

Expanding Jack Kerouac's "America": Canadian Revisions of *On the Road*

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Figure 1: Commemorative stamp of Champlain's historic voyage of 1606, issued jointly by Canada Post and the United States Postal Service in 2006. Canada Post Commemorative Stamp © Canada Post 2006. Reprinted with permission.

In our history, America began with a French look, briefly but gloriously given it by Champlain, Jolliet, La Salle, La Vérendrye. . . .

(René Lévesque, *An Option for Québec*, 1968, 14)

'Come into my house,' Jack said to me when I read *Doctor Sax*; 'we have so few visitors from Up There.' —(I'll teach you and teaching you will teach me)—

(Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, *Jack Kerouac: A Chicken Essay*, 1972, 31)

I. Introduction

Fans of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* are offered a facile lesson in American history. Readers race alongside Sal Paradise as he sweeps across the land, pausing to exult in the vastness of what he calls "the great raw bulge and bulk of my American continent" (Kerouac, *Road*, 79). And as they cover "the whole mad thing, the ragged promised land" with Sal, they encounter cowboys and vagrants, students of Nietzsche and Mexican migrants, ranchers, coal-truck drivers, mothers and fathers, drug addicts, poets, con men, jazz musicians—all the people of his "American continent" across its varied, incredible landscape (Kerouac, *Road*, 83). Is this "American continent," however, confined to the United States of America?

At first glance, the answer must be yes: The book begins with Sal Paradise "reading books about the pioneers" and poring over maps of the United States (Kerouac, *Road*, 10). As he sets off on his "dream" to "follow one great red line across America," readers are meant to recognize that Kerouac is recreating the journey of the pioneers, the adventurers, and the rugged individuals of American history, with Sal Paradise heading westward (ho!) from Eastern civilization to the Western frontier of the unknown, all along emulating Dean Moriarty, a latter-day Deadwood Dick, the nineteenth-century hero of American dime novels (Kerouac, *Road*, 11).¹ The repeated east-west movement across the center suggests that this book will focus only on the United States of America, yet it ultimately extends to the north and south borders, as well.

Veering from their course, the characters and their book end with a digression into Mexico: "no longer east-west, but magic *south*" (Kerouac, *Road*, 265). The land beyond the American border signifies "other worlds" and a place where Sal and Dean are past the "end of America, and we don't know no more," as Dean says (Kerouac, *Road*, 273). "The big continent" goes on beyond the United States but past the border, it becomes hazy; it takes on a foreignness, and a haunted aspect (Kerouac, *Road*, 276). Scenes in Mexico include Sal's nightmares of a ghostly horse chasing Dean down, and end with Sal, lying ill and abandoned by Dean (Kerouac, *Road*, 265, 273).² Canada, in the text, is similarly a haunted, ghostly place. As Sal sets off on his first trip to California, he becomes disoriented—"I didn't know who I was," he says, "a ghost"—and he re-encounters this ghost on his return, in the form of the Ghost of Susquehanna, an old man trying to head north to "Canady" (Kerouac, *Road*, 15).³ One of Sal's doppelgängers in the text, the Ghost of Susquehanna, is, like Sal, going the wrong way, and the two briefly unite: "We were bums together" (Kerouac, *Road*, 104). The Ghost never reaches Canada; but Canada, like Mexico, lingers as that ghostly presence in the text, reminding readers that they are engaging the literature of an author who saw and envisioned his "America" *via* its physical boundaries that separate and link the United States to its southern and northern neighbors.⁴

This article presents a transnational approach asking readers to re-think what is at stake in Kerouac's "American continent," from the perspective of

that Canadian presence, with its ghostly manifestation. In the first half of the article, I will focus on the Québécois storm of history that propelled Kerouac into the Canadian literary milieu with a controversial status, and in the second half, I will discuss the two kinds of literature that Canadians inspired by Kerouac have created: historical revisions of *On the Road*, and biographical revisions of Jack Kerouac. *On the Road* might invoke the mythology of "America" (e.g. the United States), but it has also, in the past twenty-five years, evoked a response from writers who, like Kerouac, come from Francophone Canadian roots and feel compelled to re-tell Kerouac's story and history of "America," filling in their ghostly image with more concrete, alternate facts, myths, and stories. In their revisions, these authors illuminate the multiple, competing histories that make up the "America" Kerouac elegizes, as well as the landscape he omits. By bringing to light the French and Canadian histories that also constitute the road Sal traverses, the trip to Canada that Sal does not make (although Kerouac did), and the intrinsic French Canadianness of the author, these revisions remind readers that Jack Kerouac was, as he dubbed his in-text self, a "French Canadian Iroquois American aristocrat Breton Cornish democrat or beat hipster" (Kerouac, *Angels*, 370). At the same time, they remind us that "America" is itself a complex discursive and geographical space of parallel, overlapping, and integrated identities.

Reimaginings of *On the Road*—here, I focus primarily on Jacques Poulin's *Volkswagen Blues* (1984), Ken McGoogan's *Kerouac's Ghost/Visions of Kerouac* (1993/1996/2007),⁵ Guillaume Vigneault's *Chercher le Vent [Necessary Betrayals]* (2001), and Ray Robertson's *What Happened Later* (2007)—each turn a different spotlight on Kerouac's "American continent." Poulin's and Vigneault's novels of the road allude to Kerouac as they highlight scenes of a Francophone America. McGoogan and Robertson take a more biohistorical approach, interested less in the generic French roots of America and more in the specific French roots of Kerouac as they both take Kerouac-as-character into Canada and on the road. These re-imaginings were made possible not only by Kerouac himself—the historical figure as well as the author—but also because of the "repatriation" debate he inspired in French Québec. This debate was driven in large part by Victor-Lévy Beaulieu's *Jack K rouac: essai-poulet [Jack Kerouac: A chicken-essay]* (1972), in which Beaulieu refuses to recognize that Kerouac was offering a depiction of an American Francophone experience that was both unique and richly connected to the Canadian Francophone experience. Writes Beaulieu: "Because Jack always identified with French Canada it never occurred to him to say he was Franco-American," a term which Beaulieu insists "would be an aberration in any case" (Beaulieu, *essai*, 122). Flatly dismissing the Americanness of Kerouac's *oeuvre*, Beaulieu boldly argues: "It's important for us [Qu bec] to annex his works" (166). Beaulieu's book published after the Quiet Revolution, when the question of Qu bec's sovereignty was on everyone's lips, brought Kerouac right into the heart of Qu bec's quest for not only sovereignty, but an identity of its own.

Prior to the 1960s, Québec was characterized by religious Catholicism, traditionalism, and conservatism, but in the period of 1960-1966, a “revolution” took place that modernized Québec, with large reforms occurring in electoral, educational, and social institutions. The newly powerful province demanded a more autonomous status and equal relationship with the Canadian federal government. Increasingly referring to themselves as “Québécois/es” and not “French Canadians,” the citizens of Québec moved away from an identity as hyphenated or ethnic Canadians and toward the identity of a unique nationality. The idea of “sovereignty” was popularized by René Lévesque in his *Mouvement Souveraineté-Association* [Movement for Sovereignty Association] (1967), which a year later led to the formation of the *Parti Québécois*, the political party promoting Québec’s secession from Canada.

When Beaulieu published *Jack Kerouac: essai-poulet* in 1972, Québec’s sovereignty was not merely semantic. In 1969, the Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ), a radical organization that used violent means to effect sovereignty, bombed the Montreal Stock Exchange as well as other places, including the home of the mayor of Montreal, Jean Drapeau. In 1970, in a historical event now known as the October Crisis, the FLQ kidnapped James Richard Cross, the British Trade Commissioner, and Pierre Laporte, Minister of Labour and Vice-Premier of Québec; the latter was murdered by his kidnappers. By 1976, four years after *essai-poulet*, the Parti Québécois was elected into power in Québec on the platform of sovereignty, in part, and this change in government led to such cultural-political reformations as Bill 101, making French the *only* official language of Québec. Since the 1970s, hundreds of thousands of Anglophones have emigrated from Québec, and in 1980, Québec held its first of two (failed) referenda for independence (the second was in 1995).

Jack Kerouac: essai-poulet is an exuberant book chronicling the author’s obsession with Kerouac and what he symbolizes. A fervent Québec nationalist whose politics form the lens for his literary analysis, Beaulieu, who has recently threatened to burn copies of his entire body of work as a protest against the growth of bilingualism in Québec, claims Kerouac in *essai poulet* (his “*hommage* to Jack”) as the child of French Canada (67).⁶ He examines each of Kerouac’s texts, suggesting time and again why and how Kerouac’s writing resonates with him—“I recognize myself in his childhood”—and insisting that Kerouac’s “true origins . . . are profoundly Québécois—the Holy Grail of identity” (31, 57). Beaulieu sees Kerouac as the son of two French Canadians whom U.S. America did not touch; believes Kerouac’s Beat writings had naught to do with Buddha or any other foreign entity or philosophy, but flowed only from his French Canadianness; and reads his literature as recording the need to return again, and again, and again to the sanctuary that was his Mémère, the prototype of the French-Canadian mother. For all that, for Beaulieu, Kerouac was *not* Québécois.

