124. LIVE! From The LA Kerouac Festival at Typewriters Anonymous: The Kerouac We Ignore w/ Daniel Dissinger

Daniel Dissinger: [00:00:00] Hi, everyone. My name's Daniel Dissinger.

I'm a professor, um, in the writing program at USC, and I'm a podcaster, a poet, and Kerouac has been pretty much in my life for-- since I was like 17, 18 years old. Like, um, and his books and the scholarship that I've created has not only just been part of my academic re-- uh, career, but has been part of like my personal life as well, and has helped me-- helped guide me to learn a lot of different things about myself and, um, a lot about my writing.

And as I'm gonna talk about here with the title of my presentation, The Kerouac We Ignore: Exploring Kerouac's Fathers and Sons, Masculine Lineage and Kerouac's Lifelong Search for Love of Self in the Duluoz Legend, has definitely opened up a lot of ideas for these, um, experiences. Um, so if you-- I will read-- not read all the slides, but if you could see them, hopefully, yes, like you could see some of the [00:01:00] images that I put up there and some of the quotes.

But I just wanna start off too by thanking Philip and Elizabeth for inviting me. This is a real honor for me to do this. I'm, uh-- Like I said, Kerouac is, is-- his work is really important to me and, um, anytime I get a chance to talk about him and his work, um, I like to take that chance. So thank you and Typewriter Ano- Typewriters Anonymous

Whoo! So my introduction to Kerouac's writing, it's very stereotypical that I started with On the Road. It definitely, just like many people, started with On the Road. It's a book that opened up so many different avenues of thought for myself to think that I could write in a way that truly came deep from within, and was a way for me to express my personal voice and my thoughts and ideas, and not be afraid to also be deeply emotional in that [00:02:00] writing.

That is one of the things that On the Road taught me right away, was here's a writer who isn't just discussing, um, America and even in a way rebelliousness. But there was a, a real deep emotional aspect to his writing that I hadn't seen before in other writing, and On the Road opened that up for me. Um, but unlike

most people, I took a different turn in the next book that I read, and I read Town and the City, which at the time when I wrote it, or read it in the very early 2000s, was the oldest book that was out at the time.

So there was nothing else but Town and the City. That was his first novel, quote unquote, "at the time." And Town and the City, if you've never read it, is a gigantic undertaking for a young writer, I would say. It's missing about 600 pages, so the original manuscript is an 1,100-page manuscript, and they published about 500.

So there is a lot out [00:03:00] there, probably in the archives, that no one has read yet. But it's a story about the Martin family, which that name goes into a lot of his other books as well that you'll see, and it's a story of a French Canadian family in pretty much Lowell, Massachusetts, and just their life pre and post-war.

And what Kerouac does in that book is really interesting. He takes himself and he splits himself up into the several brothers of the family. So Peter, Wesley, Francis, even then the youngest brother as well. And every one of the questions he has about his identity, he sort of uses those brothers to reflect through and play out events that actually happen in his life, to kind of see them play out in different ways, to kind of understand the impact that it had.

But also, there's a huge focus on George Martin, who's the father of the entire family, and a lot of people- kind [00:04:00] of read over his role. But really what I started to see was like he played a gigantic part of the whole book, and when I go further, you will-- I'll show you why. After that, I read Desolation Angels, which I feel like is his best book.

I, I think Desolation Angels is his most honest, rawest fictional piece. I think it's his writing at its peak. I think that Desolation Angels shows us a Kerouac that is waiting at the time of that book for On the Road to be published, so you actually see that play out. But you don't see a gigantic celebration.

You only see confusion, and dissatisfaction, and sorrow, and a, a man trying to understand what is his place in this world, um, as he becomes famous for a book he wrote seven years prior to its publication. So he's already seven years ahead. He's written four or five other books. Everything, his whole career is moving forward, and for the [00:05:00] public, his career has just started.

So these three books really kinda opened up his work for me in many, many different ways. So like I said, like fathers and sons and masculinity, that is the

main thing for me with Town and the City. And what I see especially here is that generational conflict. That was so important to that work. I wrote my undergrad thesis on it, and when I finished the-- finished that undergrad thesis, I truly felt something was missing in the next transition to On the Road.

Like it just didn't fit anymore after doing all this research and after writing about fathers and sons and, as we'll talk about later, this gigantic funeral scene. Something was wrong in my head that like it just didn't make sense as to why he would go from losing his father and having this whole eulogy and everything to On the Road when it opens up about him talking about his div-- uh, divorce and, and all this.

It just didn't make sense, [00:06:00] especially because On the Road never mentions it ever again throughout the entire text. So in two thousand and seven, I was doing my MFA in Naropa in Jack Kerouac's School of Disembodied Poetics, and coincidentally, the On the Road scroll was there in Denver. So I went there.

