

Poetry of the Beat Generation

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Bachelor Thesis
2010



Tomas Bata University in Zlín
Faculty of Humanities

Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně
Fakulta humanitních studií
Ústav anglistiky a amerikanistiky
akademický rok: 2009/2010

ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

(PROJEKTU, UMĚLECKÉHO DÍLA, UMĚLECKÉHO VÝKONU)

Jméno a příjmení: **Ondřej THAISZ**
Studijní program: **B 7310 Filologie**
Studijní obor: **Anglický jazyk pro manažerskou praxi**

Téma práce: **Poezie beatnické generace**

Zásady pro vypracování:

Definujte pojem "Beat Generation".

Určete místo Beat Generation v kontextu americké a britské literatury.

Provedte komplexní rozbor vybraných básnických děl autorů beatnické generace a jejich předchůdců.

Na základě provedených rozborů určete, do jaké míry je tvorba básníků beatnické generace originální a do jaké míry jen přetváří či napodobuje své předchůdce.

Rozsah práce:

Rozsah příloh:

Forma zpracování bakalářské práce: **tištěná/elektronická**

Seznam odborné literatury:

Flajšar, Jiří. Dějiny americké poezie. Ústí nad Orlicí: Oftis, 2006.

Ginsberg, Allen. Collected Poems 1947–1997. New York: Harper Perennial, 2007.

Gray, Richard. A History of American Literature. Malden: Blackwell, 2004.

Jařab, Josef. American Poetry and Poets of Four Centuries. Olomouc: SPN, 1989.

Lauter, Paul, gen. ed. The Heath Anthology of American Literature. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006.

Vedoucí bakalářské práce:

Mgr. Roman Trušník, Ph.D.

Ústav anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Datum zadání bakalářské práce:

8. ledna 2010

Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce:

7. května 2010

Ve Zlíně dne 8. ledna 2010



prof. PhDr. Vlastimil Švec, CSc.
děkan



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ABSTRAKT

Tato práce analyzuje vybraná díla básníků beatnické generace. Zabývá se tím, jak se tyto básně liší od tvorby předchozích generací a hodnotí celkový přínos do americké poezie. Práce dochází k závěru, že originalita této generace spočívá především v lexikálním obohacení básnického jazyka, pomocí kterého autoři hodnotili realitu. Jejich poetické protesty později přerostly v četné protesty sociálního charakteru.

Klíčová slova:

Americká poezie, beatnická generace, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Gregory Corso, Diane di Prima, originalita

ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses selected works of the Beat Generation poets. It examines the originality of the poems and evaluates an overall contribution to American poetry. The thesis concludes that the originality of the beat poetry dwells in the very specific and purposeful vocabulary which enriched the poetry and which authors used to name the reality. Their poetic dissent later developed into numerous social protests.

Keywords:

American poetry, the Beat Generation, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Gregory Corso, Diane di Prima, originality

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Mgr. Roman Trušík, Ph.D., the supervisor of my bachelor thesis, for his patience, kindness and for the good advice he gave me.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	9
1 BACKGROUND	10
1.1 Walt Whitman.....	11
2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT	13
2.1 Social atmosphere in the 1950s in the United States.....	13
2.2 American Fears	15
3 THE BIRTH OF THE BEAT GENERATION.....	17
3.1 To be beat	18
3.2 San Francisco Renaissance	20
4 COMPLEX ANALYSIS.....	27
4.1 The tone	27
4.2 Poetic devices	32
5 DISCUSSING THE ORIGINALITY.....	41
CONCLUSION	47
BIBLIOGRAPHY	48

INTRODUCTION

The Beat Generation is often labeled as a group of authors who changed the course of events in post-war America. Though the Beat Generation is mostly associated with Jack Kerouac and his book *On the Road* (1957), its members also wrote interesting poetry.

Allen Ginsberg, a major poet of the generation, firstly emerged in 1955 on famous *Six Gallery reading*, which was one of the regular poetry-reading evenings. There he delivered a hallucinatory poem “Howl” condemning the status quo of American society and industrial machinery. The concept of the poem was unique, and Ginsberg was almost singing the lines without rhymes, but with the perfect rhythmic instead. He gained a favorable response and launched his massive career as a poet. Together with a circle of friends like Jack Kerouac, Gregory Corso, Gary Snyder, or Diane di Prima, he laid the foundations of a new poetic tradition yet unseen in America.

That circle became known as the Beat Generation as its authors proclaimed themselves to be tired with conformity which already penetrated literature. Condemning traditional forms of poetry, they were trying to liberate the American verse, make it understandable and leave the message for the upcoming generations that something was wrong with America in the 1950s. Primarily they brought back the American sense of self-reliance and waged a long war against social consensus. Their interest in secrets of consciousness and human body led them to experience with drugs, and later also with Eastern religions, in which they saw an opportunity to escape the pressure of industrialized society.

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze selected poems, find out the elements which made their works different from other generations and evaluate the contribution to the American poetry. This thesis is going to deal with importance of freedom in poetry as a foundation stone for the freedom of speech in the United States.

1 BACKGROUND

From the earliest days of American literary and cultural life, originality was a big issue to deal with. Flicking through the book of centuries, the first poetic attempts were recorded in the 17th century, when Puritans started to write down their memoirs and divine texts. The 18th century then offered mostly the imitations of English neo-classical poetry, represented for example by the group of poets called Connecticut Wits – Timothy Dwight (1752–1817), Joel Barlow (1754–1812), and John Trumbull (1750–1831).¹

Later, first efforts to innovate poetry emerged, as William Cullen Bryant (1794–1878) occupied the position of the national bard. His poetry was on the one hand still just a template of the English neo-classical and romantic poetry, but there is also certain shift in the topic, it became more private, meditative – a major theme was death. Bryant's poem "Thanatopsis" (1821) is a nice example of that.² For the first time in the history, American authors were calling for the formal independence from the European works.

The breaking point seems to be the first part of 19th century, with the coming Transcendentalist movement (Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Thoreau), the first fully American literary movement which had a certain programme. Its members primarily attacked the state of culture, society and glorified the nature as the only source of inspiration and knowledge for the human beings. Poetry was according to Emerson missing its basic element – solid topic, which was, as said previously, seen in the spirit of the nature. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) is often said to be the key person of the American poetry, an essayist who defined the profile of the successful poet of the time.³ Emerson defined the profile of the ideal poets as following:

The poets are liberating gods. They are free, and they make free. The poet is the sayer, the namer, and represents beauty. He is a sovereign, and stands on the centre. For the world is not painted, or adorned, but is from the beginning beautiful; and God has not made some beautiful things, but Beauty is the creator of the universe. Therefore the poet is not any permissive potentate, but is emperor in his own right.⁴

¹ See Richard Gray, *A History of American Literature* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 89.

² See James Levernier, "Thanatopsis: Overview," *Reference Guide to American Literature* Ed. Jim Kamp. (Detroit: St. James Press, 1994) via Literature Resource Center.

³ See Michael P. Branch, "Ralph Waldo Emerson," *American Nature Writers* Ed. John Elder. Vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1996) via Literature Resource Center.

⁴ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Poet," *American Literary Essays*, Ed. Lewis Leary (Thomas Y. Crowell 1960) 161. Rpt. in *Poetry Criticism*. Ed. Carol T. Gaffke. Vol. 18. (Detroit: Gale Research, 1997) via Literature Resource Center.

1.1 Walt Whitman

The first poet to fulfill Emerson's ideal seems to be Walt Whitman (1810–1892), author of *Leaves of Grass* (1855), which celebrated the humanity as well as the miracle of nature. Whitman believed those two are interconnected. His famous “Song of Myself” illustrates an effort to identify human beings with nature:

I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,
I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags.

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.

You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
And filter and fibre your blood.

Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
Missing me one place search another,
I stop somewhere waiting for you. 5

.....

The historian David S. Reynolds rightly suggests that poem has purely Emersonian characteristics, emphasizing the self-reliance, images of the beauty of the natural world, and free-flowing, prose-like lines. After reading the *Leaves of Grass*, Emerson sent a letter to Whitman, admiring the work, especially its diversity.⁶

Whitman gained his inspiration firstly from the crowded streets of New York; he was trying to capture the specific moments, to transform them spontaneously into the lines, where was no place for the traditional metrical patterns.⁷ Later, in 1855, Whitman was admired for his contribution to the poetry theme. Reynolds claims one of the possible reasons may be “homosexual coming-out which allegedly liberated his imagination” or “mystical experience he supposedly had in the 1850s.”⁸

Considering himself the Messiah-like figure, Whitman “gathered together disparate images from nature, city life, oratory, the performing arts, science, religion, and sexual mores.”⁹

⁵ Walt Whitman, “Song of myself,” in *The Complete Poems* (London: Penguin Classics, 2005), 63.

⁶ See David Reynolds, *Walt Whitman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 11.

⁷ See Reynolds, *Walt Whitman*, 10.

⁸ Reynolds, *Walt Whitman*, 10.

⁹ Reynolds, *Walt Whitman*, 11.

Exactly one hundred years later, in the 1950s, his legacy was revived and adopted by some of the artists called *the Beat Generation*.

To understand the poetry as a whole is according to the critic Jan Mukařovský (1891–1975) necessary to be familiar not only with the poetics, but also with sciences related to–sociology (relationship society X art), psychology (perception, creativity), linguistics (stylistics, semantics) and history.¹⁰

Because this bachelor thesis deals with the poetry of the Beat Generation, and later its works are analyzed in details, all the sciences above will be employed gradually.

