

The road genre often means a transformation and/ or liberation in the lives of the characters. Characters often transgress society's rules and codes. What are the transformations undertaken in any of the road genre texts we have studied? How does movement/ the road offer this change? What might this aspect of movement be saying about our society?

The road which a character journeys on through a road book or movie is a means of escaping the rules and boundaries their society has put up around them. The concept of "journeying" is often related with the intention of escapism – whether it may be from the city, the past, family, and authority or even if it is a way of finding themselves. When an individual undertakes a road journey it becomes a form of freedom and a tale of personal development. The importance the road has had to play in both the Australian outback and the American frontier has been very crucial to this genre. The road genre which originated in the heart of the United States in the late nineteen-forties became commonly known as the 'beat-generation'. The road genre very often is a way of associating with the search for the "American Dream" and the problems which are connected with this search for the Dream – such as racism, class division, government, gender or sexual discrimination are all issues society need to adapt to in order for this transformation of individuals to take place (Ireland). If the road genre had not developed in the United States, it probably would have originated in Australia instead merely because of the fact Australia also as a nation faces problems within its society in regards to it been a multicultural society where many cultures and such are discriminated against. The road genre in Australian society in contrast to American road genre is different to the way it is seen in Hollywood movies. Despite the fact that in America, a character might have the opportunity to cross the border to either Canada or Mexico, Australian characters have a limited space as to where to travel as of the fact Australia is an island and most of the un-used space is outback (Venkatasawmy). The shared theme of transformations from social norm is explored whilst on the road in movies such 'Adventures of Priscilla Queen of the Desert' (1994), 'Thelma and Louise' (1991) and also in Jack Kerouac's beat-generation novel 'On the Road' (1957).

The road movie *Priscilla Queen of the Desert* is set in the outback deserts of Australia. It is a quest for two drag queens and one transsexual to find who they are

and accept the reality of the world they live in. They escape from their social world in the city and head out to the outback for a show along the way confronting their selves and finding who they are. As Butter pointed out:

In an Australia where images of masculinity are no longer serviceable, the road provides an ideal site for films wishing to explore ways of being a man at the dawn of the twenty first century. *The Adventures of Priscilla – Queen of the Desert*, critique traditional models of masculinity, and use the road as a space where masculinity is free to change.

As the characters in this movie move along on the road they discover the truth about themselves. The trio in the road movie undergo change to many different extents. The character of Adam does not change much during the journey, except the fact he tends to mature and becomes less provoking. An adolescent trying to accept his sexuality is a difficult process as the period of youth is a time of growing up and acceptance of oneself. Whilst on the road Adam/Felicia does not come to terms with himself but he also on a mental level he comes to mature. Tick (Hugo Weaving) is the character who transforms the most significantly. He comes to terms with his past – the fact that he has a child and wife – facts of his life he has been choosing to be ignorant to for the past years. Throughout the journey on the road he becomes close to his son and forms a bond between him. This helps Tick accept his past for what it was and he returns to his life in the city at the end of the movie after the tour of outback Australia ready to face his past and future. The character of Bernadette uses her time on the road to come to terms with the demise of her partner, Trumpet. At the end of the movie Bernadette is ready to move on and try a relationship with Bob. The most interesting and key transformation taken place on the road in the movie *The Adventures of Priscilla* is that of Bob. Bob leaves his home town and travels with Bernadette, Tick and Adam. It allows him the sense of freedom to explore a very unique relationship from his previous ones that would have been allowed in his society. At the end of movie each one of the trio who set out on the journey of self discovery is happy and content and seeks to ‘go back home’ and face the society they once turned away from. (Butter p.p. 231-232)

Whilst the mainstream of road novels or movies are always a male trip, the movie *Thelma & Louise* veers of this mainstream and has two woman travelling the road together. *Thelma and Louise* are staging together a different concept of the traditional road movie genre. Once again the theme of transformation and self discovery is also explored in this movie. The physical transformation the women undertake – Louise discards all of her jewellery for a cowboy hat and throws her lipstick into the dirt along the road whilst Thelma sports a black T Shirt. (Dargis p.p. 90-91). The two women in the movie use the road as a means of escaping the characters the men have assigned to them. Thelma is escaping from an abusive over controlling husband whereas Louise is escaping from her dead end job as a waitress. Throughout the journey they both grow as individuals and learn to work together (Ireland). The main point of changing self for the two characters is the point when Louise shoots down Thelma's would be rapist. As Dargis quotes:

Thelma and Louise become outlaws the moment they seize control of their bodies. There is a crime of self defence, their bandit identities forced on them by a gendered lack of freedom, their journey grounded in the politics of the body. In a culture where the female body is traded, circulated in a perverse exchange for a woman to seize power over her body is still a radical act.