They had unrolled the first half, so I immediately had to walk all the way up to the first sentence and look at the first sentence of the scroll because I knew that there was a key comp-component in that opening sentence. Now, none of this had come out yet. No one was writing about it. There was not a single academic article writing about the scroll version of On the Road at all at the time.

This was all pretty much instinct that, like, there was something wrong. And then you have the scroll version of On the Road being published, and there's the first sentence: "I first met Neal long after my father died." And so that Was in the scroll. And then when you look at the scroll, it's [00:07:00] X'd out because he-- it was-- went through a total revision.

And so that to me really told me something really was-- Kerouac was working through something between fathers and sons, and On the Road then became much more than just this rebellious content about dissent that only adolescents should read. It all of a s- all of a sudden opened up a whole world in that book that wasn't there necessarily, and it became a book that I saw that was almost about mourning and grieving the loss of a father and at the same time, fatherless sons in, like, a fatherless world post-World War II.

So it became very apparent to me that this was overlooked. So these are some of the things that, uh, also for the scroll version that I found interesting. You have... Whoop, there we go. You have reflections on father-son relationships.

Now in On the Road, there are many times where father-son relationships get [00:08:00] played out.

Between Sal and Dean, they play father-son to each other. Between Sal and Old Bull Lee or William Burroughs, like Kerouac and him, like him being the son to him being the father. Even Sal and Terry and Terry's son, who-- Beatrice, um, if you-- you can actually find out all about Terry if you read Tim Hernandez's book.

Shout out to Tim Hernandez, who's, uh, wrote the book Mañana Means Heaven, which is all about B. It's a beautiful book. But he plays father there for like two weeks, and then the fatherless post-World War II sons looking for a father that doesn't necessarily exist, Dean's father. So there was so much talk of fathers and sons that that was being ignored while everything was being much more focused on the other parts of the book, jazz, drugs, sex, and all that's there.

But there is a deeper part to the text, right? So in his-- also his obsession with labor, work, and vocation. He had a lot of [00:09:00] jobs in On the Road. You could see it. He had took on a lot of jobs. And if you read Desolation Angels, he's a fire lookout. He, he has other jobs actually throughout the entire novel.

Town and the City is also about work. Um- And as you see, the other texts that I'm gonna talk about also about work. So in two thousand eleven, two thousand fourteen, and two thousand sixteen, three major things happen. These three books get published. Two thousand eleven, Sea is-- The Sea is My Brother, which is his earliest work, is published, written in nineteen forty-two.

Then The Ha- The Haunted Life, written in nineteen forty-six, it's an unfinished manuscript, that gets published in two thousand fourteen. And then in twenty sixteen, a collection of rare and unpublished and translated from French Kerouac work gets published. All of these books are all pre On the Road work.

None of this was actually written before On the Road, and none of it was ever published, obviously, until these dates. [00:10:00] The thing that these books have in common are all of them have a deep understanding of fathers, sons, work, and masculinity, and also a search for place through kind of figuring out how do I find self-worth.

So The Sea is My Brother, he does that thing again that he does in Town and the City, but earlier on. He takes his identity and he splits it between two, two young men. Wesley Martin, who's the merchant marine, that then Bill Everhart, the academic, meets. And then they go on this entire adventure with each other.

And again, Kerouac was a merchant marine, so this isn't fictional as well. Like, he worked as a merchant marine. That's how he made a lot m- of his money, which is, like, through that and the GI Bill. So at the same time, he is also talking about dissatisfaction of trying to figure out, like, where is his place in the world, academia or being adventurous.

But you see both young men are totally dissatisfied because [00:11:00] they're trying to prove to the world that they are worthy men by the work that they do, and not truly looking internally to kind of understand that, that, that self-worth can come ins- from inside. And there's a whole discussion on the father as well, so-- and we'll go deeper into that.

The Haunted Life also, same thing. You have a whole discussion here between fathers and sons. You have the-- Peter Martin coming home from the summer for college, and then him and the relationship between the father and the father's dissatisfaction with his life, and, like, them-- the son trying to figure out how that happens.

Like, why is this happening? Now, there's a lot going on in that text for s- it to be such a small, unfinished n- novel as well. But it plays into and continues the conversation that he had from The Sea is My Brother, which then these two novels then play right into the Town and the City. And then The Unknown Kerouac [00:12:00] has three major story, three major parts that I find are most important to this whole thing.

The Night Is My, The Night Is My Woman, which is an interesting translated French text that he did. And, you know, Kerouac's second language was English, so he wrote and spoke French fluently. So yeah, so and that's part of, like, also understanding his work. Like, as a writer, he was so dissatisfied with the normal English sentence, but being someone who English wasn't his first language, he pretty much was able to kinda just think like, "How can I make this my language?"

