



FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA
DEPARTAMENTO DE FILOLOXÍA INGLESA E
ALEMANA

Grao en Lingua e Literatura Inglesas

THE ROAD IN AMERICAN LITERATURE AND FILM

JACK KEROUAC'S LEGACY

Autora: Natalia Estévez Benítez

Director: Anxo Abuín González

Curso Académico 2013 – 2014



FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA
DEPARTAMENTO DE FILOLOXÍA INGLESA E
ALEMANA

Grao en Lingua e Literatura Inglesas

THE ROAD IN AMERICAN LITERATURE AND FILM
JACK KEROUAC'S LEGACY

Autora: Natalia Estévez Benítez

Director: Anxo Abuín González

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'N. Estévez Benítez', written in a cursive style.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Anxo Abuín González', written in a cursive style.

Curso Académico 2013 – 2014

CONTENTS

Introduction	4
1. Generic Features	7
2. The Road Before Kerouac	12
2. 1. Road Novels Before <i>On the Road</i>	12
2. 2. Road Movies Before <i>On the Road</i>	14
3. Kerouac And The Road Genre	17
3. 1. Road Novels After <i>On the Road</i>	20
3. 2. Road Movies After <i>On the Road</i>	23
3. 2. 1. The Ultimate Road Movie: <i>Easy Rider</i>	26
3. 2. 2. The Trivialization Of The Genre: <i>The Straight Story</i>	32
Conclusion	37
Notes	40
Works cited	42
Filmography	45
Appendix 1. Data Sheet: <i>Easy Rider</i>	46
Appendix 2. Data Sheet: <i>The Straight Story</i>	47
Appendix 3. Selected Chronology	48

INTRODUCTION

The road has been an enduring icon of American history and culture from the accounts of the first settlers to present-day literature, including frontier narratives. The nation was built upon social and spatial mobility: the American dream about prosperity and improvement was accompanied by the long quests for a home of natives, pilgrims, settlers, pioneers, slaves or immigrants. This mixture gave birth to a particular sense of stability and independence that has stuck to American society. In that way, the conceptions of “identity” and “self-discovery” are almost inseparable from that of “journey”, as if the ultimate internal and social voyage could only be achieved through a physical one, in Ronald Primeau’s words: “[w]hereas most travelers of old in pilgrimages or quest romances moved with deliberation toward goals, Americans were nomadic in their trust that the power of movement itself would bring happiness, success, and fulfillment” (18). Thus, we are able to realize how the road acquires a particular sensibility in the American context, separating their idea of mobility from –especially– the Europeans’ one, becoming a sort of foundational myth.¹

Having this in mind, it is no surprise finding that highway literature is one of the most popular cultural forms in America, as well as road movies, proving Jean Baudrillard right: “in the U.S., culture is [...] space, speed, cinema, technology” (100). As a consequence, both genres have been studied for its intrinsic Americanness. Nevertheless, we have to be very careful when talking about the thruway as a literary genre because people began to notice its characteristics only after the 1950s. The same applies to road movies, since “the term first circulated to describe a group of New American films of the late 1960s and early 1970s that were very much about being ‘on the road’ ” (Laderman, “Road Movies” 417).

As we can see, the 60s are crucial to the constitution of these genres, but why? Maybe it is no coincidence that Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* was published in 1957 and that films like *Easy Rider* (Hopper, 1969) were made during the following years; in fact it is said that "[Kerouac] created [...] the prototype of the genre that others developed and modified over the next three decades" (Primeau 26). Moreover, Beat writers saw in the road the "space for exploring existential dilemmas of freedom and its close counterpart, alienation" (Potteiger and Purinton 277), so they open up the way for those who wanted to explore "issues of nationhood, economics, sexuality, gender, class, and race" (Cohan and Hark 12) through the motorway.

The aim of this essay is to dig on the reasons to consider the 60s as the major turning point in highway literature and cinema, and *On the Road* as a foundational text to both. In order to do that, we will divide this work into three main sections. First of all we will explore the generic characteristics of both road novels and movies. On the second section we will study the antecedents of the genre. Then we will focus on the influence of Kerouac's work with a general view of the literary and cinematic panorama after 1957, to conclude with the analysis of two movies: *Easy Rider* and *The Straight Story* (Lynch, 1999); observing the evolution of the genre in relation to Kerouac's masterpiece.

The objects of study would only be narratives with an American setting, on one hand due to the extension of this work; on the other because "it has [...] been said to be a distinctly American genre" (Ganser 40) –due to the particular meaning of the road to Americans.² It is also important to realize that we will mainly deal with literary motorway narratives –including autobiographies-, but the thruway is also found in non-literary texts (Ganser 39, Primeau 53). The reason for selecting novels over other forms has to do with Bakhtin's conception of them as polyphonic, along with his idea of the

road as one of the best chronotopes³ for interpersonal encounters: “[o]n the road [...], the spatial and temporal paths of the most varied people – representatives of all social classes, estates, religions, nationalities, ages – intersect at one spatial and temporal point” (Bakhtin 243). The reason for choosing films is that from its origins –Muybridge and the Lumière brothers- directors have been interested in movement. It is also appealing the fact that road movies are considered to shape “a unique yet essential genre of American cinema” and that they have attracted “filmmakers from all over the cinematic map” (Laderman, “Road Movies” 417), gaining followers since the 60s.

From now on, we will use “road / highway narratives” to refer to films and novels, along with “road genre” to point at literature and cinema.

1. GENERIC FEATURES

Before considering the features of the road genre it would be advisable to notice the difficulty of studying such a thing. Since “the only common diegetic characteristic shared by all road novels is that the road is the major setting which informs the narrative plot” (Ganser 40), the variety of titles that can fall under the label “highway narrative” is enormously vast. In order to limit our scope we will remember that our interest is on a) those works in which the motorway becomes a primary element, not a mere setting or background; b) those in which the vehicle means transportation but it is also an extension of the body (Laderman, *Driving Visions*13); and c) those works that use the trip to eulogize American social vastness, nor its natural landscape neither some exotic foreign reality: “it is the sociohistorical heterogeneity of one’s own country that is revealed and depicted” (Bakhtin 245).

As we have already mentioned, the scope of the road genre is quite big. One of the reasons for this wideness lays on the variety of literary and artistic genres/traditions from which it derives: the picaresque, the quest, the *Bildungsroman*, the travelogue, the pastoral, the story of initiation (Bahktin 243-245; Lackey 5-14; Barros 1-13), painting and photography (Salles). As a result, road narratives tend to play with a great quantity of themes and forms, blurring the boundaries between genres –like adventure or drama-, which is why Neil Campbell talks about “transgenre” (279). However, although malleable and wide, the literary genre is also formulaic, that is, it follows a series of particular conventions and fixed patterns that authors have played with over the years (Primeau 15), as in the case of cinema.

The clearest feature of the road genre is that its chronotope is the American thruway. Yet, as pointed above, it is important to acknowledge that the presence of a highway has to be carefully studied, because the thoroughfare has to become a character, not a mere

setting. It is not that much about driving as it is about experiencing, living, interiorizing the journey. Furthermore, we must say that the motorway has been analyzed as a dual space, “both glorified and feared” (Barros 6). The road is linked to the Garden of Eden because of the frontier myth and the Romantic sense of freedom and individualism; but it is also compared to hell, an unfamiliar territory where we, in our exile, can meet our deepest fear. By the same token, the path is also the place for redemption and emancipation, a transitional gate between “a vanished past and a possibly redemptive future” (Barros 6). Besides, we should not forget that the open highway, in opposition to civilization, offers a) the idea of a less consumerist way of life –but we should not take this for granted since this is also the space of motels, gas stations, and nearby amusement parks⁴; and b) the freedom of indulge, versus law and social restrictions (Holladay and Holton 39-40).

Thematically the most popular issue tends to be the search for identity, although the road genre can address a great variety of topics. In fact, self-discovery itself can be about sexuality, race, nationhood, violence, freedom, conformity, etc. Furthermore, when talking about themes, we should also consider the reasons for departure, since they could clarify what the work is about. Janis P. Stout in *The Journey Narrative in America Literature* identifies five basic recurrent patterns: exploration and escape, home-founding, return, heroic quest, and wandering. Trips may start as a way to escape from ordinary life, responsibility or social restrictions; other reasons may be the search for inspiration, as well as the aim for adventure and wanderlust –which could have nothing to do with an identity crisis. In that way, it is also well worth saying that coerced movement is sometimes regarded with skepticism, as if the highway could only be experienced if voluntarily. Related to the reasons for starting a journey, there are cases in which the pattern of the quest is followed, that is, goal-oriented stories: a

journey to find/recover something –even your “self”-; but there are others that depart from this model and hitting the road is “motivated solely by a need to escape”(Talbot 36), in those cases the character would be a nomad:

The nomad operates in opposition to the migrant who moves from one clearly defined destination to another, who retains nostalgia for his “origins”, as he pursues a purposeful progress. For the nomad, just as there can be no arrival there is no fixed point of departure and no point of origin. Indeed, the nomad resists this very sense of fixed territory, her consciousness emerging as a site of political and epistemological resistance. (Barros 7)

When looking at the plot, it is also worth saying that in the cases of exploration and escape, home-founding, return or heroic quest, we perceive unity and clear-cut parts: beginning - middle - ending; whereas in the case of wandering stories the genre tends to open-ended structures and episodic style. In the fashion of literature, “[b]y foregrounding the journey in a nomadic vein, the road movie evokes a countercinema in relation to classical narrative (just as its themes generally tend to be countercultural)” (Laderman, *Driving Visions*17). In addition, as heirs of the tradition of travelogue and myths, road narratives follow the structure of what Joseph Campbell coined ‘monomyth’ in *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. Like the hero’s journey’s narrative pattern, our products tend to be divided into three main parts: departure - journey - arrival. This resemblance is particularly seen in the case of goal-oriented stories: the driver, like the hero, abandons his daily environment to go on adventure and, after experiencing personal growth and overcoming obstacles, comes back home –or arrives at a new place- with the thing to find/recover, or some especial knowledge that may help him face life. It is also remarkable noticing how frequently some of the stages of the monomyth appear in road narratives: ‘ordinary world’, ‘the crossing of the first threshold’, ‘the road of trials’, ‘the ultimate boon’, or, the last stage, ‘freedom to live’. Nevertheless, this structure is not always followed; as Christopher Vogler pointed out in

The Writer's Journey, these stages may be altered, suppressed or added to (19). In the same way, Ganser says that the tripartite structure of highway novels “has been repeatedly challenged in terms of its linear, teleological implications, especially in postmodern literature” (40).

