

Lust of the Libertines

The Objectification of Women in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*

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BA Thesis English Language and Culture

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June 2014

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I. Introduction

Oh, just a face, and a name on a page.

– Pete Doherty, “Lust of the Libertines”

The Beat Generation is a literary and cultural movement about which numerous books, articles and essays have been written. However, little research has been done on the way in which women are portrayed in novels written by Beat authors. Since the Beat Generation in its entirety is too broad a subject to explore in so few words, this paper will focus on one novel in particular: *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac. Kerouac is widely regarded as one of the most important Beat writers, *On the Road* being his most critically acclaimed novel.

When *On the Road* was first published in 1957, it shocked many people and literary critics were quite harsh on Kerouac for writing such an obscene novel in which he openly spoke about, for example, drug use. Nowadays, however, the focus of the literary criticism on *On the Road* lies more on the way women are portrayed in the novel and how they are treated by the male protagonists of the story. During the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, women became more and more aware of and dissatisfied with the way power was divided between men and women. Feminist literary critics began to examine the ways in which this divide presented itself in literature and how women were portrayed in literature written by male authors. This paper will explore *On the Road* from a feminist perspective and it will look at the way women are portrayed and objectified in *On the Road*.

The first chapter will focus on some relevant background information regarding Jack Kerouac, the Beat Generation and the edition of the novel which will be used for referencing in this paper. Subsequently, a theoretical framework will be given concerning sexual objectification, the male gaze and patriarchy, and how they are all connected. Then, this paper will analyse the ways in which those three concepts work in *On the Road*, focusing firstly on

Jack's experiences with women and then Neal's while also paying attention to women who dared to call out them out on their behaviour. The final chapter of this paper will give a conclusion and a recommendation for further research.

II. Jack Kerouac

Jack Kerouac was born in 1922 in Lowell, Massachusetts as Jean-Louis Kerouac to French-Canadian parents who had immigrated to the United States from Québec. Kerouac grew up speaking French and did not learn English until he was about 6 years old. For Kerouac, French remained an important language for the rest of his life: “I’m French-Canadian, born in New-England. When I’m mad, I often swear in French. When I dream, I often dream in French. When I cry, I often cry in French” (Anctil, my translation). In 2007, journalists working for *Le Devoir*, a Canadian Francophone newspaper based in Montréal, discovered several manuscripts in Kerouac’s personal archives in New York that were written in French. Among these manuscripts were letters to his mother, a few novels that were not quite finished and, most notably, ten pages of *On the Road* dated 19 January 1951. This means that Kerouac had initially started writing *On the Road* in his mother tongue before switching to English and finishing the novel.

Kerouac’s mother Gabrielle was a devout catholic who sent him to a parochial school where he was taught by nuns: “they initiated him into the ancient cult of the virgin-whore, the notion that women were either good ... or evil. In later years, the cult would entrap him; any woman who could associate with so sinful a man as he must indeed be a whore” (McNally 8-9). It is perhaps this deep-rooted belief that was the cause of Kerouac’s misfortune with women. Kerouac was married three times and had numerous girlfriends. However, most of his relationships were rather short-lived. His first two marriages, to respectively Edie Parker and Joan Haverty, did not last longer than a few months. Haverty left Kerouac while she was pregnant with his baby, because he demanded the baby were aborted. For most of his life, even during the times he was married, Kerouac would live with his mother, who turned a blind eye to most of her son’s shenanigans.

The sudden celebrity that Kerouac acquired after the publishing of *On the Road* took its toll on him: “[h]is success had spun into a kaleidoscope of greedy faces, all feeding on him to steal a little of his new power, too much whiskey and attention” (McNally 243). He developed a severe drinking habit, seemingly to live up to the image that he had created of himself in the novel. It was this habit of heavy drinking that would ultimately cause Kerouac’s death. On October 21, 1969 he died of an internal bleeding as the result of advanced liver disease (Cook 246).