And that's literally why he made the, the stylistic choices that he made, one big reason. In that book, you see, um, Peter Martin, again, taking on many different jobs and trying to figure out, "Why don't I feel comfortable as a working person in the world?" Like labor working. So he takes jobs, he quits. He takes jobs, he gets fired.

He reflects on why he's so dissatisfied and why he can't figure out why the, he doesn't fit into the [00:13:00] working world, and he's trying to force himself into it because he feels, "As a man, that's what I'm supposed to do. Like, I'm

supposed to get a job and do this thing. I see my father doing it. I'm watching him do it."

Now, in the 1951 journal is him getting over, um, a disease in a hospital, and Kerouac was just journaling the entire time, and in that journal, he mentions his father many, many, many, many times. It's actually so much that the journal could be like, you know, journal about my dad. Like, because there's something that, you know, and scholars don't necessarily talk about that.

You know, and Kerouac has been, for his entire career, if you look at it, been almost in his own words telling people, like, "I'm really interested in this. This is where my work is. This is what's important to me." But it gets ignored, you know, many times because it's not, I guess, as flashy to look at in terms of scholarship for Kerouac or the Beats.

And then Old Bull on the Bowery is a [00:14:00] story about a young son and his father and c- them going into the city to meet up with another son and their father and, like, the relationship, and then there's an older son that comes as well. So these generational relationships are so imperative to Kerouac's work that we see that afterwards, after On the Road, it's still in those books, and we'll, we'll talk about that.

So something that I find interesting, Michael Kimmel, in his book Manhood in America There's this, like, really long quote here, but the main thing about this quote is the part that he says where at the turn of the century, manhood was replaced with masculinity. So instead of going this idea from childhood into adulthood, all of a sudden, turn of the century, you have the replacement of that with masculinity.

So instead of it being this period of time when you go from one part of their life to another, it becomes a consistent proving ground for people to have to prove how masculine they are, [00:15:00] because then it has a binary opposite to-- which is femininity. And so in this hyper-masculine patriarchal binary, you have men that don't want to be seen as feminine, so what can they do to continue to prove their masculinity in public?

And so this type of change, actually, you can see is a driving force in a lot of what Kerouac's early pre On the Road work is, and even afterwards, as he has, like, this really uneasy understanding of what it means to be a man in the world at that time. So there's this part in the nineteen fifty-one journal where Kerouac says this whole quote.

And I'm just gonna read this quote because it's really quite interesting. So September seventeenth, nineteen fifty-one: "At four AM, I staggered across the field with my big old typewriter that my father used in Lowell, Massachusetts, before I was even born. The typewriter Charlie Connors flailed and moaned upon, the [00:16:00] typewriter with which I not only write The Town and the City, but my earliest loomings in nineteen thirty-seven.

If all my life, in spite of anything that happens, is connected by that typewriter to the one unswerving idealistic purpose which was revealed to me in youthful dreams of pure glory, that I don't care if it weighs a ton as I carry it across the night." So the typewriter is almost like this physical burden that he carries with him.

It's his father's typewriter. It's the typewriter he wrote Town and the City on. It's probably the typewriter he wrote-- Well, no, C is my Brother was a handwritten manuscript. But it's the typewriter he wrote a lot of other things from, like, Atop an Underwood, if you read that as well, on this typewriter.

So his connection to his father isn't just, like, this familial blood connection. It's, like, also connected into this, this object that then becomes his vocational object, which he has a hard time accepting. So this, this whole th-- And he's saying this to our-- to readers. He's saying this to scholars, and it's almost like [00:17:00] they, they like...

Again, the-- to ignore this is to ignore more than half of Kerouac's entire understand-- like, the understanding of his entire work. So, but there was still something missing for me as a scholar after even writing my dissertation on this whole thing, and I was like, "There's still something that I'm not getting."

And so then enter, like, bell hooks and bell hooks' work all about love and the will to change. These two books paired together become the framing mechanism that I see for all of these things pre-On the Road for Kerouac. And that is that it's not only a search to kind of figure out a place for himself in the world as a writer, but also what does it mean to find a place of care and love and solitude?

He's always searching for a place. If you read Kerouac, especially Desolation Angels, he's always looking for a place to set some roots down and it [00:18:00] never is ever happening right in his eyes. It just doesn't happen because he's feeling like he needs to kind of get that validation from people. Bell Hooks provides the framework, especially in All About Love, that that comes from

within and then is a practice of that love, especially with Erich Fromm's like The Art of Loving and love is an art.

Well, if love is an art, then you have to practice that art and you practice that art by doing that art. But see, Kerouac didn't really grasp that. He really tried to get that love from others. I mean, his practice was writing. As Burroughs said in an interview, like Kerouac was a writer because he wrote.

