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Pojetí prostoru a krajiny v románech Jacka Kerouaca

Understanding Space and Landscape in Jack Kerouac's Novels

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Abstract

In the introduction of this thesis I will introduce the main authors of the beat generation and their thought reference. The thesis then focuses on the understanding of space and the landscape in Jack Kerouac's novels (*On the Road*, *Big Sur*) in connection with the theme of the creation of the Beat Generation (search for the meaning of human existence, the motif of the road, spiritualism and the relation to religion). One of the chapters of this thesis compares the biographical facts of the representatives of the beat generation (Kerouac, Ferlinghetti) and the autobiographical features of Jack Kerouac's work, especially in the novel *Big Sur*. The conclusion of the thesis summarizes Kerouac's image of literary California and its space perception of America as an unit.

Anotace

Práce v úvodu představí hlavní autory beatnické generace a jejich myšlenkový odkaz. Práce se dále soustředí na pojetí prostoru a popis krajiny v románech Jacka Kerouaca (*On the Road*, *Big Sur*) v souvislosti s tematikou tvorby beatnické generace (hledání smyslu lidské existence, motiv cesty, spiritualismus a vztah k náboženství). Jedna z kapitol práce porovná životopisná fakta představitelů beatnické generace (Kerouac, Ferlinghetti) a autobiografické rysy tvorby Jacka Kerouaca, především v románu *Big Sur*. Závěr práce shrne Kerouacův obraz literární Kalifornie a jeho prostorové vnímání Ameriky jako celku.

Content

1. Jack Kerouac	1
1.1. The Life of Jack Kerouac	1
1.2. Kerouac's Life in New York	3
1.2. The Life after University	4
1.3. Beginnings of Kerouac's Creation	5
1.4. Kerouac and Religion	9
1.5. Jack Kerouac and His Legacy	10
2. Beat Generation	12
2.1. Influence on Creation	12
2.2. Beat Generation and Its Literature	13
2.3. Importance of Beat Generation	13
2.4. Authors of Beat Generation	14
2.4.1. Prosaics	14
2.4.2. Poets	16
3. On the Road	19
3.1. Autobiographical Elements	21
3.2. The Motif of the Wandering	22
3.3. The Motif of the Road	23
3.4. North America in the Novel On the Road	24
4. Big Sur	25

4.1.	Autobiographical Elements.....	26
4.2.	The Motif of the Road	28
4.3.	The Motif of the Landscape and Space.....	29
4.4.	Between Christianity and Buddhism.....	30
5.	Conclusion	31
6.	Bibliography	33

1. Jack Kerouac

1.1. *The Life of Jack Kerouac*

One of the most significant pioneers of a Beat Generation was a writer Jack Kerouac. Originally Jean-Louis Lebris de Kerouac was born on 12th March 1922 in Lowell, Massachusetts, USA. He came from an immigrant French–Canadian catholic family.

The family led a decent life. Jack grew up in Pawtuckeville – a part of Lowell inhabited by French–Canadian community. Living nearby, the whole family often got together at various occasions and celebrations. Jack's first language was not English, though you may have thought otherwise, but French as it was spoken at home. He learned English language at a primary school.

His parents – Leo-Alcide Kerouac and Gabrielle-Ange Levesque originally came from a Canadian province of Quebec and like many other Quebecers they emigrated to New England in a hope of better conditions.

Leo Kerouac was a printer in his own print-shop, a secured financial source for his family, and he was very proud of it. He was well-known for his personality, being noble but also a bit of quick-tempered, loving horse races and occasional drink. During the Second World War his wife had to take over his place in ensuring finances because he got ill.

Kerouac's mother, Gabrielle-Ange, was a strongly believing Catholic, much more insisting on traditions than her husband. She accepted then-modern amenities quite reluctantly and rather hold to the past. She represented a great influence for her son, perhaps leading to his future strong need of privacy and certain paranoia. Their

relationship got especially strong after Jack's father had been diagnosed with cancer.

Jack took care of him during his illness and even promised to take care of Gabrielle-Ange when he is gone. However, the death of his father was not the first loss of a loved-one in Jack's life. In a preschool age he was a witness of his brother Gerard's dying after a long and painful illness, which left him with very traumatic memories. The death became something quite fascinating and extraordinary for him. It also affected his religious beliefs. Jack was only four years old and Gerard eight years old when he died. In memory of his brother Kerouac wrote the book "Visions of Gerard". We can notice a spectre of transience and melancholy in his later life.

"Papier-mache canals flowed in downtown Lowell, men smoking cigars stand by the rail spitting in the waters that reflect the drizzle hopelessness of 1926."

— Jack Kerouac, Visions of Gerard

During attending a high school Jack distinguished himself for his sports talent, he was a successful football player. Not from the beginning though. His chances to get into the team were low and so he trained a lot more and harder to improve. It was one of the earlier examples of his ambitions and determination to achieve his goals. In a senior year he met a girl Mary Carney, who inspired him to write a book called "Maggie Cassidy". Their relationship continued during his studies in New York, but their life-style was not of a same kind and they broke up. Later, Kerouac admitted that he had never loved another more than Mary.

1.2. Kerouac's Life in New York

Thanks to his athletic talent and general success Jack had many options where to go after the high school including offers from a few universities. His catholic mother insisted that he should attend the Notre Dame University. However, his urge for excitement and adventure led to a decision to study in New York, the Columbia University. First, he had to attend a preliminary year at Horace Mann school to be allowed to continue. Therefore in 1939 Jack moved to Brooklyn to live with his aunt.

It was not a problem for Jack to have good study results. It was excellent actually, but it was his fellow-students company that made him feel inferior. Most of them were from the prominent families and upper class, which granted them with certain privileges and on the other hand there was Jack – a young boy from a little town's working class, for whom New York and upper Manhattan's ever-present crowds, noise and contrast of poverty and luxury was something very much new. These extremes caused a great confusion in a young artist's mind.

