



## An ordinary bus trip

*In the following passage the protagonist reports on his journey Westwards hitchhiking along Route 66, which is a popular highway linking Chicago to Los Angeles.*

It was an ordinary bus trip with crying babies and hot sun, and countryfolk<sup>1</sup> getting on at one Penn<sup>2</sup> town after another, till we got on the plain<sup>3</sup> of Ohio and really rolled<sup>4</sup>, up by Ashtabula<sup>5</sup> and straight across Indiana in the night. I arrived in Chi<sup>6</sup> quite early in the morning, got a room in the Y<sup>7</sup>, and went to bed with a very few dollars in my pocket. I dug<sup>8</sup> Chicago after a good day's sleep.

The wind from Lake Michigan, bop<sup>9</sup> at the Loop<sup>10</sup>, long walks around South Halsted and North Clark<sup>11</sup>, and one long walk after midnight into the jungles<sup>12</sup>, where a cruising car<sup>13</sup> followed me as a suspicious character. At this time, 1947, bop was going like mad all over America. The fellows at the Loop blew<sup>14</sup>, but with a tired air, because bop was somewhere between its Charlie Parker Ornithology<sup>15</sup> period and another period that began with Miles Davis<sup>16</sup>. And as I sat there listening to that sound of the light which bop has come to represent for all of us, I thought of all my friends from one end of the country to the other and how they were really all in the same vast backyard<sup>17</sup> doing something so frantic<sup>18</sup> and rushing-about. And for the first time in my life, the following afternoon, I went into the West. It was a warm and beautiful day for hitchhiking<sup>19</sup>. To get out of the impossible complexities of Chicago traffic I took a bus to Joliet, Illinois, went by the Joliet pen<sup>20</sup>, stationed myself<sup>21</sup> just outside town after a walk through its leafy rickety<sup>22</sup> streets behind, and pointed my way. All the way from New York to Joliet by bus, and I had spent more than half my money.

My first ride was a dynamite truck<sup>23</sup> with a red flag, about thirty miles into great green Illinois, the truckdriver pointing out the place where Route 6<sup>24</sup>, which we were on, intersects Route 66 before they both shoot west for incredible distances. Along about three in the afternoon, after an apple pie and ice cream in a roadside stand<sup>25</sup>, a woman stopped for me in a little coupe<sup>26</sup>. I had a twinge<sup>27</sup> of hard joy as I ran after the car. But she was a middle-aged woman, actually the mother of sons my age, and wanted somebody to help her drive to Iowa<sup>28</sup>. I was all for it<sup>29</sup>. Iowa! Not so far from Denver, and once I got to Denver I could relax. She drove the first few hours, at one point insisted on visiting an old church somewhere, as if we were tourists, and then I took over the wheel<sup>30</sup> and, though I'm not much of a driver, drove clear through the rest of Illinois to Davenport, Iowa, via<sup>31</sup> Rock Island. And here for the first time in my life I saw my beloved Mississippi River, dry in the summer haze<sup>32</sup>, low water, with its big rank smell<sup>33</sup> that smells like the raw body of America itself because it washes it up. Rock Island – railroad tracks, shacks, small downtown section; and over the bridge to Davenport, same kind of town, all smelling of sawdust<sup>34</sup> in the warm midwest sun. Here the lady had to go on to her Iowa hometown by another route, and I got out.

The sun was going down. I walked, after a few cold beers, to the edge of town, and it was a long walk. All the men were driving home from work, wearing railroad hats, baseball hats, all kinds of hats, just like after work in any town anywhere. One of them gave me a ride up the hill and left me at a lonely crossroads on the edge of the prairie. It was beautiful there. The only cars that came by were farmer-cars; they gave me suspicious looks, they clanked along<sup>35</sup>, the cows were coming home. Not a truck. A few cars zipped by<sup>36</sup>. A hotrod kid<sup>36</sup> came by with his scarf flying. The sun went all the way down and I was standing in the purple darkness. Now I was scared. There weren't even any lights in the Iowa countryside; in a minute nobody would be able to see me. Luckily a man going back to Davenport gave me a lift downtown. But I was right where I started from.