The Beat Generation

Kerouac was part of a group of writers who called themselves The Beat Generation. They were a literary and cultural movement that rose to fame during the years after the Second World War. There are several theories on the origin of the word ‘beat’: some claim that it has the meaning of ‘weary’, ‘beat down’, while others argue that it stems from ‘beatific’. According to John Clellon Holmes, author of the 1952 novel *Go* which is considered the first Beat novel, “it was Kerouac who christened them all, though no one would ever claim that he originated the term” (Cook 6). Kerouac uses the term Beat Generation in *On the Road* to describe the new group of people Neal introduces him to: “they were ... rising from the underground, the sordid hipsters of America, a new beat generation that I was slowly joining” (Kerouac 156). Whatever the meaning of the word ‘beat’ may be, the more important question remains “*who* were the Beats? Were they truly, as they called themselves, a generation? A movement? Or were they merely – as was said so often of them by members of the literary establishment of that day – a fad, a phenomenon of publicity ... ?” (Cook 5).

Some important Beats – besides Jack Kerouac – were Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, the aforementioned John C. Holmes and of course Neal Cassady, Kerouac’s muse and inspiration for *On the Road*. Something that all these men had in common was their

“disaffiliation with the American mainstream, its conservative values and measures of success” (Elkholy 3). The Beats were “widely publicized as rebels against the system” (Cook 10); they were united in their rejection of the establishment. This, of course, led to quite some criticism and misunderstanding from outsiders: “[e]verywhere people with tidy moralities shake their heads and wonder what is happening to the younger generation” (Holmes). An interesting characteristic of the Beat Generation to point out here is that it was a predominantly male movement. In her essay “‘Adventures of Auto-Eroticism’: Economies of Traveling Masculinity in *On the Road* and *The First Third*”, Mary Paniccia Carden writes: “Beats who stand out most vividly in American popular culture are men, and the freedom they enjoyed – a geographical independence combined with creative and sexual autonomy – has been understood as a particularly male kind of freedom” (77). Female Beat writers did exist, but they were not nearly celebrated as much as their male counterparts. Women did of course play a role in the Beats’ works, but they often had little agency and were flat characters, which is also the case in *On the Road*, as can be read in the following chapters.

Nowadays, Kerouac is still seen as one of the most important figures of the Beat Generation. *On the Road* embodies everything the Beats stood for, for “it was his [Kerouac] refusal to be ‘sivilized’ that sent him out on the road” (Cook 37). The Beats were a very energetic and intense group of writers, and Kerouac captures this energy very well in his writing: “the only people that interest me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones that never yawn or say a commonplace thing.. but burn, burn, burn like roman candle across the night” (Kerouac 113). His death in 1969 meant the symbolic end of the Beat Generation.

On the Road

The legend goes that Kerouac wrote *On the Road* in 1951 in a three-weeklong writing frenzy, from April 2 to April 22, without ever taking a break from writing. As Howard Cunnell, editor of *On the Road: The Original Scroll*, puts it: “he wrote it all in three weeks on a long roll of Teletype paper, no punctuation. Just sat down with bop on the radio and blasted it out” (1). However, the novel was not published until years later, given that it took Kerouac several more years to edit it. After some much-needed revision and the dividing of the story into chapters, the novel had a more “conventional appearance” which made it “more appealing to publishers” (26). *On the Road* was finally picked up by publishing house Viking in 1951.

In *On the Road*, Kerouac tells the story of his travels across America: “it was all true-life stories, every word, all about riding the roads across America with his mad friend Dean [Neal, AD], and jazz, drink, girls, drugs, freedom” (Cunnell 1). One might say that *On the Road* is a story about “masculine independence” (Paniccia Carden 77): two men, not tied down by wives or children – choosing not to be tied down, anyway, because there are definitely wives and children involved in Jack’s and Dean’s lives, but they are quickly abandoned as soon as they threaten to put an end to their reckless lifestyle. As Eugene Burdick puts it, the Beats refused to make a “firm commitment to any organization. These organizations include, it is made clear almost with virulence, the family” (554).