That goes with Bell Hooks' idea of like to love and to practice love, you must practice that love and you do the action. So and then The Will to Change is also about masculinity. It's like one of Bell Hooks' most, I would say like not a lot of people read The Will to Change, but I feel like it's one of her best texts.

So [00:19:00] it's love, masculinity, men. And she really talks about the impact that patriarchy has had on men unable to love themselves and then unable to then love others in a practice of love that is fulfilling and that pushes against patriarchy. So here she says like self-love cannot flourish in isolation. It leaves many people wondering why, if it is so easy, they continue to be trapped by feelings of low self-esteem or self-hatred.

The reason I love Desolation Angels is because Kerouac tells the absolute truth about hating being on that mountain as a fire lookout. It was one of the worst experiences that he's ever had. He hated it. At the end of the Dharma Bums, though, he's like, oh, this is great. But the reason that is, and if you read the Tom Clark biography, is because he was kind of forced to write a more commercial-friendly book, and that was the Dharma Bums.

But Desolation Angels is not commercial-friendly. And so the whole first half, it's like 100 pages long, it's just him [00:20:00] ruminating on being on that mountain and just the absolute horror of being up there. Because he didn't know what solitude was, but he knew how to isolate himself. And that's what he did a lot.

And because he only was good at isolating, he was unable to actually find peace. And so that part of it. Now, the other part, yes, his alcoholism is a big part of it. But that's the part that he tried to medicate that with and try to find community through. So he is really unable to find this self-love. So here in The Will to Change, Bell Hooks says, when we love maleness, we extend our love whether males are performing or not.

In patriarchal culture, males are not allowed simply to be who they are and to glory in their unique identity. Their value is always determined by what they do.

In an anti-patriarchal culture, males do not have to prove their value and worth. They know from birth that simply being gives them [00:21:00] value, the right to be cherished and loved.

And so when you have this idea that like masculinity and through patriarchy is a consistent proving ground of one's worth, you can actually see that in Kerouac's early pre-On the Road work and how it goes into the other work as well. Specifically when it's like, should I, I should know, I should be okay with being a laborer.

Why can't I find satisfaction through that? But then he's like, I'm a writer, but he's also trying to accept that. So he's like pulled between these two worlds because one is more accepted and one is kind of like seen as like almost like a waste, especially. So he's trying to figure out like what it means to find worth.

So in The Sea is My Brother, there are a lot of scenes where you find men, specifically older men, the father figures being like pushed aside when they can't perform their jobs anymore. So like here we could say in the [00:22:00] beginning of this one here, a man's useful in life so long as he's producing the goods, bringing home the bacon, and that's when he's pop.

Okay. And then later you have, my old man used to be a shipyard worker, but now he's old and feeble. He's 62. I take care of him, my kid brother financially. And in that, in The Sea is My Brother, this father is actually pushed into the back of the b- of the apartment in this really dark room. So really it's about like, "Okay, you're not doing anything anymore.

Let's put you away." And so they push him to the side. And so Kerouac sees this, especially with his father, over and over again, and it's almost like he's seeing a horror that he doesn't want to happen, while at the same time he doesn't know how to escape it without being... Well, in a way, like, without, without trying to do it for himself.

He doesn't understand how to free himself from patriarchy, really. Now, here is a eulogy from The Sea is My Brother. [00:23:00] Wesley Martin, who's, um, the split identity of Kerouac and Bill Everhart's kind of like doppelganger, doppelganger and, like, the foil of him, you see him being eulogized in a dream. And in this dream, he- they're he- they're eulogizing him and saying, "He was a good worker.

Wesley was really good. He was a great worker. That's what you know of Wesley Martin." Then in the bottom half of the quote, they say, "But there are

things you didn't know about him." And they, they did-- They knew that, but did they know that he stood on the bow every morning, noon, and night for an hour? Did they suspect this profound duty of his, this prayer of thanks to a god, more of a god than any to be found in a book?

So, like, there's this spiritual depth to Wesley that he keeps hidden because he feels like that's not what a man is. And so, but in this dream that he's having, he's seeing himself being eulogized by other men and his worth being being a worker, but he's keeping this other part to himself. So, [00:24:00] like, there is a shame that runs through that, right?

So in The W- in The Will to Change, bell hooks talks about these two partners that she's had, and she's watching how the working world, when they entered the working world, how that working world then ushered them into w- like, into patriarchy even more. So she's like, "I anticipated, um..." "I found them, both of them, had been rebellious and anti-patriarchal, but as they moved more into the work world and they began to assume more of the patriarchal manners that i- identified, uh, one as powerful and successful man."

So this is a very personal quote for me, too, because this is something that I have done in my life. Work has become a huge part of my identity for many years, and everything else that was important to me, poetry, relationships, friends, family, spiritual practice, all went to the side in order to, like, have self-worth through, like, academia.

