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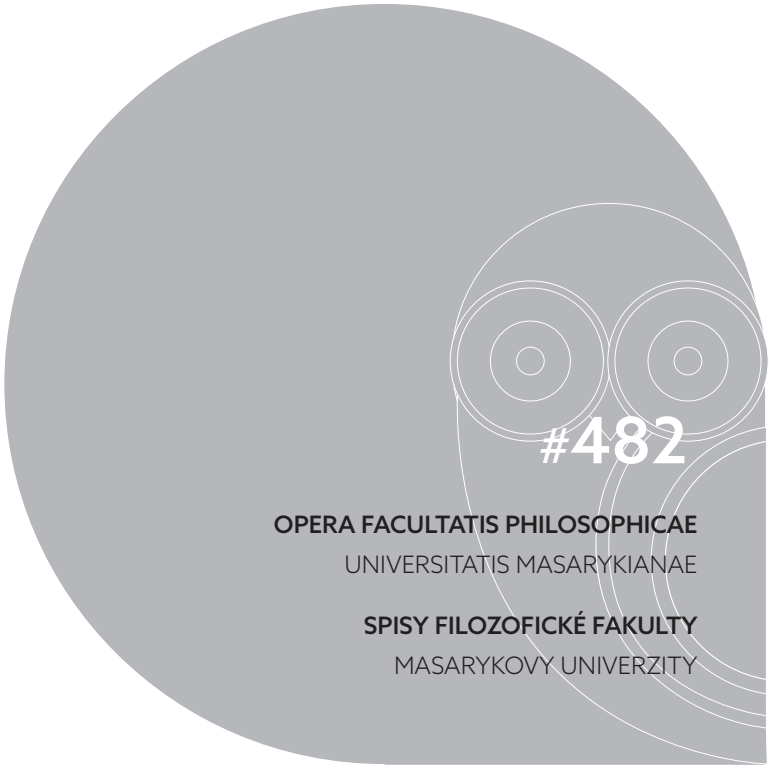

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How We Understand the Beats

The Reception of the Beat Generation in the United States and the Czech Lands

Antonín Zita

FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA
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Motto:

"There are a number of words used in *Howl* that are presently considered coarse and vulgar in some circles of the community; in other circles such words are in everyday use. It would be unrealistic to deny these facts. The author of *Howl* has used those words because he believed that his portrayal required them as being in character. The People state that it is not necessary to use such words and that others would be more palatable to good taste. The answer is that life is not encased in one formula whereby everyone acts the same or conforms to a particular pattern. No two persons think alike; we were all made from the same mold but in different patterns. Would there be any freedom of press or speech if one must reduce his vocabulary to vapid innocuous euphemism? An author should be real in treating his subject and be allowed to express his thoughts and ideas in his own words."

Judge Clayton W. Horn, *The People of the State of California vs. Lawrence Ferlinghetti*

Acknowledgements

When I found out I might be able to publish a polished version of my dissertation in book form, I did not yet know the amount of work that was ahead of me. What started as a simple project mostly aimed at addressing a few oversights and trimming off a passage or two eventually became something completely different. About a third of the original text has been excised entirely and in turn replaced with new or significantly updated material. In addition, numerous passages have been reordered, rephrased, and repurposed. Similarly to the way Jack Kerouac had written *On the Road*, I had been driven by inspiration and copious amounts of coffee when writing this book; however, unlike Kerouac's Benzedrine-driven writing sessions, my approach relied on the vast research I had undertaken after finishing my dissertation as a way of putting the text together. The resulting text, therefore, is not merely a slightly refined version of the original text, but rather a substantially improved and therefore, dare I say, brand new text.

As stated above, this research is based on my dissertation *How We Read: The Reception of the Beat Generation in the United States and the Czech Lands*, which itself draws from my master's thesis *Beats Then and Now: The Reception of Beat Generation Literature*. Therefore, I would like to first thank those who made these two research texts possible. For my master's thesis, I wholeheartedly thank all the professors and staff at Texas A&M University and especially Charles Taylor, Jr., C. Jan Swearingen, and David Chroust. I also must thank the Czech Educational Foundation of Texas for awarding me the William J. Hlavinka Fellowship, which allowed me to study at TAMU in the first place. I am also extremely thankful for the guidance of my supervisor Tomáš Pospíšil, who has fostered my interest in learning since my first days of studies at the Department of English and American Studies at Masaryk University, Faculty of Arts. In addition, I would also like to thank my dissertation supervisors Bohuslav Mánek and Petr Kopecký for providing invaluable feedback on the dissertation, Josef Jařab and Josef Rauvolf for the opportunity to discuss my research with them, and Nigel Marsh for proofreading the text.

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1 INTRODUCTION TO THE BEAT GENERATION

> 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. A man is beat whenever he goes for broke and wagers the sum of his resources on a single number; and the young generation has done that continually from early youth. (Holmes 10)

The definition of the word "beat" above was written by John Clellon Holmes in his 1952 article "This Is the Beat Generation." Holmes, described in the article's introduction as the "26-year-old author of the novel *Go*, and therefore one of the generation which he describes" (10), was the first person associated with what would become the Beat Generation to publicly point to the rift between the current and older generations in their life expectations. Holmes makes it clear that labeling an entire generation with a single term is potentially problematic; nevertheless, he argues that the generation that experienced the Second World War, whether directly or indirectly, has something in common. The eighteen-year-old girl caught smoking marijuana, the disillusioned ex-GI who succumbs to the corporate machine, or the secretary pondering whether to sleep with her boyfriend now or wait; these and many others, Holmes claims, are the faces of a Beat Generation (10). While Holmes agrees that the complaint, "Why don't people leave us alone?" might seem tiring, he claims it is actually a dangerous statement to make when opposed by society's "enormous effort of righteousness" (10). Holmes's essay paints a picture of a generation of young people who found out that the society they had been growing up in was simply too distant in its morality and values from their own ideas and dreams.

Yet it was not until 1957 that the Beat Generation became a widespread phenomenon. Two crucial events took place that year. First, Judge Clayton W. Horn famously ruled Allen Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems* not obscene. The court decision by Judge Horn was a landmark case not only because the ruling set a precedent for future cases, but also due to the exposure the Beats gained as a result. That is not to say that there had not already been interest in the Beats. For instance, Ginsberg's public reading of "Howl" at the Six Gallery in San Francisco was certainly a defining moment in the history of the Beat Generation. The reading featured five poets who were relatively unknown at that time – Philip Lamantia, Michael McClure, Philip Whalen, Allen Ginsberg, and Gary Snyder – and who were introduced by Kenneth Rexroth, an older and established poet tied to the San Francisco Renaissance scene. When Ginsberg took the stage and started reading "Howl," it was clear to the audience that "a human voice and body had been hurled against the harsh wall of America and its supporting armies and navies and academies and institutions and ownership systems and power-support bases" (Charters xxviii). Ginsberg's poem not only decried the failures and confines of a conformist life in a capitalist society, but for many it also foretold things to come. As Ginsberg biographer Jonah Raskin argues, the reading helped create the conditions that eventually led to both the San Francisco protests against the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1960 and the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley a few years later (7). The event, Raskin continues, was an affirmation of artistic power that defied and eventually won out over McCarthyism, therefore making the reading the most important public poetry reading in twentieth-century America. Still, if it was not for the obscenity trial, Ginsberg would hardly have acquired the status that he had. As Lawrence Ferlinghetti puts it, "Allen was totally unknown until the book was busted" (qtd. in Cottrell 34).

The second milestone of 1957 was Gilbert Millstein's enthusiastic review of *On the Road* in *The New York Times* which made Jack Kerouac famous virtually overnight. Kerouac was more than surprised by the general response to *On the Road* and the excitement it produced; as Kerouac's letters from that period show, he even entered negotiations about a movie adaptation with the Hollywood screenwriter and producer Jerry Wald. While nothing really emerged from their discussions, it shows the sudden publicity and attention that the Beats had gained. The late fifties were then a time in which the Beats were given the utmost attention of the press, media, and general public. Yet the Beats have paid dearly for such attention: the sudden interest also led to sensationalized treatment, and the Beat writers were frequently seen as a novelty rather than serious artists. In addition, it was this sudden attention that Kerouac had difficulties coping with, fueling his alcoholism and eventually leading to his early death; the attention that Burroughs abhorred for most of his life only to gain fame starting in the late seventies; and finally the attention that only Ginsberg, a former market researcher, was able to

handle to such an extent that some critics consider him the only modern poet that ever gained the status of a true celebrity (Bawer 1). While this publicity turned out to be a double-edged sword for the individual Beat authors, it is clear that the Beats as a whole made a lasting impact on American culture.

Naturally, the United States was not the only country where a large rift between different social groups was becoming more pronounced. Soon, most of the Western countries were swept by a wave of youth rebellion and social protests. Though less discernible at first, this discontent was taking place behind the Iron Curtain as well. The Czechoslovak Republic[1] was in the firm grip of Communism, thus making open protest substantially more difficult. The communist takeover in 1948 led not only to a wave of emigration, but also to the tight rule of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia which essentially controlled the whole public discourse (Šámal, "Cesta otevřená" 583). Importantly, one way of achieving such control was through art.

The government-approved art style of socialist realism, which portrayed the communist country in rosy colors, was omnipresent in the daily lives of the country's citizens. For Klement Gottwald, President of Czechoslovakia and chairman of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, artists were essentially political propagandists in the service of the country, therefore art should strive to move society toward the communist ideal (qtd. in Kopecký, "Literary America" 67). This view then openly supported works aligned with the Party line while suppressing works deemed deficient. Nevertheless, by the end of the 1950s the Party was slowly losing its control over the Czechoslovaks and by the time the sixties were in full swing, Czechoslovak society was showing a significant turn toward liberalization. For instance, rock and roll music, which was termed "big beat" in Czechoslovakia, was available through numerous foreign radio stations ignoring the closed borders and widely sought after by Czechoslovak youth (Šebo 15). The state, however, did not want to relinquish its powers voluntarily and acted accordingly. For instance, youth sporting long hair, a trend from the capitalist West, experienced substantial harassment for their nonconformist look. This systematic persecution of youth indifferent to the values of Communist Czechoslovakia only mirrors the strategies the regime employed towards anyone dissenting from the official discourse.

The route to gradual liberalization in the sixties eventually culminated in the political liberalization of the Prague Spring in 1968, yet it was a slow and complicated process. It should not then come as a surprise that the 1965 visit of the Beat Generation poet Allen Ginsberg, which led to Czechoslovak secret police concocting a plot in order to deport the poet, has had a significant impact on Czechoslovaks. Despite their limited availability in the country, the Beats left a lasting impression

1 In 1960 the country was renamed the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, and the name remained in place until 1990. Henceforth, the term Czechoslovakia is used to refer to both the Czechoslovak Republic and the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic.

on Czechoslovak readers. For instance, when Lawrence Ferlinghetti visited the Czech Republic in the late 1990s, he received an ecstatic welcome from the public, which he would not have received if he had not been strongly influential in the sixties.

1.1 The Beat Generation: The Artists and the Term

But who actually were the Beats? In its strictest sense, the Beat Generation was a small group of artists composed of Herbert Huncke, Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, Jack Kerouac, and Lucien Carr, who all first met in New York in 1944 (Charters xv). Soon, the term expanded outside this small social circle: while Ginsberg, Kerouac, and Burroughs are understood as the core of the Beats, other close associates include John Clellon Holmes or Gregory Corso. Nevertheless, the term also often includes Kenneth Rexroth, Peter Orlovsky, Gary Snyder, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Bob Kaufman, Diane di Prima, or Anne Waldman due to personal relationships or artistic affinities. Consequently, deciding on who is a Beat and who is not can be quite problematic. For instance, Donald M. Allen organized the poets included in his seminal anthology *The New American Poetry* into five groups: *Black Mountain Review*, San Francisco Renaissance, the Beat Generation, the New York group, and younger poets with no apparent ties to a single group. However, since poets such as Snyder or Ginsberg belonged to more than one group, trying to come up with distinctly separate groups has only led to confusion. To make matters worse, some, such as Rexroth, later denounced their Beat allegiance, thus muddying the understanding of the Beats as a group of authors even further.

Allen's collection was not the only work which indirectly problematizes the understanding of what the Beat Generation is. Similarly, the first Beat anthology to specifically name the authors as the Beat Generation – *The Beat Generation and the Angry Young Men* (1958) – not only includes the core Beats in its discussion, but also writers who focused on hipsters and had no direct ties to Beats or their writing (Belletto 8). What is more, the canon of the Beats is prone to being continuously expanded. As Kurt Hemmer explains in the introduction to the *Encyclopedia of Beat Literature*, the book contains the work of such figures as Abbie Hoffman, Timothy Leary, or ruth weiss as a way to acknowledge all Beat-associated people and artists (xi). To add to the confusion, American media often referred to the Beat Generation as standing in for contemporary American youth, or at least for a substantial segment of it. The complexities of membership of the Beat Generation then show that attaching a label to a literary group affects who belongs to the group as well as the responses the label itself elicits (Challis 2). In other words, the further one gets from "the Big Three" – Kerouac, Ginsberg and Burroughs – and their immediate circle of friends, the more blurred the line between Beat and non-Beat becomes.

The confusion surrounding membership of the Beat Generation is best explained by analyzing the term "Beat" itself. Even when one ignores the use of "the Beat Generation" to delineate a significant portion of the youth, there was still disagreement among the Beats themselves on what the term actually represents. As Jack Kerouac writes in his essay "The Origins of the Beat Generation," the term "beat" was first mentioned in a conversation with John Clellon Holmes about the Lost Generation and Existentialism; when Kerouac commented that "this is really a beat generation," Holmes reacted with an enthusiastic, "That's it, that's right!" (70). Initially, after being introduced by Holmes, the term not only expressed a general sense of being "beat," that is "down," but it also emphasized the experiences of the poor and the marginalized such as drug addicts, homosexuals, or vagrants. In other words, the term reflected a sense of marginalization and rejection by society – a sense of otherness. The image of the outcast certainly had its allure; as Ann Charters points out, the term caught on because it "suggested the arrival of something unconventional and different from the mainstream, marginalized yet possessing potential force and authority" (xx). Jack Kerouac later provided an updated explanation of the term for *Playboy* magazine: although originally standing for "poor," "down and out," or "deadbeat," "Beat" was expanded to include people who have "a certain new gesture, or attitude" best described as "a new *more*" ("Origins" 73).[2]

Charters points out that another reason the term was adopted by many was the fact it could be made to mean anything (xx). However, since the term was open to interpretation, it was also open to exploitation. As a result, the term became used in connection with juvenile delinquency and the Beats themselves were seen as condoning violence. One of the many ways this connection with violence manifested itself was the Albert Zugsmith-produced film *The Beat Generation* released in 1959: in spite of the title, the film is in fact a crime thriller in which a detective searches for a serial rapist. Faced with such sensationalist and frequently exploitative representation in the press and popular magazines such as *Time* or *Life*, Kerouac eventually modified the term as originating from the word "beatitude." Despite his best efforts to distance himself from the media image of the Beats, the damage had already been done and Kerouac became so disillusioned with the improper use of the term that he eventually stopped using it altogether. The term, in other words, has been used to represent anything from a close-knit group of friends based in New York to a whole generation of people.

Not only is the label rather ambiguous when used to delineate the Beats as a group, but it is also unsuitable as a description of a unified approach to literature. While the Beats often shared certain sensibilities, their writing styles differed

2 Similarly, Gary Snyder understood the label to represent "a particular state of mind" (Charters xvi).

significantly from one another. Kerouac, for instance, tried to advance his writing philosophy dubbed "spontaneous prose," that is an approach which favored improvisation and free writing. In contrast, Burroughs preferred disjointed narratives that resist a straightforward interpretation, as exemplified by his "cut-up" method which involved inserting scrambled portions of other authors' texts into his own writing. Finally, Ginsberg's poetry often mixes cries of social injustice and protest with religious imagery, thus leading Ginsberg to categorize himself as a visionary poet in the tradition of William Blake or Antonin Artaud (Portugés 3). The differences are obvious even when comparing only the Beat poets: apart for their disdain for formalist rules of poetry writing, their approaches to writing vary substantially from one another. As a result, Beat poetry includes Snyder's eco-consciousness with Eastern influences as well as Corso's playful portrayal of everyday experiences.

1.2 The Beat Generation as an Attitude

In other words, what the term "Beat" or "the Beat Generation" actually stands for frequently varies from person to person. Nevertheless, there is a shared thread running through the definitions of the term and the various approaches to the Beats: that of communitarian identity positioning itself as the direct opposite of the public. As Barry Miles explains, it was a "fraternity of spirit and attitude" that connected the New York Beats together (*El Hombre* 2). This attitude, Miles continues, was "an adverse reaction to the ongoing carnage of World War II, the dropping of A-bombs on civilian targets, and the puritan small-mindedness that still characterized American life." The label is, due to its many possible connotations, imprecise, yet it still, in the words of David Sterritt, "suggestively evokes a youth-centered ethos that felt the weight of conventional social norms as a burden at once punishing and exhausting – inflicting on individuals a sense of being both 'beaten,' or assailed and tormented, and 'beat,' or worn down and defeated" (2). The Beats were driven by a combination of alienation, anxiety, idealism, and intellectualism, and they also rejected conventional social norms, choosing instead to focus on individuals' ability to define themselves – and their realities – through their choices, decisions, and actions. For example, many of the Beats drew their inspiration from jazz and bebop; this can be seen in their use of hipster slang that evolved in the jazz and bop scenes, their experimental techniques such as Kerouac's spontaneous prose, and the stylistic similarities between many of the texts and jazz improvisations. It was not just the music, but also the rebellious attitude of many jazz musicians that served as an inspiration to the Beats. As Douglas Malcolm further explains,

> [a]lmost as soon as jazz became popular in the early 1920s, young men who considered themselves outsiders identified with jazz musicians' marginal social status in hegemonic white culture. While bop was more complex and the musicians more rebellious than their antecedents, the impulse of these young white men toward jazz had as much to do with ideology as it did with a particular style of music (104).

The Beats searched, in Kerouac's words, for a "new *more*," and this took various shapes. These new vistas were often geographical, as many of the Beats, had spent years and even decades living abroad. They were also spiritual, and the "new *more*" in such form could be reached not only through jazz music, but also through sex or experimentation with drugs, both of which were taboo at that time.

Consequently, the Beats decided to form their arguments through a seemingly negative dialectic as a means of opposing conventionality, materialism, repressiveness, regimentation, and corruption with the opposites of these qualities. Their writing protested the conformist malaise of the 1950s United States which, the Beats unanimously argued, crippled the human spirit while promoting superficial concerns such as material well-being. They emphasized otherness and personal exploration over the dull conformity of the current society. Ultimately, "Beatness" became associated not only with a literary movement, but also with an attitude and a set of ideas, feelings and opinions. Therefore, the Beats were seen by many as the spokespeople of those who opposed the values of the society. Bruce Cook confirms the sense of a generation gap by regarding the Beats as his generation because of "the same keen sense of identification with them that thousands of others my [of his] age did" (3). As Holmes further comments on the generational attitude and ideals: "The absence of personal and social values is to [this generation], not a revelation shaking the ground beneath them, but a problem demanding a day-to-day solution. *How* to live seems to them much more crucial than *why*" (19).

Simply put, the Beats not only associated themselves with those generally marginalized and even victimized by their societies, but also emphasized breaking away from the values of such society. Consequently, this appealed to the younger generations, which was noticeable at many poetry readings the Beats gave. Bruce Cook recalls that at one such event in early 1959 there were more than seven hundred people in attendance, not only exceeding in every way the expectations of the academic crowd that usually composes the majority audience at such events, but also forcing the event organizers to turn people away due to overcrowding (12). The audience, Cook continues, was both younger and older than the average college student and young teacher, and therefore had "a distinctly non-academic, almost proletarian appearance" (12–13). The audience's reaction was unprecedented: not only did they applaud at the appropriate places, but they also applauded at inappropriate places and did a bit of cheering and stamping, thus

resembling the openness and spontaneity of a jazz concert rather than poetry reading (14).

A similar enthusiastic response occurred during Ginsberg's 1965 visit to Czechoslovakia. As a part of the stay, Ginsberg participated in the King of May elections, traditionally a part of the student-organized Majáles festival taking place on May 1st alongside the official May Day celebration. By coincidence, the 1965 festival was the first Majáles in nine years to be held without direct interference from the state: students taking part in a parade and carrying various slogans is a vital part of the Majáles tradition and these slogans had to be closely regulated, as they were often the products of independent thought and therefore dangerous to the regime (Svatoš 95). While the students participating in the 1965 parade more than enjoyed their recently-gained freedom by carrying various satirical and provocative slogans, the pinnacle of the event, however, was electing Allen Ginsberg the King of May. When reaching the stage in order to make his pre-election speech, Ginsberg was cheered by tens of thousands of people. After chanting a Buddhist mantra while playing small hand cymbals, Ginsberg started to sing "Ať žije král majáles"[3] in his broken Czech; after a while, the organizers announced that Ginsberg had been elected the King of May.

The election of an American as the King of May, together with many of Ginsberg's anti-Soviet remarks made during his stay in various meetings with students and Czechoslovak artists, caused a huge embarrassment to the regime and ultimately led to the poet's deportation from the country a few days later. Despite this apparent setback, Ginsberg and other Beats had a substantial impact on life in 1960s Czechoslovakia, and Ginsberg's expulsion by the regime further codified the Beats in the country as standing for personal freedom and resistance against oppression. Among those who hold this opinion is none other than Václav Havel, playwright, dissident, and the first democratically-elected President of Czechoslovakia and later the Czech Republic. As he famously writes in the preface to *Spontaneous Mind*, a collection of interviews with Allen Ginsberg released in 2001, "Beat poetry and prose have most likely been perceived in our unfree conditions as even more rebellious than in the land of their origin" (ix). The encouragement of the Beats to renounce the establishment and pursue individual dreams and goals, Havel continues, took on a whole new level in Czechoslovakia, because it also provided one with "a potential instrument for resistance to the totalitarian system that had been imposed on our existence."

Similarly to the United States, the Beats represented to Czechoslovaks liberty and new lifestyles; however, these ideas were even more symbolic due to the nature of the totalitarian regime. Thus to Czechoslovaks, the Beats became synonymous with resistance toward authoritative power even more so than to the

3 "Long live the King of May" in English.

American public. The theatre and poetry critic Miroslav Kovařík further explains that the events of the sixties foretold the eventual return of Czechoslovakia into Europe, and the Beats' courage to directly address society's taboos played a vital role in the era's liberal atmosphere ("U kávy").

1.3 Controversies and Criticism

Naturally, the Beat Generation writers were not without controversies; after all, two of the seminal texts – Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* and Ginsberg's *Howl* – faced obscenity charges. As Meagan Wilson elucidates, the former was celebrated as "a work of genius" and "a masterpiece of experimental fiction," but also vilified as "a piece of filth, an exercise in pornography" or "a composition without merit" (98). The common elements of Beat writing, such as homosexuality or drug abuse, were too controversial in the fifties to be ignored, which led many critics to comment on the works' apparent controversies rather than on the literary work itself. According to Ronald Oakley, the writers of the Beat Generation were seen by the public as not only idealizing, but also supporting "society's outcasts and misfits – blacks, drug addicts, prostitutes, bums, migrant farm workers, and petty criminals," and these themes were a direct threat to the safe, middle-class, white Anglo-Saxon Protestant morality of the average American in the 1950s (398).

One of the most scathing critiques of the Beat Generation was penned by the literary critic Norman Podhoretz; the essay title – "The Know-Nothing Bohemians" – already suggests some of the points Podhoretz is about to make. He starts by discussing the bohemianism of the 1920s and 1930s as represented by such figures as Hemingway, Fitzgerald, or Pound, claiming that "[a]t its best, the radicalism of the 1930s was marked by deep intellectual seriousness and aimed at a state of society in which the fruit of civilization would be more widely available – and ultimately available to all" (307). Unlike the bohemianism of the 1930s, however, the bohemianism represented by the Beats is "hostile to civilization" in its worship of primitivism, energy, or "irrationalist" philosophies while at the same time expressing contempt for "coherent, rational discourse which, being a product of the mind, is in their view a form of death" (307–308). Podhoretz argues the lifestyles of the Beat writers – and in effect their writings as well – celebrate criminality, violence, drug addiction, and madness and concludes his essay by explaining that the Beats and their supporters are against intelligence itself (318). Diana Trilling was another voice critical of the Beats. Writing for the same outlet as Podhoretz, the *Partisan Review*, her article on a poetry reading by Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, and Peter Orlovsky is especially noteworthy for its chastising tone. Describing the audience of the reading as a "rabble" – and also expressing her surprise

that the auditorium did not smell bad when a single look at the crowd made her certain it would (224) – Trilling's critique is based mostly on her beliefs about what is allowed and what is not: "Taste or style dictates that most intellectuals behave decorously, earn a regular living, disguise instead of flaunt whatever may be their private digressions from the conduct society considers desirable" (223). The Beats, put simply, were not "proper" enough not only in their writing but also in their behavior, tastes, or preferences, an understanding which had significant impact on discourse related to Beat writing and the Beats themselves. The popular image of the Beats thus portrayed them as a threat to mainstream society who lacked moral values. Importantly, this depiction relies heavily on the ambiguity of the term, thus yet again blurring the lines between specific Beat authors and the segment of society they were supposed to be representing.

1.4 Understanding the Beat Generation

Despite the marginalization of the Beats by the public and the intellectual community in the 1950s and 1960s, they managed not only to survive but also to prevail (Cook 17). Currently, the Beats seem to be enjoying more attention than ever. Their texts are being released in countless new editions, collections of critical essays on their works are being published, and courses on the Beat Generation are being taught. They have withstood the test of time – something unimaginable for many 1950s and 1960s reviewers – and to a certain extent also entered the canon in both the United States and the Czech Republic. Although enumerating all milestone events would take up a vast number of pages, limiting the overview to the last several years still gets the point across: *Howl* (2010) and *On the Road* (2012) have been turned into major motion pictures with well-known Hollywood actors such as James Franco, Kristen Steward, or Viggo Mortensen; Kerouac's *On the Road* has been released in its famed original scroll version; numerous new editions of original Beat texts, collections of letters, and critical collections have been published; the European Beat Studies Network has been founded; and Ferlinghetti's aforementioned visit to Prague was a notable event attended by many dignitaries. In other words, it is safe to say that interest in the Beats is thriving more than ever.

If one accepts Kenneth Rexroth's premise that against "the ruin of the world, there is only one defense – the creative act," one observes that Beat works in one way or another contributed in their own ways to stopping the world's ruin by encouraging the civil rights protests of the 1960s and by inspiring thousands to challenge conformity and stifling social norms (325). Nevertheless, the creative act should not be limited to writing a literary text. As previous pages have already shown, one's understanding of what the Beats are and what they stand for may have varied substantially from someone else's: while some point out their

experimentation with drugs and sexuality, others emphasize the Beats' critique of the establishment or their literary experiments. For some, the Beats are literary visionaries, though others might view them mostly as a historical phenomenon. Simply put, while the readings of the Beats share the same subject, they often lead to quite different results, since different readers emphasize different aspects of the Beats. Linguistically speaking, the signifier "the Beats" may signify something else, and this signifying process depends on many factors such as the reader's background or the context of reading. Creating such meaning is ultimately also a creative act, albeit slightly different than what Rexroth originally had in mind.

The above is not to say that two people reading a text have to understand it in a completely different manner. Insisting on such a view would be endorsing a rather nihilistic outlook in defiance of common sense. After all, the very fact that a work of art can resonate for the same reason with readers from entirely different cultural backgrounds and walks of life makes it clear that general agreement on a text's meaning can be reached. Nevertheless, different audiences and different contexts often lead to variations in interpretations – at times rather slight, other times more pronounced. As Justin Quinn notes on the publishing and reading dynamics in Czechoslovakia of the 1950s, claiming that the context of the time did not influence the production and reading of literature seems "intentionally limited and even suspiciously ideological" (108). These different contexts are especially pronounced when dealing with works by foreign authors. The resulting different readings can be grossly oversimplified or even misinterpreted when compared with the work's original context (Zima 164). However, such readings are also often revealing, as they relativize the original context, and thus highlight the openness of the text or its ideology (165). Importantly, providing a comprehensive study of the various interpretations of the Beats and their work by comparing their reception in different contexts is the purpose of this book.

The reception of the Beats is analyzed in two different time periods: the 1950s/1960s and late twentieth century/early 2000s. However, rather than focusing on the reception in one country, the text analyzes the writing dealing with the Beats from two countries: the United States and Czechoslovakia, later the Czech Republic. This approach, a combination of a synchronic and diachronic inquiry, thus also acknowledges the shift toward trans-nationalism in both Beat studies and in American studies in general. Polina Mackay and Chad Weidner explain that the European Beat Studies Network, whose inaugural conference took place in 2012, was formed in order to advance the discussion on the Beats' relations to Europe: the ESBN "fosters dialogue on European influences on the Beats, on Europeans influenced by Beat tropes and esthetics, and on transnational and international approaches to the Beats and their legacy" (221). This recent development in Beat studies, Erik Mortenson points out, thus reflects the shift toward trans-nationalism

which American Studies as a whole has recently undergone (328). The Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, delivered by Shelley Fisher Fishkin in 2005, makes this shift clear. In the address, Fishkin explains that "[w]e need to understand the cultural work that forms originating in the United States do in cultures outside this country, studying their reception and reconfiguration in contexts informed by a deep understanding of the countries where that cultural work is taking place" (qtd. in Mortenson 328). In other words, once a work is taken out of its original setting, it can adopt new shapes and new meanings, thus further illuminating the interpretive possibilities of the work as well as contributions to political and social change. Importantly, these findings would be impossible if one limited a work's analysis to its original context or even a formalist approach. As such, a transnational and comparative approach therefore offers not only fresh perspectives on the subject matter, but also new understandings on how culture and context can reconfigure a work of art.

To provide a truly comprehensive analysis, the text acknowledges the importance of popular interpretations by incorporating the popular reception of the Beat Generation alongside their critical reception. Describing the popular reception is a laborious subject to tackle; after all, there is a thin dividing line between popular and personal reception. Nevertheless, navigating the analysis through a wide variety of sources with the use of several case studies provides the text with a reliable account of the Beats' popular image. Finally, by analyzing both popular and critical readings of the Beats, the text also comments on the mechanisms through which various readings are manifested and subsequently proliferated into future discourses. Consequently, while the text generally uses the term "the Beat Generation" to represent a rather small group of writers centered on Ginsberg, Burroughs, and Kerouac, it will also comment on the use of the term as epitomizing a certain attitude or philosophy. As the research presented in this book shows, this is an inherent component of the Beats' reception.

The book is separated into several chapters. Chapter II provides a general discussion of the theoretical approach of the text. While not appearing throughout the book, this literary theory serves as the stepping stone framing the overall methodology. Chapter III contextualizes the Beat Generation by describing the life and society of the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. Although it was a period of conformity, it also signified the beginning of protest against American society. Chapter IV analyzes the reception of the Beat Generation in the USA of the 1950s and 1960s. Among the chief foci is the creation of the "beatnik" stereotype and the portrayals in popular media which often depended on it; in addition, the chapter also addresses the slow acceptance of Beat poetry or the position of academia and literary critics on the Beats. Subsequently, Chapter V provides an overview of the current American reception. Among other topics, the current concept of the Beats within Beat Studies is addressed.

Chapter VI studies the political and social situation in communist Czechoslovakia leading up to the Prague Spring. Socialist realism significantly affected the literary criticism of the era, therefore substantial space is dedicated to discussing its ethos and *modus operandi*, though the text also covers the events surrounding Ginsberg's visit in Prague in 1965. Chapter VII analyzes the ways the Beats were portrayed in Czechoslovakia in the 1950s and 1960s. Its main objective is the changes in literary critiques and various paratextual material which occurred because of the gradual liberalization and therefore the abandoning of socialist realism; nevertheless, newspaper treatment of Ginsberg's two visits is also documented. In contrast, Chapter VIII discusses the position the Beats hold today in the Czech Republic, and one of its primary concerns is the coverage of Ferlinghetti's visit to Prague in 1998. Finally, Chapter IX examines the results of the preceding chapters, and further specifies and modifies their discussion. This chapter ties in all the various observed aspects of the Beats. Ultimately, this chapter is a closing explanation of all the case studies from the previous chapters.

Several points have to be made before proceeding to the next chapter. First, while the book offers a comprehensive account of the ways the Beat Generation was and is approached, the account is not exhaustive. Trying to include all the available sources regarding the Beats would not only be impossible, but it would also result in a text that would be simply unreadable. Still, the large variety of sources used for the case studies of the book offer a rigorous analysis of the reception.

Second, after glancing at the book's contents, the reader will notice that not all topics of case studies from one country match those from the other country. For instance, there is no thorough debate of a single event in the American chapters, while the Czech/oslovak chapters have two: Ginsberg's visit in 1965 and Ferlinghetti's stay in 1998. However, this is not an omission, but actually helps show the different ways the Beats were understood in the two countries. The availability of several Beat texts, or rather unavailability, in Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic further illustrate the difference in understanding what the Beat Generation is. As a result, trying to come up with equivalent case studies in the two countries is doomed to fail: since the Beats are not treated evenly in the discourses of the two countries, finding truly matching case studies is simply impossible. This is most notable in the amount of sources available: while there are scores of texts on the Beats in the US – from well-known critiques to innumerable columns from local newspapers – the amount of texts mentioning the Beats in Czechoslovakia is by several orders of magnitude smaller. In other words, trying to use only case studies equivalent to one another would be missing the point: the American Beat Generation simply differs from its Czech/oslovak counterpart, which the discrepancy in existing sources helps illustrate. That being said, while the book focuses on the reception of the Beats in both countries, it slightly leans

toward the exploration of its Czech and Czechoslovak reception. The reason for this is simple: it has not been done in such a comprehensive manner before, and it is this more detailed analysis which further illuminates the reception of the Beats in the United States.

Third, it should be added that not every source mentioned in the American sections is necessarily American; for instance, the scholar Oliver Harris or the novelist J. G. Ballard are both English. One of the reasons behind grouping a few English sources in the American reception sections is the dilemma of providing a sufficiently descriptive term to characterize the object of this research: "English reception" sounds as if it might exclude American reception; "English-language reception" could also include responses written in English by non-native speakers of English; and "reception from English-speaking countries" is not only a bit of a mouthful, but would also include countries such as Kenya in which English is the official language. Naturally, a possible solution to this naming conundrum would be to simply avoid using any non-American sources, to which I mostly yielded. As a result, several important milestones for the reception of the Beats in the United Kingdom, such as the *Times Literary Supplement* controversy surrounding *Naked Lunch* or the "beatnik" riot at the third Beaulieu Jazz Festival in 1960, are reduced to mere footnotes if mentioned at all. Nevertheless, a few British sources are still used, though mostly limited to a few newspaper articles by British novelists or scholars.

In addition, as the preceding pages indicated, there are various opinions on who is or is not a Beat. Naturally, there were many Beats and Beat-affiliates publishing during the 1950s and 1960s. Several important Beats of color, for example Bob Kaufman or LeRoi Jones, as well as a few women Beats and Beat associates, such as Diane di Prima or Joyce Johnson, were either some of the most prolific Beats of the period or those who had a significant influence on the Beat Generation. In other words, while the Beat Generation is often portrayed as being composed solely of white men, that is not an accurate depiction. That being said, the book mostly focuses on "the Big Three" – Ginsberg, Kerouac, and Burroughs – for practical reasons. Trying to include too many Beats in the discussion would not only result in a babel of a text, but many of these Beats were simply unknown in Czechoslovakia and are still rather obscure in the Czech Republic, which would again make comparison difficult.[4] Simply put, the book mostly discusses Ginsberg, Kerouac, and Burroughs, though special attention is paid to Ferlinghetti and Corso in the Czechoslovak and Czech Republic sections. Focusing on the three Beats should not be interpreted as an act of "whitening" the canon of the Beats, but rather as a pragmatic decision which should lead to the most comprehensive

4 For instance, the first poetry collection in the Czech Republic by Diane di Prima was released in 2004 and there are no books by Jones available in Czech translation.

study possible. In addition, the unavailability or obscurity of some of the Beats in Czech translation again underlines the different contours the label takes in the two countries.

An objection could be raised against comparing receptions in countries with different languages. Since the languages are not the same, the argument might be, they do not produce works of the same meaning, therefore the Czech audience reacts to slightly different texts than their American counterpart. Nevertheless, that would be a rather simplistic view of translation processes, and it would also have to ignore the fact that an innumerable number of works of art have been successful across different cultures and traditions. As Anthony Pym in *Exploring Translation Theories* explains, while there are several paradigms which try to explain the way translation works, none of them are actually applicable on their own (165). Granted, the notion of linguistic equivalence, that is two different languages sharing the same values, is often thought to be outdated; however, Pym further adds that the concept also "merits a serious place alongside and within the more recent paradigms" (6). Albrecht Neubert joins Pym in defending the notion of linguistic equivalence. He explains that a translation simply must have "some kind of *equivalence relation* to the original," where the equivalence relationship is the outcome of translation (413–14). Therefore, Neubert continues, "equivalence in translation is not an isolated, quasi-objective quality, it is a *functional* concept that can be attributed to a particular translational situation" (414). Admittedly, this research essentially somewhat sidesteps this issue by being interested in what the Beats and their texts mean for their audiences in the two countries, thus allowing for difference in interpretation. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this publication, translating Beat literature is considered as producing texts equal to their English counterparts.

Finally, the vast majority of Czech sources used in the book are in Czech, and since providing both the Czech original text and its English translation would be rather cumbersome, I have opted to include only my English translations of such texts. Nevertheless, a few of these texts, for example Havel's essay "The Power of the Powerless," have existing English translations, and these have been used instead. If the reader is in doubt about the original language of a quoted text, please consult the bibliography section.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Even though George Bernard Shaw's play *Mrs. Warren's Profession* was first performed in a members-only club as a way to circumvent the play's ban by the Lord Chamberlain, it still received a negative response from the press. The reason behind such a reception was the central theme of the work – prostitution. To defend his play and the titular character from what he saw as unwarranted criticism, Shaw responded by adding a preface, sarcastically titled "The Author's Apology," to the 1905 edition of the play's publication. The preface argues that the negative response of theater critics does not in any way reflect the response of the public. As it continues, "[a]nybody can upset the theatre critics, in a turn of the wrist, by substituting for the romantic commonplaces of the stage the moral commonplaces of the pulpit, the platform, or the library" (viii). Describing art as "the subtlest, the most seductive, the most effective means of moral propagandism in the world," Shaw understands that it can be used to promote or condemn ideas, manners, or opinions (x). Therefore, he insists that the audience use their "conscience" and their "brains" to properly evaluate the play's sociopolitical statement (x, xxvi). Mrs. Warren, the play's titular character, can hardly be deemed responsible for being a former prostitute when the other alternative is to be poor (xxvii-xxviii). Furthermore, Shaw did not choose prostitution as the play's focus just to shock audiences. The reason for discussing evils, Shaw argues, "is that you make people so extremely uncomfortable about them that they finally stop blaming 'human nature' for them, and begin to support measures for their reform" (xxxi). Ultimately, Shaw insists that the purpose of *Mrs. Warren's Profession* is to raise awareness about the immorality of poverty which often forces women to take up prostitution as the only possible alternative, and that the critics denouncing the play have completely missed its point.

Prefatory texts can significantly affect the overall reading experience; after all, prefaces commonly provide context to the work's creation, give a clear voice to the author, or explain the author's intentions in writing the text. As Gérard Genette explains, the purpose of an authorial preface was "to ensure that the text is read properly" (197). Unfortunately for Shaw, the theatrical production of his play could not be adorned with such explanatory material, and the work stirred up substantial controversy. Shaw defended his work by arguing that the public represents a completely different audience with different tastes and sensibilities – that is different ways of approaching a text – than the literary critics of his time. To Shaw, the general audience was more perceptive of the ideological message he had in mind than the more refined audience, which he claims failed to grasp the play's message and instead complained about its supposed immorality (Shaw vii).

Importantly, prefaces and afterwords are not the only extratextual aspects possibly affecting the way a literary text is seen. Genette thus devises the term *paratext* to address the fact that a literary text virtually always has to be presented in a certain form and therefore cannot stand on its own (1). These paratexts are then further divided into *peritexts* and *epitexts*; while the former is paratextual elements located within the physical space of the text such as the title or the afterword, the latter are found outside the actual physical space of the text, thus being represented by interviews with the author or reviews of the text (3–5). Paratexts thus do not have to be written by the text's author; for instance, numerous *peritexts* such as book covers are authored by the publisher, yet they still shape the overall reception of the text. Since readers cannot read the text in the same way after reading its paratexts as they did before doing so, paratexts, Genette claims, try to inform the reader's understanding of the text, and therefore its reception, to the advantage of the author and his supporters (2, 8). Ultimately, paratexts exist solely for the purpose of the text itself (11).

Genette thus further illuminates several issues touched upon by Shaw's preface, such as the author's intention, various audiences, different attitudes toward the message, or competing ideologies of the author and the audience. These and other factors are necessary to understand the reasons why a work of art might be hailed as a key work of its time or damned for its style, tone, or message. Different audiences might approach the text from different backgrounds, employ different reading strategies, and thus arrive at different interpretations; while sometimes these differences are rather minor and manifest themselves in small nuances, at other times these differences can lead to substantially major discrepancies in the resulting interpretations even to the point of direct opposites.

This, however, does not mean that an average text can result in an infinite number of interpretations. Nevertheless, it also means that we as readers simply cannot help contextualizing the content of a text within our knowledge, thus arriving at a different evaluation of such text (Felski 37). This knowledge is frequently

shaped by the discourse surrounding the work of art in question: the work's or its author's reputation, the other artworks associated with it, or its historical and social context. Ultimately, what is at stake here is the problematic openness of the process of interpretation itself, which could be simplified as the interplay of the text, the author, and the audience.

This interplay is also what my text – at least in relation to the Beat Generation authors – addresses and illuminates.

2.1 Theoretical Concepts – Basis of Inquiry

As Ferdinand De Saussure put it in *Course in General Linguistics*, "language never exists apart from the social fact, for it is a semiological phenomenon" (77). Furthermore, Saussure's signs do not have a meaning on their own, but rather in relation to other signs (112, 114, 118). Taking cues from Saussure, post-structuralist literary criticism abandons the formalist analysis of the New Critics and studies texts – not just literary texts, but rather discourses – in relation to their contexts. For instance, Roland Barthes applied Saussure's semiology – that is a "science that studies the life of signs within society" (Saussure 16) – in order to "demystify" ideologies. Barthes first defines myth as a system of communication, i.e. a message which is communicated, and explains that myth can be had in any medium and not only in writing (*Mythologies* 107–8). Saussure's sign is in Barthes's terminology also the signifier of the myth while the signified is an added meaning; the sign of the myth is then the act of signification, that is the myth itself (113–16). Retelling a sign even without further commenting on it is to further propagate it. By freeing the semiological analysis from the constraints of a literary text and applying it to his surroundings, Barthes is able to dissect the underlying dynamics behind larger entities – their ideology.

Barthes' work includes another notion seminal for literary criticism – that of "the death of the author." In the essay of the same name, Barthes proclaims that the author does not speak to the reader, as it is the language itself that does the speaking; importantly, authorship is not limited to a single entity of "the Author-God," but instead becomes a multi-dimensional space of various writings, none of them original (143, 146). Consequently, the author is the most important myth that has to be overthrown so that the reader can become the center of reading: as Barthes states, "the birth of the reader" is the result of abandoning the authority of the author (148). Barthes's point here is to focus on the reader who can then "rewrite" the text on their own.

Yet the study of ideology in a discourse, as put forward by Barthes or Michel Foucault, by definition leads to limited results. For instance, Rita Felski criticizes post-structuralist literary theory and its presumptions – such as analyzing the work

on its own is practically impossible or the process of reading is based on too many unpredictable factors – for being too pessimistic (3). Simply defining literature as ideology is a slippery slope, Felski argues, since it means that no new insights can be gained from literary texts and this decision is made prior to reading the given text (7). Felski essentially claims that while literary criticism from the post-structuralist point of view is instrumental in revealing the underlying ideologies, it does little to contribute to our understanding of actual reading processes. As Stanley Fish, one of the major figures of reader-response theory, further comments:

> There is a great difference between trying to figure out what a poem means and trying to figure out which interpretation of a poem will contribute to the toppling of patriarchy or to the war effort. Until recently the assertion of this difference would have been superfluous, but in many circles it has come to be an article of faith that the idea of a distinctively literary system of facts and values is at best an illusion and at worst an imposition by the powers that be of an orthodoxy designed to suppress dissent. ("Why Literary Criticism Is like a Virtue")

Therefore, it is the insertion of the reader into the context of messages that plays an important part for semantics, reception studies, reader-response criticism, and communication studies; importantly, such an approach is also the basis of this research.

