The First-person Perspective In Jack Kerouac's On The Road

“On the Road” involves Sal Paradise, an emerging writer whom Dean Moriarty, a questionable hero, fascinates. Sal reveals that “My first impression of Dean was of a young Gene Autry - trim, thin-hipped, blue-eyed, with a real Oklahoma accent - a side-burned hero of the snowy West” (Kerouac I.1.4) The story incorporates different road trips, some which involve vehicles, and some which do not involve cars. In this story, Kerouac follows these characters as they travel across the country. Sal and Dean even travel to Mexico for their big adventure. Both characters cavort and ramble while ensuring that they keep moving. Thus, this depicts that their journey, as opposed to their destination, is what matters. Kerouac’s novel, therefore, recounts an epic travel guide, which deems “On The Road” as one of the most engaging stories in American literature. Kerouac or one of his close friend experiences inspire the events in this story. Despite the challenges that the main characters experience in the countryside, such as alcohol and drug use, the trip is worthwhile. While examining critical elements like symbolism, setting, tone, plot analysis, central ideas and the point of view, this story reveals aspects of dissatisfaction and sadness.

Examining the novel’s title is also fundamental to understanding its content. Sal, who is the narrator in the story, spends most of his time traveling by road. In instances where Sal is not traveling, he wishes that he could be on the road. Sal even cries and curses for Chicago by saying, “I’m not there, when will I get there!” (Kerouac I.2.3). Hence, the first impression of the topic depicts the events in this story. An in-depth analysis of the story depicts the Beat Generation and Sal’s ethos, which provide information about the author. The title, therefore, informs of dissatisfaction and restlessness. Besides, the title communicates the feeling of longing for somewhere or something.

Two dominant themes emerge in Kerouac’s work. Dissatisfaction is one of the central ideas in “On The Road.” Sal’s obsession with traveling across the US and Mexico results from dissatisfaction. The motion through space versus the motion through time is another aspect that contributes to dissatisfaction in this story. For instance, Sal says, “Dean is the perfect guy for the road because he was born on the road, when his parents were passing through Salt Lake City in 1926, in a jalopy, on their way to Los Angeles” (Kerouac I.1.1). Thus, this phrase depicts Sal’s quest for motion, which results from his restlessness. Apart from dissatisfaction, sadness also evident in this text. According to Sal’s perspective, sadness is predominant in the US society. Sal can seek sadness in his dreams, places and people. He asserts, “There was a lull when we came in. Gene and Blondey just stood there, looking at nobody; all they wanted was cigarettes” (Kerouac I.4.62). Based on this assertion, Sal sees the sorrow in almost every character he encounters.

Kerouac assumes a sad, thoughtful and retrospective tone in this novel. Although the story is fun and amazing to read, the tone enables readers to sit alone and contemplate their life. Sal provides first-hand information about the events in the story. However, Sal also reflects on these experiences afterward. For instance, Sal realizes that Dean, his hero, is a rat. Besides, Sal contemplates about the transience of the relationships he forms on the road. Hence, these reflections bring a sad tone to the story. However, it is easier for readers to overlook this due to

the language intoxication and other events in the story.

Kerouac also develops a unique plot in this story. Many stories begin with an initial situation before presenting a conflict. However, Kerouac's novel is renowned for failing to follow the standard plot. Therefore, some scholars would consider Kerouac as horrible at developing a novel. Nonetheless, the uniqueness of this novel portrays the experimental nature of the author. That is why "On The Road" begins with a conflict as opposed to an initial situation. In this story, Sal begins by saying, "I first met Dean Moriarty…" (Kerouac I.1) Therefore, these initial assertions portray Dean as the conflict of the story. The beginning of the story denotes that Dean is the source of Sal's restlessness and the urgent need to travel from one place to another. Additionally, Dean is also the center of the conflict since Sal idolizes him in the story. Kerouac also uses different compilations for his novel. The story is a collection of compilations, through which readers can understand Kerouac from Dean and Sal's perspective. Readers further anticipate the end of the road to mark the climax in this novel. Nevertheless, drug and alcohol use in Mexico is the climax of the story. Notably, Mexico is also the climax of Sal's idolization of Dean. It is in Mexico when Sal claims that God is his hero. Kerouac also creates suspense in his plot, particularly after Sal catches a fever in Mexico. Henceforth, readers are unaware of whether Sal can survive the fever.

Kerouac utilizes the first-person perspective in this story. As a result, the reader can experience the events of the novel in Sal's eyes. Sal's character, therefore, mirrors Kerouac, who is the author. The first-person perspective enables the reader to examine Dean's character. Sal is somehow obsessed with Dean to a certain extent. Despite this obsession, Sal remains the main protagonist in the story. Through Sal's point of view, the reader can understand his thoughts, background, and his life without Dean around. Through Sal's perspective, readers also experience the story as if a random truck driver tells a passenger he picks on the way. Sal narrates that "I was a young writer, and I wanted to take off" (Kerouac I.1.17). Hence, the first-person perspective is imperative in this story because it allows the reader to gain insight into the adventures.