

What Connects You and Me?
The Dualism and Friendship of Sal and Dean
In Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*
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There are multiple connections we can take from *On the Road* written by Jack Kerouac and from Allen Ginsberg's work. *On the Road* has intriguing links made from Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty – links that bond them to make the novel great and a friendship that draws roots from what it is to be an American. Ginsberg makes certain biographical references in his work that the public can connect to. George Dardess, Karen E.H. Skinazi, and Jason Arthur are three scholars

whose work helps define these connections and also help the reader understand why these connections were influential in the works of these two Beat Generation writers. Dardess's findings indicate a strong relationship between Sal and Dean that created the essence of *On the Road*; their bond was essential to the finding of the American Dream. Skinazi's article delves more into their relationship and presents an interesting analysis that Kerouac was drawing connection from his French Canadian roots into Sal and Dean; Sal being Italian and Dean being American, these two together have pros and cons. Jason Arthur describes how Ginsberg added subtle, personal marks in his poetry that allowed the readers of his time to jump into his own life. Their findings will support the points that will be made in this paper: (1) Sal and Dean's friendship is the driving force of the novel *On the Road*. (2) The dualism of Sal and Dean embodies what the American Dream is, and (3) Allen Ginsberg's biographical touches in his works helps connect the reader into his (Ginsberg's) personal life.

We will first take a look at how friendship plays an important role in *On the Road*. There are several things to note about *On the Road*. The novel is heavily centered on the actions and responses of Dean Moriarty and Sal Paradise. Moriarty influences Sal to go on his adventure throughout America. There is something burning within Sal, and Dean brings it out of him when he gets released from jail. In the early stages of the novel, Sal admits: "the only people for me are the mad

ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars” (5). Sal is heavily interested in what his friend Dean will do next after his time in prison. He knows that Dean is a very eccentric yet outgoing person and the friendship between the two is strong at the beginning of the novel. We should also take note that Sal had set the story up in a unique way with the crumbling of an old relationship and beginning with a new one. George Dardess, in his article "The Delicate Dynamics of Friendship: A Reconsideration of Kerouac's *On the Road*" sums up Sal by saying:

A comparison between the opening and closing paragraphs of *On the Road* gives a preliminary idea of the book's structural complexity. Where the book begins cautiously, with careful distinctions made between the narrator's present, his Moriarty past, and his present Moriarty past, it ends with a complicate paragraph in which temporal and special boundaries are obliterated. (201)

Dardess later explains how this disintegration sets up a new path for Sal by stating, "The book begins with the narrator's construction of distinctions and boundaries; it ends with his discarding them – a discarding which indicates his desire to suspend opposites in a perhaps

continuous state of flux. The book moves from hierarchy to openness, from the limitation of possibilities to their expansion” (201). That suspension of opposites is the relationship he and his wife had; it can be said that Sal is looking for someone who is like him, a person in a state of change; someone who is also looking for something, but is not quite sure what that is. Sal and Dean make a good match because they are both out for the same thing.

Since Sal Paradise is engaging in a new friendship, with Dean Moriarty, he is now able to experience new things by exploring what America has to offer and what Dean has in store for him. The two friends travel all across America; to each end of the country and with that mileage, their friendship picks up both pace and baggage. Through the ups and downs of their travels, Sal’s relationship with Dean has changed significantly. We have to consider how Jack Kerouac broke up *On the Road* to signify the importance of their friendship. Dardess shows how Kerouac managed to keep the novel neatly shaped:

The structure is evident in a narration divided into five Parts, the third of which contains what can be called the climax of Sal's and Dean's friendship. Parts One and Two record Sal's gradual development of excited interest in Dean, while Part Four records Sal's development of an apocalyptic fear of him. Accompanying the growing complexity of Sal's relation to Dean is an

out-fanning geographical movement. Each Part records a circuit of the United States with New York, Denver, and San Francisco serving as the main geographical and cultural axes. In Parts Two and Three, important detours are made from more or less straight lines of progress connecting one axis with another, the first detour by way of New Orleans, the second by way of Chicago. In Part Four, the friends spin off the board altogether towards Mexico City and the "end of the road." In Part Five, Sal and Dean go their separate ways, each friend towards opposite shores of the American continent. (202)