At first, Jack was quite successful at school. As a gifted writer he found some friends, to whom he helped with essays. His enthusiasm began fading away after a while. A long-time commuting, studies and evening trainings tired him down. He started to visit student's parties and clubs. Almost immediately after a beginning of a first year at the university Jack had a quite unfortunate accident. He broke his leg. His father Leo always encouraged him to play football, his mother on the other hand always disagreed with him playing. His training, the effort to be better still and unfailing ambition for success limited his writing attempts. There was not enough time for it in his life. The injury changed that a great deal. Though you may think he would be angry and frustrated about not being able to play, it was the opposite. In fact, he confessed it had been a blessing for him, because it meant time to engage himself in literature, either reading

famous authors or his own attempts of something new.

Therefore, in a second year, when most of his team-mates were called up to serve in an army, Kerouac left the football team claiming that there were very few opportunities in a team. But it was more of an excuse. He simply was not sure about what he wanted.

Leaving the team entailed leaving the university itself. And since then he could not settle down anywhere and was constantly roaming from place to place all through his life. For a while he had worked at a gas station, before he returned home to Lowell again. He also worked as a sport columnist for the Sun newspaper, but instead of engaging in the world of sport, more likely you would find him with books he was interested in and so he soon left the newspaper, too.

As it turned out to be a difficult task for him to keep a job for longer than a few months, he wanted to go back to studying at the Columbia University. Before commencing his studies again, he had applied for a job on a merchant ship, which returned to New York just on time for him not to miss the start of the term.

Kerouac returned to the university and to the football team, too. But when a coach did not let him play in an opening match, he left again. It seems he was very unhappy by the end of the term and he was looking for any pretext to leave the university.

1.2. The Life after University

In 1942 he joined the US Navy. But its strict discipline and demands turned to be something unbearable for him. He refused to follow orders and so he was dismissed in 1943. The reason stated in his papers were alleged psychological issues, namely the

diagnosis of a paranoid schizophrenia. Kerouac was in care of doctors and military psychologists for six months of his Navy service.

Kerouac himself ascribed these psychological problems to his high intelligence. He took an issue with the daily routine in the Navy and from his point of view a lot of purposeless orders, he also could not stand the violence and brutality of the American football. It triggered fits of rage by him, because both cases required observing the rules. These fits of rage were merely his defence mechanism.

His decision to leave the university was not met with understanding at home. His parents wanted him to study. His father was not particularly enthusiastic about Jack's literary attempts the same way as his mother was not about playing football. It caused a contradiction again – doing something he liked was always a fault to someone.

1.3. Beginnings of Kerouac's Creation

To escape the blame and confusion he decided for another voyage on a ship, this time to Liverpool. After his return he worked on a novel "The Town and the City", which he hoped would get him his parents' understanding and approval.

In 1944 Kerouac returned to New York and met a young student Frankie Edith Parker, with whom he moved in soon. In summer 1944 he met Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs. Burroughs was the oldest one of them and for other two was often sort of mentor. All of them soon moved in together. It was Burroughs who introduced Kerouac to Lucien Carr. Carr was very peculiar person of a quite unstable and condescending nature, but also very attractive. Kerouac admired him and soon they became very good friends. The admiration was mutual. Kerouac impressed Carr by his energy and intellect.

Carr's and Burroughs' were introduced by their mutual friend Dave Kammerer. He fell in love with Carr and became even obsessed by him. He stalked him and spied on him in many ways, followed him like a shadow wherever he went.

Nevertheless, in August 1944 Kammerer finally overstepped boundaries and demanded a sexual intercourse with Carr. Carr refused and stabbed him with a knife several times. He got rid of the body and asked Kerouac to help him cover the evidence. But in a short time, the police arrested both of them and they were imprisoned.

For Kerouac's parents it was unimaginable shame. They always minded their good name and were afraid of what people would think, if they knew about their son's behaviour. That is why they refused to bail him out of the prison. It was Edith, who paid the bail.

On 22nd August 1944 Jack and Edith got married. But the marriage was not fated to last for long. They divorced after only two months. It might have been due to their lifestyle or perhaps because he married Edith out of spite his parents for not paying the bail.

After spending some time away from Edith, Jack returned to New York and lived with his friend Ginsberg. He also kept in touch with William Burroughs, although their friendship was not ideal. Leo and Gabrielle kept interfering in Jack's life and tried to prevent him from meeting with friends they considered to be a bad influence for him. Finally, in 1946 Jack had to return home to help his mother take care of his seriously ill father. Burroughs and his girlfriend Joan Adams moved out of New York and became farmers. Ginsberg on the contrary decided to board a cargo ship and travel the world.

At home Kerouac had a space for his writing. He was finishing "The Town and the City" and also had a lot of time to read and seek inspiration. At the time the letter arrived from Neal Cassady inviting Kerouac to live with him in New York. At the door Cassady

welcomed Jack completely naked, which was only one of many similarities in their nature and sense of humour. Like Lucien Carr before, Cassady meant a new idol for Kerouac and also reminded him of his late brother Gerard.

Cassady was the opposite of Jack. He grew up in inhospitable conditions, wandered through the country, stole if necessary and also spent some nights in reformatory schools. Cassady triggered a desire and also encouraged Kerouac to travel the US, to experience something new. So, in 1947 Kerouac decided to travel, initially to the west by hitchhiking.

After returning from the journey, he finished "The Town and the City", and with an experience he started to write his novel "On the Road". He met with Cassady again and they decided to travel to the west of America together, which later would be a theme of the novel "On the Road".

Back again, he continued working on the novel in Denver, where he also got a job as a messenger. Cassady showed up again unexpected and easily talked and manipulated Jack into going to Mexico to visit Burroughs, although Kerouac was hesitant and Cassady's presence was quite unpleasant to him. Arriving to Mexico, Cassidy left him out of a blue and Kerouac stayed by Burroughs and Joan alone. His health worsened and he "treated" himself by marijuana and morphine. Nevertheless, he still worked on his novel "On the Road".

The drug abuse left a mark on him when he returned to America. At Ginsberg's he met Bill Cannasta, a heavy drinker, exhibitionist and risk-lover. And so, Kerouac dealt with a death of someone dear to him again.