“Jack’s work is exemplary because it seems to me to be dense with a reality that for a long time was the French-Canadian reality—Look at Mémère in Lowell, watch her live and may my left hand be cut off if that woman is not typical of

us," writes Beaulieu, but then he adds a most telling parenthetical aside: "that is to say of the time when we were still only French Canadians, when we did not know that one day in a noble attempt at transcendence, we would no longer speak of ourselves as anything but Québécois" (Beaulieu, *essai*, 148). Beaulieu figures Kerouac as a symbol of a pre-national past that had been shed through revolution in Quebec. Marcel Martel, making reference to the esteemed historian Michel Brunet, explains the process in which Québec's Francophones separated themselves from the Francophones of the rest of the continent in the 1960s in order to become an "État-nation des Canadiens français" [a nation-state of French Canadians] (Mortel, *Le deuil*, 140):

Une telle formulation de la problématique nationale voue à un sort peu enviable les francophones établis à l'extérieur du territoire dans lequel les Canadiens français forment la majorité, c'est-à-dire celui du Québec. La solidarité avec les francophones des autres provinces n'est pas indispensable puisque ces groupes sont voués à l'assimilation. . . . L'assimilation est donc "le cas tragique mais tout à fait normal des Canadiens français exilés dans les provinces anglo-canadiennes ou aux États-Unis" (Brunet, 1958: 204). Nous assistons donc à un processus du largage et de liquidation intellectuelle des communautés francophones canadiennes qui culmine dans l'édification du Québec comme État-nation des Canadiens français. . . . Devant cette évolution, les Canadiens français doivent s'arc-bouter sur le seul État qu'ils contrôlent vraiment: celui du Québec. . . . [Michel] Brunet affirme même que "si la majorité des Canadiens français n'accepte pas cette vérité de science politique c'est parce qu'elle renonce à se donner les cadres minimums nécessaires à toute nationalité qui ne veut pas mourir" (Brunet, 1954: 30-31). Les néo-nationalistes modifient donc les paramètres de la dualité nationale. Celle-ci cesse d'être culturelle et devient territoriale en faisant intervenir deux États-nations. En dernier lieu, les néo-nationalistes font de l'État l'instrument de l'action collective.

[Such a formulation of the national problems forces the other French-speaking people into a not very enviable state relative to that in which the French Canadians form the majority, i.e. that of Québec. Solidarity with the Francophones of the other provinces is not essential since these groups are dedicated to assimilation. . . . Assimilation is thus "the tragic but completely normal case of the French Canadians exiled in the Anglo-Canadian provinces or in the United States" (Brunet, 1958:204). We thus witness a process of the clearance and intellectual

liquidation of the Canadian French-speaking communities which culminates in the construction of Québec as the nation-state of the French Canadians. . . . In light of this evolution, the French Canadians must rely on the only state which they really control: that of Québec. . . . [Michel] Brunet even affirms that “if the majority of the French Canadians does not accept this truth of political science, it refuses to provide itself with any nationality which does not want to die” (Brunet, 1954:30-31). The neo-nationalists thus modify the parameters of the national duality. This one ceases being cultural and becomes territorial while utilizing two nation-states. Lastly, the neo-nationalists make the State the instrument of collective action.] (Martel, *Le deuil*, 140)⁷

Thus, by virtue of the cultural collective bestowing its power on the territory, which in turn *defines* the culture, not only are Franco Americans—Americans of French-Canadian descent—but also Francophone Canadians living outside of Québec in the 1960s—excluded from the Québécois enterprise for sovereignty and the unique identification such an enterprise bestows upon the people.

Where does that leave the families who left Québec in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire? The answer, for Beaulieu, is nowhere. Kerouac’s Lowell, to him, does not represent a confluence of cultures, French Canadian and New England American, but the end of a culture: “that dead little town . . . inhabited by French Canadians deprived of a future—in Lowell one can no longer *be*: one *was*” (Beaulieu, *essai*, 30). Lowell represents the ominous fate that Québec *might* have had; it remains in a past, “of the time when we were still only French Canadians, when we did not know that one day in a noble attempt at transcendence, we would no longer speak of ourselves as anything but Québécois” (Beaulieu, *essai*, 148). “I was struck,” writes Beaulieu, examining Kerouac’s depictions of Lowell, by the large number of monsters, idiots, neurotics and depraved people Jack describes in [*Doctor Sax*]. (The lot of all societies in the process of losing their culture . . .)” (Beaulieu, *essai*, 27). This “end” of French Canadianness is a place of darkness and horror, according to Beaulieu, an apocalyptic landscape best memorialized by Kerouac. Kerouac, he writes, is the “best French-Canadian novelist of Impotence and this is why it’s important for us to annex his works” (Beaulieu, *essai*, 158, 166). These books remind Québécois why it was necessary to move on from a bitter, oppressed French Canadian existence to a self-governing, flourishing society, as they show the “cesspool of our afflictions and our failures and our wanderings and our cultural aches and pains and our alienation and our colonization” (Beaulieu, *essai*, 166). And that is where they remain for the nationalist emerging from a 1960s context. Why, asks Beaulieu, “didn’t he know how to make the *Joint*, really go to the end of the road where the Québécois dream was waiting for him?” (166).

The Francophone Canadian revisions of *On the Road* reflect the influence of Beaulieu's argument, but also the evolution of a Francophone identity in North America, from the early days of Québec's movement for a sovereignty that would separate it from the rest of the continent. Kerouac has become part of a French "America" (a broader conceptual and physical space than Beaulieu's Québec)—through the "corrections" that these revisions provide. Kerouac goes to the end of the road; he joins, post-mortem, with the Québécois cause, with the people, but he does so without abandoning the unique history of the Franco-Americans in Lowell. He ultimately provides the link between the French *in here* and the French *out there*. To the Jacks for whom "*Home in Missoula*" and "*Home in Ogallala*" mean "*Home I'll never be,*" Poulin, McGoogan, Vigneault, and Robertson create a literary home for Francophones in North America—precisely where they are (Kerouac, *Road*, 255).

II. The History: Victor Lévy-Beaulieu Opens the Road for Kerouac's Québécois Homecoming

"My first challenge, outside of Time, was to find that only right Angel. . . . I had to focus on each prospect in turn. Found one guy turning acid-freak, another disappearing into artificial intelligence. . . . Others were tougher to eliminate. One French Canadian in particular. Victor-Levy Beaulieu?"

. . . Frankie slapped his thigh. "Tell me, Kerouac, do you like next year's book?"

"Not much. It's too sloppy. Beaulieu will have me visiting France three years early. He'll say I wrote *Big Sur* when I was barely thirty and call Mardou Fox a prostitute. And he'll refuse to correct even what he discovers to be false. Instead he'll warn readers to distrust his chronology. . . .

"So what does Beaulieu get right?"

"He understands, despite himself, how profoundly French-Canadian I am. And how this influenced my life, mandating my relationship with Memere and even my blood-brotherhood with Neal Cassidy."

"I've never thought of Kerouac as profoundly French-Canadian. Slightly, maybe."

"That's why I'm glad Beaulieu's around. But he wants to see me as the end of something—the end of Québec out there in the world—rather than as the continuation of something else. His exclusionary politics flash only in French." (McGoogan, *Ghost*, 266-68)

In 1972, three years after Kerouac's death, the newly published *Jack Kerouac: essai-poulet* had a powerful effect on Québec's vision of Kerouac, who

became symbolic of the French Canadians who went down to New England in the nineteenth century and began to remake the American land they settled.⁸ This was an immigrant body who thought they would “replace the wornout impoverished Puritan race,” in the words of Père Édouard Hamon, the late-nineteenth-century defender of Québec, who described the bleak realities as well as the providence of exile in *Les Canadiens-Français de la Nouvelle Angleterre* [*The French Canadians in New England*] (Hamon, *US Canadians-Français*, 15, qtd. in Beaulieu, *essai*, 17).⁹ Beaulieu briefly imagines himself in the shoes of those early Francophones in the United States who believed their culture would not be lost to them: “New England will swing over to the Québécois camp: south of the forty-seventh parallel there will be a kind of lower Québec, constituting an original kind of society organized according to the traditional structures of French Canada, based on the parish” (Beaulieu, *essai*, 17). Indeed, New England was referred to in those days as *Québec d'en bas*—Lower Québec—as though it were an extension of the home territory. But, explains Beaulieu, their fates did not match their dreams: the *habitants*, the sons of patriots, became factory workers “whose eyes became American dollar signs,” and they lived in “tarpaper shacks” and suffered in an era when child labor was tolerated but cultural-linguistic difference was not.¹⁰ Beaulieu thinks of Kerouac “stagnating” in these “French Canadian waters” and also subject to its cultural “water-lilies”—such as the myth of *Bonhomme sept-heures*.¹¹ The *Bonhomme* becomes the eponymous *Doctor Sax*, argues Beaulieu, wearing a “Franco-American wardrobe”—and he also appears in *On the Road* (Beaulieu, *essai*, 17, 22, 18, Kerouac, *Road*, 171-2). Kerouac’s French Canadianness, in this light, is not special, though it is representative. “He was a poor specimen crying his anguish in the silence of the vastness of America,” writes Beaulieu, quoting *Big Sur*: “‘Idiotic too, cretinous even, maybe only French Canadian, who knows?’” (Beaulieu, *essai*, 13; Kerouac, *Big Sur*, 112).

