

Supervisor's Review

"Your Goal Is Your Starting Place:"

The Transformative Forces of the Road in the Novels of Jack Kerouac

by Barbora Šedivá

(MA thesis, 2019)

Building on a wide array of sources and based on solid research, Ms. Šedivá's MA thesis, *"Your Goal Is Your Starting Place:" The Transformative Forces of the Road in the Novels of Jack Kerouac*, is a well-structured and convincingly presented study of mobility in the general context of American society and culture and in the major novels of Jack Kerouac.

Ms. Šedivá opens her thesis with an aptly chosen quotation from Michel Foucault's lecture "Of Other Spaces", in which the French philosopher claims that, as opposed to the 19th century obsession with history and time in general, the key subject of the present age is space: "space itself has a history in Western experience, and it is not possible to disregard the fatal intersection of time with space". Using Foucault's observation as the point of departure in her introduction, Ms. Šedivá states that "the most vital expression of this intersection is movement" – and dedicates the second chapter of her thesis to a thorough analysis of movement and mobility in the history of the United States, showing how said concepts found their way to the American (un)consciousness and, indeed, culture and literature.

Having done that, she subsequently introduces the Beat authors as a specifically American phenomenon, explaining that their treatment of mobility, among other things, makes their writing, philosophy and ethics deeply rooted in the American tradition, shaping the very tradition in return – as she concludes in the third chapter: "The Beat Generation contributed its share in the shaping of the American consciousness and survived as an indispensable part of the nation's identity." While her own view of the Beat Generation is, by and large, positive (one might say *too positive* at times), she does not fail to take into account the movement's fierce critics, from superficial mass-media reviews to substantial critiques by major figures of American letters, such as Norman Podhoretz or Leslie Fiedler. (Their findings and objections to the Beats might possibly be dealt with here with more vigor – but that is one of the very few reservations I have regarding the present thesis.)

The fourth chapter forms the crux of the thesis: moving from the realm of theory to that of interpretation and practical criticism, Ms. Šedivá analyzes selected Kerouac's novels – namely *On the Road*, *The Dharma Bums*, *Desolation Angels*, *Lonesome Traveler*, and *Big Sur*, referring to other Kerouac works whenever needed – through the prism of mobility/movement/road motif, drawing on the conclusions from the previous chapters. Combining the close reading of Kerouac's novels with biographical approach (which is only appropriate, given how closely interlinked life and literature are in Kerouac's case), she corroborates her own – and other critics' – theoretical assumptions on the transformative power of the road motif in Jack Kerouac's oeuvre with abundance of material.

All in all, Ms. Šedivá's thesis is a very fine piece of academic writing, undoubtedly meeting our department's standards; I am suggesting a grade of *excellent/ výborně*.

Petr Onufer, PhD

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