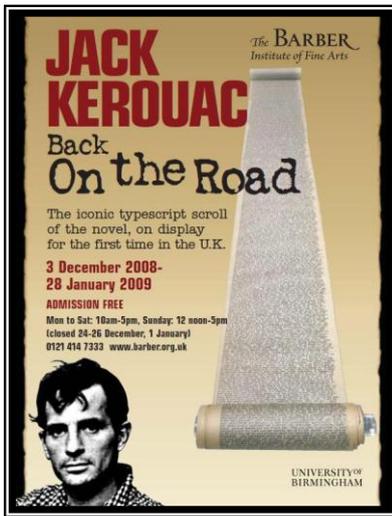


DRIED INK AND DRAWING PAPER:
 ‘BACK ON THE ROAD’ AT THE BARBER INSTITUTE
 NATALIE HARRIGAN



It caught my eye as I wandered amongst the dusky swollen shelves, a seventeen-year-old student looking for something real to read on my Saturday shift at the local library. I felt instantly charmed by the cover photographs of lurid blue skies, empty horizons and solitary vintage road signs. This was the American road as I thought I knew it, my imagination flooded with media images from road trip movies and my own idle rainy-day fantasies. Feeling hopeful and somewhat impulsive, I freed the novel from the top shelf and expectantly opened the first page.

This book, Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*, has fascinated and inspired me since that very first day and throughout the years of study that have followed. Thanks to this novel, I have developed a deep affinity with the way that Kerouac writes, his ideas and beliefs, and his attitude toward the society in which he lived.

As clichéd as it may seem, *On the Road* really did change my relationship with literature. Every expectation I had held about the book was immediately obliterated when I opened that poor, misleading cover and entered the frantic, honest world of Beat subculture. At the centre of Kerouac’s autobiographical narrative, I found a frantic fascination with women, sexuality, jazz, alcohol, drugs and the American landscape. Rather than a tourist fantasy, those drug-fuelled, law-breaking and thrill-seeking adventures seemed to disguise a deeper spiritual quest for truth, knowledge and meaningful experience.

It appeared that I had accidentally stumbled upon the foundations of a cultural and philosophical revolution; a powerful record of post-war dissatisfaction and dissent. And now, every time I pick up the novel and start reading it again, I am reminded of this radical influence, and I begin to wonder about the world and the richness of the myriad cultures that can co-exist within it. *On the Road* has created countless examples of thought-provoking empathy just like mine and this, I feel, is the main reason why the novel has endured into the twenty-first century and remained such a powerful cultural icon.

“Jack Kerouac: Back *On the Road*,” held at The Barber Institute from 3 December 2008 to 28 January 2009, constituted a tribute to this endurance. An astounding success, the exhibition was held in honour of the fiftieth anniversary of the novel’s publication in

Britain and celebrated the event by proudly displaying the original scroll manuscript of the text. The exhibition brought this remarkable literary document to Europe for the very first time and, thanks to Curator Professor Richard Ellis of the Department of American and Canadian Studies and the University's Research and Cultural Collections, I was able to witness an extraordinary and unique piece of American cultural history within my own city.

When I entered the exhibition, which included photographs, records, maps and other rare memorabilia, I rushed toward the long glass case which could be glimpsed rolling imposingly through its centre. The room bustled with crowds of people trying to get a glimpse of this 127 foot long scroll of drawing paper on which Kerouac had written his story of the American road. I stood amongst them in awe. Like a child in a museum gawping at the skeleton of some tremendous wide-jawed relic, I gazed at the scroll as it lay basking in its original, unmediated glory, "a magnificent single paragraph several blocks long, rolling," as fellow beat author Allen Ginsberg once stated, "like the road itself" (1958). No editing, no name changes, no want of explicit language or sexual detail; nothing but one long spontaneous bop prosody. More commonly known as spontaneous prose, this revolutionary literary form is based on Kerouac's "first thought is best thought" theory of fast, unstructured writing. It discards traditional punctuation, grammar and perspective and instead attempts to reproduce, as faithfully as possible, the emotions, thoughts and passions of the writer at the time of composition. "The only ones for me," he writes in this fashion, "are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow candles exploding like spiders across the stars" (Kerouac 7).

The value of the scroll, I believe, lies in the power of this medium. More than just a first draft, the scroll emphasises Kerouac's belief that spontaneous prose, more than any other literary form, is the closest that literature can ever come to achieving a true representation of real life experience. The scroll, unlike any published edition of the novel, shows us *On the Road* exactly as Kerouac wrote it, and viewing it in this original state offers a unique access to his dynamic experience.

