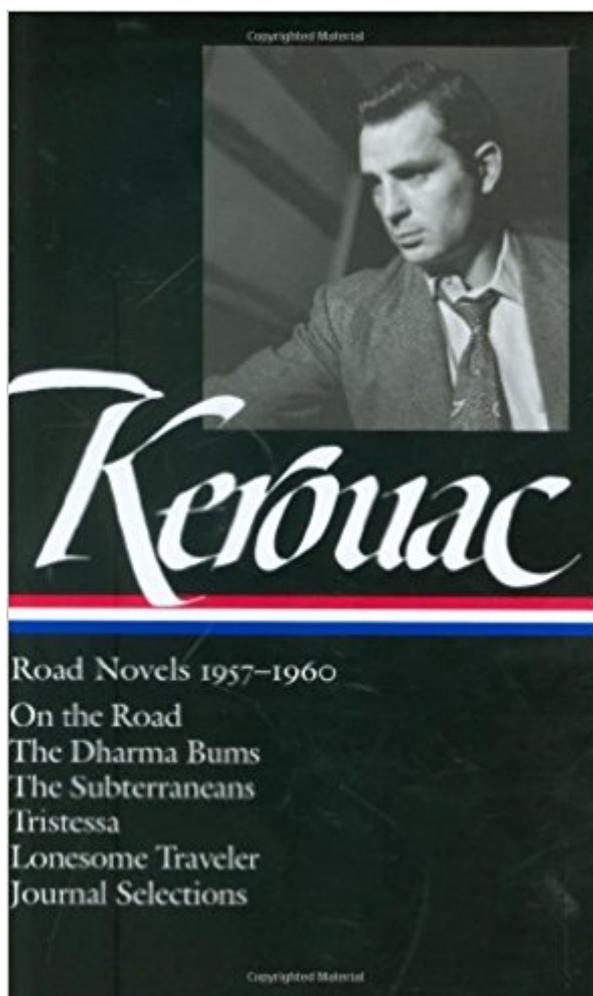


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Jack Kerouac: Road Novels 1957-1960: On The Road / The Dharma Bums / The Subterraneans / Tristessa / Lonesome Traveler / Journal Selections (Library Of America)





Synopsis

The raucous, exuberant, often wildly funny account of a journey through America and Mexico, Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* instantly defined a generation upon its publication in 1957: it was, in the words of a *New York Times* reviewer, the clearest and most important utterance yet made by the generation Kerouac himself named years ago as 'beat.' Written in the mode of ecstatic improvisation that Allen Ginsberg described as spontaneous bop prosody, Kerouac's novel remains electrifying in its thirst for experience and its defiant rebuke of American conformity. In his portrayal of the fervent relationship between the writer Sal Paradise and his outrageous, exasperating, and inimitable friend Dean Moriarty, Kerouac created one of the great friendships in American literature; and his rendering of the cities and highways and wildernesses that his characters restlessly explore are a hallucinatory travelogue of a nation he both mourns and celebrates. Now, to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Kerouac's landmark novel, The Library of America collects *On the Road* together with four other autobiographical road books published in the late 1950s and early 1960s. *The Dharma Bums* (1958), at once an exploration of Buddhist spirituality and an account of the Bay Area poetry scene, is notable for its thinly veiled portraits of Kerouac's acquaintances, including Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, and Kenneth Rexroth. *The Subterraneans* (1958) recounts a love affair set amid the bars and bohemian haunts of San Francisco. *Tristessa* (1960) is a melancholy novella describing a relationship with a prostitute in Mexico City. *Lonesome Traveler* (1960) collects travel essays that evoke journeys in Mexico and Europe, and concludes with an elegiac lament for the lost world of the American hobo. Also included in *Road Novels* are selections from Kerouac's journal, which provide a fascinating perspective on his early impressions of material eventually incorporated into *On the Road*.

