

ABSTRACT

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This thesis is founded on the premise that traditional discourses of travel and mobility are inherently masculinist, that is, travel is seen as a masculinity rite-of passage for the Euro-American male, shaping his subjectivity through the othering and marginalization of women. Taking Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957), the epitome of masculinist travel literature, as a starting point for an examination of women's road narratives, it poses the questions: what happens when women abandon their marginal positions and take to the road? How do authors write women into moving subjects? To answer these questions I investigate a number of mainly North American late twentieth-century narratives of the road, for example, Robinson's *Housekeeping* (1980), Scott's *Thelma & Louise* (1991), Morrison's *Paradise* (1997), Lopez' *Flaming Iguanas* (1997), and Tuttle's *The Bad Girl's Guide to the Open Road* (1999). I also refer to pre-twentieth-century texts. What the texts have in common is a concern with women's mobility.

Methodologically this study posits itself at the crossroads of feminist, cultural, literary, and sociological inquiries. It is neither a pure literary-historical nor narratological investigation, its interest lies in exploring the topos of the road. The thesis consists of: an introduction, a chapter presenting my theoretical departures, two published and two forthcoming articles, and a brief conclusion. Each of the articles proposes terms that can be used to discuss "women on the road" from a feminist theoretical point of view. By gendering the discourse of travel and mobility I aim to renew the understanding of women in conjunction with mobility. By coining new signifiers I encourage readings of representations of mobile women in literature and film from a revised, feminist perspective.

In the first article I propose two alternative female on-the-road subjects: the *model* and the *stripper*, insisting on their roles as female agents rather than sexual objects. In the second article I investigate "the maternal conditioning" of mobility. To describe the situation of women in a network of overlapping discourses on motherhood and mobility from a feminist perspective, I suggest two cartographic neologisms: *materotopia* and *materotopology*. The third article emphasizes the significance of the roadmovie *Thelma & Louise* for the figuring of "successful" representations of *female mobile subjects*. Mobile women regender the road narrative in two steps: an *appropriative turn* and a *metafictional turn*. The new features emerging with women's textual appropriation of the road, I claim, must be appreciated as constituting a *new aesthetic of the road*.

The fourth article synthesizes the regendering performed by Second-Wave feminist narratives (e.g. *Thelma and Louise*) with the Third-Wave feminist sensibility displayed in collections like Goode's *Drive* (2000). This generation female travelers demonstrate that women are no longer only mother figures waiting at home, sexual objects on the margin of the story, or passengers in the back of the car; they are mobilized, active, and empowered subjects, steering their own destiny.

Keywords: female mobile subject, feminist theory, feminism, narratives of mobility, mobility, materotopia, materotopology, regendering, road topos, travel, travel writing, women-on-the-road.