The process of interpretation – with varying degrees of reader involvement – has led to numerous studies in the fields of reception theory or reader-response criticism. In their introduction to *Reception Theory: From Literary Theory to Cultural Studies*, James L. Machor and Philip Goldstein explain the following:

> Reception study has become an important mode of historical inquiry because to rehabilitate the historical method discredited by formal criticism, reception study limits or rejects the transformative force of theoretical ideals and examines the changing 'reading formations' or 'interpretive communities' governing readers' practices. (xiv)

One of the first proponents of reception theory was Hans Robert Jauss. His "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory" calls for a radical change of literary theory by trying to solve "the unresolved dispute" between the various schools; Jauss's solution is to introduce the reader to the discussion (7). He chastises the two dominant approaches of the time – formalism and Marxism – for paying only limited attention to the reader: while one dismisses the reader in favor of the text itself, the other ignores the reader in favor of an ideological reading. The audience should play a prominent role in literary criticism, Jauss argues, as "[t]he historical life of a literary work is unthinkable without the active participa-

tion of its audience" (8). For Jauss, introducing the audience into literary criticism is a way of connecting the two opposite schools: while including the reception and impact of a text allows one to focus on literary works as parts of literary history and therefore discuss the historical consequences of these works on our current literary experience, the audience's appreciation of the esthetics and the way they evolve in history reveals the esthetic value of the analyzed text (8–9).

However, as Jauss points out, reception theory avoids the danger of slipping into psychology by clearly defining the audience's frame of reference rather than relying on the critic's own (11). Importantly, Jauss explains that tracking the reception of a literary work is not merely a collection of reviews or opinions, but "the successive development of the potential meaning which is present in a work and which is gradually realized in its historical reception by knowledgeable criticism" (21). In other words, Jauss tries to link a purely esthetic perspective with a historical approach through a diachronic analysis as a way to refocus on the reader.

That is not to say that reception theory envisions itself to be outside of its object. As Stanley Fish acknowledges in his essay "Why Literary Criticism Is Like a Virtue," to step outside of ideology is impossible: "Nothing stands alone; no discipline is an island; no fact – be it legal, literary, historical, physical, psychological – rests on its own bottom or on the bottom of a self-sustaining practice; all facts are pickoutable only against a background of the entire array of practices, no one of which has a substantial (self-authorising) existence." It is impossible, Fish further argues, for a text to be truly impartial and balanced – such a text would mean everything and therefore nothing. After all, "[h]uman beings are always in a particular place; that's what it means to be human; to be limited by what a specific coordinate of space and time permits us to see until we move on to another coordinate with its equally (if differently) limited permission." Ultimately, the focus on the audience and how it impacts – and is impacted by – the text should provide information not only about the text, but also about the audience itself and its interpretive practices.

Studies of the ways the audience interprets a work of art (or a text in general) substantially differ in their approaches and therefore in the results they obtain. For instance, Umberto Eco argues that the reader can make a limited amount of assumptions about the text without any prior knowledge of it.[5] Importantly, this also works vice versa, as every type of text has a certain model of reader in mind at its general level, for example considering linguistic code, literary style, or specialization (*Role of the Reader* 7). This means that in general, one cannot use the text as they want (9). One of Eco's main concerns is interpretation, which he defines as "a dialectic between openness and form, initiative on the part of the interpreter and contextual pressure" (*Limits of Interpretation* 21). As Eco further

5 For instance, one can make a safe assumption that this book is aimed at university-educated readers rather than kindergarteners or that it will be written in a formal tone rather than being a series of oddball jokes.

explains, there can be numerous interpretations that may be very different from each other, but one also has to agree that some interpretations are simply more legitimate than others**,** and while finding consensus on a good interpreter can be difficult, identifying a bad interpreter is usually quite simple (41–42). This is because, Eco argues, symbols are "paradigmatically open to infinite meanings but syntagmatically, that is, textually, open only to the indefinite, but by no means infinite, interpretations allowed by the context" (21). Therefore, it should be possible to reach an agreement about a text's interpretation, even though it may be only about what sort of interpretation the text discourages (45). Ultimately, this leads Eco to the concept of a Model Reader, which can be further differentiated into a naive and a critical Model Reader: while the former is "supposed to understand semantically what the text says," while the critical one is "supposed to appreciate the way in which the text says so" by understanding its textual strategies (55, 58).

Taking a more esthetic approach, Wolfgang Iser states in the preface to his *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* the following: "As a literary text can only produce a response when it is read, it is virtually impossible to describe this response without also analyzing the reading process" (ix). While Eco is more interested in the organization of the text in relation to the reader, Iser is more directly engaged with the reader by explaining that esthetic response ought to be analyzed "in terms of a dialectic relationship between text, reader, and their interaction" and even though "it is brought about by the text, it brings into play the imaginative and perceptive faculties of the reader, in order to make him adjust and even differentiate his own focus" (x).

Similarly to Eco, Iser argues that there is no such thing as an "ideal reader"; such a reader is "a structural impossibility as far as literary communication is concerned. An ideal reader would have to have an identical code to that of the author; authors, on the contrary, generally recodify prevailing codes of their texts, and so the ideal reader would also have to share the intentions underlying this process" (28). Nevertheless, each text aims at the "implied reader," or Model Reader in Eco's terms, who is a textual construct that is firmly set in the structure of the text rather than being a real reader (34). Ultimately, it is the engagement with the text which produces meaning for the implied reader:

> The significance of the work, then, does not lie in the meaning sealed within the text, but in the fact that the meaning brings out what had previously been sealed within us. When the subject is separated from himself, the resultant spontaneity is guided and shaped by the text in such a way that it is transformed into a new and real consciousness. (157)

The reader, put simply, imbues the text with a part of himself, thus creating the work. Therefore, Iser claims it is not only the text but also the dynamics of responding to the text that should constitute the study of a literary work (20–21).

Explaining that focusing exclusively on the author's writing style or on the reader's response will give us only limited information regarding the reading process, he makes an important distinction – that between "work" and "text." While text is the physical composition of a literary text, work is, Iser postulates, a reader's realization of a text; the work is therefore more than just the text itself, as it is the outcome of the text and the reader's subjectivity (21).

By distinguishing between the actual physical text and its manifested interpretation, Iser knowingly adopts the concepts developed by Czechoslovak structuralists such as Jan Mukařovský or Felix Vodička (Zima 199). The latter defines reception in "The Concretization of the Literary Work"[6] as "the investigation of the life of a work in literature" and proposes to focus "on the active relation of the reading public to a literary work perceived as an esthetic object" (107). Vodička points out that linguistic signs are not stable, therefore one can study only the image of the work rather than the work itself; consequently, this leads to a work having multiple interpretations (107, 109). His concept of *concretization* is then his methodological solution for analyzing literature through the lens of reception theory; as he defines it, concretization indicates "a concrete appearance of a specific work which has become the object of esthetic perception" (110). Usually, work is concretized – accepted in a certain appearance – after being available to the readership for a certain period of time; however, it can have more than one concretization, which means that there exists more than one norm of interpreting, and if these norms do not easily stabilize, the constantly changing interpretations can indicate a large number of possible concretizations (111, 127).

Another commentary on the reader and interpretation of a work is offered by Stanley Fish's notion of "interpretive communities." Fish's starting point is close to Iser's or Eco's, as he argues that not the text but rather the reader is the originator of the text's interpretation, therefore making it possible for several different and often conflicting interpretations of a text to exist. Importantly, a reader is only rarely alone in their approach to reading a given text. In his essay "Interpreting the 'Variorum'" Fish explains that interpretive communities "are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions" (483). These interpretive strategies, Fish further elaborates, exist outside of and prior to the act of reading, therefore influencing the final interpretation created by the readers "writing" the text. Notably, a reader is not limited to one interpretive community, but actually belongs to several communities: "This, then, is the explanation both of the stability of interpretation among different readers (they belong to the same community) and for the regularity with which a single

6 Originally printed as "Literárněhistorické studium ohlasu literárních děl: Problematika ohlasu Nerudova díla" in *Slovo a slovesnost*, 1941.

reader will employ different interpretive strategies and thus make different texts (he belongs to different communities)" (484).

Fish also makes it clear that not only are interpretations temporal rather than permanent, but also that interpreting a text is a process the reader learns from their surroundings (484). These interpretive strategies are naturally shared across the specific interpretive community among its members. Therefore, different or even conflicting views of a single text should not necessarily be interpreted as the results of an imperfect reading, but rather as the natural outcome of different interpretive strategies being employed by their corresponding interpretive communities. In other words, reading is a product of existing discursive and ideological formations. As Fish further clarifies, each reading "only makes sense in relation to the traditions, goals, obligatory routines and normative procedures that comprise its history and are the content of its distinctiveness; as tasks geared to different purposes, they call on entirely different skills and set in motion different orders of attention" ("Why Literary Criticism Is Like a Virtue"). This has far-reaching consequences; since readings are influenced by social norms or beliefs, being a member of an interpretive community often reveals more about its members than about the given text.

Stuart Hall's notion of "encoding" and "decoding" is another concept illuminating the process of reading and interpreting. Although Hall focuses on mass media and especially on television rather than literature, his work further corroborates Fish's claim of a text's meaning as shaped by the text's audience. Hall discusses the relationship between the author of the message – or text – and the audience and explains that the process of interpretation is not a linear mediation of meaning.[7] Quite the opposite, the majority of an interpretation is being actively negotiated by the author and the audience through the processes of encoding and decoding: while encoding describes the way the author communicates his message, decoding focuses on the audience and its method of decoding the author's message. Among other things, the resulting interpretation depends on the author's intentions and his understanding of the target audience, therefore the context of the message is also important in the process of interpretation. Writing about denotation – that is the literal meaning of a sign as opposed to its implication – Hall argues that it is rather limited in its range. In contrast, connotation, or the implied message, is more difficult to grasp:

> Any society/culture tends, with varying degrees of closure, to impose its classifications of the social and cultural and political world. These constitute a *dominant cultural order,* though it is neither univocal nor uncontested. This question of the 'structure of dis-

7 Hall prefers the terms "sender" and "receiver." However, for the sake of clarity the terms author and audience are used instead.

> courses in dominance' is a crucial point. The different areas of social life appear to be mapped out into discursive domains, hierarchically organized into *dominant* or *preferred meanings.* (134)

The dominant readings, that is readings preferred by the given society, support Fish's notion of interpretive communities. Importantly, these readings are only more common in the given context rather than being strictly "better" or "worse."

Since meaning depends on the communication between the author and the reader, there are numerous outcomes to such interaction. For instance, the audience can fail to understand or identify with the meaning as intended by the author and while Fish would claim that they belong to a different interpretive community, Hall would explain that this is because the audience was not operating within the dominant meaning (135). Subsequently, Hall classifies the author's encoding of the message and the reader's decoding of it into three codes or positions: *dominant-hegemonic position* or *code*, *oppositional position* or *code*, and *negotiated position* or *code*, which indicate the degree of acceptance of refusal toward the author's encoded message (136–38).

Importantly, this act of reading does not occur in the immediate context of the reader. On the contrary, literary work is created and constituted by the processes and specific contexts of large-scale cultural production. As Pierre Bourdieu in his seminal study "The Field of Cultural Production" explains his concept of a "field," it structures artists and the industry producing the artist's work in a power struggle for dominance among various types of readers. The field is not infinite, the space available within it is limited, and established authors have to constantly fend off challengers: "The ageing of authors, schools and works … results from the struggle between those who have made their mark … and who are fighting to persist, and those who cannot make their own mark without pushing into the past those who have an interest in stopping the clock, eternalizing the present stage of things" (60). Yet as new authors displace the old, the whole field changes, and since literary works depend on one another and their location within the field for their meaning, the interpretation of the work automatically changes in the given field (30–31).

Bourdieu's position might be summarized by the seemingly trivial "we define the subject, which in turn further defines the subject." Yet Bourdieu's model not only addresses the whole process of producing cultural artifacts, but also acknowledges the existence of subfields within the field of cultural production, namely fields of large scale and restricted production, as well as the field of power which is a combination of the field of politics and the field of economy. Importantly, the field of power dominates the subfield of large scale production, therefore describing mass culture, while the degree of autonomy of restricted production helps determine the existence of art independent of economy and politics. As Bourdieu puts it, "[t]he literary or artistic field is a field of forces, but it is also

a field of struggles tending to transform or conserve this field of forces" (30). Not only do different audiences prefer different works of art to exist, but also artists compete against each other within their given field as well as against the other fields. Bourdieu also makes the crucial observation that academia has a key role in defining cultural products:

> In fact, what circulates between contemporary philosophers, or those of different epochs, are not only canonical texts, but a whole philosophical doxa carried along by intellectual rumour – labels of schools, truncated quotations, functioning as slogans in celebration or polemics – by academic routine and perhaps above all by school manuals (an unmentionable reference), which perhaps do more than anything else to constitute the 'common sense' of an intellectual generation. (32)

The discourse on a work of art circulating through academia can then have a substantial impact. It not only affects the academic discourses that follow, but since it takes place in the wider context of cultural production, academic discourse can then seep into and subsequently influence the public discourse surrounding the work of art. And it is then this discourse which is circulated and therefore reacted to in the process of cultural production.

2.2 Definition of Approach

Writing about the primary purpose of comparative literature, Petr Václav Zima explains that its goals are to analyze the cultural and linguistic dependence of theories and literatures (124). However, as Zima further adds, a comparative critic should also pursue "the ideological interferences in theoretical and literary discourse" (124). This, then, gives a comparative literary critic who speaks two or more languages a considerable advantage, as the critic can see how discourses are constituted by different cultures and languages (121). If then, as Jauss claims, a reception study is not a simple connection of secondary texts related to the work in question, but rather the "successive development of the potential meaning which is present in the work" (21), a reception study focusing on two different languages and cultures can be even more illuminating than a non-comparative approach.

Zima classifies the traditional approach to comparative literature as typological and genetic: while the former focuses on the similarities in production or reception between multiple works, the latter discusses the impact of a work on the genesis of another one (130). While Zima claims that the typological approach should be the basis of comparative criticism, the genetic approach is not to be dismissed, as these two approaches frequently complement one another (131). Nevertheless,

a comparative approach can also be applied to the study of reception. A reception study is therefore different from a genetic approach, as it is not interested in establishing a direct line between two works, but rather in the reception of a work by the public; that is by literary critics, publishing houses, and lay readers (164). While there are numerous comparative approaches to conducting a reception study, this work predominantly focuses on evaluating the discourse of various secondary sources on the Beat Generation and their work. And since various criticisms or responses frequently influence one another, this study employs both typological and genetic approach views on reception. In a way, the study performs a traditional typological/genetic comparative analysis, yet it does so by promoting texts usually described as secondary to a primary position. In addition, its primary focus is not a particular work of art, but rather the concept – the sign – of the Beat Generation and what it means – or signifies – to audiences.

This study is informed by the theoretical concepts outlined in II.1 as well as by Zima's notion of the purpose of comparative literature and its application to a reception study. While they stem from different theoretical models and approaches, all the concepts occupy the same position in several aspects. They all highlight the act of reading itself as predetermined by existing discourse, tradition, and context, and they also explain the existence of multiple interpretations. Importantly, none of the theorists wishes to conduct a psychological analysis of the reader. Instead, they argue that while the reader is not the author and cannot ever approach the text from the same viewpoint, the negotiation between the text and the reader is where the important step in interpretation is taking place.

Nevertheless, the study does not aim to continuously allude throughout the text to the concepts mentioned above. While a commentary on the reception of the Beats through these concepts is provided at the end, the main body of this study is formed by documenting and commenting on the various sources used. As Zima states, a reception study entails quantitative analysis (195). However, while he insists that the common mode of inquiry for such a study should be based on empirical sociology or social psychology, this study takes a different route, as it is not interested in the reception of individual readers, but in analyzing the discourse surrounding the Beat Generation. This study then performs a typological and genetic comparative study of the secondary literature on the Beat Generation; therefore, the unifying link between the analyzed text is their topic – the Beats and their writing – and their genre usually classifying them as secondary texts (such as a review, publisher's note, or literary criticism). The importance of the short theoretical overview in this chapter is then to establish a common ground from which to proceed in such an analysis.

The study also does not say that interpretation depends solely on readers. Zima explains that ideology permeates every discourse, and several of the literary theorists mentioned above have clearly stated that the act of reading is to a great

degree contextual and conventional (124). The criticism of authors as the sole symbol creators has long reached a point of reasonability; while understandable, many of the comments have shifted from one extreme to another one, and suddenly audiences have become identified as the major creators of meaning (Hesmondhalgh 5). Readers do have leeway in interpreting the text, but the text creates boundaries in interpretation through the text's own existence and limitations. In addition, an ideology – or an opposition to one – can substantially shape one's reading practices. Finally, there exists a certain amount of inertia in the reading of a literary text and its relation to existing interpretations prior to the current act of reading. Simply put, readers navigate the existing discourses, ideologies, and structures of their context, and in varying degrees identify these as shaping their reading, thus potentially obtaining a certain degree of autonomy.[8]

Nothing more, but – importantly – nothing less.

8 Alternatively, one could say that a reader will approach a text depending on the reader's interpretive communities, their familiarity with textual strategies (that is being either a naive or a critical Model Reader), or their ability to decode the encoded message.

3 THE UNITED STATES OF THE FIFTIES AND THE SIXTIES: AN INTRODUCTION

> You're standing on the outside looking in… There's a barrier and you don't know how to begin breaking it down. You imagine [other people] keep watching the way you look, the way you act. They think you're different. So you head for home. What else? But still you can't forget you're alone. An outsider. (*Shy Guy*)

Titled *Shy Guy*, this 1947 educational short movie is aimed at teenagers who have difficulties making friends in unknown settings. The movie details the struggles of Phil, a new student at a local high school, who is trying to merge with the school crowd. Phil eventually succeeds by inviting his schoolmates over to his home to listen to Phil's hand-made record player. Granted, successful socializing with one's peers is an important part of one's life and perhaps even more so for a teenager. Nevertheless, the short movie is also emblematic of post-WWII America. If one were to characterize the decade following the war, "return to normalcy" would be a good contender for such characterization.[9]

3.1 The Era of Conformity

The Depression and the Second World War were over, and the nation sighed with relief. After two trying decades Americans could finally live freely and relish the

9 It should be noted that the original "return to normalcy" took place in 1920, when Warren G. Harding used it as his campaign slogan to win the presidential election, thus announcing the period of twelve years of Republican presidents in America after the First World War. A similar return was then wished for after the Second World War. I would like to thank Dr. David Chroust, Texas A&M University, for pointing this out.

sudden economic boom that the United States, unlike the countries ravaged by the war, enjoyed in the years that followed. The booming economy was not the only cause for the high spirits that many felt during this period; as David Sterritt enumerates, other contributing factors to the general sense of ease were the recent American successes on the battlefield, new developments in science and technology, the relative improvement of middle-class lives, or the emerging political dominance of the United States which replaced Europe as the largest imperialist power (20). Importantly, these developments led to a heightened sense of the need to conserve these achievements, a process that in turn led to the general understanding of the 1950s as a decade of conformity and consensus. For instance, James Guimond describes the portrayal of Americans in popular photography as "parts of a huge network of entities, institutions, and communities that nurtured and encouraged them to become healthy, normal citizens" (217). As the quote from *Shy Guy* suggests, being "normal" here means being like everyone else and this attitude was omnipresent in postwar society. Conformity, Guimond further explains, was served to the public through images of consumerism and cheerful corporate employees, "I Like Ike" buttons worn by voters, or flag-salute montages shown at the end of the day on television channels; these and other images, often distributed by picture magazines such as *Life* or *Look*, ultimately had the same message: it was right to conform and right to be an American (213–14).

"Conformity" is also the word that best describes the emergence of suburbia and Levittowns. The latter, large suburbs built in an assembly-line fashion mostly for returning veterans, are described by the historian Lewis Mumford as the following:

> [A] multitude of uniform, unidentifiable houses, lined up inflexibly, at uniform distances, on uniform roads, in a treeless communal waste, inhabited by people of the same class, the same income, the same age group, witnessing the same television performances, eating the same tasteless prefabricated foods, from the same freezers, conforming in every outward and inward respect to a common mold, manufactured in the central metropolis. (486)

The unity and uniformity of the nation became indistinguishable. To be a good citizen was to accept the conformist lifestyle that was encouraged not only through ideologies such as religion or the belief in capitalism, but also through seemingly unrelated aspects of American life; unified housing development or the increasing use of cars in everyday life in effect further promoted a unity in lifestyles to the point of a wide-scale sameness. The best way to conform was to consume American goods; after all, the production of consumer goods was according to the President's Council of Economic Advisors the "ultimate purpose" of being American (qtd. in Sterritt 21). Tellingly, the choice to conform is the first solution

to gaining new friends offered to "shy guy" Phil: when he complains to his father that everyone in his school wears sweaters rather than a regular suit like he does, his knowing father answers simply: "Wear a sweater then!"

The fifties were mostly marked by fear of the Other – the foreign and unknown – which was commonly represented by the communist Soviet Union. Its beginning can be traced to August 1949 when the Soviets created their first atomic bomb, thus starting a vicious arms race which to many Americans represented a real possibility of nuclear war between the two nations. The art of the nuclear age, for example Leonard Baskin's life-sized woodcut *The Hydrogen Man*, frequently reacted to the possibility of nuclear annihilation by reflecting uncertainty and ambiguity in their art (Johnston 223). The omnipresent fear of the Soviets and everything related to them also led to the Red Scare of the McCarthy era, which targeted government officials for being suspected communist sympathizers working on undermining the American government. This fearmongering naturally made its way into school textbooks such as Bragdon and McCutcheon's *History of a Free People* (1954). The description of the omnipresent "communist menace" used in the textbook is the following: "Unquestioning party members are found everywhere. Everywhere they are willing to engage in spying, sabotage and the promotion of unrest on orders from Moscow" (qtd. in Whitfield 33). Being a Communist was seen as being in direct opposition to American values and ideals, and as a result many people lost their jobs due to such accusations.[10]

The Red Scare in effect aroused the suspicion of otherness in American culture: not only was the country preoccupied by the image of the Soviets conquering the USA, but also a significant segment of the public approved of many policies that targeted another group deemed dangerous for the country's security – homosexuals. For example, Billy Graham, the Protestant Christian evangelist, in a 1953 public broadcast praised FBI agents "who, in the face of public denouncement and ridicule, go loyally on in their work of exposing pinks, the lavenders, and the reds who have sought refuge beneath the wings of the American eagle" (qtd. in Whitfield 45), thus equalizing apparent supporters of socialism as well as homosexuals with the Cold War-era Soviet Union. Besides, sexual prudery was rampant, thus not only making any meaningful discussion of gender roles impossible, but also further heightening fears against homosexuals (Sterritt 21). Sex was naturally something that people longed for. Nevertheless, the 1950s were a time of

10 The FBI often kept files on artists considered controversial or even anti-American. For instance, it has been recently revealed that the FBI suspected the science fiction writer Ray Bradbury of being a communist sympathizer. Describing science fiction as a possibly "lucrative field for the introduction of communist ideologies," the FBI's informant also states that the purpose of sci-fi literature "is to frighten the people into a state of paralysis or psychological incompetence bordering on hysteria," thus spreading the belief that a possible Third World War could not be won (Brown). The report also describes some of Bradbury's stories as "definitely slanted against the United States and its capitalistic form of Government [*sic*]."

sexual prudery, therefore sexual intercourse was generally conceived as limited to marriage only, and as a study of more than four thousand adults showed, the majority of the study's participants thought of people who did not marry as sick, immoral, selfish, or neurotic (May 166). Put differently, the rules regarding gender roles, albeit unwritten, were clear and these rules naturally had the most impact on women. As the journalist Calvin Trillin recalls, job positions for *Time* magazine were so tiered that the best a woman could hope for was to become a researcher for the magazine (*New York*). Being a writer, the hierarchy of the magazine indicated, was solely a man's job.

The majority of cultural production during the 1940s and 1950s was more than content with this state of things. In fact, many cultural producers such as Hollywood cinema generally served as de facto guardians of traditional values and the status quo (Sterritt 6). During her first visit to the United States, Simone de Beauvoir was greatly surprised by the apoliticism prevalent in artistic and intellectual circles (Lindey 103). This was, as Lindey further explains, one of the emerging effects of the Cold War. Since culture was the battleground where "the enemy" was faced in hopes of preserving the right values, authors such as William Faulkner or John Steinbeck were often criticized for shining a light on the deficiencies of American society, thus causing the outside world to view the country in a more negative fashion than they otherwise would have (Sterritt 22). Importantly, some authors could not be published in the USA, thus smuggling became the only way to obtain the works of writers such as James Joyce or Henry Miller (Goodman 96). Popular culture reflected the general mood of society, thus science fiction movies like *The Thing from Another World* were often interpreted as portraying society's fear of communism. Such films thus represented an increased push toward conformity in American society.

The word "conformity," Thomas Frank notes, entered the vernacular due to publications such as David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* or *The Organization Man* by William H. Whyte, Jr., and debates on consumerism, conformity, mass-production, and the corporate world thus became common by the end of the fifties (10–11). Consequently, these themes were also frequently featured in works of fiction, for example Frederick Wakeman's *The Hucksters* or Sloan Wilson's *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (36–38). The protagonist of *The Hucksters*, Frank notes, was able to withstand the environment of an advertising company which stifled his individualistic and creative character by quitting the job; in contrast, while Tom Rath, the main character of *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, is able to somewhat resolve the issues of his demanding work, he is too entrenched in his world of happy suburban family life, daily commute and corporate work to imagine any alternative to this lifestyle (36, 38). The United States had thus fully embraced consumerism and conformism and denounced everything even vaguely resembling a threat to the existing state of affairs.

In a way, conformity was also anchored in the literary criticism prevalent at that time. The formalist New Criticism dominating American universities in the middle decades of the twentieth century rejected its predecessor, a more traditional criticism in the manner of Matthew Arnold, which focused on a biographical reading of the text's author as the correct way of interpreting a text. Also dismissing the more recent Freudian approach, this formalist approach is best exemplified by W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. and M. C. Beardsley, the authors of two texts central to New Criticism, "The Intentional Fallacy" and "The Affective Fallacy." These texts warn against the two fallacies of literary criticism: while the former advises against critics trying to answer the question, "What did the author mean by the text?", the latter claims that emotive reader responses should not be a part of literary scholarship. In "The Intentional Fallacy" Wimsatt and Beardsley explain that "the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art" (468). They support their argument by explaining that once published, a poem is not owned by its author or by the critic reviewing it but rather by the public (470–71). Readers are neither required nor expected to read the author's secondary materials explaining the text in order to understand it; ultimately, interpreting the work happens in public, and therefore should not be bound by its author (482, 477).

"The Affective Fallacy" addresses the reader's response to the text. While it acknowledges that readers can respond emotively to a work of art, they claim that this should not be the focus of literary criticism (45). An account of a reader's response to a poem or a play is, according to the critics, only an account of *how* these emotions were induced and therefore supply the very same response to the readers of the critique (47). It is therefore necessary to ignore not only the causes of the poem (the author and his intention), but also its results (what the poem does to the reader), as the former leads to a psychological account and the latter to impressionism and relativism (31). Wimsatt and Beardsley summarize their stance in the opening of "The Affective Fallacy" by the following: "The outcome of either Fallacy, the Intentional or the Affective, is that the poem itself, as an object of specifically critical judgment, tends to disappear" (31).

For the New Critics, the literary work stands on its own from the world which produced it, and therefore should be approached as such. This concept of literature as isolated from society naturally is not without merit. However, it also ignores that art simply cannot exist without context. By viewing art as existing in vacuum, such an approach fails to acknowledge other values of art outside its formal elements, and therefore has difficulties explaining the possible variations in interpretation and art's role in general.

3.2 The Other America

Yet viewing the fifties as a decade dominated by conformity and consumerism would be a mistake. As the historian David Halberstam explains, the fifties signaled the vital changes American society would undergo one decade later (*The Fifties: The Fear & the Dream*). One of the important changes that started in the fifties was the increased focus on discrimination against African Americans. The landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision ended the segregation of educational facilities and had a far-reaching effect on American society. Several Southern states resisted the ruling and many whites tried to intimidate blacks, through racial slurs or violence, and to deter them from asserting their rights. Nevertheless, the Civil Rights Movement gained further momentum after Rosa Parks refused to leave a bus seat designated for white passengers only. The resulting boycott, which lasted thirteen months, forced bus companies to stop discriminating against African-American passengers. The Civil Rights Movement continued protesting segregation in other places, such as restaurants or retail stores, by organizing sit-ins, a form of non-violent protest. Eventually, these protests led to the Freedom Rides in the early sixties; still, some were dissatisfied with the slow progress of the struggle for civil rights. Unlike Martin Luther King, Jr., the civil rights leader who advocated non-violence as a means of protest, Malcolm X dismissed the non-violent approach, instead advocating that integration with whites was not needed. Furthermore, Malcolm X famously argued that African Americans should be able to achieve justice "by any means necessary," thus creating a divide in the approach to obtaining civil rights for African Americans. While he had been considered a controversial figure during his lifetime, Malcolm X brought the issue of racial discrimination into the urban areas of the United States, thus having a significant impact on the years to come.

Simply put, the fifties were a complicated period. On the one hand, most of the adult population was trapped in an elaborate maze of social conformity built on fear, hostility, and a wish to enjoy the peace after decades of struggle; on the other hand, many adults experienced personal prosperity and affluence for the first time in their lives after working hard during the trying years of the Depression era (Cook 10). As Bruce Cook continues, the road to achieving middle-class life was so difficult for the generation of the Depression era that they "embraced [its] values and symbols … with the all fervor of religious converts." That being said, there were several areas in the United States which showed clear signs of non-conformity even before this period. One such place was Greenwich Village, which was an important center where liberally-oriented people, a large art scene, numerous jazz concerts, and a thriving theater scene converged on a daily basis. "Where could a rebel and a freethinker settle but in Greenwich Village?" the writer Alfred Kazin asks rhetorically (*The Ballad*). Similarly, the novelist Dan Wakefield defines

the Village as the place where people came to flee Eisenhower's America and find a group of likeminded souls (*New York*). The Village was where William Faulkner or e.e. cummings wrote their works, where Maya Angelou recited her poetry in various nightclubs, and where places such as the Gaslight Cafe showcased Gregory Corso or Allen Ginsberg (*Ballad*). Importantly, Greenwich Village was known for its large degree of acceptance uncommon at that time. For instance, the Village had had a large jazz scene since the 1920s and as a result housed a large number of jazz clubs, one such club being the Café Society, the first racially integrated jazz club in the United States. The Village also had a significant homosexual scene and while acts of discrimination did occur, the place in general was certainly more welcoming than the rest of the United States. Simply put, New York was a place which had a significant impact on its inhabitants: as Dan Wakefield explains, rather than marrying the girl next door and entering corporate life, the people of New York, and especially of the Village, "[had] decided to take risks" (*New York*). As Wakefield then succinctly summarizes, Greenwich Village was the place where one went to escape the average.

As the fifties continued, a widening generation gap became more apparent. The growing discontent was evident not only in politics but also when it came to such things as musical preferences; the rise of rock and roll music symbolized the young generation's willingness to simply stop listening to their parents' music and find something just for themselves (*The Fifties: The Beat*). Dissenting voices suddenly emerged and voiced their dissatisfaction with the contemporary cultural climate. One such voice being the literary critic Maxwell Geismar, who in 1958 criticized *Time* and *Life* magazines for "laying down a program for a new slap-happy optimism mingled with a proper respect for whatever exists and a species of domestic drama that will avoid all bad language and all serious human issues" (14). Geismar continues by denouncing conformity in literature that tries

> to persuade millions of people that they are completely different from all the other people whom they are exactly like. 'Peace, Prosperity, and Propaganda' will be the grand theme of the new literature, and all deviants from the norm, whether biological or esthetic or ethnic, will be tolerated so long as they do what they are told". (37)

Suddenly, the values and lifestyle held dear by the generation of parents were seen as something to be resisted and even refused outright by the new generation. The San Francisco poet Kenneth Rexroth summarized the sudden turmoil of the young generation in the 1950s with the following:

> The youngest generation is in a state of revolt so absolute that its elders cannot even recognize it. The disaffiliation, alienation, and rejection of the young has, as far as their

> elders are concerned, moved out of the visible spectrum altogether. Critically invisible, modern revolt, like X-rays and radioactivity, is perceived only by its effects at more materialistic social levels, where it is called delinquency. (324)

Here Rexroth touches upon an important aspect of the average middle-class person toward the young generation: the young were often seen as nothing more than primitive and barbaric delinquents without proper values or faith, an image especially pertinent to the reception of the group of young authors who came to be known as the Beat Generation. While they did enjoy a certain amount of success, their work was controversial and often deemed inappropriate or even immoral, as evidenced by the obscenity charges levied against *Howl* and *Naked Lunch*. Bruce Cook sees the Beat Generation as exemplary of "the pull of opposites" which, he argues, is one of the facts of American life. According to Cook, the evidence of various opposites and the fissures they cause were seen everywhere: the generation gap, the differences between the individual states and even sections of the country, the splits between different ethnicities and lifestyles (21). Simply put, Americans were destined to experience abrupt and traumatic challenges in the 1950s.

3.3 The Monopoly Crumbles

The Beats were among those calling for change in American society, and contemporary academia and its understanding of what poetry should be was among the institutions Beat poets rebelled against. Centered around such magazines as *The Kenyon Review* or *Partisan Review*, these academics guarded the official high-brow culture in such a way that they were considered "The Enemy" of the Bohemians of the fifties (Rexroth 337). After all, the most vocal critics of the Beats in the fifties, Norman Podhoretz and Diana Trilling, both represented academia and both wrote for the *Partisan Review*. Furthermore, these high-brow intellectuals frequently dismissed mass culture such as popular music or television shows as not worth their time (Frank 11).

Nevertheless, the seeds of the discord between the Old Left intelligentsia and the Bohemianism of the Beats started to appear a decade earlier, when in 1944 Allen Ginsberg, at that time a freshman at Columbia College, became a student of Lionel Trilling (Wilentz). Trilling, a leading literary critic and the husband of Diana Trilling, was an old member of the Popular Front and while both Ginsberg and Trilling considered the close reading of the New Criticism as a wrong approach to literature, they differed in their actual understanding of what literature should be. For Trilling, literature was a way to affirm "a skeptical liberalism"

through the understanding of the difficulties of modern life (Wilentz). Ginsberg, however, could not disagree more. What he wanted from literature was a form of transcendence which emphasized actual experiences. According to Ginsberg, art should be available to people and should not be limited to the academic elite. As a result, Trilling's distant musings offered only ephemeral understanding rather than lasting results, thus, in Ginsberg's view, contributing to the conformity of American society. Furthermore, the attitudes of the new bohemia, to which the Beats belonged, were significantly different from those of the labor-centered Old Left. As Sean Wilentz explains, "Ginsberg and the Beats, with their mysticism, sexual frankness, and individualism, were politically unreliable as far as the Popular Front veterans were concerned." The emphasis of the old intellectuals on high-brow culture was strongly opposed to the Beats' elevation of everyday experiences, thus both groups viewed one another as their direct opposites.

Beats, in their refusal to adhere to strict form in their poems, espoused a significantly different understanding of poetry than the academic poets. Since these different concepts of poetry did not follow the established criteria of New Criticism – the esthetic form trumps everything else – academic poets were prompted to label Beat poetry as nonsensical and substandard. The Beats were not the only ones who faced opposition from academia; as Justin Quinn shows in the example of poets Edwin Rolfe or Thomas McGrath, one would be hard-pressed to find radical leftist ideas present in mainstream 1950s poetry (112–13). The formalist approach of academic poets frequently discounted a substantial amount of their poems as second grade due to their politically-charged message (113). What is more, not only did these writers have issues with publishing their work, but they also had to endure a backlash in other spheres of life as well.[11]

Outside of academia, the Beats were joined by other artists working with different media in their refusal to follow the established rules. By the end of the fifties, the American folk music revival was in full swing, thus seeing a music club next to a poetry café was a common occurrence (Wilentz). The demand for the new folk music was so high that for instance the Gaslight Cafe in Greenwich Village, although initially focused on Beat poetry, soon transitioned into a more folk-oriented establishment (*Ballad*). Aspiring Beat poets and folksingers thus often shared the same space and while they did not share their taste in music, they did share a "disdain for consumerist materialism and conventional 1950s dress and mores" (Wilentz). Beat poetry certainly had an influence on emerging folksingers, as can be seen with Bob Dylan. It was not the poetic style, but rather the performance of Beat poetry as well as a feeling of alienation toward society that is reflected in

11 For instance, in 1947 Rolfe lost his job in Hollywood to the House Un-American Activities Committee.

Dylan's work. Moreover, Dylan was also impressed by the ability of the Beat poets to play with language, something he tried to emulate in his singing.

The connection of the Beats to Dylan was not by any means overt, yet it was noticeable; for example, in 1963 Lawrence Ferlinghetti discussed with Dylan the possibility of publishing his writing in the City Lights Pocket Poets Series (Wilentz). Furthermore, Allen Ginsberg had a substantial impact on Dylan and his work. In the early sixties, the Beats as an organized movement were often considered to have ended and at the same time Dylan was about to change his music toward a more rock-oriented sound. Ginsberg and Dylan, having met for the first time in 1964, started influencing each other and their mutual respect and artistic support soon became public knowledge.[12] Dylan, who had by the time of their first meeting already penned the protest songs "Blowin' in the Wind" and "The Times They Are a-Changin,'" thus gained an important ally for his social commentaries (Wilentz). As Wilentz further explains, "[a]s a cultural revolutionary, antibourgeois seer, and antagonist of the academy, Ginsberg commanded respect on the left. Above all, Ginsberg stood for literary seriousness, on a level far above what even the most talented folkie lyricist, let alone rock and roller, could hope to attain." Conversely, as the Beat Generation as a movement slowly faded out, it was Dylan's influence which enabled Ginsberg to become "a kind of older avatar of the late-1960s counterculture – for the poet, a new kind of fame" (Wilentz). Dylan, quickly becoming an important voice of the emerging counterculture of the 1960s, had obtained in Ginsberg a sort of guru and by incorporating Beat esthetics into his work he had become a prominent voice of the 1960s.

Simply put, the changes American society had undergone during the two decades were numerous. African Americans, women, and homosexuals were among the groups voicing their concerns and demanding sweeping changes to American society, and were soon joined by university students across the country's campuses. Beat writing and Ginsberg's public persona helped promote different lifestyles and attitudes, which resulted in the rapid growth of the hippie subculture. Furthermore, the so-called "British Invasion" of rock music only further contributed to the growing discontent in American society. These and other events soon converged and created the counterculture of the 1960s, which had a profound impact on the country for decades to come. And partly due to Dylan, Ginsberg had become one of its leading figures.

Not everyone was welcoming of the changes occurring during this period. For numerous conservatives, the counterculture was responsible for many social ills and issues. Commentators such as Allan Bloom or Robert Bork thus often viewed the sixties as a failure of American society, and this perspective was especially

12 For example, a year later Dylan included Ginsberg on the cover of his seminal album *Bringing It All Back Home* (1965), and also featured Ginsberg in the video clip for one of the album's song, the famous "Subterranean Homesick Blues."

common among the conservative and the devout. As David A. Noebel, pastor and religious leader, wrote in his 1965 pamphlet "Communism, Hypnotism and the Beatles," the music of "the Beatles "isn't 'art-form' at all, but a very destructive process" (14). He continues with the following:

> Teenage mental breakdown is at an all time high and juvenile delinquency is nearly destroying our society. Both are caused in part by emotional instability which in turn is caused in part by destructive music such as rock and roll and certain kinds of jazz. But no matter what one might think about the Beatles or the Animals or the Mindbenders, the results are the same – a generation of young people with sick minds, loose morals and little desire or ability to defend themselves from those who would bury them. (14)

Thomas Frank explains that commentators such as Noebel often see the era in one of the following ways. The sixties are either "a moral drama of millennialist utopians attempting to work their starry-eyed will in the real world, … a time of excessive affluence, … a time of imbalance in the eternal war between the generations, or … the fault of Dr. Spock, who persuaded American parents in the lost fifties to pamper their children excessively" (3). However, a view of a culture losing its qualities largely stems from the belief that there is only one culture present at a time as well as from a rather romantic portrayal of artists as those with absolute freedom over their art (Hesmondhalgh 16, 20). The conservative myth of the 1960s then relies on a simple dynamic – nostalgia for things past – yet it fails to acknowledge the possibility that the object of its critique had already been present in American culture, and that it was the monolithic and dominant culture of conformity which prevented other cultures from flourishing.

The conservative right is not the only group in the American political spectrum which mythologizes the history of the counterculture. Eventually, historical accounts become simplified, contexts blurred, and sources cherry-picked to such a degree that a less than accurate portrayal of the events emerges. However, the myth of the left – the unsavory nature of mainstream culture opposed by rebellious youth and their idealistic views – is certainly much more accurate than the conservative interpretation (Frank 5–6). Still, it cannot help but rely on another oft-repeated myth – that the counterculture of the 1960s eventually sold out to the mainstream (14–15). Rather than relying on such binary definitions, Thomas Frank points out that the advertising world of the 1950s and 1960s wanted change as well, as documented by various ads and managerial handbooks (24–25). Many hippies were in fact avid consumers and "hip" consumerism existed prior to the rise of the counterculture (30, 136). As Frank explains, "[t]he counterculture served corporate revolutionaries as a projection of the new ideology of business, a living embodiment of attitudes that reflected their own" (27). In other words,

it was the attitude of the consumer culture – and not of the counterculture itself – that changed. Unlike many social critics, Frank further points out, advertising companies and corporations readily adapted to the rebellious attitude of the sixties. This indicates a crucial point: the birth of the counterculture of the 1960s was not a matter of *if*, but rather *when*.

4 THE RECEPTION IN THE UNITED STATES: THE FIFTIES AND THE SIXTIES

There were several events which helped the Beat writers enter the spotlight of the nation and make the term Beat Generation a part of the vernacular. Still, two events tower above the others in their importance: the obscenity trial concerning *Howl and Other poems* in 1957 and Gilbert Millstein's rave review of Kerouac's *On the Road* for *The New York Times* in the same year. The latter not only launched Kerouac into stardom, but also started the media craze surrounding the Beats; a craze which lasted for several years and significantly tarnished the public's view of the Beats. This frequently led outright to dismissive articles, such as the one J. Donald Adams wrote in 1958: "To my possibly tone-deaf ears, the group of San Francisco writers who proclaim themselves the 'Beat Generation' have, by the omission of a letter, misnamed themselves. It seems to me the proper word is 'bleat'" (2). What is more, one of the results of the media coverage was the disappearance of the division between "the Beat Generation" as a small group of writers – Ginsberg, Kerouac, Corso, and others – and "the Beat Generation" as a term in popular media for rebellious youth. The blurring of the lines between the two eventually turned out to be extremely detrimental to Beat artists, as the acts of people from their generation became identified with the acts of the Beats themselves, which then in an endless loop again reinforced society's preconceptions of a whole generation. As Challis notes, most of the commentary after the Beats' breakthrough into the public consciousness "has more often been remarkable for misinterpretation or malice than for constructive analysis" (10).

Jack Kerouac was the most prolific of the Beats during this period, publishing over a dozen novels and several poetry collections. Despite being best known for *On the Road*, he had published his first novel, *The Town and the City*, in 1950, that is two years before John Clellon Holmes popularized the term "the Beat Generation."

As a result, the reviewers approached the novel in a different manner than Kerouac's other novels. Granted, *The Town and the City* is written in a more conventional manner than Kerouac's other novels; nevertheless, in terms of content – providing a novelized account of a certain period of Kerouac's life – it sets the template for Kerouac's oeuvre as a whole. Since they cannot comment on the Beat Generation phenomenon, these reviews are invaluable in addressing the role of popular media in the reception of the Beats.