Encouraged by alcohol, Cannasta got an idea during going on subway to get off through the window. He was flung out while the carriage was still moving and his body

hit a pillar. After his friend's death, Kerouac got married again, this time with Cannasta's friend Joan Haverty. It was going very similar to the first marriage. They did not know each other very well and got divorced after only six months.

At the end of April 1951 Kerouac finished his novel "On the Road". Deep down he suspected that publishers are not ready for something like that. He showed the novel to Robert Giroux, who immediately started talking about revisions. Kerouac took his manuscript and left. He tried to rework the novel a bit and at the same time to write a new book "Visions of Cody". He lived at Cassady's place and had an affair with his wife, moreover was it supported by Cassady himself. After a while, Kerouac decided for another journey to Mexico. And he tried some new drugs there.

Kerouac's life changed in Mexico, his whole perception changed and he was worried of public reception of his so far best novels "Visions of Cody" and "On the Road". He was afraid they were not ready for it. The writing meant a whole life to him, nothing was more important and so he decided that he would be the most important reader for himself. Establishing that, he set off to travel through Mexico again. He travelled by various ways – on a deck of dirty buses, which merely went, on foot through varied surroundings. Also, he visited an old friend Burroughs. For a while he stayed at his house, they experimented with drugs while listening to Kerouac's jazz records. Jack spent a lot of time in a bathroom, working on his new composition. He got more and more depressed, had no money, no success, only desperation.

In 1952 Kerouac returned to Rocky Mount, only to meet with Cassady who lured him on another journey to San José. Travelling west Kerouac could no longer stand Cassady's company parted with him. He settled down in San Francisco. But working in San Francisco was not satisfying for him and so he went back to Mexico, to Burroughs. However, Burroughs was in worse state than he himself and Kerouac soon returned to

New York, where he lived in his mother's apartment in Queens. There he started writing a book called "Maggie Cassidy" in memory of his first love Mary Carney.

Though he travelled to many places throughout following years, he always returned to New York in the end.

1.4. Kerouac and Religion

Although he was raised as a Catholic by his mother, he developed a taste for Buddhism philosophy. For a few years he studied Asian mythical traditions to find an inner peace and blissfulness and the one that caught his eye the most was Zen Buddhism.

He spent hours in libraries, looking for various sources and some of them he even translated to French. Teaching of Mahayana Buddhism matched with his own perception of life and with his literary work. Kerouac tried to find a peace through a meditation. It helped him to get into harmony with himself. He mentioned Buddhism in his letters to Ginsberg and Burroughs.

To many personalities of Beat Generation Buddhism provided them with a certain way to change the experiencing of their emotions. It helped them to become quieter and calm, contrary to them being absent-minded and angry. Especially Ginsberg had been interested in Buddhism on Kerouac's recommendation. Burroughs not so much. In a letter to Kerouac he describes Buddhism as a kind of drug. That was his reaction after he had come to know that Kerouac was celibate during his studies of Buddhism.

Though Kerouac valued Burroughs opinions, he did not drop the studies. He needed to follow rules of Buddhism in order to deal with his own existence. It was a way to cope with his defeat and disappointment and to get sort of perspective and optimism. His understanding of Buddhism is reflected in a book "The Dharma Bums".

Thanks to Buddhism he got through his darkest periods of desperation and hopelessness.

It was then, when he was discovering Buddhism, that Kerouac flourished as a writer. Over seven years he wrote twelve books. The novel "On the Road" was published in 1957, six years after it was finished. Kerouac waited so long, because he did not want it to be forgotten like "The Town and the City", which did not get almost any attention. The novel "On the Road" was published at the right time, when the public was finally ready for it. And it got a great response, despite critics' prognosis.

1.5. Jack Kerouac and His Legacy:

After 1960 Kerouac suffers from a personal crisis as well as a writer. He could not bear the fame, which followed the publishing of "On the Road". He sought privacy and moved back to Lowell. Kerouac abandoned Buddhism and became Catholic again. Last years of his life he spent with his mother and his third wife Stella.

Consequences of his lifestyle – abuse of drugs and alcohol, manifested at last. Kerouac died on 21st October 1969 in St. Anthony's Hospital, Saint Petersburg, Florida.

The verdict was a liver cirrhosis as a result of a heavy alcoholism. He was buried in his hometown.

Bibliography:

1950 - The Town and the City

1957 - On the Road

1958 - The Subterraneans

1958 - The Dharma Bums

1959 - Mexico City Blues: 242 Choruses

1959 - Dr. Sax

1959 - Maggie Cassidy

1960 - Tristessa

1960 – Lonesome Traveler

1960 – Book Of Dreams

1960 – Visions of Cody

1960 - The Scripture of the Golden Eternity

1961 – Pull My Daisy

1962 – Big Sur

1963 – Visions of Gerard

1965 – Desolation Angels

1966 – Satori in Paris

2. BEAT GENERATION

Beat generation was an artistic and literary movement that originated in the United States in the post-war era of the 1950s. The word "beat" cannot be translated into Czech. The closest meaning to the words "zbitý", "úder", "blažený", "vyčerpaný" and many others. The term "beat" was devised by Herbert Huncke during his drug addiction. The term "Beat generation" was first used by John Clellon Holmes as the working title of his book "Go". Even the Beat Generation interpreters themselves differ in their views about the name of the direction.

It can be said that the creation of this movement was only for the USA. A group of authors has already known each other from Columbia University in the City of New York, where Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and many others, including William Burroughs, met for the first time. New York became the starting point, but later the centre moved to the second coast, to San Francisco. Their lifestyle can be described as bohemian, contrary to what was expected and considered to be correct, contrary to how the consumer society behaved. Beat Generation was guided by the slogan: "Not to be right but true". The representatives lived wild, often much unrestrained life full of alcohol, drugs and with frequent offenses against the law. The beat generation literature can be described as brilliant and intellectual, full of love on the one hand and, on the other, as obscene and immoral, full of crime. They tried to find a link between the reader and the author, often while reading in public places (e.g. Six Galleries in San Francisco). The effort was to create their own style, drawing on their own experience of traveling across America.