Concerning the characters that may appear, we have to mention that the identification ‘protagonist – driver’ is not always going to be possible or accurate. The road genre tends to focus “on a driver/passenger couple –usually boy-girl [...] or buddy-buddy [...]. Other less common variations include parent-child and cop-prisoner” (Laderman, “Road Movies” 418). However, we can also find the journey of a larger group –e.g. families, rock bands, ethnic groups, religious communities-, or individual journeys: lone drivers. As a consequence, our highway questers may not be drivers, but passengers. Concurrently, since this genre is not as much about controlling the steering wheel as it is about experiencing the motorway, our protagonists may even be hitchhikers who are sometimes passengers, other wanderers and, in limited cases, drivers. Another important point to consider would be the variety of people that main characters could find along the way, which is linked to Bakhtin’s thoughts about the thruway as the place where different social groups collide and dialogue: “[p]eople who are normally kept separate by social and spatial distance can accidentally meet; any contrast may crop up, the most various fates may collide and interweave with one another” (243). This idea is extremely relevant since the process of development that a character undergoes takes place because of the obstacles he overcomes, but also because of the people he meets. During the journey the protagonist is going to learn something from all the characters he encounters, to finally rise as a new individual that has interiorized the acquired knowledge –although this pattern is not always followed.

Another feature, somehow connected with the different social groups that we find crisscrossing the country, is that road stories are cultural texts that articulate Raymond Williams's division of ideology in dominant, residual and emergent values. This would account for the popularity of the genre, and also explain why it is "often at once old fashioned, conventional, and revolutionary" (Primeau 4). The highway has the power to represent the values of the dominant culture, in most cases as a critique; but it can refer to the old elements that are still precious for a culture –i.e. residual- and to the new ones as well. By the same token, we should remark that the throughway has always being linked to the values of white males, as Deborah Paes De Barros affirms:

In accounts of the American road narrative, women and people of color occupy only a liminal periphery. Women and minority authors have historically been largely dismissed from discussions of road literature. [...] The road of travel narratives is the road of the colonizer rather than the colonized. (3-4)

Nevertheless, when women and minorities go for a ride, they update the conventions of the genre by bringing different approaches. Thus, we can see that the motorway offers a plurality of voices, that is, the road genre does not only comprise the hegemonic perspective.⁵ Through this kind of products we perceive that "America would not turn out to be a single reality but a series of conflicting realities" (Bloom 28).

Besides this, in the particular case of road movies, the genre prefers cars or motorcycles. To transmit the driving sensation, it is very characteristic the use of the mobile camera, travelling shots and a good soundtrack. Additionally, according to Devin Orgeron these films "create in the viewer the seductive illusion of motion by locking the viewer's gaze into the three elements that make up the road film –subject, vehicle, and landscape" (104).

2. THE ROAD BEFORE KEROUAC

We could consider that one of the first studies on road narratives was made by Bakhtin in 1937 when talking about the chronotope and how it affected literary genres; but it was not until the 60s that generic features came to be noticed. This gap in time could be related to one theory previously mentioned: *On the Road* "brought formal recognition of the cultural ritual, and the genre began to accumulate its own distinctive features" (Primeau 8). What is more, Kerouac's generation was, in general, relevant for the evolution of the idea of movement because "[n]o group of postwar writers explored the prerogatives of 'mobility' more profoundly than the Beats" (Martínez 4) in their search for alternative systems of values in a paranoid nation.⁶

2.2. ROAD NOVELS BEFORE *ON THE ROAD*

On one hand we could say that the history of road narratives began even before the modern automobile was produced, due to the variety of literary and artistic traditions from which the genre derives. It is grounded on works such as the *Odyssey*, *Don Quixote*, *The Canterbury Tales*, *Lazarillo de Tormes*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Walt Whitman's "Song of the Open Road". On the other hand, American road narratives appeared few years after the Benz Patent-Motorwagen was built (1886), particularly around 1893 when Frederick Jackson Turner announced the closing of the frontier land, that is: the disappearance of the inspirational force that encourage Americans to progress. After the Frontier Thesis, the American society had to find another source of innovation, that according to Primeau "was brought about by the motorways" (22-23). Surprisingly, also in 1893 the considered first American automobile appeared: Charles E. and J. Frank Duryea's gasoline motor car.

It is true that early highway literature was totally devoted to the automobile, most of these texts were actually promotional campaigns about races and trials. Others were about adventurous journeys by car –inspired by Phineas Fogg⁷- like Emily Post’s autobiographical *By Motor To The Golden Gate* (1916). This tendency continued in vogue for several years with works like B. Massey’s *It Might Have Been Worse* (1920). Nevertheless, the great influence of this new type of mobility lays on the fact that through the road the frontier values seemed to remain, “what had been migration turned into circulation” (Primeau 23).

During the 20s and 30s car travel turned into a characteristic of society, and soon into a new form of entertainment –e.g. the Sunday drive and motor racing-, because of the improvement of roads and the fact that automobiles became more affordable. The restlessness of the period perfectly matched faster vehicles and the possibilities that they brought with them: escape, freedom and easier mobility. In that way, novels of those days tend to include the automobile and its speed, for instances *The Great Gatsby* (1921), *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and *Tobacco Road* (1932). Focusing on highway literature we find S. Lewis’ *Free Air* (1919) and Stockett’s *America: First, Fast, and Furious* (1930), tributes to the freedom of car travel; or John Dos Passos’s *The 42nd Parallel* (1930) and Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), two novels that present the American ideal of mobility as a way to achieve progress –going back to the frontier myth. These lines were also predominant during the 40s with novels like B. O’Shea’s *A Long Way from Boston* (1946) and its pursuit of happiness. Furthermore, we find again works based on autobiographical experiences such as Miller’s *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* (1945), in the fashion of Dreiser’s *A Hoosier Holiday* (1916). The popularity of the automobile was astonishing between 1920 and 1930,

leading to social –e.g. women’s mobility-, architectural and economic changes –e.g. roadside services.

The first half of the 40s was marked by World War II and gasoline shortages, but towards the end of the decade and the beginning of the 50s America experienced postwar prosperity. It was the golden age of the automobile with “the full flowering of outdoor drive-in movie theaters, [...] drive-in restaurants, [...] drive-in churches; and even drive-in funeral parlors” (Berger xxv). However, this is also the time of the first critiques to cars concerning pollution and road safety: “reports of murderous hitchhikers, mobile thieves, and outlaw lovers on the lam” (Holladay and Horton 37) spread terror over the country. Besides, this is the period of paranoia, conformity, McCarthyism, insecurity and anxiety. Needless to say, this stifling context was reflected in subversive works such as *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), *Invisible Man* (1952) and *Howl* (1956). Concerning highway literature, the 50s were characterized by the progressive disregard for Victorian respectability, as we see through Thompson’s *Roughneck* (1954), Nabokov’s *Lolita* (1955) or Algren’s *A Walk on the Wild Side* (1956). In this context started Kerouac to publish the novels that would constitute the Duluoz Legend.

2.3. ROAD MOVIES BEFORE *ON THE ROAD*

As mentioned in the introduction, we cannot talk about a distinct genre until the 60s. Nevertheless, we find a fascination for cars at the very first stages of cinema with filmmakers like Griffith (Laderman, *Driving Visions* 3). Orgeron finds more precedents in a series of short films of early 20th century that relate the automobile to domesticity. In a time when highway literature was emerging as a way to promote the virtues of the car, these films tried to present the new machines as no threat to family values but, still,

as dangerous. The plot was basically about an eloping couple that has to come back when their car breaks down, praising “the protection and stability offered by home and the home’s contrast with the characters’ shortsighted attempts to escape to worlds of mobility and freedom” (41). This category comprises titles like *An Acadian Elopement* (1907), *A Change in Heart* (1909), *An Interrupted Elopement* (1912) and *A Beast at Bay* (1912). There are also cases in which the car is presented as a threat without the presence of the eloping couple, as in *Sunshine Sue* (1910). Orgeron states they are relevant because what we see here is what will happen in the 60s’ road movies: “[t]he car is a means of escape, or so it seems, from the confines of home and paternal law” (40).

As Laderman explains, in 30s’ classical films we can also find some of the features that would later on characterize road movies, such as dramatic driving sequences in gangster films. More relevant would be those cases in which mobility is introduced as part of the political critique conveyed: *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (LeRoy, 1932), *Wild Boys of the Road* (Wellman, 1933), *You Only Live Once* (Lang, 1937) or *The Grapes of Wrath* (Ford, 1940). At the same time we find screwball comedies that, going back to earlier fashions, connect the highway with a couple, the most famous example being *It Happened One Night* (Capra, 1934). Laderman also points out that Westerns have crucial influence on road movies, therefore many of them “allude to cowboy treks through an untamed wilderness, such as *Stagecoach* (1939), *Red River* (1948), and *The Searchers* (1956)” (“Road Movies” 418).

During the 40s is essential the influence of *Detour* (Ulmer, 1945). The connection between our genre, film noir and the outlaw couple arises at a time when the motorway was surrounded by media reports about murders. Thus, this decade gave birth to *The Devil Thumbs a Ride* (Feist, 1947), *They Live By Night* (Ray, 1948), *Gun Crazy* (Lewis, 1950) and *The Hitch-Hiker* (Lupino, 1953); but it also could be seen as the womb of

later titles like *Bonnie and Clyde* (Penn, 1967), *The Hitcher* (Harmon, 1986), *Delusion* (Colpaert, 1991) and *Joy Ride* (Dahl, 2001).