In response to Beaulieu’s book, *Le Devoir*, the leading Francophone newspaper in Canada, devoted its literary supplement to “kéroac québécois” on October 28, 1972. *Le Devoir* was run by Claude Ryan, a federalist who sought to establish a bilingual and bicultural Canada that ensured the equality of the French and the English. The supplement, spurred by Beaulieu’s nationalist desire to drive out the pre-Québécois French Canadianness and his determination to see Kerouac as an omen of Québec’s fate, and put in the hands of Ryan, signifies the separatist-federalist debate that raged in Québec in the early 1970s. It comprises an interesting collection of artifacts: “foundational documents” of “la Franco-Amérique,” supporting Beaulieu’s visions of the *habitants* in their tarpaper shacks, and yet a testament to *survivance*; reviews of Kerouac’s books from the preceding decade; and the transcription of Kerouac’s 1967 television interview in Québec entitled “Il a pensé qu’ on riait de lui” [he thought that we were making fun of him]—suggesting that if French Canada had laughed at Kerouac five years earlier, they were not now. All of these documents are strangely malleable. They can be seen both ways—as Beaulieu’s omen of the end of French in North

America outside of Québec, and Ryan's hope of the integral role of French on the continent.

Despite an invocation of Kerouac in the 1965 novel *Le Couteau sur la table* [*The Knife on the Table*] by Jacques Godbout, a well-known Québécois author and filmmaker, in which the narrator accuses Kerouac of betraying his French Canadian compatriots,¹² before Victor-Lévy Beaulieu published *Jack Kérouac: essai-poulet* and *Le Devoir* created its literary supplement on repatriation, Kerouac was, of course, regarded as an (Anglo) American author; if he was not mainstream, that was because of his counterculture movement, not his ethnic origin.¹³ Beaulieu insisted that although Kerouac's "reputation as a writer was built around [the Beat Generation]," it was a "[p]rofound misunderstanding" (Beaulieu, *essai*, 48). It is hard to believe that this reputation, which secured for Kerouac for more than half a century a place in the American consciousness as a significant American writer and a figure symbolic of his era, was a "profound misunderstanding."¹⁴ It is equally hard to dismiss the attempt to "repatriate" Kerouac. Summarizing his rejection of "repatriation," Maurice Poteet writes in 1982:

Québec has changed so much in recent decades that such a move would be toward the past. This does not mean that Kerouac has no readers in Québec. On the contrary, his works . . . sell quite well. But this is mainly because he is considered to be a writer of universal appeal. Except for some of Beaulieu's remarks and Rousseau's analysis, *le Devoir* supplement was barking up the wrong tree." (Poteet, *Dossier*, 16)

And yet, the repeated invocation of Kerouac in the writing of the Canadian and Québec novel since 1982 suggests otherwise. Kerouac might have, in some ways, represented Québec's pre-national past, but he also represented a cosmopolitan present—a time when Québec was discovering its place among the many identities in North America.

Americanité, a term that became wildly popular in the 1980s in Québec, can be translated as a cross between Americanness and Americanization, but it suggested something radical for the burgeoning nation-state: rather than focus solely on heritage, the people of Québec began to consider the relationship between their longitudinal Frenchness and latitudinal North Americanness. The 1980s marked a time when the referendum on Québec's sovereignty had *failed*, and new sources of self-identification were essential. According to Louis Dupont, during the 1980s, "*l'américanité* became the dominant paradigm by which Québécois/es tried to make sense of their individual and collective existence in relation to a larger human endeavor, that of North America or of American civilization" (Dupont, *L'américanité*, 27). Since that time, in fact, "it appears that Francophone Québécois have sensibly altered their popular and political geography, something that has affected the way individuals perceived Quebec

collectivity” (Dupont, *L’americanité*, 27).¹⁵ In much of the twentieth century, an American identity was rejected in Québec. While the Francophones of Québec had retained their culture, Franco Americans became far more assimilated. In the 1960s, the Quiet Revolution stirred the Québécois to clearly demarcate their own identity, one that was adamantly separated from that of Anglophone Canada. This process of identification, however, was taking place as Anglophone Canada was recognizing and resisting its own Americanization. As a result, one might say, French Canada chose to identify more with the United States than with what it saw as its own oppressor.

In the nineteenth century, Americans struggled with creating an identity that was uniquely American, without negating their historical European roots; later, Anglophone Canadians struggled with the same dilemma. In the 1980s, the Québécois, too, faced this problem, with the added question of how language would fit into their experience. Writes Dupont:

how were they to translate a new American experience in a language dominated by another culture and another experience—that of France? (Hence the theme of a 1972 writers meeting, Writers of the Americas, attended by writers from the United States and Latin America). For Quebec writers, however, this dilemma took another spin. They had to conceive this experience in a language often at odds with the dominant English-speaking regions of the northern portion of North America. Besides, they wondered what language should be used: Quebec’s patois (joyal), which expressed the alienated experience of French Canadians, or standard French with its universal appeal? (Dupont, *L’americanité*, 37-8)

The issue was explored in Québec’s literary circles through the 1980s. *Americanité* was evoked by many of Québec’s writers in varying and often ambivalent ways; a short list, apart from those works discussed here, includes *La première personne* (1980) by Pierre Turgeon, *Visions d’Anna* (1982) by Marie-Claire Blais, *Lettre de Californie* (1982) by Jovette Marchessault, *Petites Violences* (1982) by Madeleine Monette, *Une Histoire américaine* (1986) by Jacques Godbout, *Premier mouvement* (1987) by Jacques Marchand, and *Copies Conformes* (1989) by Monique LaRue.

Americanité was explored in other venues, as well.¹⁶ As in literature, Kerouac played a key role in a number of these venues. The year 1987, for example, saw the arrival of the film *Le Grand Jack/ Jack Kerouac’s Road—A Franco-American Odyssey* by Herménégilde Chiasson, and the 1987 International Jack Kerouac Gathering, a conference later recorded in the book *Un Grand Homme: Jack Kerouac at the Crossroads of Many Cultures* (Pierre Anctil et al, 1990), and discussed at length in McGoogan’s *Visions of Kerouac: Satori Magic Edition* (2007). McGoogan calls the conference the “now-famous Québec City

conference," where "French-Canadians recently awakened in numbers to shout: 'Ciboire! Kerouac's one of us!'" (McGoogan, *Visions*, 76). For a full chapter, McGoogan dramatizes the scene, indicating that the questions that arose at the conference were as significant for the Québécois attendees on a personal level as on a literary one, exploring the debates among and between "French-Canadian poets, novelists, and scholars . . . challenging Kerouac buffs to investigate questions about *Le Grand Jack* . . . [and] dr[a]w[ing] parallels between Kerouac and the martyr Louis Riel" (McGoogan, *Visions*, 79-80).¹⁷ The discussions and debates did not end in resolution, but the conference certainly offered the narrator of McGoogan's book, as it did many real Kerouac scholars, a good reason to "seriously question . . . the Beat-American interpretation of Kerouac"—much the same way Beaulieu did in 1972 (McGoogan, *Visions*, 76).

As for *Le Devoir*, they might have published Maurice Comtois's attack on those in Québec who were "for and against Kerouac Québécois" in 1975 (as Poteet sharply points out), but in 2007, for *On the Road*'s fiftieth birthday, they were publishing Gabriel Anctil's celebration of Kerouac as "un écrivain canadien-français" [a French-Canadian writer] who was writing from "la Nouvelle-Angleterre, dans le Québec d'en bas," [New England in the Québec from below], and celebrating the discovery of an uncompleted novel that Kerouac had penned in French (Anctil, "Les 50 ans"). This French novel, written in 1951, is called *La nuit est ma femme* [*The night is my wife*], and many other French manuscripts by Kerouac have been discovered. Anctil writes that "Ces nombreux manuscrits inédits écrits en français par Kerouac permettent aujourd'hui de découvrir un deuxième écrivain" (Anctil, "Kerouac, le français") [These many new manuscripts written in French by Kerouac make it possible today to discover a second writer] and considers Kerouac the missing link between the country of his parents and his own land. Affectionately and intimately referring to Kerouac by his French diminutive, Anctil says that "Ti-Jean Kerouac tend de nouveau la main à ce Québec qui ne l'a jamais vraiment reconnu de son vivant" [Ti-Jean again reaches out to this Québec which never truly acknowledged him while he was alive] (Anctil, "Kerouac, le français," n.p.). Kerouac had moved along the currents of Québec's politics: he was a symbol of Québec's past and a traitor to Québec in the 1960s, controversial to Québec culture in the 1970s, and a symbol of Québec's *americanité* in the 1980s. At the turn of the twenty-first century, with writings in French that can satisfy both those ardently dedicated to a cosmopolitan Québec with pan-North American cross-cultural communication, and the linguistic soldiers who defend Bill 101 (against Bills 102, 103, 104 . . .), the American holds a secure spot in Francophone Canada.