Sal and Dean, among other friends and acquaintances, go through many things when traveling. So when Dardess shows how Kerouac breaks down the gradual digression of their friendship, he is showing why their companionship means so much to them. It starts as a heavy interest of Dean; a "mentee to mentor" view. Sal sees Dean as his hero in the first part of the novel; he practically idolizes him. The admiration continues into Part Two of the novel. Sal is so bedazzled by Dean that he does not take notice of Dean's inappropriate behavior. He sees it, but does not confront Dean about it as though what Dean was doing was alright by Sal. Dardess makes a good point in how Sal uses the word "IT" to refer to Dean's activity. "Beginning with Part Three, however, Sal begins to confront the consequences of Dean's vulnerability to "IT," to ecstasy,

to the promise of being able to reduce time and space to smaller and smaller increments until they disappear altogether as measurements of activity. Where in Parts One and Two, “IT” functions as an ultimate mystery to which Dean’s relation is priest-like (and Sal’s is that of the neophyte) . . .” (203). In the earlier parts of the novel, Sal watches as Dean takes charge and propels him into the adventure of the American Dream. Dean’s actions mystify Sal; from his speech to the way he treats Marylou, Dean’s “IT”, his will to keep moving and burning captivated Sal who wants to start a new cycle. However, as the story progresses, Dean’s behavior begins to become more blatant. Dean has not only abandoned him in San Francisco, he leaves him in New Mexico. This is when Sal starts to realize that the two of them remaining friends is not possible. What makes Sal’s and Dean’s friendship so influential in *On the Road* is the fact that they both go through a lot of reach the ending. Jack Kerouac makes interesting use of time and space; each chapter is condensed into weeks or every months. He uses this quick time lapse to jump from place to place which makes Sal and Dean’s relationship change when they are in those different places. For example, their first destination was San Francisco, where their dreams supposedly lay. However, Sal arrives two weeks late and Dean has already left. This gives Sal time (a little more than fifteen days) to get to know Remi, Lee Ann, and a woman named Terry. Sal starts to experience a

connection that he never really had before with Terry; he starts to become part of her family. However, Sal still yearns for what Dean was already heading after. It is the moment in chapter 13 where Sal still wants that “it” and again, fractures a connection that could have lasted.

Terry brought my breakfast. I had my canvas bag all packed and ready to go to New York, as soon as I picked up my money in Sabinal. I knew it was waiting there for me by now. I told Terry I was leaving. She had been thinking about it all night and was resigned to it. Emotionlessly she kissed me in the vineyard and walked off down the row. We turned at a dozen paces, for love is a duel, and looked at each other for the last time. (Kerouac, 101)

Without telling the readers, Sal feels disappointed with the departure from Terry. He knows he is starting something with her and so do the readers. What is holding him back? Frankly, it is still too early for the book to end. With two more Parts to go, Sal still has a long journey ahead. “Well, lackadaddy, I was on the road again,” Sal says. What’s keeping him on the road? The readers know it as “It” but, Dardess points out that Sal mentions something having a burden of caring for another adult. This is when we start to see Sal’s point of view change about Dean. This is also the reason that makes their relationship so intriguing. Dardess says in his article, “When one adult assumes absolute responsibility for the existence –

“burdensome” or not – of another adult, he does so at what seems a great risk, since both parties sacrifice to each other their independence.” (204) Sal tries so hard to follow in Dean’s shoes, but in reality, Sal is in Dean’s shadow. He is walking behind him when Dean is speaking with Carlo, he is left in the dust in both San Francisco and New Mexico, and now he is behind him taking responsibilities for his actions. The risk here is leaving a possibly good life with Terry; he leaves her asking himself what will happen to Dean if he had stayed. Sal in the later Parts of the novel starts to see Dean for who he really is. He calls him a “holy goof” and an “Angel of Terror.” Sal sees the way Dean’s treating Camille through his outrageous behavior. Paradise knows that it is the end of the road when they get to New Mexico. They know that this place is raw and unexplored to them. For Sal, this is where he has to make a decision, a painful one. Dardess states how this responsibility is eventually placed on Sal. “To have responsibility for your friend means not only providing him with companionship or with money, not only defending him before a jury of his peers; it means also – and painfully – maintaining a sense of how your friend sees himself apart from the way you see him” (205). Sal does everything in his power to believe that Dean would help him find his “it.” Ironically, Dean is able to do that, but not directly. Sal does not tell Dean that he sees him as a “god” or role model; however, he allows Dean to be . . . himself. At the end of the novel,

Sal is left feeling exhausted and guilty. Before they depart, Dean says “[I] Want to be with you as much as possible, m’boy, and besides it’s so durned cold in this here New Yawk . . .” he knows Sal is keeping him together, as if he realizes Sal’s risk, his burden, at the last moment. Despite their sad departure, Sal still feels responsible for Dean’s well-being. He reflects: “And off we went to the sad and disinclined concert for which I had no stomach whatever and all the time I was thinking of Dean and how he got back on the train and rode over three thousand miles over that awful land and never knew why he had come anyway, except to see me” (307). In his heart, the friendship still continues; having the novel complete a full circle. They each go coast to coast; testing their friendship and at the end, it still endures.