The following decade is characterized by the divided society: conformists and rebels. Thus, comedies about riding across the country like *Road to Bali* (Walker, 1952), *The Long, Long Trailer* (Minnelli, 1953); and *Hollywood or Bust* (Tashlin, 1956) contrasted with subversive titles such as *The Wild One* (Benedek, 1953) and *Rebel Without a Cause* (Ray, 1955) –which are not road movies. In this decade, as Laderman claims, “road movies are rather scarce”; but literary contributions to the genre are truly relevant for its evolution during the countercultural years, with a clear influence over the masterpiece of the period: *Easy Rider* (“Road Movies” 418-419). One of these literary works, and the most relevant concerning the genre under study, is Kerouac’s *On the Road*.

3. KEROUAC AND THE ROAD GENRE

After a long, turbulent and mythologized process (Holladay and Holton 8-34), *On the Road* was published in September 1957, followed by positive and negative reviews. Critics like Gilbert Millstein –*New York Times*– saw Kerouac’s work as an articulation of the reality of the Beat Generation; although “[t]he Atlantic, the Chicago Tribune, Time, the Nation, Harper’s, and others all issued condemnations. The book was variously panned for its writing style, its structure, its tone, its intelligence, and its morality” (Holladay and Holton 2).

Misunderstood and attacked –personally and artistically– by critics of his time, Kerouac was idolized by his fans: he was the voice that would denounce the conformity of American society. He captured the spirit of the period like Fitzgerald did with the ‘Roaring Twenties’, but the novel’s serious claims and aesthetic innovations were neglected, hidden under the massive appearance of beatniks and the author’s supposed bad influence over youngsters (Swartz 53, 102). Kerouac’s work seemed to be tied to the subculture of the 50s, *On the Road* a novel to be forgotten, but that was not the case.

Not only did the subculture transform itself into a counterculture and grow exponentially over the next decade or so, the novel outlived all this. [...] As a new postwar sensibility began to emerge, *On the Road* remained one of its key texts. It was both a catalyst and a signifier of generalized dissent for a broad range of (mostly) young people from the political New Left to cultural rebels such as Bob Dylan and prominent literary figures such as Thomas Pynchon. (Holladay and Holton 4)

Despite the fact that the novel is based on biographical experiences of the 40s, *On the Road* became a cornerstone to resistance movements and narratives fighting the stifling and hypocritical America of the late 50s and 60s, characterized by racism, capitalism, McCarthyism and the Vietnam War. But its influence didn’t stop there, the book remains popular and, progressively, gains academic recognition. In fact, “so much of the

novel has percolated so thoroughly through the culture” (Feeney) that it has become some kind of “bible” (Barros 6) when talking about America.

The social relevance of this book, claims Omar Swartz, lies in its rhetoric: the American system of values was obsolete and Kerouac proposed a new one based on marginal lifestyles. In a time of revolution and change, “Kerouac constructs systems of meaning that influence a reader’s life decisions” (Swartz 27); Dean became an archetype of social deviance in a period of repression, and the novel sent a message to change –or at least to be aware of- social reality. Through Sal’s experience across the country, the writer promoted plurality and alternative systems of values; through his reappropriation of the myths about America as the wonderland or the land of opportunity, he denounced that the nation was turning into a wasteland. Using his – nowadays- acclaimed ‘spontaneous bop prosody’ based on jazz models (Weinreich 39), Kerouac was able to transmit the general disillusion with the American dream. With Dean and Sal we learn that neither the solution/answer, nor “IT”, may be found on the thruway, unlike Steinbeck and previous writers conveyed.

From this information we can understand the social impact of this literary masterpiece; but we can also connect Kerouac’s critique of society to how he (re)shaped the road genre. A new vision of the thoroughfare was born with him, as he initiated Janis P. Stout’s category “lost and wandering”: the trip of two nomadic souls without destination, motivated by the questionable search of “IT” and Dean’s father.

Maybe one of the most striking innovations is that *On the Road* is not a mere celebration of the motorway because, contrarily, the book uses the highway to represent one side of the American dream that is destructive (Weinreich 48). Unlike Whitman’s “Song of the Open Road”, the romanticized purity of the thruway and its identification with freedom fades here: the journey cannot fulfill Sal’s desires, and the supposed hero

of the road –i.e. Dean- turns out to be a negative force, “a burning shuddering frightful Angel” (Kerouac 259). With *On the Road* the asphalt acquires negative connotations: it destroys families and cities, it is linked to poverty, and –in contrast with the sense of freedom- it has restrictions, that is, it can be oppressive too (Holladay and Holton 48-56). Thus, we perceive that society is criticized by reversing a symbol that was rooted in American identity, in other words, Kerouac takes the road and talks about violence of motion in a culture grounded on the benefits of mobility.

Nonetheless, we have to bear in mind that Kerouac didn't introduce new conventions. *On the Road* is original and a turning point because of the mixture between wild form, the nomadic elements that earlier narratives already had and the emphasis on the subversive aim –which derives from the general protest background of the 50s. What is more, this novel is so crucial to highway narratives because it comprises a lot of generic features, whereas in previous cases we see neither such a fusion, nor such a variety of themes and techniques: “[h]e was not the first to live on the road or to celebrate that life in literary form, but he did have an exceptional understanding of the genre's potential to at once protest the current scene and return to the values of Whitman and the Buddha” (Primeau 37). Whereas he introduced no new conventions, it is true that he reshaped some of them, the most remarkable one being his modification of the quest romance. As Regina Weinreich explains, previous road narratives followed the pattern of old romance and Cervantes's modification of it –the knight/hero is accompanied by the squire-, but this novel constitutes elegiac romance:

In elegiac romance the knight does not change at all; like Dean, [...] his character remains constant. Instead, the squire, like Sal, is the center of attention. It is his character that develops and it is his enlightenment we must try to understand. [...] He accomplishes this task by telling a story about a person who represents loss to him in some sense [...] but whom he still admires. (37-38)

Since 1957, trips do not have to end with the hero accomplishing his task. In fact, following Cervantes's tradition, the hero does not have to be a hero. In other words, Dean is an outcast, a loser that becomes relevant only because the squire –Sal– admires him, “the act of believing in Dean actually brings Dean about –makes him, renews him, creates him” (Bloom 208).

In that way, *On the Road* made people, including authors, aware of the possibilities of the pavement, and that it could constitute a genre because it had specific features. As David Laderman points out, Kerouac created a prototype since “[s]everal of the novel’s more specific thematic and stylistic preoccupations prove useful both in describing the road movie as a genre and in outlining its ideological contours and contradictions” (*Driving Visions* 10).

3.1. ROAD NOVELS AFTER *ON THE ROAD*

After 1957 we have Kerouac’s continuation of the Duluoz Legend with *The Subterraneans*, *Dharma Bums* (1958) and *Lonesome Traveler* (1960). Moreover, in later *Visions of Cody* (1972) he relates some of the trips already depicted in *On the Road*, Sal becomes Jack Dulouz and Dean is Cody Pomeroy. In this 70s’ novel we find more meditation than action, but structural experimentation is stronger.

Influenced by Kerouac’s visions of marginal lifestyles, during the 60s and 70s we will find nonfiction road books about segregation like Griffin’s *Black Like Me* (1961) and Williams’s *This Is My Country Too* (1965); about hippies with Wolfe’s *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968) and Norman’s *Divine Right’s Trip* (1972) (fiction); or about natives as in Seals’s *The Powwow Highway* (1979).

These decades were also marked by the concern for preserving nature: fuel-efficient cars, slower pace and secondary paths were elements introduced to ask “what is

America today?"; as well as to criticize the new capitalistic motorway (Primeau 28). Those elements can be felt in Steinbeck's *Travels with Charlie* and Woolf's *Wall to Wall* (1962), unlike Kerouac's fascination with speed. Nevertheless, in Steinbeck's novel there are traces of the Beat elegiac quest since there's a destination but no goal. In the same way titles like Updike's *Rabbit, Run* (1960) or Sorrentino's *The Sky Changes* (1966) would carry on pointless driving.

Moreover, during the 70s highway literature increased its visibility and popularity (Primeau 28): the road awareness was full, and reflected in the media. In this period we witness women's appropriation of the genre with Joan Didion's *Play It as It Lays* (1970). Other female authors working on this topic are Anne Phillips –*Fast Lanes* (1984)-, Michelle Carter –*In Other Days When Going Home* (1987)-, and Kerouac's daughter, Jan, who continued Beats' fascination with mobility in *Baby Driver* (1981) and *Trainsong* (1988). More contemporary names would be Pagan Kennedy with *Spinsters* (1995) and Erika Lopez with *Flaming Iguanas* (1997).

This is also the decade of metafiction, going back to Sal Paradise's aim: "Sal [...] is the observer who views Dean as a catalyst for the only action he knows: writing" (Weinreich 37). Children of this inclination are DeLillo's *Americana* (1971) –about the creation of an autobiographical road movie-, Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (1974) –a journey with philosophical discussions-, Robbins's *Even Cowgirls Get The Blues* (1977) –attacking Kerouac for his goal-orientation-, Duncan's *Out West* (1988) –analyzing the rules and literary conventions of the road trip- and later Brinkley's *The Majic Bus. An American Oddisey* (1992) –a teacher takes his students on a bus trip while reading some relevant books. Revisiting how counterculture failed was popular during this period too; a well-known example would be *Fear and Loathing in*

Las Vegas (1971) where Thompson, in the fashion of Kerouac, establishes a critique by open references to sex or drugs.

