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Zásady pro vypracování:

V literatuře se vlaky objevují nejen jako pouhé dopravní prostředky, ale mohou se stát dějištěm příběhu, mohou rovněž symbolizovat mobilitu, setkávání a loučení, modernitu, vrchol průmyslové revoluce, zdroj znečištění krajiny, prostředek vykořisťování, atd. Závěrečná bakalářská práce se zaměří na role vlaků ve vybraných dílech americké prózy, konkrétně v díle Franka Norrise *The Octopus* a tvorbě Jacka Kerouaca.

V úvodu práce student velice stručně nastíní historii americké železnice, především s ohledem na její sociální a ekonomický dopad v místech, kde se odehrávají vybraná díla, a vysvětlí fenomén "train hopping" a "hobo". Dále uvede zvolené autory a zasadí jejich tvorbu do literárního a kulturního kontextu.

Jádrem práce bude analýza vybraných děl, v níž se student soustředí především na obraz a funkci vlaku v daných dílech. Zaměří se rovněž na literární prostředky, které zvolení autoři používají. Své závěry bude vhodně ilustrovat primárními texty a konzultovat se sekundárními zdroji. Závěrem své analýzy přehledně shrne a zhodnotí, nakolik se určité motivy, funkce či symbolika spojená s vlaky v dílech shodují či liší, a pokusí se vyslovit obecnější závěry o roli vlaku v americké literatuře.

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ANOTATION

This bachelor thesis discusses the picture of trains in the selected works of Frank Norris and Jack Kerouac. First, the paper provides the theoretical background by describing the history of railways in the United States and its depiction in literature. Then, the selected authors and texts are analyzed concerning different literature and socio-historical contexts. The conclusion on the decisive motives leading both authors to contradictory picture of trains is made at the end of the thesis.

KEYWORDS

trains, Frank Norris, Jack Kerouac, USA, literature

NÁZEV

Vlaky v americké literatuře: Frank Norris a Jack Kerouac

ANOTACE

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá obrazem vlaků ve vybraných dílech Franka Norrise a Jacka Kerouaca. Nejprve práce nabízí teoretický základ, ve kterém je popsána historie železnice ve Spojených státech a její obraz v literatuře. Poté jsou vybraní autoři a jejich texty analyzovány s ohledem na rozdílné literární a socio-historický kontexty. Na konci této práce je učiněn závěr, který vysvětluje rozhodující motivy vedoucí oba autory k protichůdnému zobrazení vlaků.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

vlaky, Frank Norris, Jack Kerouac, USA, literatura

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INTRODUCTION

In the history of the USA, trains have always had an important role. It is not only a mean of transport, it can also symbolize technological progress, peak of the industrial revolution but at the same time it can stand for a devastating effect on the environment and on people as well. These and other motives are depicted in popular culture and also in the books chosen for this paper: *The Octopus* by Frank Norris and the selected works of Jack Kerouac.

While Frank Norris describes exploitation of wheat growers by a railway company and expresses animosity towards trains, for Jack Kerouac, the major representative of the Beat Generation, trains and railways were mainly symboling freedom and carefree traveling across the states. How is it possible that two great authors of American literature see the same thing so differently? This paper will attempt to find answers for this and other related questions by putting their works into literature and socio-historical contexts.

The first two chapters will provide readers with the important background knowledge for the following analysis of the selected authors and novels. The first one was written with the aim to apprise readers of the history of American railways and the influence it had on people. The period of huge the railway expansion was not only about the technological progress, which meant that people could travel easily, find better jobs or transfer goods, but there also appeared environmental problems and disputes over land ownership with Native Americans.

The second chapter will focus on trains in American literature. The first subchapter will bring a summary of train depiction in literature concentrating on contradictory views of authors such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Thoreau, Emily Dickenson or Nathaniel Hawthorne. These literates represent a unique approach to the depiction of railroads and provide the context for the later analysis of Frank Norris's novel. The second subchapter aims at clarifying trains related subcultures. The communities of train hoppers and hobos will be briefly introduced with the main focus on presenting the picture of these people in American literature. This second subchapter should provide context for the subsequent analysis of Jack Kerouac's train related works as it were mainly hobos whose lives were depicted in the Beat Generation writer's texts.

The following chapter will deal with Norris's maybe the most famous piece of works: *The Octopus*. The story of the novel will be shortly summarized aiming at the picture of trains. This portrayal will be exemplified in the next two subchapters. The first subchapter will analyze the picture of trains concerning the literature context. It will be exemplified which aspects of naturalism were crucial and Norris's approach towards railways will be compared with the one of another representant of the literary movement – Émile Zola. Importantly, the portrayal of

trains in *The Octopus* will be studied in relation to other American authors discussed in the introductory part. The second subchapter is focused on the socio-historical context. First, it will be shown what was the original motivation to write the novel. Then, an analysis on what led Frank Norris to stand with the farmers will be done with the main focus on the political level of the story.

In the fourth chapter, the second selected author will be studied. The train mentions and especially the picture of train hoppers and hobos appearing in Kerouac's works, will be pointed out. In the same way as Norris's novel, the following two subchapters will analyze the depiction of trains in Kerouac's texts. Considering the literature context, the usual image of hobos and train hoppers in literature, together with Kerouac's real life likening of railways will be discussed. To find out how the picture of trains fits the context of the post-war situation in the USA will be the main goal of the second subchapter. The same subchapter will also deal with similarities Jack Kerouac's train related works shares with Frank Norris's *The Octopus* and exemplify the different approaches of the two authors.

Overall, the aim of this paper is to set the context by mentioning the history of railway in the USA and showing the conflicting opinions on it appearing in American literature. The paper should also succeed in establishing the conclusive reasons which led the selected authors contribute to train related literature in such way they did. This whole endeavor should result in apprehending the picture of trains and the related subcultures in a new perspective.

1. TRAINS IN AMERICAN HISTORY

Trains are generally known for its contribution to the modern society. Thanks to its significance, they became symbols of technological progress and civilization. It is arguably one of the most important inventions as there are not many other creations which influenced every day's life so remarkably. For the first time in history, people could be transported not only in small numbers, but they could travel in huge groups and to destination, which were up to then considered too distant. Apart from people, there was also freight, which could be moved in an efficient way. It became a major feature of the age of the Industrial Revolution, so the period is even named the century of steam engines. Its use in transport stands behind expanding not only the economy, but the nation's borders and many more.

Train stations which appeared together with the development of railways growth into an important social aspect. They became the centers of towns, places where people discussed and grouped. To some extent these stations shape the identity of many villages and towns. For some rural places it meant that there was finally an easy way how to get into civilization, how to find more buyers for products or simply a way how to visit relatives and friends. The work force could easily move across the states and as a consequence, it meant a huge change for most Americans as it gave them more freedom in their lives. It led to changes in culture, environment and in the settlement. It enabled people to travel to the country, which especially in the United States meant, that they could explore the full territory and mix different cultures faster than ever before.

To be more specific, one of the often-mentioned assets of trains is the economic boom. Richards and MacKenzie emphasize this impact by stating that railways were the engine of the Industrial Revolution. It is claimed that though there were other ways to transport goods, it was not until railways that the industrialization noticeably progressed.¹ This huge advancement can be best summarized by the following statement: "The railway acted as a great consolidator, confirming strategic power and opening up new areas for settlement, industrial markets, mineral extraction, and the production of raw materials and foodstuff."²

Trains can be also credited for spreading culture and education. Back in the days without the internet, TV or even radios, the development of railways led to quicker passing of news and knowledge across the United States. It meant that there appeared a faster system of delivering newspapers, letters and parcels which together meant that people could be more informed and

¹ Jeffrey Richards and John M. MacKenzie, *The Railway Station: A Social History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 206.

² Richards and MacKenzie, *The Railway Station*, 206.

consciousness about what was happening around them. This feature of train was recognized by politicians who saw the potential of railways for their campaigns as it is again illustrated by Richards and MacKenzie. They state that in the second half of the 19th century, there developed a phenomenon called the “whistle-stop tour”. It came from Great Britain where it was practiced by Mr. Gladstone in his election campaign of 1879. Later, in 1948, it was believed that whistle-stops played a crucial role in the Presidential campaign of Harry Truman, as trains enabled him to travel the country and address thousands of people at railway stations.³

The people of the United States were aware of the benefits and therefore their approach towards the invention was mainly positive. Leo Marx, who wrote a book about the development of technology in the USA, declares that shortly after its introduction, trains became a national obsession. It was an embodiment of the power, the will of man to win over nature and obstacles. The press was full of stories about railroad projects, accidents or profits. It was the main topic of political speeches and songs. In most people’s minds, this technology was associated with all their hopes and dreams about peace, equality, freedom, and happiness.⁴

Glorious as it may seem, not all the impacts were positive. Wood was the main fuel for driving a train, so clearly a problem of deforestation must have appeared soon. The environment was not only globally affected by the demand to keep steam engines supplied; another problem was that these machines emit worrying number of fumes. This could be problematic especially in big industrial cities where the bad smog situation caused by factories was even worsened by railway stations. Richards and MacKenzie also mention the devastating effect it had on fauna. Thanks to the invention of a steam machine, horses were no longer needed for hard work, but railways still meant suffering of other animals. During the first years of the railway expansion, more supporting stations were needed and the main source of livelihood there, was hunting of game. It is believed that this practice led to expulsion of animals from their natural habitat.⁵ Similar consequences are referred by Marx:

...the editor of the Cincinnati Enquirer reports, in 1846, that he saw “herd of cattle, sheep, and horses, stand for a few second and gaze at the passing train, then turn and run for a few rods with all possible speed, stop and look again with eyes distended, and head and ears erect, seemingly so frightened at the tramp of the iron horse as to have lost the power of locomotion.”⁶

³ Richards and MacKenzie, *The Railway Station*, 124–125.