When the novel was first published it was met with shock and disapproval of Kerouac’s contemporaries. Literary critics thought it vulgar and even obscene: “[t]he havoc Jack wreaked on the contemporary rules ..., they interpreted as madness” (McNally 247). However, the scenes that would have shocked the public in the 1950s would not be considered as offensive today. Nowadays, the thing that stands out most for many critics is the way Kerouac’s male protagonists treat the women in his novel. In online literary magazine *The Millions* Stephanie Nikolopoulos writes that many female readers of *On the Road* “saw

him [Kerouac] as a misogynist vagabond, the bad boy who had left their broken hearts in a trail of exhaust fumes. He didn't like being tied down by responsibilities, or women" (Nikolopoulos). Furthermore, she states that when a male author writes about a female character, she "is usually going to be the subject of the male gaze. If that work happens to be *On the Road*, you're going to end up with women like Marylou and Camille, flat characters being two-timed by hyperactive car-thief Dean Moriarty" (Nikolopoulos). In the following chapters, this paper will go into more detail regarding the male gaze and it will explore the way the male gaze presents itself in *On the Road*.

On the Road can be seen as a fictionalised autobiography. Kerouac had a habit of writing about his own life, about his close friends and family, and he used aliases for them in his novels. In the version of *On the Road* that Kerouac wrote in April 1951, he had originally used all of his friends' and acquaintances' real names. However, his publishers forced him to change their names to made-up ones. In 2007, publishing house Penguin released a new edition of the novel containing the original scroll version of *On the Road*, which means that it gives "Kerouac's fellow travellers, the writers Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs, and his muse Neal Cassady, their real names instead of the pseudonyms that generations of fans have had to decode" (Bignell and Johnson). According to poet and critic Joshua Kupetz, the scroll manuscript is "a more authentic version of *On the Road*" (95), as it includes several scenes which have been removed from the 1957 edition of the novel. In short, *On the Road: The Original Scroll* is "as close as possible to the one Kerouac produced between April 2 and April 22, 1951" (Cunnell 101). This paper will reference *The Original Scroll*, thus using the characters' real names.

III. Theoretical Framework

Sexual Objectification

During the 1960s and 1970s, the second wave of feminism emerged in the United States. Women became dissatisfied with their assigned roles, they were tired of being perceived as inferior to men: “everywhere and in every organization women were responsible for keeping records, producing leaflets, telephoning, cleaning offices, cooking, organizing social events, and catering to the egos of male leaders, while the men wrote manifestos, talked to the press, negotiated with officials, and made public speeches” (Baxandall and Gordon 416). For years, this division of labor and power had felt natural to both men and women. However, slowly but gradually it began to seem “no longer natural at all” (416).

Around this time, women became interested in the portrayal of women and the power relations between men and women in literature as well. Feminist literary critics started to examine the way in which fictional female characters were depicted in male-centric literature. They found that sexual objectification of women commonly occurred in many novels written by male authors; women were often portrayed as being sexually submissive and subservient to men. In their article “Sexual Objectification of Women: Advances to Theory and Research”, Szymanski, Moffitt and Carr define sexual objectification as follows: “sexual objectification occurs when a woman’s body or body parts are singled out and separated from her as a person and she is viewed primarily as a physical object of male sexual desire” (8). In short, when a woman is objectified, her worth is equated with “her body’s appearance and sexual functions” (29). It is often forgotten that women, too, are human beings: “[o]ne is treating as an object what is really not an object, what is, in fact, a human being” (Nussbaum 257).

In literature, sexual objectification occurs when female characters are described by their physical appearance. Usually, the author pays no attention to the inner workings of the

female characters' minds, their thoughts and desires, but only focuses on their outward appearance. These sexually objectified female characters generally have little agency and are only exist for the gratification of the male protagonists.

The Male Gaze

An important concept with regard to the objectification of women in literature and other mass media is the male gaze. Firstly coined by feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey in her 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", the male gaze is a term that implicates an imbalance in gender relations and power, meaning that in novels written by male authors, women are often passive, gazed at, while men are active "gazers". Mulvey primarily applied the concept in film theory, but it has since been used in the field of feminist literary criticism as well.