2.1. Influence on Creation

In addition to the motive of the wandering, are people from the beat generation also connected with their sexual life, alcoholism, drug abuse, freedom of the speech, fashion

style and listening to jazz that often accompanied their public appearances, as well as finding peace and connection with nature through oriental and alternative religions, such as Zen Buddhism, by which they freely interpreted their philosophical ideas. Eastern religion also meant again a "escape" from the Western world, an escape from the materialist conception of the world, while Zen Buddhism appeals to compassion and participation with human being. The interpretation of Zen Buddhism was very eccentric, since the beat generation had adapted it to its image.

2.2. *Beat Generation and Its Literature*

The work of beat generation is spontaneous, and with the usage of general language, vulgar words, slang terms, the poetry is characterized by free verse and mixing reality. This included not only fiction in the work, but also real own experiences in the fiction, including the autobiographical elements (*On the Road*) in the fiction. With their works, they wanted to show rebellion and defiance - for example in the poem *Howl and Other Poems* or in the novel *On the Road*. The main character of the beatnik novel should be hard-pressed, living on the edge of society seeking freedom in alcohol, drugs and sex, and seeking an escape by wandering.

2.3. *Importance of Beat Generation*

They created the basics for the hippies movement that evolved from the Beat Generation ideals - influenced the thinking and lifestyle of many people. They introduced new elements and new possibilities of expression into literature. It has also influenced the subsequent literary work, based on the beat generation, which has only a lot to do with the original beatnik literature. Beatniks found a way to turn away from the traditional consumer society, and using its works and behavior to shock her with its sincerity.

2.4. Authors of Beat Generation

2.4.1. Prosaics

William Seward Burroughs

He was born in 1914 in St. Louis, Missouri. He belonged among American novelists, essayists, social critics and even a painters. Inherently he is also nicknamed as "The spiritual father of Beat Generation".

He was born into a relatively affluent family but was suffering from psychological anxiety and other mental disorders since childhood. Huge impact had also the fact that he was sexually abused as a child in pre-school age. All this childhood experiences were reflected in his work in the future. Even at a young age, Burroughs confessed he is gay when he fell in love with a classmate at a boarding school. Same as Kerouac also Burroughs was in the army during the II. World War and he was declared unfit to remain in it. The reason was the psychiatric finding.

During his life in Chicago, he met Joan Vollmer, whom he married. But his wife was shot by death by accident in front of their son. Under the influence of alcohol, he decided to show the trick so Joan put the glass on her head and William was supposed to shoot it down. But Burroughs missed and the bullet instead of a glass buried itself directly into Joanna's brain. This tragic accident brought him closer to Allen Ginsberg and led to their love affair.

Since his youth, Burroughs used a wide range of drugs and became a drug addicted, especially during his stay in Morocco. Among other things, he was the founder of the "cyberpunk" - a part of science fiction, which is embedded in a futuristic environment

where technology meets scum. He is also the author of the name "heavy metal", and he is also the last American author who was almost banned from publishing his work.

He died in 1997 in Lawrence, Kansas.

Significant pieces of his work:

1953 – Junkie

1959 – Naked Lunch

1971 - The Wild Boys: A Book Of The Dead

Neal Cassady

He was born in 1926 in Salt Lake City, Utah, into a family of an alcoholic father, and grew up in poor conditions. As a young man he slept in various places, wandered, stole, and often got put in the youth detention centres.

In 1946 he met Kerouac and Ginsberg at Columbia University in the City of New York. With Kerouac, he became very close - Kerouac was very much like the Cassady's dead brother Gerald. They drank alcohol and tried marijuana and other drugs together. Cassady was a huge inspiration for Kerouac.

He wrote prose and poetry, but during his life, no book was published, and there is not many of his collections preserved.

Cassady earned his cast in literary works of his friends, for example in the poem collection *Howl and Other Poems* (Allen Ginsberg), Kerouac's novel *On the Road* or *Big Sur*.

2.4.2. Poets

Allen Ginsberg

His real name is Irwin Allen Ginsberg, he was one of the most important representatives of the Beat Generation. He was born in 1926 in New Jersey. His mother was Jewish and suffered from paranoia, father was a poet. Both these attributes influenced Ginsberg's work. Like several other beatniks, he also studied at Columbia University, but he was excluded because of drugs. In his work, he expresses shamelessly about homosexuality, drug using, and the thought of Zen Buddhism and other Eastern philosophies. He liked to raise up - for example, by reciting without clothes or by radical anarchist speeches and opinions.

During his travel around the world, he visited many interesting places, even Czechoslovakia, but he was deported. Students even chose him as "The King of the Majales". Ginsberg was then accused of giving the bad example to young people.

Allen Ginsberg died in 1997 of liver failure as a result of hepatitis.

Work:

1956 – Howl and Other Poems

1961 - Kaddish and Other Poems

1965 - King of a May Day parade (Kral Majales) – inspired by events in Czechoslovakia

1978 – Mind Breaths

Lawrence Ferlinghetti

Lawrence Ferlinghetti (his real name was Ferling) was born in 1919. In addition to his poetry, he also dealt with translation (the most famous translation of his is Marcel Proust).

He was born in the USA to a family of Italian immigrants but spent his youth in France. He first studied journalism and then studied poetry in Paris. After his studies he returned to the States and taught French. In the 1950s, he founded the City Lights Publishers (named after Chaplin's movie) in San Francisco, where he published some of the Beat Generation books. He wrote poetry with an informal spoken language. At the beginning of his literary career, he experimented with writing under the influence of narcotics, especially LSD. So he developed experimental writing. In this work, Ferlinghetti focuses on the theme of freedom, love and sex. He was also famous for his pacifist attitude towards the wars.

His work differs from other beatniks in that he was quite involved in the political sphere he had embedded in his works.