So I said yes to everything. I pretty much put all of my life on hold in order to [00:25:00] do that work, thinking I was gonna get self-worth out of it, and all I did, all I got was hurt out of it. And so- Patriarchy is willing to bleed men and women dry for their productivity. But specifically with Kerouac, it's like, let's work them to the ground and then get rid of them 'cause there's no place for them if they're unable to work anymore.

George Martin in Town, The City m- is this is a mirror image of how his-- how Kerouac's father dies. During the time they were living in Ozone Park, Queens, and in a basement apartment. And in Town, The City, they're living in Brooklyn. And Peter Martin comes back from a symphony orchestra performance for Tchaikovsky, and he's talking about how much emotional depth this composer has and all this stuff.

And George Martin's like, "Well, what about me? Like, I have that depth too." And so he really has this, this moment where he lets go of all his emotion. This whole book, [00:26:00] George Martin is just reflecting on his experience with

his sons, trying to teach them not to be like him and trying to, like, guide them in a way, almost like before he dies.

Like, it's not like he knows he's gonna die, but you can see as the book goes on that, like, he's coming towards an ending, and he's trying to do this-- he's trying to, like, almost break a cycle before he passes away. And he even says, he's like, he's like, "Goddamn, I cry too. Like, it doesn't mean a goddamn thing when I cry."

So he's, like, actually telling Peter, like, "Why does it matter when I cry?" And a lot of time you don't see George Martin cry, really. Like, he cries in private. And again, like, you also don't see George Martin cry that much in, uh, Visions of Gerard when, like, the-- a book about Kerouac's, uh, older brother, uh, Gerard, when he died of rheumatism, and, uh, George Martin can't face that either.

So then he dies, and this is when Peter finally sees his father. So, like, when you think of Bell Hooks kind of talking about the patriarchal world, kind of like [00:27:00] masking men's ability to be emotional and, like, them having any other depth other than their productivity, and, like, this idea of love and why can't there be this practice of love between this, this father and this son?

It's only in his death that Peter finally sees him, and he cries out to him like, "You know, that's my father." And it's-- so it's this, this sadness that happens is that it gets too late for that time. So but this also happened to Kerouac. So, like, he-- this is an experience he had as well. I'm not gonna read all of this, okay?

But in-- at the end of Town, The City They have an entire funeral for George Martin. It is one of the most expansive scenes of the book, and it's the moment where George Martin becomes more than just the laborer George Martin. People from the, his French Can- all the French Canadian relatives come down to, to his funeral.

All the men from town come f- for his funeral. All these people [00:28:00] that the kids didn't even know existed came for his funeral, and all of a sudden they're starting to see this man more than what, like, they knew him for. But it's all-- it's, like, too late. So you can imagine if Kerouac is like, like reflecting on this, he's trying to understand what it means to, for him to kind of, like, a- get that worth in his life.

Now, this is not to say anything. This is not an excuse for him, you know, um, not recognizing his own daughter. Like, th- this is, these are things that, you

know, happened in his life and that he was reflecting on, and though they're successful or unsuccessful, you know, we can talk about that. Though we can see that there is a generational, um, lesson happening, that patriarchy kind of stops this relationship from happening.

And George Martin, uh, I mean, um, Kerouac and his father, like their relationship was very [00:29:00] interesting and in- intense. His relationship with his mom was very tense, you know, very tense as well. And before he died, he asked Jack to, like, "Make sure you take care of your mom." So now he had to take that on, and that became his labor, really.

When you, if you read a lot of the biographies or you read Desolation Angels and On the Road and every other book, his mom shows up as a character, and he's always buying houses and moving her places and, and trying to make her happy, while really it became a detriment to his own health. Now, here he, she talks about the fantasy connection between fathers and sons and how this becomes so much harder to kind of understand because this relationship is something that doesn't seem very tangible, 'cause patriarchy kind of like stops it from being a very prac- loving practice of a relationship.

Now, afterwards, I would say this id- these ideas on love, masculinity, [00:30:00] the father and son relationship, I would say haunt most of the Duluoz Legend books. For me, I say every book of his is part of it. I don't know where it starts and where it begins. I know there's a lot of scholars who are like, "These are the Duluoz Legend books, and these aren't."

But it's just like n- no one really gets to choose that, I feel. I mean, I know Kerouac might, like if he could say these were them, but he's working something out from like day one all the way until The Vanity of Duluoz and, and everything like that. Visions of Gerard become, is like really an emotional reflection on the death of his brother, and that death really played a huge role in everything else for his life.

Kerouac was surrounded by loss. His father died, his brother died when he was young. His best friend, Sebastian Sampas, who, um, his Greek friend from Lowell, died during World War II. Um, there was a bunch of men that he was on a merchant marines ship with that he [00:31:00] missed that ship. That ship went out, that ship was blown up, and everyone died.

