



The Road Story and the Rebel: Moving Through Film, Fiction, and Television

Associate Professor Katie Mills Ph.D.

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In *The Road Story and the Rebel: Moving Through Film, Fiction, and Television*, Beat studies scholar Katie Mills examines how road stories, which have offered declarations of independence to generations of rebellious Americans, have been transformed by media, technology, and social movements. The genre, which includes literature, films, television shows, and several types of digital media, has evolved, says Mills, as each new generation questions its own identity and embraces the thrill of “automobility” (autonomy and mobility) thus providing audiences a means to consider radically altered notions of independence, even as the genre cycles between innovation and commodification.

This cultural history reveals the unique qualities of road stories and follows the evolution from the Beats’ postwar literary adventures to today’s postmodern reality television shows. Tracing the road story as it moves to both LeRoi Jones’s critique of the Beats’ romanticization of blacks as well as to the mainstream in the 1960s with CBS’s *Route 66*, Mills also documents the rebel subcultures of novelist Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, who used film and LSD as inspiration on a cross-country bus trip, and she examines the sexualization of male mobility and biker mythology in the films *Scorpio Rising*, *The Wild Angels*, and *Easy Rider*. Mills addresses how the filmmakers of the 1970s—Coppola, Scorsese, and Bogdanovich—flourished in New Hollywood with road films that reflected mainstream audiences and how feminists Joan Didion and Betty Friedan subsequently critiqued them. A new generation of women and minority storytellers gain clout and bring genre remapping to the national consciousness, Mills explains, as the road story evolves from such novels as *Song of Solomon* to films like *Thelma and Louise* and television’s *Road Rules 2*.

The Road Story and the Rebel, which includes twenty illustrations, effectively explores the cultural significance of sixty years of rebellion in film, literature, television, and digital media. Spanning media platforms and marginalized communities, the text offers new interpretations of canonical works and reintroduces forgotten works, revealing the genre to be more political and philosophical than previously understood.

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