Spontaneous prose is an intensely personal method of writing and, as I contemplated the novel's manuscript, I felt as though I were looking beyond the dried ink and drawing paper and peering into the author's very soul. As I began to read, I could feel the burden of those memories, those life-changing experiences which were so strong and overwhelming that in his struggle to share them with the world, Kerouac inadvertently revolutionised his literary technique. I could see where the long pieces of

paper had been cut and taped together, so that he could feed the continuous scroll through his typewriter without disturbing his ‘creative flow,’ as he did in a three-week typing frenzy in April 1951. Where the paper had not been aligned properly, I was even able to follow the text as it slanted and drooped down the side of the page. As I stood there, taking it all in, I could almost smell the burning frustration, taste the breathless ecstasy and feel the relentless passion that fuelled Kerouac’s extraordinary art. This experience alone was worth my whole journey.

Works Cited

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Image

“Jack Kerouac Back *On the Road*” poster © 2008.
 The Barber Institute of Fine Arts.

A META-THEATRICAL STAGING IN NEW YORK CITY: SHAKESPEARE’S VIRGIN MARY ALLEGORIES JOHN HUDSON



I wrote my M.A. thesis at the Shakespeare Institute on an allegorical staging of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* which built on the work of Professor Patricia Parker and aimed to reveal the underlying allegorical characters and plot of the play. This note reports on another attempt to create an allegorical dramaturgy,

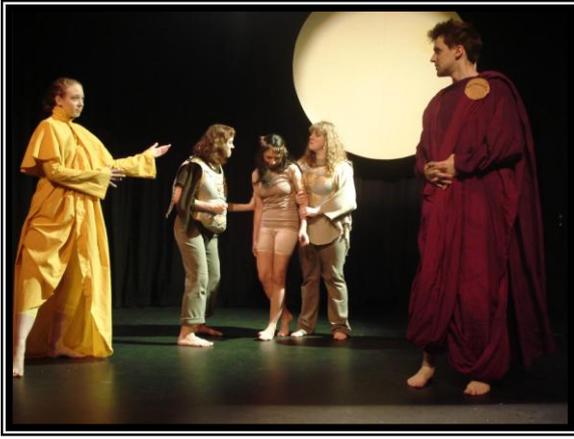
which treats the actors as human ‘puppets,’ as Robert Greene famously called them, in the “author’s theatre” (Helgerson) or “theological theatre” (Shershow) that existed in the 1590s, when the first Shakespearean plays were written.

Performed by the Dark Lady Players and directed by Jenny Greeman, this demonstration at Manhattan Theater Source in Greenwich Village takes the scholarly research that had identified some Shakespearean characters as allegories for the Virgin Mary, and puts it on-stage as “Shakespeare’s Three Virgin Marys.” In her book, *Hamlet’s Choice* (1988), Linda Hoff had shown that Ophelia could be interpreted as an allegory for Virgin Mary, which supplemented Chris Hassel’s article “Annunciation Motifs in *Hamlet*” (1998). This production costumed Ophelia in blue and white cloth, and had the meanings of the address in Hamlet’s letter – actually a large FedEx



envelope so it was visible on-stage – articulated so that, for instance, “celestial” indicates heavenly, while Ophelia is the Greek for Mary’s property of “succour” and “soul’s idol” refers to idolatry. Ophelia was also shown to generate maggots under Hamlet’s gaze when he walked out of the room still looking at her and his eyes “to the last bended their light on me” (2.1.100). This was staged in dumbshow, echoing the later reference to maggots being conceived in carrion (2.1.181-2), thus further alluding to the Renaissance doctrine of how the Virgin Mary conceived through sunshine. Since Hamlet refers to his father as Hyperion, his own allegorical identity as Helios (the sun-god) is signified by his wearing a hat of red and yellow sun-rays. This supports the view that Ophelia has become pregnant through Hamlet’s gaze/sun-rays, paralleling the Mystery Plays that brought sun rays on stage to show the conception of Mary. This pregnancy is dealt with later in the play by the explanation of Ophelia’s flowers – almost all of which are used in abortion recipes, as noted by Newman (1979) and Hunt (2005), for instance. The combination of the Virgin Mary allegory, coupled with the presence of the abortive flowers in depicting Ophelia, points to a covert anti-Christian parody.

One of the most innovative features of this production was director Jenny Greeman’s decision to create a double staging – so that three of the actors performed Shakespeare’s roles, while three other actors performed the equivalent parallel episodes



from a selection of the Towneley and York Mystery Plays. As the triads of actors mirrored each other, the allegorical identity of the Shakespearean characters became very obvious.

The allegories in *Hamlet* were poignantly followed by the Virgin Mary allegories in *Othello*, as identified in part by Steve Sohmer in an article published in *English Literary*

Renaissance in 2002. The character of Othello is partly composed from the anxious, jealous Joseph from the Mystery Plays, while Desdemona is initially addressed as an allegorical Mary and then as an allegorical Jesus. Appropriately, the change takes place on the day on which the gospel reading recounts Joseph's discovery that Mary is with child – and not by him. Again, this reading suggests that the depiction of Desdemona's death is an anti-Christian satire derived from the Mystery Plays. In *Othello*, however, Joseph's jealousy is so extreme that he suffocates his wife in the last hours of Easter Saturday when Jesus lay in the tomb with his *soudarion* (handkerchief) spread over his face. This production echoes this parallel by having Desdemona suffocated with the Handkerchief which indeed is “dyed in mummy” (3.4.76).