Québec's readers had initially identified Kerouac as American and therefore, simply, *other*. In his 1967 interview on the Québec television show, *Sel de la Semaine*, conducted by Fernand Séguin and la Société Radio Canada, Séguin begins by clarifying for Kerouac what his Québec viewers will see when they see him: "Pour les Canadiens français qui vous connaissent, vous demeurez quand même, même si vous le voulez pas, un Franco-Américain, vous êtes celui qui

est né à Lowell, dans le Massachusetts, de parents canadiens-français” [For the French Canadians who know you, you still remain, even if you don’t want to, a Franco-American, you are he who was born in Lowell, in Massachusetts, of French-Canadian parents]. Not a “French Canadian” (that was reserved for his parents) or a “Canuck,” terms Kerouac used repeatedly in his writings, but a “Franco-American,” a term foreign to Kerouac. Yet that is precisely what Séguin wants to drive home: a sense of foreignness—“même si vous le voulez pas.”¹⁸ This image of Kerouac as *American*, as *foreigner*, however, changed as Québec’s image of itself and the role of the French in North America changed. In 1968, René Lévesque founded the Parti Québécois, a political party whose goal was to keep alive “that portion of French America we call Québec” (Lévesque, *Option*, 14). Lévesque, who led the province to the first referendum on the question of sovereignty, saw Québec as the birthplace of historical figures that were central to the continent’s greatness. While Lévesque saw the modern-day Québécois as the “children of that society, in which the *habitant*, our father or grandfather, was still the key citizen . . . heirs to that fantastic adventure—that early America that was almost entirely French,” the Québec cultural establishment was willing to look outside the province’s borders (Lévesque, *Option*, 15).

It is not hard to believe, therefore, that Kerouac could be the lynchpin, the literary and spiritual link among multiple traditions—French and English, Canadian and American. Post-mortem and post-*essai poulet*, Kerouac began to take on a new role for the project that Lévesque constructed for the Francophones, symbolizing the living history of the French people *across* North America. When authors, whose roots, like Kerouac’s, were firmly planted in Québec soil, began to write about a *continent* on which the histories of the French and the English both had significant power and influence, they turned, therefore, to Kerouac and to the road that Kerouac seemed to stretch across the continent—but did not quite. In their revisions, they extend the road.

III. *On the Road Redux—en français*

In Jacques Poulin’s classic Québécois novel, *Volkswagen Blues* (1984), and Guillaume Vigneault’s best-selling novel, *Necessary Betrayals* (*Chercher le Vent*, 2001), the protagonists, respectively named Jack, set off on road trips that echo Kerouac’s *On the Road*. In both books, which were written in French but rapidly made available for English audiences, Kerouac is explicitly referenced, and *On the Road* becomes the ur-text, the roadmap, for the novels to follow.

Jacques Poulin’s works are widely read in Canada; most of his novels have been translated into English, and he has won a number of literary prizes, including the *Prix Athanase-David*, Québec’s annual literary prize, in 1995. *Volkswagen Blues*, which won Canada’s Governor General award in 1985, has remained popular and was selected as a candidate for the Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC)’s annual “battle of the books,” the “Canada Reads” program, in 2005. In the novel, the character Jack follows his brother-hero’s trail across the

continent. Early in the journey, he picks up a Métis woman named La Grande Sauterelle.¹⁹ Together, Jack and La Grande Sauterelle trace the Franco-American lineage through their journey. The history they trace is not that of the daily-life events that mark Kerouac's novels, such as *Maggie Cassidy* and *Doctor Sax* (as well as Vigneault's novel). It is that of the continent. Jack and his hitchhiker are spurred on by a postcard bearing the words of Jacques Cartier (from Camille Pouliot's biography, *La grande aventure de Jacques Cartier*). They learn the source of the passage when they visit a museum which has a poster displaying an excerpt of the original account of Cartier's first voyage, and a "very large and beautiful map of North America on which one could see the vast territory that belonged to France in the mid-eighteenth century, a territory that extended from the Arctic to the Gulf of Mexico and west as far as the Rocky Mountains" (Poulin, *Volkswagen*, 9). This map seems to suggest to us the course the novel will take: the characters will travel North America and remind readers of the French presence of each part of the land, a presence that has been subsumed by the continent's overarching monolithic Anglo culture.

A second map, however, allows us to recognize the significance of La Sauterelle in the text—a figure that stands in for that identifier "Iroquois." "French Canadian Iroquois American" was a descriptor Kerouac often used for himself and his autobiographical characters, offhandedly and without much substantiation (Kerouac, *Angels*, 370). This map is:

an equally impressive map that depicted North America before the arrival of the whites; the map was strewn with names of Indian tribes, names the man knew—Cree, Montagnais, Iroquois, Sioux, Cheyenne, Comanche, Apache—but also a large number of names he'd never heard of in his life: Chastacosta, Shuman, Miluk, Waco, Karankawan, Timucuas, Potanos, Yuchi, Coahuitlecan, Pascagoula, Tillamook, Maidu, Possepattuck, Alsea, Chawashas, Susquehanna, Calusa. (Poulin, *Volkswagen*, 10)

These are the tribes that no longer resonate not only with Jack, but many readers—tribes that were decimated by the whites who then rebuilt the lands and rewrote the maps. Among these tribes we find the Susquehanna, a tribe of Iroquois stock, and the river that becomes the nominal marker of Sal Paradise's twin-ghost, searching for "Canady."

Poulin's text, then, is not a text that will dwell in the places that the French Canadians dwelt in; rather, Poulin is attempting to rewrite history and has to go back to Cartier and the cartography of the early European settlers to force readers to rethink the "America" that Kerouac blandly mythologizes. Like Sal pursuing his east-west journey through the lens of "books about pioneers," Jack and La Grande Sauterelle pursue an east-west course that corresponds with the adventurers and explorers who first claimed these territories, adventurers and explorers

who were not all English or white (Kerouac, *Road*, 10). Their path, as a result, feels thick with historical and mythological shades, carrying and enriching its own allusion to a Paradise Lost—Sal Paradise, whose path across the continent was lost because it was so uniculturally constrained:

They had set out from the Gaspé, where Jacques Cartier had discovered Canada, and they had followed the St. Lawrence River and the Great Lakes, then the old Mississippi, Father of Waters, to St. Louis, where they had taken the Oregon Trail and, following the trail of the nineteenth-century emigrants who had formed caravans of ox-drawn wagons to set out in search of the Lost Paradise, they had covered the vast prairies, crossed the continental divide and the Rocky Mountains, forded rivers and traversed the desert and still more mountains, and now they were pulling in to San Francisco. (Poulin, *Volkswagen*, 192-3)

A thinly disguised history book that pretends to be a novel and engages a progression of vehicles (not the least the Volkswagen), usually different landmarks in the country, to launch into history lessons, *Volkswagen Blues* suggests an important revision of Kerouac's *On the Road*.

Poulin's heroes who navigate the continent are in many ways like Kerouac's. Jack, like his model, Sal, is the not-quite-cool sojourner who dreams after America's cowboy-heroes. In Poulin's version, however, French-Canadian figures are included and foregrounded among these heroes, and Jack sees their representation in his idealized brother-figure. La Grande Sauterelle, the Métis who is endowed with mystical omniscience, has very different heroes. The two figures play out the two histories of the continent; Jack loves telling the stories of explorers and white pioneers and what they discovered or created or did, and La Grande Sauterelle tells tales of the many tribes that existed in each of the places that they visit and what happened to them. In Illinois, for example, Jack remembers Louis Jolliet and Père Marquette, two French Canadians (the former born in Canada, the latter an immigrant from France) who led the first French expedition down the Mississippi, and La Sauterelle shares the fate of the Indians who lived, and were starved to death, at the peak of a rock where the explorers built their fort, Fort St. Louis (Poulin, *Volkswagen*, 80).

The alternative versions of American history illustrated by Poulin's characters, a history made even richer by its complexity and multiplicity, are superimposed over Kerouac's vision/version of the continent where the heroes, the strong white men, live freely, and the hard lives of minorities are romanticized. For Sal, the beautiful (and unproblematic) moments of his journey include his plan of "living in a tent and picking grapes in the cool California mornings" with his Mexican girlfriend and her family, and the sight of "the old Negro couple [who] . . . picked cotton with the same God-blessed patience their grandfathers had practiced in ante-bellum Alabama" (Kerouac, *Road*, 75, 81). At times forget-

ful of, or undeterred by historical social reality in which different minority (or, outsider) groups experienced radically disparate conditions, Kerouac, through Sal, paints a picture of the nation that is uncomplicated and guiltless; Poulin, steeped in history, at times even mired in it, changes the contours and layers that make up Kerouac's American road, without destroying the vision and promise it holds.

Chercher le vent, or *Necessary Betrayals*, written at the turn of the twenty-first century, is clearly informed by *Volkswagen Blues*, but it is written in a different era of Québec politics, and it stakes its own territory, as well. In 1984, one referendum on sovereignty had already failed; another was yet to fail. The year Vigneault published his novel, 2001, found Lucien Bouchard, premier of Québec, resigning because he could not advance the cause of sovereignty. Separatism did not die, but in the twenty-first century, voters in Québec have increasingly been turning to the Conservative party. The author is the son of Québec's legendary folk singer, Gilles Vigneault, a nationalist activist who helped put Québec's identity to music during the Quiet Revolution. Vigneault, the son, dedicates his book to his father and mother: "for the usual reasons and, more importantly still, for others." In this novel, we see that he shares his father's pride in his people, but the book lacks the inward gaze found in his father's songs, such as "Mon Pays" ("My Country"), virtually the national anthem of the sovereignty movement. In the son's book, which begins and ends in Val D'Or, Québec, but ventures across the continent, the "people" of Québec, be it the current citizens or the descendants of citizens of long ago, can be seen far beyond Québec's borders.