So loss and death is a huge part of Kerouac's life and, and kinda this, i-- and, and we see that played out in the sorrow that he has as, like, you read mo- more of his books. Um, Tristessa is all about a failed, very tumultuous relationship

with a woman in Mexico who both of them were drug addicts at the time, and she was a drug addict, but he just could not make connection.

You know, and he's-- has these relationships that are very, that are very toxic in many ways. The Orpheus, Orpheus Emerges, if anyone ever read that, it's a novella. It's a beautiful book, and in that book, he actually does a splitting of identity, but he actually does it in the book. There's one character who actually become two characters, okay?

So it's not just, like, a fictional... It's not like part of like there's gonna be two characters. It's one person [00:32:00] that then somehow split into two. It's really, it's a really odd experience to read. But in that too, he's trying to think about these two different paths of maleness for him. Um, the most recent book that has just been published is here, Desolation Peak.

This is a beautiful book. It's all of the journals for his time out on Desolation on-- as a fire lookout. You can read all the journals that he wrote, and in that book also is the beginnings of A Second Town in the City, and also a, um, a follow-up called the Ozone Park as well. So the family structure was so important to him that he wanted to continue to explore it.

But publishers were just not into it. Like, I would say after On the Road's initial review, um, there was if you read Tom Clark's biography, there was a gigantic campaign to kind of destroy his entire career. Kenneth Rexroth was, like, the biggest proponent of that. At any moment he had, he constantly badmouthed Kerouac in [00:33:00] writing and in interviews all the time.

So all the books that came out afterwards got horrible reviews, all of them, and he was constantly trying to get published, and it was just- After On the Road, it was just near impossible. They did publish other books, obviously, but none are-- none of them did as well as On the Road, and none of them were as, uh, good apparently as On the Road.

Though I would argue Desolation Angels is probably, my opinion, way better than On the Road. And then Big Sur, which is I think his most beautiful book, sorrowful, very sad, but it's a failed attempt for him to kind of find solitude, but only through making himself lonely. So again, like he's... I-if he were to have read All About Love, maybe he would have been able to see that there was a different path for him.

But I don't think he understood that it was possible because a lot of the men that he saw in his life just were beaten down by this idea that the-- by patriarchy

and, like, just ended up just fading and dying and fading away in that-- in, in many [00:34:00] different ways. And, and I think Kerouac just really wanted to just be a writer, and really he was forced into a role that he didn't necessarily want, which was, like, the figurehead of a re-- of, like, a rebellious movement that everyone misunderstood anyway for it to be dissent, when for him it was very spiritual.

And so, like, you have a lot of misunderstanding there. Um, and that, that, that's it. But I would-- this is a podca- my podcast, Writing Remix. This is where this is gonna be on as well. Um, you can follow that and, um, and thank you so much. Um, this was so great, and I'd love to open it up to question... Wha-- Oh, yeah, and then there's-- Yeah, and then I have another podcast.

Thank you.

I have this podcast, which is a comedy podcast about pop culture and nostalgia. But we also have scholars from all over the world come on, my friends and I, and talk pop culture, like from India, Aus-Austria, all [00:35:00] over. It's amazing. Um, it's really funny and weird. And then, um, I'm part of the Humanities Podcast Network, which is an international network of podcasters in the humanities, and we put on a free symposium every year virtually.

And, um, they're planning this year's already, and we've done six of them, and they've all been unbelievable, like, spaces for people to get together, especially podcasters or non-podcasters. And then there we go. You can contact me with any, like, collaborations or any sort of ideas or speaking or coaching or anything.

Um, but yeah, I would love to open it up to questions if anyone has them. We have time, right? Yeah. I have a question. Sure. Can I ask you, uh, to talk a little bit about the difference between solitude and loneliness? Sure. Can you- Uh, d-- Yeah. So the question is, like: Can I speak on the difference between solitude and loneliness?

So in All About Love, like- Or, or the difference between loneliness or even isolation. Or and isolation. So- [00:36:00] In All About Love, like Bell Hooks goes into this very deeply and like there's a whole chapter where she kinda talks about this in All About Love. The thing that I always grabbed from it was that solitude can be-- Like I don't have to be alone physically or isolated physically to have solitude, right?

I can have that solitude internally and still be in community. When it comes to like loneliness and isolation, I am physically and forcefully pulling myself away from everyone in order to feel like that I need this solitude, this time alone. But a lot of people aren't really, I would say, prepared for that type of lone-- like that type of solitude, right?

But solitude can be alone too, but I think it's about like one of the things is that there's a preparation for it. You know? Like I've, I've done the isolation thing. Like I've done the loneliness thing, and it really-- I thought [00:37:00] I had to in order to like regain my footing as a person. Um, but really all it did was leave me with myself.