For example, Charles Poore's review of the novel for *The New York Times* refers to the author as "Mr. Kerouac," something that would become rather rare following the publication of *On the Road*, and describes him as "a brilliantly promising young novelist of 28" (25). Unlike a substantial portion of later reviewers, Poore clearly focuses on Kerouac's writing itself rather than what it might represent. While Poore addresses the shortcomings of Kerouac's prose, he ultimately recommends the novel: "[Kerouac] has almost no faults of spiritless omission, many faults of exuberant commission, and a magnificent grasp of the disorderly splendor and squalor of existence."[13] Another positive review is written by Kenneth Rockwell and titled "First Novel Pictures Great, Tragic America." Rockwell considers Kerouac "the answer to a book reviewer's prayer, especially if the reviewer is over-tired of the psychopathic element that seems to be dominant in American fiction" (8). Importantly, while praising the novel for its style, a certain set of values that Rockwell represents and that he, perhaps unconsciously, defends can be found in the review. First of all, the reviewer applauds the novel for its sermon-like qualities and the way it indirectly "preaches against the evil," namely city life**,** which the novel portrays as "the final rottenness of our culture" and "a contemporary Inferno" (8, 9). Furthermore, Rockwell adds the following with an easy-to-trace air of moral superiority: "There is nothing in [the novel] that is *nasty*—no detailed bedroom scenes to *titillate the bestial*" (9, emphasis mine).

For Rockwell, Kerouac's first novel represents a criticism of contemporary society, yet it is a criticism that is still within the bounds of the rules set by the said society, whether through its content or its style. But a careful observation shows that even then Kerouac's writing bordered a bit too much on what the public had difficulties accepting. One such case is John Brooks's review for the Sunday edition of *The New York Times Book Review*. Describing the novel as portraying the slow decline of a Massachusetts family "by the recent war, the forces of modern life and the passage of time," he compliments the novel as a "rough diamond," but also criticizes it for providing an "exaggerated" portrayal of New York City (199). As Ellis Amburn then points out, it is likely that Brooks found the novel's contents unbelievable simply because he had "never met anyone like Ginsberg,

13 Notably, the review features a publicity photo of Kerouac in a suit and tie, which further contributes to the "non-Beat" portrayal of the novel**.**

Huncke, and Kammerer" (150). Even Kerouac's first novel, while more traditional in its prose than his subsequent work, still proved challenging to its reviewers.

The most influential review of a Beat Generation work is undoubtedly Gilbert Millstein's enthusiastic support for *On the Road*. Calling the novel's publication "a notable occasion" and the novel itself "a major novel," Millstein's unconditional embrace of the text is important not only for the sudden exposure that Kerouac and other Beats gained, but also for its effort to define what the Beat Generation is and what the critical responses to the text might be (27). Millstein predicts both condescension on the part of academia and of "official" avant-garde critics as well as a superficial approach to the novel that describes it as merely "absorbing" or "intriguing" (27). "But the fact is," Millstein continues, "that *On the Road* is the most beautifully executed, the clearest and the most important utterance yet made by the generation Kerouac himself named years ago as 'beat,' and whose principal avatar he is." Another aspect of the review that sets it apart from the others is the way Millstein defines and contextualizes for readers what the Beat Generation might stand for, as Millstein tries to define the Beat Generation without immediately dismissing it. "The Beat Generation," he explains, "was born disillusioned; it takes for granted the imminence of war, the barrenness of politics and the hostility of the rest of society (27)." The Beat Generation is further defined by "the frenzied pursuit of every possible sensory impression," yet "these excesses are made to serve a spiritual purpose, the purpose of an affirmation still unfocused, still to be defined, unsystematic."

Despite Millstein's recommendation, the novel generally garnered mixed reviews. Still, these reviews generally avoided the topic of the Beat Generation in favor of a more balanced discussion. For instance, David Dempsey's review of the novel describes it as an experimental fiction originating from the current bohemia in the USA. Pointing out the novel's "morally neutral point of view" and eccentric characters, Dempsey claims that Kerouac's success lies in the recent tradition in American literature to focus on outcasts and off-beat characters rather than the average. As he puts it, "Kerouac has written an enormously readable and entertaining book but one reads it in the same mood that he might visit a sideshow – the freaks are fascinating although they are hardly part of our lives" (3). The novel's protagonist Dean Moriarty, with his restlessness and interest in women or smoking marijuana, is "Mr. Kerouac's answer to the age of anxiety – and one of the author's real accomplishments is to make him both agreeable and sympathetic." Yet the novel is not without its faults. While it offers "great, raw slices of America," it lacks character development and an overarching plot in general. "The non sequiturs of the beat generation," Dempsey further elaborates, "become the author's own plotless and themeless technique—having absolved his characters of all responsibility, he can absolve himself of the writer's customary attention to motivation and credibility."

Similar criticism was leveled in 1968 at *Vanity of Duluoz*. For instance, Peter Sourian's rather long review focuses on the way Kerouac tells the story. Sourian argues that while Kerouac is not without talent, the Beat makes the wrong decision to focus the novel around his alter ego rather than on several of the interesting characters making an appearance throughout the novel. This leads Kerouac to make a basic mistake in storytelling: since the novel revolves around him, he can only refer to interesting events rather portray them directly. In other words, Kerouac is *telling* rather than *showing*, which then leads him to examine "the petty circumstances of his own life and on the image of himself which he finds most entrancing" rather than some of the more interesting plots sketched out in the text (Sourian). For Sourian, the novel simply does not offer anything new. These objections to Kerouac's style can be found in another review of the same novel. Published anonymously in *Time*, it starts with the following lament: "How in the name of all the past and present editors of the *Partisan Review* did Jack Kerouac, cult leader of post-World War II intellectual vagrants, ever attain standing as a member (let alone chieftain) of the avant-garde?" ("Sanity of Kerouac" 96). Comparing Kerouac unfavorably to Norman Mailer, the review claims the Beat "lacks the verbal talent to match his passionate commitment to the truth in himself." In addition, the review complains that Kerouac's signature stylistic features – long sentences, the use of dashes instead of periods, the improvisational nature of the writing – have long overstayed their welcome.

Yet what some critics saw as flaws, others saw in a more favorable light. The topic of the inner search for the self and its constant redefinition is what leads Warren Tallman to consider Kerouac's writing style being closer to the "American grain" than that of any other writer since Fitzgerald (Tallman 229). The search for life itself in America is then the ultimate point of Kerouac's writing, and it is Kerouac's language which embodies his message of restless search for ever-elusive happiness. Similarly, Henry Miller in the preface to *The Subterraneans* hails Kerouac for doing "something to our immaculate prose from which it may never recover. A passionate lover of language, he knows how to use it" (230). Importantly, Miller does not forget to establish Kerouac as a writer of a considerable social impact: "We say that the poet, or genius, is always ahead of his time. True, but only because he's so thoroughly *of* his time." Harriet Frye's review of *The Dharma Bums* shows a similar approach; on the one hand, the novel is "highly readable because it is vigorous and exuberant"; on the other hand, "[t]hose of us settled in our houses with white kitchens and TV read it and say 'So that is what the restless young people are experiencing today'" (12).

Harriet Frye's second comment on *The Dharma Bums* is representative of a common approach to Beats and especially Kerouac: commenting mostly on the social or moral aspects of a Beat text. For example, George Davenport's review of Kerouac's *Big Sur* – "[one has] to wonder if one of the more puzzling hal-

lucinations of *Beatnikismus* isn't the assumption that its private lives and private language are a matter of general interest and universal concern" (325) – might be seen as another critique of Kerouac's stylistic choices. Yet the comment actually emphasizes existing standards of behavior, accepted opinion, or "common decency"; that is the aspects of life in 1940s and 1950s America which the Beats refused. John Brook's comment on the unrealistic portrayal of New York City or even Millstein's discussion of Kerouac as representative of the Beat Generation heighten the social aspect of their writing, i.e. Beats as a movement or representative of a segment of the American population. Granted, the Beat Generation authors do represent social changes by virtue of refusing the values of contemporary society. However, that is not the only thing the Beats symbolize, yet that is precisely the aspect to which they had been frequently reduced.

4.1 The Beat Generation as a Subculture in the Public Image

Yet why was the Beat Generation so frequently dragged through the press? One of the explanations is tied to the ambiguity of the term "the Beat Generation" itself. As the fame of the Beats grew, so did their alleged association with youth violence or juvenile delinquency. Catherine Nash points out that the Beats have been understood to represent various things: a literary movement, a media creation, and an exploitative as well as exploitable marketing strategy (54). Yet as Nash further explains, several things about the relationship between the Beats and the 1950s are clear: firstly, a great deal of public attention had been paid to them during the period; secondly, although Beat writers pointed out the importance of individualism, the Beats were regarded by the media as an organized social group; and lastly, the focus on individualism of many of the authors was considered a "very real threat" to the accepted postwar social norms best exemplified by middle-class suburbia. The Beats have often been thought of not only as writers of literature, but more importantly as stand-ins for a whole segment of the population and as writers representing a certain set of values and attitudes which were often the very opposite of the generally accepted social norms. Ultimately, the Beats were frequently understood – and also *made* by the media to be understood – *only* as a social phenomenon, and this portrayal in turn shaped their reception, criticism, and their overall image. These reactions also show one more thing: using de Saussure's terminology, the social aspect of the Beats is a substantial part of the linguistic sign "the Beat Generation."

The Beats certainly piqued the interest of the general public and the common misuse of the term "Beat" as the equivalent of "hip" or "hipster" further blurred the lines between the Beat Generation as writers and the jazz-inspired hipsters, as opposed to the "squares." For instance, Paul O'Neil in his sensationalist treatment

reports that "[b]y their very nature and appearance, Beats make cops nervous and property owners indignant" (245). This, however, did not stop tourists from going to the "hip" neighborhoods of Greenwich Village just to stare at the locals (qtd. in Belletto 5). Crowds also gathered in North Beach in order to see the Beat phenomenon, which further raised the interest of the press; as Hartlaub notes, the resulting newspaper articles did not necessarily disparage its subject matter, but nevertheless still treated it in a sensational manner.

Importantly, this stereotypical representation was enabled through the invention of the derisive term "beatnik." The term is a portmanteau of the words "Beat" and "Sputnik," the first artificial satellite launched by the Soviets in 1957, and was first used by the columnist Herb Caen of the *San Francisco Chronicle* (Parkinson 276). As a result, the term not only indicates a certain otherness of the Beats, but also suggests that the Beats are communists and therefore represent un-American values. In addition, the term also indicates that the public frequently made no difference between Beat authors and young people who displayed certain Beat behavior in clothing, musical taste, or the use of marijuana.

For instance, in late February 1960 a 15-year-old Margaret writes to "Dorothy Dix," a column answering readers' inquiries sent by mail to *The Evening Standard*, and asks about the Beat Generation. Nevertheless, the anonymous columnist answers by characterizing the common beatnik stereotype, explaining that they "are mixed-up baffled kids who gripe against modern life as expressed by what they term our materialistic philosophy. They withdraw from life, create their own environment among other Bohemian Beatniks with defeatist ideas and in consequence do little to remedy the faults they complain about" ("Dorothy Dix"). The columnist continues by explaining that hipsters are beatniks with slight artistic talent, thus further proving the ever-present confusion over the terminology.[14] Another article from the same newspaper, this time written by a faux-beatnik, titled "Beatnik in English", is preceded by the following Editor's note: "For anyone who doesn't yet know this, a beatnik is a person who has forsaken all civilization as we know it. He expresses his distaste for humanity by writing unprintable poetry, by dressing like something from outer space, and by using a version of the English language that only a fellow 'sufferer' could use" (Beatnik). The image of a beatnik

14 This short article eventually led to a rather humorous mix-up. The column "Dorothy Dix: Thunder on Beatnik Front" from a later issue contains several letters from readers outraged by the simplification of the beatnik definition. Nevertheless, one of the readers was rather confused by the columnist's use of "Bohemian" and wrote the following: "Listen lady! You recently referred to the beat generation as 'Bohemian beatniks with defeatist ideas.' Well, I've had just about all I can take! My mother is all-Bohemian and I'm half Bohemian. Why should a fine, upstanding people like Bohemians be classed with hipsters, beatniks, rebels and Greenwich Village drones? Why knock a nationality like the Bohemian? It's crummy columnists like you who really stir my Bohemian blood. You've just lost an ardent fan." While the columnist addresses the reader's confusion, this also show the public was generally rather uninformed in this area.

as a barbaric individual spouting nonsensical poetry had then been codified by early 1960, and as a term invoking anti-social and dangerous attitudes had a lasting impression: concluding his 1965 manifesto on the dangers of The Beatles, Noebel rallies the readers to "make sure four mop-headed anti-Christ beatniks don't destroy our children's emotional and mental ability and ultimately destroy our nation as Plato warned in his *Republic*" (15).

At the end of the 1950s, when the term was still very recent, various industries tried to cash in the public's curiosity about the Beats. For instance, the front cover of the July 1959 issue of *Playboy* advertises the "Beat Playmate" Yvette Vickers, and the centerfold includes various Beat paraphernalia such as various jazz LPs ("Playboy's Beat Playmate").[15] The illicitness of the Beats made the term quite popular in the erotica and pornography market; one of the titles in the Evening Reader series by Greenleaf Classics, a publisher of pornographic fiction, is *Beatnik Wanton*, with the tag line being "She lusted in sin orgies and reefer brawls!"[16] Nevertheless, a more visible presence of the Beats – or rather beatniks – is found in the film industry. Hollywood and other movie manufacturers, described by Sterritt as "self-designated safekeepers of consensus, classicism, and common sense" (140), certainly saw the Beats as an opportunity to produce movies in order to satisfy the public's curiosity and at the same time create a certain image that would be in line with the popular opinion of the Beats. The film industry's response is, as Sterritt continues, a valuable example of the motion-picture establishment's mobilization and subsequent containment of the new "ideological foe" through the way it dealt with elements associated with the Beats such as jazz, drugs, coffee houses, avant-garde art and poetry, or the relaxation of sexual and racial taboos. The movies resulting from the sudden boom of interest in Beats generally tried to "defuse potential interest in Beat lifestyles by mocking, parodying, or misrepresenting them," taking a stand against possible "alternatives to official thought, escape routes from socioeconomic conformity, and pathways toward the precarious pleasures of creative spontaneity rather than the engulfing security of repetition and routine" (141).

There are numerous movies that contain Beat elements, such as the 1957 musical *Funny Face* featuring Fred Astaire and Audrey Hepburn or Roger Corman's 1959 *A Bucket of Blood*. Nevertheless, there are two MGM-produced movies that had an explicit Beat focus: the 1959 movie *The Beat Generation* and *The Subterraneans*, an adaptation of Kerouac's novel of the same name released a year later. However, these were "beatnik" rather than "Beat" movies: exploitative pieces that

15 It should also be noted that this issue features several texts from Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Corso; in addition, the "Beat playmate" barely resembles the popular stereotype of a beatnik woman. Still, the issue advertised the content with "Beat Poems by Top Beatniks," thus again showing the frequent use of the derogatory term.

16 Other Evening Reader titles are *Flesh Den*, *Alumnus of Sin*, or *Operation: Lust*.

tried to cash in on the popularity of the Beat Generation movement. This sensationalist approach to the Beats is already evoked by the tag lines of the two movies. The tagline for *The Beat Generation* is "Behind the weird 'way-out' world of the Beatniks!" and the one for *The Subterraneans* says "Love among the new Bohemians." Much can be learned about the contemporary portrayal of the Beats by analyzing these beatnik films in further detail. For example, *The Beat Generation* was produced by Albert Zugsmith, and just briefly looking at his oeuvre gives an accurate impression of his chosen approach to the material. Zugsmith's exploitation films are very blatant in their shock tactics. His 1960 film *Sex Kittens Go to College* has the tagline "You never saw a student body like this!" and its uncensored version featuring striptease dances was shown in adult movie theaters. Zugsmith's other films also include the 1962 adaptation of Thomas De Quincey's novel *Confessions of an Opium Eater*, starring Vincent Price as Quincey, or *Fanny Hill* (1964), an adaptation of the controversial 1748 John Cleland novel of the same name. While Zugsmith had produced a few serious motion pictures earlier in his career, for example the 1958 Orson Wells's film *Touch of Evil*, most of his work is firmly exploitative in nature and usually features the sex symbol Mamie Van Doren; *The Beat Generation* is no exception in this regard.

The plot of *The Beat Generation* starts with Louise Armstrong performing a song with clearly anti-Beat lyrics: "You don't have much ambition / and are aimless and depressed / you think you're really with it / but you're missing all the best." This serves as a reminder that the filmmakers aimed at reassuring and entertaining their audience rather than providing a thorough investigation of the phenomenon (Sterritt 146). Eventually, it turns out that the Beat Generation is not the prime focus of the movie, but it is rather an average crime thriller about a serial rapist nicknamed "The Aspiring Kid." Nevertheless, the main villain is a beatnik, therefore emphasizing and further reinforcing popular feelings of weirdness and dangerousness toward the Beats (147). In other words, the film helped spread the view of the Beats as dangerous criminals condoning violence.

Yet Zugsmith's film was hardly the only one which tried to capitalize on the public's interest in the Beat Generation. Other Beat-inspired films include *Beat Girl* (1960), also known as *Wild for Kicks*, with its sensationalist tagline being "My mother was a stripper… I want to be a stripper too!", or *The Beatniks* (1960), which professed to divulge to the audience "the ultimate secrets of the beat generation!" These films have one thing in common: while they profess to portray the Beat Generation, they are in fact shallow crime thrillers exploiting the topic of the Beats for financial gain. Importantly, these films frequently draw inspiration from the juvenile delinquency films of the decade such as *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), albeit adapted to a Beat-inspired – or rather beatnik – setting. As a result, the promotional poster for *The Beatniks* shows a lurid image of a young man with a vicious smirk holding a gun to the temple of a disheveled young woman.

While extreme and explicit in its imagery, this is merely a logical continuation of the sensationalist trend set in cinema by *Blackboard Jungle* or Marlon Brando's *The Wild One* (1953). After all, the 1955 film was promoted as portraying "modern savagery" and the high-schoolers as "teenage savages" ("Blackboard Jungle"). However, violence is not the only link between the juvenile delinquency films of the decade and the "beatsploitation" films. For instance, when the protagonist of *Blackboard Jungle* introduces himself to the classroom as Dadier, the students quickly nickname him "Daddy-O", the hipster slang for "dude" or "man"; unsurprisingly, *Daddy-O* is also the title of a 1959 film with the tagline "Meet the 'Beat'! Daring to Live … Daring to Love."[17] Finally beatniks are not only featured as the protagonists in such exploitation films; frequently, a beatnik setting is used as the background for actual crime. *The Rebel Set* (1959), a film about an armored car robbery, features a poetry reading in a beatnik café. Accompanied by a jazz band, the local poet exclaims: "This poem is a piece of baggage, a hatbox, it has no content, the brain is missing!"

As a result, rather than the Beats, these films featured their parodic versions. Since they frequently drew from the established genre of juvenile delinquency films or used beatnik elements such as poetry readings in cafes as the setting for their crime plots, these films helped associate the Beats with juvenile delinquency and violence, which is true even when a beatnik was not the actual perpetrator of the crime. While none of these films truly aspire to be balanced in their representation of the Beat Generation, shortly after *On the Road* was published there was a large likelihood of the novel being adapted with Kerouac's input. As Kerouac writes in an October, 1957 letter to Neal Cassady, Paramount and Warner Bros. apparently had plans to shoot the movie with the possibility of Marlon Brando starring, and fought over the script (*Letters* 83). Earlier in the letter, Kerouac mentions that Warner Bros. opted to purchase the rights to the novel for $110,000, but Kerouac's agent refused the offer because he believed better ones would soon be available (82). In a July 1958 letter to a friend Kerouac mentions that the Hollywood produced Jerry Wald was "just about to buy it for 20th Century when we sold it" to Tri-Way Productions (156). While the offer from Tri-Way was substantially smaller than those from major studios, Kerouac opted for the smaller studio either because of a larger share of the profits or more direct input on the film; however, the film never materialized, as Tri-Way experienced financial difficulties and was unable to finish the film (Geis 301). Ultimately, Kerouac did not appear to regret that a movie adaptation starring Marlon Brando was not made (Geis 305). As Kerouac later put it, he felt that *On the Road* was already too close in the public eye to the violence of *The Wild One's* "hoodlum jacket thing" (*Letters* 330). In the end, the only exception to the sensationalist portrayal of the Beats in the tradition

17 As usual, the prime focus of the film was crime, this time murder and drug smuggling.

of juvenile delinquency movies is the short film *Pull My Daisy* (1959), which was an adaptation of Kerouac's play *The Beat Generation* and actually starred some of the Beats such as Ginsberg or Corso.

While it frequently portrayed the Beats as dangerous individuals, the beatnik stereotype also commonly ridiculed the phenomenon, thus creating unthreatening caricatures. This is best symbolized by the character Maynard G. Krebs, the stereotypical, though lovable beatnik sidekick to Dobie in the popular sitcom *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis* (1959–1963). Krebs, with his goatee, unkempt clothes, and nonsensical poetry, embodied the popular stereotype of the beatnik at that time which, as some argue, represented the Beats in a similar light to that in which Stepin Fetchit portrayed African Americans (Womack 17). Various newspaper ads promoting beatnik paraphernalia further attest to the popularity of the beatnik stereotype. One was able to rent "genuine" beatniks for private parties, purchase beatnik berets, or order a whole beatnik costume, goatee included.[18] Even if the product or service advertised was not directly Beat-related, the use of Beat imagery as a way to promote a certain message was not uncommon. For instance, the Hat Corporation of America ran an advertisement in *Life* magazine in 1961, which featured a beatnik "in a characteristically insouciant slouch" (Frank 209). The ad's line – "There are some men a hat won't help" – explains that wearing a hat makes one better suited for climbing the corporate ladder; as the ad further explains, hats "can make the rough, competitive road between you and the top a little easier to travel" (qtd. in Frank 209). As Frank quickly adds, beatniks were at that time "figures of consumer horror," and therefore unsuitable for providing any models of behavior to follow.

Portraying the Beats as juvenile delinquents or docile and nonsensical beatniks was one way of curtailing the social critique the Beats might inspire. Yet some of the more far-reaching representations were significantly more nuanced. For instance, Kerouac's publicity photo which appeared on the *On the Road* cover was significantly altered by the majority of newspapers. The original photograph features Kerouac wearing a crucifix; importantly, the cross was edited out by most publications (Nash 58). As Kerouac recalls, *The New York Times* was the only publication which included the crucifix in the photo ("Origins" 69).[19] This tactic was not limited to newspapers or popular magazines, nor was it the only method of

18 A scene in which a street vendor is selling genuine beatnik apparel as a popular party costume appears in the 1980 film *Heart Beat* starring Nick Nolte and Sissy Spacek as Neal Cassady and Carolyn Cassady, respectively.

19 A comparison of the photo used in *The New York Times* and the one without the crucifix shows that original photo was cropped so that the crucifix was not visible. Interestingly, while they kept the crucifix, *The New York Times* decided to edit Kerouac's slightly disheveled hair. View the following links for comparison: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/29873672@N02/3681361217/>.
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/29873672@N02/3681370693/>.

compounding the existing sensationalist treatment. Not only does the 1959 Signet Book edition of Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* use the cropped version of the photo on its back cover, but the publisher's *peritext* on the cover also shows the general proclivity of paperback editions of Kerouac's novels to stereotype the Beats as juvenile delinquents at worst or as scandalous Bohemians roaming aimlessly at best. While the novel's back cover advertises the novel as emerging "[f]rom the pagan depths of Frisco's Bohemian bars," its front cover describes it as "[t]he sensational bestseller about two reckless wanderers out to scale the heights of life … and love." The publisher's sensationalist language only accentuates the extent to which public discourse was rife with stereotypical portrayals of the Beats and usually focused on superficialities or clear misrepresentations rather than trying to pay attention to their literary work or their ideas. Ultimately, the word "Beat" was taken over and reinterpreted by critics and media in such a way that Kerouac stopped using the term in the mid-1960s.

The extent to which the reputation of the Beat Generation was tarnished is further portrayed by the meeting that took place in a New York apartment on 26 January 1961. On that day a small group of writers, including James Baldwin, Norman Mailer, Susan Sontag, and Ted Joans, met to discuss the end of the Beat Generation (Wilentz). As Wilentz further explains, "most of the writers had gathered to bury what was left of a movement that they believed had been thoroughly co-opted by the commercial mainstream. What had begun as an iconoclastic literary style, whether one approved of it or not, had become, the detractors said, just another fad, a subject fit for television comedies." Nevertheless, while the label "Beat" had become corrupted, the impact the Beats had in the 1960s cannot be ignored. Their influence on music, for instance, is well documented. Ginsberg's relationship with Dylan has been already mentioned. Similarly, Burroughs was featured on the cover of The Beatles' album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* and, after two controversies in the United Kingdom, was considered by artists such as Paul McCartney or Mick Jagger as a sort of underground icon (Baker 168).[20] Outside of influence on specific artists, the presence of the Beats can be felt, for example, in advertisement strategies of the late 1960s. While the beatnik was still a common target of disapproval at the beginning of the 1960s, in 1967 rebellious attitudes had become so commonplace that "the rebel had become a paragon of consumer virtue" (Frank 209). Gradually, conformity and convention had become undesirable in the West; conversely, defiance toward rules and traditions was not only tolerable, but also the ideal which should be reached, and therefore also heralded in advertisements (209–11). While the label had been discarded, the ethos of the Beats managed to thrive in the 1960s in less direct ways. Protesting

20 The two controversies were Burroughs's attendance at the International Literary Festival at the Edinburgh Festival in 1962 and the discussion following a negative review of Naked Lunch excerpts in the Times Literary Supplement. For more information, see Baker 140–41.

the norms and established forms of behavior became so commonplace that it had become co-opted into the mainstream. This would not be the case if it were not for the Beats; without them, the counterculture of the sixties, which profoundly changed American society, would not have existed.

4.2 The Beat Generation as Enabling Social Commentary

Since the terms Beats, beatniks, and juvenile delinquents were in many media outlets used interchangeably, it makes sense that such portrayals led to discussions on the Beats' effects on society even outside reviews of a particular Beat text. For instance, Gene Feldman and Max Gartenberg published their anthology *The Beat Generation and the Angry Young Men* in 1958, which discussed the two literary movements and their refusal of social norms. They read the Beat Generation and the Angry Young Men as "the new barbarians" who are cut off from values spreading the false image of a satisfying lifestyle, and as a result refuse to be enslaved to the illusions they know to be untrue (9–10). Feldman and Gartenberg then continue by defining both the Beat Generation and the Angry Young Men as "social phenomena which have found increasing literary expression" (10). This definition has far-reaching implications. The Beats, in other words, are a social phenomenon first, and their work as artists is secondary. Feldman and Gartenberg also use the lives of the Beats rather than their writing to discuss wider social issues, and this approach is reflected in the texts they chose to anthologize; as Steven Belletto notes, Feldman and Gartenberg chose "the more lurid or outré aspects of bohemian living (Burroughs on heroin use, Kerouac on Times Square, [Carl] Solomon on life in a psychiatric asylum, and so on)" ("Introduction" 8). While such a reading is understandable, Belletto adds, it also exemplifies the critical approach to the Beats common in the period, which virtually reduced the Beats to an excuse to discuss society as a whole.

Ultimately, the terms "beat" and "the Beat Generation" came to symbolize something more than what a term describing a close circle of friends and a loose group of artists could ever symbolize – a social phenomenon. The understanding that a substantial number of responses to the Beats was made in terms of social commentary rather than the quality of their writing then explains reviews such as Victor R. Yanitelli's critique of Kerouac's *Desolation Angels*. Written in 1965, the review claims the Beat Generation "passé" and that it is the reviewed novel which proves it (90). The text further continues as a social commentary rather than a review of literature:

> Newer, more violent voices are making themselves heard, shouting them down. Younger elbows seem to be prodding them aside just as they, the beat ones, ruthlessly elbowed out their predecessors. There is a sad historical irony verified in the beat generation's experience, namely, that as the brash splendor of their loudness begins to fade, they find themselves pasted with the same labels they once scornfully used for the discards they were supplanting.

For Yanitelli, the Beats were important only for their role in relation to society as a whole, not for their work. Such reading ultimately leads Yanitelli to argue that the novel is "a testament to the dying, if not the already dead," the dead being the Beats as a social movement of note (91). A similar attitude is echoed in Robert Mazzocco's evaluation of the same novel for *The New York Review*. Dubbed by the reviewer as "the first, and certainly the best, of our visionary L'il Abners," Kerouac was the first "to set down the sound of a particular generation, and the first to 'put down' the institutional values of the fifties, the fringe benefits and the swimming pool in the backyard" (8). These sentiments were the main point, if not the only point, of many reviews in magazines and newspapers. Adding to the discussion, the academic John Ciardi complains of "juvenile delinquency" in the novels that leads to the blood and violence of street gangs, while Paul O'Neil, reporting on the Beat Generation for *Life* magazine, complains of the passivity and "childish rage" of the Beats ("Epitaph" 257; 246). According to Ciardi, the Beats were directly responsible for the juvenile delinquency of the period, and he sees the movement as a whole promoting dangerous anti-social behavior.

The sociological approach was not limited to the detractors of the Beats; many of their supporters relied on bringing up morality or social issues in their defense of the Beats. For example, Bruce Cook, one of the earliest Beat supporters, aligns the Beats with a positive understanding of the act of protesting, pointing out that the fundamental meaning of the word "protest" is to "witness for" something or to make an affirmation of an idea or a cause (22). For Cook, the Beats test one's strength against the community and provide the image of America that could exist in the future; while critical, these acts are in Cook's reading also essentially American (23). Yet here it should be mentioned that the Beats were to a degree forced to play such a role. After all, one of the breakthroughs made by the Beats into the public consciousness was the obscenity trial of *Howl*, which had to defend the right of Ginsberg's poetry to even exist. When Lawrence Ferlinghetti discusses the initial reception of Ginsberg's *Howl*, he mentions that the "critical support for *Howl* (*or the protest against censorship on principle*) was enormous" ("Horn on *Howl*" 127, emphasis mine). Ferlinghetti's mention of the protest against censorship hints at the different readings of the Beats. Due to the *Howl* and *Naked Lunch* trials, the Beats were often viewed as challengers of censorship practices. Naturally, the Beats were opposed to censorship simply because it affected their work

as artists; in addition, they did protest many of the social norms of their time, thus validating an analysis of their social importance. Yet by stressing their part in refusing the principles of censorship they could be supported by anyone also protesting censorship who might otherwise find their works unappealing. Overall, the censorship trials signify two things: not only were they supported – and therefore used – by others purely on the grounds of a fight against censorship, but the very existence of the Beat Generation has been politicized by the censorship trials of their work. This in turn further emphasizes the social aspect of the Beats, and thus further contributes to readings favoring a discussion of the Beat Generation as a social phenomenon.

The social importance of Beat literature, therefore, was a topic present from the very outset of the emergence of the Beats into public discourse. After all, it was also the focus of Judge Clayton Horn's verdict on *Howl*. The verdict states the following:

> 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 of 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. (qtd. in Ferlinghetti, "Horn on *Howl*" 134)

As the verdict shows, the social commentary made through the works of the Beats was an important part of the initial responses to the Beat Generation. Judge Horn's verdict thus exemplifies the understanding of the Beats as a social phenomenon, which in turn initiated the custom of expressing one's beliefs about the social attitudes the Beats represented rather than commenting on the writing itself. The reduction of the Beats to a social phenomenon is brought up in John P. Sisk's "Beatniks and Tradition." Although Sisk is clearly dismissive of the Beats – he weighs the idea that "Beat literature may turn out to be an ephemeral oddity that fifty years from now exists only for desperate Ph.D. candidates" (194) – he emphasizes that criticizing the Beats for representing certain values is not a valid approach to their writing. Instead, he explores the Beat Generation as a social phenomenon in line with the subversive tradition in American literature. This causes the middle class to view the Beats as destructive because they are frequently the targets of the Beats' revolt. As he puts it, "the important and easily-overlooked fact is that it is in the American grain, and that however we react to it we are reacting to part of ourselves" (194). The subversive tradition, Sisk argues, started with Emerson and Thoreau and moves through such figures as Whitman

or Twain to twentieth century authors like Hemingway or Vidal, and the Beats are simply a new addition to this tradition (195).

Rather than simply responding to the Beats, Sisk instead focuses on addressing the dynamics of responses. He further argues that the writer, a critic of society by nature, is locked in dialectic with the society he writes about (195–196). Importantly, although writers within the subversive tradition criticize society, they are still its members; often the corruption that is present in society is located within the writers as well, thus further heightening their critique of the society and its norms (197). Ultimately, the frequently vicious responses to the Beats or those sharing their views lead to a harsh critique of middle-class values on the one hand and perhaps even harsher critique of the criticizing element on the other. There simply is no middle ground, which further contributes to escalating the situation beyond the point of no return:

> This fear of dissension helps to explain the dearth of popular satire … , but it also helps to explain the extreme attitudes of subversive writers like the Beatniks, who are in a sense forced to bear more than their fair share of the dialectic burden. Society, possibly because of its uneasy conscience, fails to engage itself effectively with such opposition; perhaps it is best to say that it dares not for fear of coming face to face with its deviation from the American Dream. (198)

For Sisk, the Beats are caused by the conformism and consumerism of the era. By focusing on a reading that classifies Beats as belonging to a certain tradition of American writing and therefore being an inherent product of American culture, Sisk uses the Beats to discuss what they are able to say about the society in an increasingly complex world (200). Christine Lindey further elaborates on the relationship between the individualist artist and the public in the 1950s: "The very desire to seek extremes, to reveal taboos, to allow free range to imagination, implies the existence of repression… Artists expressed raw emotions and direct responses to experience at a time when the petit-bourgeois mentality of democratic capitalism stressed vigilant, prudent and measured behavior" (106–107). Under such circumstances, the backlash the Beats faced and the wildly inaccurate portrayal of them was inevitable.

Paul O'Neil has a stance toward the Beats similar to Sisk's. Writing for *Life* magazine, he also does not have a particularly positive view of the Beats. His phrasing and choice of words, such as the rather mocking description of Ginsberg a "the lion of the poetry-reading circuit" or his gleeful way of divulging shocking biographical information about the Beats, are more than revealing. In addition, he seems to be quite inconsistent in his references to the Beats: at times he uses the term to refer to the actual artists, at other times it is a whole segment of America's population.

Nevertheless, calling the Beats "the most curious men of influence the twentieth century has yet produced," O'Neil defends them by deriding their critics for using biographical data in order to judge their literature (235, 242). As he puts it himself, "it is too easy to forget that Poe was a drunk, Coleridge an opium eater and Vincent van Gogh a madman, and that a great deal of the world's art has a disconcerting way of getting produced by very odd types" (242). While he argues that only few of the Beats have real talent, their primary importance lies in their decision to raise voices against "virtually every aspect of current American society" (232). The Beats are "the voice of nonconformity" and, through their embodiment of "nonpolitical radicalism," they are "the only rebellion in town" in the United States of the 1950s (242–43). He claims that while there are others who question the values of fifties America, only they "have actually been moved to reject contemporary society in voicing their quarrel" with the society's materialism or conformity (246). Despite numerous lurid claims, such as that about 80% of the Beats suffer from crippling psychosis, O'Neil ultimately sees the Beats as a necessary product of society: they should be discussed and understood in relation to the zeitgeist of the fifties rather than immediately dismissed as naive or threatening.[21]

While Sisk's or O'Neil's articles try to defend the Beats, they actually further emphasize their social aspect by doing so. For many commentators, the Beats were a conduit for discussing the dynamics of social protest against the values of American society. Published in 1959, Lawrence Lipton's *Holy Barbarians* was a book-length study of the Beats, and its hardcover jacket promoted it as "the complete story of the 'Beats' – that hip, cool frantic generation of new Bohemians who are turning the American scale of values inside out." The work gives off a rather sensationalist impression at first, which is further increased by the cover of its 1962 paperback release. The front cover says, "The first complete inside story of the Beat Generation. Who they are / What they believe / How they live," thus being perfectly in line with other sensationalist treatments of the Beats. The back only adds to such an impression by claiming that the book answers such questions as "[w]hat effect have the 'Beats' had on the American Way of Life?" or "[w]hat are their beliefs regarding sex, jazz, the use of drugs?" While the majority of the book recalls Lipton's various encounters with various Beat or beatnik characters, several essays at the back of the book do contain a few insightful analyses. For instance, Lipton argues that the Beats herald not a new literary school but "a change in the literary use of language itself" and therefore were anticipated by Walt Whitman and Henry Miller (1962, 230). After making several other observations, for example noting the Beats' emphasis on sound rather than mere text,

21 Nevertheless, the article does not shy away from portraying the Beats as beatniks. The photo which accompanies the article is clearly posed and contains many of the elements present in the sensationalized depiction of the Beats; these include using hipster terms in the description of the photo, or refer to stereotypical beatnik fashion such as sandals and leotards.

Lipton counters the approach of his peers to the Beats as a social phenomenon by discussing the bias of academia against the movement. It not only fails to see the antecedents of the Beats such as Rimbaud, Verlaine, or Yeats, but it even perpetuates the stereotype of Beats not valuing learning when the opposite is true (231, 234). Mentioning Ferlinghetti's poem "Constantly Risking Absurdity (#15)," Lipton then offers a reason why academic poets refuse to accept the Beats:

> The poet on the college payroll can risk religious heresy (except in denominational colleges); he can risk subversion (except in state-supported universities); he can even risk outspoken sexuality (if he doesn't publish it too conspicuously); but he can never risk absurdity. In decent society, even among the best-educated people, it is the cardinal sin. It is something that only the disaffiliated poet of the slum can permit himself. Yet it is traditionally one of the high moments of the poetic rite. (241)

According to Lipton, the refusal of the academic poets is due to their inability to step down from their pedestals of dignity and self-respect. It is therefore not only their inability to accept other poetic forms as valid, but also their self-image as serious academic poets that lead to their dismissal of the Beats. In addition, Lipton's text makes one important distinction: it clearly differentiates the Beats, that is the artists of the Beat Generation such as Ginsberg or Corso, from beatniks and hipsters, which is a distinction that a substantial number of contemporary texts did not understand or did not bother to make.

4.3 The Depravity of William S. Burroughs

The public's stance toward William S. Burroughs was slightly different than toward the other Beats. Unlike Kerouac or Ginsberg, he did not legally publish a book-length text in the United States until the beginning of the 1960s: his first novel, *Junky*, was published under a pseudonym while *Naked Lunch*, first published by the Parisian Olympia Press in 1959, was not available in the United States and the United Kingdom.[22] Furthermore, several sections from *Naked Lunch* printed in *Big Table* magazine in 1959 were deemed obscene by the U.S Post Office Department and hundreds of copies of the magazine were seized. This meant two things: first, that Burroughs's writing was essentially out of reach for American readers; second, the public was still able to read *about* Burroughs despite not being able to

22 *Junky* was originally published as *Junkie: Confessions of an Unredeemed Drug Addict* under the pseudonym William Lee. It was published for Ace Books' double-book paperback edition, the other novel being *Narcotic Agent* by Maurice Helbrant. It was marketed as a pulp fiction crime thriller and as such had gained virtually zero attention outside its target audience.

read any of his work. After all, Ginsberg dedicated *Howl* to Burroughs, while the character Old Bull Lee from *On the Road* is Kerouac's fictionalized version of Burroughs. As a result, information about Burroughs was available; however, the way Burroughs was written about significantly shaped the initial reception of his work.

The fact that *Naked Lunch* was originally unavailable in the USA and the UK significantly increased the appeal of the book. As Burroughs's biographer Barry Miles recalls, the original Olympia edition had "uncompromisingly modern, yet somehow sinister cover" in an age of bland book jacket designs; the book's "coolness" was further enhanced by the notice inside the back flap: "Not to be sold in the USA or UK" ("*Naked Lunch*" 114–15). Ownership of *Naked Lunch* thus became a status symbol: "[I]t represented an attitude, a state of mind, the detachment of the cool hipster from the mundane crowd. It was a shorthand way of saying you were cool" (116). The association of Burroughs with obscenity and forbidden fruit was further amplified by the novel's original publishing house, as Olympia Press released either pornographic works or novels which would not be touched by other publishers: famously, Olympia was the first to release Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*. As a result, it was virtually impossible not to associate *Naked Lunch* with the subversive and the forbidden before even reading it.

Another event that further shaped the initial reception was the decision to print the first ten chapters from *Naked Lunch* in *Big Table* magazine. After the magazine was seized due to obscenity charges, several writers and intellectuals leapt to Burroughs's defense.[23] One of them was the English professor and poet John Ciardi, who publicly denounced Burroughs's critics in the influential *Saturday Review* weekly. Ciardi describes Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* as the "writing of an order that may be clearly defended not only as a masterpiece of its own genre, but as a monumentally moral descent into the hell of narcotic addiction" ("Book Burners" 30). "[T]he writing does, to be sure, contain a number of four-letter words," he continues, "but the simple fact is that such obscenities – if obscenities they are – are inseparable from the total fabric and effect of the *moral message*" (emphasis mine). Ciardi's point regarding the moral message is quite important: not only does he claim that the moral aspect of the novel redeems its obscenities, but such a reading also completely ignores the novel's satire which partially was targeted precisely on morality and common decency. More importantly, the defense had some unforeseen consequences. As Meagan Wilson points out, Ciardi's

23 This was not the first controversy surrounding Burroughs: originally, excerpts from *Naked Lunch* along with a short piece by Kerouac and a few others were supposed to be printed in *Chicago Review*, a literary magazine edited by University of Chicago graduate students. Nevertheless, a short *Naked Lunch* excerpt from its fall 1958 issue was judged obscene by a local newspaper. As a result, the magazine was barred by the university from publishing another potentially controversial issue, thus forcing all but one editor to quit the magazine and start *Big Table* with the purpose of publishing the first ten chapters from the novel.

certainly well-meant defense of *Naked Lunch* as a moral book greatly shaped the reception of the novel (101). She further elaborates with the following:

> First, it was the first evaluation of Burroughs's work, introducing the figure of Burroughs to American readers. Second, … the censorship of his text immediately molded readers' ideas of Burroughs, associating him as the author who writes dirty books about taboo subjects such as drugs. And third, Ciardi, a Harvard literature professor and recent translator of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, elevated *Naked Lunch* as a "masterpiece"—a well-respected literary authority had given *Naked Lunch* credibility.

In other words, the first major public defense of the novel not only promoted it as containing controversial content, but also heralded the novel as a major moral achievement, with its moral focus ultimately redeeming the controversial content. For Ciardi, the only way to redeem the content of the novel is to understand it in an autobiographical – and therefore moral – reading. Such a reading in turn further highlighted the image of Burroughs as a writer of depraved images caused by his drug-induced hallucinations long before readers even had a chance to legally read the book in English-speaking countries.

The emphasis on obscenity and graphic content elicited strong reactions from readers, thus again emphasizing Burroughs as a "dirty" writer. Grove Press, the American publisher of the novel, not only expected such a reaction, but also encouraged it. Grove not only had a reputation for publishing literary avant-garde material, especially focusing on European titles, but also was explicitly political in its publishing policies (Wilson 107). Barney Rosset, the owner of the publishing house, was a staunch opponent of literary censorship, having already published several works that were challenged in the courts such as D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* or Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*.[24] Upon its release in 1963, several states took legal action against *Naked Lunch*, resulting in Boston courts declaring the book obscene in 1965, its presiding judge calling *Naked Lunch* "obscene, indecent, and impure … [and] taken as a whole [it] is predominantly prurient, hard-core pornography, and utterly without redeeming social importance" (qtd. in Wilson 111). Upon appeal the Massachusetts Supreme Court declared the novel not obscene one year later; however, reviews for the book were available before the court decision and they either applauded the novel or condemned it, thus further showing the polarizing nature of the book in the popular press (112). Importantly, Grove Press further fanned the controversy surrounding the novel in its promotion, as the advertisements and catalogue descriptions often stressed the work's illicit perception. One such advertisement states in large letters, "*Naked*

24 Grove Press did not avoid publishing controversial non-fiction as well, which it proved in 1965 by publishing *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*.

Lunch ruled 'not obscene' in Boston" and then provides a short excerpt from the court ruling on the "modern American classic" (qtd. in Wilson 118); while proving the novel is not obscene, referring to the obscenity trial further accentuated the novel's controversial nature. Another advertisement campaign for the novel was conducted in the pages of *The New York Times* and lasted from 1966 to 1967. One of the ads invites the readers to "share in the new freedoms that book and magazine publishers are winning in the courts" and "join with a group of like-minded readers in a unique club which keeps you in touch with the best writing of our era" (qtd. in Wilson 117). Importantly, the ad's headline reads "For Adults Only," while the text in the bottom right corner – right above the subscription form – says "Dear Sir: I swear I'm over 21" (qtd. in Wilson 117, 120).