Jack Kerouac  
*On the Road*  
(1957)

Part One, Chapter 3

- 1 countryfolk. Gente di paese.
- 2 Penn. Pennsylvania.
- 3 rolled. Viaggiammo molto velocemente.
- 4 Ashtabula. Città americana.
- 5 Chi. Chicago.
- 6 Y. Forma abbreviata di YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association), che offre ai giovani alberghi a buon prezzo.
- 7 dug. Apprezzai.
- 8 bop. Stile di musica jazz.
- 9 Loop. Il centro di Chicago, così chiamato perché circondato da un anello di ferrovia.
- 10 South ... Clark. Due strade centrali di Chicago.
- 11 jungles. Quartieri poveri.
- 12 cruising car. Macchina della polizia.
- 13 blew. Suonavano strumenti a fiato.
- 14 Charlie ... Ornithology. Il titolo di un pezzo jazz di Charlie Parker.
- 15 Miles Davis. Famoso trombettista del gruppo di Charlie Parker.
- 16 backyard. Giardino sul retro di una casa.
- 17 frantic. Pazzo.
- 18 hitchhiking. Fare l'autostop.
- 19 Joliet pen. Il penitenziario di Joliet.
- 20 stationed myself. Mi piantai.
- 21 leafy rickety. Ombrose sconnesse.
- 22 truck. Autocarro.
- 23 Route 6. Statale 6.
- 24 roadside stand. Chiosco sulla strada.
- 25 coupe. Vettura piccola chiusa.
- 26 twinge. Fitta.
- 27 to ... Iowa. Aiutarla a guidare fino in Iowa.
- 28 I ... for it. Mi ci buttai a pesce.
- 29 I ... wheel. Presi io il volante.
- 30 via. Passando per.
- 31 haze. Caligine.
- 32 rank smell. Forte odore.
- 33 smelling of sawdust. Odorosa di segatura.
- 34 they clanked along. Passavano sferragliando.
- 35 zipped by. Sfrecciarono via.
- 36 hotrod kid. Un ragazzo su una macchina dal motore truccato.

**LITERARY COMPETENCE****> VOCABULARY****1 READ the text and match the highlighted words with their Italian translation.**

- 1 camionista .....
- 2 schizzassero .....
- 3 baracche .....
- 4 periferia .....
- 5 pianura, piana .....
- 6 stavamo percorrendo .....
- 7 convulso .....
- 8 nudo e crudo .....

**> COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING A TEXT****2 FIND a heading for each of the three sections of the text.**

- Part 1 (lines 1-19): .....
- Part 2 (lines 20-35): .....
- Part 3 (lines 36-47): .....

**3 READ the first section and answer the following questions.**

- 1 Who was travelling on an ordinary bus?
- 2 Which town did the protagonist reach?
- 3 Where did he stay for the night?
- 4 How did he spend the following day?
- 5 What did he do while listening to 'bop' sounds?
- 6 What was he going to do in the following afternoon?

**4 READ the second section and note down**

- the protagonist's first ride;
- who gave him a lift afterwards;
- whether he 'took over the wheel';
- what he saw for the first time in his life.

**5 READ the text to the end and say whether the following statements are true or false. Correct the false ones.**

- 1 He walked to the edge of the town.
- 2 Lots of men driving home from work passed him by without stopping.
- 3 The narrator was afraid of not being seen, since there were no lights in the countryside.
- 4 He decided to walk downtown.

**> COMPETENCE: ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING A TEXT****6 FOCUS on the narrative method.**

- 1 Who narrates the events?
- 2 How does the narrative technique affect the way the reader perceives the whole scene?
- 3 The narrator is presented through his actions. List them and say who/what they are related to.
- 4 From what he does, what kind of man do you think he is?
- 5 What does travelling mean for him?



**7** **DEFINE** the language used by Kerouac in this extract.

**8** **IDENTIFY** all the natural descriptions. How is nature perceived by the narrator?

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➤ **COMPETENCE: PRODUCING A WRITTEN TEXT ON A GIVEN SUBJECT**

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**9** **WRITE** a 10/12-line paragraph about the following topic: 'The myth of the journey has been dealt with in many different ways: from epic to autobiographical narration, with introspective or exotic tones. In what literary works and films that you know does the journey play an important role?'