According to Chong, Molyneaux and Fournier "all viewers, regardless of gender, look at media images with an inherently male gaze" (420). Furthermore, they state that "media images ... affect our ways of seeing ourselves and others, and have in turn engendered perceptions to the point where we see male images as active and female images as passive. Men see women as objects" (420). In short, "women ... passively perform for the pleasure of the active male gaze" (420).

In literature, the male gaze occurs when a story is told from the perspective of and written by a heterosexual man. When a female character is introduced into the story the author will focus on her physical appearance: "women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact" (Mulvey 11). The male author will look at his female character with a male gaze, describing the woman so that she is attractive to both her male antagonists and the reader: "[t]he determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female form which is styled accordingly" (Mulvey 11). In conclusion,

when the male gaze occurs in literature, women are “displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look” (Mulvey 13).

Patriarchy

Sexual objectification and the male gaze find their roots in the male need to feel superior to women. Feminist sociologist Nancy Chodorow claims that the male tendency to place themselves above women is the result of external influences, one of these influences being their very own mothers: “the very fact of being mothered by a woman generated in men conflicts over masculinity, a psychology of male dominance and a need to be superior to women” (214). Masculinity is a significant concept to take into account with regard to this. Especially in the 1950s, when *On the Road* was written, men were still expected to live up to a certain stereotype: that of a masculine man, a man able to provide for a family.

This need for men “to be superior to women” and to be very masculine is in turn rooted deeply in a social system called patriarchy. Literally meaning “the rule of the fathers” (Tickner 1197), feminists nowadays use the term to denote “the rule of men over women more generally. Patriarchy so defined encompasses all systems of male dominance” (Tickner 1197). These systems of male dominance have been in place for years and years and it is very hard for feminists to break down the patriarchy. Chong, Molyneaux and Fournier blame the media for this: “[t]he media reflects and perpetuates the socialized gender norms of patriarchal society” (420).

Second-wave feminist writer Kate Millett remarks in her book *Sexual Politics* that “it can be said scientifically that women are inherently subservient, and males dominant” and that a woman “enjoys her oppression and deserves it, for she is by her very nature, vain, stupid, and hardly better than barbarian, if she is human at all” (203). She then goes on, however, to proclaim this statement “bigotry” (203), and she sees it as a reason for women to

stand up against these prejudices. As Chong, Molyneaux and Fournier argue, “gender is a role that men and women perform according to the expectations of society” (420-21), meaning that the respective roles men and women take on are not biologically determined, but that they are merely a social construct, enforced by patriarchy. In a society with a patriarchal structure “[w]oman then stands ... as signifier for the male other” (Mulvey 7). Carol Pateman, feminist and political theorist, claims that this structure has consequences for the way men and women live their lives: “the patriarchal construction of the difference between masculinity and femininity is the political difference between freedom and subjection” (207).

An interesting aspect of patriarchy is the way male and female sexuality are regarded. Female sexual desires are often neglected: “[p]atriarchal myth and belief had always assumed greater sexual capacity in the male and argued from it a greater need” (Millett 119). Although women are solely seen as sexual objects, the very idea that they, too, have sexual needs is seen as absurd: “while patriarchy tends to convert woman to a sexual object, she has not been encouraged to enjoy the sexuality which is agreed to be her fate” (Millett 119). In this way, patriarchy reinforces the idea that women should be sexually submissive to men, that their only purpose is to satisfy men, because men are supposedly “more strongly sexed and therefore entitled to sexually subjugate the female” (Millett 203).

Millett remarks that “patriarchy as an institution is a social constant so deeply entrenched as to run through all other political, social, or economic forms” (25). This means that literature, too, cannot escape the patriarchy. Patriarchal norms and standards have found their way into the literature of many authors, resulting quite often in the sexual objectification of women.

IV. *On the Road*

The most useful way to go about exploring the objectification of women in *On the Road* is to divide the research into two parts: one part focusing on Jack's girls and another part focusing on Neal's girls. First, this paper will analyse Jack Kerouac's relationships with the girls in the novel and then it will take a closer look at Neal Cassady's ways with women. Finally, there will be a small part on what can be called the feminist backlash against Jack and especially Neal.