⁴ Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), 97, 192.

⁵ Richards and MacKenzie, *The Railway Station*, 211.

⁶ Marx, *The Machine*, 195.

Other serious issues followed. Fights between railroad builders and Native Americans are well documented part of the main era of the railroad development. It is stated that due to these conflicts, in the first half of the 19th century, railroads constructions slowed down. The territories with Native Americans' settlement, e. g. their area in Oklahoma, was perceived as a barrier in business development. To overcome these difficulties, it is claimed that in 1880s, the Congress took measures, so the building of railroads could continue.⁷ These problems could be attached to the effort to move American frontier, which came with the concept of Manifest Destiny. This was a philosophy, held in the 19th century, described as a belief in the need of dominating the whole territory of North America.⁸ Trains play a significant role here as in the culture, it was the main symbol of broadening the borders as it is reflected in the painting by John Gast: *American Progress*.

By no means can we assume that the period of the biggest railway expansion was perfect and that it brought only prosperity, but overall, it can be said, that it changed the world mainly in the good way. In the end, it was a natural progress, which meant that the whole mankind made one of the biggest steps in its history. This claim is supported by Marx who sees the spread of railways and desire for machines in the first part of the 19th century as an inevitable and logical result of the fact, that the country lacked labor and had an abundance of land.⁹

There were areas and people who benefited from railways more than others. Concerning states, California, as it is also described in Norris's novel, was the main area profiting from the growth of the railroad transportation. For many decades, farmers in the region made use of the favorable conditions for farming and crops they produced enabled them to do business with those parts of the country, which were not so good in terms of agriculture. The importance of train transportation for distribution of these crops is apart from the novel itself described in the 1920s journal *Railroads and Business Prosperity*, in which it is stated that cities in the east and north of the United States were supplied with fruits and vegetables from "The Golden State".¹⁰

It was stated, that there were also people who benefited from railways more than others. These were meant mainly the ones, for whom trains became source of livelihood or inspiration. The later part of the 20th century, was an era in which the significance of railways declined as it is generally known that the progress in internal combustion engines resulted in cheaper cars

⁷ "Railroads," Oklahoma Historical Society, accessed August 21, 2018, <http://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=RA004>.

⁸ "Manifest Destiny," History.com, accessed February 4, 2019, <https://www.history.com/topics/westward-expansion/manifest-destiny>

⁹ Marx, *The Machine*, 180.

¹⁰ Henry C. Wallace, "The Farmers and the Railroads," *Railroads and Business Prosperity* 10, no. 1 (July 1922): 72. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1172105?seq=10#metadata_info_tab_contents

and people preferring them. Though being active in this period of decline in train transportation, Jack Kerouac recorded the adventures of being an employee of a railroad company and crucially for this paper, he took inspiration in train travels and train related subcultures.

More about the motives processed by Norris and Kerouac will be shown later, but before that, it is important to remark that trains and train stations became scenes for numerous stories of other, not only American and the selected authors. Emile Zola, for instance, took inspiration in railways and paid a great attention to the description of it. A train station was a place where Lev Ivanovic Tolstoy decided to set a few scenes of his famous *Anna Karenina*. Even the most famous detective, Sherlock Holmes, often travelled trains. Most importantly, for this paper, however, it must be found out how the portrayal of trains and related subcultures shaped in the history of American literature.

2. TRAINS IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

With trains, there was a completely new world, full of new objects which could serve as metaphors and symbols. To literature, it brought new motives, such as the loneliness of Station-Masters, people waiting and sharing a room, etc. Train stations became places of meetings and farewells; the place where characters set off towards their adventures. As Remo Caserani points out, the train itself and the inability to change its direction became a perfect symbol for destiny, something which was unavoidable. The monotonous rhythm of the wheels, on the other hand, could become the expression of time as it goes by; an equivalent of a clock ticking.¹¹

2.1 The picture of trains

Before performing an analysis of what train symbolizes in Norris's novel, a context needs to be provided. The consecutive outline of authors and their texts representing unique and sometimes contradictory approaches was written with the help of Ian Marshall's article on the same topic.¹²

The popularity of trains in American literature grew and declined in accordance with the rise and fall of railroads importance. In the first years of the railroad constructions, at the start of the 19th century, the invention was seen mainly as a positive thing which would move the nation. The popularity of trains was growing with the tendencies of spreading the nation westwards. When the idea of Manifest Destiny came, trains were perceived as something which will broaden the borders and unite the nation in its whole size. For similar assets, it was honored by Ralph Waldo Emerson in his lectures:

Thus, the timeliness of the invention of the locomotive must be concluded. It came just at the right moment, for America. The geography of America was in no other way to be subdued, the upward navigation of our great rivers; the dangerous navigation of inland seas. More than this, it is an eminent political aid. We could not, else, have held the vast North America together.¹³

Emerson's approach is idealistic as in his texts, it seems that the expansion of railways had no flaws. Railroads were symbolizing the prosperity, glory of the nation and the new age as it is apparent from the subsequent passage of his journal: "I hear the whistle of the locomotive

¹¹ Remo Caserani, "The Impact of the Train on Modern Literary Imagination." *Stanford Humanities Review* 7, no. 1 (1999). Available at: <https://web.stanford.edu/group/SHR/7-1/html/caserani.html>

¹² Ian Marshall, "Steel Wheels on Paper: The Railroad in American Literature," *Railroad History*, no. 165 (Autumn 1991): 37–62. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43521515>

¹³ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Spirit of the Times," in *The Later Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1843-1871*, ed. Ronald A. Bosco and Joel Myerson, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 114.

in the woods. Wherever that music comes it has its sequel. It is the voice of the civility of the Nineteenth Century saying, "Here I am."¹⁴

The reactions of American writers varied even in the times when trains were considered to be a national obsession as there were authors, who did not see the rapid industrialization so positively. Apart from the problems with Native Americas, railways also brought troubles with the working conditions. This issue was identified by Henry David Thoreau, who held a different opinion from Emerson and talked about the moral side of the railway expansion. He believed that the purity of people and nature is being destroyed by the progress and that the comfort of one means the suffering of others. The following excerpt is referring especially to the immigrant workers who represented cheap workforce.

We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us. Did you ever think what those sleepers are that underlie the railroad? Each one is a man, an Irishman, or a Yankee man. The rails are laid on them, and they are covered with sand, and the cars run smoothly over them. They are sound sleepers, I assure you. And every few years a new lot is laid down and run over; so that, if some have the pleasure of riding on a rail, others have the misfortune to be ridden upon.¹⁵

For Thoreau, trains were perhaps the ultimate embodiment of everything he was fighting against as he perceived it as a destructive and arrogant invention. He also believed that there is no point of using it for travels, if only few people can afford it and those, who spend most of their lives by earning money for their ticket, they had already lost the reason. The consecutive extract summons his opinion on railways as it is stated it means to spend the best part of one's life working only with a vision of a certain liberty in times, when it does not matter anymore.

When the smoke is blown away and the vapor condensed, it will be perceived that a few are riding, but the rest are run over – and it will be called, and will be, “A melancholy accident.” No doubt they can ride at last who shall have earned their fare, that is, if they survive so long, but they will probably have lost their elasticity and desire to travel by that time.¹⁶

Nathaniel Hawthorne was not so concerned about the moral side of these constructions and was among the first American authors, who recognized the potential of a train in fiction. His short story *The Celestial Railroad* is an allegory about the spiritual journey of Christians,

¹⁴ Ralph Waldo Emerson, in *Against the Machine: The Hidden Luddite Tradition in Literature, Art, and Individual Lives*, ed. Nicolas Fox, (Washington, DC: Island Press/Shearwater Books, 2004), 122.

¹⁵ Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. *Transcendentalism: Essential Essays of Emerson & Thoreau*, (Clayton, Delaware: Prestwick House Literary Touchstone Classics, 2008), 78.

¹⁶ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2009), 34.

for which the pilgrims rather use a train than going by foot. Few years later, Hawthorne uses trains in his works again. This time it is more serious and in *The House of the Seven Gables*, he mentions the contemporary concerns about the rapid industrialization.