Karen Skinazi, author of the article *Through Roots and Routes: On the Road’s Portrayal of an Outsider’s Journey into the Meaning of America* makes good connections of how the Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty characters show both the drawbacks and the benefits of the American Dream. Sal represents the outsider that uses his curiosity to connect to other outsiders – going beyond the limit of nationhood and bettering oneself. For Dean, he embodies the brash American that is stuck in the mainstream values of America. This prevents him from seeing new possibilities. When Kerouac puts them together, they create a mental picture of what America is. It is grand in

its own right, but it refuses to be separated by its own glory. The dualism of Sal and Dean is very reflexive one as both men are dependent on each other. Dardess would agree that whatever happens to one character, the other is affected in kind.

Skinnazi begins her article with a nice introduction taken from Pierre Anctil's preface in *Un Homme Grand* which says:

Kerouac, a man situated at the crossroads of two cultural traditions. He is simultaneously French America, hiding in the parish halls and the humble working-class neighborhoods of a hundred milltowns, and the American Dream, conceived out of boundless space accessible to all, a dream that unfolds like a goldsmith taking possession of his precious metal, progressively appropriating an entire virgin continent. (86)

What makes this introduction so powerful is that it encompasses the underlying plot in *On the Road*. What is the American Dream? What was Sal's and Dean's "It"? The "boundless space" in which the introduction speaks about can be seen as the open range of Denver or the unexplored possibilities of New Mexico. Both Sal and Dean, especially Sal, want to search America for their "It." The dualism comes into play where Sal presents the "old" conservative view of America's values. Readers can see it in Sal's character; the way he is laidback and reserved. He is the observer, the watcher of Dean. Dean, by contrast is the fiery, "new" view on

American value. Dean is the one that takes charge and possesses the spotlight. They are each connected because Sal cannot narrate his or Dean's story without Dean being himself and chasing his "It." Sal Paradise keeps his distance, but still feels he is a part of the dream of Dean. While Dean is actively searching for his "It", Sal is looking for his own without any real direction. One can make the analogy that Dean Moriarty is a bull. The American Dream or his "It" is the bright red cape, flowing in front of him and Sal is the reluctant bull-rider that has to go along for the ride and hopes his does not fall off. Although the bull may be the center of attention, the rider has also taken a persona because he is daring, risky, enough to take on the bull's challenge. As Skinazi explains:

Throughout *On the Road*, Sal appears to be hovering in the hero's shadow—in a luminal space that is both in and outside the spotlight, following the hero, Dean, in his conquest of the continent, but unable to appropriate the land as Dean does. As a result, Sal Paradise is both mirror-image and antithesis of the book's cowboy-idol, Dean Moriarty. (87)

As stated before, Sal is following in Dean's shadow. He chooses to go ride the bull and search for his possible "It." But Sal is almost unable to make sense of the vast world he is entering. Everything fascinates him; from the drunk people, to the wild ones. Dean is similar, but he is excited for a different reason. Dean wants to find

the next “high.” He wants to take on the world and be on top of it. Both characters mirror each other by their contrasting characteristics. Skinazi later says: “And this combination of sameness and difference results from the fact that Salvatore is an American like Dean, but unlike Dean, as he is also Italian—a duality that must negotiate” (87). Sal is on the path to finding his “It,” but he is not quite there yet, because he is following Dean. Sal’s pursuit of happiness can be traced back to the great Americans that came before him, people like Lewis Clark and Walt Whitman. Their ideas of being American influence Sal, so he tries to assimilate himself. Sal is not the character to put himself into the spotlight, but Dean is. Sal sees Dean as the perfect person to force him to “take the open road”. It’s as if Sal choose Dean to become his liaison, saying “Live the Dream for me!”, “Show me the way!” Sal knows that he cannot do it alone, so he chooses to follow Dean and mimics him. What makes the dualism so dynamic can be summed up by a few words said by Skinazi, “Sal cannot *be* Dean” (88). And rightfully so, their personalities are at both ends of the spectrum, but if you bend it slightly, you can reflect each of them. In order to make them compatible, Jack Kerouac places them into a world full of possibilities. Both Sal and Dean grow dependent upon each other: Sal needs Dean’s vibrant lifestyle to find what he’s looking for, while Dean needs Sal’s smarts and money to achieve his “fun” in the vast world.