Jack's Girls

The concept of the male gaze can easily be applied to the way Jack Kerouac deals with the women in his life and by extension his novel *On the Road*. The first girl he meets while he is traveling is a girl called Ruth Gullion. Neal introduces Jack to her and Jack describes her as "a nice little girl, simple and true, and tremendously frightened of sex" (159). Within minutes of meeting her, he takes her back to his apartment to show her that sex is not something to be afraid of. All he wants is to get her into bed with him, because that is all that she is good for in his eyes. However, when he finally succeeds, he fails to live up to his promises.

The next girl Jack encounters is a girl he meets on a bus to Los Angeles: "I saw the cutest little Mexican girl ... Her breasts stuck out straight and true; her little flanks looked delicious; her hair was long and black' and her eyes were great big blue tings with a soul in it" (183). This is a description from a heterosexual, male point of view: a clear example of the male gaze. The girl is diminished to merely her physical features. Jack and this girl, Bea, get to know each other and decide to travel together for a while: "[f]or the next fifteen days we were together for better or for worse. When we woke up we decided to hitch hike up to New York together; she was going to be my girl in town" (186-87). The added "in town" implies that Bea is replaceable, like an object; Jack probably has a different girl in every city. At one

point, Bea refuses to have sex with Jack and he in return gets angry: “I got mad and realized I was pleading with a dumb little Mexican wench” (186). He also says that Bea has “a simple and funny little mind” (186). Basically, when Bea does not wish to sleep with Jack, he decides that she must be “simple” and “dumb”.

One very obvious example of sexual objectification occurs when Jack is reunited with Edie Parker, his ex-wife, whom he has not seen in a long time: “[t]he moment I saw her I knew I’d never go back to her: she was fat, her hair was clippt short, she wore overalls and munched on candy with one hand and drank beer with the other” (342). He looks at her with a male gaze and finds that she is no longer attractive. He then decides that he no longer desires to be with her.

Eventually, Jack settles down with a girl. Her name is Joan Haverty. Their meeting is quite unconventional: “a pretty girl stuck her head out of the window and said ‘Yes? Who is it?’ ‘Jack Kerouac’ I said” (405). The girl invites him up and “there she was, the girl with the pure and innocent dear eyes that I had always searched for and for so long” (405). Even when describing what is apparently Jack’s dream girl, he focuses on her eyes: a physical feature.

Furthermore, the objectification of women in *On the Road* creates a certain division of the girls into groups of bad girls and good girls, as it were. Louanne – who will be discussed more extensively below – for example, is a “whore” and therefore a bad girl, whereas Joan Haverty is a good girl, with her “pure and innocent dear eyes”. This is again an example of women being defined from a male point of view, while not taking into account their actual actions.

Neal’s Girls

When Neal Cassady is introduced in the novel, it immediately becomes clear that his sexual desires are of paramount importance to him, more important even than food or a roof above

his head. Kerouac writes that Neal is standing in the kitchen, making coffee “while he proceeded with his loveproblems...for to him sex was the one and only holy and important thing in life, although he had to sweat and curse to make a living, and so on” (110). Part of Neal’s “loveproblems” at that moment is his marriage: “there was talk that he had just married a 16 year old girl named Louanne” (109). Louanne is described as “his beautiful little sharp chick” (109), which can certainly be seen as objectification for she is only described by her physical features. Also, a certain degree of ownership is implied by the use of the word ‘his’, which further shows that Louanne is thought of as an object. This becomes even more clear when Kerouac writes that Neal is walking around in his apartment, slightly nervous, and he decides “the thing to do was have Louanne making breakfast and sweeping the floor” (110), as if she were Neal’s to order around.