From the 70s onwards what we have witnessed is the trivialization of the literary genre. Most authors prefer to stick to the old driver-hero –as in Herlihy's *Midnight Cowboy* (1965)- and go back to the optimistic vision of the thoroughfare where motion becomes therapeutic; such are the cases of Heat-Moon's *Blue Highways* (1982), Olson's *Seaview: A Novel* (1983), Sayers's *Brain Fever* (1996), Duffy's *Last Comes the Egg* (1997) or Weisbecker's *In Search of Captain Zero: A Surfer's Road Trip Beyond the End of the Road* (2001). Others focus on the obsession with violence: Wright's *Going Native* (1994), Dixon's *Interstate* (1995) and King's *Desperation* (1997). The highway has also been explored as related to American religious experiences in Levinson's *All That's Holy: A Young Guy, An Old Car, and the Search for God in America* (2003). Moreover, the tendency to link the road with an apocalyptic world has recently increased with remarkable novels such as Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2000) or Hume's *Back to the Garden* (2012).

Nevertheless, we can still find authors that continued the elegiac romance of Kerouac. The protagonist of Doge's *Not Fade Away* (1987) drives his truck not searching for freedom, but acting freely through pointless movement. One contemporary case is that of Danielewski's *Only Revolutions* (2006), a complex novel regarding structure and plot; through travels in time and space the protagonists of the story revisit and criticize America. Another relevant title is Krakaver's *Into the Wild* (1996), based on the tragic adventure against conformism and materialism of Christopher McCandles. In these cases the highway may not be a negative element, but the important thing is that mobility proves to be no solution; moreover the main characters no longer embody the frontier spirit or, if so, have no happy ending.

3.2. ROAD MOVIES AFTER *ON THE ROAD*

The decade following the publication of *On the Road* is characterized by the consolidation of a new distinct film genre: road movies. Real road movies, like Timothy Corrigan calls them (144-45), were born during the 60s as a mixture of countercultural values –presented in films like *The Wild One*- and the popularization of driving; “with location shooting and the mobile camera”, as John Orr argues (qtd. in Laderman, *Driving Visions* 286); and with muscle cars (Walker 4).⁸ In light of this, from the 60s onwards, life on the motorway would be eulogized and employed as a critical weapon in cinema.⁹ This tendency was inaugurated, as most authors claim, by Arthur Penn’s *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), but especially by Dennis Hopper’s *Easy Rider* (1969): “both films portray mobility as essential to narrative structure and political commentary, reinventing the spirit of *On the Road* for young anti-establishment audiences” (Laderman, “Road Movies” 418-419).

These two titles were a success, which led to the popularization of the genre and to massive production of road movies. In fact, in most cases, 70s’ road movies followed the pattern established by those films, that is, they were either quest road movies or outlaw road movies, as *Two-Lane Blacktop* (Hellman, 1971) and *Thieves Like Us* (Altman, 1974) respectively show. However, it is also noticeable that, as the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal took place, the journey expressed the disappointment after counterculture; and, influenced by European cinema, the typical search for America became the search for the self:

Laden with psychological confusion and wayward angst, these road movies adopt a nomadic narrative structure, focusing on existential loss more than social critique. [...] Driving on the open road becomes an allegory of a personal search through life’s meaningless landscape. [...] Consequently, we observe in these films a general tendency to depoliticize the genre, as well as a more ironic attitude toward the journey (little of

Kerouac's indulgence or Fonda's earnestness here). [...] In this more existential focus, the genre's core conflict with conformist society has been internalized, "rebellion" thus becoming an amorphous anxiety about self. (Laderman, *Driving Visions* 83).

Buddy-road movies also flourished during this period, undergoing progressive improvement:

Prior to *On the Road*, road movie protagonists were either heterosexual couples [...] or whole communities of displaced persons [...]. After Kerouac, such pairs or groups of travelers were eclipsed by the male buddy pair. [...] Previously male buddy teams had taken to the road primarily in comedies, most famously the Hope-Crosby *Road to* series. Post-Kerouac buddy-road movies take the male couple more seriously, while simultaneously problematizing it. (Cohan and Hark 8)

Towards the end of the decade and early 80s, "[w]ith the end of the Vietnam War, and the resignation of Richard Nixon, the oppositional fervor that had fueled so many road movies had cooled" (Cohan and Hark 207). Thus, we have Hollywood's approach to the genre with comedies such as *Smokey and the Bandit* (Needham, 1977), *The Cannonball Run* (Needham, 1981), and *National Lampoon's Vacation* (Ramis, 1983), examples where the subversive mood of *On the Road* cannot be found. The process of trivialization and depoliticization that the genre has suffered started here. Looking back to earlier screwball comedies like *It Happened One Night* we have *Midnight Run* (Brest, 1988), *Homer and Eddie* (Konchalovsky, 1989), *Calendar Girl* (Whitesell, 1993), *Beavis and Butthead Do America* (Judge, 1996), *Road Trip* (Phillips, 2000), *Sex Drive* (Anders, 2008), *Due Date* (Phillips, 2010) and *The Guilt Trip* (Fletcher, 2012) among many others. These titles show how the genre developed from epic to easy comedy or dramedy: the highway is the perfect excuse for romance, having fun with / making friends or solving family issues.

The 80s also saw the flowering of self-reflexivity films that employed irony to undermine the patterns of previous road movies. Jim Jarmusch's *Stranger Than Paradise* (1984) and Joel and Ethan Coen's *Raising Arizona* (1987) are clear examples, as well as later Abbe Wool's *Roadside Prophets* (1992). As a consequence of this self-reflexivity, road movies started to challenge fixed models: white, heterosexual, healthy and young male buddies –e.g. Dean and Sal– were substituted by female –*Thelma and Louise* (Scott, 1991)-, non-white –*Get on the Bus* (Lee, 1996), *Smoke Signals* (Eyre, 1998)-, homosexual –*My Own Private Idaho* (Van Sant, 1991)-, transsexual –*To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar* (Kidron, 1995)-, ill –*The Living End* (Araki, 1992)-, or old protagonists –*The Straight Story* (Lynch, 1999)-; updating and revitalizing the genre (Cohan and Hark 307-329). What is more, the outlaw couple was revisited and transformed too: on one hand we have Lynch's version with *Wild at Heart* (1989), but we can also find the lure for violence presented in *Kalifornia* (Sena, 1993) or *Freeway* (Bright, 1996), which would be criticized by imitation in *Natural Born Killers* (Stone, 1998).¹⁰

Concerning contemporary titles such as *Broken Flowers* (Jarmusch, 2005) and *Little Miss Sunshine* (Dayton and Faris, 2006), we clearly perceive the trivialization that started during the 70s. Subversive cases are a minority, mostly independent cinema, whereas most films are comedies or erase the epic content to focus on an existential crisis. The quest turns into easy laugh in *Wild Hogs* (Becker, 2007), and the search for “IT” becomes the search for one's self –*About Schmidt* (Payne, 2002)- or for “real” human interactions –*Nebraska* (Payne, 2013). This issue will be discussed below through the analysis of *Easy Rider* and *The Straight Story*. Working on some of the ideas Kerouac popularized, Dennis Hopper directed what is considered to be the canonical road movie par excellence, not only because of formal characteristics, but also

because of its countercultural position. Lynch, while also playing with generic conventions, moves in the opposite direction by using the journey to defend traditional values; his film would exemplify the trivialization we have been talking about.

3.2.1. THE ULTIMATE ROAD MOVIE: *EASY RIDER*

As we have already mentioned, *On the Road* is considered a foundational text for the road genre in the same way that *Easy Rider* is known as the canonical road movie. The idea about making the film arose when Dennis Hopper, Peter Fonda and Jack Nicholson first collaborated in Corman's *The Trip* (1967), just after Fonda made *The Wild Angels* (Corman, 1966). These two films, along with *The Wild One* and *Scorpio Rising* (Anger, 1963), are early cinematic portrayals of the biker trend that, according to Katie Mills, grew at the same time that the Beat's writings because of the foundation of motorcycle clubs –e.g. Hells Angels- around 1947. Although “this rebel image differs considerably from that of the Beats” because “[b]ikers were slightly older; they were not artists” and “they were more rejected by the postwar economy than rejecting of it” (115), Mills maintains that *Scorpio Rising*, *The Trip* and *The Wild Angels* are crucial to our understanding of motorized rebels (114), and “play a major role in the metamorphosis of the rebel road story from a Beat relic into its hippie reincarnation as *Easy Rider*” (123). Just like her, Laderman says that our film is also in debt with *The Wild One*, even though much more with Corman's work (*Driving Visions* 44-50). Orgeron establishes another link by saying that, like Jean Luc-Godard's *Breathless* (1960), Hopper's work of art “explores the seductive powers of modern motion and critiques its often empty inspiration” (102).

Nevertheless, most authors relate the film to Kerouac's work, not only because of the overt use of drugs and the buddy pair, but for the critique conveyed, the way it is

conveyed and because it remarked the features and possibilities of the road genre like the book did. In fact, Laderman states that “*Easy Rider* has strong affinities with *On the Road*, and may be seen as a loose film version of the novel” since both focus around the quest for spiritual and cultural identity (*Driving Visions* 66). Furthermore, critic Rex Reed wrote, at the time the movie was released, that “by taking up where Kerouac and Lawrence Lipton and all the Holy Barbarians left off, Fonda and Hopper have produced the definitive youth odyssey of the 1960s” (qtd. in Cohan and Hark 179-180).

Reed’s review was accompanied by more positive and negative ones, but just like it happened with *On the Road*, *Easy Rider* became an instant success. Barbara Klinger claims it was such a hit because the film was released when the highway culture was at its apex –with the National Highway Act of 1956, the publication of Kerouac’s masterpiece and the fascination surrounding Hells Angels-; and because it mixed typical American elements with cultural critique (Cohan and Hark 180).