Despite Sal's undying will to follow Dean, he still cannot find the answer he is looking within the novel. He keeps going back on the road, searching for that answer. Skinazi supports this occurrence by saying and quoting from the novel:

Italian American Salvatore goes on the road and time after time returns to the road because of Dean ("[T]he bug was on me again, and the bug's name was Dean Moriarty and I was off on another spurt around the road") (Kerouac, *Road* 115). He is not satisfied until he finds and discovers Dean. On the first venture, he heads straight for Denver and asks repeatedly, "But where is Dean?" (39). This question resonates throughout the narrative. (90)

Sal Paradise knows that he needs Dean to carry on, in fact Dean is the reason why he is on the road in the first place. So without his catalyst, Sal is in limbo. Sal's ultimate goal is to find out what makes Dean's "Dean." Sal understands that he is the "cookie-cut" guy who went to school and is "home" oriented. He also understands that he wants more than that, so he needs Dean to lead him through this unknown world to him. Even when Dean is not physically there, Sal keeps him on his mind, so that bug still remains. So near the end of the novel, Sal still doesn't find his answer. He still wonders about Dean's well-being; he does not believe that he has found the "It" he is chasing.

Another point that can strengthen the dualism Sal and Dean create is the fact that Sal lets Dean do the things he does, even if they are immoral. Sal is not an angel himself, but in probably most readers' points of view, Dean is not a very moral man. Readers pick Dean apart, mainly because of his infidelity. Sal makes it known that he has severed his connection with his past love, he also makes it known that "love was a duel." Readers sympathize with Sal. Dean on the other hand, does not make a public apology or appeal. He blatantly acts immoral and shows no regret. Sal tries to make sense of Dean's conduct and implicate it into the "It" they were searching for. But as the novel shows, Sal struggles with that reasoning. Skinazi describes the battle of trying to understand Dean's actions: "For Sal, it is the Myth of the West – the notion of the virgin land – that entices and intimidates him. This West is writ of glorious and incorruptible: he justifies Dean's criminality by claiming that "it was a wild yea-saying overburst of American joy; it was Western, the west wind, an ode from the Plains" (93). Since they are embarking on this new journey, Sal gives Dean's the pass on his immoral behavior. He says that this is the West that is doing it to him and Dean is embracing it. This is what it means to be an American; wild and free, like Lewis and Clark had discovered it. However, this idolization seems to fade when Dean behaves this way in excess. "When Sal arrives in the West, his fascination with the spirit of America as embodied by

the Myth of the West suddenly oppresses him, and he feels a deep and sudden desire to return to his (ethnic) roots” (Skinzai, 93). Sal repeatedly wants to return to New York and see his aunt. His “roots” can be seen as the old ways or how life should remain. Sal is frightened of Dean toward the end of the novel and wants to justify Dean because he takes on that burden.

There is also the aspect of Sal being the outsider or observer and Dean being the native or the action present in the novel. This confirms the duality between Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty. Skinazi explains how those “quiet” versus “loud” attributes create a nice yin and yang of the relationship: “The tension between insiderness and outsidership is always present in *On the Road*. Sal suggests repeatedly that he is outside much of the action of the novel, despite his active involvement in the sex, drugs, poetry, and rolling down the open road. According to his construction of the narrative, the driving on the road novel is Dean’s, and Sal is a passenger” (96). All of the events happening around Sal are influenced or have something to do with Dean. Everyone is looking for a piece of Dean, but since Sal cannot be Dean, he is unable to give that to the people. Sal sits by and watches the story unfold because of Dean. Dean has control of the wheel, both on and off the road. And what is a driver on the open road without his fellow passenger? Sal seems to justify his passiveness by saying “I only went along for the ride, and to see what else was going to do” (Kerouac, 129).

Connections can be made through more than just two characters. Although Jack Kerouac had made various connections to his French-Canadian heritage to his two characters, Allen Ginsberg had made these biographical links extensively. Jason Arthur author of the article, “Allen Ginsberg’s Biographical Gestures” explores the notion that Ginsberg tried to reach out to the audience and share his life with them. Through his work, “Ginsberg has always exercised an editor’s control of the public face of his private life” (Arthur, 227). Arthur talks about Ginsberg’s works pre-Howl and how his poetry reflected some of his personal life. Arthur explains that Ginsberg didn’t intend his life to be public, however his poetic nature allowed people to read into his work. He says, “Ginsberg’s careful manipulation and publication of written materials not originally intended to be public (i.e., letters and journals) marks Ginsberg as a curator of his private life. His goal in part, as Schechner claims, is to “clarify the example” of his extraordinarily singular life” (227). Allen Ginsberg’s “The Green Automobile” is our first glance into his personal life. Although the text of the song cannot be found, it can be heard in the first few lines that Allen Ginsberg is homosexual. Most artists abridging and interpreting the song read them as this:

If I had a Green Automobile
I’d go find my old companion
In his house, on the Western ocean.