Only later do we learn a thing or two about Louanne’s character, but not after once again her physical appearance is emphasised: “Louanne was a pretty, sweet little thing, but awfully dumb and capable of doing horrible things” (110). What these horrible things are, becomes clear a little later on in the story: ““And where’s Louanne?” I asked, and Neal said she’d apparently whored a few dollars together or something of that nature and gone back to Denver... ‘the whore!’” (111). Throughout the story, Neal sleeps around quite a bit, goes from one girl to another and is not faithful in the slightest. There is very little comment on Neal’s adulterous behaviour. However, when Louanne leaves Neal because he treats her badly, it is immediately assumed she is sleeping with other men which makes her a whore, apparently. This is a perfect example of the patriarchal idea that women are objects who only exist to please men, whose sexuality is more important.

The male gaze occurs quite regularly in *On the Road*. Every time new female characters are introduced, the narrator focuses on their physical appearance and omits a description of their inner features. When Jack and Neal get to Chicago for the first time, Neal

is completely entranced by the women there: “[a]nd that woman in that window up there, just looking down with her big breasts hanging from her nightgown. Just big wide eyes waiting” (336). He turns his male gaze up at the woman in the window and focuses solely on her breasts and eyes. When Neal’s second wife is introduced in the novel, Jack sees of her “on the bed, one beautiful creamy thigh covered with black lace, a blonde, look up with mild wonder” (146). Something similar happens when Jack describes Diane, Neal’s girlfriend later in the story: “[s]he was a big sexy brunette ... and generally like a beautiful Parisian whore” (350). The focus is entirely on her body, seen through the eyes of a man.

To Neal, women are sexual objects even when they are already married. At one point in the novel, Jack and Neal meet their friend Freddy, and they try to get him to come with them to New York. Freddy, however, declines because his wife is waiting for him at home. The conversation that follows is typical of Neal’s attitude towards marriage and relationships in general, and it shows that the only thing on his mind is sex: ““Oh yes? said Neal lighting up. ‘And where is the darling tonight.’ ‘What do you mean’ said Freddy looking at him out of the corner of his eye. ‘I tole you I was married to her didn’t I?’ ‘Oh yes, Oh yes’ blushed Neal. ‘I was just asking. Maybe she has friends? or sisters?’” (298). Neal lusting after married women is a regular occurrence in *On the Road*. It happens again when Jack and Neal get into a small car accident and get out of their car to exchange details with the driver of the other. Neal does not pay attention to the whole ordeal, because he is too busy gazing at the driver’s wife: “and Neal not taking his eyes off the man’s wife whose beautiful brown breasts were barely concealed inside a floppy cotton blouse” (333). Neal himself is married multiple times and has two children, but he has little regard for them. He abandons his wife when she is pregnant and later when she has two small children at home. It turns out that when a woman is tying him down, when he can no longer objectify her and only use her for sex, he no longer has any interest in her.

Unlike Jack, Neal does not settle down eventually but he remains a wanderer. He does not want to choose between Louanne, Carolyn, and Diane. Neal simply wants every woman he can get his hands on: “[o]h I love, love, love women! I think women are wonderful! I live women!” (242). His lust for women is too big to simply pick one and stay with her. There is a certain tension in the novel between the search for “kicks”, for girls, jazz, and drugs on the one hand, and domestic life on the other hand. Their traveling is inherently masculine. They are free to go wherever they want to go, unlike most of the women they meet, who are forced to stay at home because that is what is expected of them, after all, in a patriarchal culture. Whereas Jack eventually succumbs to the need to found a family, to give up a piece of his masculinity, Neal keeps hopping from girl to girl, leaving wife and children behind. Family life is not something Neal is particularly suited for. He does nothing to change his ways. At first, he goes back to Caroly but soon finds that he misses the traveling, and, of course, all the girls: “[s]o now he was thrice-married, twice-divorced, and living with his second wife” (404). Diane, his mistress at that time, is pregnant. Neal has a considerable amount of paternal duties to fulfil, but he refrains from ever making a commitment to one girl.