¹⁰ See Jan Mukařovský, *Studie z poetiky* (Praha: Odeon, 1982), 19.

2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

2.1 Social atmosphere in the 1950s in the United States

The USA ended up war as the winners and became the leading world superpower. The post-war face of America therefore underwent many changes, as unemployment, inward-looking moods were put an end to and financial crisis disappeared with the well-handled armament agenda. Construction exploded. The achievements of the modern age – cars, hoovers, and televisions spread among the society, helping it to relieve the constraints of the war. The country experienced one of the longest periods of sustained economic growth.¹¹

In 1952, a victory by Dwight Eisenhower represented the change. Many people expected that fresh Republican president would reduce government intervention in social and economic affairs and end the Korean War. Citizens wanted to enjoy their lives fully as the strongest, most prosperous democratic nation in the world. Richard Gray claimed that “Eisenhower had a simple task to follow – to preserve economic independence and cultural hegemony. This was finally reached by the strange strategy – inactivity.”¹²

Gentle and calm president presided over a prosperous nation, consisting of families that lived stable life in the suburbs, where the husband worked and the wife was responsible for raising children. The family took on new importance; the home was a center of *togetherness*, a term introduced in 1954 by magazine *McCall's*, referring to modern relationship of married couple which shared housework and catered the kids together. Many Americans consider fifties to be the best times ever as the most important values of the time were family, religion, and stable economy. The church attendance rose to its historic maximum (almost 60 percent) in 1953.¹³

Federal funds invested in colleges and industries helped to gain technological advances and also increased productivity. Profits doubled within the years 1948–1958, more and more goods were produced in the automobile and aircraft industries, jobs and interesting wages were available. Nevertheless, according to Berkin et al., surveys revealed that more

¹¹ See Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 553.

¹² Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 554.

than one-fifth of suburban wives felt unsatisfied with their marriages and lifestyles. These women often complained about boredom of housework, lacked understanding from their husbands and opportunity to have a career at the same time. But neither the men found their suburban dad role satisfying, many of them were rejecting the ideal of togetherness.¹⁴

Gray remarked that “literature transformed grieves and anxieties into the possible eruption of weariness, remorse and guilt.”¹⁵ Many artists and the intellectuals of the time, who dragged themselves away from the active involvement in political issues, founded the escape in formalism. The art itself took moderate and tamed form, offending no one, touching no one. But there is nothing like pure consensus. Each coin has its two sides, and so no society is without the areas of revolt, dissent. It is obvious that calm society is vulnerable to radical raids of fear. Americans were scared to death when thinking of someone who would come and rob them off their wealth. This paranoia was widely and publicly supported not only by the government, but also by the popular culture. There were movies about the space invaders, aliens, who invaded the Earth in order to destroy it.¹⁶

By the late 1950s, symbols of revolt emerged through the culture and the days of the tranquilized America were slowly passing by. In music, above all, it was rock and roll music with remarkable Elvis Presley and his erotic gyrations, signaling the refusal of accepting the consensus mores. The new types of heroes appeared in the literature – outsiders, who were driven by their own choice to the social margins. The protagonists commonly represented the authors’ own personality. According to Gray shared “J. D. Salinger (1919–), Henry Miller (1891–1980), Charles Bukowski (1920–1994) or Jack Kerouac (1922–1969) the same qualities in their works – interest in aesthetic and politics of rebellion.”¹⁷

Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1957) was then among the first works to bring back the sense of freedom, estrangement and terrifying wilderness of America, expressed by peculiar, rough and confessional language.¹⁸ The language which was then given more space in poetry, the language which defeated the norms of formalism, the language which

¹³ See Carol Berkin, Robert W. Cherny, James L. Gormly, W. Thomas Mainwaring, and Christopher L. Miller. *Making America: A History of the United States* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 621.

¹⁴ Berkin et al, *Making America: A History of the United States*, 623.

¹⁵ Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 554.

¹⁶ Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 555.

¹⁷ Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 654.

¹⁸ See Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 655.

was used to record the crudity of the coming times of change. *On the Road* is an autobiographical work based on the author's road trips across the US, celebrating the vastness and potential of the country. Traveling from coast to coast, meeting women and lovers, searching for the own soul and loneliness, are perfectly described with the spontaneity and excitement by the protagonist Sal Paradise (Kerouac himself).

Needless to say, after the Second World War the world was divided into the two spheres of influence. The United States with its capitalistic system on the one hand, the Soviet Union with its collectivist idea on the other hand. Both sides fought alongside in the war, but both had different visions of the post-war division of the world. America was leading superpower, possessing the secret of the atomic bomb and therefore having a big industrial advantage, while Russia, still struggling with the economic decline, saw in the atomic bomb chance to improve its economics and probably also an opportunity how to spread its influence even further. The race which then followed is well-known as the Cold War conflict, lasting for almost 50 years (1945-1991).¹⁹

2.2 American Fears

Basically, by the end of the fifties, America was fighting against two enemies – the Soviet Union, and its own fear of homosexuals and internal Communist infiltrators. The former appeared to threaten moral of society while the latter even its own existence. Studies of male sexuality, carried out in 1948 by Alfred Kinsey, caused shock to many readers by claiming that almost 8 percent of citizens lived a gay lifestyle. The Republican national chairman stated that “sexual perverts ... have infiltrated our Government” and were “as dangerous as Communists”²⁰ and in consequence Eisenhower excluded homosexuals from most government jobs.²¹

The frightening atmosphere was deepened by Senator Joseph McCarthy, who became notorious for declaring war on anything and anyone he saw as Communist subversion. He was very talented when playing on the public anxieties about the growing power of Russia and the possible presence of an enemy within the American society. The atmosphere of the time encouraged citizens to spy on fellow citizens or colleagues, even without concrete

¹⁹ See Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 553.

²⁰ Berkin et al, *Making America: A History of the United States*, 623.

²¹ See Berkin et al, *Making America: A History of the United States*, 623.

evidence. The series of witch-hunt-like trials followed and thousands of people, writers, artists, poets, and academics, often accused on false witness, were sacked from their jobs and blacklisted as Communist collaborators. There was practically no defense against, accusations were made anonymously. Charlie Chaplin is just one famous case among many others, who was subject of the public abuse and who was even forced to leave the country.²²

McCarthy showed no mercy and persuaded majority of the people that preservation of their welfare depended upon his routing out enemies of the society. And if there were none, he was able to invent them.²³ The fear of the betrayal of atomic secrets made McCarthy even stronger, and was more than useful weapon to help him reach his political ambitions. It was a bomb which increased the tensions.²⁴

²² See "McCarthyism and Literature," in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* Ed. Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau V (Detroit: Gale, 2007) via Literature Resource Center.

²³ See "McCarthyism and Literature," in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* Ed. Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau (Detroit: Gale, 2007) via Literature Resource Center.

²⁴ See Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 555.

3 THE BIRTH OF THE BEAT GENERATION

The book *On the Road* made Kerouac very famous; all characters were inspired by the real persons, mostly those, who later cooperated in the Beat Generation. The trips of Sal Paradise described in the book even traced the real trajectory of the movement, starting in New York, finishing in San Francisco.

Columbia University in New York was a place where some of *the Beats* firstly met during their studies. Jack Kerouac entered the university as a successful football player, who was also well-read and skilful in writing disciplines, Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997), as a star student, who was finally expelled because of his troubles with law. They were both introduced to William Burroughs (1914–1997), Harvard-graduate heroin addict, whom they admired for his level of intelligence and worldly cynicism. Burroughs became father-like person to them and the two adopted his drug-consuming lifestyle implementing it into their work. Soon, they found out the academic environment of New York hostile to the topics their works were dealing with.²⁵

With the end of the World War II, San Francisco Bay Area became a cradle of the new progressive culture, the perfect magnet for those searching for radical change. Since the era of the Gold Rush, San Francisco was tolerant to different religions, life-styles, sexual orientations and races because of the growing number of immigrants. It was no wonder that this atmosphere helped to create unique groups of poets and other movements, well-known as San Francisco Renaissance.²⁶

So, even though the Beat Generation was initially associated with New York, it attracted the larger public interest in San Francisco, as Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Gary Snyder (1930–) and Lawrence Ferlinghetti (1919–) started to read their poetry publicly in the local bars and coffeehouses.²⁷

²⁵ See John Ower, “Allen Ginsberg,” *American Poets Since World War II*. Ed. Donald J. Greiner (Detroit: Gale Research, 1980) Dictionary of Literary Biography Vol. 5. via *Literature Resource Center*.

²⁶ See Amy Glynn Greacen, “San Francisco Renaissance,” *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of American Poets and Poetry*, Ed. Jeffrey Gray et.al (Westport, CT: Greenwood press, 2006), 1410.

²⁷ See Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 641.

3.1 To be beat

At this point it is essential to explain what the word *beat* exactly means and why was it used as the nickname for the whole generation of authors.