The final example is the Nurse's scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, which, as Steve Sohmer suggested in a 2005 article, was partly based on the presentation of Mary at the Temple in the apocryphal gospels. This production shows that the Nurse, whose name we are told elsewhere in the play is Angelica (4.4.5), represents the angel of the Annunciation. This is why the Nurse refers twice to “Susan” (1.3.18-19), since the word comes from Susannah, meaning lily, the standard symbol of the Annunciation. In this production the Nurse, who wears little wings, gives Juliet a large paper lily, while the allegorical cast perform a parallel narrative that reveals the meanings of “Susan” and being “with God” (1. 3.19) as a reference to Emmanuel and to the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 that a virgin shall conceive a child. Finally, in using a consistent elongated pronunciation, the cast makes clear the well-known Elizabethan pun on ‘Mary’ and ‘marry,’ thus indicating very clearly that the Nurse and Lady Capulet are trying to get Juliet mary-ed (i.e. turned into a Mary), which she refuses.

Allegorical and meta-theatrical theater is enjoying something of a revival in shows in the New York Fringe Festival and elsewhere. The Dark Lady Players are planning presentations at several universities in the United States and hope to interest English

Literature and Drama departments in their allegorical approach to Shakespeare's plays. They would welcome an invitation to the UK.

Photos

Dice; Ophelia's conception under the gaze of Hamlet as the allegorical Helios; Confrontation; Wall © (2009) Jonathan Slaff



THE VERNON MANUSCRIPT SYMPOSIUM ANNA GOTTSCHALL

The Vernon Manuscript Symposium, which was held at the Rothmere American Institute, Oxford, on Friday 19 June 2009, registered a great success and celebrated the forthcoming publication of an electronic edition of the Vernon Manuscript (Bodleian Library, MS Eng. Poet. a.1). The event was convened by Professor Wendy Scase in response to the culmination of an AHRC-funded project which had been based in the Department of English at the University of Birmingham and run in conjunction with two project partners: The Bodleian Library and Evellum. The project adds to our knowledge and understanding of the Vernon Manuscript through extensive consideration of its contents, textual and codicological relations, production and reception; gives greater access to the manuscript for researchers whilst addressing conservation concerns; and it also provides a model for the production of electronic facsimiles of large manuscripts.

This venture consisted of the transcription and proofing of each folio of the manuscript using xml files by a team of transcription assistants based at the University of Birmingham. Following a rigorous checking procedure under Dr Rebecca Farnham's and Dr Gavin Cole's supervision, the folios have been united with high resolution images and detailed page descriptions. These have now been transformed into a new digital edition which, for the first time, contains full-colour images, parallel facsimile and transcription of the texts. Further, the digital edition includes descriptions of every page and specialist essays on contents, production, decoration and language. It is expected to be released by Bodleian Digital Texts by the end of 2010.

The day-long Symposium included a preview of the papers to be published in *The Making of the Vernon Manuscript*, which is edited by Professor Scase and forthcoming in 2011, published by Brepols. The Symposium presented three sessions consisting of a

total of nine papers. Professor Scase gave an introduction to the project, describing its aims and the problems encountered in undertaking a team effort which sought to create an accurate and consistent transcription whilst refraining from personal interpretation. Subsequent sessions highlighted the interdisciplinary nature of this project with papers delivered by academics from Birmingham and from further afield on topics broadly categorised as codicology and palaeography, decoration and illustration, and language to an audience forty strong. Elisabeth Kempf and Victoria Gibbons discussed the corrections and titling practices used throughout the manuscript, whilst Dr Ryan Perry presented an in-depth analysis of the Phantom Miracle contained within the manuscript. Dr Rebecca Farnham, the post-doctoral research fellow on the project, gave a detailed description of the border artists alongside Dr Lynda Dennison who discussed the artistic origins of the manuscript and Dr Alison Stone who presented her research on the illustrations within the manuscript and possible French parallels. Finally, Professor Jeremy Smith and Dr Simon Horobin discussed issues related to the dialectal mapping of the manuscript and to the scribes involved in its production.

The event was drawn to a close by Dr Samuel Fanous, co-ordinator at the Bodleian Library. He expressed his delight in creating a corpus of data that would constitute a teaching and research tool which would enable the public to simulate the experience of reading a manuscript through the digitised images and texts. The Symposium provided a great opportunity for students and academics to meet and share ideas on this fascinating manuscript and innovative project.

The highlight of the event was the opportunity to view the original manuscript in the New Bodleian Library, in small groups throughout the day, under the supervision of Senior Assistant Librarian Dr Bruce Barker-Benfield.

The website for the Vernon Manuscript Project can be found at:
<http://www.medievalenglish.bham.ac.uk/vernon/>.