The recurring accentuation of the novel's obscene language and immorality resulted in many reviews emphasizing the novel's reputation as an immoral and subversive text. One such review was Charles Poore's critique in the *The New York Times*. As Wilson points out, one of the subheadings of the review is "Its Content Already Known," suggesting that writing the review is a mere formality (112). In the review, Poore explains that in the novel "the insufferable prig and the insufferable sinner will find a forlorn meeting ground" (31). Although he does comment on the writing style for a moment, a critical analysis of the novel, according to Poore, should focus on two of its elements: "One is the tragic dilemma of the narcotics addict and the manifest failure of society to deal with it effectively… The other is the glaringly gaudy way Mr. Burroughs has chosen to represent his case – using shocking words by the shovelful and concentrating on perverted degeneracy to a flagrant degree." The review simply ends with, "I advise avoiding the book." A similar and even harsher review was published in *Time* magazine. Renaming the Beats as "the Young American Disaffiliates," most of the review is again concerned with Burroughs as a person rather than the novel itself:

> The Burroughs gambit was, until recently, almost unanswerable, because it was almost impossible to track this author down, physically or in print. He was the greyest of grey eminences, a wraith who flickered into occasional visibility in Mexico, Paris or Tangier… [H]e was the legendary "Bull Lee" of *On the Road*; he spent 15 years on junk; he wrote an unprintable book called *Naked Lunch*, which no one had read but which everyone said hit the veins like a jolt of heroin. ("King of the YADS" 98)

The reviewer then tries to unveil the "mystery" of Burroughs by providing additional information about the writer: "[Burroughs] is not only an ex-junkie, but an ex-con and, by accident, a killer. In Mexico, having acquired a wife, he shot her between the eyes playing William Tell with a revolver"; in contrast, information about the novel, apart from a brief summary of the narrative, is sparse. The

reviewer ends with, "the value of [Burroughs's] book is mostly confessional, not literary." British reviewers reacted in a similar fashion, an example being the infamous "Ugh" review in the *Times Literary Supplement* which resulted in a long polemic between numerous correspondents defending or lambasting the novel. The reviewer complains that the "pornographic" scenes of the text are "too uncritically presented, and because the author gives no flicker of disapproval the reader easily takes the 'moral message' the other way" (qtd. in Johnson, "Good Ol' Boy" 50–51).

The impact of the discourse emphasizing the explicit language of the novel was substantial. Upon the novel's release, reviewers of *Naked Lunch* had problems with evaluating the text separately from its history and marketing, both of which identify and further promote the novel as controversially obscene and prohibited (Wilson 115). In addition, using an autobiographical lens was frequently touted as the only way to actually approach the novel, which in turn further emphasized the novel's controversial character. Ultimately, depending on where one stood regarding explicit language and defying literary taboos, Burroughs was either a drug addict who created a drug-fueled text riddled with obscenities and profanities, or a novelist who braved the conventions of literature, thus resisting the conformism of the period. In other words, the way Burroughs and his work were initially interpreted was significantly affected by events outside Burroughs's control.

4.4 The Criticism of Academia

The gatekeepers of poetry were usually recruited either from the ranks of academia or from influential literary magazines and were prone to dismiss any voices calling for change in contemporary approaches to poetry. As Bruce Cook explains, two groups held the monopoly on literary criticism: university scholars following New Criticism, and the group of New York intellectuals known as "the Family" or the "*Partisan Review* crowd" (10). These two groups, Cook continues, "dominated the arena without themselves ever really falling into serious contentions… A sort of polite trust prevailed between the two that was based on overlapping interests and mutual advantage. Outsiders—and there were many of them—spoke wryly of this coalition as the '*Kenyon Review–Partisan Review* axis'" (10–11). The New York Intellectuals included critics Harold Rosenberg, Lionel Trilling, Nathan Glazer, and Alfred Kazin, and writers such as Paul Goodman, the author of *Growing Up Absurd*. These intellectuals adopted the values of the Old Left, yet were wary of any significant social changes, which was the result of experiencing the disappointment of the Stalinist purges after their initial support for Communism. The emergence of the New Left, with their positive stance toward Communism, was then a threat to the Old Left vanguards (Menard). While it was not until the mid-1960s that the New Left, centered around identity issues such as rights for African

Americans or feminism, formed, they were in their ideas the precursors to the movement of the 1960s. As such, these intellectuals and the Beats, as well as other groups such as the San Francisco Renaissance poets or the Black Mountain Review group, could not possibly get along.

The Beats were familiar with these New York intellectuals; after all, both Kerouac and Ginsberg were students at Columbia University. Ginsberg was particularly close to Trilling, who took him under his wing and discussed Ginsberg's own poetry with him, something Ginsberg was afraid to undergo with his own father, an author of run-of-the-mill newspaper poetry. Trilling also repeatedly intervened on Ginsberg's behalf (Kirsch).[25] Yet it was another member of the Family, the up-and-coming Norman Podhoretz, who became a visible figure in the spat between the Beats on the one hand and the intellectuals and academics on the other. Podhoretz ran in similar social circles as Ginsberg: not only he was a fellow Columbia student, but also soon developed a close relationship with Trilling, eventually becoming his protégé (Oppenheimer). This, however, did not stop him from penning "The Know-Nothing Bohemians," possibly the most vitriolic attack on the Beat Generation authors. Naturally, the text appeared in *Partisan Review*.

The text begins by discussing the Beats – "a new group of rebels and Bohemians" – in a rather sensationalist manner that already shows his contempt for the writers (305). Among other things, he comments that the photo of Kerouac featured in Millstein's *On the Road* review shows the writer "unshaven, of course" and is further "topped by an unruly crop of rich black hair falling over his forehead." Claiming that the Beats are unlike the radical bohemians of the 1920s and 1930s, Podhoretz claims that the Beats represent primitivism and anti-civilization attitudes. He then continues by discussing the presence of sex in Beat writings. Sexual behavior unrestricted by conventional moral standards was, according to Podhoretz, one of the defining characteristics of the old Bohemians: "the 'meaning' of Bohemian sex … was at once social and personal, a crucial element in the Bohemian's ideal of civilization" (309). However, its role is sharply different in Beat texts, Podhoretz argues, and it in a way replicates the dynamics of con-

25 As Adam Kirsch enumerates, these scandals were the murder of David Kammerer by Lucien Carr, the "graffiti" finger-painted in the dusty window of Ginsberg's room saying "Fuck the Jews," and finally Ginsberg being the accomplice to Herbert Huncke, who had stored stolen goods in his apartment. Regarding the first, while Ginsberg was not directly involved, he was a close friend of both Carr and Kerouac, to whom Carr ran on the night of the murder for help. Kerouac was later arrested as a material witness. The second incident was Ginsberg's attempt to get the custodian, whom he suspected was anti-Semitic, to properly clean his room; while trivial, the affair caused Ginsberg to withdraw from Columbia for a year. Finally, the final incident occurred after Ginsberg had left Columbia; still, Trilling intervened, thus Ginsberg landed up in a mental hospital rather than in jail where he would have to serve time. Importantly, Ginsberg met Carl Solomon, the addressee of "Howl," while at the New York State Psychiatric Institute. As Kirsch notes, "Howl" would not have been written if it were not for Trilling. For an overview on the relationship between Trilling and Ginsberg, read Kirsch, "Lionel Trilling and Allen Ginsberg: Liberal Father, Radical Son."

sumerism the Beats seem to criticize. Interestingly, Podhoretz's analysis seems to contradict itself under a careful scrutiny. He starts his argument by showing that although homosexual sex does represent freedom from social restrictions and conventions, heterosexual sex is often connected with forming permanent relationships, which can be seen in Kerouac's novels with frequent marriages occurring during the narrative. While concluding that Kerouac's persona in *On the Road*, Sal Paradise, seems to be afraid of sex and sexual performance, he also points out the sexual prowess of the womanizer Dean Moriarty (309–310). Importantly, it does not cross his mind that it might be an intentional contradiction of the text. For Podhoretz, both characters are manifestations of the primitivism and spontaneity – that is "Beatness" – of the writing which in his reading results in shallowness and "an anti-intellectualism so bitter that it makes the ordinary American's hatred of eggheads seem positively benign" (313).

Podhoretz does occasionally have ideas which might have been developed into a more balanced criticism, for example when discussing Kerouac's reliance on real-life events when they seem to be unnecessary for the novel's narrative. Nevertheless, the review eventually turns into a diatribe against the Beat Generation and all that they supposedly represent. Insisting on a strictly autobiographical reading of Kerouac's novels, Podhoretz argues the following: "The hipsters and hipster-lovers of the Beat Generation are rebels, all right, but not against anything so sociological and historical as the middle class or capitalism or even respectability. This is the revolt of the spiritually underprivileged and the crippled of soul" (316). In the end, Podhoretz becomes agitatedly personal, and not only claims that the Beat Generation represents the same "spirit" which inspires "the young savages in leather jackets," but also adds several pathetic (in both senses of the word) stories such as the one about a nine-year-old boy stoned to death, for whose death the Beats are supposed to be responsible (318). Not only are the Beats severely limited in their intellectual capacities, Podhoretz claims, but they are also hoodlums condoning violence and juvenile delinquency. The anti-intellectualism that the Beats in Podhoretz's reading symbolize eventually leads one to "[k]ill the intellectuals who can talk coherently, kill the people who can sit still for five minutes at a time, kill those incomprehensible characters who are capable of getting seriously involved with a woman, a job, a cause" (318). The Beats, the critic argues, then represent a serious threat not only to society's norms but also to society itself; following their lead would then lead to a corrupted and immoral society. Utilizing a moralizing rhetoric, Podhoretz's reading results in an extremely divisive text and the essay clearly shows on which side one should stand. Ultimately, the reader should choose the critic's side, since anyone supporting the Beats is clearly "against intelligence itself" (318).[26]

26 The essay was the last – and certainly the most acerbic – in Podhoretz's series of essays attacking

Diana Trilling's "The Other Night at Columbia: A Report from the Academy" follows in a similar vein. Trilling was one of the "three wives from the English department" that attended the poetry reading featuring Allen Ginsberg and Gregory Corso at Columbia University and a certain "motherly" attitude is present throughout the text (214). Trilling makes clear that certain norms should be followed without being questioned: "[W]hy should I not also defend the expectation that a student at Columbia, even a poet, would do his work, submit it to his teachers through the normal channels of classroom communication, stay out of jail, and then, if things went right, graduate, start publishing, be reviewed, and see what developed, whether he was a success or failure?" (215). This description naturally refers to Allen Ginsberg as it was he who deviated "from respectable standards of behavior" and who therefore should be scorned by readers. The rather subjective tone of the essay is further emphasized by Trilling's discussion of her personal relation to Ginsberg and her view of the attendees at the reading. She describes Ginsberg as a "case": "a gifted and sad case, a guilt-provoking and nuisance case but, above all, a case" (218). The audience was in Trilling's eyes similarly defective, as only few of the women in attendance were pretty and few of the men masculine, though she notes, with some disappointment, that they were clean and did not smell (224). As the essay progresses, her patronizing tone becomes more and more apparent: "[T]hese *were* children, miserable children trying desperately to manage, asking desperately to be taken out of it all; there was nothing one could imagine except to bundle them home and feed them warm milk, promise them they need no longer call for mama and papa" (226).[27] For Trilling, the audience members, despite being adults, are not mature, and the poetry reading she is describing was not an endeavor worth serious consideration. Ginsberg's poetry, with its vivid description of music, drugs, and sex, "can be read simply as an advertisement for fun, for sex, drugs, and rock and roll," which might be the reason why the young audience had enjoyed it while those of Trilling's generation may resent it (Kirsch). Perhaps, Kirsch further adds, the reason behind Trilling's dismissal was seeing the Beats as commodifying radical politics into an apolitical lifestyle. Yet it would be naive to believe that Ginsberg, who professed to Podhoretz that he wanted to completely get rid of middle-class values rather than just reexamine them, was merely playacting (Oppenheimer). Simply put, Trilling was unwilling to

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the Beats. Soon after the essay was published, Ginsberg invited Podhoretz to his flat to discuss with him and Kerouac the esthetics and actual goals of the Beat Generation writers. The result was a heated debate during which neither Ginsberg nor Podhoretz caved in to the other's arguments. After several relentless hours of back-and-forth disagreement, Podhoretz decided to leave when Ginsberg quipped: "We'll get you through your children!" (Oppenheimer).

27 It should be pointed out that Trilling uses the personal "I" throughout the majority of the text, therefore her use of the more general and inclusive "one" hints at the assumption that the reader should agree with her by default.

consider Ginsberg's radical poetics on their own terms, thus considering him and other Beats as poseurs without much to say (Kirsch). This then naturally leads her to conclude that Beat writing and supporters of Beats are adolescents not worthy of serious attention.

Ultimately, Trilling's text comes very closely to representing the "moral majority" of the fifties. Trilling expects Ginsberg and other Beats to follow the same norms and rules that she does, both in an academic setting as well as outside of it. Her identification with academia and what she perceives as good manners is palpable throughout the text. The first can be witnessed in Trilling's claim that Fred Dupee, who gave an introductory speech before the reading itself, was "speaking for the Academy, claiming for it its place in life, and the performers were inevitably captive to his dignity and self-assurance" (226). The capitalization in the word "Academy" is especially telling, since Trilling constantly refers to the Beats as "beats," quotation marks and lowercase "b" included. The second, Trilling's cry for good manners, is evident even more than her staunch defense of academia. Suggesting that the Beats are best ignored "as merely another inevitable, if tasteless," expression of the era's zeitgeist, she explains that "Lion in the Room," a Ginsberg poem dedicated to her husband, was a "decent" poem because it contained no obscenities (222, 228). The way Trilling effectively equates taste with style is another telling point of her critique, which is based on a "moral judgment" of literature and its authors. Trilling expects everyone to follow the set precedents and conventions, Ginsberg and other Beats included. Failing to do so, the Beats cannot command respect in more serious circles such as academia, thus they are logically, in Trilling's account, inferior by default.

For those representing academia, the Beats boiled down to representing a narrow primitivism. This view eventually leads John Ciardi, an early supporter of the Beats, to complain that they do not stand for a true intellectual uprising but rather for the mere search for "kicks" through sex, drug abuse or delinquent behavior ("Epitaph" 257). The theatre critic Robert Brustein, whose dissertation was supervised by Lionel Trilling, published the essay "The Cult of Unthink" shortly after completing his doctorate, and his reading follows the same lines as that of the previously-mentioned academics. In other words, he sees the Beats as supporting violence and general ignorance. Brustein achieves such a reading by comparing the average Beat to Stanley Kowalski of Tennessee William's *A Streetcar Named Desire*: similarly to Marlon Brando's character, they are inarticulate and often turn to violence (50). The Beats are self-contained in their own feelings and "kicks," thus are pseudo-existential as a result; there is no personality to such people, only negation. In effect, the Beats are only conformists who merely pretend they are rebels, but what is more, their self-proclaimed reverence of life is actually a reverence of death, as the search for pleasure will lead them to a "bottomless void" of desires which simply cannot be fulfilled (52–53). Unable to articulate what they

rebel against, the "hipster literati" use the same vocabulary as violent street gangs (54, 56). Soon, it might be more than just vocabulary that they share: "It is not so long a jump from the kick-seeking poet to the kick-seeking adolescent who, sinking his knife into the flesh of his victim, thanked him for the 'experience'" (54). Ultimately, Brustein is able to articulate his and his colleague's sentiment in only a few words: the problem of the Beats is simply their inability to "come to grips with life" (58).

Other critics see the Beats in the context of "teen culture." For instance, James F. Scott argues that the Beats are inherently influenced by society and it is therefore also society which should be questioned (150). Importantly, Scott takes the view of the Beats as a social phenomenon a step further by arguing that they are merely another proof of the general rise of teenage culture in the United States:

> Unfortunately, however, the self-conscious cultivation of juvenility is not restricted to the isolated cadres of Beatdom. In fact, the emergence of an American teen cult is one of the most disturbing events of our generation. Undergirded by popular psychology, exploited by commercial advertising, and dramatized by the public arts, the sentimental enshrinement of adolescent values has come to touch nearly all areas of American life. Not only is the adolescent patronized in the permissive home and the "progressive" school; his attitudes and beliefs now threaten to become normative for the whole adult population. (151–152)

The problem then is not the Beats themselves, but the trend of growing immaturity, of which the Beats are merely a symptom. What is happening, Scott claims, is a general dumbing down of society by lowering the generally-accepted standards to the level of teenagers (153). Consequently, the Beats are simply one of many manifestations of the emerging teen culture; their desire for "kicks" only mirrors the emerging culture of instant gratification, opposition to which is necessary to prevent the impending takeover of the country by a less intelligent and childish generation. American society should take a step back and reevaluate its ideals and tendencies to prevent it becoming a society of children in adult bodies.

Yet why did so many critics portray the Beats as promoting violence? Apart from the popular representations analyzed before, two important events help illuminate the answer to this question. First, in 1957 Norman Mailer published his pamphlet "The White Negro." By providing a romanticized image of African-Americans, the essay strives to explain the recent phenomenon of the "hipster" and the new psychology that the atomic age will require. Mailer argues that the world is at a unique point in its history, as the existence of concentration camps and the development of the atomic bomb makes the unconsciousness of every living person face the idea that one might die at any given moment (Mailer).

This grim *deus ex machina* is in direct contradiction with the teachings of modern industrial society – that one can subject nature and time to its will – thus leading to inevitable anxiety in society. This existential crisis, the need "to live with death as immediate danger," forces everyone to choose: either entertain the psychopath in the self by ignoring the boundaries between the lawful and the criminal or accept the conformity of the "totalitarian tissues of American society." If one chooses the former, Mailer claims, they choose the identity of hipster – an amalgam of the bohemian, the juvenile delinquent, and the Negro, the last of which is in Mailer's account used to continuously living on the sidelines of white society where law does not apply to them, thus being perfectly adapted to the new age. The hipster, or "the white negro," is a philosophical psychopath, and therefore he is not only able to denounce the laws of society and cross the boundary from law into lawlessness, but also establish the inner philosophies from which a post-twentieth century society could spring. And in order to establish the new morality – to do what you want – this society of the future requires new language, the language of hipster talk.

While giving an air of trying to appear more radical than he actually is, Mailer in "The White Negro" actually proposes more than just juvenile individualism. He essentially claims that going back to the barbarian in us is a way to liberate society from "the collective violence of the State." The price to pay – an increase in individual violence – is more than acceptable when humanity gains renewed faith in building a better world. In other words, Mailer claims that the hipster could break the established social order as a way to avoid the mass, systematic violence ultimately represented by the atomic bomb.

Before commenting further on the impact of Mailer's essay, the other impactful event should be discussed as well. In January 1958, the nation was shocked by the murder spree of twenty-year-old Charles Starkweather and his companion, fourteen-year-old Caril Fugate. Overall, eleven people were murdered by the young couple in Wyoming, including Caril's parents, who were against the two seeing each other, and their two-year-old daughter. The modes of killing were also particularly brutal – multiple victims died from a shotgun blast to the head – as was their capture, which involved "a high-speed shoot-out through downtown Douglas" (Wischmann). In the end, Starkweather received the death penalty, while Fugate, whose active role in the murders was disputed, was sentenced to life, although she was paroled eighteen years later.

Since the victims did not fit any profile, the killing spree was beyond the grasp of rationalization: rich or poor, young or old, Starkweather and Fugate did not discriminate in their killings. What is more, this was the first time in America's history that mass murderers were on the loose "in the television age and no one knew where or when [they] might strike next" (Wischmann). Starkweather, wearing a black leather jacket and rimless glasses, glamorized James Dean and thought of himself

"as a rebel without a cause" (Birmingham, "William Burroughs"). Importantly, it was the feeling of being in control which truly fueled Starkweather: "He had money. He had a girl. He had killed and not been bothered by it. It gave him an enormous feeling of power. He now operated outside the laws of man. He felt as if he were invisible, could do just as he pleased, take what he wanted. The law was helpless against him" (qtd. in Birmingham, "William Burroughs"). This feeling of power is, in Mailer's terms, the orgasm which frees the hipster from the constraints and contradictions of society as well as the drive behind the hipster's acts. Importantly, this connection between Starkweather and Mailer is what substantially contributed to society's conception of the Beats as condoning and even promoting violence.

As Mailer in "The White Negro" claims, "the nihilism of Hip proposes as its final tendency that every social restraint and category be removed." The following passage from the essay reveals that such liberation could even lead to murder if deemed necessary:

> It can of course be suggested that it takes little courage for two strong 18-year-old hoodlums, let us say, to beat in the brains of a candy-store keeper, and indeed the act – even by the logic of the psychopath – is not likely to prove very therapeutic, for the victim is not an immediate equal. Still, courage of a sort is necessary, for one murders not only a weak fifty-year-old-man but an institution as well, one violates property, one enters into a new relation with the police and introduces a dangerous element into one's life. The hoodlum is therefore daring the unknown, and no matter how brutal the act, it is not altogether cowardly.

Commenting on the similarities between Mailer's essay and the crimes of Starkweather and Fugate, Birmingham succinctly points out that it appeared "as if Mailer had written Starkweather into existence" ("William Burroughs"). The image of the hipster seeking violence as the ultimate act affirming one's liberation is thus ultimately emblematized by Starkweather. What is more, such imagery would then haunt the public reception of the Beats, despite Mailer stating that being "beat" – that is losing one's will and confidence – is of utmost fear to the hipster. The respected writer thus provided the public and critics with the framework to use against the Beats despite the glaring inaccuracies (Birmingham, "William Burroughs"). Simply put, "The White Negro" turned out to be published at the best possible moment. As J. Michael Lennon specifies, Kerouac's *On the Road* was published in September 1957; that is only a few months after Mailer's essay (239). Lennon further explains that *On the Road* became famous overnight, and therefore the public desired to know more about the Beat Generation. Importantly, Mailer's essay proved to be the vital key – "its intellectual manifesto," as Lennon puts it – which was frequently read to explain the origins and motives of the Beats.

Since they disagreed with Mailer's insistence on violence, neither Ginsberg nor Kerouac was thrilled by such a connection (242).[28]

Mailer's "The White Negro" thus "established Mailer's reputation as a philosopher of hip," which meant that others turned to him for a better understanding of the Beats (Lennon 189). As a result, Mailer's role in the public image of the Beats can be clearly felt from the critiques of Podhoretz or Brustein.[29] Their constant allusions to the Beats' almost wholesale endorsement of violence or their anti-intellectual stance is the direct result of the public image of the hipsters, and therefore the Beats, which Mailer helped create. For instance, Podhoretz's reference to "good orgasms" as the "first duty of man and the only duty of woman" in "The Know-Nothing Bohemians" does not make much sense without reading "The White Negro" as well (309). That is not to say that otherwise no one could form a link between the Beats and petty criminal activities. After all, Ginsberg in "Howl" alludes to the many joyrides in stolen cars that Neal Cassady and Jack Kerouac undertook, and which are later fully portrayed in *On the Road*. Yet linking the Beats with violence was a relatively new connection that Mailer helped cement. Seeing the Beats as a social phenomenon, readers and critics alike hungered for an explanation of the phenomenon. Mailer's essay then in their eyes validates the Beat representation in popular media, thus leading to Beat exploitation films such as Zugsmith's *The Beat Generation*, which usually contain a Beat element to sell a B-grade movie about juvenile delinquency or a murderer on the loose.

The tendency to read the Beats through both Mailer's essay and their popular portrayals is best documented in Mary Elizabeth Rucker's master's thesis submitted for defense in August 1959 at Atlanta University. Titled "The Literature of the Beat Generation: A Study in Attitudes," it aims to expound the motivation of the Beat Generation writers. The thesis begins with the explanation that literature is "a reproduction of the minds of a people" rather than its reflection, thus setting the stage for a sociological analysis of the Beats, as the text aims to clearly define the philosophy of the Beats and to discuss their philosophy in the context of American society (ii, iv). The main body of the thesis is separated into four chapters with telling titles: "Social Attitudes," "Political Attitudes," "Religious and Philosophic Attitudes", and "Aesthetic Attitudes." While the thesis does refer to several primary sources written by the Beats, for example Holmes's "This is the Beat Generation" or a few of Kerouac's novels, it also frequently uses non-Beat writing and presents it as actual work of Beat Generation literature. For instance, the the-

28 Nevertheless, it should be also stated that Ginsberg thought highly of the essay overall, as it managed to articulate the disengagement of young people in contemporary society (Lennon 242).

29 Curiously, while Podhoretz denounced the Beats in "The Know-Nothing Bohemians," he was taken aback by the sheer tour de force of Mailer's essay, even though he was also shocked by the beliefs of the hipster. Soon, Podhoretz would write a "warm, generous appraisal" of Mailer's work and the two became close friends (Lennon 227, Menand).

sis refers to the novelization of Zugsmith's *The Beat Generation* several times, and even quotes the poem which the actress Vampira reads in the movie, yet the text employs the novel as if it were a genuine Beat work. Outside of Zugsmith, Rucker also relies on Mailer's "The White Negro" – namely the sections on the psychopath and use of violence – as well as on Podhoretz's series of essays critiquing the Beats; other sources she relies on are numerous articles in *Time* and *Nation*. Thus in the religion section, Rucker argues that the Beats' "worship of primitivism and spontaneity is more than a cover for their way of life; it arises from a pathetic poverty of feeling as well," and subsequently quotes from "The Know-Nothing Bohemians" to illustrate her point (21–22). In another telling example, Rucker's discussion of the use of hipster slang concludes that such "new language expresses contempt for rational discourse, which is to the beatnik a form of death because it is a product of the mind. If one is articulate, he has no feeling, for feelings cannot be expressed in syntactical language" (35). The Beat Generation for Rucker is a generation of inarticulate, irrational, and violent barbarians.

The conclusion of Rucker's text is then rather predictable. First, she is dismayed by the Beats' disavowal of the family, as this refusal stops them from being able to function in society (39). Rucker's tone then becomes substantially more agitated. The Beat Generation has chosen to live outside society because their nation "has failed to help [them] adjust to or find their places in our society" (40). This development, Rucker continues, is not limited to the United States, as similarities can be found in the existentialists in France or the Angry Young Men in England. "And this fact," she then adds, "is a serious one in relation to our destiny… It is frightening to think of a world that is governed by the standards of groups such as these." Ultimately, either society, or the "guardians of our civilization," as Rucker puts it, help "these young people to solve their problems," or they will soon start entering the world of politics. And that is, Rucker concludes, "among the greatest threats of the Beat Generation (40)." Rucker thus follows in the footsteps of Trilling or Podhoretz. The Beats themselves are not only without value as artists, but they are also an indication of the rapid decay of the measures and ideals holding society together. Importantly, such a reading is again possible due to the vagueness of the term the Beat Generation.[30]

30 The influence of Mailer on academic public discourse was felt even a decade later, when the literary and social critic Irving Howe in his essay "The New York Intellectuals" written in 1969 analyzes the urge to pursue immediacy on the politics of the New Left. Using Mailer's example of realizing the self by brutally murdering an old candy-store keeper – but also adding that perhaps he would wish to "cut up a few Jews" after reading LeRoi Jones – Howe warns that the heedless overindulgence of will would ultimately lead to a loss of complexity, whether in literature or life in general (115–16). Howe then states that constantly surrendering to the immediacy of the present, as Mailer proposes, leads to self-gratification with diminishing returns, which eventually fails to register in the person numbed down by such exploits (117). Ultimately, Howe's conclusion is in its reasoning similar to "The Know-Nothing Bohemians": he charges the New Left with injecting "rhetorical violence" and "verbal 'radicalism'" into

Academics and intellectuals thus frequently portrayed the Beats not only as being directly responsible for juvenile delinquency, but also as the heralds of the downfall of civilized public discourse. Yet there were also those who supported the Beats, albeit such support was mostly limited to fellow writers and poets. For instance, William Carlos Williams wrote the introduction to *Howl and Other Poems*, while Norman Mailer and Mary McCarthy voiced their support for the controversial *Naked Lunch*. In terms of support from academia, the output was rather restricted, and it took a substantial amount of time before the Beats were treated as a serious object of study.

For example, Frank D. McConnell's "William Burroughs and the Literature of Addiction," published in 1967, is one of the first serious studies of a Beat generation text in a scholarly journal which does not make allusions to the Beats representing an attitude or social movement.[31] Other studies, such as *The Visionary Poetics of Allen Ginsberg* by Paul Portugés or William L. Stull's "The Quest and the Question: Cosmology and Myth in the Work of William S. Burroughs, 1953–1960," have one thing in common. The Beat Generation was considered largely irrelevant by the end of the 1960s, therefore it was not until several years later that interest in the Beats resurfaced. Consequently, the texts by Portugés and Stull, both of which were published in 1978, are great examples of the initial lack of serious academic interest in the Beats. This general avoidance of the Beats by academia was certainly connected to the media craze surrounding the writers, the stereotype of the beatnik, or seeing the Beats only as a social phenomenon.

The above being said, there was a small yet noticeable effort by a few scholars to approach the Beats from a more neutral or even supportive point of view. For example, the poet and professor Thomas Parkinson edited *A Casebook on the Beat*, the first scholarly text discussing the work of the Beats rather than Beats themselves. In the concluding essay to the collection of Beat texts, Parkinson sees the Beats in terms of social refusal rather than a revolt and criticizes the way popular media refer to the Beats: the media focus on the lives of the Beats makes them into a larger-than-life spectacle, thus inhibiting any serious discussion (277, 286). He also touches upon several important aspects of Beat poetry, one of which is their non-conventionality; that is its importance of pitch or loudness. Bruce Cook's *The Beat Generation* published a decade later is another early study of the

public discourse, thus bringing to an end the "liberal humaneness and rational discourse" (122–23). Importantly, it was Mailer who was the chief architect of this change in public discourse (122).

31 The article being published in a scholarly journal, namely in *The Massachusetts Review*, must be emphasized. Steven Belletto notes that one of the earliest serious treatments on the Beats is Warren Tallman's "Kerouac's Sound," first printed in 1959 in *The Tamarack Review* and reprinted a year later in *Evergreen Review* (11). However, not only were both literary magazines rather than scholarly journals, but *Evergreen Review* was also founded by Barney Rosset, publisher of Grove Press, who strongly favored counter-cultural art and therefore definitely supported publishing the article. Still, Tallman was a professor of English at the University of British Columbia, so his contribution should not be overlooked.

Beats, while notable anthologies include Seymour Krim's *The Beats*, released in 1960, and *The Beat Scene*, which was edited by Elias Wilentz and published a year later. Yet the most important early Beat scholar is undoubtedly Ann Charters, the author of the first Kerouac biography. This was a daring feat at that time: the Beat Generation, both as a literary movement or a stand-in for a social movement, dwindled away and Kerouac, whose star had faded away by then, had drunk himself to death. Levi Asher, the editor of *Literary Kicks* weblog, explains Charters's determination in more detail:

> This woman wrote about Jack Kerouac in 1973, back when *nobody* took him seriously as a writer. I mean, *NOBODY*. Her book wasn't even published by an established firm: Straight Arrow Books was a division of Rolling Stone magazine. That was what the mainstream literary world thought of Jack Kerouac back in '73, four years after his death. It took courage, vision and selfless dedication to devote her career to a writer whose literary reputation had never been good, and was now in a state of utter ruin.
>
> Now everybody from Viking Penguin to New York University kisses Kerouac's ass, and it's an all-new world for Beat scholarship. But let's have a little respect for the person who put her reputation on the line back when it meant something.

Asher's expressive comment not only deals with Charters and the dangers of publishing a Kerouac biography, but also helps explain the lack of academic interest in the Beats. The stereotypical beatnik portrayals and the association of the Beats with physical violence via Mailer's controversial essay significantly affected the image of the Beats, and the term "The Beat Generation" was all but forgotten.

The Beat Generation was then frequently brought up as a pretext for discussing the state of society as a whole, thus leaving out discussion on the quality of Beat writing. This construction of the Beats was common during the period, Belletto points out, and was used by both Beat supporters as well as their detractors (10–11). The frequent focus of Beat criticism in the 1950s and the 1960s was not the literature itself, but rather the personal lives of the Beats and what they represented in relation to society. As a result, this led to common disagreements between the two camps, as they both saw the Beats as representing thoroughly different values and attitudes. During such quarrels, the texts themselves took a back seat.

4.5 The Changing Landscape of American Poetry

While the Beats did not command any respect from academia during the period, the situation outside academia was substantially different. The concept of poetry

was carefully curated by academics and intellectuals commonly abiding by the formalist rules set by the New Critics, which can be seen in the anthology *New Poets of England and America* (1957) edited by the poets Donald Hall, Robert Pack, and Louis Simpson. The Beats viewed themselves as standing against the university poets and fought against their influence in American poetry (Belletto 1). Together with other poets outside this "ivory tower" of academic poetry, this opposition was consolidated in the seminal anthology *The New American Poetry 1945–1960* edited by Donald M. Allen and published in 1960. Allen's book was a direct response to the 1957 anthology, as it showcased numerous essentially unknown poets who refused to follow the tradition of academic poetry. The poets featured include Robert Duncan, Robert Creeley, or Charles Olson, and several Beat figures are also present. Ultimately, the anthology represents the counter-tradition in American poetry.

Allen makes the objective of the publication clear from the very beginning when he states that all the poets present in the anthology have one thing in common: "a total rejection of all those qualities typical of academic verse" (xi). The anthology turned out to be the most influential poetry anthology published after WWII and many of the poets contained within have become widely read and taught (Golding 180). Importantly, the anthology has achieved this status not only because it helped institutionalize numerous innovative poets, but also because it spearheaded the criticism of academic poetry. It was extremely impactful and was quickly reprinted, which was rather unusual for poetry anthologies at that time; overall, it sold over 100,000 copies in its first ten years (Golding 181, 192). The poets featured were separated into five groups: Black Mountain poets, New York school, San Francisco Renaissance, Beats, and finally the most recent poets. The Beats featured in the "Beat" category are Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, and Peter Orlovsky; however, the anthology featured several other Beats and Beat-associates, namely Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Philip Lamantia, Philip Whalen, Gary Snyder, Michael McClure, and LeRoi Jones. In addition, the section "Statements on Poetics" included short texts by the anthologized poets on the state of poetry at that time. Notably, the Beats authored seven out of the sixteen texts, thus further popularizing Beat esthetics to a wider audience.

The categorization of the Beats and Beat-associates into different groups indicates several facts. First, in regards to poetry, the Beats were only part of a larger trend to abandon contemporary standards of poetry. Second, the categorization also shows that the boundaries between the various groups are often muddled and frequently crossed, thus proving yet again the unstable nature of the term Beat Generation even when isolating individual writers. Finally, the nature of the critique of academic poetry often varied between these groups. The poets chosen by Allen "tend variously to oppose the academic criticism of their moment, the poetry written under the aegis of that criticism (often, but not always, by teacher-

poets in mainstream institutions), the larger institutional structures of academe, and the intellectualism associated with academic pursuits" (Golding 200). In other words, a sizeable number of American artists demanded a significant reformation of how poetry should be understood. Regarding the position of the Beats, Carolyn Gaiser argues that they aimed to "free writing from the stringencies of stale academic form" because "[t]heir distrust of form in writing reflects their equally profound distrust of formal codes for human behavior" (271). In Gaiser's account, the poetry contained within did not only strive to change the stilted nature of contemporary poetry, but in more general terms also the ways in which society expressed itself.

The anthology *Contemporary American Poetry* edited by Donald Hall and released in 1962 is a perfect example of the changes taking place during this period. While the 1957 anthology *New Poets of England and America* supported academic poetry, *Contemporary American Poetry* published a mere five years later is quick to denounce the traditionalist approach to poetics. Hall begins with a denunciation of the state of poetry: "For thirty years an orthodoxy ruled American poetry. It derived from the authority of T. S. Eliot and the new critics; it exerted itself through the literary quarterlies and the universities. It asked for a poetry of symmetry, intellect, irony, and wit. The last few years have broken the control of this orthodoxy" (Introduction 25). Granted, Hall's anthology is definitely not as radical as Allen's, since the anthology contains a large number of poets representing the more traditional stance. That being said, the inclusion of Gary Snyder and Allen Ginsberg hints at the substantial change in American poetry occurring during the 1950s and 1960s. This is further compounded by the fact that Ginsberg did not originally make the cut in the first edition and was only included in subsequent editions. Writing in 1969, Hall comments in the preface to the second edition on the evolution of poetry and the changes from the first edition. Regarding the initial exclusion of Ginsberg, Hall remorsefully states that "it was ridiculous to omit [him] in the first place" (36–37).

Other anthologies which were either dedicated solely to the Beats or at least gave them ample space began to flourish. For instance, in 1963 Corso, Ferlinghetti, and Ginsberg were anthologized in the fifth volume of the Penguin Modern Poets, a series which aims to provide an overview of three modern poets in a single volume. More importantly, the Beats managed to stay relevant even when their time in the spotlight was diminishing. In 1969, the year of Kerouac's death and four years after Victor Yanitelli called the Beats a dead movement in his review of *Desolation Angels*, another influential anthology was released: Stephen Berg and Robert Mezey's *Naked Poetry: Recent American Poetry in Open Forms*. The anthology includes Ginsberg and Corso, but also Beat-related poets Kenneth Rexroth and Kenneth Patchen, the latter being a huge influence on the Beats due to his experimentation with poetry readings accompanied by music. Berg and Mezey

explain that their initial approach was to include a definitive and comprehensive essay to provide an overarching conception of contemporary poetry, which is at its best when foregoing formalist concerns in favor of venturing into "the wilderness of unopened life" (xi). However, they soon realize that trying to find a collective classification for the poets in the anthology is an impossible task, as there always were a few exceptions to the unifying principle they devised. Ultimately, Berg and Mezey confess that what matters most is the impact these poems have on their readers, and for this readers do not need them as interpreters (xi).

The Beats then played a major role in the shift in American poetry, and it should then not come as a surprise that as early as 1961 poet Tuli Kupferberg claimed the Beats "destroyed the importance of the Academy in American poetry" (qtd. in Belletto 1). The gradual change occurring in the world of poetry serves as a reliable testament to the changes to American literature as a whole during the 1950s and the 1960s. Together with other artists, the Beats helped reshape the American landscape of both art and thought. Yet all this was at a cost. The idea of the Beats as a group of fellow-minded writers or the Beats as the young generation protesting conformism soon ballooned into a vulgar media image of the beatnik. The public often relied on sensationalized and unreliable accounts, thus pitting itself against the Beats. During the period, the Beats were usually either ignored or dismissed outright by academia, which often relied on virtually the same accounts as the public. They were also harmed by the image of the hipster as defined by Norman Mailer superficially associated with the Beat Generation, or by the vast number of talentless poets spewing forth Beat-inspired poetry. The Beats bear at least partial responsibility for the latter. As Lawrence Ferlinghetti in an interview with Colin Robinson recalls, some of the poets Allen Ginsberg recommended to City Lights would not normally have been published, since they simply were not good enough, and were published only after Ginsberg put in a word for them. Nevertheless, Ferlinghetti then adds that the Beats had a lasting impact on American literature, and one of the milestones was certainly the not-guilty verdict for publishing *Howl and Other Poems*: "After that the floodgates were opened. People like Barney [Rosset] … were able to publish *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Henry Miller's *Tropics*, Jean Genet, and so on." Beat writing also managed to sustain itself outside of its social importance, as Gary Snyder receiving the Pulitzer Prize in 1975 for *Turtle Island* shows. Despite the often dismissive reception, it would be therefore naive to claim that the Beats did not play a substantial role in American literature or its history in general.

5 THE RECEPTION IN THE UNITED STATES: CURRENT RECEPTION

Over five decades after the major Beat publications of the fifties, the consensus on the Beats has changed significantly. Previously seen by many as controversial figures whose literary output generally did not have much literary value, the Beats are now viewed as greatly affecting American literature and American culture as a whole. Writing in 1999, Allan H. Kurtzman, a donor of a substantial collection of Beat archival texts to University of California, Los Angeles, notes the following:

> Eleven years ago, when I offered my collection of Beat material to the UCLA University Library, I received several polite notes of thanks. I also seemed to perceive some embarrassment at the thought of including such a collection in a "serious" library. Yet today, influential observers everywhere recognize the unique contributions of the Beat Generation to late 20th century culture and particularly the creative spontaneity of Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs in helping to define those contributions.

Thinking fifty years ago that one might eventually be able to donate a Beat collection to a university library, one would probably be faced with scornful looks if not outright dismissal. After all, it was the age when Podhoretz and many other critics were waging an all-out war against the Beats and when a large segment of the public was being fed sensationalized beatnik images by the shovelful. Contrary to what John P. Sisk suggested in the late 1950s, it turns out that the Beats are not just a subject for "desperate Ph.D. candidates" after all (194).

The political and social climate is vastly different than in the fifties: the Cold War is over, the Berlin Wall was torn down decades ago, and the Internet allows an unprecedented proliferation and sharing of information. The plight of the civil rights movements of the fifties and sixties – the fight for the rights of women,

homosexuals, or people of color – has greatly affected the mindset of the following generations and is generally understood as one of the cornerstones of modern democracies. Importantly, Beats are seen as one of the factors which helped in the fight for human rights, and this interpretation has subsequently permeated the general understanding of the writers. Furthermore, unlike in the time period first examined, the acceptance of the Beats is nearly unanimous. The Beats are acknowledged by both popular and academic audiences as having survived the test of time, therefore belonging to literature in what is known – as well as criticized – under the often vaguely characterized term "the Western canon." Finally, Beat scholarship is by no means mainstream, yet Beat scholarship is a growing and thriving field and is larger than ever before, sometimes to the surprise of Beat scholars themselves.

The fact that Beat authors are viewed as important American writers of the twentieth century can be illustrated by the placement of *On the Road* and *Naked Lunch* in *Time* magazine's "All-TIME 100 Novels" list of English language novels. The list, which considered all novels published since 1923, described *On the Road* as a "culture-changing novel" that "launched a thousand trips" (Grossman and Lacayo). Conversely, the description of *Naked Lunch* accentuates its controversial status upon publication; Burroughs is "the depraved scoutmaster for generations of would-be hipsters" who "traffics in the utmost degradations." These annotations simplify rather, but still make an important point – the Beats have stood the test of time and are popular with a general readership. Burroughs, whom an article in *The Guardian* on the centenary of his birth called "American literature's most notorious son," was extremely influential on many other artists in his later years (Irvine). While writers such as Thomas Pynchon or J. G. Ballard name Burroughs as making a lasting impression on their writing, Burroughs's presence was especially felt in music. Not only is the term for the music genre "heavy metal" derived from Burroughs's work, but he also influenced many famous musicians or music bands, most notably R.E.M., Lou Reed, and Nirvana (*A Man Within*). During his stay in New York, Burroughs lived close to the legendary CBGB, the music bar that was the center of punk and new wave bands, and many musicians, for example Patti Smith, consider him to be the father of the punk scene (Miles, *El Hombre* 217).

Yet the impact is felt even outside popular representations of the Beats. The auction of the scroll on which Kerouac wrote *On the Road* is a revealing example of the popularity of the Beats. In 2001 the scroll sold for $2.43 million, which was not only almost $1 million more than the expected price, but also a record for the highest price of a novel sold at auction ("Kerouac Scroll"). Subsequently, this not only led to the publication of the novel's original scroll version in 2007, but also to other Beat discoveries and publications. Kerouac, undoubtedly the most prolific of the Beats, thus gained numerous additions to his bibliography. For

instance, the manuscript to his novel *The Sea is My Brother*, which was written during Kerouac's time as a merchant seaman, has been discovered and subsequently published. Another vital discovery, a letter from Neal Cassady to Kerouac, was found in 2012 after being considered lost for over 60 years. The letter, generally known as the "Joan Anderson letter," inspired Kerouac in developing his prose style and until its discovery only a few fragments had been published, thus it represents a valuable addition to existing Beat texts.[32] Finally, Kerouac has had four collections of his works published by Library of America. Describing itself as a "champion of America's great writers and timeless works," Library of America thus ranks Kerouac alongside William Faulkner or Herman Melville ("Unknown Kerouac").

In other words, the Beats have had a lasting impact on American culture, and their influence is perhaps stronger now than ever before. However, a question needs to be raised: how exactly are they understood by the public, and what are the scholarly approaches to the Beats most commonly applied by contemporary academia?