And so that, I wasn't ready for that, and I think like when, when we think we're going into solitude, we're really just running from ourselves thinking we can do that, and it's never gonna happen. But a solitude I feel like is very much more like an inner peace I have with myself, like an inner peace and a love I have, and an acceptance of myself that I have that I can, you know, be in community or alone.

But isolation is definitely like a f- forceful pull away from everyone. And, you know, as we learn too with Thoreau, I think a lot of people look at the transcendentalists and they take that so, um, like literally. They, they... You know, Thoreau had a government job and Thoreau lived in town, and then he went to the woods for solitude and then came, came back.

You know, [00:38:00] Whitman went into nature but then came back. You know, I, it's like th- there's, there's such an extremist view of a lot of things, and I think also with the Beats that happens, with Kerouac. That's why like when people read On the Road, they-- there's like a... And I fall into this, like the need, like I gotta get out there and dri- and I'm just gonna be, you know.

But or, you know, but a lot of the Beats had jobs. They, you know, they, they, uh, they made m- they had to make money. They knew they did, but they were much more in community than anything, and they did a lot of work to make sure that their stuff came out. Like, you know, and I feel like there's just this idea of rebellion, but they were really, um, well-read intellectuals that understood much more deeply than just dissent, right?

But also with like what I'm talking here too, it's like- We ignore everything else that they've done other than, like, just being r- rebels. And it's just like they came from very working class po- [00:39:00] pre-World War II America, and the Beat era, in my opinion, starts pre, like early '40s, even earlier than that. And

so, like, that's why when, when On the Road comes out in '57, Kerouac is so far along that his audience is so much younger than him, and they want him to be this other Kerouac, and he's like, "I, I c- I'm not gonna wanna do that."

But he's, like, forced into this position again, you know. So, uh- Is there a reason that you're pulling in bell hooks in connection with Kerouac? Yeah. I mean, for me, I always look at, um, now, especially On the Road, like people sometimes, like there's a discussion sometimes in the Beat scholarship people like, "Can you read Kerouac in like On the Road as, you know, an adult?

Like what do you get out of it?" And this is how I got something out of it, was like introducing bell hooks into my life as an academic and a writer and to my students has [00:40:00] been the most rewarding thing, and I could see the, the missteps that he s- that he did. You know, there's a m- that moment in On the Road when he's with Terry, with Sal, meets up with Terry, the quote-unquote Mexican girl in On the Road, which, you know, when you read-- if you read Mañana Means Heaven and you find out about B- uh, Beatrice, she wasn't Mexican actually and they were cau- they actually were-- her and her family were rounded up and, like, deported.

So it was really interest- it's an unbelievable story. But he-- you could see the happiness and the change in the narrative there in On the Road, but Kerouac can't let himself be in that 'cause he doesn't know how to really love. He has a very hard time doing it. And, um, when I read bell hooks, I could s- you almost can see the mistakes that he made, not with other people really, but also with himself.

Like, he really had a hard time tapping into the love of himself. And, and I find a lot of the pre On the Road work [00:41:00] shows that problem because he doesn't know who he is really, all the way into his adulthood in a way. Other questions or... Yeah. You mentioned that Kenneth Rexroth had a beef with Kerouac. I didn't know anything about that.

Can you, like, tell a little bit more about it? Yeah. So in San Francisco, like when the Beats were, you know, all there at some point, and with the Black Mountain poets and stuff like that, Kenneth Rexroth was part of it. Like, he was like Burroughs. Like, Burroughs is much older than the Beats, you know? And then-- And so Kenneth Rexroth was also like that.

He was like this patriarch of, I would say, like of them. But- He was, he's a very specific type of writer, and I think what he started to see was the beat writers kind of pulling away from that and, and kind of critiquing some of the older

writers, and he just didn't wanna have anything to do with it. And so I think he, like, took it very personally.[00:42:00]

And then there were a lot of personal attacks on Kerouac, which he did not take very well. And, um, and so there was, like, always this tension. Um, and you could read a lot-- I mean, I would say I've read, like, the Tom Clark biography, "The Voice Is All," which I thought was beautiful, by Joyce Johnson. But the, the Tom Clark bio- biography is very, like, how...

Is very, um, I don't wanna say it in a bad way, emotionless, because Tom Clark's really just going, "This happened, this happened, this happened." And he really shows you, like, the, the vitriol that, like, Rexroth and a lot of reviewers and everyone had for him after "On the Road" came out. And so, like, yeah, he just took it upon himself.

And I think he was, he was also jealous of his fame at that time, and he also didn't like what he was doing, and he couldn't handle it. So, yeah. Was this playing out in, like, reviews and in publications, or was it happening at readings, or what was the- Yeah, I would s- all, all of it. Like, uh, uh, everything.

