

Jack Kerouac

Biography

Born in 1922 in Lowell, Massachusetts, but of French Canadian origins, Jack Kerouac learned English as a second language at school. He led a troublesome and unconventional life. He refused the writing conventions of the time and developed a new spontaneous style that brought to the creation of *On the Road* (1957), written in three weeks. It is the formless report of penniless young people journeying across the country in a free way, without considering daily problems such as timetables, maps, roads, mortgages but following only their love for life, jazz, sex, drugs and mysticism. Kerouac exalted a code of poverty and freedom which was at the basis of the so-called Beat Generation, a literary movement that spread all over America in the late '50s. This autobiographical book was followed by other similar ones like *Doctos Sax* (1959), *Lonesome Traveler* (1960), *Desolation Angels* (1965) where he portrays other prominent Beat writers. He died in 1969. Kerouac stated he improvised words and did not edit a single word (much of his work was edited by Donald Merriam Allen, a major figure in Beat Generation poetry who also edited some of Ginsberg's work). Connected with his idea of breath was the elimination of the period, he preferred to use a long dash. The result of this method is a kind of jazz improvisation echoing the stream of consciousness technique. In the following passages you can find the basics of his innovative prose.

Essentials of spontaneous prose

Set-up

The object is set before the mind, either in reality, as in sketching (before a landscape or teacup or old face) or is set in the memory wherein it becomes the sketching from memory of a definite image-object.

Procedure

Time being of the essence in the purity of speech, sketching language is undisturbed flow from the mind of personal secret idea-words, blowing (as per jazz musician) on subject of image.

Method

No periods separating sentence-structures already arbitrarily riddled by false colons and timid usually needless commas – but the vigorous space dash separating rhetorical breathing (as jazz musician drawing breath between outblown phrases) – ‘measured pauses which are the essentials of our speech’ – ‘divisions of the sounds we hear’ – ‘time and how to note it down’ (William Carlos Williams).

Scoping

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! (the space

dash) – Blow as deep as you want – write as deeply, fish as far down as you want, satisfy yourself first, then reader cannot fail to receive telepathic shock and meaning – excitement by same laws operating in his own human mind.

Lag in procedure

No pause to think of proper word but the infantile pileup...

Timing

Nothing is muddy that runs in time and to laws of time – Shakespearian stress of dramatic need to speak now in own unalterable way or forever hold tongue – no revisions...

Center of interest

Begin not from preconceived idea of what to say about image but from jewel center of interest in subject of image at moment of writing, and write outwards swimming in sea of language to peripheral release and exhaustion – Do not afterthink...

Structure of work

Modern bizarre structures (science fiction, etc.) arise from language being dead, 'different' themes give illusion of 'new' life. Follow roughly outlines in outfanning movement over subject, as river rock, so mindflow over jewel-center need...

Mental state

If possible write 'without consciousness' in semi-trance (as Yeats' later 'trance writing') allowing subconscious to admit in own uninhibited interesting necessary and so 'modern' language what conscious art would censor...

Belief and technique for modern prose

1. Scribbled secret notebooks, and wild typewritten pages, for yr own joy
2. Submissive to everything, open, listening
3. Try never get drunk outside your own house
4. Be in love with your life
5. Something that you feel will find its own form
6. Be crazy dumb saint of the mind
7. Blow as deep as you want to blow
8. Write what you want bottomless from bottom of the mind
9. The unspeakable visions of the individual
10. No time for poetry but exactly what is
11. Visionary tics shivering in the chest
12. In tranced fixation dreaming upon object before you
13. Remove literary, grammatical and syntactical inhibition
14. Like Proust be an old teahead of time
15. Telling the true story of the world in interior monolog
16. The jewel center of interest is the eye within the eye
17. Write in recollection and amazement for yrself
18. Work from pithy middle eye out, swimming in language sea
19. Accept loss forever
20. Believe in the holy contour of life
21. Struggle to sketch the flow that already exists intact in mind
22. Don't think of words when you stop but to see picture better
23. Keep track of every day the date emblazoned in yr morning
24. No fear or shame in the dignity of yr experience, language & knowledge
25. Write for the world to read and see yr exact pictures of it
26. Bookmovie is the movie in words, the visual American form
27. In praise of Character in the Bleak inhuman Loneliness
28. Composing wild, undisciplined, pure, coming in from under, crazier the better
29. You're a Genius all the time
30. Writer-Director of Earthly movies Sponsored & Angeled in Heaven