Bayard Taylor is celebrating “the great locomotive triumphs of the age” in his text called “The Erie Railroad”. He does not only praise trains for its assets, but also mentions a steam engine as a poetic thing. Simultaneously, Taylor was delighted about the declining number of people who were fighting the railroads as in one part of the text it is stated: “the vulgar lament over their introduction is beginning to disappear” and “we now more frequently hear of the power and poetic mystery of the steam engine”.¹⁷

Bret Harte decided to use trains in pure fiction and train stations were the setting of his three poems *The Ghost Jim that Jim Saw*, *Guild’s Signal* and *The Station-Master of Lone Prairie*, which focused on the topic of the loneliness and mystery. Harte was also reacting and celebrating real events. His poem *What the Engines Said* is claimed to be praising the opening of the Pacific Railroad which connected the two coasts of the continent. The story itself is a dialogue between two train engines from different companies and although these companies were competing each other, the main idea of this poem is said to be a celebration of the unity.¹⁸

Similarly to Harte, Walt Whitman is also stated to be one of the authors who celebrated the achievements in railroad constructions. It is claimed by David E. Nye that Whitman was praising mainly the completion of the first rail line to San Francisco.¹⁹ Particularly important for this chapter is Whitman’s poem *To a Locomotive in Winter*, which brings a completely new approach to the train picture in American literature. There, Whitman pays great attention to a description of individual parts of the machine and praises the locomotive as a great working entity. Contrary to other authors, his aim was not to show the romantic part of traveling, but he was rather fascinated by the technological side and celebrates it as a piece of perfection and “type of the modern – emblem of motion and power—pulse of the continent”.²⁰

It would be a mistake to omit female authors as they also contributed to the general picture of train in American literature. One of these women was Emily Dickinson who wrote a short poem, in which she mentions a train in slightly unusual way, but it is quite clear what she

¹⁷ Bayard Taylor, “The Erie Railroad,” in *American Art to 1900: A Documentary History*, edited by Sarah Burns and John Davis (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 283.

¹⁸ Bret Harte, “What the Engines Said” in *Train songs: Songs and a Poem about Railroads, Railroadings, and Railroaders*, ed. Jerry Silverman (Pacific, MO: Mel Bay Publications, 1991), 151.

¹⁹ David E. Nye, *America as Second Creation: Technology and Narratives of New Beginnings*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 172.

²⁰ Walt Whitman, *The Complete Poems of Walt Whitman*, ed. Stephen Matterson (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1995), 425.

is referring to. The portrayal of the machine is rather positive, expressing mainly appreciation and admiration of it. In the last part, Dickenson also mentions the huge power trains have, but unlike other literates mentioned in this chapter, she is not feared about consequences.

The approach of American authors towards railroads at the start of the 20th century is still mainly positive. Train is perceived as a great technological achievement, symbol of unity and the power of the nation. At the same time, however, as the century progresses, it is clear that golden times of steam engines are gone. Authors are getting to be consciousness about possible damages to the environment and in the later part of the 20th century, trains are slowly disappearing as it is clear from the following examples.

Willa Cather decided to build on the tradition started by Bret Harte and in 1900 she published a short story called *The Affair at Grover Station*, which uses motives of mysticism and isolation of a train station. In the story, there is a ghost of a station-master, who was murdered, writing the number of the train where his body can be found. A few years later, she mentions railroads to illustrate that there is no appreciation of the past endeavor as she writes a novel called *A Lost Lady*. Among other motives, there is a celebration of the men who were risking their lives in making the America superior and it suggests that the times of these people are gone. One of the characters mentions the following thought: “We dreamed the railroads across the mountains, just as I dreamed my place on the Sweet Water. All these things will be everyday facts to the coming generation, but to us –“²¹

Archibald MacLeish is celebrating the ability of a train to endure time in contrast with the nature around it. The poem called *Grazing Locomotives* shows a train as a great invention, but on the other hand, it mentions that the it consumes natural resources and it implies that the power of the machine may be even too huge and warns about the possible consequences of using it. He is among the first writers who realized this side of the industrial progress.

The American railroad as a symbol of national unity reappears in Hart Crane: *The River*. The poem captures a train called *The Twentieth Century* as it is going across the USA. It expresses mixed feelings as on one hand, it is a symbol of progress, but on the other hand there is similarly to MacLeish the fear of destroying the landscape.

John Cheever: *The Five-Forty-Eight* is a short story about a man, who is trying to escape from his former secretary and lover. Besides the main topic, it also offers a description of a commuter train and the whole dullness of the monotonous traveling. The interior of the train is characterized as something, which smells oddly and is uncomfortable, but for the main hero it

²¹ Willa Cather, *A Lost Lady*. Mineola, (NY: Dover Publications, 2019), 31.

serves as a safe place, where he feels secure. This depiction of the train could be seen as a new attitude of authors in the second half of the 20th century, as the luxury and high standards of this mean of travel were no more applicable.

Having established the most repeated motifs in American literature until 1950s, for the rest of the century and to the present, it can be assumed that the days of celebrating it as a great invention and hope for the whole nation are gone. Authors' omission of trains in their works corresponds with the real events as people started using cars rather than trains. Railroads became a new symbol; now it stands for the past and authors use it to evoke nostalgia and old times. As it can be recognized from Cheever's short story, the popularity and so the quality of train traveling has been slowly decreasing.

Looking to the future, it seems that the times of depicting railroads are gone. Perhaps trains will not be depicted in its former glory as the technology of steam engines is no more up to date. With the technology changed the aspect of romance is not relevant anymore. If authors want to express concerns about technology and its misuse, train cannot serve as the right symbol anymore, since it was developed few centuries ago. They have also lost the status of noble mean of transport it once used to be. Railway stations are no more used only by well-dressed people and the ability to buy a train ticket does not serve as an evidence of a certain social status. Since the situation has changed so much in the last few decades, it is obvious that in nowadays, not only in American literature, train can only stay as a symbol of past, not the progress as it once used to be. Steam engines and trains can only be used to evoke the atmosphere of old times.

2.2 The picture of related subcultures

But train literature is not all about presenting the machine in a symbolical level. There is plenty more to explore in terms of what is usually called the subcultures of hobos and train hoppers. These communities will be briefly characterized and consequently, the picture which literature provided of it will be discussed in order to analyze and categorize Jack Kerouac's contribution.

Frederick Feided who wrote a book about the picture of hobos in the works of Jack London, John Dos Passos and Jack Kerouac brings a brief definition of a hobo, which needs to be established before continuing. He states that hobos as migrants are people who run from struggles of wealth and power. A hobo has no roots and, in most examples, he is described as a victim of forces, which were beyond his possibilities to overcome.²²

²² Frederick Feided, *No Pie in the Sky the Hobo as American Cultural Hero in the Works of Jack London, John Dos Passos, and Jack Kerouac*, (San Jose: Authors Choice Press, 2000), 81.

The subculture of hobos is closely associated with trains as most of these people, at least in Kerouac's works, illegally hop them when migrating. Stewart H. Holbrook, in a book devoted to the history of railways, states that although the activity of train hopping occurred at the same time as the train transportation itself, the main growth in popularity came after the Civil War. Together with the rise in the number of people hopping trains, in popular literature appeared a new character called "tramp". This tramp, when it first appeared, was according to Holbrook a worthless or comic character described as:²³

...a nondescript male in fearful, tattered clothing, whose face was dark not with a full-grown beard, but with a black hedge somewhere between a poor shave and real whiskers. His nose, of course, was crimson, a badge of his habits. Over his shoulder was a stick, on the end of the stick a small bundle, tied up like a bag in a red bandanna handkerchief, in which were his entire possessions – food, extra clothing if any, and whatever else he saw fit to carry with him on his travels.²⁴

Of course, to be a hobo does not necessarily mean to hop trains, but to provide a context concerning the depiction of these people in general, Bret Harte needs to be started with. Feided claims that his short story called *My Friend, the Tramp* is one of the first texts, which recognized the potential of hobos in literature. According to the author of *No Pie in the Sky*, the story is written in the form of personal reminiscence. Unlike the following stories, however, it lacks the important aspect of expressing sympathies for human outcasts and therefore it greatly differs from the consecutive authors.²⁵

The first considerable writer which Feided mentions in his mapping of tramps' portrayal is Jack London. It is claimed that it was no sooner than this author appeared that hobos (both terms "tramps" and "hobos" were by various authors used interchangeably) were treated with respect and understanding. London took a totally new point of view with the main source of inspiration for most of his writing being own experiences. Moreover, as Feided claims, the picture of hobos he created was closely associated with the political situation.²⁶ Feided claims that London's vision of a hobo was "rather than a picturesque detail is a romantic landscape or a social undesirable who must be discouraged by the respectable community, he becomes a social fact, a phenomenon of economic determinism under capitalism".²⁷ It is additionally stated

²³ Stewart H. Holbrook, *Story of American Railroads: From the Iron Horse to the Diesel Locomotive*, (Dover Publications, 2016), 389.