HA! HA! HA! HA! HA!

...

We'd pilgrimage to our highest mount
Of our earlier Rocky Mountain Visions
Laughing in each other's arms
Delight surpassing highest Rockies.

The "laughing in each other's arms" usually gives the listeners a hint that Ginsberg may be homosexual. Whether this was intentional or not, Ginsberg eventually made his sexual preference known to the public. Arthur states that even Ginsberg was unsure how he wanted the poem to be read; privately or publicly.

In fact, Ginsberg is fond of equating "The Green Automobile" with the letters written that year. For instance, while apologizing to Cassidy for not having written in a while, Ginsberg explains that his writ copy of the "The Green Automobile," which he includes with the letter, proves that "though this letter is late I've been writing it, in other forms. (229)

These "other forms" could symbolize Ginsberg's struggle to write the letters as private consumption or public. Arthur then quotes from Oliver Harris, who wrote about the Beat Letter exchanges, about Ginsberg's debate: "... measures Ginsberg's identification of letter and literature, hinting at the reciprocal economy that makes letters poems and of poems letters . . . eliding the

distinction between the poem as publishable and public property” (Harris, 177). It is often said that authors give their work some biographical meaning; we have seen it with *On the Road*. Allen Ginsberg’s “The Green Automobile” may be the first we have seen of his openness to the public about his personal life.

Arthur dives further into the letters that were exchanged between Jack Kerouac and Neal Cassidy. He explains how Ginsberg’s biographical gestures were not easily done despite his poetic brilliance. Arthur states that the time period was once in which Ginsberg was very fragile; Ginsberg was battling his homosexuality and his personal family life. The letters to Kerouac were very in-depth and although they were meant to be private, the essence of them could not have been kept that way.

Early in the letter exchange, Ginsberg indicates a parallel instrumentality between letters and conversations. In a letter dated 1948, he claims to have “at last discovered my art, along the lines laid down in conversations and late letters” (1948a). The “art” Ginsberg claims to have collaboratively “discovered” is verse poetry, namely the sonnet, whose intellectual compression (what young Ginsberg marvels at as “a jewel of thought”) is the antithesis of the declamatory long line that drives Ginsberg’s mature poetry. (Arthur, 231).

Ginsberg had written many letters asking Kerouac to visit him. These letters are praising Kerouac for creating Allen's new "art." He feels that his art is less important, than the actual presence of the person who created it. This gives the reader a chance to read into Ginsberg's actual motive. "We thus see early on Ginsberg's preference for personal interaction over the isolating act of writing, a preference that eventually leads to poetry that draws on the intimacy of a specific audience" (Arthur 231). This "art" needed to become public in order to be enjoyed to the fullest; it was dependent of the public.

Ginsberg continues to write in this new form and eventually tells Kerouac in another letter that he has failed to write a manuscript dealing with "personal problems." Ginsberg criticizes himself about how he was a "poser", who "ventriloquially" evokes allusions and forms." Ginsberg is clearly battling trying to have his life reflected in his work; however, he is actually alienating himself from it. We can say that Ginsberg wants to welcome the readers into his life, via his writing, but he is not sure what the outcome will be. Arthur later shows that Ginsberg was trying to incorporate both his conversations and poems into the letters, but they often stand apart from each other:

Ginsberg's early contributions to the letter exchange tend to treat letter content and poetic efforts separately. The poems that begin to accompany letters are lengthily introduced but set

apart on the page, or appended to the finished letters, as though the poems are on display rather than organically related to the act of correspondence. The two kinds of text do not merge. (232)

Ginsberg desperately tries to keep his poetic self into the letters that were personal to Kerouac and Cassidy; however, it could not be done when his personal conversations were blatant. Picture going to a diner and ordering a meal of scrambled eggs and when the eggs get to you, there's an image of a naked woman made in ketchup onto of the eggs. They are totally unrelated and forcing them together hurt the image of the author, or in the example's case, the waitress.

This research has given me great insight of how there are works within the Beat Generation that make various connections. Not only are there character-to-character links present, but there are author-to-reader connections. These relationships can carry a story forward and may be very pivotal to it, while the struggle of an author trying to reach out to his/her writer can be easily seen. The articles by George Dardess, Karen Skinazi, and Jason Arthur helped this paper prove several points: The dualism and friendship of Sal and Dean was important to *On the Road* and Allen Ginsberg was trying to reach out to the audience even before his poem "Howl".

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