There are several opinions. From the previous reading it is clear that 1950s as the era of repression made some people unhappy and frustrated about the American taste of materialism, where the human feelings started to play less important role. Those people became more interested in life itself rather than omnipresent wealth and the mainstream culture. Jack Kerouac was the first to use the term the *Beat Generation* publicly, when making an interview for the *New York Times* in 1948 (published 4 years later, in 1952):

We are beat, man. Beat means beatific, it means you get the beat, it means something, I invented it. We love everything, rock and roll, Zen, apple pie, Eisenhower- we dig it all. We are in the vanguard of the new religion.²⁸

Kerouac was basically describing the underground, anti-conformist youth gathering in New York. But then, the article published in *The New York Times Magazine*, in 1952, helped to gain the broad interest:

The origins of the word *beat* are obscure, but the meaning is only too clear to most Americans. More than mere weariness, it implies the feeling of having been used, of being raw. It involves a sort of nakedness of mind, and, ultimately, of soul; a feeling of being reduced to the bedrock of consciousness. In short, it means being undramatically pushed up against the wall of oneself. It is a postwar generation having lust for freedom, and the ability to live at a pace that kills (to which the war had adjusted them), led to black markets, bebop, narcotics, sexual promiscuity, hucksterism, and Jean-Paul Sartre.²⁹

Despite the fact Kerouac was the first to use the adjective *beat* to name the generation of radical youth, he did not invent it. Instead, Herbert Huncke (1915–1996), a teenage thief and drug addict introduced the term. Huncke was well-known in the New York underworld for stealing goods and hiding them in the apartment shared with Allen Ginsberg. The adjective *beat* meant primarily *beaten down, tired, robbed or cheated* (in the drug world in New York). Later it was lifted up and the paradoxical connotations were added by Kerouac and Ginsberg.³⁰ Ginsberg commented on this topic:

²⁸ Herbert Gold, *The Age of Happy Problems* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 80.

²⁹ John Clellon Holmes, "This Is The Beat Generation," in *The New York Times Magazine*, November 16, 1952.

³⁰ See John Clellon Holmes, "This Is The Beat Generation," in *The New York Times Magazine*, November 16, 1952.

The point of Beat is that you get beat down to a certain nakedness where you actually are able to see the world in a visionary way, which is the old classical understanding of what happens in the dark night of the soul.³¹

The question remains, if three people make a generation. The press at the time understood the name *Beat Generation* as a reference to only a small group of writers, friends of Ginsberg, Kerouac or Burroughs, so it was often confusing to recognize who really belongs to the movement. Finally the members who consistently defined themselves as “Beat” writers were taken seriously: Ginsberg, Kerouac, Neal Cassady, Gregory Corso, and Peter Orlovsky.³²

If we need to define the movement broadly, the best description would include also all other writers who reached prominence in the 1950s and early 1960s, who shared the same opinions, ideas, intention: poets Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, Amiri Baraka, Anne Waldman etc.³³ Amiri Baraka remarked humorously:

“The so-called Beat Generation was a whole bunch of people, of all different nationalities, who came to the conclusion that society sucked.”³⁴

But of course, the word *beat* has many other faces. Among musicians, beat represents the tempo, the pace of the composition, or the pulse. Nowadays, in the popular music, drums are usually the instrument which dictates the tempo of the songs. Moreover, keeping the beat is necessary to remain in the groove, to be in harmony with the others. Beat poetry imitates the jazz beat; “there is an effort to catch the abrupt, changing rhythms, the improvisational bravura of bebop and swing.”³⁵

In a psychological and social sense, *beat* evokes the condition of being beaten by something or somebody, the condition of the outsider, who is down but not out. This attitude is definitely not new on the field of literature, as “many Romantic and American

³¹ Michael Schumacher, *Dharma Lion: A Critical Biography of Allen Ginsberg* (New York: St Martins 1994), 261.

³² “Beat generation - Meaning and usage, History, The Beatnik stereotype, Influences on Western culture,” Cambridge Encyclopedia. <http://encyclopedia.stateuniversity.com/pages/2495/beat-generation.html>

³³ “Beat generation – Meaning and usage, History, The Beatnik stereotype, Influences on Western culture,” Cambridge Encyclopedia. <http://encyclopedia.stateuniversity.com/pages/2495/beat-generation.html>

³⁴ John Grady, “Introduction,” *Beats Then And Now Home* <http://beatsthenandnow.com/Pages/Introduction.html>

³⁵ Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 641.

authors had cherished the stance of alienation and insanity of those who look at normal *square* society from the periphery, rejecting its conventional discipline.”³⁶

Finally, in a spiritual sense, Gray believes that adjective *beat* describes “the raptness and innocence, the pursuit of visions through the music, meditation, drugs or poems.”³⁷

The literary critic Rachel Donadio suggested that

The adolescent longing for liberation from conventional manners and intellectual standards; the polymorphous sexuality; the narcissism; the destructive absorption in drugs; the undercurrent of criminality; the irrationalism; the naïve political radicalism and reflexive anti-Americanism; the adulation of pop music as a kind of spiritual weapon; the Romantic elevation of art as an alternative to normal reality; the pseudo-spirituality, especially the spurious infatuation with Eastern religions; in all this and more the Beats provided a vivid glimpse of what was to come.³⁸

There are several points I would not agree with Donadio. Above all, there was nothing like “pseudo-spirituality,” and her argument on that topic is simply unsupported. Major figures of the generation, including Ginsberg or Snyder, spent long periods of time studying Buddhism. Even Diane di Prima, a famous poet of the Beat Generation, made a commitment to the study of Zen Buddhism with her teachers Katagiri Roshi and Kobun Chino Roshi.³⁹ Facing the death, Ginsberg was accompanied by his close friends; among those was his spiritual teacher Gelek Rimpoche, a Tibetan Buddhist lama.⁴⁰ I doubt this was just a pose.

3.2 San Francisco Renaissance

Kenneth Rexroth (1905–1982), an extremely talented poet, critic, translator and journalist in one person, is often considered to be the father of San Francisco Renaissance. He spent his life trying to write the way he talked, giving his poetry sense of spontaneity within the prose-like lines reminding Walt Whitman.⁴¹

His poem “Vitamins and Roughage” (1944) mocks the upcoming ideal of beauty which replaced the traditional way of harmony between the body and soul:

³⁶ Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 641.

³⁷ Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 641.

³⁸ Rachel Donadio, “Speaking up for the Fifties,” *The New Criterion* (June 2008), 1-2.

³⁹ See Kurt Hemmer, *Encyclopedia of Beat Literature* (New York: Facts on File, 2006), 72.

⁴⁰ See Allen Ginsberg, *Karma červená, bílá a modrá*, Ed. Josef Jařab (Praha: Mladá Fronta, 2001), 313. My translation

⁴¹ Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 482.

Strong ankled, sun burned, almost naked,
 The daughters of California
 Educate reluctant humanists;
 Drive into their skulls with tennis balls⁴²

Rexroth also organized the regular poetry-reading evenings. The most remarkable one, called The Six Gallery reading, on October 7, 1955, was the public manifestation of the Beats and helped to connect the poets of the older San Francisco generation with the talented youngsters from New York. Five young poets of the time presented their work on the stage – Philip Lamantia (1927–2005), Mike McClure (1932–), Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder and Phil Whalen (1923–2002). It is said that about 150 people were in attendance, Jack Kerouac in the role of usher ran out to fetch three jugs of California burgundy, which helped to loosen everybody up. The atmosphere was charming. No charge, just small collection for wine, and postcards.⁴³

That night the face of America changed dramatically as Allen Ginsberg held the stage. Ginsberg was 29 years old, had hardly published any poetry yet and also never before participated in a poetry reading. A teenager at the time, Yvonne Rainer still clearly remembers what happened that night:

Ginsberg, quite drunk, clean-shaven, in black suit and tie-less white shirt, holding a jug of rot-gut red wine, intoning and chanting the poem. He brought the house down with a performance of his hallucinatory new poem Howl. Among other things, this epic work in four parts dealt with drugs, mental illness, religion, homosexuality - the fears and preoccupations of a generation.⁴⁴

Gathering confidence, Ginsberg began singing the lines like a Jewish cantor, delivering each new line in a single breath. The crowd was astonished, and Kerouac began shouting *Go! Go!* in cadence. By the end of the poem, Kenneth Rexroth was in tears and Allen Ginsberg launched his massive career as a poet.⁴⁵

⁴² Kenneth Rexroth, “Vitamins and Roughage,” *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry* ed. Richard Ellmann and Robert O’Clair (New York: Norton, 1988), 711.

⁴³ “LitKicks: Six Gallery,” Literary Kicks, <http://www.litkicks.com/Places/SixGallery.html>

⁴⁴ Ruby Rich, “Ginsberg’s Howl resounds on film,” *The Guardian*, January 20, 2010, 19.

Extract from “Howl”, which made Ginsberg famous:

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness,
 starving hysterical naked,
 dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for
 an angry fix,

 with dreams, with drugs, with waking nightmares, alcohol and
 cock and endless balls,

 who howled on their knees in the subway and were dragged off the
 roof waving genitals and manuscripts,
 who let themselves be fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists,
 and screamed with joy,⁴⁶

“Howl” started it all, dividing the society into two sides; Ginsberg was either beloved or hated. If Kerouac’s *On the road* is considered to be the manifest of the Beat fiction, then “Howl” is in my opinion the manifest of the Beat poetry, showing the similar, or even more, amount of controversy.

The significance of the Six Gallery reading is that it introduced the upcoming poetry scene and turned several poets into the celebrities as the rumors about the dynamic reading show had gotten around. In the next few months, show was repeated several times to larger crowds, and again had enormous success.⁴⁷

American poet Michael McClure comments on Six Gallery reading:

In all of our memories no one had been so outspoken in poetry before - we had gone beyond a point of no return. None of us wanted to go back to the gray, chill, militaristic silence, to the intellectual void - to the land without poetry - to the spiritual drabness. We wanted to make it new and we wanted to invent it and the process of it as we went into it. We wanted voice and we wanted vision.⁴⁸

But I suggest the importance of the Six Gallery reading dwells in something even more fundamental. The fetters of social conventions were broken that night and the discussions about the freedom of speech were unleashed as “Howl” offered unusual and shocking images. Basically, from its opening line, “Howl” is an accusatorial and visionary at the same time, glorifying the outsiders and the deviant behavior along with condemning the society for its lethargy, passive way of living and lack of empathy. There is a clear trace of

⁴⁵ “LitKicks: Six Gallery,” Literary Kicks, <http://www.litkicks.com/Places/SixGallery.html>

⁴⁶ Allen Ginsberg, “Howl” in *Howl and Other Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2001), 9.