²⁴ Holbrook, *Story of American Railroads*, 389.

²⁵ Feided, *No Pie*, 18.

²⁶ Feided, *No Pie*, 15–24.

²⁷ Feided, *No Pie*, 24.

that London's texts about hobos were politically motivated as he believed that a system which can produce hoboed and tramps must be overturned. In the end, however, Feided remarks that the overall tone of London's major works on the topic of hobos, *The Road*, is rather positive.²⁸ Essentially for the later conclusions, Jack London, as it is declared in a BBC article, was among the first publicly known people who popularized train hopping.²⁹

The second big name connected with the depiction of hobos is John Dos Passos. In *No Pie in the Sky*, it is mentioned that the motivation of this author to depict hobos was slightly different as he was concerned in showing the fight of these people with the trusts, which Dos Passos perceived as the main antagonists and something potentially harmful to the society. The fictional stories of his hobos and bums are stories of frustration and social forces which are not possible to beat. The aspect which is shared with London's hobos is that the characters fight the political system.³⁰ Feided even claims that hobos characterized in the works of Dos Passos are "intensely political".³¹ Importantly, however, the final message of his stories, as Feided states, is contrary to London's stories pessimistic as the characters in Dos Passos's stories experience cold and hunger.³²

There are other authors, apart from the Feided's list who contributed to the picture of hobos and train hoppers in American literature. Albert Murray's novel called *Train Whistle Guitar* will serve as a perfect example as it is a story of a hobo who hop trains. Though written few decades later, the story is set in 1920s and it tells a story of a young boy who is extremely enthusiastic about trains. He meets a hobo called Luze, who is traveling trains with his guitar. In the eyes on the boy, it is a perfect adventure and he decides, together with his friend, to hop a train. They both wish to live like hobos, because it means freedom and exciting life full of adventures, but their journey does not last for long as they are found by Luze and they are told to go home and study. The story promotes the importance of education, but more crucially for this paper, train hoppers and hobos are shown negatively. Contrary to London or Dos Passos, Murray did not try to show hobos as victims of any political or economic system, but as people whose lives are just miserable. Murray also stressed the importance of education which he saw as a way to escape ending up, living as a hobo. This level of the story may be illustrated by the part when Luze told the boys to go home:

²⁸ Feided, *No Pie*, 29, 40.

²⁹ Peter Bowes and Sara Jane Hall, "Train Hopping: Why Do Hobos Risk Their Lives to Ride the Rails?" *BBC News*, December 19, 2012. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-20756990>.

³⁰ Feided, *No Pie*, 42–44

³¹ Feided, *No Pie*, 43.

³² Feided, *No Pie*, 42–44.

Make old Luze proud of you he said then, and he was almost pleading. Make old Luze glad to take his hat off to you some of these days. You going further than old Luze ever dreamed of. Old Luze ain't been nowhere. Old Luze don't know from nothing. And then the train was there and we watched him snag it and then he was waving goodbye.³³

It is tricky to establish the general picture of hobos in American literature as each author listed works with his rather unique vision. On one hand, the characters in London's and Dos Passos's texts could be described as victims of the society as in both examples, it is above all the political situation which caused they ended up in such situation. On the other hand, however, Bret Harte was an author who certainly did not support the picture of a hobo as someone people should sympathize with. Likewise, Murray's hobo might be a positive character, but such way of living is denounced. Therefore, the conclusion for this subchapter is that there is no definite pattern in depicting the subcultures of hobos and train hoppers.

³³ Albert Murray in *The (Underground) Railroad in African American Literature (African-American Literature and Culture Expanding and Exploding the Boundaries)*, ed. Darcy A. Zabel (New York: P. Lang, 2004), 188.

3. FRANK NORRIS: THE OCTOPUS

To analyze the picture of trains and the railway company in this novel, a short summary of its plot needs to be provided first.

In general, the story is about a clash between ranchers, who are trying to get as good tariffs for the transportation of grain as possible, and a railway company which is represented by merciless S. Behrman. The situation between the two sides starts to deteriorate when the railway trust imposes high shipping rates. For ranchers, there is no other possibility to transport their commodity than to accept the high prices. However, the tariffs are not the only problem for farmers. The railway company tries everything to maximize its profit and therefore there follows another dispute, this time over the regulation system which means that the plows the farmers bought have to be sent to San Francisco first, even though there were just few kilometers from its final destination. The biggest problem comes when the railroad tries to take advantage of the land, which the farmers were working on and improving its state for years. The price for which it is offered to the them is unfair and they cannot afford it, which results in the need of defending their rights.

The leader of the Ranchers' League which was formed to defend rights of the farmers becomes Magnus Derrick, the most respected person in community. His son, Lyman Derrick, is chosen to influence the transportation rates in Railroad Commission. Later, they find out that he did not make any progress nor the terms were not improved which results in a fight between Magnus and his son. The tensed situation is getting worse as there blows the whistle that the railroad company is going to evict ranchers from their land. They decide that it was enough and there is a shootout between them and the railroad employees which ends in most of the ranchers' death. This leaves the members of ranchers' family in poverty, living as bums with their lives being completely changed and destroyed. The main character, Presley, leaves the region and the poem he composed becomes a testimony of the whole tragedy.

Concerning the train depiction in the story, the picture of both the machines and the railway company could be summarized as being always unfavorable. The railroad trust and especially its representative S. Behrman are the ultimate enemies who caused all the problems in the region, while the ranchers represent mostly the good values with only some vices. In order to find out what led Frank Norris to impute all the problems to trains, the novel will be exemplified in a greater detail in the following subchapters.

3.1 Literature context

This subchapter aims at the explanation of the negative trains and railroad trust depiction. First, it will be shown in what features does the novel fits Norris's own understanding of a naturalistic tale. Then, the literary aspects which led to the gloomy portrayal of trains and the railroad trust will be exemplified. Finally, it will be established if such portrayal of trains could be found in another naturalistic text or in American train related literature introduced in the chapter 2.

Firstly, it should be made clear what aspects make the novel naturalistic. Frank Norris being a representative of this literary movement is regarded as a fact as it is stated by different literary experts e.g. Charles Child Walcutt.³⁴ However, to find reasons which led him to portray trains in a negative way, a more about his understanding of naturalism has to be written. Let's look at the Norris's own interpretation and shortly compare it with the actual plot:

The naturalist takes no note of common people, common as far as their interests, their lives, and the things that occur in them are common, are ordinary. Terrible things must happen to the characters of the naturalistic tale. They must be twisted from the ordinary, wrenched out from the quiet, uneventful round of every-day life, and flung into the throes of a vast and terrible drama that works itself out in unleashed passions, in blood, and in sudden death.³⁵

It is clear, even from this rather short excerpt that *The Octopus* is a perfect example of this approach as the story follows a tragedy that happened to ordinary people. The main focus of the story is on the farmers' fight with the trust, but it is important to remark that the company destroyed lives of other characters as well. The novel also tells a story of a train engineer Dyke who is introduced as a kind man willing to do anything for his daughter. He was working as an engineer, but early in the story, he is unfairly sacked. Keen to find another job, he decides to become a farmer, but his effort comes to nothing as the railroad company introduces extremely high tariffs for transportation of the crops. Devastated by his inability to make any profit in a legal way, Norris describes him as a downfallen alcoholic being forced to commit a train robbery. His desperation and desire for a revenge even leads to his attempt to kill S. Behrman, the railroad trust representative. However, his gun fails and he is sentenced to spend the rest of his life in a prison. Unlike the farmers, whose story was already introduced, Dyke's life does

³⁴ Charles Child Walcutt, *American Literary Naturalism, a Divided Stream*, (University of Minnesota Press, 1956), 114.

³⁵ Frank Norris in *A Companion to the American Short Story*, ed. Alfred Bendixen and James Nagel (Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2010), 177.

not end in sudden death, but nevertheless, it serves as a fine example showing the cruelty of the railroad trust.

Secondly, having established the important naturalistic features of the novel, the work of Don D. Walker may help with revealing aspects which in the final consequence led to the gloomy depiction of the railroad trust and trains. *The Western Naturalism of Frank Norris* reveals more about the author's understanding of the literary theory and offers a more detailed study about his works. In the article, it is highlighted that Norris's naturalism focused on the yet unmapped places, the wilderness, plains and deserts. His characters who came there only wanted to live their pure and elemental life which would lead to a better understanding of all emotions, impulses, loves, joys, sorrows and fears. This is by Don D. Walker understood as a celebration of romantic primitivism and believe in the return to nature and pure elemental life.³⁶

Walker also adds an important remark that Norris became a writer when nature was being transformed from the vision promoted by Cooper and Emerson into the understanding of Darwin and Spencer. For the latter mentioned, the return to nature did not automatically stand for goodness; it meant rather return to a brutish past and therefore a decline. Norris was, according to Walker, unsure whether it was good to go back or not and even though he was using the previously mentioned idea of nature as something good, in some of his works he used a different approach. Therefore, as the author of the article claims, Norris's characters were experiencing breakdowns and their turn to nature was also turn to brutality.³⁷

Some of these aspects will lead to a better understanding of the railroad corporation and trains description. The setting of the story is crucial. Though it is not yet unmapped wilderness, the ranches are still situated far from towns. It is also true that the motivation to come living at such place could be, apart from making profit which will be exemplified later, a will to live a simple life close to nature. However, they cannot as there is the railroad trust which does not enable them to forget about the modern industrial life set in cities. Notwithstanding the fact that train brought them the possibility to make their living by farming, in novel it mainly symbolizes the modern world, huge cities and people whose characters are spoiled by this progress. Norris, as mentioned by Walker, wanted to celebrate the romantic primitivism which is represented by the ranchers. They are shown as naive, unspoiled and pure and therefore among other things, unsure of using bribery. The negative portrayal of the railroad company is hence partly caused by Norris's effort to show these people in the best possible way, being better than those who

³⁶ Don D. Walker "The Western Naturalism of Frank Norris," *Western American Literature* 2, no. 1 (1967): 14. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43017184>.

