



FACULTY OF ARTS
Charles University

Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

Reviewer's Report on B. A. Thesis
AMERICAN POSTWAR PILGRIMAGE: THE BEATS IN PARIS
by
Margarita Kirlan

This is a well-written, perceptive and interesting thesis and I recommend the grade of **1/výborně**. The student uses transnational theory and, in part, World Literature theory to illuminate the way that Paris, France and French literature transformed the work of some Beat writers at a crucial point in their development. She judiciously distinguishes between the effects that this engagement had on different writers, and ranges comfortably through an impressive number of theoretical and literary historical considerations.

However, as is sometimes the case in such studies, the student overstates the importance of Paris on these writers in several different ways. For instance, that Allen Ginsberg began writing "Kaddish" in a Parisian café seems more like a random circumstance than a determining factor; certainly it's hard to see what bearing this circumstance has for our understanding of the poem. (And I'm unpersuaded by the follow-up argument on this matter on p. 35.) Also, toward the end of the thesis, the student sketches out the later fame and influence of the Beats in such a way (for instance on p. 48) that suggests that France was somehow behind this. Of course, the city was important for them during those formative years at the end of the 1950s, but that does not mean that we can read France and French culture in their subsequent work. It would seem, to me at least, that the transnational encounter with France was, at that stage, over.

Over, with perhaps one important exception: Lawrence Ferlinghetti. While he is mentioned in connection with City Lights, the thesis overlooks completely Ferlinghetti's engagement with French poetry throughout his career. Unlike most of the other Beats, he knew the language well, and translated from it. I was also surprised that the student didn't draw on James Campbell's study, *Paris Interzone* (2001) which covers a lot of the ground of this thesis (she only mentions a newspaper article by Campbell).

It would have been interesting to toggle these writers' French inflected works with their actual knowledge of the language as this can often provide a clear index of cultural engagement. Perhaps, for Burroughs and Ginsberg, France, or more properly Paris, was merely a stop along an extended journey.

It would also have been helpful to distinguish between Paris and France. As the student will know, Pascale Casanova argues for the former as a center World Literature, not



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the latter. Perhaps, in some of their more superficial engagements with French culture, the Beats were responding to the fact that Paris was still, just about, a global literary entrepôt, a kind of gateway to world culture, rather than being a place to engage with only francophone literature. (Really, only Ferlinghetti did that.)

There are some glitches along the way: on p. 7, it seems that some of the supervisor's remarks are incorporated in the thesis text. Céline's name is frequently denuded of its accent; on p. 18, instead of providing the publication date of *The Soft Machine* we are given the word "date."

While these responses are critical, I hope they don't occlude my appreciation of this work, which richly exceeds the requirements for a B. A. thesis.

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13 August 2018