⁴⁷ “LitKicks: Six Gallery,” Literary Kicks, <http://www.litkicks.com/Places/SixGallery.html>

⁴⁸ Michael McClure, *Scratching The Beat Surface* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1982), 13.

homosexuality and sexual practices throughout the poem spiced with the very specific range of words and language, for example – “Who blew and were blown by those human seraphim, the sailors, caresses of Atlantic and Caribbean love.”

I think Ginsberg must have been expecting the complaints, but bravely didn't step back. Without any editorial change, “Howl” got its printed version in 1956 within the *Pocket Poets Series* published by *City Lights Booksellers & Publishers*, whose owner Lawrence Ferlinghetti, a poet and talented translator became a very good friend with Allen Ginsberg.

Although he had a little in common with the poetry of the Beats and he is rather connected with the earlier generation of San Francisco renaissance, it was him who published most of the *the Beats* and catapulted them to their careers – Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Gregory Corso, William S. Burroughs, Diane DiPrima, Michael McClure, Philip Lamantia and Gary Snyder. *City Lights Booksellers & Publisher* became Mecca for the artists and writers.⁴⁹

None of them might have been aware of the consequences which followed immediately after publishing “Howl”. Ferlinghetti along with Ginsberg became the subjects of investigation and were later taken to court for the poem's obscenity. No poem before or since has had such a profound impact on the culture and “Howl” came to trial. The “Howl” trial in 1957 was the first from the series of lawsuits concerning literary censorship; the second was the *Lady Chatterley's Lover* case in 1960, and the third was the *Tropic of Cancer* decision in 1961.⁵⁰

During the “Howl” trial the new standards – so called “Roth standards” were used to determine whether or not a work was obscene. According to simple definition – Congress could ban material “whether to the average person, applying contemporary community standards, the dominant theme of the material taken as whole appeals to the prurient interest.”⁵¹

Fortunately, the Honorable Clayton W. Horn made a wise decision and found the defendant not guilty, because isolated words cannot be considered obscene, the effect of the work was not *erotic* or *aphrodisiac*, and for that reason poem has redeeming value:

⁴⁹ “Lawrence Ferlinghetti,” *City Lights Books*, <http://www.citylights.com/ferlinghetti/>

⁵⁰ Fred Moramarco, “Echoes on Howl,” *The Humanist*, Nov/Dec 2006, 42.

⁵¹ Fred Moramarco, “Echoes on Howl,” *The Humanist*, Nov/Dec 2006, 42.

“I do not believe that “Howl” is without even the slightest redeeming social importance. The first part of “Howl” presents a picture of a nightmare world; the second part is an indictment of those elements in modern society destructive of the best qualities of human nature; such elements are predominantly identified as materialism, conformity, and mechanization leading toward war. The third part presents a picture of an individual who is a specific representation of what the author conceives as a general condition.”⁵²

And the judge went on to set certain rules for the guidance of authorities in the future, such as:

If the material has the slightest redeeming social importance it is not obscene because it is protected by the First and Fourteenth Amendments of the United States Constitution, and the California Constitution.

The book or material must be judged as a whole by its effect on the *average adult* in the community.

The test of obscenity in California is that the material must have a tendency to deprave or corrupt readers by exciting lascivious thoughts or arousing lustful desire to the point that it presents a clear and present danger of inciting to anti-social or immoral action.⁵³

The verdict was preceded by the impassioned and intelligent defense of Allen Ginsberg, showing everyone how seriously he thought about both the issues poem raised and about the radical nature of its form.⁵⁴

To sum this up, I would say the case was a crucial step for freedom of expression in the United States, it lowered the voice of censorship and it also showed that people at the time were really interested in what poets had to say. It proved that poetry could change the course of things.

While reading “Howl” many readers may feel offended by the language of the poem, since a lot of vulgar words are used to picture the visions author had. But reading poem for more times, the reader will probably understand that those words are not crucial by themselves but rather play supportive role to the context. Although “Howl” has been published 55 years ago and today social norms are no more under a tension, I was firstly amazed. It was not because of these vulgarisms but rather because of the apocalyptic visions introduced in the first part. The raw attack on cruelty and coldness of the society, which is likely to break into the fragments, reminded me something – present state of the society as I see it, and because never before I read such that kind of poetry, there is no

⁵² Lawrence Ferlinghetti, “Horn on Howl,” *Evergreen Review* (Winter 1957): 145. Rpt. in *Poetry Criticism*. Ed. David M. Galens (Detroit: Gale, 2003) via Literature Resource Center

⁵³ Lawrence Ferlinghetti, “Horn on Howl,” *Evergreen Review* (Winter 1957): 145. Rpt. in *Poetry Criticism*. Ed. David M. Galens (Detroit: Gale, 2003) via Literature Resource Center

⁵⁴ Fred Moramarco, “Echoes on Howl,” *The Humanist*, Nov/Dec 2006, 42.

chance I was influenced or swayed. I did not feel touched by the poem's rough language or shocking stories of those "who passed through universities with radiant cool eyes hallucinating Arkansas and Blake light tragedy among the scholars of war," but rather I wondered how pertinent those remarks are.

That brought me to think about the author's personality, to think what kind of person could be so sensible to catch the moments, the situations, the wounds of life and the lost battles with faith. There are also many obstacles which discourage you from reading the poem without having proper amount of knowledge - social background, long and seemingly disorganized form, absence of rhyme, tough language or even the "strange" words which laics may consider hard to understand such as "angel-headed hipster, Adonis of Denver-Joy, Moloch etc." But finally I have noticed its pure goal – lasting appeal for humanity. It would take up another thesis to fully and precisely describe the poem, therefore I am able to talk just about feelings I perceived at this point. Basically, I agree with Professor Josef Jařab, who rightly suggests: "Assaulting the American values and made the Moloch responsible for the tragic consequences and impact on the society, Ginsberg declared the human body and soul holy."⁵⁵

Although poetry is often very complicated to understand, there is a clear effort to communicate with the reader. From the previous reading only the bearing wall of the poetry – the topic – was revealed. There are, of course, more ways which help critics to see beyond the lines and be able to receive the information right way and though I have to admit I am not a fan of analysis and don't like the idea of the academics marching to measure the poetry, because the personal experience and sense means much more to me, there is and must be a way how to help not just the keen readers to perceive and enjoy the poem.

For these purposes several approaches were created. But these approaches can not be the accurate procedure, because rich diversity of poetry simply rejects common techniques or methods which would serve as the basis for the depth studies.

Each poem consists of words which are specially arranged and chosen in order to draw the reader's attention. Those words and other language features related to – rhythms, non-

standard word orders, rhymes etc., are intended to give the reader pleasure, since that is ignored in everyday speech.

So far, I have discussed only the general matter of feelings and images but of course, that is not enough to grasp the poem as a whole. Often the feelings, which poem arouses, represent the good starting point. But to talk just about feelings would mean to end up writing about them and about the poem itself.

What is more, poetry offers two points of view:

- 1) it uses specialized language (verse, rhymes...)
- 2) it says something (subject of matter)⁵⁶

In other words, there wouldn't be pure content without the form and vice versa. Realizing all the information above, on the next pages I will use the specific tools and guidelines for my own research into the poetry of the Beat Generation.

⁵⁵ See Allen Ginsberg, *Karma červená, bílá a modrá*, Ed. Josef Jařab (Praha: Mladá Fronta, 2001), 11. My translation

⁵⁶ See Richard Gill, "Poetry," in *Mastering English Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), 4.

4 COMPLEX ANALYSIS

In this section I will try to illustrate and explain the main features and interesting factors of the Beat Generation poetry. Some readers may claim there is no need for something like *complex analysis* of the poem and if one is not able to experience and feel the message a poem carries, no additional comments nor hints will help. Maybe there is something about it, but these opinions rather arise from often misleading interpretations which are based just on mechanical analysis. The reader should realize and think about issues poem arouses and why is it so, what makes him/her feel that way and be able to name and specify these things.

What I assume to be mechanical analysis is counting the number of verses in the poem, consequently resulting in nothing but superficial and worthless figure without the deeper context. Apart from that, rhymes and metaphors are also often listed, classified for the same purpose, resulting again in nothing if the context is missing.

Basically one question remains: What is the main goal of analysis? All the efforts are supposed to lead the reader through the piece and then discover its content deeper. As was said previously, the aim of scientific analysis dwells in explaining the impact poetry has on its reader, what kind of devices are used and what for.

4.1 The tone

First thing I would like to focus on is the tone of the poem. Richard Gill supposes it is one of the key elements to understand poetry, because “it refers to the emotional coloring of the language, gives the information about author’s voice, mood, attitude etc.”⁵⁷ Tone is both specialized and general, as the selection of words and their order play as important role as the matter of feelings which arouse from reading. Gill rightly claims that the best possible advice given about tone is: “Try to imagine the poet speaking and hear in the words his or her attitude to what is being said.”⁵⁸

In order to feel and consequently compare individual voices of the renowned authors of the Beat Generation, I have chosen their well-known poems, so that reader can have a general opinion on what poet has to say.