It is precisely in their cultural critiques where we see a clear connection between the novel and Hopper’s film: both demonize the American dream by juxtaposing two sides of America. The nation’s glorious past and its decayed present collide by references to the frontier myth. In the case of the book, the contrast is established by the different visions Sal has of Dean as they search for “IT”: at the beginning Dean is admired by Sal, but at the end Sal rejects Dean, who represents the degradation of the American dream, once innocent and full of promises; as Mark Richardson puts it:

On the Road tells a Young Goodman Brown sort of story. We look out on America and see double: promise and piety on the one hand, wickedness and fraud on the other. Dean Moriarty, in all his dubiety, simply is America: “tumbledown holy America,” Sal equivocally says, catching the seediness and the grace. (Bloom 208-9)

Meanwhile, *Easy Rider* juxtaposed “the landscape [...], representing the great potential of the country’s historical past, with the profane sentiments of its fascistic and bigoted

inhabitants, threatening the very foundations of democracy in the present” (Cohan and Hark 181). What is more, to emphasize the idea of the frontier myth, the film is charged with elements that remind us to the classic Western such as: the images of Monument Valley, the scene of the campfire, or the resemblances between a) bikes and horses, or b) frontier fortune and drug money (Cohan and Hark 190; Laderman, *Driving Visions* 79). Even though the movie reversed the typical east-to-west trajectory, it pointed out the fact that the frontier had been closed for a while, that its image was no longer valid – unlike what other cultural products seemed to suggest (Cohan and Hark 190). This idea is emphasized if we consider that as Wyatt and Billy approach civilization –i.e. east- and move southward, the frontier ideals vanish more and more. The trajectory pattern was also challenged by Kerouac who made his characters move in all directions. It is worth mentioning here that the South is very important and has a double dimension in both cases: like Sal and Dean heading to Mexico, Wyatt and Billy drive to New Orleans searching for fun, drugs and women. In the film the South represents both the best and the worst place for the outcast, it is where the hippie commune is, but it also means ignorance, racism and violence –as seen through Wyatt’s and Billy’s murder-; in the novel Dean and Sal drive in search for the magic South –i.e. Mexico-, but they only find disappointment, as Sal’s words show:

[J]ust beyond, you could feel the enormous presence of whole great Mexico [...]. We had no idea what Mexico would really be like. [...] We felt awful and sad. But everything changed when we crossed the mysterious bridge over the river and our wheels rolled on official Mexican soil [...]. We looked with wonder. To our amazement, it looked exactly like Mexico. (274)

Both book and film are about being a stranger in your own country, a feeling our protagonists try to repress by continuously moving.

What we also appreciate in the two cases is the prevalence of mobility over stability. Billy and Wyatt, like Sal and Dean, cannot bare civilization, domesticity and stillness; they are Deleuzian nomads, especially Dean with his suitcase under his bed. As we mentioned at the beginning of the third section, *On the Road* inaugurated Janis P. Stout's category "lost and wandering", which appears again in Hopper's film: Wyatt and Billy may want to get to Mardi Gras, but they are not reluctant to slow down the pace of the trip, they love to wander.

It would be relevant to mention that in the movie we find a different approach to domesticity. Sal does not say no to domesticity, he is just not ready; that is why he is always returning home, he has a family. Dean is also ambivalent, for he has several families while not wanting any. But in *Easy Rider* home does not exist, Billy and Wyatt have no roots, like the protagonists of *Route 66*.¹¹ Nevertheless, it is true that *On the Road* and its filmic counterpart reject women because they are a symbol of stability and family; subsequently, they are seen as mere sexual objects and the thruway as the space to assert masculinity. In fact, Matt Theado says this is common to highway literature because "women in American literature frequently represent the imposition of civilizing influences over the frontier-pushing males", so that "[m]uch of the novel plays off the tension between Sal's sentimental notion of a woman as nurturing wife and Dean's image of a woman as sexual object" (59). In the same way, *Easy Rider* "aligns women with stability, with the setting that must be left behind, thus setting the road movie stage as a male fantasy" since "[f]irst at the commune, then in the diner, and now in the cemetery, the desire of women [...] is embedded in the landscape of oppressive stability" (Laderman, *Driving Visions* 77).

In relation to that, Hopper's treatment of minorities is similar to what Kerouac did. Trying to create some sort of affinity between the protagonists and minorities –

especially African Americans-, in order to distinguish our travelers from mainstream society, movie and book construct “others purely from the point of view of the alienated white male observer” (Bloom 84) and, consequently, fail to truly transmit the meaning of those lives.

Another similarity is found at the very end. Since the motorway proves to be no cure for Sal, he decides to leave Dean behind: Kerouac is clearly reshaping the frontier myth with this ending, showing the negative side of the road. The legacy is taken and magnified by the moviemaker, who decides to kill the protagonists; “*Easy Rider*’s excursions into the dystopian regions of American national identity coupled with its abrupt demolition of its hippie heroes places it firmly within the transitional discourses of the time that were dramatically rewriting the optimism of the frontier ethic” (Cohan and Hark 198) –like Penn’s *Bonnie and Clyde*. The main difference here is that, whereas *On the Road* introduces the possibility of social reintegration for Sal, the fact that Wyatt and Billy are shot down remarks that society rejects them even more than they reject society. In the novel, the impossibility of the American dream is presented through the image of Dean disappearing as he rounds “the corner of Seventh Avenue” (309), but the final image of the film goes far beyond: the American flag covers Billy’s dying body and burns with Wyatt’s motorbike, representing the death of that dream.

The use of drugs also highlights the link between *On the Road* and *Easy Rider*. In both cases drug abuse isolates the couples from plain reality and society, as well as it “highlight[s] their sense of disillusionment with the American Dream” (Schneider 1). Also remarkable is the fact that the movie shows progressive disillusionment regarding the journey, as in Kerouac’s work:

Throughout the novel, Sal has struggled to refrain from condemning Dean, but in the end he cannot help it. Sal has clung to the faith that understanding Dean means taking into

account the “impossible complexity of his life,” which means not dismissing him according to traditional structures of morality and behavior. (Holladay and Holton 53)

Dean may not be tired of trying to escape from the chains of society and not being able to, but Sal is, like Wyatt and Billy:

At a certain point down the road, the road movie’s glorified mobility seems to yield a disillusioned attitude in the protagonists, who have been unable truly to escape [...]. After George’s murder, the film becomes increasingly dark in mood, developing a bitter tone of disenchantment. (Laderman, *Driving Visions* 76)

What we can also appreciate in both cases is the importance of the form. Kerouac wrote the whole novel in a 120 feet long paper, so that rolled on the floor looked like the thruway, and used “complex and breathless sentences, unconnected observations of passing scenes, pile-ups of adjectives, exclamations, and an emphasis on verbs (rather than nouns) –all to complement his novel’s effort to portray an American road of energy and freedom” (Holladay and Holton 48). Hopper and Fonda were aware of how crucial the montage would be in transmitting the driving sensation too:

[M]any tracking shots and montage sequences aim to convey aesthetically the thrill of the road. Some of the most memorable examples occur during scene transitions, when flash forwards are rapidly intercut with shots in the present. This technique translates the excitement of the characters’ tripping with Eisensteinian energy; moreover, it visually conveys the sense that in their travels they are transcending not merely cultural limits but temporal and spatial ones as well. (Laderman, “What a Trip” 47)

Regarding this point, it is important understanding that music is relevant to writer and director. It may seem that the novel has no soundtrack, but “[j]azz is the beating heart of *On the Road*” (Theado 58), as Kerouac’s bob prosody exemplifies. Most obvious is the case of *Easy Rider*: made up of popular songs, music was used as a commentary “intended to illustrate the close relationship between the sensibilities communicated by song lyrics and the knowledge, views and aspirations of those seeking

out alternative ideologies and lifestyles across the US during the late 1960s” (Bennett 29).

Having this information in mind, it would be no mistake to claim that *On the Road* was a basic text in the constitution of *Easy Rider*, maybe not a direct influence but clearly some of the elements Kerouac first presented were collected by Hopper and Fonda. This is relevant regarding our work because, the fact that the most relevant road movie of all times –i.e. *Easy Rider*- drinks from the 1957’s classic means that the novel would remain crucial, directly or indirectly, for the development not only of the literary genre, but the film one too.

3.2.2. THE TRIVIALIZATION OF THE GENRE: *THE STRAIGHT STORY*

As a more contemporary exploration of the American highway we find David Lynch’s movies. Even though titles like *Lost Highway* (1997) are more related to Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), a connection between the director and Kerouac can also be established: “thematically, the focus on America, on American landscape, and the meaning of that exploration”; aesthetically his spontaneous shooting mirrors Kerouac’s bob prosody, and with his unconventional storytelling “Lynch creates a visual vocabulary that extends the possibilities of film in a powerful, risky, and fresh way –fresh in the way that *On the Road* felt when it first appeared” (Holladay and Holton 195-197). Nevertheless, in this study we will pay attention to the most unconventional of his films, *The Straight Story*, and we say unconventional because “[a]s the title suggests, it lacks the weirdness and the formal eccentricities that one expects from” a Lynchian work (McGowan 177); getting a G rating, this film lacks the complex narrative structure and distortion that characterizes the director. Nevertheless, we have to bear in mind that the plot is still unconventional, for Alvin Straight is an old

man crossing America in a lawnmower to make peace with his brother. It is true that with this movie the filmmaker is playing with conventions –by using such a strange vehicle or an old driver- as our writer did, but through this example we are going to see the contemporary tendency to diminish the epic content of road movies in favor of an interior journey, in contrast with what happens in *Easy Rider*.

In the fashion of Kerouac, Lynch uses an identity crisis as a mirror for cultural crisis; however, the crisis of the film refers to contemporary breakdown of traditional values, whereas the novel talks about traditional values needing to be fought: “Straight [...] reconfirms American values without questioning them” (Biderman 168) while Dean and Sal are countercultural, they resist established values. In that way, Alvin’s adventure is about self-discovery, an individual existential journey of overcoming that follows the pattern of *The Wizard of Oz* much more than it does follow Kerouac, since the highway becomes “a space of reunion, not rebellion; a space of community and communication, not of solitude and silence” (Orgeron 166). In this sense, *The Straight Story* is not so inconsistent among Lynch’s works, because it is a movie about the decay of the American family –Alvin is trying to reunite with his brother- and he always makes films about the fragility of the familial bond (Orgeron 183). Both cases talk, therefore, about domesticity and stability, but while Dean and Sal drive in order to escape them (Swartz 62), Alvin’s lawnmower is the vehicle for salvation, the road becomes a redeemer: we go back to the idea of the benefits of mobility that existed before *On the Road* was published. This is especially seen in the film through the contrast between Alvin and the pregnant runaway who, like Dean and Sal, moves to avoid responsibilities.