5.1 Popular Culture and the Mythology of the Beats

In popular representation, the Beat Generation is usually rendered as a social movement which challenged the normativity of McCarthy-era America rather than a small group of artists. For instance, the somewhat comical entry for the Beat Generation in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* explains that the Beats were an "American social and literary movement originating in the 1950s… Its adherents, self-styled as 'beat' … and derisively called 'beatniks,' expressed their alienation from conventional, or 'square,' society by adopting an almost uniform style of seedy dress, manners, and 'hip' vocabulary borrowed from jazz musicians" ("Beat movement"). Similarly, Josh Rahn's article for the online portal *The Literature Network* describes them as "a new cultural and literary movement [which] staked its claim on the nation's consciousness." Rahn argues that the visibility and influences of the Beats were unprecedented, which allowed them to challenge conformity, capitalism, and consumer culture. Ultimately, the impact of the Beat Generation on the structure of modern American society was immense: censorship was ended, ecology and environmentalism started to be discussed, Eastern philosophies permeated the American consciousness, and the "stuffy" formalism of Modernist poetry was subverted in favor of a new, relaxed structure.

32 The discovery of the letter might have a profound impact on current Beat Studies. As Christopher Graham Challis notes in 1979: "If the 'Joan Anderson letter' should come to light many questions about Cassady's creativity and his influence on Kerouac would be answered, but there seems to be little chance of this" (122).

Naturally, neither of the articles should by any means be considered an authoritative source on the Beats. Yet the (un)reliability of these and similar sources does not matter that much. What truly matters, however, is the act of creating, maintaining, and proliferating a certain discourse on the Beats. These sources create a somewhat "abridged," bare-bones version of the subject in question, and while the descriptions thus created would show cracks when under scrutiny, these types of sources can frequently be one's first exposure to the Beats, thus for the uninitiated ultimately representing *the* image of the Beat Generation. Therefore, these sources also help document the transformation the Beats have undergone in the public discourse. Effectively, both articles are examples of the discursive acceptance of the Beats, thus further contributing to seeing the Beats as an important *social* milestone in twentieth century America. Ultimately, this points to the changes taking place in American society and therefore its readers; as Stanley Fish explains, interpretive communities can change because canons of acceptability can also change ("Acceptable" 349).

The above does not mean that the Beats do not deserve their reputation as opposing the social norms of their time. After all, many of their accomplishments, such as protesting censorship or advocating the acceptance of homosexuals, have significantly changed American society. As a result, Peter Hartlaub writes in 2015 for *The San Francisco Chronicle* that "the Beats themselves turned out to be positive ambassadors of their time and their movement… In 2015, the Beats are beloved, a symbol of what San Francisco has become. Tolerant, with a social conscience. Recognizing the potential of people who think different." Even in the 21st century, the Beats can be at the center of a controversy, as when in 2007 the New York radio station WBAI-FM did not run Ginsberg's "Howl" for the 50th anniversary of the obscenity court ruling, because they were afraid of a possible legal backlash from the Federal Communications Commission (Cohen). Yet the question is which aspects of the Beats – the Beats as experimental writers, artists continuing the tradition of American individualistic writing, or artists challenging contemporary esthetic norms – are ignored during such reading?

Insight into common representations of the Beats can be found among reviews of various critical re-editions of canonical Beat texts or biographies. In a review of *Spontaneous Mind*, a collection of interviews with Ginsberg, William Deresiewicz emphasizes the poet's "frank and vivid voice" as well as his talent for improvisation and being present in the moment. Ginsberg's poetry is "a risk-seeking, ecstatic spontaneity flung in the face of the cold war mentality," Deresiewicz writes. After commenting on how the stereotype of Ginsberg as a "semiliterate primitive" is far from the truth, Deresiewicz points out the poet's activism, which often addressed issues acknowledged by society to be relevant only decades later. Notably, Deresiewicz also emphasizes that Ginsberg was portrayed by many of his interviewers – and therefore seen by both his critics and supporters – in a different manner:

> Just as he never let himself get stuck in an intellectual position, neither did he allow himself to be trapped in an image. Each interviewer tries to elicit the Ginsberg of his or her imagination – William F. Buckley Jr., the dangerous radical; *Playboy*, the homosexual crusader; fellow dropouts, the mocker of squares – and each time, Ginsberg performs judo flips on their expectations, handing back complex, nuanced versions of the attitudes with which they've tried to saddle him.

While Deresiewicz focuses on Ginsberg's substantial efforts to elude being represented in a particular fashion, he somewhat understates the other side of the representation process – that there are numerous public images of Ginsberg and therefore of other Beats as well. The varying portrayal is a crucial point. The images are not necessarily separate, yet different sources accentuate one or more images over others.

For instance, Gregory Stephenson explains the lasting interest in the Beats by their genuineness – the fact that they have truly experienced what they write about: "[T]he continuing appeal of the works of the Beat Generation is ascribable … to their quality of *authenticity*. We respond to the truth of their writings because we feel that they were created out of real pain and hope, out of absolute personal necessity" (14–15, emphasis mine). The Beat Generation is then often viewed as embodying particular values and ideas – an ethos. However, this ethos is frequently trivialized by emphasizing adventurous traveling and self-indulgence. Such an approach to the Beats is evident in numerous popular accounts such as the report from Allen Ginsberg's reading at Chapman University. Noting that the auditorium of the reading held a large number of young people who were virtually grandchildren to Ginsberg, Jess Bravin notes that many of the attendees were drawn by "the countercultural spirit they felt the writer embodied." Some of the young fans explained their attendance by expressing their fascination with "the whole '60s thing" (qtd. in Bravin). As a result, a large portion of them would like to experience the "fascinating" period of the Beats themselves. Other attendees for example see similarities between Ginsberg and the band Metallica or the singer Billy Joel. Ginsberg told Bravin that he hoped his young audience would learn respect for others or tolerance toward homosexuals. However, the audience also desired to experience the long-gone era of "women, booze and drugs" when being able to hitchhike across the country without any money was not out of the question. In other words, the "spirit" of the Beat Generation – with its connotation of uninhibited sex, drug use and traveling – is what comprises a portion of the Beats' appeal to some of their readers.

Viewing the Beats as embodying a rather hedonistic ethos is somewhat understandable. Nevertheless, such interpretations risk becoming simplifications which in turn can become almost mythological in their accounts and scope. This simplification process is best seen in the way current filmmakers adapt the works

and lives of the Beats to the silver screen, as Jordan Larson's discussion of recent additions to Beat film adaptations makes clear. Larson begins by explaining that two recent films, *Kill Your Darlings* and *Big Sur*, both released in 2013, join the previously released *Howl* (2010) and *On the Road* (2012) in portraying the lifestyles of the Beats as rebellious, adolescent fun.[33] However, what made the Beats so influential in the first place, Larsen argues, was their individualistic desire to push the boundaries of artistic expression rather than as adolescents looking for new ways of spending their free time. Ultimately, this revival "arguably goes too far with its re-imagination of the Beat writers' livelihoods as simple adolescent goofing around." According to Larson, the main problem with these films is that they diminish what was truly radical about the Beat Generation – their iconoclastic approach to life which continued well into the Beats' old age. This simplification is further compounded by the larger attention the seemingly more innocent lives of Kerouac and Ginsberg receive; Burroughs, whose life was significantly darker and more complicated, has not shared the recent resurgence of the Beats in popular culture. His troubled life and multifaceted work, Larson continues, are substantially more difficult to present as a "harmless and youthful adventure," as David Cronenberg's "disturbing and gritty" adaptation of *Naked Lunch* shows. Larson further comments on the issue of representation:

> One could argue that these films are only trying to honor the spirit of the Beat Generation, but can you separate the "essence" of a story or a movement from what its progenitors really said and did, and at what point in their lives? Neal Cassady and Jack Kerouac were grown men who were also alcoholics, misogynists, and womanizers who killed themselves with substance abuse. Pretending Kerouac's life was some sort of consequence-free dream not only does a disservice to viewers, but to the Beats, as well.

Larson warns against such refashioning and diluting of the Beats to make them more suitable for the mainstream, because it is dangerous in its depoliticization. By portraying the lives of the Beats as mere joyrides in search for sex – even though they at times may have looked that way – the mainstream is missing out on a substantial aspect of the Beats, mainly why exactly they were described as rebellious.

The effort to avoid the mythologizing of the Beats and their lives that often stems from such portrayals is further complicated by the autobiographical nature of many Beat Generation texts. Several Beat texts profess to be strictly autobiographical when in fact they describe numerous fictional events, thus the Beats

33 *Kill Your Darlings* deals with the murder of David Kammerer by Lucien Carr, while *Big Sur* is based on Kerouac's novel of the same name documenting Kerouac's struggles with newly gained fame after the publication of *On the Road*.

themselves participated in their mythologizing. For example, Burroughs's *Junky* is a somewhat fictionalized account of his life in the 1940s. Similarly, his *Queer* can be traced to the letters Burroughs sent to Ginsberg in the early 1950s during his effort to locate the drug ayahuasca in South America. Nevertheless, it is Kerouac's work which contributes to the mythologizing of the Beats the most. While it is widely understood that his most famous works such as *On the Road* or *Dharma Bums* are fictionalized retellings of real-life events including Cassady, Ginsberg, or Burroughs, it is only rarely acknowledged that his entire oeuvre is essentially a mythologized cycle of memoirs (Barnett). This mythologizing then makes it even easier to reduce the Beats to a simple symbol such as a "counterculture icon" or "visionary prophet."

The way mythologizing informs the popular image of the Beats is illustrated by various advertisements from major companies featuring the Beats. One of the best examples of this process is the photo of Kerouac used by the multinational clothing company Gap in its 1993 advertising campaign. The slogan of the advertisement – "Kerouac wore khakis" – tries to summarize Kerouac's life and work into a straightforward symbol in order to "portray a particular set of ideas relevant to [its] target market (Nash 57)."[34] As Nash further explains, to Gap the Beats symbolize "freethinking individualism," rather than "a threat to American society" (58). Similarly, as Burroughs's gaunt, erudite persona was more than well-known at that time, Burroughs was featured in a Nike advert (Johnson, *Lost Years* 7).[35] By choosing Burroughs to promote their sneakers, Nike wishes the audience to associate Burroughs – and therefore the advertised product – with ideas of rebelliousness or rugged individuality; their goal certainly was not to remind people of his drug addiction or the accidental shooting of his wife. These advertisements thus show that the Beats can become "stamps of approval" on a commercial product – recognizable symbols which signify the product's individualism, rebelliousness, or anti-consumerism – by appealing to the same qualities in the authors.

5.2 Obituaries

Ginsberg and Burroughs both died in 1997 only a few months apart. Their obituaries generally tried to summarize their lives and work, thus trying to encapsulate the whole image of the Beats in a single text. As such, these obituaries provide a valuable insight into current reception as well as the ways the Beats are mythologized.

34 The advert can be viewed online at http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/Images/jksm.gif; accessed on 1 February 2018. Other artists or known public figures featured in the campaign were Ernest Hemingway, Andy Warhol, Pablo Picasso, James Dean, or John Wayne.

35 Unlike Kerouac, Burroughs was still alive and actively participated in the making of the advert.

The general sentiment of the obituaries is markedly different from the texts written in the fifties and sixties. Describing Ginsberg as the "master poet of the Beat Generation" in the headline, Wilborn Hampton depicts *Howl* as "a manifesto for the sexual revolution and a *cause célèbre* for free speech" and Ginsberg himself as being ubiquitous for the counterculture movement of the sixties. Ginsberg is a rebellious protester who shocked Eisenhower's America with his celebration of homosexuality and drugs, but also as one heavily involved in numerous civil rights campaigns throughout the second half of the century. Nevertheless, this does not stop Hampton from stating that Ginsberg was "known around the world as a master of the outrageous." Most of the article describes the poet's life until the publication of *Howl*, and Ginsberg's later life is mostly reduced to his travel experiences. Hampton makes an important point by emphasizing that Ginsberg's *Collected Poems* published in 1985, "firmly established the poet in the mainstream of American literature." In other words, Ginsberg has become "respectable" – a term Ginsberg himself used in interviews mentioned by Hampton – and therefore a vital part of American culture.

Yet Hampton's primary focus on Ginsberg's life and his social achievements is revealing for another reason – the common emphasis of the Beats' social importance. The role of Ginsberg as a historical figure is also the basis for the obituary written by James Campbell for *The Independent*. Describing the poet as "the exemplary avant-garde figure of the post-war world," the article can be separated into two parts ("Obituary"). The first part concerns Ginsberg's early life, again ending with the publication of *Howl*; that is the poetry collection through which Ginsberg "achieved a nakedness in poetry that reflected his soul," as Campbell puts it. The second part deals with Ginsberg's life since the poem's publication up until his death; although he mentions some of the poems written during this era, the second part is mostly concerned with Ginsberg's social struggles, stories of his outrageous behavior and comments on the poet's personality. Campbell's and Hampton's articles are thus quite similar in what they decide to highlight. Both begin with a brief characterization of Ginsberg's personal life rather than his achievements as an artist, then continue with a short biography – informing readers about Ginsberg's mother being kept in a mental institution, for example – only to culminate in the publication of *Howl and Other Poems*. The various events from the poet's final decades are then mostly an afterthought. Importantly, these events seem to be mostly comprised of "Ginsberg anecdotes," that is stories that further illustrate the poet's eccentricity.[36] Such treatment is to a degree expected in obituaries; after

36 For instance, Campbell writes the following about the FBI keeping a file on the poet: "Though profoundly indignant at the intrusion, Ginsberg delighted in taunting the organization. When J. Edgar Hoover insidiously let it be known that the Bureau possessed photographs of Ginsberg in the nude with other men, perhaps scheming to blackmail him, Ginsberg asked for permission to use one of them on the cover of a book."

all, it is essentially a retrospective literary genre. Yet the glaring omission of the vast majority of Ginsberg's work, as well as the preferential treatment that Ginsberg the man rather than Ginsberg the poet receives, is certainly noteworthy.

As Richard Severo's obituary on William S. Burroughs shows, such treatment was not limited to Ginsberg. The bulk of the text is concerned with Burroughs's life leading up to the publication of *Naked Lunch*. Severo describes Burroughs "as a renegade writer of the Beat Generation who stunned readers and inspired adoring cultists with his 1959 book *Naked Lunch*." The image of Burroughs as a renegade or an outlaw is common in Burroughs articles, and this also includes his obituaries: while no Ginsberg obituary seems to be complete without at least one humorous Ginsberg anecdote, those covering Burroughs usually include accolades such as "the hard man of Hip," "the godfather of punk" or "the original junkie" (Campbell, "Struggles"; Ciabattari; Self). Campbell in his Burroughs obituary describes the writer as an artistic revolutionary who "became an icon late in life," also pointing out the cult status that he attained among rock stars like David Bowie, Mick Jagger, Frank Zappa, or Patti Smith. While the journalist does talk about some of the important features of Burroughs's writing, such as his "routines" or the cut-up technique, most of the text focuses on his early life and on his iconic status. Similarly, Ciabattari's emphasis on the more shocking aspects of Burroughs's life can be seen in his description of the Beat as a writer who "scandalised literature with books like *Naked Lunch*," a novel that "shocked Eisenhower-era Americans" with "its graphic sex, drugs, violence and slashing satire of consumerism." Ciabattari's text also includes memories of the late writer shared by various Burroughs associates from his biographer Barry Miles to Denis Low, former Kansas poet laureate; importantly, these selected recollections again reduce Burroughs to a "literary outlaw," as Burroughs's biographer Ted Morgan famously dubbed him in his biography of the same name.

In contrast, the novelist J. G. Ballard offers a more insightful commentary into Burroughs's life and work. A few weeks after the Beat's death, Ballard writes that Burroughs was well-aware of the ability of language to be "manipulated to mean absolutely the opposite of what it seems to mean" and that this knowledge can be traced in all his work. For Ballard, Burroughs's work is the counterpoint to the bourgeois novel which to Ballard is "the greatest enemy of truth and honesty that was ever invented." Burroughs did not care about moral judgment, Ballard claims; on the contrary, he tried to simply tell the truth:

> I think [Burroughs]'s a writer of enormous richness, but he had a kind of paranoid imagination. He saw the world as a dangerous conspiracy by huge media conglomerates, by the great political establishments of the day, by a corrupt medical science which he saw as very much a conspiracy. He saw most of the professions, law in particular but also law enforcement, as all part of a huge conspiracy to keep us under control, to keep us

> down. And his books are a kind of attempt to blow up this cozy conspiracy, to allow us to see what's on the end of the fork.

Ballard thus tries to shy away from the popular image of Burroughs as a "renegade" or "literary outlaw" and instead offers an analysis of the author's writing. The novelist Will Self approached Burroughs in a similar manner on the centenary of his birth. While Self uses the moniker "original junkie" throughout the text, he focuses on Burroughs's first novel *Junky* instead of presenting yet another summary of the author's life. Self warns against "the post hoc mythologizing of the writer and his life from the very grim reality of active drug addiction that constitutes the action of *Junky*" and offers a unique reading of the novel: "It is Burroughs's own denial of the nature of his addiction that makes this book capable of being read as a fiendish parable of modern alienation."

Popular narrative, whether obituaries or recent films based on the Beat Generation, thus proves to be revealing in its characterization of the Beats. It often emphasizes the Beats as individual persons rather than writers and as a result often focuses on their personal lives and controversies. It is not then their texts but their unconventional lives against the backdrop of the socially conservative fifties that seem to be the main point of such representations, and therefore interest in the Beats. While understandable, this celebratory nature of the Beats also contributes to the mythologizing of the Beats as stereotypical social activists. Their "mini-mythologies," such as Ginsberg being the "visionary artist" or Burroughs, the "original junkie," shooting his wife in a game of William Tell, show that their lives represent more than just their lives. They represent an attitude, a stance toward society, and an ethos which can be extracted from the Beats and possibly even emulated. Importantly, such depictions can result in a hagiography in which the work of the Beats is only secondary to the ideas they symbolize.

5.3 The Beat Generation and Contemporary Academia

As with popular reception, the position of the Beats in academia has also changed drastically when compared to their initial reception. An important shift in the Beats' acceptability in academia took place in 1982 with the first major Beat Generation conference at the Naropa Institute: while the occasional journal article was published even before, it was only after the conference that Beat scholarship became to grow substantially (Theado 1). Currently, many revised and critical editions of primary texts as well as book-length studies and collections of scholarly essays are being published. Together with other events such as the formation of the European Beat Studies Network in 2012, it is therefore safe to say that Beat scholarship is stronger than before. And while Beat scholarship is certainly not

a large field of interest in academia, it still has a substantial presence and, what is perhaps more telling, acceptance among academics. For instance, Ginsberg's *alma mater* not only possesses a sizeable collection of Ginsberg's papers, but also featured the poet during the celebration of its 250th anniversary in 2004. Being included in the section "Columbians Ahead of their Time" depicting the university's most notable alumni, Ginsberg is described as the "[q]uintessential Beat, countercultural prophet, Buddhist-Jewish adventurer, distinguished professor … [who] played a highly visible role in a number of protest movements, including those in support of gay rights and against the Vietnam War, nuclear weapons, and U.S. policy in Latin America" ("Allen Ginsberg"). Similarly, Stanford University houses another major archive of Ginsberg's papers and other memorabilia, which it acquired in 1994. In an article describing the talk held in 2013 on the occasion of an exhibition of some of the items in the collection, Ginsberg is described as "the iconic figurehead of the Beat Generation," and later in the text Stanford literary critic Hilton Obenzinger calls the acquisition of the archival material for the Allen Ginsberg Papers collection "a brilliant decision" and Ginsberg himself "one of the great American poets of the 20th century" (Goldman). It would then be easy to assume that the Beats have been accepted into academia with open arms.

However, this acceptance was not without obstacles. It has grown substantially only in the last few decades, and even in the 1990s the situation was not wholly supportive. The coverage of Stanford University's acquisition of the material is quite revealing in this regard. Titling his report "An Unlikely Home for Ginsberg's Archive," David Margolick writes for *The New York Times* that Stanford University's decision to actually purchase Ginsberg's archives is "the latest twist" in the Beat poet's exceptional life, thus indicating that only few would expect Stanford to be interested in the Beats' work. Margolick then quotes Ginsberg who claims that Stanford had not only been very conservative in the 1950s, but that the university had never invited him for a reading, despite the poet's numerous tours across other universities in the nation. What is more, the English Stanford professor Marjorie Perloff who backed the purchase of the collection makes it clear that even in the 1990s the Beats were not exactly welcome at America's major universities: "If he came down tomorrow, nine-tenths of the English department wouldn't turn out for him" (Margolick). Perfloff's comment then echoes Allan H. Kurtzman's sentiment that in the late 1980s academia was rather reluctant to accept the Beats. Academia's change of heart then started sometime in the 1990s, and it was not until the mid- to late 2000s that the Beats experienced a generally supportive environment. As Kurt Hemmer further comments on this paradigm shift in Beat scholarship, "[l]iterary historians in the future may refer to the beginning of the twenty-first century as the heyday of Beat scholarship. The Beats are not being embraced in all quarters and probably never will be, but the recent appearances

of several estimable scholarly texts … should be a harbinger of things to come" ("Barbarians" 81).

Without doubt, the state of the Beats in academia is drastically different from their position in the 1950s. This change in perception is deftly summarized by Matt Theado:

> Until recently, most people seemed to know of [Kerouac] more as a pop-culture icon that represents youth movements, quests of the spirit, and satiation of the senses with fast cars, jazz, drugs, and the pursuit of kicks. […] Still, with his resurgence in popularity, recently published work, and new academic momentum in support, Kerouac's work may seem paradoxically more ungainly than before. Now that he avoids the easy labels ("Beat Bard," "Daddy of the Hippies," "a literary James Dean") scholars, critics, and most of all new readers are continually reevaluating or discovering for the first time their takes on Kerouac. (1)

In other words, the easily-remembered monikers applied to the Beats are mostly a thing of the past. Yet academia's support of the Beats is not entirely without complications even today. For example, Emory University, another top research institution in the United States, recently opened an exhibition showcasing its collection of rare Beat Generation memorabilia titled "The Dream Machine: The Beat Generation & the Counterculture, 1940–1975." The exhibition aims to celebrate the Beats, yet as the name of the exhibition suggests, the focus is on their social and political importance rather than their writing. Writing for the Emory News Center, Maureen McGavin introduces the Beats with the following: "The Beat Generation emerged as a key part of the U.S. counterculture in the years following World War II. The exhibition showcases the Beat spirit of exploration and experimentation around practicing politics, making art and building community." This description then resembles those found on Columbia's or Stanford's webpages – the Beats matter for their social importance and the role they played in the development of the counterculture; their writing, as a result, is lessened by such descriptions. Still, this is a major victory for the Beats and their acceptance in academia.

This trend of increasing academic interest in Beat Generation authors is further paralleled by a thriving industry in the release of previously unpublished works, especially Kerouac's (Dittman 122). Archival research, text restoration and publication of previously unpublished material constitutes a sizeable portion of Beat scholarship, and as Dittman notes on the example of Kerouac, although the author fell out of favor by his death in the late sixties, Kerouac's work as well as numerous biographies and critical studies were back in print by the beginning of the 1990s (125). Yet the focus of Beat scholarship goes beyond new archival mate-

rial. While many new biographies of various Beat figures are being released, many of these often focus on previously uncharted territories – areas ignored by other scholars. For instance, *The Voice is All: The Lonely Victory of Jack Kerouac* (2012) by Joyce Johnson, Kerouac's girlfriend, highlights the Beat's French-Canadian identity as one of the most important aspects forming Kerouac's future writing; similarly, David S. Wills in *Scientologist!: William S. Burroughs and the 'Weird Cult'* (2013) emphasizes the role of Scientology in Burroughs's life and work. Burroughs scholars frequently draw on post-structuralism to comment on his challenging writing, as seen in several of the essays found in *Naked Lunch@50: Anniversary Essays* (2009), edited by Oliver Harris and Ian MacFayden and released for the novel's 50th anniversary. The presence of post-modern theory in Beat scholarship has been especially palpable since the 1990s. Joanna Pawlik notes that the increasing interest in the Beats occurred partly due to the influence of French theory as a hermeneutic for Beat texts; this influence of French theory replaced the biographical readings frequent in the 1980s and 1990s and resulted "in a significant re-framing of Beat writers' dialogues with Europe, away from their engagement with modernism, Surrealist or otherwise, and toward their intersections with French intellectual history" (104). Current scholarship thus often re-evaluates the Beats by focusing on those Beats and Beat-associates who previously stayed at the margins – women writers and people of color. Lastly, the frequent travels abroad of the Beats are mirrored by the scholarship emphasizing the Beats' transnational identity and their substantial cultural impact across the globe, as found in *The Transnational Beat Generation* (2012) edited by Nancy Grace and Jennie Skerl.

Nevertheless, not even Beat scholars can completely avoid the confines of the discursive formations characterizing the Beats as being important for their role in the development of the counterculture, and therefore representing certain attitudes and beliefs. This is manifested in two ways: first, a sense of nostalgia in various Beat scholars' accounts; second, the lasting portrayal of Beat scholarship as an underground pursuit which lies outside general academia. Importantly, these commonly act in concordance and are therefore inseparable.

The sense of nostalgia in several scholars' personal accounts of their relationship to the Beats mirrors the biographical approach of early Beat critics, yet with one crucial difference. Instead of focusing on the lives of the Beats, the lives of the critics are the center of attention, thus the critic serves as a stand-in for anyone who would find the Beats appealing. For instance, Jonah Raskin begins his Ginsberg biography by providing a short narrative about his own relationship to the Beats, thus mirroring the biographical approach of early Beat critics: "In 1957, at the age of fifteen, I bought for seventy-five cents a copy of the City Lights paperback edition of *Howl and Other Poems* with the trademark black-and-white cover… *Howl* was underground poetry, outlawed poetry. Ginsberg made it seem as though it was cool to be a teen and that teens, not adults, knew what was cool" (xi). There

often seems to be an unwritten rule in writing about the Beats, whether for popular media or for scholarly publications, to include a short anecdote; frequently, it depicts the author's first contact with the Beats. Since these anecdotes often refer to the rebelliousness or countercultural nature of the Beats, they further emphasize the understanding of the Beats as a symbol embodying certain attitudes.

The nostalgic value of these comments is evident when merged with a metacommentary on the state of Beat scholarship and its position within academia. A few established Beats scholars object to the way academia approaches the Beats. Yet these voices do not oppose what they view as an unfair treatment or approach to the Beats, but rather the incorporation of Beat scholarship into academia as a whole. This criticism stems from the understanding of the Beats as being in direct opposition to the institutionalization of research, and therefore the institutionalization of the Beats. As a result, the argument concludes, the Beats are being appropriated for corporate use, and provide a profit to the industry which shunned them from the beginning. Analyzing such discourse then provides metacommentary on the issue or representation, as these arguments essentially fight for a certain representation of the Beats.

Writing in 2015, Jed Birmingham aims a rather scathing attack at *The Transnational Beat Generation* for the reasons outlined above. Emphasizing the Beats' critique of consumerism and capitalism, Birmingham denounces the essay collection for being a "self-congratulating narrative" which lies "within an institutional structure and publishing culture that may be as corrupt and exploitative as any Fortune 100 corporation" ("DIY"). Birmingham demands a more hands-on approach to the Beats: rather than applying "spicy theory all over everything like the hot pepper relish on a tasteless Subway sandwich," a true Beat scholar should roll up "his sleeves and [get] busy uncovering some forgotten sources" as well as do some "blue-collar work in the archives." Beat scholarship, Birmingham further argues, should also be more politically-conscious – rather than promoting yet another reading of a Beat text, Beat scholars should try to promote Beat scholarship by comparing and contrasting important social and political milestones of the Beat Generation period with current events. One should thus focus on the student revolts of the 1960s, on the responses of the Beats to these revolts, or on the university machinery of labor, publishing and corporate structure. Birmingham then continues by commenting on the current status of Beat scholarship in academia as a whole:

> There are numerous reasons why the Beat Generation gets little respect in the university. Many of them stem from embarrassment. Such as the Beats' less than progressive views on race, gender and sexuality. Much serious Beat Criticism corrects and critiques these views thus placing Beat square pegs within the circle of acceptable academic discussion. Yet a Beat Criticism that voices racial, ethnic, and gender issues along the

> party lines of progressive (and supposedly transgressive) theory is not about difference or plurality at all. It is a processed criticism; it is homogenized not heterogeneous. Beat scholars in the university are just another brick in the wall.
>
> The Beats are also a guilty pleasure. Beat books such as *On the Road* and poems such as "Howl" provide enjoyment to a general public of "uneducated" readers. Academic criticism hates nothing more than "uneducated" people having a good time. ("DYI")

Birmingham's criticism then echoes the anti-academic ethos of the Beats and other artists of the 1950s and 1960s. His solution to this conundrum emphasizes archival work and text restoration as a way of resisting the institutional nature of academia. Instead of focusing on literary theory – and thus guaranteeing a constantly growing archive of criticism based on new readings of a text – Birmingham calls for filling in the blanks of Beat literature and focusing on the margins: making sure women poets such as Diane di Prima or Anne Waldman are established as crucial Beats is one of his proposed solutions.

For Birmingham, Beat scholarship should be truly "Beat" in its anti-academic stance and refusal to follow the latest trends in literary scholarship: the worst thing about many contributions to Beat Criticism is the elitism of the scholars and the fact that, as Birmingham puts it, it is "just another fucking job" ("DYI"). Birmingham's stance is quite radical, yet the distrust toward academia and its attitude toward the Beats can be felt across Beat scholarship. As has been already mentioned, in 2001 Kurt Hemmer expressed his surprise at the sheer amount of Beat scholarship and therefore the wide-reaching support for the Beats in academia: "There was a time not too long ago when the idea of multiple, high-quality, academic books on the Beats appearing within a few years of each other was absurd" ("Barbarians" 87). Yet surprisingly, two decades on from Hemmer's comment, this astonishment regarding Beat acceptance is still present in current Beat scholarship. For instance, one of the latest (as of February 2018) and clearly high-profile additions to Beat scholarship is *The Cambridge Companion to the Beats* (2017). The collection is a part of the Cambridge Companions to Literature series which aims to be the entry point for readers into the subject's criticism and is described on its website as covering "major writers, artists, philosophers, topics and periods"; the essays, the description continues, have been commissioned for the publication and constructed so that they "appeal to student readers" ("Cambridge Companions"). In other words, the series ultimately represents the canonization of the collection's subject matter, yet *The Cambridge Companion to the Beats* is introduced by its editor Steven Belletto with the following:

> Fans of irony will appreciate that *The Cambridge Companion to the Beats* now exists. Cambridge University Press, the world's oldest, telegraphs a certain seriousness and – to

> some readers – the imprimatur of the academy. And yet, if you know anything about the Beats, you probably know that they were "antiestablishment," that they wrote against conformity, consumerism, and the values of mainstream culture. (1)

Granted, Belletto then continues by explaining that the division between the Beats and academia was never as large as it has frequently been portrayed, and that the sheer amount of Beat scholarship currently available indicates that the Beats have finally been welcomed by academia at large (1–2). Still, Belletto adds that the current relationship between the Beats and "the academy … remains vexed on many levels," which seems rather unfounded in light of recent acquisitions of Beat manuscripts and memorabilia by Stanford or Emory.[37] Yet such a precaution on Belletto's part – taking the more "traditionalist" position on Beat scholarship within academia – did not preclude the criticism eventually leveled at Belletto's collection.

R. J. Ellis's critique of the collection of essays begins with a pattern common in Beat scholarship, as it starts by – yet again – pointing out that the Beats were disapproved of by academia and that students in literature programs would hear that they "just won't get a lecturing post" if their graduate studies focused on the Beats. Similarly, Oliver Harris also begins his interview with Belletto by stating that the collection being released in the Cambridge Series is a "paradox," as the university ultimately represents the very institution which initially dismissed the Beats as irrelevant and not possessing any artistic value. Ultimately, however, Ellis's overall argument is not without merits – he faults the collection for frequently providing broad brushstrokes where more detail was needed – and is valuable for a few reasons. First, academic responses to the Beats sometimes cannot avoid stereotyping the Beats, and this includes not only the representations by institutions such as Stanford University, but also individual Beat scholars who may "constantly repeat the mantra that the Beats pursued/sought/found freedom of expression during an era of growing repression …" without commenting on the issue in a detailed manner (Ellis). Second, Beat criticism clearly follows a pattern set by current literary scholarship as a whole. In other words, when Ellis complains that the Cambridge collection is too inclusive in its approach – since it stretches the line between the Beats and Beat-associates too thin – this only means that Beat scholarship has not only long been part of Academia, but also has for long used current academic approaches. Simply put, Beat scholarship is – and has certainly been for a few years now, to the dismay of some Beat scholars – a part of academia and therefore the whole industry of cultural production it represents. The collection of critical essays *Reconstructing the Beats* (2004), edited by Jennie Skerl,

37 In addition, another contribution to Beat scholarship, David Stephen Calonne's *The Spiritual Imagination of the Beats*, was published by the same Cambridge University Press a few months later.

serves as an example of Beat scholarship as yet another small field found in academia. In the introduction to the collection – which is quite tellingly separated into three chapters, namely "Re-historicizing," "Recovering," and "Re-visioning" – Skerl writes the following:

> This collection has several purposes: to re-vision the Beats from contemporary critical perspectives, to reassess their place in mid-century American history and literature, to recontextualize Beat writers within the larger arts community of which they were a part, to recover marginalized figures and expand the restricted canon of three to six major figures established from 1956 to 1970, and to critique media stereotypes and popular clichés that influence both academic and popular discourse about the Beats. (2)

One of the collection's main aims is then to insert the female voice into the history of the Beat Generation movement and emphasize the importance of African-American and other minorities in the Beat Generation (3–4). Skerl points out that there were numerous female poets and artists associated with New York and San Francisco bohemia, artists such as ruth weiss or Joanne Kyger, while African Americans Bob Kaufman and Ted Joans were household names of the West Coast and East Cost scenes. *Reconstructing the Beats* thus not only represents the renewed scholarly interest in the Beats and the modern approaches used in Beat Studies, but it also represents the changes in academia in general – changes in the way scholars read and subsequently critique literature and culture. Consequently, Beat scholarship is no longer on the "skid row" of academic production. Beat Studies is a "comparatively small but deep" field of scholarly pursuit, Belletto explains in an interview with Oliver Harris. While the studies' role in the total field of production is small overall, it can no longer be considered as not being part of academia as a whole by virtue of constantly producing newer and newer readings in the same manner as virtually any other field of literary studies.

Some of the practices of Beat scholars, namely Birmingham's lament over the "standardized" approach to research or the constant need of Beat scholars to highlight academia's attitude toward the Beats in the 1950s and 1960s, are then to a certain extent unfounded. Nevertheless, they are also revealing, as they tell something about the scholars themselves and therefore about the Beats, albeit indirectly. Therefore, Birmingham's rant on the loss of "Beatness" in current Beat Studies – the slow disappearance of a "down and dirty" approach in research – indicates the qualities found in the Beat Generation ("DYI"). To Birmingham, the Beats represent authenticity and beating one's path outside of the established routes. Similarly, the references to the relationship between the Beats and academia are not merely factual statements, but on a meta-discursive level are also inherent parts of an established narrative possessing specific connotations – a sense

of exclusion, which is by definition linked to a notion of exceptionality, of being the Other in relation to the monolith of academia. A sense of "Beatness," therefore, impregnates some of the contributions to Beat Studies. As a result, even Beat scholars can possess a Beat ethos and identity in their criticism.

5.4 Critiquing the Beats

As Skerl's *Reconstructing the Beats* shows, one of the central issues surrounding the Beats – what the Beat Generation is and who belongs in it – is then frequently being reframed by current scholarship. However, the notion of a Beat identity is in less direct terms addressed by some of the critics of the Beats. Importantly, this criticism goes beyond Birmingham's disdain for the arbitrary application of literary theory currently in vogue to the Beats.

Finding detractors of the Beat Generation is a far more difficult task than in the fifties; still, one can hear occasional voices of dissent. One such voice is that of Harold Bloom, who in the introduction to the *Jack Kerouac's On the Road*, a part of his Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations series, starts with the following: "I have not reread *On the Road* during the near half-century since its first publication, and I am not happy at encountering it again" (1). Bloom's criticism resembles that of the 1950s: the novel is, he claims, a "Period Piece," a work of art that has little artistic merit outside of the context of its period. Bloom argues that the elements of social protest in the novel have now, in the age of "mediaversities" and "corporate robber barons" who rule society, faded away. As a result, *On the Road* then emerges most unfavorably when compared to "the masterpieces of Classic American fiction" such as the works of Steinbeck, Melville, or Twain. There is "no literary value whatsoever" in the novel, the critic further claims; the work sorely lacks the "delicate nuanced artistry of our father, Walt Whitman," and is merely a self-indulgent evasion of the American quest for identity (1–2). Unsurprisingly, Norman Podhoretz took offense in 1987 when he found out that the city of Lowell, Kerouac's hometown, had decided to honor the Beat by building a new park bearing his name. He claims that Kerouac wrote books "heaping abuse on the way of life lived in" small-town America such as Lowell and Kerouac's "gift" was, in Podhoretz's reading, his ability to produce "narcissistic monologues" ("Monument"). Yet Podhoretz is not ultimately surprised by such news; he sees the park as another move by both critics and publishers to pay "retroactive homage" to the Beats, as when Harper & Row published a large collection of Ginsberg's poems. For Podhoretz, this development is ultimately a symptom of the degradation of values in America, and the Beats are to blame.

Harold Bloom is an idiosyncratic figure in American literary criticism known for his disdain of the current trends in literary theory; similarly, Norman Pod-

horetz effectively prizes his spats with the Beats or his former associates such as Trilling or Mailer. Others Beat critics are better at accentuating what exactly they dislike about the Beats. Bruce Bawer, looking in 1985 at Allen Ginsberg and the criticism and controversies surrounding him, describes Ginsberg as a phenomenon. Similarly to Podhoretz, he considers the recently published collection of Ginsberg's poems, *Collected Poems 1947–1980*, a testament to the canonization of the poet by the mainstream press (2). However, he then draws attention to the numerous "Ginsberg anecdotes" that many Ginsberg critics include in their reviews or essays, which leads him to claim that the persona of Ginsberg rather than his poems is what truly lies behind his success; in other words, it is the idea of Ginsberg that is of value to the critics and subsequently being celebrated (1–2). Bawer advances his argument of Ginsberg's past as a marketing research consultant and considers the success of *Howl* a combination of shock tactics, Ginsberg's knowledge of his audience, and his ability to package and market the product in an appealing if unconventional manner; for Bawer, Ginsberg had been relying on these tactics ever since the public reading of "Howl" in the Six Gallery (7). Even though the poems that followed are only variations of the same messages relying on the same tropes and development, Ginsberg successfully developed a "personality cult" around himself (12). The cult members, Bawer continues, consider him a "messianic poet" whose poetic faults can be ignored precisely because of his messianic qualities of authenticity. Ultimately, his main point is that people are attracted to Ginsberg the "polemical performance artist" rather than the poet; as a result, these people live through Ginsberg's persona their own versions of liberalism (2, 13).

Bawer is unable to avoid some of the old arguments about the Beat Generation made in the 1950s: he claims that the Beats romanticize poverty and crime while representing anti-intellectualism, and that Ginsberg has done "considerable damage to both American society and American literary culture." Nevertheless, the bottom line of his criticism, that Ginsberg is popular because of the *idea* of Ginsberg, touches upon some of the representations of the Beats common even today. It is the idea of the Beats – that is, what they signify – which is appealing to the audience. It does not necessarily have to be the only appealing aspect of the Beats, nor is it usually so, yet the values the Beats represent, their "Beatness," should also be taken into account when dealing with the Beats' reception and status. Importantly, this notion addresses the seeming focus of Stanford University or Emory University on their lives and their social impact: readers do not only value the Beats as writers, but also as cultural figures – as icons – and some readings simply accentuate this aspect over their literary achievements.

Finally, this notion of a Beat ideal is also present in discussions on the methods and directions of Beat Studies. Being "beat" means encompassing certain principles, and these can inadvertently manifest themselves at any time. However,

the hierarchy of said principles and their importance in one's reading of the Beats can again vary depending on the specific nuances of the given reading. The Beats and academic discourse thus inform one another; by accentuating certain aspects of the Beats, the resulting scholarship reshapes the Beats into a different mold, thus provoking a reaction from future interpretations. Thus, Birmingham disavows current literary criticism of the Beats – "It is a processed criticism; it is homogenized not heterogeneous. Beat scholars in the university are just another brick in the wall." – in favor of more independent research focusing on the "little magazines" of New American Poetry ("DYI"). Yet this process of informing and reinforming does not occur in an enclosed loop but rather in an uneven, perhaps somewhat misshapen, spiral. There is a development in the understanding of the Beats; the core remains mostly the same, yet the boundaries veer and shuffle, and at times coalesce to recenter the core. In this case, on his quest to understand the Beats, Birmingham is drawn in one direction while Skerl in *Reconstructing the Beats* in another.

Ultimately, this contest over "Beatness" then mirrors the one happening in popular culture: while some readings emphasize the work of the Beats, others promote them for their impact on American society.

6 CZECHOSLOVAKIA OF THE FIFTIES AND SIXTIES: AN INTRODUCTION

> A father and a son noticed something, so they bend down and find out there is a Colorado potato beetle on the road. This is it – the American bug, the most recent villainous agent of American barbarism… What do the American imperialists want? They want the most dangerous potato pest to destroy our potato industry so that our nutrition and animal husbandry, as well as the industries which depend on them, would soon collapse. (*Československé filmové noviny*)

The above is from a newsreel presented before the main feature film in movie theaters in communist Czechoslovakia. The newsreel *Československé filmové noviny* (The Czechoslovak Film Newspaper) was a weekly source of news from across the world. Usually focusing on news such as the anniversary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia or meeting yearly quotas at the local steel mill earlier than anticipated, the newsreel provided its audience with their regular dose of propaganda. Petr Kopecký notes that while the United States had to slog through the McCarthy era of persecuting everything un-American, the Czechoslovak state-controlled media – and therefore the firm grasp of the Communist Party – painted the country beyond the Atlantic Ocean as an entity devoid of morals ("Czeching the Beat" 97). Political trials were the norm, as the case of Milada Horáková showed[38], and those who dared to oppose the government's policies were often victimized by the regime. One did not even have to actively oppose the Communist regime to be persecuted: as the fate of many Czechoslovak pilots flying in the Royal Air Force during the Second World War showed, just an association with the West could

38 Horáková was a politician who was tried and executed for plotting to overthrow the Communist regime. The charges against her were naturally fabricated.

lead to political persecution. Losing a job or the family flat, or not being able to study at a university were among the minor punishments, as the alternative was imprisonment or even forced labor. And all this was happening under the close supervision of the Soviet Union.

6.1 Art and Socialist Realism

To provide a lasting means of governance, totalitarian regimes must rely on propaganda to create conformity. Therefore, ideology was omnipresent in the everyday life of communist Czechoslovakia, and art was not an exception. While Czechoslovak artists retained their orientation toward the West after the war, in February 1948 the Communists organized a coup and established the government of one party. A few months later, President Klement Gottwald delivered a speech during the Congress of National Culture (Sjezd národní kultury) organized by the Czechoslovak Communist Party. During the speech, he denounced the elitism of bourgeois artists imitating decadent Western art and emphasized the necessity for artists to serve the needs of socialism and build a better future for the whole of humanity (qtd. in Svašek 385–86). Maintained by socialist realist criticism, art serves the people and is judged based on its effectiveness in doing so (Kubíček 127).

Soviet literary criticism had a profound impact on its Czechoslovak counterpart. The theater and literary critic Sergei Machonin, who eventually came to oppose the regime, was among the first to provide a thorough study of Soviet socialist realist literature in postwar Czechoslovakia. His essay then not only elaborates on the model which ultimately became the template for Czechoslovak socialist realism, but also helps explain Gottwald's understanding of art and its position in the public sphere. He explained that one of the defining features of Soviet socialist realism is the combination of a revolutionary sense of being and a romantic idealism, or "revolutionary romanticism" (241). There is no single protagonist in the works of revolutionary romanticism. Instead, the protagonists are all the characters combined into a single collective and even though these characters are parts of a larger whole, they do not lose their own identities as the identities help to shape the whole (244). This leads Machonin to argue that Soviet socialist realism's concept of the protagonist is an improvement over the bourgeois novel, which is flawed not only due to its characters but also due to its lack of ideology; this absence, Machonin adds, then shapes the overall nihilistic form of the bourgeois novel and causes the moral stagnation of the West (258). In contrast, because the art of socialist realism is a direct reflection of socialist reality, it does not suffer from such hindrances (245). This understanding of socialist realism consequently gives a specific purpose to its art: unlike the morally ambiguous novels of the West frequently giving voice to flawed individuals of sometimes de-

fective moral judgment, the socialist writer must take sides by having a clear and specific attitude – the attitude of the progressive ideology of Communism (247). A true artist, Machonin concludes, must lead by example through the incorporation of ideological and formal demands to accurately portray reality for the esthetic needs and requirements of the Soviet people (257, 262). This naturally also was true in Czechoslovakia, as characters in a work of art in the 1950s had to represent the values of a specific social group (Šámal, "Jak se stát" 55).