³⁷ Walker, "The Western Naturalism," 15.

live in cities. It is only logical that he wrote *against* the corporation as it represents the complete opposite of the qualities he was celebrating. The farmers are living with no special dreams or hopes; they just wanted to live in peace. The trust is then the ultimate evil, because it destroyed their lives and made the pure and elemental people turn brutal. The portrayal of trains Norris created is then a logical consequence as the machine is perceived as the root of all evil. This thought is supported by the following fragment from the end of the novel:

Into the prosperous valley, into the quiet community of farmers, that galloping monster, that terror of steel and steam had burst, shooting athwart the horizons, flinging the echo of its thunder over all the ranches of the valley, leaving blood and destruction in its path.³⁸

Thirdly, there is another question. Is the negative picture of trains a feature shared by other naturalists? Let's look at another literate – Émile Zola. This French writer is probably the most famous representative of naturalism and it is claimed by Walcutt, that his work served as a source of inspiration for Norris.³⁹ Importantly for this paper, Zola has also written a novel depicting a railroad: *La Bête Humaine*. To see *The Octopus* in literature context, it needs to be looked at the French novel as well.

Generally speaking, the picture Zola created of trains is a more complex one as it is not only animosity expressed towards it. On one hand, the description is similar with the French writer describing trains as something which should people be afraid as in the following excerpt: “At this moment the train passed in its storm-like violence, as if it would sweep everything before it. The house shook, enveloped in a gust of wind.”⁴⁰ On the other hand, however, the main protagonist, engineer Jacques Lantier, is only able to fight with his madness thanks to riding his locomotive. The train in Zola's novel may be associated with human demons, but at the same time, it stands for a solution. Moreover, there is the attention which the author paid to the most accurate description of trans and railway stations, which could even imply that Zola had, unlike Norris, sympathy for the technology and railways. The following excerpt illustrates these thoughts:

He only lived tranquil and happy, when detached from the world on his locomotive. When the engine bore him along in the trepidation of its wheels at express speed, when

³⁸ Norris, *The Octopus*, 446.

³⁹ Walcutt, *American Literary Naturalism*, 114.

⁴⁰ Émile Zola, *The Monomaniac (La bête humaine)*, (London: Hutchinson & Co, Paternoster Row, 1901), 34, http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/57038/pg57038-images.epub?session_id=c881908959dc1ef06f498bb2a902b22aaf3573d4.

he had his hand on the reversing-wheel, and was entirely engaged in watching the metals and looking out for the signals, he ceased thinking, and took deep draughts of the pure air, which always blew a gale. And this was why he was so fond of his engine.⁴¹

Finally, as a comparison with another naturalistic text proved that the literary movement is not the ultimate reason for such train depiction, *The Octopus* also needs to be put into the context of other American authors' works, introduced in the chapter 2. It was foreshadowed that the symbolic role of a train in literature is mainly to symbolize progress and something unifying and good, but not in Norris's case. The fact that the machines are rejected as something harmful to the society is not unheard of as Henry David Thoreau was introduced as one of the first authors warning about consequences, but he took interest in the bad working conditions which does not correspond with Norris's tries to interpret train as an enemy of people living close to nature. To some extent, there is a similar connection of nature and trains in the works of Archibald MacLeish and Hart Crane. From today's point of view, however, their concerns seem to be mainly environmental as there is no worry about the influence the invention has on people's lives. Therefore, to make a conclusion for this question, it may be stated that no evident inspiration or connection with other major works of American writers depicting railroads could be traced. Because this subchapter succeeded in establishing only some of the reasons for the trains' portrayal, a research in terms of socio-historical factors must follow.

3.2 Socio-historical context

To fully clarify Norris's grim picture of trains and the railway company, there are some other motives which are yet to be addressed.

First, it should be mentioned what motivated Norris to write the novel. Here, it does not require any detailed study as it is widely known and claimed by Bercovitch and Patell in their publication, that Norris took inspiration in real events known as Mussel Slough Tragedy. In *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, it is furthermore urged that the real problem started similarly to the one described in the novel. It is stated that The Southern Pacific Railroad invited ranchers to develop their land, with the prospect of purchasing it for nominal prices. When the time came, the railroad company decided to set higher prices than it was original promised. The situation escalated and in May 1880, federal deputies who were protecting the interests of the railroad trust killed five ranchers, who were revolting eviction from their land.⁴²

⁴¹ Zola, *The Monomaniac*, 54.

⁴² Sacvan Bercovitch and Cyrus R. K. Patell, *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 677.

Having established the original inspiration, this analysis may continue in searching the reasons why Norris's interpretation of the events is to put all the blame for this tragedy on trains and the trust. The text of the novel implies two major reasons.

The first reason concerning socio-historical context which led to the negative portrayal of trains could be a fear of the technological progress. Frank Norris wrote the novel at the end of the 19th century which marked a period of a great technological transformation with trains as the main symbol of these changes. It is plausible that it was this reason leading the author to portray railroads in such unfavorable way, as it was shown in the introductory part that there were more literates rejecting and warning about the consequences of industrialization likewise. However, this theory has a flaw as all the anger is aimed entirely at trains and railways and not technology in general. There are other innovations such as agriculture machinery or telegraphs and these are, though being results of the same technological development, not seen as anything harmful. They give farmers independence and make their lives easier respectively. Even though railroads represent the same opportunities, trains are never celebrated for its assets nor for the fact, that it gave ranchers the possibility to make use of the agricultural land, which would be otherwise too distant and without any chance of cultivating. Therefore, due to the inconsistency in the descriptions of trains and other machines, the fear of the technological progress does not fully explain the following hideous portrayal of a locomotive:

...Presley saw again, in his imagination, the galloping monster, the terror of steel and steam with its single eye, cyclopean, red, shooting from horizon to horizon; but saw it now as the symbol of a vast power, huge, terrible, flinging the echo of its thunder over all the reaches of the valley, leaving blood and destruction in its path; the leviathan with tentacles of steel clutching into the soil; the soulless force, the ironhearted power, the monster, the colossus, the octopus.⁴³

The second reason seems more probable and it lies in the political level of the story. Right from the start, it is crucial to remember that both people representing the railroad trust and the farmers, main antagonists and protagonists of the story, share one important attribute – they are all businessmen. When Norris provided characterizations of most of the farmers, he omitted the important fact that they also want to earn money. It was shown in the previous subchapter that the ranchers are mainly described as people willing to live in harmony with nature, but that does not mean they are not using the advantages of free trade. Moreover, most of the ranchers even employ other workers. Yet the message of the story is a glorification of the farmers and

⁴³ Frank Norris, *The Octopus: A Story of California*, (New York: Airmont Publishing Company, Inc., 1969), 42.

critique of the railroad company though both groups are trying to achieve the same goal. Surely, there is the factor that the trust acts unfairly, but so do the farmers later in the story. On top of that, the action of the trust is at least legal, which cannot be said about the bribery done by the farmers.

This all leads to Norris's political belief. In his idea, the railroad trust was probably perceived as something too huge and potentially harmful to the society, while the farmers and owners of the ranches representing the lower middle-class are the people earning sympathies. Trains are consequently despised as machines enabling the trust to absorb both the working and lower-middle class. The awful portrayal of trains results from the slightly left-wing political message of the story which is clear from Presley's perception of the events. This character wrote a poem which *The Cambridge History of American Literature* describes as being socialistic.⁴⁴ In some parts of the story, the political message seems even more leftists as there is a character called Caraher who openly talks about himself as being "red".⁴⁵ Though a communist, later in the story, he even earns sympathy as he also despises the railroad trust and supports the farmers. Funnily enough, Caraher owns a saloon and earns money on suffering of others and especially Dyke who is drinking there, being wretched by his troubles. Importantly for this paper, Caraher also encourages and supports other characters in their fight with the railroad trust and he was one of the major factors contributing to the tragedy in which the story ended.