⁵⁷ Gill, “Poetry” in *Mastering English Literature*, 14.

“America” (1956) by Allen Ginsberg :

America I've given you all and now I'm nothing.
 America two dollars and twentyseven cents January
 17, 1956.
 I can't stand my own mind.
 America when will we end the human war?
 Go fuck yourself with your atom bomb.
 I don't feel good don't bother me.
 I won't write my poem till I'm in my right mind.
 America when will you be angelic?
 When will you take off your clothes?
 When will you look at yourself through the grave?
 When will you be worthy of your million Trotskyites?
 America why are your libraries full of tears?
 America when will you send your eggs to India?
 I'm sick of your insane demands.⁵⁹

Try to imagine Ginsberg's voice when reading the poem. Read it aloud. Right from the beginning he uses very strong and fierce language, which has on the one hand remarks of suffering and exhaustion, but on the other hand seems to be kind of appealing.

Angry with status quo, author leaves reader a link in the third line (date 1956), so that one can check what was going on during that period in the United States. The more the reader knows about the social conditions in the time, the bigger impression he/she will get. Most of Ginsberg's well-known poems share the similar characteristics when considering their tone and it is not so hard to identify the moods. He's one of the most outspoken poets ever, complaining and asking lots of questions.

The author's attitude towards what is being said is and must be always subjective, since the author always takes a certain stand on reality. Poetry, more precisely lyric poetry, puts author's voice to the foreground position and describes his attitude towards reality (more or less reliable). “America” is a nice example of that as Ginsberg describes his own feelings towards society, leaving the matter of objectivity somewhere in the back.

Beyond that, “America” is interesting for its dialogical discourse. It may remind reader classic domestic quarrel couples sometimes have. America is there portrayed as an evil woman, responsible for leading wars, superficial and mean towards the rest of the world, making author feel disgusted – “I'm sick of your insane demands.”

⁵⁸ Gill, “Poetry” in *Mastering English Literature*, 14.

⁵⁹ Allen Ginsberg, “America,” in *Howl and Other Poems*, 11.

Gary Snyder is known for advocating the alternative ways of living, showing reverence for nature and ecological concerns. His voice, not only in this poem, glorifies the vastness of nature and his native continent – North America.

“For all” by Gary Snyder

Ah to be alive
 on a mid-September morn
 fording a stream
 barefoot, pants rolled up,
 holding boots, pack on,

 I pledge allegiance to the soil
 of Turtle Island,
 and to the beings who thereon dwell
 one ecosystem
 in diversity
 under the sun
 With joyful interpenetration for all.⁶⁰

Brilliant example of that is: “I pledge allegiance to the soil of Turtle Island...” Turtle Island is said to be the name Native American tribes used for the continent of North America.⁶¹

Snyder is obviously fascinated by his homeland, pledges allegiance not only to the flag of United States, but also to the heritage his ancestors left. “One ecosystem in diversity” could signify the effort to fill up the gap between nature and all cultures living in American continent.

Gregory Corso, youngest of the Beats, contributed most with red-hot description of the social and political change that transformed the United States in the 1960s. His voice, and again, not only in this poem, is mostly affective, showing irreverence towards almost everything:

“The Whole Mess... Almost” by Gregory Corso

I ran up six flights of stairs
 to my small furnished room
 opened the window

⁶⁰ Gary Snyder, “For all,” in *The Gary Snyder Reader* (New York: Counterpoint, 1999), 504.

⁶¹ See David Landis Barnhill, *At Home on the Earth: Becoming Native to Our Place: A Multicultural Anthology* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 297-306.

and began throwing out
those things most important in life

First to go, Truth, squealing like a fink:
"Don't! I'll tell awful things about you!"
"Oh yeah? Well, I've nothing to hide... OUT!"
Then went God, glowering & whimpering in amazement:
"It's not my fault! I'm not the cause of it all!" "OUT!"
Then Love, cooing bribes: "You'll never know impotency!
All the girls on Vogue covers, all yours!"
I pushed her fat ass out and screamed:
"You always end up a bummer!"

.....
Went back up those six flights
went to the money
there was no money to throw out.⁶²

.....

The tone of the poem above is the pure evidence of passionate youth and anger many youngsters share viewing society too cold and narrow-minded to live in. In the tenth line God “whimpers” that is not his fault. Author pointed out that things such as truth, love or beauty are worthless or had stopped be appreciated in the world around him, while money represent the value he is not familiar with. That is the reason why all these things are “thrown out of the window. “

Focusing on what these three poems have in common, when it comes to the tone, there are several points worth mentioning. Though the tones slightly differ, the main idea remains – subject of matter is America and all the aspects of living in it, callings for the radical changes in the society. In Ginsberg’s case even political ones. In brief it means that the poets wanted to show that something is wrong out there.

Secondly, the poets share confessional, freedom-loving, antisocial, self-centered and apocalyptic mystique which is omnipresent within the works of The Beats. Tired of conformity, American sense for responsibility and materialism, they urged for the freedom of the individual soul to experience all the ecstasies life offers, included beauty, love, alcohol, drugs etc. Besides that, there is a remark of refusing the traditional forms of poetry, especially meters, as authors mostly used free verse to express feelings in a spontaneous way.

⁶² Gregory Corso, “The Whole Mess... Almost,” in *Herald of the Autochthonic Spirit* (New York: New Directions, 1981), 48.

Gill points out that “to write a poem is to create a voice, and to create a voice is to create a self. Whenever a poet writes as *I*, a self is created, a person who thinks, feels and responds to the world through the senses.”⁶³

To a large degree, *self* comes from the author’s personal experience. Since the Romantic era (1780-1830), individuality and value of subjective experience reached a matter of importance in literature, i.e. how the reader feels about poem was crucial.⁶⁴

A personal experience is reflected significantly in the works of the Beat poets. Allen Ginsberg had disturbed life, especially childhood, when his mother’s periodic bouts of schizophrenia intensified. She was often walking around the house naked crying out that her mother-in-law was insistently trying to kill her. At the age of nine, Allen was an eye-witness of her suicide attempt and later, in 1956, he signed the consent for her to be lobotomized.⁶⁵ Afterwards, he dedicated her whole poem called “Kaddish” but this horrible experience may have helped to develop Ginsberg’s general tone or represent the basis of the dialogic discourse seen in *America*.

Corso and Snyder experienced turbulent periods as well. Gregory Corso spent part of his childhood in orphanage as his mother abandoned him right after his birth. At the age of sixteen he and his two friends devised the complex plan of shop robbery in New York. The three were arrested and Corso, as a master planner, sentenced to spend three years in jail, where he was often beaten up and abused. The life was from the beginning very hostile to him and the only way how to stand it was to escape to the world of fantasy and imagination. Carolyn Gaiser in her critical essay from 1961 understands Corso’s personality as following:

“Emerging from a bleak slum environment, he learned to make life tolerable by embellishing it with grandiose fantasies, which, with the poet’s imagination, he articulates as if they were real.”⁶⁶

A natural character of Gary Snyder’s poetry once again has its roots in childhood, as young Snyder joined Wilderness Society and worked at summer YMCA camps near the base of

⁶³ Richard Gill, *Mastering English Literature: Third Edition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 166.

⁶⁴ Gill, *Mastering English Literature*, 166.

⁶⁵ See Elsa Blanc, “KADDISH, a great poem by Allen Ginsberg,” *World Religion Watch*, http://www.world-religion-watch.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=186&Itemid=66

⁶⁶ Carolyn Gaiser, “Gregory Corso: A Poet, the Beat Way,” in *A Casebook on the Beat*. Ed. Thomas Parkinson (New York: Ty Crowell Co, 2000), 266.

Mount St. Helens. At that point, Snyder became interested in traditional Native American cultures, admired them for harmonious lifestyles.⁶⁷

The insights into the poet's life give us certain answers and draw the basic picture of why author marked the reality just that way. The authors of the Beat Generation proclaimed that personal freedom and experience of the soul are crucial, and for that reason they tried to transform the facts of life into the lines of poetry in, if possible, unchanged shape.⁶⁸ They are not detached from their work, they're the part of it and their voices are unmasked. Now it should be much easier for reader to understand the sophisticated anger in Ginsberg's voice, to recognize vast imagination and streetwise humor in the lines of Corso or to feel the continuance in the Transcendentalist tradition when reading Snyder's poetry.

4.2 Poetic devices

What makes poetry interesting and noble are the specific schemes – word order, often altering from daily conversation, and the various patterns of repetition. The repetition most readers associate with poetry is the repetition of sounds. Even the smallest units of the text are able to create additional meaning; apart from rhymes there are many other sound patterns to distinguish such as alliteration, onomatopoeia, assonance, consonance etc.

Though the Beats refuse to adopt the old forms of poetry, especially traditional metric systems and therefore sound patterns in their pieces seem to be quite unusual, there are some tricky tools which made the verses well-organized and understandable. Worth noticing is also the specific language permeating the poems.

In Ginsberg's "Kral Majales" (1965), a poem written during the author's short stay in Czechoslovakia, poet attacks the evils of communism and capitalism. The opening line starts with:

And the Communists have nothing to offer but fat cheeks and eyeglasses and
lying policemen
and the Capitalists proffer Napalm and money in green suitcases to the
Naked,
and the Communists create heavy industry but the heart is also heavy

⁶⁷ See Patrick D. Murphy. "Gary (Sherman) Snyder," *American Nature Writers* Ed. John Elder Vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1996) via Literature Resource Center

⁶⁸ Gaiser, "Gregory Corso: A Poet, the Beat Way," in *A Casebook on the Beat*, 266-275.

and the beautiful engineers are all dead, the secret technicians conspire for
 their own glamour
 in the Future, in the Future, but now drink vodka and lament the Security Forces,
 and the Capitalists drink gin and whiskey on airplanes but let the Indian brown
 millions starve

Right from the beginning, a beautiful example of anaphora is to be seen, as each line starts with “and (the).” It may appear to be non-sense but it perfectly keeps the pace of the poem, and gives the author room for taking a new breath to mark the end of each line or idea. Ginsberg avoided rhymes; he wrote in free verse (verse without regular meter) and worked with repetitions to create a rhythm.