In the beginning of Vigneault's novel, Jack, like Sal, has lately been divorced and takes to the road with, and because of, a brother-figure, Tristan, who, like Dean, is crazy, volatile, drunken, and passionate; Tristan, like Dean, casts a long shadow. Through the course of the novel, we see Jack's personality—dark and brooding, but not without hope—emerge from that shadow. We also see Jack's relationship to the landscape emerge, for it is only when Jack has left the safety of remote Val D'Or, Québec, seven hours north of Montreal, to immerse himself in life in Bar Harbor, Maine and Shell Beach, Louisiana, that he can begin to understand his place in the world around him.

Vigneault's Jack, a pilot by training, photographer by happenstance, and a man held captive by mistakes from his past, is changed by his encounters in the United States. He finds himself in Maine rethinking his future, when he meets May, an old Boston Brahmin with a collection of art books, finishing-school French, and a former acquaintance with Jack Kerouac. A writer of "antiliterature," May is in many ways Kerouac incarnate; she tells Jack (whom she calls *Jacques*), "Our only tool to arrive at something credible, something that rings true, is form . . . pure form!" (Vigneault, *Necessary*, 107). May turns Jack on to the *I Ching*: "Retrace your steps to meet what will resurface. Your power to achieve Tao in action depends on the return. Be modest and flexible while highlighting what differentiates you. Use your own knowledge of the source" (Vigneault, *Necessary*, 110). Given this advice, Jack decides to return to himself not by returning

north to Canada, but to find out what he can of himself and others—of sameness and difference—in the South.

Jack discovers himself on the road. He taps into a source of inner strength working painstakingly to save a hurricane-hit snack bar alongside Louisiana locals, who expect such hardships, and are on the verge of giving in to their fate. More significantly, he is able to be comfortable with difference and be silent when the Black Louisianans, with whom he has forged a temporary community-by-necessity, strum blues tunes about picking cotton. He says,

I didn't dare join in, not even on the chorus, since the tale was so unrelated to my own genealogical tree. My ancestors dug potatoes out of the ground. I just whistled and smiled at the black of night and at the golden spheres glimpsed in the marshes, alligator eyes. (Vigneault, *Necessary*, 160)

Here is one of the telling departures from Kerouac's *On the Road*. Unlike Kerouac's Sal, who, among the Mexicans, for a moment believes that in a way, he too is Mexican (Kerouac, *Road*, 98), Jack can create an allegiance to his peers without forgetting all difference between them. In these new surroundings, Jack is taught new ways of communicating and embracing community, and doing so while resisting the urge to efface their historical differences, their incommensurate experiences. His sense of self, and the continent he traverses, both become fuller and more complicated than the selves and surfaces Kerouac created with Sal and his American road. The complexity of North America is not flattened, but rather highlighted, teased out, and accepted, coming closer to the state that David Hollinger calls "postethnic" (Hollinger, *Postethnic America*) or others have called "rooted cosmopolitanism."²⁰

In both Poulin's and Vigneault's books, the history of the French in North America is mapped out, allowing readers to trace the connections among communities of descent across the continent. In *Necessary Betrayals*, Jack's voyage includes visits to Maine, Florida, Louisiana, and New York. But it is the time that he spends in Maine and Louisiana that are central to the book and to his development as a character. These places are also central to the history of Franco-Americans, the French Canadians who had migrated south both involuntarily and voluntarily. Thousands of (French) Acadians of the Canadian Maritimes were expelled from their homes by the British in the mid-eighteenth century and scattered throughout the colonies.²¹ A community of Acadians (Cajuns) reformed in Louisiana (we know we are following their route in the book when we travel with Jack, Tristan, and their hitchhiker, Nuna, along "Acadia National Park's forestry roads") (Vigneault, *Necessary*, 50). A century later, thousands of French Canadians left Canada again, moving to Maine primarily (as well as New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and northern New York). This exodus, a chosen one, was from Québec, when poverty at home stood out in sharp contrast to industrialized New England. At the turn of the twenty-first century,

when Poulin and Vigneault were both creating their texts of French America, the number of Americans in these areas who still considered themselves ethnically French Canadian remained high according to the Québec newspaper *La Presse*. The majority of the 13.6 million Franco-Americans were living in the Northeast (22%), followed by Louisiana (*La Presse*, 8 December 1983, E6). By using these two locales as touchstones for his character's development, Vigneault, a writer little known outside of French Canada, reminds his Québécois readers of the alternate American trajectories of their shared French-Canadian ancestors.

Volkswagen Blues and *Necessary Betrayals* complement *On the Road* through repetition and adjustment. By weaving allusive names, characters, plots, and literal references to *On the Road* into novels that reveal the French Canadian (and in Poulin's case, Native) foundations of the United States, Poulin and Vigneault force their readers to reread *On the Road* in a context of disparate, incommensurate histories, bringing Kerouac's personal heritage to bear on his writing.

IV. Using the "real" Kerouac

In McGoogan's *Kerouac's Ghost* and *Visions of Kerouac* and Robertson's *What Happened Later*, Jack Kerouac becomes a character. In both cases, he is created to conform to Kerouac's real life—but his life is melded with the lives of the two authors, McGoogan and Robertson, who, using the autobiographic impulse that is, of course, also Kerouac's, have as their second protagonists characters resembling themselves. The Jack Kerouacs of these two authors are recognizable: they are still searching for themselves, and they are still on the road.

Ken McGoogan is not a well-known novelist; in fact, most of his writing has been non-fiction and has centered on the history of arctic explorers. But his passion for Kerouac drove him to create three iterations of his Kerouac-based novel. McGoogan calls himself the grandson of a "pure laine Québécoise" (personal email March 21, 2009), a term meaning "pure wool" that is used by the Québécois to confer exclusivity on themselves, to indicate ancestry that can be traced directly back to the original French inhabitants of Québec. He is from the Francophone town of Ste-Marthe-sur-le-lac, Québec, a place he "fictionalized dramatically" in his Kerouac novels as Sainte-Thérèse-sur-le-lac, the hometown of his authorial stand-in, Frankie McCracken, who, like McGoogan, was born in 1947.²² McGoogan (and by extension, McCracken), an Anglophone with Francophone roots, clearly sees himself sharing much in common biographically with the late Jack Kerouac—and his novel, in its multiple forms, expresses this connection.

Similarly, Robertson shares much of his biography with his in-text narrator—beginning with the name Ray Robertson—as well as with Kerouac. "Ray Robertson," writes the author, "is Ray Robertson—he's me. (Mainly because I was mirroring Kerouac's use of his own autobiography, although he called himself, of course, Jack Dulouz, mainly for legal reasons)."²³ Robertson is a

reasonably successful Canadian writer; in addition to *What Happened Later*, he has written several novels. He recently sold the film option to *What Happened Later*. He is also a contributing reviewer at the *Globe and Mail* and was a frequent guest on CBC Radio's "Talking Books" during the show's long run. From Chatham, a small city in southern Ontario, Robertson (and by extension his character, Ray) is, like McGoogan, an Anglophone with Francophone roots.

"Just like in WHL [*What Happened Later*]," admits Robertson, "my mother's parents were French-Canadian (her maiden name was Authier and her name was Jean-Marie, her sister Yvonne, and brothers Leo and Paul—can't get much more French-Canadian than that). They originally lived in a French-Canadian farming community just outside of Chatham called Paincourt."²⁴ Like McGoogan, Robertson exploits this connection to Kerouac, but he does so in a sophisticated way that forces readers to rethink the significance of such roots in a new forum: in an Americanized Anglo Canada.

In McGoogan's three versions of his novel, Jack Kerouac, dead a year, finds a twin-spirit in the living being of Frankie McCracken at a fire lookout on "Mount Jubilation" in Canada. The mountain's name and location make it the mirror-image of Desolation Peak, across the border in the Cascades in the United States, where Kerouac lived as a fire lookout in 1956 and wrote *Desolation Angels* (published in 1965). At the start of *Kerouac's Ghost*, Kerouac's ghost heads out on the post-mortem road and is picked up by a woman named Camille who resembles, remarkably, a woman who once picked him up in his life—in an episode he says his editor forced him to cut from his writing. He describes the woman by comparison: "Like the original, this dynamite blonde was maybe twenty-years old, but she spoke English with a French accent—a lovely twist" (McGoogan, *Ghost*, 13). Indeed, much of the book will have this "lovely" French or Canadian "twist"—from the figure of Frankie, a Canadian twist on Kerouac, to the roads they travel, with the Trans-Canada, Highway 93, and the Banff-Jasper Highway acting as the Canadian twists on the American I-80.

McGoogan's Jack explicitly contemplates what it is that might attract French Canadians to his work, and he becomes, through this ghostly visit to Canada, "the ghost I imagined then"—the Ghost of Susquehanna of *On the Road*, searching for "Canady" and unable to find it in *On the Road* (McGoogan, *Ghost*, 52, Kerouac, *Road*, 105). He has returned to earth after his death, because his role is to be a guardian angel to Frankie McCracken, as Sal's twin-figure the Ghost of Susquehanna was to Sal. Frankie, like Jack, is French and Anglo, a man trying to find himself both in the movement of the road and the stillness of the fire lookout, a writer and a dreamer. McGoogan's Jack, as a ghost who is discovering who *he* is by recognizing features of himself in the man he is supposed to watch over, becomes not the hero of an American counterculture, but a French-Canadian ethnic minority who turns his difference into the essence of a bestseller.