The politics is not only the reason behind the adverse portrayal of trains and the railroad company, but the characters representing them as well. S. Behrman is throughout the story the dominant representant, who embodies all evil, mercilessness and doom of other characters. His picture is in most aspects very similar to the picture of trains as he is also seen as the complete opposite of the ranchers. When describing him, the author used some generally known clichés about capitalist businessmen:

He was a large, fat man, with a great stomach; his cheek and the upper part of his thick neck ran together to form a great tremulous jowl, shaven and blue-grey in colour; a roll of fat, sprinkled with sparse hair, moist with perspiration, protruded over the back of his collar. He wore a heavy black moustache. On his head was a round-topped hat of stiff brown straw, highly varnished. A light-brown linen vest, stamped with innumerable interlocked horseshoes, covered his protuberant stomach, upon which a heavy watch chain of hollow links rose and fell with his difficult breathing, clinking against the vest buttons of imitation mother-of-pearl.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Bercovitch, *The Cambridge History*, 678.

⁴⁵ Norris, *The Octopus*, 247.

⁴⁶ Norris, *The Octopus*, 52.

It is interesting that even though Norris's political belief is quite clear, he gave space to characters who represented the enemy to justify their action. The following passage is a reaction of the president of the railroad trust when confronted with Presley's anger:

Where there is a demand sooner or later there will be a supply... You are dealing with forces, young man, when you speak of wheat and the railroads, not with men. There is the wheat, the supply. It must be carried to feed the people. There is the demand. The Wheat is one force, the railroad another, and there is the law that governs them—supply and demand.⁴⁷

To draw a conclusion concerning the motives of Frank Norris, it is clear that not only the fact that he was a naturalist, but also the period he wrote the novel in, played a crucial role. Norris took inspiration from real events and he chose to stand up for the farmers he probably saw as victims of partly the technological progress but more importantly the politics which seemed to him favored huge corporations over self-employed farmers and the working class. Thus, the final answer for the train depiction is the author himself. The rather unique picture he provided stemmed up not only from Norris's personal perception of naturalism, but the decade and his perception of the world around him played a decisive role too.

⁴⁷ Norris, *The Octopus*, 396.

4. JACK KEROUAC'S TRAINS RELATED WORKS

Railroads and trains are probably not the first things which comes to someone's mind when thinking about Jack Kerouac. He is usually not recognized as an author who contributed to this type of literature as in his novels, trains and railways do not get much space, so they could be easily overlooked. Moreover, they are not the symbols of anything this paper dealt with so far as for Kerouac, they meant freedom. To find out more about it, the ambition of this chapter is to point out the picture of trains and the portrayal of the related subcultures of hobos and train hoppers from his works. These train mentions will be later analyzed.

First, let's start with something else than *On the Road* and *The Dharma Bums*. *Lonesome Traveler* is a collection of short stories, in which trains get more space, being portrayed from a different perspective than in the two novels. In *The Railroad Earth*, one of those short stories, Kerouac recalls adventures of a brakeman. Here, trains do not appear only as a mean of travel, but the way he describes the railroad job and the fact that he even defends it, could lead to a conviction that this time his aim was to depict railways in the best possible way. With regard to the fact that Kerouac's stories are generally known to be strongly influenced by his real-life views, it is plausible that trains had an important effect not only on his writing, but on his life as well. To list an example, in one part of *The Railroad Earth*, the narrator praises the job when in a conversation with another person: "What you talkin about man it's great and you're moving all the time and you make a lot of money and no body bothers you out there".⁴⁸

The positive standpoint towards railways is then strengthened by other statements of the speaker. Close attention is paid to describing the railroad job as attractively as possible. Among the aspects by which Kerouac wanted to communicate its charm is the salary as it is described that being a brakeman means to earn as much as six hundred dollars. It is also claimed that the work shifts enable the narrator to have some time to read and work on literary ideas. Then there is the romantic aspect of train travel. The stream of consciousness style Kerouac used, enables the speaker to describe the surroundings and remember various experiences with the aim to illustrate the most of train romance to the readers. In Kerouac's perception, a railroad job is not only a reasonable choice concerning career, but there is also the pleasure it gives when there is the opportunity of going through the country and have it as a source of livelihood. Similarly to the previously mentioned Walt Whitman, there are even tries to find poetry in such things as the smoke a locomotive emits, or the way in which other people can see him riding on a train.

⁴⁸ Jack Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveler*, (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 75.

The style of Kerouac's narrative, in which it seems like every milepost had its own story, will be best documented by the following quotations:

With stars above, and the smashby Zipper and the fragrance of locomotive coalsmoke as I stand aside and let them pass and far worn the line at night...⁴⁹

...where the sweet commuter trees are and the redwoods crash and talk about you when you pass in the engine the boilers of which redly cast your omnipotent shadow out on the night.⁵⁰

I wish I was a child in California when the sun's gone down and the Zipper crashes by and I could see thru the redwood or the fig tree my throbbing hope-light shining just for me...⁵¹

It is important to remark that trains are a popular topic even in other short stories from *Lonesome Traveler*. Their role is not so significant as in the previously mentioned text, but it is a story called *Piers of the Homeless Night*, in which Kerouac again deals with the topic of trains. A railroad job is mentioned again as thanks to some connections on the railways, it enables the narrator to travel as a secret host. Once again, the assumption may be that Kerouac wanted to show the greatness and romance of train traveling as in the subsequent extract, the speaker's annoyance is expressed about the impossibility to fully appreciate the ride:

I'd tried my best to appreciate a good ride but could only lay flat on the caboose seat with my face buried in my bundled jacket and every conductor from San Jose to Los Angeles had had to wake me up to ask me about my qualifications... Ole Jack you are now actually riding in a caboose and going along the surf on the spectrallest railroad you'd ever in your wildest dreams wanta ride, like a kid's dream, why is it you cant lift your head and look out there and appreciate the feathery shore of California...⁵²

Kerouac making references on a railroad job is one of the recurrent motives. In the story called *Slobs of the Kitchen Sea*, he portrays a trashy work by claiming that it destroys both body and spirit and results in the loss of dignity as it is claimed:

Suddenly I saw myself in the foc'sle mirror, slick-haired, ring eyed, whitejacketed sudden-waiter-slave of scows where a week before I'd walked erect longwaist on the Plomteau Local, railroad afternoons in drowsy gravel spurs giving the pot the come ahead with no lapse in dignity when stooping swift to throw a sweet switch.⁵³

⁴⁹ Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveler*, 59.

⁵⁰ Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveler*, 69.

⁵¹ Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveler*, 69.

⁵² Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveler*, 12.

⁵³ Kerouac, *Lonesome Travaler*, 85.

Train mentions in Kerouac's stories are not constantly about praising a railroad job and encountering with hobos or train hoppers. Similarly to the authors mentioned in the introductory chapters, Kerouac also used trains and railways in creating similes as he writes that looking at the canyons of the Southern Pacific rail is like looking at an old dream.⁵⁴ In another story, the narrator even notices and describes work at a railroad track in Morocco:

There was a railroad track on the beach that brought the train from Casablanca – I used to sit in the sand watching the weird Arab brakemen and their funny little CFM Railroad (Central Ferrocarril Morocco). – The cars had thin spoked wheels, just bumpers instead of couplings, double cylindrical bumpers each side, and the cars were tied on by means of a simple chain. – The tagman signaled with ordinary stop-hand and go-ahead goose and had a thin piercing whistle and screamed in Arabic...⁵⁵

That would be enough for train mentions, now let's look at the portrayal of hobos and train hoppers he created in his two most famous novels: *On the Road* and *The Dharma Bums*. The topic of both these books is similar; again it's about Kerouac's journeys. For the purposes of this paper, the general plot of the two stories will be omitted as it is not so important.

The critical parts of *On the Road* for the purposes of the following analysis are those, in which the narrator reminisces his experiences with hobos. These people he met are given space to remember old times, during the depression when hoping trains used to be much easier and there were other people, not only bums, doing it. To illustrate this, the story of a hobo called "Mississippi Gene" may be used. This minor character is characterized as being a thirty-year-old hobo who rode freight trains around the country.⁵⁶ Crucially, it can be felt, that the author's view is not neutral as he certainly sympathizes with them and shares some of their desires. In Kerouac's novels, all hobos and bums were depicted not as people to be feared and despised, but contrary to the popular belief, they were celebrated as beings who were brave enough to live freely and it is clear that the narrator would like to live in the same way as he writes about various encounters with them:

I suddenly saw an SP freight going by with hundreds of hobos reclining on the flatcars and rolling merrily along with packs for pillows and funny papers before their noses, and some munching on good California grapes pickfed up by the siding. "Damn!" I yelled. "Hooee! It is the promised land." They were all coming from Frisco; in a week they'd all be going back in the same grand style.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveler*, 91.

⁵⁵ Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveler*, 161.

⁵⁶ Kerouac, *On the Road*, (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 27.

⁵⁷ Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*, 88.