Naturally, the above also means that art could be reduced to the ideology it contains, and therefore its ideology was to define its quality. This was, however, the point of socialist realism, and was further perfected by numerous Party ideologues. Ladislav Štoll, a true Party hardliner and a leading literary critic of the 1950s, argues that ideology is unavoidable no matter what the author does ("Literatura a kulturní revoluce" 30). Therefore, Štoll explains, it is not a particular ideology itself, but rather the ability of the chosen ideology to "accurately" and "truthfully" depict the objective realities that truly matters. Importantly, the only ideology that in Štoll's reading offers an objective portrayal of reality and a progressive view of the future is Communism. This had far-reaching consequences not only for journalism or history but also for art, as the presence or absence of *correct* ideology directly impacts the quality of a given work of art. The clearer the artist's thinking is in terms of ideology, philosophy and politics, Štoll explains, the better his resulting art becomes (31). Finally, Štoll states the following maxim: "The closer an artist is to the people and life, the better he is artistically" (37). Of course, "the people" denote the *right* kind of people – those believing in the values of Socialism and Communism as emblematized by the Soviet Union, values which are, the Party maintains, in direct opposition to the decadence and immorality of the West. As a result, art should not only share the values of the public rather than those of an individual, but also represent the collective struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, which on a worldwide scale meant embodying the international fight of the People's Democracies against the capitalist West (Svašek 386).

Using art, and therefore language itself, as a means of propaganda was proposed by Joseph Stalin himself. In his 1950 essay "Concerning Marxism and Linguistics," Stalin makes it perfectly clear that language is a tool waiting to be used: "[L]anguage has been created precisely in order to serve society as a whole, as a means of intercourse between people, in order to be common to the members of society and constitute the single language of society, serving members of society equally, irrespective of their class status." Guided by socialist realism, art and language then served to unify the people under a common ideological banner.

Therefore, the philosophy and application of socialist realism puts art under significant constraints. The problem is twofold: it must conform to expectations of the given literary art form, such as expectations regarding characters or plot

development in literature, but it also must fall within Party rhetoric. Propaganda, symbol manipulation, and dissemination of political ideology is inherent to the official art of totalitarian regimes just as it is found in totalitarian governments themselves (Budil 9). In such regimes, language is often reduced to a set of predetermined questions and answers, resulting in a fictional account of reality being hailed as more truthful than reality itself (Kubíček 129). Through such ritualization, language ceases being an open communication tool, resulting in a broken system of codes and symbols.[39] By using socialist realism as the artistic standard, the Czechoslovak communist regime suppressed individual thinking and banned many works of art for their supposed ideological flaws (Alan 17). As a result, official art denotes not only the Party's specific concerns, but also connotes its rules and hierarchy through the use of various codes and symbols. The need to represent Party ideology led to specific art forms being considered inadequate and therefore simply banned, which was especially noticeable in painting; as Maruška Svašek notes, the gatekeepers of art deemed all non-figurative styles such as Impressionism or Cubism an affront to reality (388). Since the content and themes are clearly set, the mass culture of totalitarian regimes is then determined directly by the state rather than the audience, which causes many artists to be entirely dependent on the state for their livelihoods (Alan 39). This not only means that artists who wished to continue in their work were forced to further disseminate Party doctrine, but also the definition of appropriate art was in the hands of the Communist cadres and not the people as Gottwald argued (Svašek 386). In other words, for Communist ideologues literature represented "merely another ideological discourse" (Cerce 155). The stale and dogmatic art which resulted from such constraints then leads to a paradoxical situation, as it is the direct opposite of the revolutionary ethos promised by Communism (Lindey 73).

Since language and literary criticism are viewed as tools with specific purposes – to contribute to the improvement of socialist countries – it naturally opposes literary criticism not dedicated to such a task. Jan Mukařovský was formerly one of the leading members of the structuralist Prague Linguistic Circle and thus more than familiar with the structuralist concepts first put forward by Ferdinand de Saussure; however, after the communist takeover of Czechoslovakia in 1948 Mukařovský expressly denounced structuralism and its approach to literature. Mukařovský explains that the reason Marxist literary criticism focuses on the language of literature is relatively simple: by improving literary language literature

39 This interpretation of totalitarian language, however, should not be applied to literature in a completely uncritical manner. Petr Poslední notes that such an interpretations might lead to viewing totalitarian literature of the Stalinist era as pseudo-religious utilitarian texts rather than actual literature and therefore the study objects of cultural sociologists rather than literary critics (37). This kind of approach is in danger of simplifying historical development, thus committing similar reductions as those made by totalitarian regimes (38).

itself can better portray the real and therefore contribute to its reformation ("Ke kritice" 152). Language in this view does not merely follow an ideology, but it is purposefully and carefully examined and reviewed so that it can be used in an even more effective manner to promote socialist ideology. As a result, the view of esthetics is also affected. As Mukařovský writes in his essay "Estetika jazyka" (The Esthetics of Language), esthetic norms presuppose the existence of a consensus among a population as to which esthetic approaches are desirable and which not (71). Since Structuralism was not applied to determine which esthetic norms are the most viable ones for socialist realism and since it did not conform to its esthetic and ideological notions, it was deemed undesirable and unable to serve the needs of the new literature (Brabec 11–12, Jungmann 123).

In other words, the role of the artist in communist Czechoslovakia was firmly controlled by the ideology of socialist realism. As a direct consequence, a large rift between official art and the art that failed or did not wish to meet the requirements was therefore created (Alan 17). Importantly, the Czechoslovak communist regime was so dependent on its symbols and ideologies that there was no mechanism in practice to cope with arising nonconformity. Essentially, Alan argues, a permanent war was waged between the totalitarian power and those artists who chose not to follow the basic doctrines in their art. One such writer who did not subscribe to the notions of Socialist Realism was Josef Škvorecký. His novel *Zbabělci* (*The Cowards*), which was written in the late 1940s but published in 1958, describes the uprising in a small Czechoslovak town during the final days of the Second World War from the point of view of the adolescent Danny. Instead of possessing revolutionary fervor common in Communist narratives, however, Danny views the events unfolding around him with a mix of disinterestedness and irony and joins the end-of-war uprising mostly to impress his platonic interest, which unsurprisingly landed Škvorecký in trouble. While the initial reviews of the novel were lukewarm but not negative, in the early days of 1959 the novel spawned a furor among official critics (Janoušek et al. 17). Focusing on the novel's failure to follow socialist realist ideology, Štoll was one of the first to denounce the novel:

> [The novel] is in its spirit entirely foreign to our beautiful democratic and humanistic literature. It is a thing artistically dishonest, untruthful, and cynical. All of this is not because of the chosen topic, the main protagonist or the first-person narrative, but mainly because of the author's *ideological standpoint*, that is the *ideological repository*, which is also the cause of the imitative provincialism of the novel's expressions. ("Literatura" 37)

Jan Nový, another literary critic deriding the novel, was even blunter in his criticism. Škvorecký does not try to portray accurately the historical events covered in the novel, Nový claims. Instead of focusing on the revolutionaries sacrificing their

lives in the uprising against the Germans, Škvorecký directs the novel's narrative on cowardly and narrow-minded teenagers interested in girls and jazz music (46). What especially troubles Nový is not just Škvorecký's failure to offer an alternative to the morally dubious characters, but also the writer's inability to mock these unsavory individuals by disassociating himself from them (48). Instead, Škvorecký seems to agree with the main protagonist's cynicism and nihilism, Nový claims, therefore not providing a sufficient commentary on how to understand the novel's characters.[40] Eventually, the controversy surrounding the novel led to the tightening of Party rhetoric around literature and literary production, purges in the editorial boards of several literary magazines and the abolishment of others, and censorship of planned and previously approved publications deemed potentially defective (Janoušek et al. 18–21).[41]

Škvorecký, naturally, was not the only one who drew the ire of Party's ideologues; the work of Arne Novák was criticized in a similar fashion. Novák, a prominent literary critic during the interwar period, was condemned by the socialist realist critic František Buriánek for his reactionary writing and promotion of individualism (61, 63). As Buriánek further explains, individualism is the cornerstone of bourgeois ideology and the middle class and therefore should not be tolerated. Nevertheless, adherence to Party lines sometimes produced rather bizarre criticism. For instance, Jan Štern, a communist hardliner later disillusioned with the regime's ideology, sees literature as being in the service of history, which is why newly minted authors must face up to the challenge and make sure to describe the emerging Socialism in an accurate manner (7). This position in turn causes Štern to view the most recent poetry collection by Jiří Kolář as flawed, since it does not mention the beginning of the two-year plan for rebuilding the economy (11).[42] Simply put, the strict rules for artists in the postwar period affected the the-

40 It should be noted, however, that the ambiguousness and anti-ideological outlook also shocked many democratic reviewers in exile (Janoušek et al. 283).

41 The last point should not be underestimated. Starting in 1953, Czechoslovakia adopted the Stalinist model of planned production in literature, which bound the national chain of state-owned bookseller Kniha (Book) to purchase books from the state publishing houses not according to actual demand, but to the current importance of the ideology within. Yet this was not the only limitation imposed on the book industry. Other problems stemming from the planned economy of the nation included a lack of quality paper for a given publication (since the production of paper was planned in advance without regard for demand, the available quantity and quantity at a given moment was limited, therefore publishers often obtained the paper in stock rather than the one they needed), decisions of censors to suddenly interfere with a series of books sent to printers (therefore long-term projects such as large encyclopedias of several volumes were often left unfinished), and the poor planning of print-runs based on wildly inaccurate surveys conducted almost one year before the actual publication date (thus many sought-after books barely scratched the surface of their demand, while other books, usually those closely following Party ideology, were simply unsellable) (Janoušek et al. 54–57).

42 Miroslav Kovařík provides one more example of the frequently ludicrous standards of literary criticism: "We were particularly concerned with the Party idiots, who were simply everywhere. One censor asked me if Beethoven was born in East Germany or West Germany" ("Hrabětův svět").

matical and ideological content of art, and a strict adherence to such guidelines frequently revealed the grotesque logic behind socialist realism.

Importantly, the standards of criticism levied against domestic authors were applied to foreign writers as well. In the first decades of Czechoslovak Communism, the decisions whether to publish an American writer or not had little to do with artistic merit but rather with the ideology contained within (Kopecký, "Literary America" 68). Therefore, the writers who were persecuted or blacklisted during the McCarthy era were often among those being published; in addition, many African-American authors portraying racial inequality in the United States were also translated, which allowed the government to spread its message – that the United States is the enemy of freedom and the people – even further (68, 70). However, since all parts of the book industry – from producing the book to reading it – were under the direct control of the state, each foreign publication "had to undergo a radical ideological revision before it was allowed to be published" (Cerce 155). To make sure foreign authors were read in the "proper" way, either an afterword was used to shape the reader's experience of the text to one condoned by the Party, or the author's work, as was the case of Langston Hughes, was thoroughly searched for the most fitting texts from the author's oeuvre and heavily editorialized (Kopecký, "Literary America" 70–71; Kopecký, "Czeching the Beat" 98). Importantly, unlike other American left-wing writers such as Alexander Saxton or Victor J. Jerome, the Beats were never used by the regime for its ideological purpose. Despite their critical tone, the Beats were, Rauvolf argues, simply too anarchistic for communist propaganda ("Prague" 182).

Naturally, not even substantial editorial cuts were able to appropriate all Western art, which in its nature was individualistic and frequently voiced dissent (Lindey 107). However, even then the critics following the Party line knew that such a work of art could be useful, as the resulting critique would comment on what art should *not* be. A template for such an approach is Jaroslav Bouček's *Trubaduři nenávisti: Studie o současné západní úpadkové literatuře* (Troubadours of Hatred: A Study of the Contemporary Decadent Literature of the West). Written in 1952, the ideological pamphlet heaps abuse not only on Jean-Paul Sartre, Jean Genet, and John Steinbeck, but also on comic book characters such as Superman and Captain Marvel. For Bouček, the decadent intellectuals and writers of the West create a morality which is simply unacceptable to the average person (10). This immorality is then constantly perpetuated in Western art, for example in the "despicable" characters of Steinbeck's *Cannery Row*, which in turn allows American imperialism to instill in its population "hazardous individualism and terrifying and deadly hatred toward mankind" (20, 35). Following Bouček's lead, Petr Pujman in his 1960 essay on Nabokov's *Lolita* writes that the novel's publication in the West "is a great opportunity … to recognize the vast difference in the way we understand literature and the way it is understood in the West" (231). Accus-

ing Nabokov of writing a pornographic work and condoning the violence of the novel's protagonist, Pujman admits that even though *Lolita* is a great work on the technical and stylistic level, it ultimately fails on purely moral grounds (232–33). "The moral center" is missing – there is no critique of the protagonist's actions or of the society that created him; instead, the work is an ode to young nymphomaniacs and the middle-aged men that seek them out (233). For Pujman, the novel is simply "excrement in elaborate wrapping" and the fact it enjoys critical and commercial success in the West is telling (233). In other words, while Western literature was to a small degree accessible in Czechoslovakia, the selection was limited, since it still had to abide by the standards of socialist realism. "In the bipolar world of the Cold War era," Kopecký elaborates, "America became the arch-enemy of the newly formed Soviet Bloc" and since neither of the superpowers wanted to risk an open armed conflict, literature replaced actual armed conflict as one of the many fronts where the ideological warfare between the two sides was fought ("Literary America" 66).

6.2 Changing the Tide

Nevertheless, things were slowly changing during the 1950s. In 1956, Nikita Khrushchev criticized Stalin for abusing his powers and creating a cult of personality. Khrushchev had a far-reaching effect on life in the Eastern Bloc, leading to a thaw in society as the Party was loosening its grip on the everyday lives of its people (Kopecký, "Literary America" 72–73). While this did not stop hardliners such as Štoll from trying to uphold their control over literature during the Škvorecký controversy, in 1961 a second wave of Stalin criticism denounced ideological dogmatism and called for a revision of contemporary practices (Janoušek et al. 23). For instance, because of the liberalization, jazz had become prominent due to its influence on poetry and its effect on Czech writers who had grown up during the Protectorate (Novák 2).[43] Information regarding Western literature was scarce, yet it was becoming more and more available due to the diligence of the literary journal *Světová literatura* (World Literature); importantly, other journals soon followed (Vlček 208). These journals played an invaluable role in disseminating Western art amongst Czechoslovaks. For instance, it was *Světová literatura*

43 The importance of tolerating jazz should not be overlooked: jazz was bourgeois music originating from the West, and therefore unacceptable. After all, one of the criticisms aimed at Škvorecký was that the author's alter ego Danny listens to jazz. Similarly, in the 1952 the propaganda movie *Zítra se bude tančit všude* (Tomorrow, People Will Be Dancing Everywhere), the antagonist villainous tendencies and his opposition to the values of socialist Czechoslovakia are clearly defined at the beginning of the film through the art forms he prefers: his apartment is adorned with cubist paintings and he likes listening to jazz.

that first introduced to the public writers such as Henry Miller, Carl Sandburg, and, importantly, several Beat Generation authors including Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Allen Ginsberg (Kopecký, "Literary America" 73). The publication of Western texts was also clearly politically motivated, although this was naturally not disclosed by the editors and translators working in such periodicals. As Škvorecký notes, *Světová literatura* published texts which either could be read in a different – that is anti-communist – manner than the one suggested by the text's authors or the accompanying critique, or it published texts which were deemed simply unacceptable according to socialist realist standards (qtd. in Quinn 117). In addition, as the 1960s progressed, these journals were broadening their scope and often commented on wider socio-political issues (Janoušek et al. 64). In other words, these journals played a crucial role in spreading Western literature and thus providing an alternative to official art and its ideology. Ultimately, art during the 1950s and 1960s was defined by the power struggle between Stalinist hardliners and more liberal artists and critics, with the latter gaining more and more exposure as the 1960s progressed. (Svašek 383).

While these changes naturally occurred in individual steps and the changes were at first slow, more and more voices were being raised against the dogmatic approach toward literary criticism and art in general. For instance, Ferdinand Peroutka was among several critics who courageously stood up to Štoll and defended Škvorecký's *The Cowards*. Peroutka was in direct opposition to state-approved criticism by describing the novel as the first fully mature Czechoslovak novel (53). He sees the novel as anti-cultural, anti-societal, selfish, and anarchistic, and the novel's characters as using harsh language too often; nevertheless, he also argues that it is the most powerful novel of the last twenty years from a strictly literary perspective (53–54). Peroutka then makes an important point: not only does the novel describe characters who are clearly anti-ideological in their refusal to participate in state-regulated life, but the novel also describes the first anti-ideological generation of Czechoslovakia (57–58). All the young generation wants is to be left alone and this wish is shared among youth across the world, Peroutka adds. Such a critique of hardliner Štoll would have been unprecedented in the early 1950s, and this change thus anticipated the wholesale refusal of Štoll's dogmatic attack on structuralism in 1966 and 1967 (Janoušek et al. 151). These continuing changes in art criticism thus signaled the slow liberalization of Czechoslovak society.

The way the young generation affected public opinion can best be seen in the example of the Majáles festival. The festival's tradition is essentially built on the political activism of university students and an anti-systematic stance toward the government independent of the period (Svatoš 92). Ever since the Communist takeover in 1948, the organization of the whole festival had been kept under close scrutiny. The Majáles of 1956 was the first time the student festival was held after Khrushchev's critique of Stalin, therefore it was an important milestone because it

hinted at the increasing erosion of the totalitarian state and rising nonconformity of the young generation; importantly, over 100,000 people came to observe the festivities (Svatoš 93).[44] Later, the 1965 procession was the first Majáles in years directly organized by students, which many of those in attendance used "to express their political views by means of a provocative jape" (Blažek 39). As a result, the student parade accompanying the festival featured many political slogans and prankster-like mottos with double meanings (41).[45] The regime tried to supervise the festival from a distance; nevertheless, it proved difficult to exercise control over the students. The state supervisors could only stand by and watch as the 150,000 people in attendance cheered students carrying thinly-veiled criticism of the state (Blažek 41).[46]

After observing the festivities, the Party arrived at the consensus that the youth showed abandonment of official traditions and values (Kudrna 10). As Kudrna adds, such a development was partly due to the regime's inflexible approach toward the students, and Party officials were aware of this issue. Citing the Party's internal analysis of the 1965 Majáles, Kudrna points out that the regime had failed to provide an alternative to young people when faced with their opposition to traditional values (10). Furthermore, the report itself acknowledged that the regime is inflexible in adapting recent cultural trends from the West for its own purposes, and especially when it comes to the sudden emergence of rock and roll music.

However, freedoms were not guaranteed despite the gradual liberalization process. For instance, the Majáles of the following year was yet again under strict supervision, and all the signs and slogans had to be pre-approved in order to be featured in the parade (Svatoš 100). Furthermore, the regime was faced with another threat – that of adolescent men sporting long hair. Often wearing jeans, the symbol of the decadent West, and listening to rock music, men with long hair were dubbed "vlasatci" or "máničky" ("long-haired ones") and in 1966 became the largest public enemy to the socialist regime (Kudrna 12). Their nonconformist look connoted otherness and a sense of individualism and therefore it had to be harshly punished – men with long hair were not only mocked by the state-controlled media, but they were also exposed to continuous discrimination which, while technically illegal, was only encouraged by the state (Kudrna and Čuňas,

44 The officials organizing the 1956 festival were surprised by the degree of nonconformity of the students as well as the criticism levied toward the state through the use of various slogans or chants; as a result, the Party rather than the students became the organizers of Majáles from then on. Nevertheless, this move was not successful in curbing the individualism of the students, as illegal gatherings were taking place in the early 1960s around Petřín. Since attendance at these events increased each year despite systematic repressions, the regime was forced to relent and allow an official celebration to avoid further public disturbances. For more information, see Svatoš 93–98.

45 The slogans chanted by the students included "Soviet hermit, our model," "Long live the enemies of students" or "We greet the Public Security – and the non-public" (Blažek 41).

46 The official May Day parade was attended by 400,000 people (Blažek 41).

"Zásah" 27–28).[47] This systematic harassment would frequently lead to the police forcibly taking the youth to the nearest police station, where their hair was cut against their will. Adding insult to injury, they also had to pay for the procedure (Kurdna 12–16).

6.3 The Beat Generation and Communist Czechoslovakia

Despite such harassment, the process of liberalization was inevitable: rather than being the result of isolated and sudden incidents, the changes in the general population and especially among students were gradual and had been gaining momentum for several years, as the Party itself acknowledged (Kurdna 3). While it is difficult to highlight a single event from the gradual process of liberalization leading toward the Prague Spring, one such event must be analyzed in more detail: Allen Ginsberg becoming the King of May during the 1965 Majáles festival.

Ginsberg visited Czechoslovakia twice in 1965. His first arrival in Prague, on February 18, was purely coincidental. Before Prague he had stayed in Cuba; however, after protesting the treatment of Cuban homosexuals, he was expelled from Cuba and put on the first flight out of the island. As luck would have it, the flight was a Czechoslovak Airliner on its regular flight from Havana to Prague (Rauvolf, "Prague" 185). Since a few of his poems had been published in magazines and a collection of his poems was in the works, Ginsberg's contacts were able to make him the official guest of the Union of Czechoslovak Writers; as a result, Ginsberg even received pay for the magazine publications, which allowed him to stay in the capital for several weeks.[48] Ginsberg's stay was written about in several of the nation's newspapers and the poet became a mainstay of Prague's Bohemian circles. On 19 March 1965 Ginsberg left Czechoslovakia for Moscow, where he stayed for several weeks. Finally, on 29 April 1965 Ginsberg returned to Prague after a short stay in Poland.

Ginsberg did not intend to stay for long; however, as he was waiting for his plane to New York, Ginsberg was asked to participate in the King of May elections of the Majáles festival by none other than Škvorecký who had to turn down the offer of the student organizers because he had fallen ill (Blažek 40). Ginsberg was

47 As Kudrna and Čuňas note, long-haired youth was frequently barred from public transport or denied service. In addition, women sometimes had to undergo humiliating STI examinations (28–29).

48 While Rauvolf notes that the reason Cuban authorities put him on the flight to Prague is "a mystery," Blažek explains that the answer is rather simple: there were no direct flights to the United States due to the blockade, therefore he was flown to a city where he could change flights to New York ("Prague" 1985; 35). It should also be noted that the two acquaintances Ginsberg contacted upon his arrival and who helped him obtain the official invitation from the Union were Jan Zábrana, who had been the first to introduce Ginsberg to Czechoslovak audiences, and Josef Škvorecký, the author of the controversial *The Cowards* and contributor to various literary magazines including *Světová literatura*.

first displayed on a truck bed in the procession, then, after chanting Buddhist mantras to thousands of people, was elected the King of May. As Blažek explains, the reason the communist regime let the King of May happen was their desire to avoid having to break apart unofficial student celebrations, as doing so was not only costly, but was frequently reported by Western radio stations, thus tarnishing the country's image abroad (39). However, Ginsberg's election became a huge phenomenon and the poet himself was deemed so influential that the authorities decided to deport him with the help of clandestine practices by the Czechoslovak secret police; the official explanation for his deportation was the corruption of youth (46). The state-run newspapers then used this accusation, backed by excerpts from his diary discussing homosexuality, to smear the poet as well as the translators and writers who introduced Ginsberg to the students.[49] Even though Ginsberg was deported, the importance of his election to be the King of May should not be underestimated. As Andrew Lass argues, the election was an important symbol and a political statement, because it gave people the ability to actually choose ("Allen Ginsberg" 44).[50] Furthermore, Ginsberg was active both before and after the election, as he visited various theaters, cafés and wine bars, and met with Czech writers, poets, and translators. While some of these meetings were of rather a personal character, others, such as Ginsberg discussing with students at student dormitories on the night of the election, were clearly political; importantly, all these activities were carefully monitored and subsequently documented by the secret police (Svatoš 99).

Despite the regime's best efforts to discredit and therefore silence Ginsberg, the damage had been done, as the poet and other members of the Beat Generation had already made a profound influence on Czechoslovak cultural life in the sixties. The emergence of rock music, alternative theater, improvisation performances, or poetry readings – all these were influenced by the Beats (Rauvolf, "Beat po česku" 22). Beat poems by Ginsberg or Ferlinghetti were not only presented on national radio or television, but also recited at various cafés and wine bars (Kopecký, "Czeching the Beat" 99). One such place was the Viola café in Prague, which under its founder Jiří Ostermann frequently hosted Beat poetry recitals and where the poets Inka Machulková, Václav Hrabě and Vladimíra Čerepková, accompanied by jazz music, read their Beat-influenced poetry (Novák 4); importantly, these three poets, together with Milan Koch, are often referred to as the Czechoslovak Beat poets (Rauvolf, "Beat po česku" 24). Miroslav Kovařík, the founder of the Docela malé divadlo theater (A Rather Small Theater) in the

49 See Vodrážka and Lass for the transcript of the internal memo of the secret police regarding Ginsberg.

50 Interestingly, Andrew Lass, who was present during the elections, suggests that someone from the organizers decided that Ginsberg should win the popular vote by controlling the voting machine ("Allen Ginsberg" 43–44).

city of Litvínov, was another person responsible for the popularity of the Beats. Not only was he among the first to perform Kerouac's and Ginsberg's poetry, but the Beats were also regularly featured in his Litvínov theater. The Beat Generation was through its very existence – as only a limited number of poems were available – an important catalyst for Czechoslovak poetry, because they represented a certain mode of writing which was quickly adopted by the country's poets (Dvorský 131–32). Outside of poetry, the influence of the Beats was felt among the various emerging subcultures. For instance, the translation of Ginsberg's *Howl* was released precisely at the time when the hippie subculture was at the height of its popularity in Czechoslovakia (Vlček 208). Rauvolf also argues that the Beats significantly helped popularize hitchhiking in the early 1960s (Rauvolf, "Prague" 184). Overall, the sixties signified the country's return to Europe, Miroslav Kovařík clarifies, and the Beats played a substantial part in this liberalization process ("U kávy").

Consequently, the emerging subcultures in the second half of the 1960s, which would later form the loosely-organized underground movement of the 1970s, were greatly affected by Ginsberg's deportation, as it fueled rather than extinguished the growing dissent in Czechoslovak society (Machovec, "Avantgarda" 171).[51] Ginsberg's popularity thus signified a general trend of Czechoslovak society – the movement toward liberalization at the expense of the regime's diminishing power. This trend soon culminated in the Prague Spring, a period of liberalization and reformation starting in early 1968. Under the leadership of the reformist Alexander Dubček, the newly elected First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, the Party proposed reforms toward a more democratic socialism under a program later known as "Socialism with a human face." This program planned steady progress toward democratization and political liberalization, ultimately leading to the official abolishment of censorship. Suddenly, Czechoslovaks were able to enjoy domestic and foreign art unbridled by censorship and discuss politics openly. Nevertheless, these provisions were not enough, according to some critics. In June 1968 Ludvík Vaculík published "Dva tisíce slov" ("Two Thousand Words"), a manifesto denouncing the involvement of many of the hardline Party members in the reforms. The manifesto argues that the reforms are in the hands of the wrong people – those not only unsuited for such a role, but also directly responsible for the dehumanizing effect of the regime's policies leading to a loss of mutual trust and interest in politics (460–61). Importantly, Vaculík accuses Party members of essentially becoming the new ruling class and subsequently encourages the public to pressure hardline Communists through demonstrations,

51 The term "underground" generally refers to a number of artists, mostly poets and musicians, around the poet Ivan Martin "Magor" Jirous and the band The Plastic People of the Universe. These artists programmatically refused to take part in the establishment of the normalization period and usually shared certain esthetic features; see Machovec "Podzemí a underground" for more information.

strikes or public critiques to step down from office (461, 464). Dubček and others, however, denounced the manifesto for being too radical and even if they had not, it would not have mattered. On the night of August 21 of the same year, the armies of five Warsaw Pact countries invaded Czechoslovakia, thus stopping all the reforms. One year later, Gustav Husák replaced Dubček as the first secretary and started a long period of normalization – the return of the status quo and the rule of the Party.

6.4 The Normalized Czechoslovakia

The effects of normalization on everyday life and entertainment were enormous; one of them was the significant purge in the books available on the market. Unlike the 1950s, the sixties experienced a boom in foreign literature and one could barely read all the titles available: works by writers such as Graham Greene, Franz Kafka, Ernest Hemingway, or Samuel Beckett, but also philosophers including Theodor W. Adorno, Friedrich Nietzsche, or Sigmund Freud could suddenly be purchased on the quickly proliferating book market (Měšťan 67–69). This availability, however, was not limited to older titles. Many of the foreign releases were translated into Czech a relatively short time after being published, which was made possible by the diligence and hard work of numerous translators; the 1970s and 1980s, in contrast, went back to the old model of government supervision and limited availability (70). In addition, almost all literary magazines and journals, many of which were established (and sometimes even re-established after previous purges) in the more liberal sixties, were simply banned; only two periodicals, the closely supervised *Literární měsíčník* and *Tvorba*, were available (Kubíček 133–34). Reading thus suffered on numerous fronts.

Naturally, the smaller number of existing periodicals made it easier for the regime to oversee the content, thus discarding the pluralism of the sixties. The best example of the radical shift back to the "norm" of the communist regime is the first issue of the 1971 *Světová literatura*. The issue not only featured a completely new editorial board, but also included a short leading article that addressed the changes in the magazine: the task of the journal is to use "a socialist viewpoint in order to describe the most important progressive trends and writers in world literature in as complete and accurate manner as possible" (2). Importantly, the article also stated that the previous editorial board had failed to fully establish the journal as "supporting the noblest cause of mankind – socialist humanism." "Accuracy," "truthfulness" and "objectivity" are more important than relativistic objectivism not following any principles, the text further claims. Decrying many of the works of Western writers as a short-term fad, the new editorial board closes the essay by proclaiming the full commitment of themselves and the journal to the

values of socialist society. As a consequence, the amount of space in the literary magazine dedicated to American literature – and Western literature in general – was extremely limited from then on (Semínová). Unsurprisingly, among the editorial board was none other than Ladislav Štoll.

At the Czechoslovak Communist Party plenum a month after the Warsaw Pact invasion, a resolution prepared by Moscow was read that bluntly defined the purpose of the government as controlling the media and therefore shaping the ideas and opinions of its people: "The press, radio, and television are first of all the instruments for carrying into life the policies of the Party and state" (Bren 29). The media again were an instrument of the official ideology and therefore any act not approved by the state was automatically considered to be against it. However, the social shift of the sixties was irreversible, and the regime had no choice but to adapt and change its tactics. Milan Jungmann notes that the legacy of Ladislav Štoll was simply too impractical during the normalization period: the people who experienced the liberalization of the regime as well as the youth who rose against the preceding generations and their values would not be swayed by such a heavy-handed approach (124). As a consequence, the government chose a slightly less restrictive approach to its citizens, which resulted in a slightly more liberal yet still prohibitive regime. In order to pacify its citizens, the regime gave them more consumer choices in the market than before. Most people were therefore relatively free in their domestic spheres, especially when compared with the earlier decades; however, this was true only as long as they did not wish to interfere with the regime's governance in any way, whether by focusing on human rights or free speech, or by a simple desire to experience Western culture.

This ideological shift – or rather a change in application of ideology – was naturally reflected in state-sponsored culture. Long gone were the times of socialist realist movies such as *Anna proletářka* (*Anna the Proletarian*) in which the main antagonists were the cartoony capitalist factory-owners who exploited the workers. Instead, the antagonists of the normalization period were often operating from within the government structure. For instance, the television series *Okres na severu* (*The District Up North*) centers on Josef Pláteník, a regional secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, and in one of the episodes Pláteník exposes a communist official for taking bribes and using public funds for personal gain; corruption and dishonest comrades, the show claims, are some of the factors inhibiting economic development and therefore the well-being of the people ("Případ"). Therefore, the regime avoided explicit authoritarian messages in favor of a slightly more nuanced way of presenting the same ideology to the public.

A significant number of citizens seemed to agree that some consumer freedom was still better than none and the regime was able to retain its control over the country's political life as a consequence. However, such a system of governance – showing its citizens a mirage of personal freedoms while keeping them in check

through the ever-present ideology – is arguably more oppressive than a traditional dictatorship controlling the biopower of its population in an explicit manner. In his seminal essay "The Power of the Powerless," Václav Havel dubs the post-1968 government "post-totalitarianism" and argues that its complex structure and intricate dissemination of ideology resembles an organized religion rather than a means of governance (129). Post-totalitarianism is omnipresent in Czechoslovakia, yet it handles its subjects while wearing "its ideological gloves" rather than with brute force, which then in an Orwellian fashion twists the daily dehumanization into virtues (135–36). Ultimately, post-totalitarianism represents a nihilistic stance toward the truth itself:

> Because the regime is captive to its own lies, it must falsify everything. It falsifies the past. It falsifies the present, and it falsifies the future… As the interpretation of reality by the power structure, ideology is always subordinated ultimately to the interests of the structure. Therefore, it has a natural tendency to disengage itself from reality, to create a world of appearances, to become ritual. (136–37)

For Havel, life in Czechoslovakia had to be lived in constant defiance of reality. Ultimately, Czechoslovak society after 1968 essentially returned to the conformity and authoritarian governance of the 1950s, a situation that lasted until 1989.

7 THE RECEPTION IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

The first public mention of the Beats is most likely a short text in *Literární noviny* (Literary Gazette) published on 2 May 1958. The anonymous text provides a very brief description of the events leading to the trial of *Howl and Other Poems* by explaining that the publication was seized because it was deemed pornographic and Ferlinghetti was jailed for trying to sell such a pornographic work ("A jak to dopadlo"). The article then ends in a somewhat sardonic tone: "Everyone who knows American 'men's magazines' will be quite surprised by such news." The article takes a jab at the "moral bankruptcy" of the West, which on the one hand bans poets from freely expressing their thoughts, yet on the other allows pornographic magazines such as *Playboy* to flourish. Apart from being the first mention of the Beats, the article is important for another reason. While *Howl and Other Poems* was ruled not obscene by Judge Horn on 3 October 1957, the text does not even mention the verdict despite being written seven months later. Whether this omission was intentional or not, it shows that news regarding Western art was mostly unavailable to the public.

Since Western literature also had to undergo careful revision in order to be printed, the first thorough analysis of the Beats, Igor Hájek's "Americká bohéma" (The Bohemians of America), was a truly landmark text not only in terms of the Beat Generation and their readership in Czechoslovakia, but also in the wider context of the availability of Western art as a whole. In other words, the study not only promoted the Beats among Czechoslovaks, but also showcased them as important representatives of Western literature in general. As a consequence, the Beats' initial position in Czechoslovakia was significantly different from that in their home country: they lacked the aura of controversy omnipresent in the United States, which only worked for their benefit.

Hájek and Jan Zábrana, another translator of Beat works, thus played a crucial role in popularizing Western literature. Their roles in making Beat Generation texts available to Czechoslovaks cannot be understated; as Kopecký points out, the Beats achieved the status of "poetic celebrities" due to the public exposure provided by the two translators ("Czeching the Beat," 99). Writing for *Světová literatura*, they both also knew that they had to be extremely careful when dealing with Western literature and especially potentially explosive artists like the Beats: afetr all, Josef Škvorecký worked as the deputy editor-in-chief of *Světová literatura*, and he lost his job after the controversy surrounding *The Cowards*. Therefore, they tried to avoid the censors' gaze by packaging the Beats in socialist realist terminology. Yet, as the 1960s progressed, their reliance on socialist realism loosened, and their critique became substantially more direct. Their various texts on the Beats, such as essays, introductions, or afterwords, thus not only document the changing representation of the Beats during the period, but also the changes that Czechoslovak literary criticism as a whole was undergoing. The Beat Generation, in transition from an overtly ideological reading to a more formalist one, and the liberalization of Czechoslovak society in the 1960s are thus firmly intertwined.

7.1 Placating the Censors – The Early Critiques of Jan Zábrana and Igor Hájek

Written in 1959, Hájek's "Americká bohéma" is a truly comprehensive study and the first of its kind: its twenty-five pages contain a vast amount of biographical information on the Beats and several excerpts from their work, while Hájek's critical analysis is interspersed throughout the text. The essay starts by mentioning the *Howl* trial and its outcome on the publicity of the Beat Generation, then it continues by discussing the Beats, namely Ginsberg, Kerouac and John Clellon Holmes, and provides excerpts from their works. In addition, Hájek also briefly discusses the social and cultural background of the Beats such as the effects of McCarthyism, the threat of the atom bomb, or the emerging executive culture and the corresponding conformism (211–12).

On the surface, Hájek's reading does not hide the influence of its Štollian focus on ideology – the clear-cut difference between good and evil, the communist and the capitalist (Brabec 17). It is therefore unsurprising that the essay begins with a critique of American society and its artists: the United States is the matrix of "heartless, anti-human, mechanized" society which exploits the masses and which, as Štoll's concept of art enforcing social change states, should be the target of contemporary artists (208). Nevertheless, most contemporary American artists, Hájek continues, are writing either conformist fiction or stylistically excellent yet completely amoral novels (212–14). Consequently, these artists not

only fail to discuss the realities of their countries, but ultimately also fail to be true artists.

However, the Beats do not fall into this category. The ability to critique Western society is, in Hájek's reading, the most important aspect of the Beat Generation, and they are the only current American writers who dare to face and criticize the dangers of consumerism, conformism, and Capitalism. Starting with Ginsberg, Hájek argues that while "Howl" is by no means a pleasant work of poetry, it is by no means a "phantasmagoric creation of a mad Bohemian" (208). On the contrary, Hájek argues that the agonizing imagery of the poem is a manifestation of a pain coming from within a person sensitive to their surroundings and it is this pain which is often used as a vehicle for criticism. *Howl*, even though it is rather naturalistic, thus depicts "a terrifying and apocalyptic vision of the emotional upbringing in the USA," while the poem "America" resembles in its tone and demands for social justice the works by progressive leftist poets (208, 210). In addition, instances of good-natured humor, poetic descriptions of town and countryside, and sympathies toward ordinary people are among the successes of Kerouac's *On the Road* (219). The ability of the Beats to create a new esthetic – an esthetic focusing on the oppressor and the oppressed, on everyday experiences and honest emotions – is what accentuates their writing and makes it important for the public. In Hájek's reading, ordinary Americans, pummeled by a heavy dose of propaganda about the country's apparent successes, became too numb and blind to important social struggles and the Beats are seemingly the only ones who can wake them up (227). The Beats are then heralds of the fall of capitalism in their own country.

The above being said, since a Štollian reading informs Hájek's critique, the Beats – being Western artists – had to possess certain flaws, namely a lack of political awareness and an inability to utilize their critique in a direct mechanism of change. For instance, while Hájek claims that Ginsberg's exceptional sensitivity allows him to notice what most of his nation tends to ignore, the poet is able to present only a bleak and nihilistic outlook rather than a solution to the injustices of the world (210). Similarly, the incessant drive of *On the Road*'s characters toward new experiences and encounters reveals the shallowness of their "hip" philosophy because, Hájek argues, this leads to their all-encompassing nature which is effectively unable to distinguish the more important aspects of life from those deserving less attention (219). Their move outside society is mostly an "inner emigration from American conformism," Hájek further clarifies, and their decision not to privilege some experiences over others is a hindrance rather than a blessing, as it robs the novel's characters of order and purpose (219). In other words, the protest of the Beats is mainly defined by negation rather than by offering possible alternatives to the status quo they criticize.

The lack of vision is precisely the reason why Hájek chastises Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums*. While the critic hails the novel for offering the most straightfor-

ward commentary on freedom in the United States among Kerouac's work, to the novel's detriment it is an individualistic rather than collective freedom that Kerouac strives for (220). Despite his sensitivity to the constraints of 1950s America, Kerouac is unable to envision a functioning society and therefore cannot reform it; his only refuge is sleeping under a clear night sky. By wanting to be free from the society, Hájek explains, Kerouac also wants to be free from the need to change it. Ultimately, the biggest flaw of the Beats is then their refusal of progressive politics in favor of individual bohemianism. In Hájek's reading, their flight from American suburbia and conformism ignores the class struggle that informs the very things they oppose, and because the world of American capitalism with its omnipresent threat of nuclear war is the only world they know, they are unaware of other, positive approaches in which the masses are the makers of their own futures and therefore offer only bleak visions of the world (215, 227). Despite stemming from a completely different understanding of art and the role artists have in society, Hájek's critique of the Beats echoes the same arguments made by some of the New York intellectuals such as Trilling or Podhoretz. Instead of offering an actual solution to the consumerism and conformism they criticize in their work, the Beats decide to simply drop out of society instead of trying to fix it. Nevertheless, Hájek's reasoning behind their deficiencies– that they are unaware of the liberating nature of socialist ideology, which would set them on the right path toward a different society – is definitely a line of thought the New York intellectuals would not make (227, 230).

Even though Hájek claims that the Beats are lacking in terms of their ideological viewpoints, he argues their writing should not be entirely dismissed. While the Beats did not set out to reach a specific goal, their efforts to "stir things up" and "reveal the filth so common in the USA" should be appreciated (211). Hájek also singles out Kerouac's social commitment as one of his strengths (221). After all, the Beats often use the characters of downtrodden, everyday folk not in a derogatory way or as mere symbols of a greater suffering, but rather as an ideal which one should strive for (230). Ultimately, while the Beats are unable to rein their anger into a more positive and truly progressive attitude, they signify the first American youth rebellion that does not criticize only certain aspects of capitalist life but rather life in capitalist America as a whole (228). Therefore, the Beats may be able to join the ranks of truly progressive writers, which is why Czechoslovak readers should not give up on them just yet (330).

Taken at face value, Hájek's essay seems to be a typical, if slightly forward-looking, product of socialist realist criticism. Nevertheless, such an interpretation is highly problematic for several reasons. First, Zuzana Semínová suggests that while numerous critical analyses in line with communist ideology were the product of the actual opinion of a given critic, politicized statements were simply necessary in order for the critiqued texts to be translated and published. Other critics agree

with Semínová; for instance, Josef Rauvolf argues that several of the passages quoting Soviet literary critics or criticizing the Beats were added to the essay in order to appease the censors and ensure the essay's publication ("Vyvázat se" 4). Navigating the politics of publishing foreign writers was a truly precarious activity, and it was especially delicate with writers who did not fit the mold of socialist realism, such as the Beats.

The observation that Hájek actively employed socialist realist rhetoric to bypass the censors is also supported by a more direct analysis of the text. For instance, the excerpts in the essay, which include portions from "Howl" or sections of *On the Road*, show that Hájek carefully curated the Beat texts available to him and chose only those sections which would support the socialist realist reading, and this is particularly noticeable with the excerpts from "Howl" (Rauvolf, "Prague" 180). As Rauvolf further explains:

> The first [excerpt] finishes with "who disappeared into the volcanoes of Mexico," leaving out the verses about "super communist pamphlets" (What would the authorities have thought of that?!) as well as the ones about sexual pleasure and insanity. The translation continues with Part II, but without any footnote (again, probably due to content merging the holy asshole and cock with holy Moscow and the fifth International). (Rauvolf, "Prague" 180)

Yet it is not only the careful selection of the excerpts which problematizes attempts to understand Zábrana's essay as an exemplary piece of socialist realist criticism. While it is omitted by other scholars, the essay is followed by translations of a few beatnik caricatures made by William F. Brown from his book of caricatures *Beat! Beat! Beat!* (1959). The caricatures generally poke fun at the Beats for their non-conformism and alleged emotional immaturity.[52] Nevertheless, in *Světová literatura* they are also accompanied by a short explanatory text; while anonymous, it is sensible to assume it was written by Zábrana. The text states the following:

> "Like every new literary movement, the Beat Generation irritates the bourgeoisie. One of the ways it protects itself from the influence of new thought is through demeaning jokes. However, we believe that the most talented members of the Beat Generation will soon find their way from unrestrained protest to conscious social protest" ("Beze slov").