Work:

1958 - A Coney Island of the Mind

1961 - Starting from San Francisco

1970 - Back Roads to Far Towns After Basho

1973 - Open Eye, Open Heart

1976 - Who Are We Now?

The presented text deals with the concept of space and landscape in Jack Kerouac's novels, with emphasis on the titles *On the Road* and *Big Sur*. The analysis of selected novels is set in the context of the creation of the so-called Beat Generation, which focused on the motives of searching for the meaning of human existence, the motif of the path, spiritualism and the relation to religion. The interpretation of the autobiographical features of Jack Kerouac's work, notably in the *Big Sur* novel, will not be overlooked. Another aspect of the text is Kerouac's image of literary California and its spatial perception of America as an unit.

The interpretation is divided into two thematic units, analysing the novels *On the Road* and *Big Sur*. These thematic units are then subdivided into subchapters that focus on the above - mentioned aspects of Kerouac's work. As a common denominator of Kerouac's works, we could label the term "beat", which perfectly describes the subsoil from which Kerouac's novels have been growing. Beat was characterized by John. C. Holmes, as a certain nudity of mind and soul, a sense of reduction to a mere basis of consciousness.¹ Specifically, in the novel *On the Road*, this concept expresses the wild pursuit of the main heroes for their experiences and pieces of experience. It is therefore evident that the essence of the term beat is not unambiguous and can be used in various contexts.

¹ HOLMES, John Clellon. This is the Beat Generation. In: *Beat down to your soul: What was the Beat Generation?* New York: Penguin Books, 2001, s. 222-228. ISBN 0-14-10-0151-8, s. 223.

3. On the Road

The following chapter deals with Kerouac's novel *On the Road*, which was first translated into Czech in 1978 under the title "*Na cestě*." The main motif of this Kerouac's fundamental work, which was created in 1951, is the way or the merging of the physical path, with the path in the spiritual sense of wandering as a theme to which Kerouac repeatedly returns in his works. Interesting information in the context of this work is the fact that Kerouac wrote his novel right on the several-dimensional role of Japanese drawing paper so that he did not have to keep up with paper-writing on the typewriter. The work is thus made up of one long paragraph by the method of free-flowing thoughts without any modifications or punctuation (so-called spontaneous prose)². According to the legend, the writer refused to fix a single word, except for the last meter of the typewriter that was chewed by his dog.³

Kerouac describes his style into more details in the work *The Subterraneans* where he states that "*Poor examples coming from the mechanical need of writing on a machine, such as flowing the sounds of the river, words, darkness, and heading to the future, and confirming the madness, the extinction and the rumbling circle of my mind, blessed or not blessed is where the trees are in jittery wind [...] "*⁴.

Although in the novel there is no plot (it is only a set of author's memories), Kerouac presents impressive descriptions of the landscape, nature, emotions and other aspects of his life as a wanderer.

The main character of the novel is Sal Paradise, a young student with literary ambitions, who fits fully into the majority of the society. However, he is not satisfied with his

² TYTELL, John. *Nazí andělé*. Olomouc: Votobia, 1996. ISBN 80-7198-104-4, s. 73-74.

³ COLLINS, Ron a David M. SKOVER. *Mánie: sex, drogy & literatura: příběh bouřliváků a buřičů, kteří zahájili kulturní revoluci*. V Praze: Metafora, 2013. ISBN 978-80-7359-377-3, s. 151.

⁴ KEROUAC, Jack. *Podzemníci*. Olomouc: Votobia, 1997. ISBN 80-719-8225-3, s. 49.

position in the life, so he is looking for a company of people who are “banished” by the majority. One of his so called friend is a delinquent Dean Moriarty, who learns from Sal to the literary art. Dean inspires Sala to listen to his inner adventurer and set off the journey through America. At this moment, the description of Sal's journey begins in the physical and spiritual sense of the word. During this trip, Sal is visiting many of American cities, namely Denver, San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, New Orleans, and others, and Kerouac's atmosphere makes it easy for the readers...

Kerouac has a special way of nihilistic reasoning, by which it continuously intersects the descriptive passages. He philosophizes about the way of life, which always leads only to death.

*"Something, someone, some spirit pursues us all through the desert of life to reach us just before reaching the paradise. When I think about it today, of course, it is clear to me that it is death, death will catch us before paradise arrives. The only thing we long for during our life, for which we sigh and jump and from which we make a pleasant mellow, is the memory of some lost bliss that we have apparently experienced in our mother's womb and which we will know (although we do not want it in any way admit) again when death comes. But who would want to die? "*⁵

After the novel *On the Road* became the most successful publishing act, the publishing house forced Kerouac to write a free continuation.

The *Dharma Bums* saw the light of the world in the autumn of 1957. In this novel, the reader can feel Kerouac's inclination to Buddhism, which he conveyed in his person with convinced Christianity.

⁵ KEROUAC, Jack. *Na cestě: rukopisný svitek*. Praha: Argo, 2009. ISBN 978-80-257-0170-6, s. 148.

3.1. *Autobiographical Elements*

Although virtually all Kerouac novels contain autobiographical elements, the novel *On the Road* is presented as the fictional autobiography of Sal Paradise - Kerouac is a kind of "self-talk" in the text. It is an almost surreal record of the remembrance of a great journey.

On the Road, the title is based on the actual route (or the four partial routes) of Kerouac trip across the United States, during which Kerouac enrolled the cultural, psychological and spiritual changes he later described in his work.

In the interview for the *Paris Review*, Kerouac said that "*... the only thing I can offer is the real story of what I saw and how I saw it.*"⁶ The author himself was the character of Sal Paradise, while the inspiration of the main character Dean Moriarty is, in fact, Neal Cassady (in general, the main characters of the novel are at the same time real persons of the Beat Movement – Kerouac's inspiration was not just Neal Cassady, but also Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs). Describing journeys across the United States took time between 1947 and 1950, and Kerouac had already recorded their impressions and experiences that later reflected in the manuscript.

Thanks to this, he could faithfully convey his experiences and emotions associated with jazz parties, alcohol, sex, drugs, petty crime, listening to music (the author presented the music he listened to in such a way that the book de facto has its own soundtrack) and of course traveling by various transport resources.