This self-touted French-Canadian ethnic minority quickly turns didactic. "Too many loud-hailers of the King of the Beats disregard my French-Canadian heritage," begins McGoogan's Jack in a long speech that teaches readers one of

the key lessons of the book(s) (McGoogan, *Ghost*, 95). This lesson is the lesson of origins: Kerouac's origins. Throughout *Kerouac's Ghost* (and to an even greater degree in *Visions of Kerouac—Satori Magic Edition*), McGoogan rehearses Kerouac scholarship. He pays particular attention to those who consider the impact of Kerouac's French-Canadian culture and offers a long description of the battle between Allen Ginsberg and Victor-Lévy Beaulieu at the Québec City conference. This battle allows McGoogan to suggest the notion of an American-Canadian dialectic in Kerouac (Kerouac as King Beat is the thesis, and Kerouac as French Canadian is the antithesis). In this scene, Jack reminds readers that he (Kerouac) spoke only French in his youth—a fact well-known to many Kerouac fans. He then offers a more radical suggestion—that *On the Road*, the Beat Bible itself, has its roots, too, in Kerouac's French Canadianness.

Ann Charters, one of Kerouac's biographers, and a prominent Kerouac expert, writes in her introduction to the Penguin edition of *On the Road*: "Kerouac outlined ambitious new plans for . . . 'On the Road.' . . . [H]e envisioned it as a quest novel like Cervantes's *Don Quixote* . . . He abandoned his earlier hero . . . in favor of a narrator called Smitty, who would play the role of Sancho Panza to the central character, Red Moultrie" (Charters, "Introduction," xiv). The idea of a Don Quixote-Sancho Panza is, to some degree, realized in *On the Road*, with Sal Paradise (who shares his initials with Sancho Panza) acting as a kind of sidekick to Dean Moriarty. But the referents for Kerouac's literary allusions are shifted to have a *French twist* in McGoogan's rendering of the genesis of *On the Road*. Here, Jack says, "When I first began wrestling with *On the Road* . . . I conceived my hero as a bilingual French Canadian—a Canuck. His travelling companion was to be a 'pure' French Canadian called Cousin. These two would roam America like Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, with Cousin constantly chiding the hero for his English foolishness" (McGoogan, *Ghost*, 95). Blatantly revising our Anglo (or monolithic) American image of *On the Road*, the genesis story explores the complicated relationships among three parties: the bilingual French Canadian (the Franco American like Kerouac?), the "pure" French Canadian (those left behind by the Kerouac family?), and Anglo America. Writes McGoogan, "The idea was to contrast the unrelieved gravity of the clannish French Canadian with the romantic hopefulness of a Canuck who had set out, like myself, to conquer the Anglo-American world" (McGoogan, *Ghost*, 95). Here, Jack is a bridge, uniting Anglo America and French Canada—the continent writ small on the body.

Yet McGoogan does not stop here. Driving his point further yet, McGoogan has Jack continue his soliloquy by revealing his regret over the invisibility of his French Canadianness in *The Town and the City* and ultimately, in *On the Road*. He insists that "my naivete, religiosity, even my celebration of Beat, and of beautiful Fellaheen losers who survive from one civilization to the next without belonging to any of them," and his language are *all* "quintessentially French Canadian" (McGoogan, *Ghost*, 95-6). And why does this Jack—does McGoogan—stand on this soapbox and tell us again and again how "quintessentially French Canadian" Kerouac was and his works were? The answer is offered to us directly. "Does

it matter?" asks the narrator. Then he replies, "Only if you care what shapes people's lives" (McGoogan, *Ghost*, 96).

What shapes people's lives is clearly at the heart of these revisions, and we see an identical impulse in Robertson's exploration of Kerouac's trip to Québec in *What Happened Later* (the title of which Robertson took from Kerouac's proposed sequel to *On the Road*). *What Happened Later* reads as a response to the line from Kerouac's *Tristessa* that Robertson includes as an epigraph: "This part is my part of the movie, let's hear yours." In Robertson's "part," Kerouac's trip to Rivière-du-Loup, Québec, finally finds its way into print.²⁵ If this trip that Kerouac took in 1967 seems to have not been as central to his life as his other travels that made their way into his writing, it *was* important to the Anglophone writer Ray Robertson (with his Francophone roots), who parallels Kerouac's self-discovery with that of his self-named character. The story of young Ray growing up, growing into his Canadian identity, and growing obsessed with Kerouac is mirrored by Kerouac's visit to Canada and its implications for his identity. Throughout the novel, parallels between Jack and Ray are explicit. The son of the printer (Jack) moves up the social ranks to become a student at Horace Mann and later Columbia University; similarly, the son of a factory worker (Ray) attends the upscale CCI (Chatham Collegiate Institute), even though his social class suggested that was not his fate. The chapter that begins "I didn't know I was Canadian until September 28, 1972," about the six-year-old Ray watching the Canada-Russia Summit Series of hockey, is sandwiched between a chapter about Jack telling his friend Joe Chaput about the meaning of "Kerouac," and another about Jack deciding to "return to Canada, to his Québécois roots" (Robertson, *What Happened*, 27).

The monologue that Jack spouts in regards to his name and ancestry will be all-too-familiar to readers of Kerouac who know his penchant for family historicizing:

The Baron François Louis Alexandre Lebris de Kerouac went to Québec to help Montcalm fight Wolfe for the valley of the St. Lawrence, after which, after the French lost that unfortunate war as you well know, Joe, he was granted one hundred miles of land along Rivière-du-Loup for exceptional gallantry and service to the king of France, where he met and married an Iroquois princess with whom he sired six sons who sired six sons . . . (Robertson, *What Happened*, 21)

Here, we are, of course, in well-worn territory—in the family mythologizing that marks Jack of *Desolation Angels* as a "French Canadian Iroquois American aristocrat Breton Cornish democrat or beat hipster" (Kerouac, *Angels*, 370). It is reminiscent of Jack of *Vanity of Duluoz* as the "descendant of very grand gentlemen who were in the Court of King Arthur" and a "descendant of Cornish sea-mongers and Breton . . ." (Kerouac, *Vanity*, 155, 180). Yet again this

obsession with family history—with the disguise of “Duluoz” as thin as a cervix in the last stage of labor opening to reveal the Kerouac inside—appears when *Duluoz’s* Jack says, “we were descendants of Cornish Celts who had come to Cornwall from Ireland in the olden days long before Jesus and the calendar they start Him from, Kerouac’h being, they said, an ancient Gaelic name. The cry was always ‘Cornwall, Cornwall, from Ireland, and then Brittany’” (Kerouac, *Vanity*, 186).²⁶ How does Ray fit into the myth of the Kerouacs? As we follow Ray throughout the novel, searching for a copy of *On the Road*, and reading *around* the novel, we see that his lack of understanding of his *own* French roots and his desire to delve into Kerouac’s roots in lieu of his own, mark him as Kerouac’s shadow—another Sancho Panza—trying to figure out his (French and Canadian) place in the (Anglo and American) world, much as Sal Paradise was in *On the Road*, or Kerouac in his life.

Both of Robertson’s characters are alienated from their French identities, albeit differently. Ray, a generation removed from Kerouac, whose relationship with “Memere” is legendary, tells how his *grandparents* were born in Québec: “Mom called Grandma Mem” (Robertson, *What Happened*, 54). And yet the French culture, while part of his ancestry, is not quite the young Ray’s. He is estranged from his Francophone roots. He prefers patently American toys like Hot Wheels and G. I. Joes, and one of his key childhood disappointments seems to come by way of a French G. I. Joe his grandmother bought him: “I was stuck with Joe d’GI. My friends and I made the best of it. Grandma’s G. I. Joe became all of the other action figures’ solitary prisoner. We called him The Foreigner. We made sure he was always under heavily armed guard” (Robertson, *What Happened*, 58).

When, on the other hand, Robertson’s Jack comes to Canada and speaks French with the locals, trying to claim or reclaim the locale as his own, they respond in English. Robertson dramatizes a scene in Rivière-du-Loup, land of Kerouac’s roots, as Jack attempts to engage a bartender:

Why won’t you speak French with me? Jack said.

Without turning around, *You’re American, aren’t you?*

My first North American ancestor was Baron Alexandre Louis Lebris de Kerouac of Cornwall, Brittany, a brave soldier who fought for France in—

You’ve got Massachusetts license plates. You’re from Boston?

. . . . *You’re Americans*, the man said, addressing Jack.

North Americans, Jack said. Pointing at the man then back at himself, *Our blood is the same blood. The language of my forefathers was the same language of yours. All three of us—he swung an arm around Joe’s shoulder—are sons of France.*

The man wiped his hands on his towel. *We get lots of Americans up here this time of year*, he said. *They come to kill*

the caribou. He shut the door to the motel lobby behind him.
(Robertson, *What Happened*, 173-4)

Why does the bartender dismiss Jack? Is Robertson creating another moment—like Kerouac’s appearance at *Sel de la Semaine*, the 1967 television interview—when Séguin insisted that Kerouac was American to the viewers, no matter what he thought of himself, and French Canada seemed to be laughing at his attempt to be one of them? (Marchand, *Pardon*). Or is the bartender suggesting, like Beaulieu and many of the separatists, the desire to move on from a notion of shared “blood” to a new identity of their own? Is Robertson making a different point—that the mainstream, Anglo estrangement from French culture in America works both ways—the son of French Canadians cannot be recognized as anything other than an Anglo American, and the grandson of French Canadians cannot recognize himself as anything other than part of Anglo America? For indeed, Ray, a boy from Chatham, Ontario, a place where his grandparents speak French and his father buys the *Hockey News*, is a boy who covets real American G. I. Joes and Hershey Bars (“the Great American Chocolate Bar”), and “wish[ed] that we lived in the United States, where all the good stuff was” (Robertson, *What Happened*, 93).