This commentary thus belittles Western critics of the Beats for their shortsightedness, thus further validating the Beats in the eyes of the government censors. The

52 Tellingly, the book concludes with one of the beatniks abandoning his nonconformist identity by shaving his beard, wearing a suit and tie, and getting a job.

careful selection of texts least insulting to the censors as well as the critique of the Beats' critics thus shows Zábrana's systematic textual strategies used to ensure that the Beats actually get published in the journal.

Lastly, the reading of Hájek as carefully navigating socialist realist rhetoric is also supported by Hájek's own life and actions. During the 1960s, Hájek was the foreign editor for *Literární noviny* which was one of the literary periodicals forcibly terminated following the Warsaw Pact invasion. Hájek himself had been in Great Britain when the invasion took place, and since he was among the numerous writers blacklisted from ever being mentioned in print, he was forced into exile. The same must be stated about Jan Zábrana, another frequent translator of the Beats. His parents were imprisoned for several years after the communist takeover in 1948 and Zábrana himself was unable to pursue a university education due to political reasons ("Jan Zábrana"). While Zábrana did write the afterword to *Pátá roční doba*, the anthology showcasing radical American poets openly sympathizing with Communism, the politics of publication are simply too complex to be viewed in a reductionist manner. As Quinn points out, it is more than likely that Zábrana saw this publication as an anti-communist act and personally read the poems contained within in such a way (Quinn 117–18). Faced with a complex situation to navigate in a highly politicized setting, Hájek and Zábrana simply chose the best strategy which allowed them to spread Western literature in the totalitarian country. As a result, some of the "communist buzzwords" appearing in the early Hájek and Zábrana critiques, such as the emphasis on "displaying the truth," being "progressive," or offering "an answer" to the ills of the world, are mere ploys aimed at appeasing the censors.

Subsequently, these critiques, while echoing the official socialist realist ideology of the Party, are aimed at a different audience – those who are able to read between the lines. As Kopecký points out, Hájek thus should be recognized for bringing the Beat Generation to Czechoslovakia, especially considering that the poems presented in the essay were not only extremely different from traditional Czechoslovak poetry, but also provided domestic writers with inspiration which later formed their future works ("Literary America" 76). Semínová adds that the translated excerpts from *On the Road* and "Howl" in the article were for a long time the only available translations of these two texts. This naturally only emphasizes the crucial role "Americká bohéma" had in popularizing the Beats in Czechoslovakia and therefore the Czech Republic.

Soon after "Americká bohéma," several profiles of other Beats and their excerpted works were released. The first Beat to be profiled was Lawrence Ferlinghetti, whose selection from his early poetry collections accompanied by a short essay was printed in a 1960 issue of *Světová literatura*. Written by Zábrana, the essay starts by noting that while Ferlinghetti is often considered by his home country to be among the foremost Beat poets, his poetry is actually vastly different from that

of his peers ("Lawrence Ferlinghetti" 17). After analyzing the minimalist and direct nature of Ferlinghetti's poetry, Zábrana continues by discussing Ferlinghetti's politics; however, the discussion is rather brief; the standard Beat notions of Bohemianism and anarchism are boosted only by a glancing mention of the long and explicitly political poem "Tentative Description of a Dinner Given to Promote the Impeachment of President Eisenhower." While Zábrana notes that the poem is a direct attack on the "military psychosis" that might hint at future developments in political poetry, he then goes back to discussing the specificity of Ferlinghetti's poetic language and form, thus avoiding an explicit discussion of Ferlinghetti and politics. Perhaps to instill more explicitly political rhetoric to Ferlinghetti's profile, the poems are followed by a set of photos chosen to help illustrate the feelings of the Beat Generation (Souček 18). Importantly, the short text introducing the photos is concluded by the following:

> This photography is often naturalistic when it wants to be realistic or sugary when it is aiming for optimism under the threat of an imminent nuclear and space war. It is raw and dark and is accompanied by a flow of both costly and cheap printing ink from conformist introductions. At times, however, it is a flow of blood, sweat and tears – a flow which accompanies every art daring to say its NO to the Potemkin villages built by official American art around the continent and its endless roads. (18)

This short text, together with the explicitly political "Tentative Description," is a paratext used to provide a "correct" reading of Ferlinghetti's work. "The Potemkin villages" of the United States are thus revealed through the photography accompanying Ferlinghetti's poems – and therefore also through the poems themselves – in a manner worthy of every engaged and progressive member of a socialist society. On the surface, this enables a reading legitimizing the Beats to the censors; however, it also helps distribute anti-authoritarian art to Czechoslovak readers.

The translation of Kerouac's poem "October in the Railroad Earth" was available in the third 1961 issue of *Světová literatura*, though it was not accompanied by a commentary. Later that year, Gregory Corso was profiled in *Světová literatura*. In the short introduction to the selection of his poetry, Zábrana is mostly concerned with the formal aspect of Corso's poetry and his improvisational style. Nevertheless, what Zábrana finds fascinating about Corso is his "fate of a poet," that is Corso being "a son of the proletariat" and being brought up under harsh conditions ("Gregory Corso" 78). Subsequently, when compared to Zábrana's previous text on Ferlinghetti, the short bio takes a slightly politicized turn. Noting that Corso's life was extremely difficult – for example, he grew up essentially as an orphan and at the age of thirteen was jailed in the Tombs, the infamous jail in Lower Manhattan – Zábrana continues by expressing amazement at the fact that

the young people who challenged the hegemony of the academic poets did not come from a life of luxury with flats "illuminated by the corpse-like glimmer of television screens" but rather from underprivileged backgrounds (80). He then continues by claiming that despite the faults of Corso's style, the poet's talent and fate will put his challenging experiences, given to him "unselfishly by his capitalist homeland," to good use (80). As opposed to this rather politically-charged account, LeRoi Jones, the African-American poet later known as Amiri Baraka, received a slightly toned-down treatment in 1963. Most of the short profile is concerned with Jones's biography and style, the latter being described as "absolute" and "maximalist" (Zábrana, "LeRoi Jones" 18). While Zábrana points out that his race is somewhat unique among contemporary poets, therefore placing Jones into a slightly different position, the remainder of the profile is concerned with the subjects of Jones's poetry and the way he approaches them. Corso's profile and especially the collection of photography accompanying Ferlinghetti's poems are explicit in advocating the esthetics of socialist realism and, as a result, the ideals of the communist government; in contrast, by focusing mostly on the poet's style, the profile of LeRoi Jones does not possess most of the traces of more traditional socialist realist criticism. The change in tone of Zábrana's criticism also indicates the lessening of constraints imposed upon art as the 1960s progressed.

In 1962 Ferlinghetti's *A Coney Island of the Mind* was translated by Zábrana, thus making it the first Beat work published in Czechoslovakia outside of excerpts in *Světová literatura*. A quick glance at the afterword for *A Coney Island of the Mind* makes it clear that it is among the more explicitly political. After mentioning Julius Fučík, the Czechoslovak communist activist who was tortured and executed by the Nazis, and his affinities for American poetry, Zábrana continues by describing the Beats as protesting the "fossilization" and "stagnation" of American literature in general and poetry in particular ("Jen mrtví se neangažují" 119). He describes the Beat Generation as leading the revolt against stilted American art, which soon changed into a rebellion "against the consolidated and orderly society … for leading art to a dead end through its domesticity, ignorance and idiotic pursuit of material prosperity" (119). The afterword thus contains a strong "us versus them" rhetoric, which is further emphasized by his description of "Howl" as an act of mourning for the young intellectuals of America who were doomed from their birth (120).

Zábrana's afterword does not hesitate to criticize the Beats when describing their philosophies. For instance, the translator claims that the anarchic gestures of the Beats cannot have a longstanding effect, as they are a far cry from the "revolutionary perspectives" required for complex social change (121). In addition, he castigates the Beats for their frequent focus on drugs or for their interest in the "fad" of Zen Buddhism.[53] And while Zábrana acknowledges the turn toward

53 It was Gary Snyder who studied Buddhism and other Eastern philosophies, and who is credited

politics in Ginsberg's recent work, he describes the results as rather shabby, even though these poems might be deemed progressive by Americans (122). The Beats, in their anti-establishment stance and their emphasis on the moment, seem to be too chaotic for Zábrana's tastes. However, after this "required" section utilizing socialist realist standards, Zábrana goes back to Ferlinghetti and his poetry. Among Ferlinghetti's notable features, the translator states, is the fact that unlike some of his peers, Ferlinghetti is not afraid to show delicate human feelings (124). Ultimately, one of the qualities defining Ferlinghetti's poetry is the importance of life and its dignity (125). Ferlinghetti, however, is not a Marxist nor is he interested in left-wing politics; as Zábrana continues, one might even have reservations about some of his verses. Still Zábrana concludes on a positive note. Unlike his peers, the poet is not afraid to be directly engaged with politics, and staunchly fights against the ruling class so that he does not become their instrument of power (125). In Zábrana's reading, it is this characteristic of Ferlinghetti's poetry that not only sets him apart from his contemporaries, but also energizes his poems with a vitality frequently absent in the work of his Beat acquaintances. Since this vitality is also inherent in the literature of the more democratic powers of the world – that is communist countries led by the Soviet Union – Hájek argues that it makes Ferlinghetti's poetry more relevant to communist Czechoslovakia than that written by other Beats.

Zábrana's essay for the poetry collection then contains numerous points informed by a socialist realist approach. However, as Zábrana points out, the translation of *Coney Island* was the first time in postwar Czechoslovakia that a collection of an American poet who started writing after 1945 had been published ("Jen mrtví se neangažují" 118). Since it is very likely that censors would pay special attention to a poetry collection by a still relatively young and therefore untried American writer, it can then be reasonably assumed that Zábrana chose to be especially cautious when preparing the collection. Therefore, Zábrana noting that Ferlinghetti does not seem particularly interested in leftist politics is a rather daring defense on behalf of the poet rather than a mere aside.

A year later the ever so prolific Zábrana published a short defense of Ginsberg against the popular and critical backlash in the United States as a way to introduce a selection of his work from *Kaddish and Other Poems*. The text starts by renouncing Ginsberg's American critics for stubbornly clinging to the esthetics of the past ("Allen Ginsberg" 55). Zábrana points out that the criticism is so polarized that none of the two views of Ginsberg – him being either the greatest American poet since Whitman or a mere "bearded charlatan and mad drug addict" – can be correct (55). Zábrana proposes a middle path between the two extremes: readers

for being among those who introduced these to American public. However, due to the extensive nature of his expertise – for instance, he spent several years in a Buddhist temple in Japan – his preoccupation with Zen Buddhism can hardly be described as a "fad."

should try to view Ginsberg critically but without unnecessary vitriol. This may appear rather innocuous at first, but when reading between the lines, Zábrana actually suggests abandoning the notions of socialist realist criticism when approaching Ginsberg's work.

Such an interpretation seems tenuous at first, as a substantial portion of the text follows in the footsteps of socialist realism. For instance, Zábrana writes that faced with the "Moloch of money" and "the well-oiled cogs in the machine of the capitalist country," Ginsberg and his poetry represent a clash of values and therefore emphasize that current conditions in the United States are simply unsustainable (58). However, he then adds that even though Ginsberg is very familiar with Communism through the influence of his mother, he never manages to fully embrace the idea of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat despite being more than familiar with the concept (60). Ginsberg's inability to see *the way* of liberating humanity from the clutches of capitalism is then "the ball and chain" of Ginsberg's work and a necessary fact to acknowledge in order to fully "understand and properly evaluate some of his incorrect and for us unacceptable opinions which are at times present in his poetry" (60).[54] Although Ginsberg and his fellow Beats criticize the United States and its society, one should not, Zábrana concludes, sympathize or even identify with their worldviews when it comes to their opinions on politics. In the end, Zábrana argues that Ginsberg's work has essentially two uses for the Czechoslovak public. First, it allows them to experience the unconventional esthetics of a leading avant-garde artist of the West. Second, it serves a historical purpose, as it is a testimony of the current state of the United States and a segment of its population. For non-Americans, Allen Ginsberg's poetry is proof that capitalism is simply untenable.

Yet again, Zábrana carefully mixes socialist realist rhetoric with a cautious but deliberate defense of the poet. For instance, he blames Ginsberg's shortcomings – not embracing the truly progressive humane values of communism – on "the poisonous apples of America" which has filled the American public with an unhealthy dose of skepticism (59–60). While the Beats manage to resist the omnipresent push toward conformity, their "needless relativism" is to be blamed on the capitalist country which has robbed them of ideals and faith (60). Furthermore, Zábrana makes it clear that by now, several years after the publication of *Howl*, Ginsberg is not esteemed only by a few eccentrics, nor is he merely a fashionable fad (56). Zábrana thus warns against a simplistic reading of Ginsberg's work, as his poetry is clearly the work of an educated man who not only possesses a clear understanding of poetics, but also ponders even the smallest details of his composition (56–57). Ginsberg should be hailed as creating a new understanding of poetics, dubbed by

54 Here Zábrana singles out Ginsberg's insistence that poets should not meddle in politics as especially harmful.

Zábrana "thematic obligation," which stems from an understanding of the poet as a social critic who is obliged to critique his surroundings (57). Finally, Zábrana argues that Ginsberg and the Beats, both as a literary movement and a vaguely defined youth subculture, are unmistakably American, which further defines not only their modes of expression but also the form of their protest (59). By explicitly supporting a contextual reading and suggesting that readers critically view Ginsberg's work for themselves, Zábrana implicitly turns the established criticism on its head. One should not then view the Beats through the prism of socialist realism, but rather make up his or her own mind instead. This might seem one small step for a reader, but it was a giant leap for readers in Czechoslovakia.

This modest yet important shift in critical discourse on the Beats is even more evident in the 1964 afterword to an anthology of Gregory Corso's poetry. From the very beginning, Zábrana argues that even though "burying" the Beat Generation is currently fashionable, the Beats will withstand this pressure and turn out to be a historical milestone and an important literary movement ("Fakta, poznámky" 129). As is usual for Zábrana, Corso's style is also discussed; it is hailed not only for its sense of everydayness, but also for the poet's ability to maintain a deeply personal and uncanny vision throughout his poetry, often balancing between odd practical jokes and semi-apparent satire on the one hand and requiring faith in his poetic style from his readers on the other (133–34). The small yet clearly visible difference in the discussion of the Beats lies in the way Zábrana describes the message of Corso's poetry and how one might understand his work. Reminding readers that the Beats protest "all forms of rigidity, apathy, alienation or appropriation of modern society," Zábrana continues by arguing that Corso's poetry "does not aspire to understand the world in its entirety" (132, 134). However, unlike in Zábrana's previous work, this statement is not followed by a critique of shortsightedness in terms of the Beat's worldview. Instead, Zábrana claims that even though Corso might be limited in his understanding of the world, he still helps readers to comprehend the world better by offering them a new point of view from which the world can be experienced (134). The perceived flaws of the Beats in Zábrana's previous texts – that is the inability and unwillingness of the Beats to actively engage in politics to make the world a better place – are here set aside in favor of a reading that emphasizes the positive application of Corso's work.

The avoidance of socialist realist vocabulary is further highlighted by Zábrana's brief mention of Ginsberg's interest in Eastern philosophies. In the afterword to Ferlinghetti's *Coney Island*, the translator chastised Ginsberg for what he imagined to be a temporary obsession; however, now Zábrana only states that Ginsberg's poetry is shaped by his Jewishness and his interest in Zen Buddhism and Hinduism (138). Again, this omission of interpretation – Zábrana merely *describes* rather than *interprets* – is telling. It hints at the gradual change in Czechoslovak literary criticism; that is the decline of socialist realism in favor of a more

formalist reading. Ultimately, this change then mirrors the liberalization of society as a whole.

7.2 Abandoning Socialist Realism

As the 1960s progressed, the ongoing changes were becoming more and more visible; the days when literary journals had to quote Soviet literary critics as a way to ensure that the analyzed text received "a stamp of approval" seemed to be long past despite actually being very recent (Rauvolf, "Vyvázat se" 4). One such text was the essay "Bez minulosti a budoucnosti" (Without Past and Future) by Soviet literary critics Raisa Orlova and Lev Kopolev. Published in 1961 in *Světová literatura*, the text analyzed the ongoing trend of rebellious youth among Western writers in the Angry Young Men or the Beat Generation. Unsurprisingly, the essay argued that since the majority of Western literature is simply unsuitable for the revolutionary proletariat, such movements will inevitably fail unless they take their cues from "the truly progressive democracies of today" (22).

Published in 1961, Orlova and Kopolev's texts follow the traditional axis of socialist realist criticism; in contrast, articles published in the following years of the decade show a vastly different approach to literary criticism and therefore also the extent of the changes in the social climate of 1960s Czechoslovakia. Kopecký explains that in 1963 the Congress of the Union of Czechoslovak Writers signaled this shift in literary criticism by removing the traditional socialist realist critics such as Ladislav Štoll from their positions of power and replacing them with their critics ("Literary America" 77). Some of the changes stemming from the criticism of a dogmatic socialist realist reading were palpable immediately: after all, 1963 is also the year in which Škvorecký's *The Cowards* was republished, albeit with a few minor changes, and the author himself was rehabilitated (Kosková 124–25). Other, at first less pronounced changes took place in literary journals such as *Světová literatura* or *Literární noviny* and their treatment of Western literature. While these still somewhat subscribed to politicized readings during the early 1960s, starting in 1963 these journals started portraying the United States in a more objective manner (Kubíček 126). Consequently, socialist ideology was progressively losing its influence over Czechoslovak literary criticism and by 1967 it was generally understood by literary critics that literature has only one purpose – literature itself (Kubíček 134). This naturally had a profound impact on the understanding of the role of the critic. The purposes of literary critics of the past, setting an example for progressive politics or emphasizing the struggle of the masses, were then gradually supplanted by an interest in a work of art on its own terms

Igor Hájek's short text "Z bradburyovského světa" (From a Bradburian World), published six years after "Americká bohéma," is a prime example of the gradual

shift in Czechoslovak literary criticism. The text from the very start clearly eschews socialist realism by pointing out that because the Beat Generation reacts to social and historical realities which are unique to the United States, the way it is perceived in the USA is possibly vastly different from the impressions it has made in Czechoslovakia (2). Hájek does mention the radical stance taken by the Beats and many of their followers, that is abandoning programmatic social change and finding refuge outside society; however, his tone is contemplative rather than judgmental. Importantly, the Beats' notion that *any* authority or social order is inherently oppressive is treated similarly: while previously in "Americká bohéma" Hájek criticized them for not being political enough, now he merely presents the stances and philosophies of the Beats and invites readers to draw their own conclusions. Nor does Hájek challenge Ginsberg when he asserts that one of the efforts of the Beats is to perceive the world without any ideological lens distorting the view; importantly, this also includes Marxism.[55] Similarly, instead of lambasting the Beats for their preoccupation with sexuality, Hájek claims that their focus on sex and sexuality is only a reaction to the omnipresence of media and Puritanism in American culture, which are unable to address human sexuality directly, thus commodifying it instead (3). Contrary to previous texts on the Beats, Hájek also notes that the young generation inspired by the Beats is actually political, and then finishes by stating that Ginsberg's visit to Czechoslovakia "reminds us that the complexity of this world does not permit us to close our eyes to a single human problem" (3). The Beats then are not simply a tool used to point out the deficiencies of the immoral West and the superiority of progressive socialist policies; instead, Hájek encourages the reader to be engaged with Ginsberg's ideas, a notion further emphasized in the essay by incorporating Ginsberg's own words into the text and using them as answers to the issues Hájek raises. Providing Ginsberg's own answers may seem unimportant, yet it again shows the development of Czechoslovak literary criticism: Hájek here abandons the position of the socialist realist critic – the interpreter of the "correct" truth – and leaves readers to assess Ginsberg's answers on their own. This decision of the critic not to interfere between the author and the reader during the process of interpretation is truly symbolic: the poet and his work are presented on his own terms, and the people get to form their own opinions of Ginsberg's work. This would have been simply unprecedented a few years before.

Similar changes can be observed in the preface to the anthology *Obeznámení s nocí: Noví američtí básnici* (Acquainted with the Night: New American Poets) written by Stanislav Mareš and Jan Zábrana. Even though it was published in 1967, the

55 Hájek simply notes that Ginsberg critiquing Marxism should be expected: "He is not, after all, a Communist, albeit he grew among them" (5). This sentence turned out extremely problematic for Hájek following Ginsberg's deportation several weeks later, as he was criticized in the newspaper *Mladá fronta* for not pointing out the deficiencies in Ginsberg's stance.

preface itself was written two years earlier and therefore Mareš and Zábrana are at times seemingly ambiguous in their discussions of the goals of the anthology. Nevertheless, the intent behind the anthology is clear: to present new American poetry without being inhibited by socialist realist ideology. The preface starts with a careful discussion of anthologies in general and the challenges editors face when putting one together, then continues by stating the following thinly-veiled criticism of past approaches to literature in Czechoslovakia:

> One of the mistakes, which were, in our opinion, committed by the majority of previous anthologies, was the effort to provide the widest-possible selection of chosen poetry in terms of chronology, that is the decision not to focus solely on the poets of a single period and to ignore various tendencies and trends of the given national poetry in favor of joining together various protagonists from different time periods; conversely, another mistake was to focus exclusively on a part of poetry *selected through extraliterary reasoning*, for instance focusing solely on radical poets. (9–10, emphasis mine).

As Mareš and Zábrana explain, the emphasis should be instead on current poets who are established but have not been publishing poetry for more than twenty years; that is poets such as John Ashbery, Robert Creeley, or the Beats.[56] Such an open critique of forced politicized readings is a truly remarkable step by the editors and a sign of the liberalization and openness of the society, as Petr Kopecký points out ("Literary America" 80). Mareš and Zábrana also note that their choice not to use any other criteria than the contemporaneity of the poets contributed to interesting contrasts in the anthology, one of them being Donald Hall and Allen Ginsberg, both sworn poetic enemies, being present (16). They close their preface by stating that they hope the anthology would contribute to "the establishment of new values that we are currently witnessing in this country" (16). In other words, if their divorce from the ethos of socialist realism had not been clear from earlier passages, their open acknowledgement of "new values" makes their dismissal of politicized readings more than evident. Although short, the preface is markedly different in its rhetoric from the criticism discussed earlier. Interestingly, the editors mention that they refused to organize the poets according to the movements or groups they belong to, preferring to present them in random order instead (15–16). While this might be simply interpreted as editorial pragmatism, it is more likely a refusal to offer a lens through which to interpret the poets in the anthology. Instead, the poetry should stand on its own, uninhibited by any outside influence that might affect its reading, such as labeling Ginsberg or Corso as Beat

56 The Beats present among the twenty-four poets in the anthology are Gregory Corso, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Allen Ginsberg, LeRoi Jones, Michael McClure, and Gary Snyder.

poets. Put differently, representing poets as belonging to certain social or historical movements has been replaced by an emphasis on individual reading.

While not solely focusing on the Beats, the anthology *Jazzová inspirace* (Jazz Inspiration) published in 1966 was yet another sign of the overall changes.[57] Edited and introduced by Lubomír Dorůžka and Josef Škvorecký, the anthology focuses on poetry influenced by jazz music. While it contains several Czechoslovak authors such as Škvorecký, Josef Kainar and Vítězslav Nezval, the collection's main focus is on Western authors: Carl Sandburg, Langston Hughes, Tennessee Williams, but also the Beats LeRoi Jones, Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti, and Kerouac are among those included. Importantly, Dorůžka and Škvorecký in their introduction pay no heed to socialist realist criticism, and instead hail jazz as a new esthetic and means of expression. They not only note that jazz goes against the bourgeois European understanding of beauty and harmony, but also equate jazz with resistance to oppression, whether such oppression is forced labor during the *totaleinsatz* in the Third Reich or the lives of African-Americans in a racist society (10–11, 22–23).[58] Ultimately, jazz is in direct opposition to society's conformity and to conservative art critics denigrating jazz as a mere cacophony – in Dorůžka and Škvorecký's reading, jazz poetry is the manifestation of life itself (23–24).

Granted, the introduction does contain a few socialist realist attributes; for instance, it mentions that jazz through its improvisation is opposed to the sensibility of the petit bourgeois (10–11). Yet the way the text is composed makes it clear that Dorůžka and Škvorecký do not talk about Western bourgeois or Western conservatives and their inability to see the exhilarating nature of jazz, but about conservative critics in general. The conformist critics relying on old-fashioned and banal standards of beauty in their evaluation of jazz are thus also socialist realist critics desperately clinging to the dogma of their ideological interpretation. Therefore, it is not only the publication of jazz poetry itself, but also the open denunciation of the socialist realist relics by the two editors which truly highlight the groundbreaking changes taking place in the country.

57 Rauvolf mentions that the anthology was published because it had been approved before Ginsberg's visit and could not be cancelled because production of books was a lengthy process for the country's planned economy ("Prague" 198). It is true the regime was inflexible in its cultural production; for instance, the 1970 film *Ucho* (*The Ear*) by Karel Kachyňa was immediately shelved after it had been cut, even though it was clear during the film's production that it would not be put in theaters. Nevertheless, this does not explain the swift cancellation of the planned release of *Howl and Other Poems* after Ginsberg's deportation. Therefore, a slow liberalization rather than the regime's inflexible economy was most likely at play here.

58 The reference to forced labor in Germany was most likely penned by Škvorecký, as he was among the 400,000 Czechoslovaks who were brought to Germany to labor in the war industry. Importantly, the reference to the totalitarian Third Reich can also be read as an allusion to Communist Czechoslovakia.

Literary critics were especially open in their essays the closer they got to the Prague Spring. Even though they were often faced with controversial themes such as drug use or obscenity, they were abandoning politicized interpretations in favor of a more formalist reading, thus presenting their points in a significantly nuanced way without having to shy away from controversial topics (Kopecký, "Literary America" 80–81). Simply put, gone was the careful, diplomatic tip-toeing around the issue at hand. Nevertheless, after the armies of the Warsaw Pact intervened in order to deal with the supposed counter-revolutionaries, it soon became clear that such freedoms would not last. Despite that, Zábrana managed to write several texts on the Beats in 1969, that is when the state had not yet fully regained its control over the country's media outlets. The first and shortest one is an introductory essay "Pound & Beatnici" (Pound & the Beats) prefacing Ferlinghetti's and Ginsberg's accounts of meeting with Ezra Pound in the late 1960s. Another text also published in *Světová literatura*, "Případ Beatnici" (The Case of the Beats), serves as an introduction to a study by Fernanda Pivano, Ginsberg's Italian translator. The general tone of the article is that of a matter-of-fact portrayal of the Beat Generation and its end as an organized movement. Zábrana starts by pointing out the simple fact that all movements end sooner or later and that while it might be the end of the road for the Beat Generation, it is not the end for its individual authors, as they have already shown their worth (114). In hindsight, Zábrana also agrees that the Beats in fact had an ideological program in mind despite them stating the opposite: this program argued not only for a complete disregard for authorities and hierarchies of any kind, but also – by extension – for trying to understand each work of art on its own terms (114). This note is therefore not only the swan song for literary criticism outside the Party's influence, but also shows that the role the Beats played in defining Zábrana's approach to literature was not negligible. As a result, the remainder of the text rejects a judgmental tone in favor of simple descriptions and observations. This is especially noticeable when discussing some of Ginsberg's poems. Even though these often feature an amalgam of drugs, sexuality, the Vietnam War, or the conformist establishment, Zábrana simply describes rather than interprets, leaving the reader to do the interpretation himself.

Zábrana's last text of 1969, the long essay "Básník, který neodešel" ("The Poet Who Has Not Left"), is something of a coda to the Beat Generation as a movement and a clear establishment of Allen Ginsberg as a poet who surpassed most of his contemporaries. As the title suggests, the text is also a defense of Ginsberg and his work, which is especially notable considering the text includes reworked passages from Zábrana's earlier critiques. Zábrana starts in his usual way; that is by pointing out Ginsberg's unwavering relevance for current American poetry even when several of his critics predicted the opposite (205). The most telling parts of the essay, however, are the passages lifted from Zábrana's previous essays and updated into their current form; these reworked passages indicate the

change in the social climate. For instance, as was noted above, his 1963 essay on Ginsberg in *Světová literatura* chastises the Beat for professing an almost apocalyptic hopelessness instead of trying to achieve change through political engagement, and for possessing worldviews which are simply incompatible with those of Czechoslovaks. However, the updated passage in "Básník, který neodešel" provides a refutation of the first claim – Ginsberg, unlike his peers, actually imagines a brighter future and hopes for a better tomorrow – and completely omits the second point (215).

Moreover, the essay also incorporates the majority of "Případ Beatnici" and it is again significantly revised: while the initial version of the text simply summarized his most recent poetry, the updated version also attaches a simple description of one of his poems. This essentially serves as a definition of Ginsberg's work and a way to silence his critics – the poem, Zábrana explain, tries to ultimately expose the "corruption of speech" which leads to a crisis of the self as well as of society as a whole (219). Since it is speech itself that corrupts, it cannot be trusted even when serving the purposes of a righteous ideology. Therefore, it is rather unsurprising that this essay also refuses an ideological interpretation in favor of a reading without prescribed esthetic notions in the strongest and most direct fashion among Zábrana's essays. As a consequence, the short essays on the Beats of the 1950s and 1960s not only help document the changes taking place in society, but also actually disseminate the anti-authoritarian texts of the Beats which contribute to the overall liberalization documented in the very same texts.

It is obvious, then, that as the 1960s progressed, the language of the texts on the Beats had become progressively critical of the standards of socialist realist criticism. This naturally mirrored the developments of Czechoslovak society as a whole, yet the influence of the Beats on freethinking writers and translators such as Škvorecký, Zábrana, and Hájek should not be underestimated. Primed to detest the totalitarian regime even before their encounter with the Beats, these then further helped disseminate the rebellious message of resistance and anti-authoritarianism among Czechoslovaks. While perhaps not overtly political, the texts of the Beats took a highly political turn in the hyperpolitical Communist state: the insistence of these three critics on a more formalist reading was at that time a dangerously political act.

7.3 Newspaper Treatment of Ginsberg's Visit

The Beat Generation in general was only rarely mentioned in the government-controlled media. As a result, Ginsberg's two visits to the country and the coverage it produced offers an invaluable insight into the representation of the Beats in the country. Initially, the media treated Ginsberg favorably during his first visit.

However, the Beat's appearance at Majáles and the subsequent deportation led to the poet's downfall in the official press: despite being already prepared for print, a collection of Ginsberg's poetry had to be abandoned by the publishing house Odeon for political reasons (Rauvolf, "Beat po česku" 22–23).

One of the first texts to cover Ginsberg's stay in Czechoslovakia in the mainstream media was a short article in the official newspaper of the Communist party *Rudé právo* (Red Law). The article opens by describing Ginsberg as an "important American poet" and a member of a "beat" group of authors who have a positive role in today's American literature. ("Na besedě s Allenem Ginsbergem" 2). Painting the poet's visit as an exceptional opportunity to teach the Western of the progressive ways of the Eastern Bloc, the text mentions Ginsberg's wish to become familiar with Czechoslovak "reality" and his desire to continue the exploration of "socialist space" by visiting Moscow. As with all official texts, it does not forget to use American artists in its propaganda against the "rotten" West. As a result, William Carlos Williams, who was one of the topics of Ginsberg's discussion with students, is described as a poet who "drew inspiration from specific sources of life" and for whom poetry "must live in the present." Finally, the article concludes in a rather exhilarating tone that Ginsberg's *Howl* is currently being translated and is soon going to be available to the Czechoslovak readership.[59] Tellingly, while the article skimps on the details of Ginsberg's departure from Cuba, it does mention that the poet had substantial problems in his home country before being allowed to fly to Cuba in the first place. In other words, the article then uses Ginsberg and other Beats as one more piece in its propaganda by providing a government-approved representation of Ginsberg as a progressive poet and vital critic of the West.

In three days' time, on 6 March 1965, a photo of Ginsberg was featured on the front page of *Literární noviny*. The caption describes him as "the most peculiar representative of non-academic American poetry," thus pushing Ginsberg further into the spotlight (Pařík).[60] Later that month, *Svobodné slovo* (The Free Word) reported on Ginsberg's visit to Bratislava. The rather ecstatic tone of the article further emphasizes the portrayal of Ginsberg in the popular press as an American progressive who fights for the socialist cause in his home country. It starts with the following anecdote: during Ginsberg's poetry reading in a local theater the poet requests the lights to be turned on; however, once a spotlight is aimed at him and the book he is holding, Ginsberg clarifies that he wants the lights to be turned on in the whole auditorium so that he could see the audience (Poláčková 2). This wish "to see who he is writing for," the article claims, is what drives Ginsberg and

59 Unfortunately for Ginsberg and his readers, this was never meant to be. As it was already mentioned, after his deportation from Czechoslovakia all preparations for publishing *Howl* in book form were withdrawn and it was not until 1990 that it was available (Semínová).

60 While no actual article on Ginsberg was included in the issue, in two weeks the magazine printed the eventually problematic "Z bradburyovského světa" by Hájek.

what caused him to travel from Cuba to Moscow via Czechoslovakia. Importantly, Ginsberg's kind and egalitarian demeanor is linked to a politicized account of his work: this "master of modern Beat poetry" surprised the audience with his "modesty and education" when discussing "the new non-academic poetry" and the challenges it had to face. Ultimately, not only did Ginsberg discover Czechoslovakia, the text concludes, but Czechoslovakia also discovered in Ginsberg "a true luminary" and an important figure in American progressive literature. Again, *Svobodné slovo* shows the ability of the totalitarian government to appropriate a Western artist as a valuable ally to the government and people of Czechoslovakia in their fight against the decadence and immorality of the West.

As stated before, the way Ginsberg was discussed changed dramatically after his deportation. Still, even though Ginsberg was deported on May 7, it took the press more than a week to comment on the event. The first to do so was *Mladá fronta* (The Young Front) and it gave the deportation a rather exclusive treatment: unlike most of the previous mentions of Ginsberg's tour through Czechoslovakia, the exhaustive text covered the entire page. Titled "Allen Ginsberg a morálka" ("Allen Ginsberg and Decency"), the article starts by recounting the day Ginsberg was deported and then proceeds to provide a brief summary of his stay in Czechoslovakia, ending with a note that on May 3 he was arrested by the police for disorderly conduct (5).[61] Tellingly, the article also quotes Igor Hájek's "Z bradburyovského světa," namely the part where Hájek simply notes that Ginsberg argues against Marxism. Harkening back to official literary criticism, the article then claims that Hájek failed in his duties as a journalist and literary critic, since he did not adopt a stance toward Ginsberg's views despite providing him with an outlet for his ideas. Subsequently, the article introduces two anonymous people who voice their opinion on Ginsberg and his poetry. While the first is described as Ginsberg's "admirer" and regards him as a "great humanist," the other one offers a scathing critique of the poet: "My stance toward Allen Ginsberg is extremely negative. In my opinion, he is not a poet, never was one, and can never be one. His ideals are not only inconsistent with the ideals of the current socialistic man, but they are also in direct contrast to the common sense and sentiment of all healthy and rational people." The remainder of the text paints Ginsberg as a morally corrupt and despicable individual. It aims to achieve this by quoting from the letters of parents whose children were allegedly negatively influenced by Ginsberg's presence and as a consequence required psychiatric treatment, then by referencing a psychiatric report detailing the treatment of these youths, and finally by quoting extensively from Ginsberg's diary, which was reported stolen and

61 Since Ginsberg did not have any documents on him, he was taken to a drunk tank so that his identity could be established. However, despite the wishes of a plainclothes officer, Ginsberg was not admitted due to not being severely intoxicated (Blažek 43).

then later found by a random passerby.[62] The text quotes several passages from the diary, focusing especially on Ginsberg's homosexual encounters with university students but also mentioning brief passages criticizing the regime, only to state that it cannot continue to do so because many of the entries are explicit and the editors of *Mladá fronta*, unlike Ginsberg, are still bound by moral constraints.[63] The text concludes by the following:

> "His diary slanders our government representatives, our party and even our people. It is a testimony to acts which are in direct opposition to the laws of our country and to the civilized world as a whole. These acts are frequently punished in a significantly harsher way; Ginsberg's visit … might have ended in an entirely different fashion."

Apart from the overall ferocity, the conclusion is especially worth emphasizing for the thinly veiled threat contained within. This threat is undoubtedly aimed at Ginsberg's supporters, starting with fellow poets or translators such as Igor Hájek and finishing with students inspired by the Beat.

The article "Kocovina s Ginsbergem" ("A Hangover with Ginsberg") published a day later in *Rudé právo* also rides the waves of appealing to common decency by portraying Ginsberg as an immoral deviant. Explaining that Ginsberg was deported from Czechoslovakia as *persona non grata*, the text argues that while Czechoslovakia wishes to be hospitable and welcoming to its visitors, it simply cannot tolerate indecent manners (3). Ginsberg simply overstayed his welcome by setting

62 The passerby was in fact an agent of the secret police, which demonstrates that all the events surrounding Ginsberg's deportation were carefully orchestrated by the officers of Státní bezpečnost (State Security), the plainclothes secret police of the regime (Blažek 43). It also shows the ruthlessness of the regime: since the first arrest on May 3 did not lead to a larger controversy, a more elaborate plan to deport the poet, inconvenient for example because of his anti-regime remarks at student discussions, had to be devised. Firstly, Ginsberg's diary was retrieved after several agents got the poet drunk in the Viola café; subsequently, Ginsberg was attacked in the Prague streets by another plainclothes officer yelling homophobic remarks so that the state police had to be called and he would be taken to a police station for questioning. Next, since yet another plainclothes officer had "found" and handed the diary in to the police, the police were permitted to inspect the diary to identify the owner. In turn, this perusal of the diary allowed the police to read the diary in full and later use the personal entries within as one of the reasons for Ginsberg's deportation. Furthermore, the secret police prepared in advance the medical profiles of the youths who, contrary to the claims in *Mladá fronta*, sought psychiatric treatment before actually meeting Ginsberg. The testimonies of these youths and their parents, many of whom were among the Communist elites and therefore certainly eager to write such reports, were then added to the reasons justifying Ginsberg's deportation (Rauvolf, "Prague" 188). For more information on the orchestration of Ginsberg's deportation, see Blažek 43–47. It should be noted that there exist alternative accounts of the secret police's involvement. For instance, Andrew Lass, an American living in Czechoslovakia who translated for Ginsberg during his stay, claims in an interview that the diary was lost while Ginsberg was attending a show of the rock band The Beatmen (Lass, *Na plovárně*).

63 Regarding the regime, the diary stated the following. "Terror like in Cuba, only better camouflaged. All capitalist myths about communism are true. I have started to feel that communism is everywhere a big restraint. There is whispering going on everywhere" (Vodrážka and Lass, 195).

up homosexual orgies and therefore "grossly violated the standards of common decency."[64] Similarly to *Mladá fronta*, *Rudé právo* mentions that some youths required psychiatric assistance due to Ginsberg; after describing the reactions of their distressed parents and the opinions of psychiatrists on Ginsberg and his influence, the text also concludes by pointing out the contents of Ginsberg's diary.

Opting for a somewhat less adversarial tone than the article published in *Mladá fronta* a day earlier, "Kocovina s Ginsbergem" matter-of-factly claims that now the poet's true colors have been shown, it should be simple for all to judge the Beat's *true* character and therefore approach his poetry from a new, *more accurate* viewpoint. The role of the state in Ginsberg's deportation and therefore its involvement with art in Czechoslovakia cannot be overestimated. As Rauvolf notes, Czechoslovakia's president and head of the Communist Party Antonín Novotný delivered a speech a mere day after Ginsberg's deportation, and the speech clearly stipulates that Western artists of dubious morals as well as those Czechoslovaks trying to spread their work will not be tolerated ("Prague," 189). This is not merely the removal of an inconvenient artist, but also a call by the state via the newspaper it controlled for a return to the norm – a return to the omnipresent socialist realist discourse. Although unwittingly, Ginsberg was therefore at the center of something more than "just" freedom of expression – it was an incessant fight over the act of interpretation itself.

7.4 The Impact of the Beat Generation

Critics agree that Hájek's "Americká bohéma" was a crucial text that helped popularize the Beats in Czechoslovakia (Kopecký, "Czeching the Beat" 98; Rauvolf, "Beat po česku" 22). Together with other Beat poetry translated by Zábrana and published in *Světová literatura*, this text ensured that the Beats were relatively well-known in the mid-sixties. The Beat Generation is, after all, one of the aspects typical of the sixties that Juraj Šebo lists in his memoir as having a major influence on the younger generation of the period (11). Young people around the world wanted to break from preceding generations and the Beats were a significant part of this effort. Socialist realist art did not fare well with Czechoslovak youth; instead, they preferred Remarque, Camus, Greene, or Ferlinghetti and Ginsberg (31). By the

64 As intercourse between two consenting adults of the same sex was decriminalized in the country in 1961, the public condemnation of Ginsberg's homosexuality shows the regime was willing to break its own rules in order to achieve its goals. Tellingly, the text then adds that Ginsberg was expelled from another country for similar homosexual orgies earlier that year, which is a clear reference to the poet's stay in Cuba. However, Ginsberg was deported due to his open discussion of freedom of speech and the rights of homosexuals rather than organizing homosexual orgies; for more information see Ginsberg, "Beat Reporter." This also shows that at some point during Ginsberg's visit the regime had become aware of the true nature of his arrival in Prague, yet it had still decided to paint Ginsberg as a possible ally of the government for political reasons before Majáles took place.

time Ginsberg arrived in Czechoslovakia, he was a notorious figure, as he had to be popular to be chosen by the student body as one of the nominees for the King of May elections (143).

One of the places clearly influenced by the Beats was poetry readings accompanied by jazz music. While these readings originated in the literary café Viola, many cafés and theaters, such as Kovařík's Docela malé divadlo, soon followed suit, thus poetry readings accompanied by jazz music became more commonplace; this in turn also documents the gradual liberalization of society (Rauvolf, "Beat po česku" 22). The popularization of jazz poetry even led to the publication of the "Poezie a jazz" (Poetry and Jazz) LP in 1965, which includes poems by Corso and Ferlinghetti accompanied by jazz music. Petr Kopecký points out there were several reasons for the Beats becoming so popular in sixties Czechoslovakia, one of which was the unconventional form of their poetry, which helped emphasize the vast difference between the ideas present in Beat poetry and those in the official art following Party guidelines ("Czeching the Beat" 99). Beat poetry was radically different in both form and content from the majority of the officially-sanctioned poetry available. Nevertheless, the influences of the Beats also go beyond their art. For instance, Allen Ginsberg is often credited for helping to popularize the trend of young men wearing long hair: while it was somewhat fashionable even before Ginsberg's visit in 1965, his presence in Czechoslovakia and especially his part in the Majáles festival was seen by the government as a factor that further popularized long hair among men (Šebo 81, Blažek 47). The importance of this trend should not be underestimated: rather than being a mere fashion statement, it was an outward and explicit sign of a growing discomfort among the country's youth. Albeit relatively short, Ginsberg's stay therefore had a profound impact on Czechoslovak society (Kudrna 9).

In terms of influence on other artists, numerous Czechoslovak poets were not only affected by Beat poetry, but some of them, such as Jan Skarlant or Václav Hrabě, included direct references to the Beats in their own poetry (Rauvolf, "Beat po česku" 23). Due to the large exposure Ginsberg's poetry enjoyed in the sixties, it is only logical that a few Czechoslovak poets, most notably Milan Koch, took many stylistic cues from the Beat's work (24). Josef Vlček also adds that the poet and musician Pavel Zajíček is essentially Ginsberg's protégé, or that the novelist Bohumil Hrabal bears similarities to Kerouac's work in the way he idealized the people living on the margins of society (215, 208). Plenty of other artists were not directly influenced in terms of style, but still referenced the Beats in their work; for instance, the folk singer Wabi Daněk in his song "Na cestě" (On the Road) references being with Sal and Dean in spirit while he is traveling.[65] In other words,

65 Other singer-songwriters who acknowledged the Beats as important for their artistic development include Vlastimil Třešňák and Jaroslav Hutka (Rauvolf "Beat po česku" 24). Numerous of these artists performed at the popular Porta folk and country festival (first taking place in 1967), and the connec-

not only direct influences, but also references and parallels were certainly present in Czechoslovakia in the sixties and later.