Whilst in many Hollywood movies a woman is usually seen as a sexual object of desire for a male, in *Thelma & Louise* this aspect has been juxtaposed. The women here are the ones who are in control. They are on the run from the law and along the way pick up the stereotypical male tendencies. It is argued that the movie is a feminist movie, but whereas from a different point of view it can be viewed as been a non-feminist movie merely by the fact that the women step out of their stereotypical roles as petite females and sport male objects for example; a gun which they take off a highway patrol officer after locking him in the boot and also their clothing. Not only do these physical attributes symbolise the change they have taken on but also their mentality and personal traits have changed. The dialogue Thelma and Louise speak in once they hit the road changed to consist of male qualities. What this movie tells the viewer about the society that Thelma and Louise escape from is that it is gender discriminative. Thelma faces discrimination from her husband whereas Louise almost gets raped and is robbed of everything from J.D after making love with him (just days

after she was almost raped). The movie shows women in a very vulnerable position opposite men but later on during their journey find themselves and transgress from society rules and codes (Dargis).

Jack Kerouac's novel *On The Road* which was originally written in the late nineteen-forties but was not published until nineteen fifty seven is a classical popular narrative which explores the beat-generation subculture which emerged in the 50s from Kerouac's book and also biker boy movies such as *Easy Rider*. The novel *On the Road* is the tale of the experiences and journey which Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty (who is described to be the personification of the road, wild and carefree only has one aim in life and that is to live wild and free) take from the East frontier of the United States to the West frontier in search of the meaning to the word 'life'. They head out towards California the sunshine state where many characters once they hit the road in America aim to go to merely because of California always been associated with sun, fun and life. The book tells the narrative of madness played out by all sort of different and unique characters one might come across whilst been on the road from settings such as a small café in Virginia to a New York jazz joint (Cheng). Many movies/ and or books in this specific genre are in some way a search. The quest taken place in *On the Road* is the subplot for the search for Dean's father (Ireland). At time however throughout the journey the relationship of Dean and Sal is been as one between a son and lost father or two brothers. Due to the fact that novels and movies seem to be primarily male, the father-son bond acts as a useful inspirational plot device (Weinreich). But whilst the shared theme of journeying is found a lot in the road genre, in many road novels and movies characters are usually escaping from their lives, or more often then not their journeys have no beginning or an end. Although at the beginning of the novel the two characters of Sal and Dean are very different, gradually over the course of the three years of restless journeys back and forth across the country they realise they have a lot in common and each one of them changes to a certain degree. Whilst at the beginning of the novel Sal is depressed and weak by the end becomes full of joy and confidence and has found himself whilst been on the road been impulsive and living for the first time in his life along with Dean. The character of Dean in contrast with Sal does not change much throughout the novel. He is a high womanizer and during the course of the three years has been married three times and has four children (Cheng). The fifties was the period of the

‘baby-boom’ area and it was the wild and carefree time in whereby many Americans lived by in search for the ‘dream’. Kerouac in his novel presents what Ireland refers to as ‘an existentialist approach to life’. That is to say that a character should choose to make their own ‘code of behaviour’.

In ‘On the Road’ Sal and Dean reject societal modes of behaviour and instead assert their own moral code in terms of their sexual relationships with others, their attitudes toward the law, the work ethic, the government, and finally toward the American Dream itself. (Ireland p.p. 480)

The three literature texts studied; *Priscilla Queen of the Desert*, *Thelma and Louise*, and *On the Road* are although all part of the same genre and share the same central ideas of ‘journeying’ each has a different story to tell the viewer. The ideas behind *Priscilla* are queer in their sense that ones sexuality needs to be accepted not only by the society the person lives in, but also by the person himself. *Priscilla* brings the concept of homosexuality in our society and the idea of ‘escapism’ to the spotlight and shows how it can be overcome and become accepted. The road was the journey Tick, Adam/Felicia and Bernadette to discover the truth not only about their self but also about the world they lived in. Similar to this road movie the feminist road movie *Thelma and Louise* also explores the theme of self-discovery. Two women set out in the American outback escaping from the gender discrimination they faced back at home. Once the women gain control over their environment they change immensely and face the world head on. The road in this road movie made both the women stronger not only mentally but also physically. On the other hand however, Kerouac’s novel does not have the same shared idea as *Priscilla* or *Thelma and Louise*, (discrimination of some sort), it in fact has a different subplot of self discovery and journey to discovery what the world has to offer. This is a very different journey and is also very enlightening in the sense you only get out what you put in. Sal and Dean are escaping the daily routines of society and making a society of their own. They are travelling aimlessly through time in search of what life truly means.

In conclusion, the road is defined by its open space. It offers the characters a chance to develop and find themselves. The mystery which the world holds is along the road and is not something Sal, Dean, Tick, or Louise would have found staying in

their communities. They searched along the road and found what it was they were looking for whether it may have been themselves or whether it may have been a new way of seeing their life and then returned 'back home'. Somewhere over the rainbow is where the individual will leave their black and white ordinary lifestyle and find their yellow brick road to take them on the journey of self discovery.

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