Wordplay goes on, as alliteration in fifth line “heavy industry-heart is also heavy”, reinforced the feeling of pressure by using the letter “h” too often.

Similar function has double repetition of “in the future” in eighth line, which is called epizeuxis – repetition of words or phrases which are very close to each other.⁶⁹ The intention here is to intensify the meaning; epizeuxis is quite common in daily language, and speaker uses it often without realizing.

Apart from being among strong-breath poems, there is another quality quite typical for Ginsberg – so called juxtaposition (two objects or texts that oppose one another).⁷⁰ It was seen before in “Howl”, but now Ginsberg made it even more visible when comparing the evils of two different regimes.

As poem continues, author shifts the tone totally, moves from comparison to dictating, with help of repetition (more precisely anaphora) again:

And I am the King of May, which is the power of sexual youth,
 and I am the King of May, which is industry in eloquence and action in amour,
 and I am the King of May, which is long hair of Adam and the Beard of my own body
 and I am the King of May, which is Kral Majales in the Czechoslovakian tongue,
 and I am the King of May, which is old Human poesy, and 100,000 people chose my name,
 and I am the King of May, naturally, for I am of Slavic parentage and a
 Buddhist Jew⁷¹

This is what makes Ginsberg remarkable. He uses the length of his breath to measure each single line, in this case it is “and I am the King of May” that keeps the beat; his voice

⁶⁹ “Epizeuxis - Glossary Definition,” English Language (ESL) Learning Online - UsingEnglish.com
<http://www.usingenglish.com/glossary/epizeuxis.html>

⁷⁰ “Juxtaposition,” Dictionary.com <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/juxtaposition>

⁷¹ Allen Ginsberg, “Kral Majales,” in *Collected Poems 1947-1980* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1988), 353.

becomes more direct, and the words flow in cadence. Richard Gray claims that “he [Ginsberg] recognized Whitman’s long line as an appropriate precedent; possible vehicle for what he called my romantic – inspiration – Hebraic-Melvillian bardic breath.”⁷² But there is much more about it. Ginsberg primarily wrote lyric poetry. The word *lyric* is a standard term for pleasant, rather short, romantic poems, which were in the ancient Greece reciting and singing to the tones of stringed instruments such as lyre. The most important link between music and poetry is therefore the presence of rhythm, and as the good musician can feel the rhythm in his songs, the good poet should hear the rhythm in his poetry. Ginsberg was gifted on this field; he could hear the rhythms since his childhood as his father wrote very traditional lyric poetry. Ginsberg said about his father that

He would stomp around the house, not stomp, walk around the house reciting Milton and Shakespeare and Poe, “The Bells,” “The Raven,” “Annabelle Lee.” I memorized those when I was a kid. When I was eight years old I could recite a lot...⁷³

It gains even bigger importance when read publicly or just aloud, because Ginsberg considered himself to be a champion in recitation:

“I’m a poet who specializes in oral recitation and performance. I am pleased that my work is good on the page--it should be solid on the page--but there is a dimension of sound, which Ezra Pound emphasized. I’m a specialist in that, I’m very good at vocalization, I’m famous for that around the world, and yet I’m banned from the “main marketplace of ideas” in my own country--radio, television.”⁷⁴

Later Ginsberg managed to interconnect the worlds of poetry by composing his own songs, for example “Father Death Blues.” The verse above is written in purely Whitmanian tradition, in self-celebrating spirit. Ginsberg pictures himself as a Messiah coming to the Czechoslovakia, representing the power of love, art and religion – “and I am the King of May, which is long hair of Adam and Beard of my own body.”

Gregory Corso also often avoided limitations of meters and rhymes. His poetry is impulsive, full of feelings which enrich the free verse. A poem “The American Way” is arranged that way:

⁷² Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 642.

⁷³ Gary Pacernick, “Allen Ginsberg: an interview by Gary Pacernick,” in *The American Poetry Review* (July-Aug. 1997), 23 via Literature Resource Center

⁷⁴ Allen Ginsberg and Matthew Rothschild, “Allen Ginsberg: “I’m Banned from the Main Marketplace of Ideas in My Own Country,” *The Progressive* (Aug. 1994), 34. Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism* Ed. Jeffrey W. Hunter and Deborah A. Schmitt (Detroit: Gale Research, 1999) via Literature Resource Center

I am a great American
 I am almost nationalistic about it!
 I love America like a madness!
 But I am afraid to return to America
 I'm even afraid to go into the American Express—⁷⁵

Corso seems to be another Beat poet who distrusted the form. There is an effort to catch the immediacy, the moment; an effort to employ consciousness and thus create automatic writing. The second and third line may remind the reader the burst of feelings, as they are written in a very spontaneous way.

According to the literary critic Carolyn Gaiser, rebelling against limitations of form was general attitude of the Beats towards poetry; more precisely she says: “As a literary movement, the Beat is an attempt to free writing from the stringencies of stale academic form. Their distrust of form in writing reflects their equally profound distrust of formal codes for human behavior.”⁷⁶

The usage of careless free verse Corso in this poem would fit Gaiser’s definition, as the number of syllables differs wildly from line to line (8-13-10-13-16). Anaphora occurs again, expressed by *I* – the goal is to keep the rhythm.

In the second verse of the poem author mocks the authority of the Catholic Church in the US:

They are frankensteining Christ in America
 in their Sunday campaigns
 They are putting the fear of Christ in America
 under their tents in their Sunday campaigns
 They are driving old ladies mad with Christ in America
 They are televising the gift of healing and the fear of hell
 in America under their tents in their Sunday
 campaigns

Anaphora “They are” is used to create and keep the rhythm, protecting writing of being sloppy and completely without form. There is another feature to be seen in the verse – repetition of “Christ in America” in the end of the lines – so called epistrophe. Epistrophe

⁷⁵ Gregory Corso, “The American Way,” in *Elegiac Feelings American* (New York: New Directions, 1970), 69-75.

⁷⁶ Carolyn Gaiser, “Gregory Corso: A Poet, the Beat Way,” in *A Casebook on the Beat*, 266-275.

is close to the rhyme in general, but has a different task to do. In using it author sees probably an opportunity to confront the same word or group of words with the different context. The whole verse uses parallelism as sentences are written in the same way – starting with “they are” and ending with “Christ in America.”

Epistrophe also shows Corso’s unique and extensive level of imagination. Focusing on the first line of the second verse – Corso used very strong key verb “frankensteining,” striking the attention immediately, especially when combined with “Christ in America”. Many believers may feel touched because the association between Christ and Frankenstein is quite harsh. But the thing is that word Frankenstein does not have to imply just negative meaning and picture of a cruel ugly monster. According to the novel *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, young scientist Viktor Frankenstein created a very sensitive and powerful human-like being. Steven Marcus in his essay on Frankenstein adds that “those who have read ... Mary Shelley’s story should realize ... [that] Frankenstein was a benevolent man. It is society that made the monster bad ... Frankenstein’s monster is represented, at least in very large part, as a rejected and abandoned child.”⁷⁷ It is possible that Corso, a well-read person, mocked through this ambiguity not just church but also those who wrongly referred the monster as “Frankenstein”. Those are in fact accused and made responsible.

Then, author seduced the reader even more when continuing the word play in the second line – “They are putting the fear of Christ in America.” If Christ was previously “frankensteined” and portrayed as a sensitive, lonely, and abandoned child, missing the relationships and planning his revenge, then his worshippers (creators) must be in the next lines scared “under their tents (chapels) in their Sunday campaigns (Sunday church visits).”

At this point I agree with Richard Gray who suggests “The rapidity of Corso’s verse line is a part of his message, as are his subversive humor and unpredictable alternations of pace and tone...”⁷⁸ His verse lines are indeed wild and surrealistic, trying to catch the impulses and flow of mind. The *run-on lines* prove that. Basically, the lines can end in two ways:

- a) run on or

⁷⁷ Steven Marcus, “Frankenstein: myths of scientific and medical knowledge and stories of human relations,” in *The Southern Review* (2002), 188 via Literature Resource Center

⁷⁸ Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 645.

b) end – stopped;

An end – stopped line includes finished idea or meaning; it ends with a punctuation mark (full stops, exclamation marks, colons, commas, semicolons etc.). Run-on lines leave the sentences (ideas) unfinished and cumulate the expectations of what is about to come next.⁷⁹ By leaving the sentences empty-ended Corso forced the reader to finish the whole verse (or poem) in order to get the message. This is quite different from Ginsberg, whose lines were mostly longer, but end – stopped.

Surprisingly, even though the Beat Generation was mostly about the men and their camaraderie, right from the early days of its birth, there was a strong and determined woman writing interesting poetry – Diane di Prima (1934–). Her poetry deals with the topics of love, self-seeking; defend the alternative lifestyles and women rights at the time.

Her usage of slang language is also remarkable. A poem *17* illustrates the major topics her poetry was dealing with – love and alternative lifestyles which are described with very informal/slang language:

In case you put me down I put you down
already, doll
I know the games you play.