Book Information

Hardcover: 864 pages

Publisher: Library of America; 1st edition (September 1, 2007)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1598530127

ISBN-13: 978-1598530124

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 1.1 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.3 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (40 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #50,406 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #7 in [Books > Literature & Fiction >](#)

History & Criticism > Movements & Periods > Beat Generation #81 in Books > Literature & Fiction
> United States > Anthologies

Customer Reviews

September 5, 2007 marks the 50th anniversary of the publication of Jack Kerouac's (1922 -- 1969) most famous novel, "On the Road". The Library of America has aptly commemorated the event with its newly-released volume of Kerouac's "Road Novels." The works in this collection were published between 1957 -- 1960, although most of them were written considerably earlier. This volume includes four Kerouac novels, a collection of essays called "Lonesome Traveler", and selections from Kerouac's journals. This volume offers the opportunity for readers to revisit and reassess Kerouac and for new readers to get to know his work. Kerouac amply deserves to be included in the Library of America series which is devoted to honoring the best of American literary achievement. Kerouac, for all his personal failings and his difficulties with alcoholism and substance abuse, had a better understanding of what his work was about than did some of his critics. In his introduction to "Lonesome Traveler", Kerouac wrote: "Always considered writing my duty on earth. Also the preachment of universal kindness, which hysterical critics have failed to notice beneath frenetic activity of my true-story novels about the 'beat' generation. -- Am actually not 'beat' but strange solitary crazy Catholic mystic." Kerouac's novels are autobiographical in character. His works lack artistic distance, but they more than compensate for this lack with their immediacy and sense of honesty. They describe a complex and torn individual whose life had been riddled with failure but who was driven to succeed as a writer. Part of Kerouac rejected mainstream American conformity and materialism in favor of a bohemian life of spontaneity, sex, and wild experience.

2007 was in many ways an interesting year. For one it marks the 50th anniversary of the publication of first of Jack Kerouac's so-called road novels, the seminal "On the Road." This book is one of many commemorating that event, but is one the better selections because it contains four of Kerouac's best known road books along with his lesser known "Lonesome Traveler" and relevant selections from the journal that he kept throughout his life. "On the Road" was an instant best seller for Kerouac, yet it is a strange book in many ways. Like all of Kerouac's novels it is a slightly fictionalized autobiography. It concerns a period in his life when he became infatuated with Neil Cassidy (Dean Moriarty) and the search for something never fully defined. Much like the recent hit comedy, "Seinfeld", nothing really happens in this novel. Yet it is a fascinating read because it is filled with touching, funny, or bizarre events that are interesting perhaps because they lead

nowhere. This set the pattern for the whole road novel series. These novels also reflect and describe the anomie felt by Kerouac till the day of his death. Some maintain that the third novel in this series "The Subterraneans" is the best, but this is debatable. It also is claimed that the so-called 'beat generation' was spawned by the first novel of the series. This is nonsense. "On the Road" actually refers to events that happened ten years before its publication in 1947-48.

The September 5, 2007 fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Jack Kerouac's *On The Road* is commemorated by the release of three major volumes: A designated 50th Anniversary edition (Viking, \$24.95); *On The Road: The Original Scroll*, the long-awaited controversial release of the uncensored 120-foot alleged "teletype roll" on which Kerouac blasted out his masterwork in just three weeks, six years before its publication (Viking, \$26.95); and the handsome Library of America edition (\$35.00), *Jack Kerouac: Road Novels 1957-1960*, edited with notes by neo-historian Douglas Brinkley, featuring *Road* and five other of his best known novels with selections from his journals. Whether this literary blitz will land a grand revival of Kerouac's work by old and new generations is yet unseen. But it secures his reputation as a major American writer because his voice resonates with great poignant prose of Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, and John Steinbeck, celebrating wonders and adventures of youthful travels on the open road. *On The Road* helped kick off the 1950s literary "Beat Generation", including works of William Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg. It recounts early adventures of Kerouac ("Sal Paradise"), sidekick Neal Cassady ("Dean Moriarty"), Burroughs ("Old Bull Lee"), Ginsberg ("Carlo Marx") and others as they traveled the country in stolen and transport service cars, and partied with sex and drugs while digging be-bop jazz and celebrating the sights and sounds of America. One 1949 trip was to Burroughs' New Orleans house on Wagner Street in Algiers, now renovated and commemorated by an historical marker on its grounds with a quotation from *On The Road*. Kerouac wrote of crossing the Mississippi River on the Algiers ferry.

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