What we can also observe is a return to the protagonist as a motivated hero: Alvin has a destination, a goal –meet his brother- that he finally achieves. Unlike him, Dean and Sal are the rebels that get on the road for no clear reason at all, seen when Bull Lee

asks: “Now, Dean, I want you to sit quiet a minute and tell me what you’re doing crossing the country like this”, to what “Dean could only blush and say, ‘Ah well, you know how it is’ ” (145). In this sense, Alvin does not talk about freedom but acts freely, he “possesses genuine individuality” and he “is not merely playing at rebellion” (Gaughran 151). He may have been a nomad before, the motorway his mechanism to escape domesticity –as he tells to his daughter Rose: “Rose, darling. . . I’m gonna *go back* on the road” (emphasis mine)-; but now that he is old, his driving tendency –not venturing near the yellow line, the slow pace and riding a lawnmower- shows that he knows that freedom is never totally achieved. On the contrary, Dean and Sal’s conception of liberty is presented in another film by Lynch, *Wild at Heart*, where the driving tendency of the protagonist “suggest that he thinks freedom means release from any restraint, the lack of limitations of any kind” (Gaughran 151). In *The Straight Story* driving means facing the responsibilities of adulthood, in the novel it means just the opposite.

At this point, it is also relevant to consider the transformations that our protagonists suffer. Whereas at home Alvin’s age was a negative aspect, when he hits the asphalt years provide him with the wisdom and experience needed for such a journey (McGowan 183); this character shows a positive evolution, although he does not truly change. Sal, conversely, suffers a “negative” development: he moves from excitement to disillusionment, his countercultural attitude is diminished by the futility of the journeys and, afraid of becoming the “Ghost of the Susquehanna”, he finally leaves Dean behind, that is, he finally gives up chasing the impossible American dream; his marginalization is followed by integration, pointing out that liminal positions are not everlasting (Swartz 96). That he is changing is acknowledged by Sal himself at the beginning of the adventure:

I was far away from home, haunted and tired with travel, [...] I looked at the cracked high ceiling and really didn't know who I was for about fifteen strange seconds. I wasn't scared; I was just somebody else, some stranger, and my whole life was a haunted life, the life of a ghost. I was halfway across America, at the dividing line between the East of my youth and the West of my future [...]. (17)

The fact that Sal finally abandons marginal behavior –the traveler is reintegrated into the dominant culture-, links his ending to Alvin's one. However, while *On the Road's* last sensation is bittersweet because Sal is not completely happy about abandoning Dean, *The Straight Story's* final shot remarks that Alvin has achieved exactly what he wanted: watching the stars with his brother.

Another point to consider would be the treatment of the American land. With its positive view of the pavement and the thesis of the restoration of communication –with yourself and with society-, it is clear that in *The Straight Story* the faith in the small town is also restored, in contrast with *Easy Rider*. The beauty of the Midwestern landscape mirrors the moral beauty of the American small town. The different individuals that Alvin encounters throughout his trip work as a mechanism to glorify the established values, idealizing the heart of America. *On the Road* states just the opposite, as we have mentioned, the novel's journey asserts alternative ways of life, and the fact that Dean and Sal never “stay” nor find a place as great as they expected is a way to demonize America –magnified in *Easy Rider*. In that way, Lynch uses the slow pace and the landscape as a reaction towards the intense and quick changes of modernity, unlike Kerouac, who prefers mad driving and different cities to assert that the country was paying no attention to peripheral existence. It is also interesting the importance of formal aspects in both novel and film. Lynch's montage, as Orgeron points out, represents the slow pace and straightness of the movie:

Lynch goes to great lengths in the film to create a cinematic pacing true to Alvin's journey. This film moves against all of the rules of pacing and cutting that seem inherent to late 1990s filmmaking. It is methodical, highly reliant on a rich and evocative mise-en-scène, slow, and edited in a continuous, fluid, invisible fashion. The only formally bizarre moments in the film involve the use of the zoom lens (accompanied by rapid cuts), which, since *Easy Rider*, has been a central formal technique of the road movie. (180)

He is getting out of the trend of recent road movies that, working upon Kerouac style, "relied quite heavily upon the twin notions of speed and chaos" (Orgeron 177), as is the case of *Natural Born Killers*. Lynch's film uses simplicity, ordinariness, to tell us about an extraordinary experience, a "heroic" act; whereas *On the Road* and *Easy Rider* present complex structures and techniques to magnified no action, just continuous movement.

As we can see, *The Straight Story* exemplifies a deviation from the thruway proposed by Kerouac, and by Hopper later on, a deviation that has been followed by the majority of authors in recent years. This interiorization, often trivialization, of the road trip reflects that the meaning of the motorway is still connected, in America, to the positive vision of the first settlers, but also that –in the fashion of Kerouac- it is powerful enough to criticize the culture where it was born.

CONCLUSION

Through this study we came to realize the importance of the road in American culture. For a nation founded on the benefits of mobility, the automobile came to be one of the last exponents of hope in progress, but –after countercultural movements and two world wars- it also came to be a symbol of crisis, fragmentation and alternative values. Thus, the road genre could not be understood if separated from the socio-historical evolution of the country where it was born, but the vision of the nation is also based on highway experiences. Route 66 and Harley Davidson are just two of the icons of America, known all around the world because of the great impact of our genre, icons that reveal part of the national culture and history. In this way, road narratives become one of the most popular ways of (re)thinking, analyzing, defending or criticizing American society, narratives whose potential emerged with *On the Road*.

As we can observe from the examples dealt with, Kerouac's work has been a major influence in the cultural market since its publication. In the case of narratives like *Blue Highways* and *The Straight Story* the motorway has maintained its Romantic purity, it is conceived as a space that provides the liberation that one individual needs to find himself and (re)connect with the community. The aim of these titles is to represent and protect the American ethos and its values. In such cases, the highway is just the state in-between, the path to salvation or to progress. They would be connected to Kerouac by opposition since they reverse what the writer had introduced –the thruway as a negative element-, but they would also take some of the features *On the Road* first popularized such as using driving as an expression of rebellion, of failures in communication, or of problems at facing adulthood and domestic life. On the other hand, we have cases such as *Only Revolutions* and *Easy Rider* that, rather than fall on the interiorization or/and trivialization of the journey, expand the epic content hidden under our 1957's novel.

These road narratives are clear examples of the influence of Kerouac, exploring his idea of violence of motion to talk about the collapse and decline of American values, in other words, here the conventional belief system would be attacked.

I would like to highlight that the volume of production is higher in the first case: we find much more novels and films that “fight for the persistent hope that the road still leads to a place where dreams come true” (Cohan and Hark 330), than about the mad highway that Kerouac presented. Titles like *Spinsters*, *Nebraska*, *Little Miss Sunshine*, or even violent movies like *Natural Born Killers*, with their “happy endings”, resist the writer’s negative perspective and turn the journey into the perfect problem-solving formula. Others like *Into the Wild* –novel and later film adaptation (Penn, 2007)- still make a critique of America –although not as strong as the one in Kerouac and Hopper- through the destructive force of the motorway, its restrictions and the tragic endings of their protagonists. Maybe this information is pointing out that the country is not ready to face the fact that the frontier myth is over; maybe in a nation so rooted upon the benefits of movement to say that there is no progress left, no destination to go, is still not possible or accepted.

Nevertheless, despite this trivialization, the collision between dominant, emergent and residual values is still the heart of the genre. The fact that it has been continuously challenged by different approaches –female, native, African American or homosexual among others- proves this idea. Alternative routes like *Black Like Me*, *Baby Driver*, *Thelma and Louise* or *The Living End* exemplify the rebellious character of road narratives, the potential the motorway has to criticize and fight “straightness”. Although progressively depoliticized, the genre still plays with Bakhtin’s dialogic making protagonists, and consumers, confront American social vastness and its positive and negative realities. Here it is important to notice that, in some cases, the prevalence of

dominant practices over emergent ones responds to the media being controlled by different corporations. In such cases, an illusory sense of mobility that seems to liberate the individual from the chains of society would be created, illusory since this movement is actually controlled by dominant values. In my opinion, the greatest example would be automobile commercials that engage viewers with images of endless and free roads, driving away from civilization, while they clearly address materialistic individuals. Thus, the importance of works such as *On the Road* or *Easy Rider* relies in pointing out that the highway to free yourself is a pointless one, just a line to drive, not the one that society wants you to follow, neither the one that necessarily takes you somewhere.

The road may have regained its original positive meaning, but what becomes clear through this study is that Kerouac reshaped the genre in many formal ways. Anyway, I think, his most remarkable contribution to American culture was his conception of the thruway, how he transformed the meaning of a national symbol from positive to negative, how he turned a space full of possibilities and hope into an empty and simple red line. He captured one of the best ways to talk about collapse and tension –internal or external-, not only of his age, but also of nowadays. *On the Road* marked a new itinerary that has been continuously traveled by different artists since 1957. Some authors may prefer to stick to their own paths, but others do not hesitate in taking Kerouac's mad road and make their own deviations, adding alternative routes to the literary map, routes equally important and worthy of a ride.

To conclude, there is just one question left : “[w]hat’s your road, man? –holyboy road, madman road, rainbow road, gruppy road, any road. It’s an anywhere road for anybody anyhow” (Kerouac 251).

Notes

1. For a more extended discussion on this topic see Pierson, George W. *The Moving America*. New York: Knopf, 1973.

2. The internationalization of the American sensibility towards the road has been explored in Mazierska, Ewa and Laura Rascaroli. *Crossing New Europe. Postmodern Travel and the European Road Movie*. London: Wallflower Press, 2006.

3. Bakhtin gives “the name *chronotope* (literally, ‘time space’) to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (84). According to him the fusion of temporal and spatial indicators are relevant to the constitution of one genre so that “it is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions” (85).