The first verse of the lyric poem seems to be similar to haiku, a form, which was quite popular among the Beats – once because Zen Buddhism, Buddhism and generally Eastern religions became popular in 1950s-1960s and also because it served as an imitation of jazz rhythm.

Traditional haiku uses syllabic verse – each line is defined with the specific number of syllables. According to a conservative haiku definition, there should 3 lines with 5 syllables in the first and last line, while second should contain 7 syllables (17 syllables in total). Counting the number of syllables in the first verse (10-4-6), it is obvious that this is not a haiku form. Rather it is an attempt to catch the bebop rhythm (type of jazz based on improvisation).

In case you put me down I got it figured
how there are better mouths than yours
more swinging bodies
wilder scenes than this.

⁷⁹ See Gill, “Poetry” in *Mastering English Literature*, 40.

The song-like second verse advocates the living in the alternative community – “more swinging bodies, wilder scenes than this” as the defense against possibility of being betrayed by lover. The adjective “swinging” in the third line proves the presence of jazz language- swing, which emerged in the 1920s, is another type of jazz and also popular dance.

The last verse is then just an acceptance of reality:

In case you put me down it won't help much.⁸⁰

Talking about haiku, I could not leave the contribution of Jack Kerouac (1922–1969) unheeded. Kerouac is mostly associated with prose and known as a leading figure in prose writing among the Beat Generation. Nevertheless, his contribution to poetry is underestimated. Kerouac, like many other Beats, was a great admirer of jazz and its techniques. John Arthur Maynard explained in his book *Venice West* why was jazz that popular among *Beats*:

Jazz served as the ultimate point of reference, even though, or perhaps even because, few among them played it. From it they adopted the mythos of the brooding, tortured, solitary artist, performing with others but always alone. They talked the talk of jazz, built communal rites around using the jazzman's drugs, and worshipped the dead jazz musicians most fervently. The musician whose music was fatal represented pure spontaneity.⁸¹

Kerouac noticed jazz musicians make a pause between phrases, while drawing the breath and saw a chance to insert a short poem into that space. His interest in Buddhism probably led him to think that Haiku would be the perfect form. But it would not be beat attitude to accept the pre-scribed norm or form, so Kerouac made a little shift. Introducing haiku to the Western culture he claimed:

“I propose that the *Western Haiku* simply say a lot in three short lines in any Western language. Above all, a Haiku must be very simple and free of all poetic trickery and make a little picture ...”⁸²

⁸⁰ Diane Di Prima, “17,” in *Dinners and Nightmares* (New York: Corinth, 1974), 119.

⁸¹ John Arthur Maynard, *Venice West: The Beat Generation in Southern California* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 48.

⁸² Barbara Louise Ungar, “Simply Haiku: Quarterly Journal of Japanese Short Form Poetry ~ Feature,” <http://simplyhaiku.com/SHv5n4/features/Ungar.html>

So he made his haiku free of all poetic trickery, even of its conservative form and broke the rule about syllables in each line. In the book *American Haikus* (2003) most of his *western haiku* were collected. Having no names, they create simple pictures:

The tree looks
like a dog
Barking at Heaven⁸³

There is a real shift in syllabic order – first line contains 3, second 3 and last line 5 syllables.

The smoke of old
naval battles
Is gone⁸⁴

Another haiku, another case – this time there are 4 syllables in first line, followed by 4 syllables in the middle and 2 syllables in the last line. Obviously, Kerouac obeyed just the basic rule saying there are three lines because his haiku differ each to each in the number of syllables. Once again, this could be a sign of adjusting the line to jazz rhythm in order to fill the dash between musician's breaths.

Diane di Prima was something like female counterpart to Allen Ginsberg. She meant for feminists as much as Ginsberg meant for the gay movement at the time. In fact, her poem "Ave" is an honor to women who suffered inferior handling in the 1950s:

O lost moon sisters
crescent in hair, sea underfoot do you wander
in blue veil, in green leaf, in tattered shawl do you wander
with goldleaf skin, with flaming hair do you wander
on Avenue A, on Bleecker Street do you wander
on Rampart Street, on Fillmore Street do you wander
with flower wreath, with jeweled breath do you wander

with gloves, with hat, in rags, in fur, in beads
under the waning moon, hair streaming in black rain
wailing with stray dogs, hissing in doorways
shadows you are, that fall on the crossroads, highways
.....

Through the first two verses di Prima draws a picture of poor women who still wander and look for their own identity in the society – she called them "lost moon sisters" in the opening line which signifies her solidarity. Besides, the first line uses epistrophe "do you

⁸³ Jack Kerouac, *Book of Haikus* (Boston: Penguin, 2003), 3.

⁸⁴ Jack Kerouac, *Book of Haikus*, 6.

wander” in the end to confront the different context and to simplify the message – if the end of the lines is the same one, readers will pay attention rather to the beginning and to the associations thus created.

The second verse is very close to the visions Ginsberg had in his “Howl.” Syntax of the sentences is more less the same and so suffering and pain are there illustrated similarly, consider:

“Howl”

with dreams, with drugs, with waking nightmares, alcohol and
cock and endless balls,
.....
who howled on their knees in the subway and were dragged off the
roof waving genitals and manuscripts,⁸⁵
.....

As “Ave” continues, di Prima used the method of juxtaposition (to draw a comparison between certain characteristics of text), which is, again, known from poems of Ginsberg. The first three lines celebrates the strength of women – “you are armed, you drive chariots,” but then even the weaknesses are mentioned – “you cower on hillsides.”

you are armed
you drive chariots
you tower above me
you are small
you cower on hillsides
out of the winds

Then di Prima identifies her own existence with those women when saying:

I am you
and I must become you
I have been you
and I must become you
I am always you
I must become you⁸⁶

This kind of “integration” as a part empathy is to be seen in “Howl” too, more precisely in its last part, which was dedicated to Carl Solomon whom Ginsberg met during his stay in the mental hospital.

⁸⁵ Allen Ginsberg, “Howl,” in *Howl and Other Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2001), 9.

⁸⁶ Diane Di Prima, “Ave,” in *Loba* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 3-11.

5 DISCUSSING THE ORIGINALITY

Having analyzed the selected works of the Beat Generation poets, it is about the time to discuss the specific features of their work as well as those which are not that original.

Firstly, I mentioned recusant rejection of the traditional forms of poetry. The usage of free verse as a way out of the classic poetic scheme was illustrated in the analysis above. Considering the history of free verse, it is clear that this form is nothing new in poetry – according to literary critic Paul Lake it “has precedents in the Hebrew poetry of the Bible (which may owe its looser structure to the patterning conventions of musical accompaniment), and in Western literature it becomes prominent only in the nineteenth century, with Blake, the French Symbolists, and Whitman.”⁸⁷

At the time when Beat Generation approached the poetic scene, free verse was not that popular among the poets; academic and formalist poetry prevailed and although there were some experiments, it was finally condemned by the major poets of the time – Ezra Pound (1885–1972) and Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888–1965). Pound and Eliot wrote Modernist poetry emphasizing technique and precise form, intellectualism and economy of language. Their attitudes towards free verse were mixed. Pound, on the one hand called for a metrical revolution, trying to arrange his lines more like musical phrase, but on the other hand detested Walt Whitman, the grandfather of English free verse. In 1913 he even remarked:

Whitman is a hard nut. The *Leaves of Grass* is a book. It is impossible to read it without swearing at the author almost continuously.⁸⁸

Eliot found free verse too plain because of the absence of rhyme and meter. He preferred using blank verse (poetry having a meter, commonly iambic pentameter, but no rhyme) and added:

The most interesting verse which has yet been written in our language has been done either by taking a very simple form, like the iambic pentameter, and constantly withdrawing from it, or taking no form at all, and constantly approximating to a very simple one.⁸⁹

Beat poets had different reasons for taking free verse as a point of departure, but in general one can claim that it was a part of rebellion against majestic precise poetry. Unlike Pound,

⁸⁷ Paul Lake, “Disorderly Orders: Free Verse, Chaos, and the Tradition,” in *The Southern Review* (1998), 780 via Literature Resource Center

⁸⁸ Ezra Pound, *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound 1907-1941* (New York: New Directions, 1971), 21.

Allen Ginsberg looked up to Whitman's legacy as poets had a lot in common – they fought against machinery, opened themselves to the nature, experienced a mystic visions, discovered their sexuality and described homosexual practices in their works as natural and therefore nothing to be ashamed of.

In my opinion, Ginsberg perfectly understood the core of the free verse. Knowing it is not without the rules, he adjusted the lines to the length of his breath, created parallel structures based on repetition and so made them understandable. This is his unique personal contribution to the free verse. Similar to Whitman, he used the first person singular, and music played a key role for the composition. But music is also the thing which tells the poets apart – Ginsberg had a great advantage over Whitman in this field. The age of Walt Whitman was the age of classical music, as a source of inspiration one could propose perhaps arias, operas or recitation. Ginsberg was lucky to experience the period of coming popular music giving him opportunity to listen to various new forms of music – jazz, rock 'n' roll, R&B etc. And of course he did. "Howl" was a nice example of that. Moreover, jazz influence is omnipresent within the verse of most of the Beat Generation poets. Reason for that is very simple – jazz uses rhythmical changes, often unpredictable, which may seem to be chaotic, but in fact it is a matter of masterful improvisation. With a bit of exaggeration, I suppose that this improvisation was imitated and later emerged as a flow of thoughts, surrealistic visions or automatic texts in the poems.

