

Abstract

The aim of the present study is to account for the significance of mobility in American culture and its reflection in literature. In order to reach this goal, the thesis observes the role of mobility in the history of the United States, its transformation in the twentieth century, and the manifestation of this motif in the works of Jack Kerouac. Through the analysis of his novels, including *On the Road*, *The Dharma Bums*, *Desolation Angels*, *Lonesome Traveler*, and *Big Sur*, the thesis identifies some of the recurrent themes associated with the motif of journey and further interprets them in the context of postwar America. With the support of an array of secondary literature, this research approaches mobility as a constitutive part of the American identity and Jack Kerouac as one of its most ardent advocates.

The introduction probes the contemporary preoccupation with space and the necessity of interrogating its intersection with time. While incorporating both of these dimensions, movement is identified as a manifestation of this intersection and it is distinguished from mobility as lacking the meaning acquired through culture. In order to explain this process of acquiring meaning, the link between mobility and narrative is established and its presence in literature observed. It is subsequently argued that the pervasiveness of the motif of journey in literature is due to its potential for accommodating other symbolic meanings. Some of these meanings are identified within the introduction, while others are revealed and discussed in the subsequent chapters.

The objective of the second chapter is to explore the way mobility entered American literature and consciousness. A brief historical overview of migration into and within the country is provided, along with the introduction of the essential concepts connected to mobility in the United States, such as the Great West and the frontier. The changing approaches to traveling in the twentieth century are also identified. The second half of this chapter examines the reflection of this preoccupation with mobility in the literature of the nation and compares the American travel narrative with its European literary predecessors.

The third chapter offers an account of the Beat Generation, its philosophy and basic premises, as well as the political context of its contemporary age. The difficulty of providing a concise definition of this group is explained along with the indeterminacy in terms of the movement's actual duration. This chapter also focuses on the importance of mobility in the lives and literature of the Beat Generation. While its members were often in opposition to the dominant values of American society, their obsession with movement reflected a similar tendency inherent in the nation's character.

The practical part of the study is presented in chapter four, which analyzes the novels of Jack Kerouac in the light of the previous observations. The theme of mobility in his literature is approached with respect to the findings of former research done in this field. The chapter is divided according to the individual interpretations of the motif of journey throughout Kerouac's oeuvre and provides a detailed analysis of this motif in each of the novels in question. These interpretations perceive mobility as an enterprise for its own sake, as a spiritual quest, social protest and liberation, and transformation. The last section describes the way in which both Kerouac and America itself developed over the course of the author's life.

The conclusion reiterates the objectives of this research and emphasizes its outcomes. The chief purpose of this segment is to recognize the contribution of the Beat Generation to the American literary canon and the participatory role of Jack Kerouac in the construction of the American identity.

Key words: mobility, journey, road, Jack Kerouac, Beat Generation, American literature, identity, travel narrative, transformation, liberation, spiritual quest, social protest, West