Like most influential movements in literature, the book is a reaction to the pre-eminent state of society, and Kerouac, by its novel, opposes the "monological" culture of the Cold War, which encouraged self-censorship, self-observation, and only politically

⁶ BERRIGAN, Ted. *Interview s Jackem Kerouacem pro Paris Review*. Olomouc: Votobia, 1996. ISBN 80-7198-129-X, s. 27.

acceptable information.⁷ In his confession, Kerouac described the struggle of a beat generation that sought spirituality in America that had lost spirituality. America of Kerouac's era was built on the upper middle class, which was instigated for consumption and spectacular consumption. Against this model of a "typical American" as if Kerouac had defined himself in his prose.

3.2. *The Motif of the Wandering*

Kerouac's work strongly resonates with the motif of the wandering that is ambivalent in its nature - on the one hand, it is attractive and fascinating for a conventional man, on the other hand it opposes, in a particular way, the absence of a permanent home and the cultural stereotypes that are associated with the idea of a wanderer. In the 20s of the 20th century, the view of the wandering changed - before this change the wanderer was de facto understood as a future criminal element, characterized primarily by the refusing to work, however, after this discourse change was the wanderer understood as someone with the need for freedom, rejection of stereotype and subordination.⁸

In the area of North America, as Kerouac also points out in the novel *On the Road*, the wandering became understood in the new perspective of the meaning - the ability to easily get lost out of sight of the law. Kerouac represents the characters of modern wanderers who had to learn how to transfer the characteristics of the rocky life into the urban environment as well. This necessity is the result of the sudden changes in the landscape associated with urbanization - one can no longer walk hundreds of kilometers alone in an empty landscape, and the way of traveling through the country is changing. The traveler accepts for his journey the transporting by train, bus or tram, which enrich the concept of the wandering with new aspects.

⁷ CUNNELL, Howard. Tentokrát rychle. Jack Kerouac a vznik románu *Na cestě*. In: KEROUAC, Jack. *Na cestě: rukopisný svitek*. Praha: Argo, 2009. ISBN 978-80-257-0170-6, s. 8-9.

⁸ MAFFESOLI, Michel. *O nomádství*. Praha: Prostor, 2002. ISBN 80-7260-069-9, s. 54.

3.3. *The Motif of the Road*

The journey is pictured even in the name of the novel itself. Its content is about the epic spiritual path that the main heroes are trying to find to get something that makes their lives meaningful. But they do not find this, so they're looking for a change on the way back from California. Kerouac blends the text with a physical journey taking place from the east coast of America to the west coast of America and a spiritual journey through which is often travelled under the influence of drugs.

Cunnell considers as Kerouac's motivation to frequently repeat the motif of a journey as the conviction that the road is a basic element of American idealism, a belief in some place at the end of the road where one builds home. This idea was displaced in the Kerouac era on the periphery of American life, and Kerouac's ambition was to record the events on this periphery.⁹

There is an undeniable connection between the journey and ride and speed, in the work *On the Road*. These path attributes symbolize liberation and escape from the anxieties of conventional life. Kerouac combines with the ride also the motifs of the rapidly changing landscape. When he moves in the car with Neal at high speed on the road, he wakes the landscape like a wind that wraps her unrestrained and unconcerned. The ecstatic joy of traveling is repeatedly emphasized in the novel.

*"Yeeees," roared Dean. "We're going!" He glanced over the wheel and pushed the gas pedal to the floor. He was back in his element, they all saw him. We were all enthusiastic because we realized that behind us we left confusion and nonsense, and we are doing the only possible noble and meaningful activity of our time - we are flying in the car. And that we flew in the car...!"*¹⁰

⁹ CUNNELL, Howard. Tentokrát rychle. Jack Kerouac a vznik románu *Na cestě*. In: KEROUAC, Jack. *Na cestě: rukopisný svitek*. Praha: Argo, 2009. ISBN 978-80-257-0170-6, s. 12.

¹⁰ KEROUAC, Jack. *Na cestě: rukopisný svitek*. Praha: Argo, 2009. ISBN 978-80-257-0170-6, s. 139.

The motif of the journey is closely related to the way Kerouac depicts landscape and space. It is mostly visible from the space of the road where the main heroes are transporting. It is a paradox that the motorway is also something for Kerouac that has the potential to destroy the original culture and nature.

3.4. North America in the Novel *On the Road*

Kerouac, through spontaneous writing without interference and limitations, has not only been able to give a credible picture of physical America, mediated by descriptions of urban and rural landscapes but at the same time, afflicted America in its vital form. He captured the spirit of the time and its energy by noting the tiny nuances around him, subduing the power of the moment. The novel *On the Road* recorded immediate success and earned Kerouac the title of King of the Beat Generation, against which the author argued that *On the Road* could not be taken as a "manifest of the speaker" of the entire generation. Penny Vlagopoulos adds that "*At the end of his life, constantly bombarded by requests to express his opinion and his relation to the fast-paced, unofficial culture, he explained that *On the Road* was hardly any kind of propaganda.*"¹¹

The description of the American West coincides with the way it is commonly understood in literature. Going to the West meant going to discover a country that has retained its charm and wild character in comparison with the East. Likewise, for Sal, the countryside and the cities that lie ahead are the challenges of a new adventure.

Sal sees himself as one of the explorers or settlers who came to the West to seek a new life. They see the echoes of past times and other great American writers who have been wandering around the American landscape. For example, the countryside around the Mississippi River reminds him of Mark Twain, in Denver he finds collective memories of cowboy times and dangerous border guards.

¹¹ VLAGOPOULOS, Penny. Vznik nové Ameriky. In: KEROUAC, Jack. *Na cestě: rukopisný svitek*. Praha: Argo, 2009. ISBN 978-80-257-0170-6, s. 58.