Feminist Backlash

There are a few scenes in the novel that should be mentioned in which women actually speak up against Neal and his womanizing ways. Helen Hinkle, Al Hinkle’s wife, for example, calls Neal out when he leaves Carolyn with their young daughter: “‘Neal why do you act so foolish?’ said Helen. ‘Carolyn called and said you left her. Don’t you realize you have a daughter’” (292). Neal, however, is fairly indifferent to her accusations, which only angers Helen Hinkle more: “[y]ou have absolutely no regard for anybody but yourself and your damned kicks. All you think about is what's hanging between your legs and how much money or fun you can get out of people and then you just throw them aside... Not only that but you're

silly about it. It never occurs to you that life is serious and that there are people trying to make something decent out of it instead of just goofing all the time” (292). Although Jack proceeds to defend his friend, he also feels a kind of admiration for Helen: “Helen Hinkle was the only one in the gang who wasn’t afraid of Neal and who could sit there calmly, with her face hanging out, telling him off in front of everybody” (293).

Another woman who is fully aware of Neal’s terrible behaviour is Gabrielle Kerouac, Jack’s mother with whom he lives when he is not on the road. Towards the end of the novel, Jack brings Neal home and it is obvious that Gabrielle is not too fond of Neal: ““Jack’ said my mother ‘Neal can stay here a few days and after that he has to get out, do you understand me?’” (349). She even talks to Neal about her concerns with regard to his lifestyle: “[w]ell Neal’ said my mother ‘I hope you’ll be able to take care of your new baby that’s coming and stay married this time. ... You can’t go all over the country having babies like that. Those poor little things’ll grow up helpless. You’ve got to offer them a chance to live.’” (354). It seems that Neal actually is a bit ashamed of himself: “[h]e looked at his feet and nodded” (354).

Another interesting thing to point out is a scene in which female sexuality is not neglected or denied, but actually put out in the open. Louanne and Neal are filing for a divorce, but “Louanne ... insists on screwing in the interim. She says she loves his big cock – so does Carolyn – so do I” (146). Here it is acknowledged that women, too, have sexual desires and needs, which goes against the patriarchal idea that women’s sexuality is something to look down upon.

V. Conclusion and Discussion

While the Beats prided themselves on being open-minded, free-spirited and sexually liberal, rejecting mainstream American values, Jack Kerouac was still stuck in the old patriarchal views of the relation between men and women. *On the Road* is a very good example of this, taking a look at Jack and Neal's relationships with women and how they treat them, how they talk to them and about them. They are sexually objectified; they only serve the gratification of men and are subservient to them. By objectifying the women in *On the Road*, Kerouac perpetuates and reinforces the patriarchal views of the relations between men and women that feminists have tried to break down so fervently over the years. This goes to show that maybe the Beats were not as liberated and "hipster" as they thought themselves to be.

The male gaze is a phenomenon that occurs quite regularly in *On the Road*. Both Jack and Neal gaze at women, only noticing their physical appearance and paying no mind to their feelings and the inner workings of their minds. Every time a new female character is introduced, the narrator only focuses on describing her appearance, which means that these fictional female characters are sexually objectified. It is also very obvious that Jack and Neal view women as replaceable objects by the way they go from city to city and search for new, pretty girls to sleep with in every single one of them.

However, the objectification of women by Jack and Neal does not go unnoticed by the women themselves. Several female characters in *On the Road* speak up against Neal and condemn his unfaithfulness. Both Helen Hinkle and Gabrielle Kerouac find the strength to call Neal out on his behaviour. Neal, in turn, does not want to listen to them and continues living his life the way he has always done.

It would be very interesting to extend this research to more works by Beat authors, to examine the ways in which they portray fictional female characters. In that way, a general statement can be made about the way Beats treated the female characters in their novels. It

could very well be that in other Beat novels, women have more agency and attention is paid to their feelings and thoughts, and their sexuality.

Finally, the way in which language is used by the male protagonists who objectify women would be an interesting topic of research. Jack and Neal often use words as ‘little’, ‘dumb’, and ‘whore’. Exploring the exact connotations these words carry could possibly yield some very interesting results. This, too, can be extended to a whole array of Beat novels for a more representative outcome.

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