On the Road, through Robertson, takes a new turn. He does not focus on the French-Canadian Kerouac we know in print, either from sources in which his French Canadianness is cloaked in the more-acceptable forms of Catholic difference, as in *The Town of the City* (Irish) and *On the Road* (Italian), nor on those in which his French Canadianness is manifest in almost every page of his writing (*Maggie Cassidy*, *Desolation Angels*, *Vanity of Duluo*, and more). Instead, Robertson takes Kerouac to *what happened later*—after all his writing, after his Frenchness was brought back to its roots and seemingly shamed in multiple ways, and further, past Kerouac, to the Rays, a later generation of North Americans, whose attempts to return to French roots are also fraught and uncertain. In Robertson’s novel, French culture exists in small pockets, but the broader Anglo-American culture is more alluring, even in Canada. Robertson’s novel is not mere paean to French history and culture on the continent, but is more akin to Annie Proulx’s *Accordion Crimes*, where broader Anglo-American culture is more alluring, even in Canada, and the French-Canadian source is evanescent.²⁷ The *Francophonie* of North America’s past seems only to be a ghostly, lingering presence. Where, Robertson asks us, does it belong?

V. Conclusion

By employing a language and heritage that hearken back to French Canada to create artful pictures of the American road, Kerouac, carved a clear place for a new trend in Canadian fiction, even as he maintains a celebrated position in the American canon. Rather than serve two separate roles, however, he is an excellent example of a writer who bridges the literature of North America. Kerouac’s

role in Canadian literature ranges widely, from being the object of Godbout's and Beaulieu's attraction and condemnation in the 1960s when the Québécois/es began envisioning their sovereignty, to his prevalence in Québécois novels during the height of Americanité in the 1980s, and further on, to his continued popularity today.

Kerouac shows up in many Canadian texts in many ways. The French novels Gilles Archambault's *Voyageur distrait* (1981) and Alain Poissant's *Vendredi-Friday* (1988), employ Kerouac in their formulations and negotiations of Québécois identity. *Le Voyageur distrait*, in particular, which moves from Montreal to Lowell in the footsteps of Jack Kerouac, is a book that explicitly centers on the ambivalent relationship between a writer from Québec and his Franco-American predecessor. These novels, however, have never been translated, making them unavailable to monolingual Anglophone readers and therefore unable to fully participate in the conversation among literary descendents of Kerouac across North American cultures. Nicole Brossard's postmodern work of fiction, *Mauve Desert* (1987), which *has* been translated and is a well-known Québécois novel, resembles *On the Road* in its repetitive scenes of driving and Francophone characters, including the main character's mother, Kathy Kerouac (always introduced by first and last name), though its primary focus is on the exploration of lesbian relationships and budding female sexuality. The Anglo-Canadian novel, *In the Place of Last Things* (2004) by Michael Helm, can also be said to evoke *On the Road* (as well as *Lolita*), if not explicitly. The Jack in the novel is not the main character, but rather a pedophile, in search of whom the narrator, a cynical Canadian who feels himself to be an outsider to the "American warp," embarks on a dizzying trip from Canada into the U.S. and ultimately into Mexico. These examples—in the lesser-known French novels, the feminist novel, and the Anglophone novel—all mix the flavor of Kerouac into their recipes, demonstrating the complexity of Kerouac's role in Canadian literature that cannot be completely covered in one study.

It is clear, nonetheless, that Kerouac has an interesting, though not unique, position in both American and Canadian Studies. Although Canada and the United States have distinct canons, there are many writers (E. Annie Proulx, Carol Shields, Joyce Carol Oates, Douglas Coupland, Thomas King, Winnifred and Edith Eaton, among many others) who have physically and/or creatively straddled the Canadian-American border, and complicated the idea of national separation on a continuous field. The endeavour to distinguish these literatures along national lines has led to problems of categorization time and again.²⁸ One way of addressing this problem is to maintain a transnational approach, considering cultural connections across borders. Few studies have specifically focused on analyzing such sites as "francophone Canadian literatures in the larger context of North American literatures and cultures," as one contributor to the January 2003 *PMLA*, which was devoted to "America: The Idea, the Literature," suggested (Messmer, *Declaration*, 53). Francophone Canadian/American (inter)relations, however, have recently gained momentum. In the media, Franco-American

history and its relationship to Canada has sparked interest on both sides of the border. The June 2006 *New York Times* article “Long-Scorned in Maine, French Has Renaissance” describes the reemergence of French language and culture in parts of the American northeast. The albums released by Louisianan singer Zachary Richard aim to stitch together the French histories of North America in the French song “Massachusetts” about Jack Kerouac and the English song “No French No More” about the banning of French language in American schools. And the fifty-year anniversary of *On the Road*, along with the recent publications of *What Happened Later* and David Creighton’s *Ecstasy of the Beats*, both of which investigate Kerouac’s “Canuck” heritage, have caused a stir in Canadian literary circles, prompting a “Kerouac’s Legacy” event in Toronto in September 2007, which subsequently aired on CBC Radio. Finally, scholars are currently breathlessly anticipating Kerouac’s French novels, which they hope to be published simultaneously in both English and French.

In their revisions of *On the Road*, Canadian writers Poulin, McGoogan, Vigneault, and Robertson have created a picture of American and Canadian histories interwoven through the continent, with overlapping Francophone characters, monuments, historical figures, and landscapes. These novels do not tear down borders or dispel difference. They do, however, remind readers that Samuel de Champlain, “Father of New France” and founder of Québec City, is the same navigator, geographer, and diplomat whose moniker graces communities, schools, bridges, lakes, townships and streets across the United States (see Fig. 1); that Joliet, Illinois and Joliet, Ohio are named after the same explorer that gave Joliette, Québec its name; that the Kerouac of Lowell, Massachusetts is the Kerouac of St. Hubert, Québec. Kerouac and his in-text narrators defy a monolithic American definition, opening a discursive space for Canadian writers to reimagine *On the Road* through the multiple Kerouacs he creates. In the “Author’s Note” concluding *Kerouac’s Ghost*, McGoogan talks about his revision of the earlier version of his book, entitled *Visions of Kerouac*. He refers to John Fowles, who rewrote his own book, *The Magus*: “he rewrote his novel not simply because he felt he could improve it, but because he loved it” (295). The same, it would seem, can be said about rewriting someone else’s novel. The revisions these authors make to *On the Road* do not detract from Kerouac’s exuberant prose or poetic, if limited, history of America writ into the highways and byways, the truckstops, the dobe houses, and the cars full of young bop musicians and their instruments. By rewriting *On the Road*, Francophone Canadian writers expand Kerouac’s “America,” recognizing the English and French, American and Canadian histories of the land to all be a part of the complex and multi-layered “American continent.”

Notes

1. Deadwood Dick was originally a character in the dime novels of Edward Lytton Wheeler (1877-1897). In *Virgin Land*, Henry Nash Smith writes: “The most important traits of Deadwood Dick are that he too is without the upper-class rank which belongs exclusively to Easterners or Englishmen; that he possesses to a high degree such characteristic skills as riding and shooting; and that

at the same time he is eligible for romantic attachments. Indeed, his life is cluttered with beautiful women pining for his love" (100).

2. For discussions of the role of Mexico in Kerouac's writing, see Adams, Campbell, and Belgrad.

3. For a reading of *On the Road* that considers the impact of Kerouac's Franco-American lens including an analysis of the Ghost of Susquehanna as he appears in *On the Road* and *Pic*, see Karen Skinazi's "Through Roots and Routes: *On the Road's* Portrayal of an Outsider's Journey into the Meaning of America" in *Canadian Review of American Studies* (2009). Maurice Poteet also briefly discusses the appearances of the ghost in "The 'Little (Known) Literature' of Kerouac's 'Little Canada,'" published in *Moody Street Irregulars* (1979).

4. Writes Kerouac in the opening lines of *Lonesome Traveler* with his "VISIONS OF AMERICA": "All that hitchhikin/ All that railroadin/ All that comin back to America/ Via Mexican & Canadian borders . . ." (*Traveler* 1).

5. This book has gone through several permutations. It was originally published as *Visions of Kerouac* (1994), with a more extensive frame story and three points of view. In 1996, McGoogan republished the book as *Kerouac's Ghost*, using only Kerouac's ghost as the narrator and omitting nonfictional discussions about the meaning of Kerouac's life. In 2007, McGoogan republished the original version of the text, slightly revised, with a new introduction, now called *Visions of Kerouac—Satori Magic Edition*.

6. Beaulieu's attempt to send a message to the province came in response, specifically, to the Parti Québécois Leader Pauline Marois's suggestion that school children in Québec could benefit from English classes. "I'm admitting that my life as a writer has counted for nothing since we're in the process of being anglicized," claims Beaulieu, adding that an Anglicized Québec "doesn't interest me. I'd rather admit that I failed, that I worked for nothing and burn my work" ("Québec author").

