

Supervisor's report on B.A. thesis by
By Margarita Kirlan

“American Postwar Pilgrimage: The Beats in Paris”

In her thesis, Margarita Kirlan examines the writing of William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac and Gregory Corso in light of the French literature and culture they came to admire and emulate during their years in Paris in the late 1950s. The thesis argues that Paris itself, along with French writers and artists, played an invaluable role in the formation of the Beat ethos, which has come to play a significant role in world literature.

The primary source materials of the thesis include Allen Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems* (1956), “Kaddish” (1959); Brion Gysin and William Burroughs's *The Third Mind*, Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*; Jack Kerouac's *Satori In Paris* (1966), *Big Sur* (1962), *The Subterraneans* and *On the Road* (1957). In addition, recent email correspondence with Oliver Harris, a scholar of William Burroughs and Senior Lecturer in the Department of American Studies at Keel University, informs the arguments of the thesis, as does much of the most recent scholarship on the Beats and on transnational literature.

The thesis contains an introduction, three chapters that constitute the body of the thesis, a conclusion and a rich bibliography. The first chapter, “Why Did the Beats Go to Paris?” investigates the motivations that led several key members of the Beat Generation to leave the US for Paris in the late 1950s. Recreating the conservative social and literary life of the US during the Cold War period, this chapter lays the groundwork for the later arguments and investigations of the thesis. The second chapter, “The Beats in Paris (1957 — 1960) examines the years the Beats spent in Paris, detailing important ways that French literature and culture influenced their work and perceptions of both literature and the writer's role in society. This chapter introduces the concept of transnationalism to enrich our reading of the Beats and the invaluable role their contacts with French writers and artists had for their own work. The third chapter, “The Formation of the Beat Legacy,” looks at the legacy of the Beats, suggesting that through their work French literature and culture had a profound influence on American literature in the second half of the twentieth century. The conclusion brings the discussion up to date, detailing some of the latest ways of thinking about the Beats as

transnational writers, and points the way forward for future discussions of this topic.

Margarita worked hard on the thesis and her research has been exemplary. The thesis was enriched by her stay in Paris, during which she was able to access a great deal of relevant material in French. I have three questions to pose.

- 1) Does your argument that the Beats were transnational writers change the way we should read their work in relation to American literature?
- 2) Some of the literature you examine was written before the Beats went to Paris and some of it was written afterwards. Is there a significant difference in the work of the Beat writers before and after their time in Paris? What does looking at literature from both periods prove?
- 3) Does the idea of being a “transnational” writer have more or less meaning since the widespread popularity of the internet and the increased ease of dissemination and translation for literary works?

In light of the foregoing, I hereby recommend the mark of 1 (výborně) for this thesis work.

Stephan B. Delbos, MFA, PhD
17 August 2018.