Kerouac views the landscape in a more critical way that corresponds to historical political-historical events. The novel commented on the Federal-Aid Highway Act from 1956, which was signed by President Eisenhower and formally began to build a national highway system. This act for Kerouac meant the fact that America was definitely covering its Wild West. Because people could comfortably travel to the West, there were places that could be discovered. This fact is demonstrated by the Wild West Festival in Cheyenne, a tourist attraction that seeks to consume life in the Wild West. Similarly, the mining town of Denver becomes a tourist attraction rather than a link to the old West.

The destructive effect of building motorways is seen by the main heroes in Mexico, where highways have changed the face of the mountain landscape and destroyed Indian culture. On the other hand, the motorway is, in this sense, an ambivalent means for the main heroes to make their way, a means that gives them freedom.

4. Big Sur

The novel *Big Sur* could be considered as an epitaph of Kerouac's life. He wrote for six weeks in Lawrence Ferlinghetti's hut near the seaside town of Big Sur, California, where he wanted to find inner peace, think and observe.

*"I'm always proud to love the world in some way. Hate is in comparison to this so simple, [...]"*¹².

¹² KEROUAC, Jack. *Big Sur*. Hradec Králové: Cyindr, 1995. ISBN 80-901-8880-X, s. 139.

Loneliness in the woods, however, instead of expecting tranquillity, brings a feeling at the brink of insanity that Kerouac "cured" with trips to the city on a journey with his comrades, who are, as on *On the Road*, great personalities of Beat Generation.

The novel *Big Sur* takes us into the last decade of the writer's life, which was overwhelmed by the artistic crisis. Despite the fact that the novel is soaked with melancholy and nihilism, which is diametrically different from *On the Road*, it is still a proof of Kerouac's comic and poetic mastery.¹³ Kerouac was supposed to write *Big Sur* over ten nights on a typewriter and with the help of Benzedrine. It is Kerouac's most powerful autobiographical prose that can be perceived as an allegory of the end of the Beat era.

From a formal point of view, the writer has suppressed aspects of spontaneous prose and has made the text a much more readable matter that readers understand as a clear sense of the feelings of crisis and melancholy. Another change in form is the fact that the writer has freed himself from the exclusive use of the past, making the story more up to date.

4.1. *Autobiographical Elements*

The novel *Big Sur* is Kerouac's most autobiographical work. As his novel aims into the intimacy of the author's essence, it also becomes depressive and in some aspects surreal. Kerouac tries to get rid of the disillusion. His melancholy view of the world suits the philosophy of Buddhism to which he fully inclines. In his novel, the Zen-Buddhist elements, spirituality and philosophical and religious meditation are increasingly appearing. While *On the Road* is Kerouac, a rebellious rebel who wanders over jazz bars and diversifies his life

¹³ HILSKÝ, Martin. Osamělý poutník Jack Kerouac. In: KEROUAC, Jack. *Na cestě*. Praha: Odeon, 1978, s. 20.

with unrestrained eroticism and drinking, Big Sur is returning to nature with a certain amount of nostalgia.

"In the end, it always happens in the nature, where you feel the nostalgia of cities, where you dream of long gray roads leading to cities, where twilight melts softly into the night like in Paris, but you don't think about the fact, how twisted this is, because we do belong into nature, and we find ourselves there, with the eternity of life and the purity of our soul."¹⁴

Even in the Big Sur novel, is Neal Cassady's alter-ego, which is now Cody Pomeray. Neal Cassady works in Kerouac's novels as a unifying element and source of inspiration - symbolically, Cassady's way across Kerouac's literary work can be seen as a reference to the rogue poetics. Other emerging celebrities from the beat generation including Lawrence Ferlinghetti (pseudonym Lorenzo Monsanto) and Allen Ginsberg (Irwin Garden).

Kerouac as Jack Duluoz, a creative exhausted artist, and an eternally sober alcoholic, describes in the novel his six-week stay in a California mountain cabin where he stayed during the 1960s. Although Jack Duluoz will not last for a long time in a quiet solitude, he will soon succumb to San Francisco's clubs, the text seems to have included a farewell to the energetic and unconventional beatnik, and indeed to his whole generation. That corresponds to ubiquitous nihilism - perhaps on every side Kerouac operates with terms like death or madness.¹⁵

The work also reflects Kerouac's religious pluralism - Christian moralizing combines with Buddhist philosophizing. The author himself, through Jack Duluoz, has several times suggested that the Big Sur symbolizes the Garden of Eden in which he plays the role of a sick clown suffered by a moral disease.¹⁶

¹⁴ KEROUAC, Jack. *Big Sur*. Hradec Králové: Cyindr, 1995. ISBN 80-901-8880-X, s. 22.

¹⁵ NICOSIA, Gerald. *Memory Babe: kritická biografie Jacka Kerouaka*. Olomouc: Votobia, 1996. ISBN 80-85885-02-6, s. 553.

¹⁶ Tamtéž, s. 552.

The novel originated when Jack Kerouac was in the artistic crisis phase of life. In the media, "hysteria" was around the "King of the Beat Generation", which obviously did not seem to be too much about the label. From the story, there is a feeling of surrender and a desperate attempt to find shelter from the spotlight. In this context, Kerouac fled to the mountain cabin from himself with the image of a solitary pilgrim.

4.2. *The Motif of the Road*

While in the novel *On the Road*, the physical journey of the main character here, comparable to *Odyssey*, travelled across the United States from one shore to another in the company of his best friend, *Big Sur* is a recurring journey from the Bigsur Hills to the city and back. Movement in space in this case symbolizes the metaphysical movement for salvation and destruction. As if the writer always hoped that somewhere else it would be better, but he only experienced repeated disappointments.¹⁷

Big Sur also includes the philosophical aspect of the motif of the journey. The clear confession of the deep artistic crisis is also a mirror to the generation of beatniks, revealing the testimony of their lives. The author "travels" from the source of the crisis to resolve it back and forth as he fails to overcome this crisis. The path is in this sense a dramatic internal struggle. Part of this autobiographical feature is the escape from self-stylization to a more sincere and personal tone, to which the chosen form of narration.¹⁸

Referring to the leaving Beat soul is the way Kerouac travels. While in the work *On the Road* was the main way of transporting a hitchhiker, now a former bum is buying a ticket by convention. Drivers are no longer so willing to provide their "services" to

¹⁷ PEISERT, Jakub. Příběh s unhappy endem (ale vlastně bez začátku i bez konce). *Labyrint*, 1996, č. 2, s. 20-21.