I walked along the tracks in the long sad October light of the valley, hoping for an SP freight to come along so I could join the grape-eating hobos and read the funnies with them.⁵⁸

It must not be forgotten about the second selected novel. *The Dharma Bums* may not be as famous as *On the Road*, but importantly for this paper, it provides a similar picture of train hoppers and hobos. To illustrate this, the following excerpt from the novel may be used:

He said he was an ex-Marine from Paterson New Jersey and after a while he whipped out a little slip of paper he read sometimes on freight trains. I looked at it. It was a quotation from the Digha Nikaya, the words of Budha. I smiled; I didn't say anything. He was a great voluble bum and a bum who didn't drink, he was an idealistic hobo and said "That's all there is to it, that's what I like to do, I'd rather hop freights around the country and cook my food out of tin cans over wood fires, than be rich and have a home or work. I'm satisfied. I used to have arthritis, you know, I was in the hospital for years. I found out a way to cure it and then I hit the road and I been on it ever since."⁵⁹

4.1 Literature context

Having pointed out the train mentions from Kerouac's works, the following analysis primarily aims at clarifying the interest the author took in railways and how he influenced the depiction of related subcultures by comparing his text with the approach taken by the authors discussed in the introductory part of this paper.

Firstly, the connection of the Beat Generation author and trains related subcultures needs to be traced down. The reason Kerouac chose hopping trains when traveling mainly the United States can be found in the author's introduction in *On the Road*. The creator of this rather short text claims that Jack Kerouac made the decision to become a writer being seventeen years old, inspired mainly by a poet named Sebastian Sampas and more crucially by Jack London. The author of *White Fang* impressed him so much that he had also decided to become a lonesome traveler and capture his experiences.⁶⁰ At this point, it is important to remind that it was Jack London who was marked to be one of the major contributors to the picture of hobos in American literature and that he popularized the activity of train hopping. Therefore Kerouac's fascination with train hoppers may be attached to him looking up to his idols.

Having solved this, the extent to which do Kerouac's characters reflect author's own opinion of trains and railways needs to be debated. The assumption could be that the positive

⁵⁸ Kerouac, *On the Road*, 98.

⁵⁹ Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*, (London: HarperCollins, 1994), 100.

⁶⁰ Introduction. *On the Road*, by Jack Kerouac.

portrayal was done only for the purposes of the story and it does not correspond with the author's real viewpoint of railways. However, *Encyclopedia of Beat Literature* approves that Kerouac really processed his own attitude toward trains by providing further data about *The Railroad Earth*, the frequently cited text in the earlier part of this paper. It is claimed that the story takes place in San Francisco in September of 1952 when Kerouac decided to come back to the west and, crucially for this paper, it is stated to be one of the most autobiographic texts he wrote, giving literary historians information about this phase of his life.⁶¹ In a similar way, *On the Road* is claimed by to be also strongly inspired by his real-life trips with Neal Cassady and therefore, it can be understood as an autobiographical text reflecting Kerouac's opinions as well.⁶²

The claim that the picture of railways provided by Kerouac was strongly influenced by his real-life likening of trains is furthermore confirmed by other texts this paper did not cited. Kurt Hemmer mentions a rather interesting remark that when Kerouac writes about his desires and dreams in the book called *Book of Dreams*, he confesses that his ultimate dream is to have a home, where he could be visited by his friends and have a railroad job. It is said that he even had a particular wish to work on the railway track going from Boston to New Hampshire to Lowell.⁶³ A similar wish was also expressed in the previously mentioned story: *Piers of the Homeless Night*. There the narrator says: "...if it wasnt for this shipping I'd sure like it maybe to be a railroad man, learn to be a brakeman, and get paid to ride that old zooming Zipper."⁶⁴

Having understood the logic behind the portrayal of trains and railroads in Kerouac's stories, the following paragraphs are written with the purpose of understanding the portrayal of author's hobos in contrast with the already introduced approaches.

It is clear from the cited excerpts that Kerouac's hobos are people who are proud of their way of life. There is no self-pity, no one from the hobos blame the society for they ended up in such unprivileged situation. The bum described in *The Dharma Bums* is moreover a hobo by choice and based on his characterization, he is surely enjoying his life. Frederick Feided states that such picture of hobos was given by the post-war situation which has resulted in improving the conditions which made hobos from the characters of London and Dos Passos. Kerouac's characters are then not protesting political or economical situation, but they were, according to

⁶¹ Kurt Hemmer, *Encyclopedia of Beat Literature*, (New York: Facts On File, 2007), 194.

⁶² Hemmer, *Encyclopedia*, 176.

⁶³ Hemmer, *Encyclopeida*, 25.

⁶⁴ Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveler*, 12.

Feided, symbolizing their rejection of the post-war values.⁶⁵ Feided summarizes this approach by stating that: “Kerouac’s hoboes see society as a mad house from which escape is essential”.⁶⁶

These factors make Kerouac’s hobos rather unique. His portrayal of them can certainly be compared to the works of both London and Dos Passos as he also tried to improve the general picture of these people in the society. This can be documented on the story called *The Vanishing American Hobo*, one of the *Lonesome Traveler* stories, which is written with a clear aim to show hobos as respectable people. However, omitting the political and economical reasons makes his type of a hobo to be a pure one. In his texts, to be a hobo means to be a normal man who had only decided to live differently. The picture we get from the previously mentioned texts is that living such way is a huge adventure, full of hopping freight trains and encountering with amusing people running from the establishment. In some ways, it may be concluded that Kerouac did the best to make hobos a phenomenon. He did not only defend their rights, but thanks to his unique depiction of their lives, hobos and train hoppers are even today enjoying a cult status.

4.2 Socio-historical context

Having established the picture of train hoppers and hobos in Kerouac’s texts, this subchapter will discuss the socio-historical background influencing his train related literature. This analysis should also open space for a comparison with *The Octopus*.

To analyze Kerouac’s works without mentioning the tendencies in the post second world war American society would build an incomplete picture. It was already claimed that the origin of Kerouac’s interest in hobos and train hoppers stems mainly from looking up to Jack London. Still, there are other aspects, which needs to be addressed. Josh Rahn in his article mapping the history of the Beat Generation movement, whose leading member was Kerouac, mentions other two important factors. These could provide the analysis of Kerouac’s trains related works with extra information, explaining the positive portrayal of people living in the margins of society. The first factor is the fight against growing materialism in 1950s. It is claimed that Kerouac himself had problems with the reality of everyday consumer culture. These growing tendencies were, according to Rahn, seen as the result of the second crucial aspect – capitalism.⁶⁷ It would

⁶⁵ Feided, *No Pie*, 58.

⁶⁶ Feided, *No Pie*, 59.

⁶⁷ Josh Rahn, "The Beat Generation," The Literature Network, accessed September 12, 2018, <http://www.online-literature.com/periods/beat.php>.

be only logical then, if Kerouac's characters he encountered with when hopping freight trains were depicted as victims of the political and economic situation in the society, but they are not.

When analyzing Frank Norris: *The Octopus*, it was established that the main reason for the dismal picture of trains was the situation in the society as the protagonists of the story fought with the modern world represented by a greedy railroad trust. Moreover, Norris's writing could be also marked as anti-capitalistic. How is it then possible that these two authors differ so much in providing a picture of the same thing?

The answer is that each of these two authors chose a different kind of protest. Both these literates were revolting and had a similar enemy. Norris was fighting the system as he saw it destroying little businessmen, while for Kerouac, it was about the consumerist tendencies. The crucial difference is, that while Norris saw trains as the symbol of what he believed to be a doom, for Kerouac, it was the way to save oneself and escape from the establishment. It surely corresponds with the period the authors were active in. In the first two chapters, it was shown that the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries marked the golden times of railways and therefore trains were, for Frank Norris, symbols of the changes in society which the industrialization brought. However, as the importance of railroads declined, in the second part of the 20th century, trains could be associated with social equality. The ability to buy a train ticket was no more the privilege of the richest, but something rather in contrast with the post-war reality, full of people buying own cars. This new status of trains, in combination with the communities of train hoppers and hobos then enabled Jack Kerouac to see railways in a completely different way to Frank Norris.

5. CONCLUSION

This thesis has discussed the history of trains depiction in American literature, together with an analysis of the different approaches of the selected authors.

In the first chapter, there was an introduction to the influence of railways on both the history of the United States and its citizens. The second chapter was divided into two parts. One showed the depiction of trains as symbols of unity, technological progress and celebration of the new age, while the second was aimed at clarifying the picture of train related subcultures. This introductory part laid out the important context for the subsequent analysis.