Gregory Corso is different from Ginsberg; in his works, he is a unique rebel struggling against everything and everyone. In that sense I would say he fits the picture of a beat artist the best. His rapid free verse, run-on lines and slang language evoke the atmosphere of careless youth living right now, at this moment. Gray rightly notices that poet is "standing apart from the game of life...refusing to commit himself to a fixed, definite status."⁹⁰

In one interview from 1994 Corso even denied his membership in the Beat Generation saying:

⁸⁹ Charles Hartman, *Free Verse: An Essay on Prosody* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 112.

⁹⁰ Richard Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 645.

“I didn't know I was joining any ranks when I met Allen. I met him at a bar. He looked at me because he was gay, and he thought I was, you know, a handsome, good-looking Italian kid here. He didn't know at all about joining anything. This is all what's being written today. I then joined the Beat generation? That's ridiculous. Can I resign?”⁹¹

Corso's spontaneous verse is embedded in the jazz tones. His affection to jazz is nicely illustrated in the poem “For Miles” (Miles Davis, a famous jazz musician), where author compares the musician to a poet:

Poet whose sound is played
lost or recorded
but heard
can you recall that 54 night at the Open Door
when you & bird
wailed five in the morning some wondrous
yet unimaginable score?⁹²

Poetry of Diane di Prima was heavily influenced by Allen Ginsberg's free verse approach, though not so well-developed. It deals with feminist issues, which, I would say, is her main difference and contribution. Jack Kerouac, is a little exception, since he invented his own form of haiku as homage to jazz music.

So, considering the form itself, there is obviously nothing original so far. The Beats just needed to arrange the lines into the shocking, sometimes chaotic way to catch the attention. Naturally, this could not be achieved, and perhaps would not even work with traditional poetic schemes with meters and regular accents. Opposed to Modernists, the feelings and passion which arose from lines were favored by the Beats.

Influence or inspiration in poetry is something which can not be avoided. Similar to music, one always has to start from a certain point, considering what was before him and develop personal attitude towards traditions and previous generations. If the *beat* attitude was to rebel against traditions or social consensus, then the presence of these elements is expected – there must be some kind of tradition to rebel against as well as social issues to complain about. Analysis proved that both these were indeed factored in the works.

Much was written about the relationship between Allen Ginsberg and Walt Whitman or Allen Ginsberg and William Blake – a famous English romantic poem, whom Ginsberg

⁹¹ “Profile: Poet Gregory Corso,” in *Weekend All Things Considered* (21 Jan. 2001) via Literature Resource Center

⁹² Gregory Corso, “For Miles,” in *Gasoline & the Vestal Lady on Brattle* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1981), 50.

also admired – and it is clear these poets had a major impact on Ginsberg.⁹³ I will not repeat conclusion literary critics did, and as an example of how is tradition reflected in the beat poetry, I have chosen a poem “American Way” by Gregory Corso again:

They are frankensteining Christ in America
 in their Sunday campaigns
 They are putting the fear of Christ in America
 under their tents in their Sunday campaigns⁹⁴

Corso’s rebel pose and pretended carelessness wouldn’t allow him to admit the direct influences older poets had on his work, so he smartly hid links behind the words. In the first line it is again verb *frankensteining* which is worth studying. It is in fact a link to the legacy of Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), major English Romantic poet, and one of the finest lyric poets in the English language. Shelley, along with John Keats (1795–1821) and George Gordon Byron (1788–1824), gained a prominent status among the poets of the Romantic period.

A novel *Frankenstein* was written by Marry Shelley, wife of Percy Shelley. There are many similarities between the protagonist of the novel – Victor Frankenstein and Percy Shelley, for example Shelley used to write poems under pseudonym *Victor*.⁹⁵

There is also the similarity between the poetry of Corso and Shelley. Percy Shelley was a rebel role model, who in the name of social awakening rejected Christian mythology and morality a condemned any kind of restrictive politics which marked the post-Napoleonic Europe. His poetry is the search for love and beauty through the meditations on the natural world and imagination, but deals also with social morality.⁹⁶

This is very similar to the themes of many a poem by Corso, for example “The American Way” is a pointed attack on the Christian dogmas, while “The Whole Mess... Almost” represents the longing for ultimate beauty, as the only hope for society. In this sense, Corso continues the romantic tradition of poetry, even though he refused to adopt its prescribed forms.

⁹³ See Josef Jařab, *American Poetry and Poets of Four Centuries* (Olomouc: SPN, 1989), 223.

⁹⁴ Gregory Corso, “The American Way,” in *Elegiac Feelings American* (New York: New Directions, 1970), 69-75.

⁹⁵ See Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley Volume 3* (Albany New York: Bibliolife, 2008), 355.

Apart from forms and traditions stands vocabulary the Beat poets used. It is definitely full of slang words which have the roots in the underground world of New York. Words like *dig*, *hipster* or *square* are then connected with New York 1940s jazz scene.

In adulation of jazz musicians who often were on drugs like heroine or Bensedrine, Beats started to use it too. William Burroughs was on heroine, Jack Kerouac wrote his *On the Road* on Bensedrine. Allen Ginsberg used number of drugs, above all marijuana or LSD, to develop his artistic development; he wanted to alter consciousness and later he admitted that for example poem “Kaddish” was written with the help of amphetamine injections and morphine.⁹⁷ As the restraints faded out with drugs, the Beats were not afraid of using even vulgar words as a part of their natural vocabulary.

Whereas slang does not mean a new contribution to the poetry, since even Walt Whitman considered slang to be “the life of the language,”⁹⁸ vulgarisms were definitely yet unseen. It was mentioned before that Allen Ginsberg was the first to break language taboos and was accused of being pervert when “Howl” was firstly published. However paradoxical this may sound, by winning the “Howl” trial Ginsberg got his poetry closer to audience and opened the door for other members of his generation (in general for any poet), who also wanted to express the despair explicitly. Suddenly, even rough language and pictures of immoral America were accepted by the masses. That is something I take as the most important contribution to the American poetry. As the poem *1959* by Gregory Corso illustrates, poets stopped to be afraid of calling the things by their proper names:

Deny, I deny the tastes and habits of the age.
I am its punk debauché A fierce lampoon
seeking to inherit what is necessary to forfeit.

Lies! Lies! Lies! I lie, you lie, we all lie!
There is no us, there is no world, there is no universe,
there is no life, no death, no nothing—all is meaningless,
and this too is a lie—O damned 1959!⁹⁹

.....

⁹⁶ See Andrew Sanders, *The Short Oxford History of English Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 386.

⁹⁷ See John Long, *Drugs and the 'Beats': The Role of Drugs in the Lives and Writings of Kerouac, Burroughs and Ginsberg* (College Station: Virtualbookworm.Com Publishing, 2005), 166.

⁹⁸ Tony Thorne, *The Dictionary of Contemporary Slang* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), 26.

⁹⁹ Gregory Corso, “1959,” in *Mindfield: New and Selected Poems* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1998), 97.

Readers got obviously used to the fact that poets will no longer beautify the reality and few years later, no one complained about coarseness. Many authors benefited from that and hence laid the foundations of a new tradition. It was rough, harsh language which made poets like Charles Bukowski (1920–1994) even famous. His poem “i can’t stay in the same room with that woman for five minutes” includes pictures of broken families and irony over poet’s fate:

you’ve got your shoes on, I said to my daughter,
let’s go.
her mother walked to the door with us.
have a nice day, she said.
fuck off, I said.
.....

I’ll be right back, I told my daughter.
I walked in, sat down, and ordered a scotch and
water. over the bar there was a little guy popping in and
out of a door holding a very red, curved penis
in his hand.
can’t
can’t you make him stop? I asked the barkeep.
can’t you shut that thing off?
what’s the matter with you, buddy? he asked.
I submit my poems to the magazines, I said.¹⁰⁰
.....

¹⁰⁰ See Charles Bukowski, “i can’t stay in the same room with that woman for five minutes,” in *Burning in Water, Drowning in Flame* (New York: Ecco, 2002), 210.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this bachelor thesis was to analyze selected poems of the poets of the Beat Generation and evaluate the overall contribution to the American poetry with an emphasis on their originality.

After their first appearance in 1950s, they slowly developed into the prominent and respected generation of authors. Winning the battle over freedom of speech in 1957 they entered the door for upcoming generations of poets who can explicitly express themselves and need not to be worried about the consequences.

Although the Beat Generation denied literary traditions and rebelled against any kind of conformity or fixed status in literature, they have the ancestors in famous poetic figures like Walt Whitman, William Blake, Henry Thoreau, or Percy Bysshe Shelley and adopted some of their ideas, above all by declaring the human soul holy.

What the authors have in common is spontaneous usage of free verse, which was at the time almost abandoned by major formalist poets, specific vocabulary ranging from jazz slang terms to even vulgar words and lasting appeal for humanity as a message they wanted to get across to society.

Though the Beats did not offer any solution or plan how morality should be treated, they succeeded and the United States experienced in 1960s the new wave of revolt against social consensus with coming *hippie* movement. The word *hippie* was derived from *hipster*, so there is a clear trace between two movements and its members promoted the same values as the Beats – they were interested in modern music (this time psychedelic rock), abused drugs as LSD or marihuana to access the alternative states of consciousness and embraced the sexual liberation.

The Beat generation was a remarkable circle of poets and authors who worked enthusiastically as a team, encouraging and supporting each of its members. This kind of corporation is quite rare in the history of American poetry and can be perhaps compared just with the Transcendentalist movement. It was a story of few friends whose ideals made them poets of international reputation.

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