4. These elements constitute important visual motifs concerning cinema, along with open landscapes, horizon lines and highway signs.

5. Through this point we can see how Bakhtin’s idea of dialogic is relevant to the road genre. In Bakhtin’s opinion the novel expresses multiple voices or points of view – is not only the author’s voice that is presented, we also have the narrator’s and the characters’-, that is why the novel is dialogical –while lyric poetry is monological. Furthermore, the different voices would not express the particular perspective of one individual, but would stay for a social class or cultural group. See Bakhtin, Mikhail. “Discourse in the Novel.” *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. 259-422.

6. Remarkable titles are Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl* (1956), “A Supermarket in California” (1956) and “Green Automobile” (1963); William S. Burroughs’ *Yonqui* (1953) and *The Naked Lunch* (1959); along with Clellon Holmes *Go* (1952). Other

relevant figures of the Beat Generation were Neal Cassady –who inspired the character of Dean Moriarty-, Lucien Carr, Gregory Corso and Lawrence Ferlinghetti.

7. First man to travel around the world by car (Primeau 23).

8. The film genre is characterized by the fusion between identity and vehicle. As a consequence, the chosen machine would be really important since it would mirror the personality of the protagonist, and because “the perspective of the camera [...] adopts the framed perspective of the vehicle itself” (Corrigan 145-46).

9. In TV it is remarkable the case of CBS’ *Route 66*, the first road program. With a similar emphasis on the motorway that Beats had, although “more conservative in all ways” (Mills 64), this show also contributed to the popularization of the genre.

10. Oliver Stone takes Bonnie and Clyde’s myth to question the glorification of serial killers by media (Laderman, “Road Movies” 417).

11. Mark Alvey finds this show a bridge between novel and film (Cohan and Hark 152).

Works Cited

- Bakhtin, Mikhail M. "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel. Notes toward a Historical Poetics". *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. 84-258.
- Barros, Deborah P. *Fast Cars and Bad Girls: Nomadic Subjects and Women's Road Stories*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2004.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *America*. Trans. Chris Turner. London: Verso, 1988.
- Bennett, Andy. "Sixties Rock, Politics and the Counter-Culture". *Cultures of Popular Music*. Berkshire: Open University Press, 2005. 24-41.
- Berger, Michael L. *The Automobile in American History and Culture*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001.
- Bloom, Harold, ed. *Jack Kerouac's On the Road*. Broomall: Chelsea House Publishers, 2004.
- Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004.
- Campbell, Neil. "Road Narratives and Western Identity". *Western American Literature*. 36.3. 2001. 279-290.
- Corrigan, Timothy. *A Cinema without Walls*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994.
- Feeney, Mark. "We've been down this 'Road' before. The influence of Jack Kerouac's most famous novel can be felt far and wide". *The Boston Globe*. 16 March 13. Web. 04 March 14. <<http://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/movies/2013/03/16/road-tested-the-influence-jack-kerouac-most-famous-novel-can-felt-far-and-wide/qvGYsCkUogawLRkXS6VFxM/story.html>>

- Frogel, Shai. "Lynch's Zarathustra. *The Straight Story*." *The Philosophy of David Lynch*. Eds. William J. Devlin and Shai Biderman. Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2011. 159-174.
- Ganser, Alexandra. *Roads of Her Own: Gendered Space and Mobility in American Women's Road Narratives, 1970-2000*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009.
- Gaughran, Richard. "David Lynch's Road Films. Individuality and Personal Freedom?" *The Philosophy of David Lynch*. Eds. William J. Devlin and Shai Biderman. Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2011. 143-158.
- Holladay, Hilary and Robert Holton, eds. *What's Your Road, Man? Critical Essays on Jack Kerouac's On the Road*. Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 2009.
- Kerouac, Jack. *On the Road*. New York: The Viking Press, 1973.
- Lackey, Kris. *Roadframes. The American Highway Narrative*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997.
- Laderman, David. *Driving Visions: Exploring the Road Movie*. Texas: University of Texas Press, 2002.
- . "Road Movies". *Schirmer Encyclopedia of Film*. Vol.3. Ed. Barry K. Grant. New York: Schirmer Reference, 2007. 416-421.
- . "What a Trip: The Road Film and American Culture". *Journal of Film and Video*. Vol. 48, No. ½. Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1996. 41-57.
- Martinez, Manuel L. *Countering the Counterculture. Rereading Postwar American Dissent from Jack Kerouac to Tomás Rivera*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2003.
- McGowan, Todd. "Eight. The Ethics of Fantasizing in *The Straight Story*." *The Impossible David Lynch*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. 177-193.

- Mills, Katie. *The Road Story and the Rebel: moving through film, fiction, and television*. Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006.
- Orgeron, Devin. *Road Movies. From Muybridge and Méliès to Lynch and Kiarostami*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- Potteiger, Matthew and Jamie Purinton. "Road Stories". *Landscape narratives. Design Practices for Telling Stories*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1998. 277–231.
- Primeau, Ronald. *The Romance of the Road: The Literature of the American Highway*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1996.
- Salles, Walter. "Notes for a Theory of the Road Movie". *The New York Times Magazine*. 11 Nov. 2007. Web. 17 Feb. 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/11/magazine/11roadtrip-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0><>
- Schneider, Daniel J. "Ending the Exceptional: Defiance of Conventions in Dennis Hopper's 'Easy Rider' ". *Student Pulse. The International Student Journal*. 2010, Vol. 2, No. 07. Web. 27 May 2014. <<http://www.studentpulse.com/articles/267/ending-the-exceptional-defiance-of-conventions-in-dennis-hoppers-easy-rider>>
- Sherril, Rowland A. *Road-Book America: Contemporary Culture and the New Picaresque*. Illinois: University of Illinois, 2000.
- Stout, Janis P. *The Journey Narrative in America Literature: Patterns and Departures*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983.
- Talbot, Jill L. "This Is Not an Exit: The Road Narrative in Contemporary American Literature and Film". PhD Thesis. Texas Tech University, 1999.
- Theado, Matt. *Understanding Jack Kerouac*. Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2000.

Vogler, Christopher. *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*. Studio City: Michael Wiese Productions, 2007.

Walker, Clinton. *Golden Miles: Sex, Speed and the Australian Muscle Car*. Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 2009.

Weinreich, Regina. *The Spontaneous Poetics of Jack Kerouac. A Study of the Fiction*. Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987.

Filmography

Easy Rider. Dir. Dennis Hopper. Columbia Pictures, 1969.

The Straight Story. Dir. David Lynch. Disney Pictures, 1999.

APPENDIX 1

Data Sheet

TITLE: Easy Rider.

DIRECTOR: Dennis Hopper.

YEAR: 1969.

GENRE: Drama, Road Movie.

STARRING: Dennis Hopper, Peter Fonda, Jack Nicholson.

COUNTRY: USA.

SCREENPLAY: Peter Fonda, Dennis Hopper, Terry Southern.

PRODUCTION COMPANY: Columbia Pictures Corporation.

IN ASSOCIATION WITH: Pando Company, Raybert Productions.

DISTRIBUTED BY: Columbia Pictures.

PRODUCERS: Peter Fonda, William Hayward, Bert Schneider, Bob Rafelson.

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: László Kovács.

EDITOR: Donn Cambern.

SCORE: Steppenwolf, Mars Bonfire, The Jimi Hendrix Experience, The Birds, Roger McGuinn.

DURATION: 95 min.

APPENDIX 2

Data Sheet

TITLE: The Straight Story.

DIRECTOR: David Lynch.

YEAR: 1999.

GENRE: Drama, Road Movie, Biography.

STARRING: Richard Farnsworth, Sissy Spacek.

COUNTRY: USA, France, United Kingdom.

SCREENPLAY: John Roach, Mary Sweeney.

PRODUCTION COMPANY: Walt Disney Pictures.

IN ASSOCIATION WITH: Asymmetrical Productions, Canal+, Channel Four Films, Ciby 2000, StudioCanal.

DISTRIBUTED BY: Buena Vista Pictures.

PRODUCERS: Pierre Edelman, Neal Edelstein, Michael Polaire, Mary Sweeney.

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: Freddie Francis.

EDITOR: Mary Sweeny.

SCORE: Angelo Badalamenti.

DURATION: 111 min.

APPENDIX 3

Selected Chronology of the Road Genre

(Blue: historical events. Red: road literature. Green: road movies)

- 1886: Benz Patent-Motorwagen.
- 1893: Frontier Thesis, F.J. Turner.
Duryea's gasoline motor car appears.
- 1895: First illustrated automobile ad in an American magazine (for Benz in *The Motorcycle*).
First American automotive trade magazines (*Horseless Age* and *The Motorcycle*).
- 1896: Henry Ford builds the "Quadricycle", his first car.
First reported automobile accident.
- 1898: First recorded woman driver (Genevra D. Mudge).
- 1899: Old Motor Works becomes the first American factory of automobiles.
First report of a person killed by an automobile (Henry H. Bliss in New York City).
- 1900: First automobile advertising in a mass-circulation magazine (*The Saturday Evening Post*).
- 1901: Gasoline becomes the primary fuel for motorized vehicles after the discovery of oil in Texas.
Indian Motorcycle Co. is founded.
Blue Books begin to be published (travel guides).
- 1903: The first Ford's original Model A is sold.
Dr. H. Nelson Jackson and Sewall K. Crocker accomplish the first trans-continental car-trip.
First reported speed traps.
Harley Davidson is founded.
MoToR magazine is founded.
- 1904: U.S. Office of Public Roads established.