¹⁸ ONUFER, Petr. Posmutnělá hledání Jacka Kerouaca. *Nové knihy* 36, 31. 1. 1996, č. 4, s. 1.

hitchhikers, but the main reason for the change in Kerouac's travel is the fact that he is no longer interested.

4.3. *The Motif of the Landscape and Space*

In comparison with *On the Road*, the novel *Big Sur* takes place on a smaller territory. Kerouac had to work with the landscape around Big Sur, ending in the Pacific Ocean near the artist's temporary dwelling. It was the Pacific Ocean, more like its wild waves, crashing into the shore, to whom the author dedicated the poem "Sea", which on twenty-four pages evokes the moaning of seawater and the impact of waves. At the same time, this poem, as Jakub Peisert stated, recalls in the book several poems in the form of haiku, which fix the presence so that it can be expressed forever. The poem is an organic part of the work that draws the writer's perception of the landscape around Big Sur in a new form and in a different context.

The location of Big Sur in California is very important for Kerouac. When the main character first enters the mountain cabin, he speaks of it as he would be a refuge in front of the busy city and the people in it. Kerouac, through Duluoz, searches for isolation, peace, and the beginning of the path to find himself in the log cabin. Raton Canyon is again a metaphor for Kerouac's balancing on the brink of madness (Duluoz repeatedly promises to the reader that before his story ends, this fall will take place).

Although Big Sur is presented as a haven, it is, in essence, a terrible and dangerous place where the media-prosecuted writer was forced to resort to temporary rest. As Duluoz's insanity progresses, the Big Sur is symbolically changing. Writer's emotions are reflected in the landscape, or in the way he sees the landscape and in the details that he focuses on. When Duluoz faces the delirium of tremens, he describes the landscape around

him as a mad creepy canyon - in this context, the landscape around Big Sur works like a barometer of Kerouac's moods.

Just as Kerouac is no longer a Beat Generation King, who is twenty-five years old, but a nearly forty-year-old cynical alcoholic, the landscape is bigger, dirtier, harsher and less friendly. The novel illustrates how static space can be changed in the context of the transformation of mind - California is at one point a beautiful and friendly country which will be described as terrifying and lonely at the next moment.

4.4. *Between Christianity and Buddhism*

Through the novel, there is the theme of influencing the main hero through Christianity and Buddhism, which coexists in Kerouac's work and determines not only the behavior of the writer's alter-ego, but is also visible in the perception of the landscape and the way. Zen-Buddhism in Kerouac's work coincides with the sensible concept of nature that gives freedom to body and thought.

In the Big Sur novel, Kerouac finds himself at the bottom. The starting point for this is a connection between Christian and Buddhist thought. However, the religious visions are not as pure as we could read them in *The Dharma Bums* - they are polluted by Kerouac's worsened mental and physical condition. In the final climax of the novel, the reader sees the vision of the cross, which symbolizes the fact that Kerouac eventually renounced Buddhism and ultimately turned to Christianity. This aspect is in sharp contrast to the beginning of the novel, which also contains a Christian motif - this time it is the sound of bells, which, however, seems to be intolerable to the main character and awakens it to the reality of personal failure.

5. Conclusion

Jack Kerouac is probably the most well-known figure of the Beat Movement, which is originated in the second half of the 1950s as a response to the US consumer, capitalist and conformist society. His novel, *On the Road*, first published in 1957 after long years of refusal by the publisher, has become a manifestation of the Beat movement, and made Kerouac the uncrowned beatnik's king. This almost surrealist work contains the essence of beats - jazz clubs, drugs, alcohol, sex, tragedy, non-conformist ways of life, and return to nature. After the great success *On the Road*, the publisher forced Kerouac to create another novel. The novel *Dharma Bums*, which, like its predecessor, contains powerful autobiographical elements. Dharma means a journey - in this case not only the physical path of Jack Kerouac, who appears in the book as Ray Smith, and Japhy Ryder (in fact, the poet Gary Snyder) in the American West, but also the journey through the writer's interior, driven by the newly absorbed Zen- Buddhism. Like *On the Road* in *The Dharma Bums*, he strongly emphasizes California's theme. Very particular is the moment when Kerouac describes his climb to Mount Matterhorn, California. This experience for him was very strong, as is evident from the emotional descriptions of the California landscape.

The Subterraneans, released in the same year as *The Dharma Bums*, still maintains to the spontaneous writing model that Kerouac practiced when he was writing *On the Road*. Also, in this story, the motif of the road plays a strong role - this time it is the journey of Marda Fox, Kerouac's lover, her life from drug addiction to her new life.

The *Big Sur* novel from 1962 differs from Kerouac's early works with its much more nihilistic and melancholic attitude. Unlike the early works of energy, foolishness and desire for a wild, nonconforming life, in *Big Sur*, Kerouac appears as a nearly forty-year-old sober alcoholic and extinct artist trying to escape from the media and the "beat king" label. This change is reflected in the concept of the landscape - while *On the Road*, Kerouac and his friends are coming to the United States, and this path for him means freedom and escape from everyday life; in *Big Sur*, the mountain landscape around the cabin, where Kerouac was

staying, becomes incomprehensible, cruel and dangerous. The concept of the country is therefore closely related to how the writer feels and how the period of life passes.

Another aspect of Kerouac's concept of landscape is the environmental aspect - writer with melancholy notes how the construction of motorways has changed the West from the wild landscape into a tourist attraction. The journey to Mexico, in turn, means inspiration, in which he discovers that the motorway has destroyed the original Indian culture there. The highway became an ambivalent thing for Kerouac - on the one hand it gave him freedom of movement and the joy of a fast ride that corresponded to his fast life, on the other hand, he had the space for discovering and for the wandering.

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