Like, it-- reviews, wr- [00:43:00] interviews, out in public. At a certain point, Kerouac didn't even wanna be in public. I mean, he didn't do a lot of public readings. I mean, there's pictures of him there, but he didn't do a lot of reading. He, uh, younger he did, but at a certain point, he just, like... You know, when you see the clip of him on "The Steve Allen Show," um, reading, um, first of all, he's very drunk, two, 'cause he was so nervous.

He, like, didn't even know what to do. But the second thing is he wasn't even reading "On the Road." He had "On the Road" there. It was the book in front that everyone saw, but he was reading from "Visions of Cody." And so, like, he just didn't want people to constantly have to read "On the Road." Then he read a little bit of "On the Road."

But he was so sick of it, I think, at that time, because he hated, I think, what had to happen to the book, because he didn't want it published the way it was published. You know, he, he had a very, he had a very clear vision of what he wanted, and the, the editors were like, "We can't do that. Like, there's no way."[00:44:00]

So there was a lot of revision, I mean, six years of revisions or more. Ginsberg was trying to get that book published for years, and it just wasn't happening.

And so, like, Kerouac wrote four books during that time. Like, so there was-- He was already past "On the Road." So I think Rexroth was just pretty much jealous, and yeah, he did anything he could to kinda, like, hit as, you know, poke and chip away his, his career.

Yeah. Other questions?

What's missing from "On the Road"? What's missing? What is missing? There-- Well, I would say there's like whole scenes I think on, on the highway, like a lot of driving scenes. There are a lot of sex sc- scenes that have to do with sex and as well that are taken out. The editors didn't want that in there. The father stuff would definitely in the beginning, like the opening line, they revised that out.

And, um, there was a part of the book, and I believe it's "On the Road," where like it got destroy... So in the scroll version, you'll see [00:45:00] if you read the scr- the published scroll version, there's a moment where he says like Corso or someone like someone's dog or someone lost the manuscript or it got destroyed, and then he had to like write from there.

So like there's whole parts of it that also don't even have in-- will never see the light of day ever again. So I think like he has-- And again, Kerouac is a prolific writer. Anytime he had bought a house, he had a file cabi- he had file cabinets, and everything is there. So the estate has everything. Like, and, and so like there's probably more books coming, and I-- who knows?

I mean, there's a lot of French books as well.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. He went to France and was interviewed in France, or he-- and they, they really, they laughed at his French 'cause he's French Canadian, so then he had a very working class dialect. So he got very, um, offended, and he got very sad, and he's like, "Wow," even with my, my [00:46:00] people, he felt like he wasn't even accepted.

So this is a man without a home, really, when you think about it, because, like, he had, you know, a second language. He just didn't fit in in the working world, in the male world, and all these things, and he just was just like trying to find a place that he could fit. And instead of trying to make it himself, he was trying to get other people to help him do it.

And, and that never was gonna happen, you know, 'cause everyone wanted him to be something else. And so like he just kinda deteriorated from there. Yeah. Any, any other questions or comments? No? Yeah. You said a, a portion of the

scroll was eaten by a dog. Well, it was destroyed. Yeah, that's like a thing. There, yeah, there is a, there is like a little funny note when you read the publication, the, the, the scroll version, where he writes a little note there.

I don't know- how true it is that it was eaten by a dog, but it was like taken and someone was reading it. It might've been Lucien Carr or something, and it [00:47:00] got destroyed. Because the thing is like they would send this stuff around to be revised. I mean, they did all this by mail. I mean, the Howl was revised in the mail.

Like, you know, they would mail these manuscripts to each other. A- and so this thing was a scroll. I mean, I couldn't even imagine what they were even doing with it. I mean, so you-- You know, I mean, it's, it's wild to think that there are even that many records of it, like, you know, to keep everything intact.

But again, he was very meticulous on like how he would keep all those records. Yeah, he was very purposeful. Yeah. And that's the thing, I would say this one last thing, like this whole thing about the spontaneous prose and all the stuff that like first thought, best thought and everything. Yes, absolutely.

But the thing about the Beats were they were meticulous revisers. They wanted everything to be exactly the way they needed it to be as writers. Kerouac revised, he did, but he wanted to revise his way. And so editors-- he-- it was very difficult for him to work with editors, and I would say he should be very thankful to Sterling [00:48:00] Lord, who passed away, that like to have to, to be able to work with Kerouac was very, probably a very difficult thing, uh, because he had a v- like I said, a very clear vision for what he wanted his work to look like.

And I think now we revere it, but I think then it was very difficult to accept what he was doing. And now he's like an archetype of, of artistic writing and very American writing in a way for someone who English was not his first language, so, you know. Yeah, that's-- Thank you so much. Well, if there are no other questions, thank you so much.

Thank you. Again, to Typewriter Anonymous and, uh, Philip and Elizabeth, thank you so much, and thank you all. Thank you. Thank you, Danny Dissinger