- 1905: Cars first sold on the installment plan.
First stolen car reported (St. Louis).
“In My Merry Oldsmobile” is composed by Gus Edwards and becomes a hit.
- 1906: First American automobile races on a circuit track.
- 1907: First twenty-four-hour American motor race held.
An Acadian Elopement.
- 1908: Ford Model T was introduced.
The Murdocks accomplish the first family transcontinental automobile-trip.
New York-to-Paris, 20,000-mile automobile race.
- 1909: Alice Huyler Ramsey becomes the first woman to drive across the United States.
Indianapolis Motor Speedway opens.
A Change in Heart, D.W. Griffith.
- 1910: First drive-in gasoline filling station is built in Detroit.
Sunshine Sue, D. W. Griffith.
- 1911: First Indianapolis 500 motor race.
- 1912: *An interrupted Elopement, Mack Sennett.*
A Beast at Bay, D.W. Griffith.
- 1913: The number of cars registered in the United States exceeds 1 million.
- 1914: World War I begins.
First “stop” sign (Detroit) and electric traffic lights –red only (Cleveland).
- 1916: *By Motor to the Golden Gate, Emily Post.*
A Hoosier Holiday, Theodore Dreiser.
- 1918: World War I ends.
- 1919: *Free Air, Sinclair Lewis.*
- 1920: National Prohibition Act takes place.
The Nineteenth Amendment is ratified, culmination of the women’s suffrage movement in the U.S.

It Might Have Been Worse, Beatrice Massey.

1923: The 24 hours of Le Mans conducts their first sports car race.

1929: Wall Street Crash.

1930: Death toll on the nation's highways reaches nearly 33,000 per year.

America: First, Fast, and Furious, Letitia Stockett.

The 42nd Parallel, John Dos Passos.

1932: Route 66 is opened for traffic.

Car safety inspections become obligatory in Maryland.

I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang, Mervyn LeRoy.

1933: First drive-in movie theater opens in Camden, New Jersey.

Wild Boys of the Road, William A. Wellman.

1934: Federal Highway Act passed.

It Happened One Night, Frank Capra.

1935: First drive-in restaurant (a Bob's Big Boy) opens.

More than half of all American families own at least one car.

1937: *You Only Live Once*, Fritz Lang.

1939: World War II begins.

Total American car production to date passes 75 million vehicles.

The Grapes of Wrath, John Steinbeck.

Stagecoach, John Ford.

1940: First urban freeway constructed in Pasadena, California.

The Grapes of Wrath, John Ford.

1941: The Defense Highway Act is approved.

1942: World War II causes: production of civilian passenger cars to be halted (until late 1945), the introduction of gasoline and tire rationing, and the imposition of the national speed limit (35 mph).

1944: Federal Aid Highway Act is signed into law for subsidizing the construction of secondary roads and national highways.

- 1945: World War II ends.
Civilian passenger car production resumes and gasoline rationing ends.
The Air-Conditioned Nightmare, Henry Miller.
Detour, Edgar G. Ulmer.
- 1946: *A Long Way from Boston*, Beth O'Shea.
- 1947: Henry Ford dies.
Driver education is introduced in schools.
Cold War begins.
The Devil Thumbs a Ride, Felix E. Feist.
- 1948: First NASCAR and SCCA races.
100 millionth motor vehicle manufactured in the United States.
Red River, Howard Hawks.
They Live By Night, Nicholas Ray.
- 1950: Korean War leads to a temporary cessation of auto manufacturing.
Gun Crazy, Joseph H. Lewis.
- 1952: *Road to Bali*, Hal Walker.
- 1953: Chevrolet introduces the Corvette sports car.
The Hitch-Hiker, Ida Lumpino.
The Long, Long Trailer, Vicente Minnelli.
The Wild One, Laslo Benedek.
- 1954: Ford's Thunderbird model is introduced.
Roughneck, Jim Thompson.
- 1955: Vietnam War begins.
First solar-powered car runs successfully.
Lolita, Vladimir Nabokov.
Rebel without a Cause, Nicholas Ray.

1956: The National Interstate and Defense Highways Act –for the construction of 41,000 miles of the Interstate Highway- is signed into law.

Illinois is the first state to require seat belts on all new cars sold in its jurisdiction.

A Walk on the Wild Side, Nelson Algren.

The Searchers, John Ford.

Hollywood or Bust, Frank Tashlin.

1957: Over 80% of the cars of the world are produced by American companies.

On the Road, Jack Kerouac.

1958: *The Subterraneans*, Jack Kerouac.

Dharma Bums, Jack Kerouac.

1959: First U.S. Grand Prix held (Sebring, Florida).

1960: Eighty percent of American families own automobiles.

Lonesome Traveler, Jack Kerouac.

Rabbit, Run, John Updike.

1961: National Driver Register Service begins to accumulate data on individual “serious offenders”.

Black Like Me, John H. Griffin.

1962: *Travels with Charlie*, John Steinbeck.

Wall to Wall, Douglas Wolfe.

1963: *Scorpio Rising*, Kenneth Anger.

1964: Pontiac Tempest GTO, first of the “muscle cars,” is marketed.

Ford’s Mustang is introduced and achieves record sales.

Front seat belts become standard equipment on all American cars.

1965: Motor Vehicle Air Pollution Control Act passed.

The Federal Highway Beautification Act becomes law.

This Is My Country Too, John A. Williams.

Midnight Cowboy, James L. Herlihy.

- 1966: *The Sky Changes*, Gilbert Sorrentino.
The Wild Angels, Roger Corman.
- 1967: *Bonnie and Clyde*, Arthur Penn.
The Trip, Roger Corman.
- 1968: *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, Tom Wolfe.
- 1969: Automobile accidents account for 54,895 deaths.
Easy Rider, Dennis Hopper.
- 1970: *Play It as It Lays*, Joan Didion.
- 1971: *American*, Don DeLillo.
Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, Hunter S. Thompson.
Two-Lane Blacktop, Monte Hellman.
- 1972: *Visions of Cody*, Jack Kerouac.
Divine Right's Trip, Gurney Norman.
- 1973: Oil Crisis.
- 1974: Richard Nixon's resignation after the Watergate scandal.
Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, Robert M. Pirsig.
Thieves like Us, Robert Altman.
- 1975: Vietnam War ends.
- 1977: *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*, Tom Robbins.
Smokey and the Bandit, Hal Needham.
- 1979: *The Powwow Highway*, David Seals.
- 1980: Nancy Reagan becomes involved in the "War on Drugs". Drugs became a relevant issue during this decade.
- 1981: *Baby Driver*, Jan Kerouac.
The Cannonball Run, Hal Needham.
- 1982: *Blue Highways*, William L. Heat-Moon.
- 1983: DeLorean Motor Company closes.

- Seaview: A Novel*, Toby Olson.
- National Lampoon's Vacation*, Harold Ramis.
- 1984: *Fast Lanes*, Anne Phillips.
- Stranger than Paradise*, Jim Jarmusch.
- 1985: Ford releases the Taurus.
- 1986: Hyundai becomes the first Korean auto maker to enter the American market.
- Porsche introduces the 959 sports car.
- The Hitcher*, Robert Harmon.
- 1987: *In Other Days When Going Home*, Michelle Carter.
- Not Fade Away*, Jim Dodge.
- Raising Arizona*, Joel and Ethan Coen.
- 1988: *Trainsong*, Jan Kerouac.
- Out West*, Dayton Duncan.
- Midnight Run*, Martin Brest.
- 1989: *Homer and Eddie*, Andrei Konchalovsky.
- Wild at Heart*, David Lynch.
- 1990: Gulf War begins.
- The World Health Organization removes homosexuality from its list of diseases.
- 1991: Gulf War ends.
- Cold War ends.
- The U.S. begins to experience postwar prosperity.
- Delusion*, Carl Colpaert.
- Thelma and Louise*, Ridley Scott.
- My Own Private Idaho*, Gus Van Sant.
- 1992: *The Majic Bus. An American Oddisey*, Douglas Brinkley.
- Roadside Prophets*, Abbe Wool.
- The Living End*, Gregg Araki.

- 1993: First web browser comes online.
Calendar Girl, John Whitesell.
Kalifornia, Dominic Sena.
- 1994: The Violence Against Women Act takes place.
Going Native, Stephen Wright.
- 1995: *Spinsters*, Pagan Kennedy.
Interstate, Stephen Dixon.
To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar, Beeban Kidron.
- 1996: *Brain Fever*, Valerie Sayers.
Into the Wild, Jon Krakaver.
Beavis and Butthead Do America, Mike Judge.
Get on the Bus, Spike Lee.
Freeway, Matthew Bright.
- 1997: Toyota Camry becomes the bestselling car in the U.S. dethroning the Ford Taurus.
Adoption of the Kyoto Protocol.
Flaming Iguanas, Erika Lopez.
Last Comes the Egg, Bruce Duffy.
Desperation, Stephen King.
- 1998: *Smoke Signals*, Chris Eyre.
Natural Born Killers, Oliver Stone.
- 1999: Columbine High School Massacre takes place.
The Straight Story, David Lynch.
- 2000: *The Road*, Cormac McCarthy.
Road Trip, Todd Phillips.
- 2001: September 11 attacks take place.
War in Afghanistan begins.

George W. Bush signs into law the USA PATRIOT Act.

In Search of Captain Zero: A surfer's Road Trip beyond the End of the Road, Allan Weisbecker.

Joy Ride, John Dahl.

2002: *About Schmidt*, Alexander Payne.

2003: Anti-war protests broke out around the world in opposition to the U.S. Invasion of Iraq.

Iraq War begins.

Oil prices begin to inflate.

2005: *Broken Flowers*, Jim Jarmusch.

2006: *An Inconvenient Truth* (Davis Guggenheim) is released, highlighting the question of global warming.

Only Revolutions, Mark Z. Danielewski.

Little Miss Sunshine, Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris.

2007: *Wild Hogs*, Walt Becker.

Into the Wild, Sean Penn.

2008: Oil price reaches its peak in \$147.30/barrel.

Sex Drive, Sean Anders.

2009: Barack Obama becomes the nation's first African American president.

2010: Hybrid vehicles account for less than 0.5% of the world cars.

Due Date, Todd Phillips.

2011: Iraq War ends.

Osama bin Laden is killed by the U.S. Special Forces.

2012: *Back to the Garden*, Clara Hume.

The Guilt Trip, Anne Fletcher.

2013: *Nebraska*, Alexander Payne.