7. Thanks to Marc G. Bellemare and an anonymous reviewer for checking/correcting translations in this paper.

8. Between 1840 and 1930, approximately 900,000 French Canadians emigrated to the United States (Lavoie 53).

9. Deeply opposed to the migration to the United States, Hamon, in his play *Exil et patrie*, depicts the Franco-Americans renouncing their faith and becoming anglicized.

10. "Habitants" refers to the inhabitants of French Canada, and specifically refers to the French peasant or farmer settlers.

11. Literally translated as The Seventh-Hour Man, and thought to come from the English "Bonesetter," the *Bonhomme sept-heures* is Québec's version of the bogeyman.

12. *Le Couteau sur la table* is the first Francophone Canadian novel to call upon Kerouac, and it includes a mental exchange between narrator and Kerouac, here a traitor, who is asked, "*But why were those roads to the South so precious, so appealing?*" (Godbout, *Knife*, 87). Calling Kerouac "the cream of the U.S.A" and "Saint Jack Kerouac," and without giving the imaginary Kerouac a chance to respond, the narrator continues: "Still and all, you dropped us! You swapped Québec for Los Angeles. Good old Jack! As if we weren't as fascinated by heat as you!" (*ibid.*). The narrator is full of accusations for the author who lived not as or among the poor "never-changing descendants of the French, obstinate peasants in Cayenne or Ville-Marie" but rather decided "I'm taking off" on the road and away from the hard Canadian life (88).

13. See Sollors, 15.

14. American homages to Kerouac's most popular work are abundant, and they appear in the forms of novels, films and songs. Most works attributed to the spirit of Kerouac are about the freedom of the open road. A short list of books includes Tom Wolfe's *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968), Hunter S. Thompson's writings, Jan Kerouac's book *Baby Driver* (her version of the Kerouackian road-trip à la pregnant teenager on LSD, published in 1981), the popular road book, *Blue Highways: A Journey into America* (1982) (which cites *On the Road* and seems inspired by it, although its author, William Least Heat-Moon, goes out of his way to deny Kerouac's influence on his writing [84, 418]), and Aurelie Sheehan's book of short stories, *Jack Kerouac is pregnant* (1994) about men's freedom to go on the road. Movies from Dennis Hopper's 1969 motorcycle madness movie "Easy Rider" to Callie Khouri's 1991 feminized/feminist buddies-on-the-road film "Thelma and Louise" pay their dues to *On the Road*. Some music inspired by Kerouac includes Bob Dylan's "Subterranean Homesick Blues" (1965), Simon and Garfunkel's "America" (1968), Willie Nelson's country song, "On the Road Again" (1980), and the 10,000 Maniacs' song "Hey, Jack Kerouac" (1987). The spirit of Kerouac's vision of the "ragged promise" of America has seeped into every corner of American popular culture.

15. This movement was not without a historical predecessor: In the nineteenth century, during the migrations to New England, French Canadians were reacting strongly to Anglo-imperialist Canada, favoring American ideology. The rebellions of 1837-1838 were based on a pamphlet addressed to British parliament that appears derivative from the American Declaration of Independence. Furthermore, Dupont writes that "the *mission providentielle* discourse of *l'Amerique francaise* is not too far, rhetorically at least, from its American counterpart, that of Manifest Destiny"; in response to the vast emigrations to the United States, French Canadians "incorporated the theme of emigration

to New England with the expansionist discourse of concurrent migrations to pioneer frontiers in Abitibi, Lac Saint-Jean, Northern Ontario, and Manitoba” (Dupont, *L’americanité*, 31, 30). At the end of the nineteenth century, French Canadians peered over the border jealously as their American counterparts built schools and churches; in Canada, French schools were outlawed everywhere but Quebec. For the French Canadians and Franco Americans of this early period (nineteenth century through 1930s), however, the attraction to Americanness was based on the vision of a *French America—L’Amérique française*.

16. For further discussion of *Americanité’s* role in Québec in the 1980s, see *La Littérature québécoise de l’Amérique: guide bibliographique; Urgences* 34 (1991), a special issue on “Mythes et romans de l’Amérique;”; Harel’s *Le Voleur de parcours: Identité et cosmopolitisme dans la littérature québécoise contemporaine*; and Gould’s “Rewriting ‘America,’” which focuses specifically on Québécoise writers who “reenvision ‘America’ through Francophone eyes,” refiguring “America” “from the point of view of gender, francophone minority culture, and transculturalism” (Gould 189).

17. McGoogan pulls quotations from Kerouac biographer Ann Charters and the American Beat cohort—Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and Carolyn Cassady (ex-wife of Neal Cassady, the “Dean Moriarty” of *On the Road*), among others. Louis Riel is a controversial figure in Canadian history. In the late 19th century, Riel led the Métis people to a rebellion against the Canadian government and was executed for high treason. His image, however, has changed from traitor to hero in modern Canadian culture, as people have recognized his bravery for standing up to a racist government and fighting for the freedom of an oppressed minority group.

18. The interview can be watched at this time online: http://archives.radio-canada.ca/arts_culture/litterature/clips/126/ (accessed 1 March 2009).

19. La Grande Sauterelle translates literally as The Great Grasshopper, but it also calls to mind a 1967 film of the same name. Métis, meaning “mixed” (similar to the Spanish term “mestizo”), is the name of the group that is of mixed First Nations/European (often French) descent.

20. See, for example, Ackerman, “Rooted Cosmopolitanism.”

21. The fictional landmark of the Acadian exile is Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s epic poem “Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie,” which tells of a young maiden named Evangeline Bellefontaine who is torn from her beloved and her home town of Grand-Pre (in the region of Acadia that is now Nova Scotia) and taken along the Mississippi River to exile in Louisiana. Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth. *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: Selected Poems*. Ed. Lawrence Buell. New York: Penguin, 1988.

22. Ken McGoogan, personal email to author, March 21, 2009.

23. Robertson, personal email to author, June 3, 2010.

24. Robertson, personal email to author, June 3, 2010.

25. Having not been written about by Kerouac, the story of this trip by Kerouac and Chaput comes down in history in half-shades. Although an interview with Joseph Chaput was published in *Moody Street Irregulars* in 1979 describing the trip, a second article, also in *Moody Street Irregulars* was published later that year, describing the discrepancies in the interview. In the latter, Joy Walsh writes that “Some of the material printed in the interview had been refuted by two of Kerouac’s friends according to Tony Sampas” (2). Walsh re-interviews Chaput, and in doing so, she changes some of the original information about the trip that Chaput and Kerouac took to Quebec. Yet even this second interview appears inaccurate; Walsh cites the trip as having taken place in 1966, where other sources cite 1967 (with the opening of Montreal’s Expo ’67 being the impetus for the trip) (see, for example, McNally, *Desolate*, 332).

26. *Vanity of Duluoz* is particularly invested in family historicizing. In a less bombastic description of his background, Jack calls himself the “descendant of Jean-Baptiste LeBri de Duluoz an old gaffer carpenter from St. Hubert in Temiscouata County, Québec, who built his own home in Nashua N.H” (Kerouac, *Vanity*, 111). Jack later declares “Good enough for a Duluoz, descendant of the Gaspé and Cape Breton,” (in parentheses) as his boat passes the mouth of the St. Lawrence River, and even later describes the etymology of his name as “Breton French . . . ancient Irish . . . English, British” (Kerouac, *Vanity*, 123, 247-8).

27. In Proulx’s novel, Dolor-cum-Frank believes that he will return to his French heritage one day, “like an insect cracking out of its winter case, he would wake speaking, thinking in French, a joyous man with many friends, his lost family would come back. And he always saw this transformation occurring in a warm room dominated by a wood-burning stove. There was a blue door and someone coughed. In French” (194). Dolor does eventually go to Quebec, his “source” (203). To his surprise, he finds men who speak fluent “American” and music that had been Americanized, as well (205). But he also finds what he is looking for: French people enjoying traditional Québécois music, “the *cuillères*, the *os*, the *pieds* of the *accordéonistes*” (205). This experience makes him realize how far he is from his source, and yet how far from American life. Soon, however, he realizes that he is not unique, that even the Franco Americans with some relationship to their heritage are not happy. Everybody “was French but nobody was French—they weren’t anything; they were caught between being French and being American” (219). His wife tries to convince him to become Frank Gaines, sell his accordion and forget their French-Canadian past. Dolor agrees, but his real resolution is otherwise: he kills himself.

28. In the introduction to *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, for example, Sacvan Bercovitch, the general editor, and himself a Canadian American, outlines the parameters of his study and in doing so, reveals the anxiety about limitations inherent to the term "American Literature": "in these volumes, *America* designates the United States, or the territories that were to become the United States *America* in these volumes is a historical entity, the United States of America. It is also . . . a people constituted and sustained by . . . a semiotics of exclusion, closing out not only the Old World but all other countries of the Americas, North and South" (Bercovitch, *Cambridge History*, xv). This semiotics of exclusion, however, does *not* actually close out the rest of North America, as texts in the *History* include both those by Canadians who lived in the United States (such as Winnifred and Edith Eaton, and George Copway) as well as Canadians who remained in Canada (such as Joy Kogawa).

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