his texts can give the false impression that the author is constantly drumming on a typewriter, as if a literary rebel in isolation from the culture in which he exists. In fact, Kerouac was an integral part of the culture and historical period of his country. Thanks to his creative method, works were born, inspired – and inspiring – by other artists and the culture of his era in general. In particular, the personality of Jack Kerouac, also with his works, had a significant impact on the music of the 1960s. Prominent and world-renowned musicians such as Bob Dylan, Patti Smith, The Beatles, and Tom Waits were inspired by Kerouac. The writer had a special influence on the group “The Doors”, Ray Manzarek, the band's keyboardist, in his memoir “Light My Fire: My Life with The Doors” (1998) wrote: “It seems that if Jack Kerouac will not write “On the Road”, “The Doors” would never have existed.” There is no doubt that the novel “On the Road” has become – an integral part of the American cultural. Not only is it a novel of a specific time and place, but it is also an inspiration to future generations and anyone who is dissatisfied with the pressure of American or any other culture and does not agree to bow to the conventional way of life.



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