In the third chapter, the main motives and plot of Frank Norris's novel *The Octopus* were shortly introduced. This novel was then analyzed concerning literature context i.e. it was explained how it fits Norris's own idea of naturalism, what features of the literary movement influenced the picture of trains, what has the novel in common with works of other literates and it was compared with the earlier introduced American writers. In terms of socio-historical context, it was shown that the story was based on real events. The reasons why Norris decided to stand with farmers and write against the railroad company were claimed to be partly a fear of the technological progress and mainly author's political belief. The fourth chapter focused on train related works of Jack Kerouac. The train mentions from his books were pointed out and concerning literature context, the motives leading Kerouac to write about railways were shown. His vision of hobos hopping freight trains was then looked into and its portrayal was compared with the already introduced authors and their characters. The second subchapter dealt with the socio-historical context. It was established that similarly to Frank Norris, Kerouac was also dissatisfied with the situation in the society and saw capitalism as the originator of the problems. However, Kerouac's fight with materialism and establishment was entirely different to the one of Norris as the Beat Generation author saw trains as the way to escape the reality, to live outside the establishment. Unlike Norris whose approach was to depict trains as evil machines destroying humanity, a few decades later, due to the different situation in the society, Kerouac saw the same thing otherwise, though the political belief of both authors was in many aspects similar.

In conclusion, it is believed that this paper will help with mapping the history of train depiction in American Literature, explain the main reasons which led both authors to depict railways in such way, recognize Jack Kerouac as a writer who contributed to train related literature and show the connecting link between the two authors.

6. RESUMÉ

Cílem této práce je zanalyzovat zobrazení vlaků a železnice ve vybraných dílech Franka Norrisa a Jacka Kerouaca s důrazem na literární a socio-historické vlivy. Analytická část práce se také snaží najít ty aspekty, které dílo obou autorů spojují.

První dvě kapitoly tvoří teoretický základ práce. V první kapitole je představen vlak a jeho vliv na historii a společnost ve Spojených státech. Pozornost byla věnována jak pozitivním vlivům, tak i těm negativním. Pozitivní vlivy byly dokumentovány například na ekonomickém růstu, nárůstu pracovních příležitostí, nebo efektivnějším předáváním informací. Mezi negativní vlivy naopak patřilo znečištění životního prostředí nebo spory o vlastnictví území s původními obyvateli. Druhá kapitola měla za úkol seznámit čtenáře s obrazem vlaku v americké literatuře. První oddíl se věnoval zobrazení vlaku jako technologického triumfu, symbolu národní jednoty nebo mobility. Mnohdy rozdílné přístupy k zobrazení vlaku byly ilustrovány ukázkami z díla nejznámějších amerických autorů, kterými byli Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman nebo Bayard Taylor. Druhý oddíl této kapitoly byl sepsán za účelem seznámení čtenáře se subkulturami, které jsou se světem železnic pevně spjaty. Obraz těchto subkultur “train hoppers” a “hobos” byl ilustrován dílem Jacka Londona, nebo John Dos Passose.

Následující dvě kapitoly byly sepsány za účelem analyzovat obraz vlaku a železnice ve vybraných dílech Franka Norrisa a Jacka Kerouaca. Třetí kapitola stručně seznámila čtenáře s dějem Norrisova románu *The Octopus*, kde byl kladen důraz především na ústřední motiv, kterým je spor mezi farmáři a železniční společností, která se snaží využít své situace a vydělat na úkor zemědělců. Obraz železnice a obzvláště pak vlaku jako stroje je v díle silně negativní a následující dva oddíly zabývající se literárním a socio-kulturním kontextem byly sepsány za účelem prozkoumání důvodů, které k tomu vedli. Mezi hlavní faktor ovlivňující obraz vlaků v díle Franka Norrisa byl označen naturalismus. Tento umělecký směr, především v chápání samotného autora, má za úkol ukázat příběh obyčejných lidí, kteří se snaží žít v harmonii s přírodou, jejichž život se nečekaně změnil v tragédii. Jako jeden z důvodů pro nepříznivý obraz vlaků a železnice byla tudíž snaha ukázat moderní svět jako neslučitelný s vizí farmářů, kteří byli v příběhu hlavními protagonisty. Zároveň bylo doloženo, že negativní obraz vlaků není typickým prvkem pro naturalismus, jelikož jeho nejznámější představitel, Émile Zola, sám napsal román z prostředí železnice, ve kterém není obraz vlaku tak zaujatý nebo jednostranný, ale naopak autor klade důraz na přesné popisy železničního prostředí. Stejně tak byl Norrisův román zasazen do kontextu amerických autorů představených v úvodní části. V rámci toho, že nebylo možné dohledat žádnou spojitost mezi Norrisovým zobrazením vlaků a dílem jiných

autorů, byl učiněn závěr, že tento přínos do literatury zabývající se železnicí zůstává unikátním. V kapitole zabývající se socio-historickým kontextem bylo zdůrazněno, že hlavní motivací pro sepsání románu byly skutečné události známé jako Mussel Slough Tragedy. Z toho zjištění byly následně odvozeny dva hlavní důvody vedoucí k tomu, že v Norrisově verzi všechnu vinnu nesou vlaky a železniční společnost, zatímco farmáři jsou vyobrazeni jako pozitivní postavy. Jako první důvod byl označen strach z technologického pokroku, jelikož přelom devatenáctého a dvacátého století bylo období upozorňování na možné následky industrializace a jejího vlivu na životní prostředí a společnost. Jako druhý důvod bylo označeno politické přesvědčení autora, který tento román vylíčil jak střet drobných živnostníků s obří korporací, která není v souladu s jeho chápáním světa. Někteří hrdinové knihy jsou navíc levicového smýšlení, včetně postavy Carahera, který je otevřeně označen za komunistu, a přesto se těší sympatiím, jelikož podporuje farmáře v jejich boji proti železniční společnosti. Jako závěr analýzy tohoto románu tedy byla vyslovena myšlenka, že se na negativním obrazu vlaků a železnice podepsal jak naturalismus jako literární směr, tak doba, ve které byl román sepsán. Naturalismus logicky vedl Norrise k tomu, aby se postavil na stranu farmářů, jelikož jejich životy skončily tragédií kvůli příchodu železnice. Ještě větší měrou ovlivnily obraz vlaků Norrisovi obavy z následků industrializace a jeho politické smýšlení. Levicový a antikapitalistický postoj navíc vytvořil prostor pro srovnání s druhým vybraným autorem.

Druhým vybraným autorem pro tuto práci byl Jack Kerouac. Kapitola čtyři si kladla za cíl ukázat čtenářům, že i přesto, že je autorův přínos pro literaturu zobrazující železnici často přehlížen, vlaky se v jeho díle objevují často. Za pomoci souboru krátkých příběhů *Lonesome Traveler* bylo nejdříve ukázáno, jak autor vnímal práci na železnici a v druhé části této kapitoly byly citovány ukázky ze dvou nejznámějších románů Jacka Kerouaca – *On the Road* a *The Dharma Bums*. V těchto dvou knihách nemají vlaky velkou roli, jsou však dějištěm setkání s příslušníky subkultur “hobos” a “train hoppers”. V rámci literárního kontextu bylo kladeno za cíl zjistit, proč to byly cesty vlakem, které ho následně inspirovali k sepsání výše zmíněných románů. Nejvlivnější osobou se ukázal být Jack London, jehož přínos pro zobrazení subkultur “hobos” a “train hoppers” byl vysvětlen v úvodní části práce. Dále bylo zjištěno, že Kerouacova díla jsou silně autobiografická, tudíž lze předpokládat že do svých knih zpracoval svůj vlastní názor na železnici. Tato teze byla navíc podložena zmínkami o vlacích v jeho dalším díle. Objasnit Kerouacův přínos pro obraz s vlakem spojovaných subkultur byl další úkol v rámci oddílu literárního kontextu. Byl učiněn závěr, že jeho přínos se na rozdíl od autorů zmíněných v úvodní části práce oprostuje od politické agitace. Postavy tuláků, jejichž příběh vypráví prostřednictvím svých románů si nestěžují na nepřízeň osudu, ale naopak jsou představeni jako

jedinci, co mají dostatek zdravého rozumu utéct z reality plné materialismu a konzumerismu. Druhý oddíl této kapitoly se pak zabýval socio-historickým kontextem. Bylo deklarováno, že Kerouac sdílel s Frankem Norrisem odpor ke kapitalismu jako politickému zřízení. Zatímco pro Norrise byl kapitalismus systém umožňující vzestup korporací, které následně „vykořisťovali“ drobné podnikatele, pro Kerouaca to byl systém, který má na svědomí poválečnou realitu, která se přičila jeho vidění světa. Přístupy obou autorů byly porovnány a byl učiněn závěr, že ačkoliv měli oba spisovatelé stejného nepřítele, jejich přístup byl zcela odlišný. Norrisovi postavy se proti novým skutečnostem, jako jsou industrializace nebo kapitalismus představován železnicí a vlaky bouří a jejich aktivní boj nakonec vyústí v tragédii, ať už je tato tragédie symbolizována smrtí, nebo životem v bídě. Jack Kerouac se rozhodl před těmito skutečnostmi raději uniknout. Jeho postavy, v originále nejčastěji označované jako “hobos”, naskakují na nákladní vlaky a cestují po Státech sice v bídě, ale sami v tom nevidí tragédii, naopak, jsou se svým způsobem života spokojeni.

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