Since the art of the Beat generation was unavailable for long periods of time, their influence often takes the form of general impressions or attitudes rather than specific formal approaches to literature or programmatic attitudes. Josef Rauvolf explains that while the Beats were only one of the many sources shaping the imagination of these illegal artists, they were certainly a powerful inspiration for the underground movement of the normalization period. ("Vyvázat se" 4). As Martin Machovec further elaborates, there are some parallels between the underground art of the normalization and the Beats, especially Allen Ginsberg ("Podzemí" 4). Still, these similarities were mostly in a shared attitude, or a certain point-of-view and life experiences (Rauvolf, "Beat po česku" 23). Similarly to the Beats, belonging to the Czechoslovak underground was then expressing a certain attitude to life, or, as Vodrážka defines it, a "new sensibility" (16). The emphasis on an overall impression of the Beats rather than the particulars can be best seen in the following definition of the Beats in the second issue of the illegal magazine *Vokno* (Window): "A movement of American youth after the second world war. The Beats were initially Bohemian in nature and revolted against bourgeois morals, ideals, and attitudes. Later they protested the mechanization of civilization and the constant fear caused by wars, finding refuge in traveling, drugs, sex, and mysticism" (/sun/ 57).

The official discourse can also serve as a vehicle through which the Beat Generation can be judged, and the final report undertaken by the secret police during Ginsberg's deportation further portrays the impact of the Beats on Czechoslovaks. While he was staying in Prague, Ginsberg was extremely popular among university students, the report documents, and they were especially enthusiastic when Ginsberg spoke about the importance of freedom and its lack in Czechoslovakia; in contrast, Ginsberg's theory of "psychosexuological philosophy" was not received with such understanding (Vodrážka and Lass 189). The students simply chose the aspects of the Beats which were the most important for them and their lives. What mattered most was the lack of personal liberties, as this was felt every day in the totalitarian regime; the poet's discussion of unusual philosophies was in such a context an impractical luxury.

The regime's insistence on the discourse of normativity, however, had been gradually abating during the seventies, as the publication of Kerouac's *On the Road* in 1978 proves. The novel was so popular that the first printing of 20,000 copies quickly sold out and soon readers were signing petitions requesting that additional copies of the novel be made; surprisingly, the second edition was published

tion between the Beats and singer-songwriters experienced in the US is present in Czechoslovakia as well: the festival's master of ceremonies of 25 years was Miroslav Kovařík.

two years later (Rauvolf, "Prague" 195). Still, the regime remained determined to shape the Beat's discourse. The dust jacket of the second edition thus describes the novel as "the fundamental literary work of the so-called Beat movement." It further contextualizes the text by framing Kerouac as belonging to a segment of youth who started to critique the American government: they refused the "ideal of 'a young and successful American' with a firmly-set and unchangeable goal," choosing instead to escape civilization to "a modern primitivism" in protest. Noting that the Beats tried to find solace in experiencing the present, the dust jacket also describes this effort as hopeless. Therefore, "*On the Road* is nowadays an account of the desire for a better life, freedom and happiness," and as such, the dust jacket concludes, brought important impulses to American novels that followed.

Rather than banning it outright, the regime accompanied the novel with its preferred reading, thus guiding its readers along the *correct* path so that they did not stray from the preferred interpretation. The regime was determined to remain in control of its readers and the reading strategies they might have employed. While the short dust-jacket description is certainly less explicitly ideological than the socialist realist critiques of the 1940s and 1950s, it is, however, also significantly more politicized than the readings promoted by Zábrana and other critics toward the end of the 1960s. These "moderate" readings were in place for a relatively long period, and it was not until the Velvet Revolution that the regime was changed – and with it its readers.

8 THE RECEPTION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

The Velvet Revolution took place in 1989 and what initially seemed to lead to a possible reformation of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia instead caused the Party's downfall and resulted in the first democratic elections in four decades. It might seem logical to think that the Beats would have been forgotten by the time the borders of Czechoslovakia opened to the West. After all, a significant amount of time had passed since the initial outburst of Beat publications in the 1960s and while a few books were published starting in the late 1970s, these were available only sporadically and mostly in small, hard to obtain print runs.

Despite the above, the new democratic Czechoslovakia, which soon split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia, did not forget the Beats. On the contrary, the Beats were treated not as ordinary artists, but rather as important figures that had a significant impact on the people of Czechoslovakia. For instance, Allen Ginsberg traveled to the country in the spring of 1990; that is mere months after the end of the communist regime, and, accompanied by the recently elected President Václav Havel, read his poem titled "The Return of the King of May" in Wenceslas Square. The poem is a sequel to "Kral Majales (King of May)," the poem Ginsberg wrote on his flight to the United Kingdom after being deported from Czechoslovakia. While both poems critiqued Communism, "The Return of the King of May" also warned against the dangers of capitalism and consumerism; the audience's reaction, still affected by the cheerful mood after the fall of the communist regime, was rather lukewarm (Kopecký, "Czeching the Beat" 101). Importantly, Ginsberg reciting his poetry next to the President indicates the way Beats were treated in the days following the fall of Communism: they were celebrated as writers and important social figures by the common readership, and respected by many of the country's government officials.

The meeting of the Beats and high-ranking officials of the country was repeated several years later when in 1998 Lawrence Ferlinghetti arrived in Prague to attend the Prague Writers' Festival. Ferlinghetti's visit was covered extensively by the media and Ferlinghetti himself was overwhelmed by fans at nearly every step. Importantly, an extensive poetry reading session focusing on Ferlinghetti's oeuvre was a crucial part of the event and many leading artists and politicians took part in the reading; among those reciting the Beat's poetry were Václav Klaus and Miloš Zeman – both high-ranking politicians and future Presidents of the Czech Republic – and they not only expressed their enthusiasm to be at the event, but also explained that Ferlinghetti's poetry had had a significant impact on them during the 1960s (Kopecký, "Czeching the Beat" 101). This enthusiasm regarding the Beats was shared by ordinary people as well. For example, when Ginsberg, invited by Professor Josef Jařab to give lectures on poetry at Palacký University, visited Olomouc in 1993, a man in a local bar disclosed to Ginsberg that his poetry had kept him going while he was imprisoned (Rauvolf, "Beat po česku" 23). Simply put, the Beats were an unavoidable presence in the early years of the new country and, as this chapter suggests, still remain popular.

8.1 General Reception of the Beat Generation

Summarizing the initial influence of the Beats on Czechoslovaks, Richard Olehla, a Charles University Professor, explains that Kerouac's *On the Road* has been extremely popular in the Czech lands since its publication (Olehla). Because literature produced in the United States was for a long time considered "the literature of the enemy," it was only rarely translated; however, that all changed with the first translations by Hájek and Zábrana. Eventually, *On the Road* entered the Czechoslovak book market and as a result presented readers with a world starkly different from their own. As Olehla clarifies, the ability of the novel's characters to freely travel from one destination to another symbolized the notion of freedom and personal liberty. The impact of such uninhibited movement on Czechoslovak readers was truly profound. Czechoslovaks were not only barred from traveling to most countries for forty years, but also the Iron Curtain barred them physically from crossing the border to the West. In terms of being able to travel freely– and the liberty this symbolized – the conservative 1950s United States were no match for Communist Czechoslovakia. As such, the Beats were to the Czechoslovaks an even larger symbol of individual freedom than they were to Americans.

The way publishers took to the Beats after the Velvet Revolution acknowledges Olehla's claim. The 1990s saw such a surge in the popularity of the Beat Generation that nearly every publishing house released at least a book or two by the Beats (Dudek 18). As Petr Dudek further points out, some publishers relied on the Beats

to such an extent that they would hardly be able to compile a publishing plan without relying on Beat works. The desire to print the Beat authors in large quantities, however, should not be understood as a simple act of publishers exploring a book market suddenly liberated from the constraints of the communist government. Writing in the introduction to an interview with Ferlinghetti, Ivana Pecháčková argues the work of the Beat Generation and its ideals of individual freedom became "one of the initiatory sources and later even symbols of re-establishing free Czech culture" (12). One of the many examples of such codification of the Beats in the Czech Republic was the aptly titled "Allen Ginsberg Memorial Freedom Festival" held in 2015 by the Department of North American Studies, Charles University. The five-day event not only aimed at commemorating the 50th anniversary of Ginsberg's visit, but also at celebrating the life and work of Allen Ginsberg, and argued that Ginsberg being elected the King of May was a defining moment in Czechoslovak history ("Allen Ginsberg Memorial"). Corroborating this view, Darrell Jónsson claims that the event was a "key link in the chain of events leading to the Velvet Revolution," and ranks it as important as the 1968 Soviet invasion or the establishment of Charter 77. While at the beginning Beat poetry was tolerated by the regime because of its anti-American stance, the Beats were hardly the government puppets the Party wished them to be. Instead, Jónsson continues, they had shown that poetry can be an act of resistance, and this is precisely what the crowning of Ginsberg as the King of May symbolized to Czechoslovaks. As a nationality, Czechoslovaks have throughout history experienced short outbursts of freedom at the cost of decades and sometimes even centuries of suppression that usually followed. Ginsberg's presence at the festival, Jónsson argues, gave the Czechoslovaks a taste of the freedom that they so desired.

In other words, the Beats are considered relevant to the historical experience of the Czech Republic and are treated accordingly. Importantly, this treatment starts at the educational level, as the current "maturita" examination further highlights.[66] Not only is the Beat Generation one of the twenty-two literary epochs, movements, and groups required for the mandatory Czech language and literature part of the examination, but Jack Kerouac is also included in the short list of important foreign writers of the twentieth century ("Seznam autorů"). The list, which also includes Thomas Mann, Boris Pasternak, and Tennessee Williams, altogether contains nineteen authors whose work the students should be familiar with to successfully pass the exam. For Czech students, the Beat Generation is mandatory knowledge to the same degree as the playwrights from ancient Greece or the French Realists. Simply put, the Beats in the Czech Republic represent the American canon.

66 "Maturita" is a standardized high school exit examination and students can specify most of the subjects they wish to be examined from.

Nevertheless, the Beats are more than just mandatory objects to be studied. After Ginsberg's death, the newspaper *Hospodářské noviny* (Economic Newspaper) published a short obituary, which opened by reminding readers that Ginsberg was elected the King of May during the 1965 Majáles. Noting that Ginsberg "is considered to be one of the last poetic bards in the history of world literature," the paper's recalling of the famous student festival is quite telling ("Král českého majálesu"). Ginsberg is best remembered, the newspaper states, as the American poet who played a vital part in the development of 1960s Czechoslovakia. His implied role is that of a herald of a new age, an age of individual liberty, and thus he had become one of its symbols even after decades have passed since his first arrival in Czechoslovakia. Similarly, Gary Snyder was also recognized for his contribution to promoting the freedom of the individual. When he was one of the guests at the 17th Prague Writers' Festival in 2007, he was hailed for being a member of the Beat Generation, inspiring the hippie movement that followed, and bringing the importance of ecology into the spotlight (Třešňák). In a way, journalist Petr Třešňák continues, Snyder has not only survived his contemporaries, but he has also outgrown them. His message stresses the significance of experiencing nature or the relevance of ancient cultures, and these and other notions present in his work are still crucial even today. The timeless quality of the messages in Snyder's poetry is further underlined by relating a short anecdote regarding Snyder's stay in the Czech Republic. Třešňák writes that Snyder wanted to take a break from the hectic pace of the festival by hiking through the countryside for a day, and the journalist was one of several people invited to accompany Snyder on his outdoor walk; "As if playing tennis with McEnroe," Třešňák thought to himself before setting out. The short hike made Třešňák realize that the ultimate role of the contemporary writer – and therefore Snyder as well – is facilitating interaction with people from different walks of life. Snyder's importance as a writer is then not only achieved through the esthetics of his poetry, but also through the ideas and philosophy he and his poetry represent: Snyder is a facilitator of ideas and viewpoints, and a symbol of spiritual well-being.

Understanding the Beats as representing an ethos had already been quite pronounced a few years earlier at the 13th Prague Writers' Festival. The 2003 festival was dedicated to William S. Burroughs and one of his assumptions – "We don't report the news. We write it." – was the central theme of the festival. One of many writers attending the festival was the Scottish novelists and playwright Irvine Welsh, who said the following about Burroughs and his role in the contemporary world:

> These events are fun if taken in the right spirit; you get to meet people from different cultures, experience the cut and thrust of debate, and occasionally indulge in some old--fashioned bad behaviour. As this year's festival is in memory of William Burroughs, this

> seemed a fitting approach. Burroughs was a most celebrated writer, especially in the latter part of his long life. Over the past 30 years, every literary young buck or pop star craving some arty credibility just had to get their picture taken alongside old Bill. It's either a tribute to his brilliance or a sad indictment of the conformity of today's writing that, half a decade after his death, he still feels like our most startlingly contemporary novelist.

The above is an apt commentary on Burroughs and his public image, because it embodies the most common approaches to the writer. Due to his long-lasting heroin addiction, open homosexuality, or the accidental shooting of his wife, Burroughs is often perceived as the enfant terrible of the Beats, as Welsh's commentary indirectly explains.

This, however, further complicates the reason behind Burroughs's popularity: while some might be attracted to the ideas frequently appearing in his writing – expansive government control exploiting language as the ultimate control method – others are more interested in Burroughs's persona embodying attitudes and behavior, such as idiosyncrasy and opposition to conventions. The second approach is best seen in a short bio published in the literary magazine *Host* (The Guest). Released to mark the centenary of Burroughs's birth, the text mostly summarizes the author's life; like many such texts, it primarily focuses on the period before Burroughs published *Naked Lunch*. The text opens with a line stating that today Burroughs would have celebrated his centenary; however, the Beat's lifestyle would make such a celebration "practically impossible," and a similar tone is present throughout the rest of the text (Vykoupil 15). Most of the article is concerned with Burroughs's early life, frequently pointing out various "juicy" bits such as that he chose to live in New York because of the relative ease with which one could have accessed alcohol, drugs, and young male prostitutes. In contrast, Burroughs's literary achievements are summarized in the flat statement, "[H]is work and life has captivated and affected a large number of people" (15). The Burroughs of this short text is not a writer but something of a curiosity – a person who has led a lifestyle of debauchery and whose life choices, the text explicitly states, should not be emulated.

The responses above and others like them – present in study notes for the maturita examination or short magazine articles and disseminated by journalists or social networks – then show the overall simplicity of general reception. While at times this reception can lack nuance to the point of crudeness, at other times its more straightforward nature can help pinpoint the central features of the authors which are most appealing to their audiences. Similarly, these popular interpretations can be accurate, or they can include misconceptions, as when Pavel Turek interviewed Gary Snyder during his 2007 stay. The interview is punctuated by misunderstandings on both sides, which culminates when Turek mistakenly claims that Kerouac's spontaneous writing was a huge influence on Snyder's poetry;

Snyder's refusal of this idea exudes a palpable irritation ("Dopijte tu vody" 46). In general, different interpretations and misinterpretations can indicate the different understandings – and therefore the different discourses – within which the audience operates. Importantly, publisher's peritexts are the types of texts which frequently try to appeal to the general understanding of the reading public.

8.2 Introductions, Afterwords, Book Covers

While not strictly a part of the text, material added by a publisher, such as a preface or introduction, often provides a new insight into the work itself. This insight, however, can be provided indirectly – by analyzing the way the publisher presents the text and its author. Since publishers wish to promote their releases, promotional texts by the publisher and other paratexts included in the release also indicate possible interpretations of the text by trying to evoke certain qualities and thus make the text more appealing to the prospective reader. Naturally, the promotional nature of these texts – their aim is to sell the book, after all – might make them slightly unreliable for analysis. Yet that is precisely the advantage of using publisher's texts for a reception study: they are essentially packaging for the content, therefore often mediating the first contact between the reader and the text itself. As such, texts of publishers help shape and further proliferate the popular image of the author or work in question.

The publisher's peritext for the Gregory Corso anthology *Jak neumírat* (Mindfield) begins by placing Corso firmly within the Beat Generation movement. Corso's early poetry quickly found its rightful place among readers for several reasons, the text claims, because it was humorous, unburdened by complicated wording or puzzling themes, and it was more grounded in reality than the endless "philosophizing" of university professors (Corso, *Jak neumírat*). The reason for his popularity, the text continues, was his ability "to scrutinize an oft-discussed phenomenon through the use of familiar phrases or tiresome clichés, so that the newly formed link reveals the true nature of the phenomenon." The book cover also includes information about Corso's early popularity in Czechoslovakia, noting that the first poetry collection printed in the country was sold out almost immediately. Similarly, the back cover to Kerouac's *Lonesome Traveler* provides a brief yet effective way of characterizing the Beat. The cover starts with a Ginsberg quote calling Kerouac "the new Buddha of American prose," while the publisher's poetic text explains that Kerouac "left the university, because he thought it was too stale, and then he worked on the railroad, at sea, in the forest, he worked everywhere and did everything, and at the same time he wandered and, most importantly, he was writing the whole time." Kerouac's writing then embodies experience uninhibited by the conventions of society.

The book flap of the Ferlinghetti anthology *Ve snu ve snu snil jsem sen* (In a Dream in a Dream I Had a Dream) describes the poet as a "solo tragedian," street poet, and an activist who prefers to be "a songbird rather than a parrot." The afterword by l. bosch begins by pointing out that Ferlinghetti was considered to be slightly more poetic, intellectual and European than his Beat peers ("Historii tvoří lži vítězů" 327). The characteristics of Ferlinghetti's poetry include describing commonplace events or childhood recollections as seemingly innocuous and ordinary, even though these in fact indicate an important personal or social change. Arguing that Ferlinghetti is not a Beat, bosch recalls Kenneth Rexroth's critique of the Beats and his laudatory comments regarding Ferlinghetti in order to draw the dividing line between Ferlinghetti and the others even further. Unlike the Beats, Ferlinghetti does not necessarily try to dismantle all previous traditions, and in fact he even honors them by citing other writers in his poetry (330–31). Ferlinghetti's playful paraphrasing and modifying of others thus places him in the tradition of artists such as Woody Allen or Quentin Tarantino.

That being said, bosch also points out that at times it might be difficult for Czech readers to agree with Ferlinghetti. After mentioning the poet's anti-consumerism and anti-totalitarian stance, bosch draws attention to the poet's critique of Ronald Reagan. Ferlinghetti sees Reagan as the President who cut funding to vital social services; in contrast, bosch claims that Reagan for Czechs will forever be the person who helped topple the Soviet regime through increasing the military budget and therefore causing an arms race that the severely underperforming economy of the Soviet Union simply could not withstand (338). The Czech audience might be able to understand the critique of Reagan, bosch continues, but they can hardly identify with it. The social and historical context of Czech readers is in this respect different from that of Ferlinghetti's audience, who have most likely experienced firsthand the events and problems Ferlinghetti critiques. Nevertheless, bosch assures the reader that Ferlinghetti is still true to the concepts of imagination, freedom, or liberty and that he is a true optimist, even despite the sometimes bleak tone of his poetry (340). As bosch argues, Ferlinghetti shows that the true artist should have a social conscience and should be politically active, so that ecological disasters and the fall of humanity can be avoided, thus painting Ferlinghetti as a one-of-a-kind poet and a world humanist.

The translator's note to Ferlinghetti's *Unfair Arguments with Existence* and *Routines* describes the poet as an existentialist with a rebellious nature (Pecháčková 173). He was the most engaged "political agitator" of all the Beats and focused on ordinary people, who were often ignored by most poets. Warning against the perils of modern industrial society, Ferlinghetti draws the attention of readers to the importance of freedom, love, spirituality, and living in harmony (173–74). After Ferlinghetti's writing style is discussed, the translator points out that the poet is still actively engaged in social issues and, unlike many of his Beat peers,

has remained strong both literally and morally. The importance of Ferlinghetti's activism and community involvement is also emphasized in the short biography included as an afterword. While going through Ferlinghetti's prolific career, the text does not fail to mention his anarchist leanings, which led the poet and owner of the City Lights Bookstore and publishing house to eschew the sudden media attention after the *Howl* obscenity trial in favor of a more direct contact with the community and a focus on political activism. The afterword also describes Ferlinghetti's *A Coney Island of the Mind* as portraying the dark side of American society, and touches upon his involvement in the hippie movement or the protests against the Vietnam War (bosch, "Lawrence Ferlinghetti" 177–78).

The social and historical background is also emphasized in the afterword sections to a volume of Ferlinghetti's poetry containing the early poetry collections *Pictures of the Gone World*, *A Coney Island of the Mind*, and *Starting from San Francisco*. The first afterword, a selection of Jan Zábrana's recollections of his first encounter with Ferlinghetti's work, points out that his *A Coney Island* truly encompassed the zeitgeist of the United States of the fifties. The poems contained within were also among the first to illuminate the overbearing power of technological advancement on everyday reality; the poems, Zábrana states, contain real human emotions – humor, anger, protest – and are far from sounding too formal or pathetic ("Ze vzpomínek Jana Zábrany" 213–14). While Ferlinghetti's poetry was certainly new in his home country, its firm roots in Surrealism somewhat resembled the early works of Vítězslav Nezval or Konstantin Biebl and therefore had a tradition to follow for the Czechoslovak readership (214). In Zábrana's account, Ferlinghetti is the kind of poet who despite his foreign nationality can be easily understood by his Czechoslovak readers due to his familiar tone and humane approach. In contrast, Markéta Kaněrová's second afterword is more biographical as it discusses the poet's life, but also describes the early success of the Beats. Kaněrová thus describes Ginsberg as "a bard of the new generation" who in "Howl" protested the suffocating nature of conformism, thus rallying his audience into a revolt against the establishment (223). By abandoning stilted academic poetry, the published works of Kerouac, Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti, and others helped turn American youth away from their careers and directed them toward art instead (225). Kaněrová's reading emphasizes the social aspect of the Beats on a grander scale: the Beats were an important literary phenomenon that had a profound impact across the world; nevertheless, Czechoslovakia and later the Czech Republic was the place where the Beats resonated the most.

Unlike the Beat poets who had a unique position in Czechoslovakia, Burroughs was virtually unknown in the country. He was therefore in a somewhat similar situation in Czechoslovakia as he was in the USA in the 1950s and early 1960s: he had been constantly talked *about* by other Beats despite not publishing anything under his name until 1959. As a result, the only available Burroughs text

in Czech prior to the Velvet Revolution was the short story "The Death of Opium Jones" in the thirteenth issue of *Světová literatura* in 1968, thus the references to Burroughs in various literary journals were rather cryptic. Because Burroughs is the most idiosyncratic of the Beats, the way he was promoted among Czechs in the 1990s varied slightly from the portrayal of other Beats. For instance, the text on the back cover of the Czech edition of *Queer* first starts with an overview of his most important work, then proceeds to establish him as an influential figure by highlighting the impact he had on other Beats, rock musicians, or science fiction writers. The description ends by stating that while the novel was written in 1952, it was published only in 1985, the delay being due to "hypocritical reasons."[67] As the back cover says, the novel's qualities include "a matter-of-fact language, dry style, dark sense of humor and aggressive energy." These, the text continues, introduce the reader to Burroughs's visions, which actually have "long become reality."

The Czech edition of *My Education: A Book of Dreams* took a similar approach toward Burroughs. After a very brief bio, which describes Burroughs as one of the leading Beats and considers him to be one of the most engrossing American novelists of the twentieth century, the blurb tries to present the text – a collection of dream recordings and descriptions – as the ultimate key to explaining Burroughs's oeuvre. These dreams "question the structure of everyday reality," therefore not only documenting some of the inner workings of Burroughs's mind, but also embody "a unique and disturbing journey beyond the limits of human consciousness" (*Škola mého života*). Unlike Corso and his poetry of the mundane or Ferlinghetti's call for uninhibited freedom and the common good, Burroughs is presented as a tortured figure and a visionary. His sharp mind, the cover argues, enabled Burroughs to address the otherwise ineffable. However, this was at a significant cost; starting from the accidental shooting of his wife and ending with his long heroin addiction, the price for his pointed observation is for most people simply too dear to pay. Reading *My Education*, the cover effectively argues, therefore offers a unique experience to its readers, as the book's contents refer to an understanding of the real an average person will simply never be able to obtain.

67 It is true that the novel, with its frank depictions of homosexuality, was simply unpublishable in the 1950s. However, claiming that the novel was not published due to the hypocrisy of a person in control of the publishing process seems to be rather dishonest, as Burroughs himself did not consider *Queer* to be a good example of his writing and therefore did not pursue its publication in the first place. This assertion might be a simple mistake of the publisher; nevertheless, it also might be another way of portraying Burroughs as an "outrageous" writer, thus hoping to increase the sales of the novel.

8.3 Ferlinghetti in Prague

While Ginsberg's several stays in the 1990s were certainly well-noted, it was Lawrence Ferlinghetti who has captivated the nation's attention most after the Velvet Revolution. Visiting in 1998, only a year after Ginsberg's death, Ferlinghetti was the host of the 1998 Prague Writers' Festival and the concurrent Beat Generation Fest. Ferlinghetti's arrival was front-page news and the way he was received astonished even Ferlinghetti himself (Snížek 17). For instance, not only did random passers-by constantly stop Ferlinghetti in the streets in order to obtain his autograph, but the improvised book signing taking place during his stay at times resembled a rock concert rather than a book-signing event (Vyternová). As Karel Srp, the founder of Jazzová sekce (Jazz Section) who also organized the Beat Generation Fest, recalls, the podium where Ferlinghetti was signing books was sometimes so overwhelmed by his fans that some of them had to be pushed off the stage (Snížek 18).[68, 69] Ferlinghetti's current profile at the Prague Writers' Festival webpage gives a hint of the reasons behind the overwhelmingly positive welcome Ferlinghetti received in Prague: "Visibly 'in the American grain,' [Ferlinghetti] remains pre-eminent in American letters as poet, translator, publisher, playwright, and patron saint. His humanistic radical writing is seen as an important predecessor to the Beat Generation" ("Lawrence Ferlinghetti").

Contemporary news articles reporting on Ferlinghetti's visit further reveal the image of the Beat in the Czech Republic. For instance, the Slovak daily *SME* begins by informing its readers about the ongoing reading of Ferlinghetti's poetry titled Nonstop Ferlinghetti. The reading, which took place at Saint Salvator's Church in Prague, lasted 72 hours and was conceived as a tribute to an important literary epoch: the literature of the Beat Generation (Petránsky). Noting that the list of readers was extremely diverse, the text describes Ferlinghetti's *A Coney Island of the Mind* as "legendary" and Ferlinghetti himself as still possessing his "phenomenal sense of spontaneity"; similarly, Ginsberg's "Howl" is described as "iconic."[70] When Ferlinghetti himself was reciting some of his work, the article

68 Jazzová sekce was an import player in promoting alternative culture during the normalization period by publishing novels, bulletins and magazines and organizing various music events. In 1986 several of its board members were imprisoned on trumped-up charges. In addition, a few of its members died while imprisoned or due to the brutal techniques used during interrogation. Importantly, Ferlinghetti was one of the foreigners who petitioned the Czechoslovak government to release those imprisoned.

69 At one point Ferlinghetti looked at Karel Srp and asked about the huge amount of attention and popularity he was receiving: "Did Allen have this as well?" Srp answered in the negative (Snížek 18).

70 Ferlinghetti's poetry was read by a truly diverse crowd: from dignitaries such as the Prime Minister and future President Václav Klaus to random passers-by. In addition, the reading was streamed via the internet to Stockholm, which was at that time the European Capital of Culture, therefore further highlighting the importance of the reading and of Ferlinghetti himself.

adds, the audience was listening as if in a trance and subsequently rewarded the poet with a standing ovation.

Another newspaper article, this time from the Czech *Hospodářské noviny*, begins by describing the eighth Prague Writers' Festival as a large tribute to the Beat Generation and singles out Ferlinghetti as the main feature of the festival. The "famous" and "legendary" Ferlinghetti was an important member of the Beat Generation movement, which the article describes as refusing the traditional values of consumerism and standing against "the society of the majority," promoting "voluntary poverty, a vagabond lifestyle, and erotic licentiousness" ("Americký beatnický básník"). While the article also focuses on the language of Beat literature, it mostly details the event itself and its goals, one of them clearly being the importance of personal freedom. The connection between Ferlinghetti and Czech readers is highlighted by Karel Srp, who notes that Ferlinghetti was one of the foreign writers protesting the imprisonment of Czechoslovak intellectuals by the communist regime ("Americký beatnický básník"). The main point of the festival, which also included a life-sized mock-up of the City Lights Bookstore, and its various events were the ideals and spirit of the Beat Generation, and at that time it was the largest Beat Generation festival to date in terms of the number of various excerpts, archival footage, and newspaper clippings. Commenting on the legacy and importance of the Beats, Karel Srp states the following: "Given our current perspective, at certain times the fifty-year-old history of the Beats might seem childish. At other times, however, their ideas have not been surpassed even today. The general idea of the Beats is still exciting, surprising and shifting constantly" (qtd. in "Americký beatnický básník"). Ferlinghetti himself was certainly overwhelmed by the welcome he received, and stated that he felt more popular in the Czech Republic than he ever did in his home country.

In 1999, a publication was released to further commemorate Ferlinghetti's visit to Prague. Titled *S Ferlinghettim v Praze* (With Ferlinghetti in Prague), it documents all the events, interviews, and encounters that took place during his stay. The book's prologue opens by reminding readers of the allure of the Beats. It was their emphasis on individual freedom and personal choice as well as a critique of consumerism that captivated the minds of Czechoslovaks in the 1960s (Snížek 15). After all, Snížek adds, the Beat Generation and Ginsberg in particular were a large influence on the underground movement of the normalization period. Importantly, their critique of capitalism seemed to be irrelevant in the early years of the new Czechoslovakia following the fall of the communist regime. Nevertheless, as the nineties swept by and the public was faced with yet another political scandal, the dangers of unbridled capitalism became apparent, thus making Ginsberg's warning against the invasion of other ideologies simply replacing the previous ones truly prophetic. As Snížek further states, while the writing of the Beats might have lost the shock value associated with their early texts, their words and

ideas were as relevant in the nineties as they were in the sixties (15). The Beat Generation Fest, Snížek reminds us, was aimed at discovering the impact of the Beats on Czechoslovak culture and its relevance for today's world. Judging by the vast amount of newspaper articles detailing Ferlinghetti's stay, the number of fans and journalist showing up for the various events, and all the dignitaries, including the then-President Václav Havel, who wished to participate in one way or another in the events, the Beats simply cannot be seen as unimportant for the Czech people.

The appeal of the Beat Generation has remained constantly high throughout recent Czech history. As Kateřina Alexandra Vyternová writes in 2013, Ferlinghetti's good standing in terms of his popularity and reputation in the Czech Republic is more than deserved. A similar tone of admiration can be found in an article by Ondřej Bezr when he writes that the "American poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti has always been received here with the utmost respect, despite there not being as many of Ferlinghetti's books translated into Czech as would be desirable." Going into the history of Ferlinghetti publications in Czechoslovakia, Bezr explains that the wish of the communist regime to gain ideological allies from the West made the publication of Ferlinghetti's poetry possible; after all, Ferlinghetti was a vocal critic of imperialism and the United States. Nevertheless, in their haste to obtain another American critical of his home country, Bezr writes, the regime was unable to "look behind the corner" of Ferlinghetti's writing. Had it been able to do so, it would have found ideas and notions extremely dangerous to the Czechoslovakian regime – ideals of freedom and individual self-determination. These ideas, Bezr argues, are still important, which is the reason that, despite the poet's old age and the sixty years that have passed since he started writing and publishing, Ferlinghetti and all the other Beats remain relevant in the Czech Republic even for today's generations. This portrayal of Ferlinghetti and his work thus further emphasizes the historical importance the Beats played in Czechoslovakia.

8.4 The Beats and the Underground

As the example of Ginsberg's and Ferlinghetti's visits show, the Beats are generally viewed as symbols of individual freedom and resistance against government oppression. Importantly, this notion is further echoed in the works of numerous Czech and Czechoslovak artists. For instance, Inka Machulková was influenced by Beat poetry to the point that she is considered one of the few truly Beat poets in Czechoslovakia. She was a part of the Viola circle of artists from the very beginning and the repertoire, Machulková recalls in a 2007 interview, revolved around the Beats and jazz: among the most popular shows was a wildly successful jazz event "Komu patří jazz" ("Whom Does Jazz Belong To") or a reading of Ferlinghetti's poetry in Zábrana's translation (Machulková). Her first experience with Beat po-

etry was Corso's poem "Marriage" published in *Světová literatura*. As she puts it, what struck her about the poem was not only the fact that it voiced her innermost feelings, but also the poetic language used, which was to Machulková entirely new. Overall, while Machulková claims that any effort to explain the allure of the Beat Generation at that time might sound banal, she singles out the notions of inner freedom and personal earnestness as the defining aspects of the Beats she identified with most. However, she claims that the inspiration she found in the Beat Generation was not due to a blind obsession about "the American way of life," but rather to the parallels with her own experience she saw in their works. The work of the Beats, in other words, therefore gained new meaning in the Czech context, which further boosted their popularity in the country. As she further explains, Machulková was easily drawn to Corso's critique of American conformity, because she had lived in a totalitarian country and was able to contextualize the critique of a way of life into a different system of government. In the Beats, Machulková and her peers found kindred souls through their critique of consumerism, pointless materialism, or stifling bureaucracy. This, Machulková notes, was possible since the Beats did not focus on a specific overarching ideology, but rather on social issues which are essential irrespective of the particulars of the given regime.

While Machulková managed to experience the Beats during the relatively liberal 1960s, her poetry was still deemed provocative by the regime; after several interrogations asking about the meaning of specific lines in her poetry, she decided to emigrate from the country following the Warsaw Pact invasion in 1968. However, artists active during the normalization period of the 1970s and 1980s viewed the Beats in a slightly different manner. The Czechoslovak underground movement of the normalization period, loosely organized around the poet Ivan Martin "Magor" Jirous and the avant-garde rock band the Plastic People of the Universe, was fond of the Beats because they viewed them as symbols of American freedom (Olehla). Since their art was not approved by the regime's authorities, the underground movement was forced to work illegally, which eventually led to the Plastic People being sentenced for "organized disturbance of the peace"; similarly, Jirous was imprisoned five times for his political views and opposition to the regime. Importantly it was also Jirous who set out the philosophy of the "second culture" of underground art. As Jirous writes in his seminal essay "Zpráva o třetím českém kulturní obrození" ("The Third Czech Cultural Revival: A Report"):

> [T]he first culture does not want us, while we do not want to have anything in common with the first culture… The goal of the underground in our country is to create a second culture; however, this culture, unlike that practiced in the West, does not aim to destroy the establishment, as that would thrust us directly into its throes. Rather than that, the second culture works with those who wish to join by removing their skepticism and showing them that there are many things to be achieved… (19–20)

At first glance, the Beats might seem to be an ideal source of inspiration for the underground artists of the normalization period. After all, Jirous's concept of "second culture" bears similarities to the refusal of the Beat poets to adopt traditional writing methods, instead replacing them with their own programmatic definitions such as Kerouac's spontaneous writing or Ginsberg's experiments with breath and meter. Furthermore, the underground artists were certainly aware of the Beats: for instance, the second issue of the samizdat magazine *Vokno* contains an excerpt from a book called *Satori in Prague*, a clear reference to Kerouac's *Satori in Paris*, while the fourteenth issue includes a translation of an interview with Ginsberg. Nevertheless, an important distinction must be made. The Beats were hardly the most defining in terms of direct influence on underground art. The influence of the Beats on the underground therefore should not be understood in the strict sense of adopting specific literary techniques. Instead, one can see certain analogies between the two in a more general sense, mainly in the shared themes and the refusal to adopt an official style of writing (Pilař 99, 108).[71] In addition, other common features include resistance to mass culture – whether one created by consumerism or controlled by a totalitarian government – and an apparent apolitical stance.

However, even this approach is problematic. Martin Pilař explains that the conscious decision to become an outsider in a society in protest against its values is by no means an isolated phenomenon, but rather a reoccurring phenomenon in history (94). While Czech scholarship frequently compares the underground movement to the work of the Beat Generation in order to discuss their similarities, Pilař clarifies that this results from the false belief which claims that the strongest countercultural movements in the postwar West were the Beats in the United States and the underground movement in Czechoslovakia (97–98). Pilař also points out that even some early proponents of this idea, such as Martin Machovec, later dismissed it as naive. Machovec himself puts it in the following manner: "The oft-repeated conviction regarding the cultural alternative (or the more specific and culturally-oriented 'underground,' which was supposed to exist after WWII only in the United States and Czechoslovakia) is to be considered a myth or a misconception stemming from confusing terminology" ("Avantgarda" 194).

The point of comparing the Beats and the Czechoslovak underground, therefore, should not be to document the exact similarities between the two or to track the influence of the Beats in underground art, but rather to draw attention to the discourse used by artists and historians to address these shared affinities. In other

71 It should be pointed out that here Pilař's text compares the Beats to the writers of Edice Půlnoc (Midnight Edition). These authors, who include Egon Bondy or Ivo Vodseďálek, were mostly active in the fifties and are considered "proto-underground" writers due to their relative obscurity prior to the Prague Spring. Importantly, Pilař's point regarding the Půlnoc writers and the Beats can be extended to the underground artists as well.

words, the objective is to document how the term "Beat" or "beatnik" is used to address a certain "state of mind," as Machulková would say.[72]

A prime example of such a use is the comprehensive profile of Vratislav Brabenec in *Respekt* magazine. The text by Pavel Turek already refers to Brabenec, the saxophone player of The Plastic People, as a "beatnik" in the subtitle of the article (56). Stating that despite his old age Brabenec is still wildly active, Turek then recounts Brabenec's early life leading up to the formation of the Plastic People of the Universe. Painting the musician as rebellious in nature from an early age, Turek in the section of the article titled "An Understanding of Freedom" emphasizes the importance of jazz music and Beat writings to the musician (57). As Turek continues, "[t]he encounter with Kerouac's prose and Ferlinghetti's verses in the translations of Jan Zábrana at the beginning of the 1960s was extremely decisive for Brabenec's sense of poetics and perception of the world." To fully compliment the musician's Beat nature, Turek notes that Brabenec "[s]till leads the life of a beat and drunk poet" (57). Recalling Kerouac's poetic style, Turek closes the text by noting that music is for Brabenec not only a drive, but also "sensuous sex" and "a ritual." In other words, the language of the text uses analogies and comparisons evoking the work of the Beats to further emphasize the inherent rebelliousness of Brabenec's oeuvre, and therefore his Beatness.

Commenting on life in the 1960s and the subsequent normalization, the underground writer and performer Milan Kozelka also describes the experience of intentional separation from the government-approved lifestyle as "Beat." The magazines *Světová literatura* and *Divoké víno* (The Wild Vine) were the few sources of joy in the overall dull period, Kozelka writes, and the work of the Beats was frequently translated by their Czechoslovak fans. The Viola café was the birthplace of the first official Beat culture and long passages by various Beat poets were frequently learned and memorized. However, Kozelka notes that by the beginning of the seventies, it was becoming more and more difficult to pursue a truly Beat lifestyle of hitch-hiking, poetry cafés, and public meeting places. While moving from the capital to smaller towns and the countryside was a partial solution, finding like-minded communities was problematic due to the increasing pressure of the regime on non-conformity. As Kozelka then explains, a choice had to be made: one could either be a free "beatnik" or a trouble-free member of a conformist society.

Yet the important difference between the Beats and the underground movement, Kozelka argues, was the context in which each had to exist. Unlike the Beats, the Czechoslovak underground subculture had nowhere to go and could

72 While in English the term "beatnik" is usually used in a disparaging manner, its Czech variant "beatník"is usually used instead of the noun "Beat" in Czech. This naturally makes distinguishing the beatnik stereotype substantially more difficult than in English. It, however, also shows that the beatnik stereotype is virtually absent in the Czech discourse on the Beats.

not simply escape: the excruciatingly dull protective supervision, exclusion from universities and jobs, and intolerance of the regime leading to prison sentences, homelessness, alcoholism, and suicides were daily realities for those who consciously refused the values of the regime. As a result, being "Beat" is a certain state of mind or attitude as much as it means following certain literary techniques. Yet this state of mind simply cannot exist outside the world itself, since it is the context which defines these attitudes and the effect they have. If a Czechoslovak wished to emulate the Beats, for instance through a decision to travel freely or live irrespective of the conventions of society, these acts would have a significantly harsher impact than if one had done so in the United States. This impact, in turn, would redefine the act itself as a different, more radical act than originally conceived.

In other words, if the Beats were "Beat" because of the taboos they unearthed in their writing and lifestyles, the members of the underground movement were even "Beater," as the repercussions they could potentially face for the same acts were much graver. A general ethos of the Beat Generation is then present in the works and lives of many Czechoslovak underground artists of the normalization period; however, its finer details take a different form, as there is a substantial difference between mild harassment and the actual threat of being imprisoned on trumped-up charges or being forced by government authorities to leave the country.

8.5 Critical Reception

When compared to its American counterpart, Czech academia logically has a substantially smaller interest in the Beats. Most scholarship focuses on the historical impact of the Beats on Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic, though some, most notably Josef Jařab and Josef Rauvolf, provide additional insights into the Beats. Yet the somewhat limited nature of the scholarship is in many ways illuminating: similarly to the popular reception, the Beats are in the Czech Republic cultural artifacts with substantial social importance. This in turn helps demonstrate not only the stance of the Beats and therefore their reception, but also the overall conception of the Beats in Czech discourse. Unlike in the ever-changing American academia, the notion of the Beats is not being re-defined, challenged, or updated. On the contrary, as in the maturita examination, the Beats are permanent fixtures in Czech discourse. Being canonized, the Beats then help illuminate various aspects of Czech history and culture.

A substantial amount of scholarship analyzes the influence of the Beats on Edice Půlnoc and underground writers. For example, Martin Pilař comments on the problem of studying the influence one literary group had on another. While

there are thematic analogies between the Beats and the Půlnoc writers, Pilař points out the majority of Půlnoc texts had been finished long before the Beats were made available in Czechoslovakia, therefore one can hardly talk about the one being directly influenced by the other (99, 101). Despite developing independently of one another, they do share several typological similarities, for instance in their attitudes to the values of their societies or in their emphasis on building communities (102–103). Similarly, Mirek Vodrážka in his study "Vytvoř si systém, nebo tě zotročí systém jiného" (Create a System or Be Enslaved by Another Man's) deals with the creation and establishment of the underground movement subculture during the normalization period; the Beats feature in the essay as influential predecessors and inspiration of the Czechoslovak underground. As Vodrážka writes, the underground movement would barely exist without the Beats of the fifties and the hippies of the sixties (15). Whether it was Allen Ginsberg with the band The Fugs or later Ivan Jirous and the Plastic People of the Universe, these writers encapsulated a certain code, a different sensibility, and a total refusal and critique of mainstream culture. In the same vein, Kudrna and Čuňas compare the underground movement with the American counterculture of the sixties and note that both of them were strongly politicized (28). However, they note an important distinction – the alternative subcultures of the West were not the targets of a systematic repression stemming from the government – and use Ginsberg's following words to highlight it further: "[The Czechoslovaks] were the real underground. We were only toying with it" (qtd. in Kudrna and Čuňas 28). Other examples include Stanislav Dvorský, who analyzes the influence of the Beats on the Czechoslovak underground, noting it was not important thematically, but rather in the way it encouraged spontaneity, inner monologues, improvisation, authenticity, or even interest in controversial subjects (132–33). These studies, in other words, are interested in the Beats as a sociological phenomenon which could help explain the realities of communist Czechoslovakia.

The scope of Beat critiques goes beyond mere comparison with Czechoslovak writers. Petr Kopecký's "Czeching the Beat, Beating the Czech" discusses the influence of the Beats, namely Ferlinghetti and Ginsberg, in Czechoslovakia and later the Czech Republic. Kopecký points out that after the fall of Communism, it was thought that the Beats might lose their elevated status. The end of the normalization period had led to a surge of books from the West finally being available, which resulted in the texts associated with rebellion or subversion losing their appeal due to the sheer amount of published literature (101). Nevertheless, the Beats have retained their popularity; as Kopecký argues, the reason behind such longevity is "the essential universality of the poets and their trenchant critique of spiritual emptiness, greed and obsession with power" (101). Similarly, Josef Rauvolf's "Beat po česku" (Beat: the Czech Way) comments on the role of the Beats on Czechoslovak artists and the society as a whole. Most of the points he

makes are essentially the same as those of Kopecký, yet he also identifies a key difference from the reception of the Beats in the United States: while it was Burroughs who seemed to be making the most waves in the United States during the 1990s, he seems to have been virtually ignored in the Czech Republic (24). The "Burroughsian hell" of drug addiction, oppression of homosexuals and control systems, Rauvolf argues, might have been too difficult for the Czechs to easily adapt to; on the other hand, the poetry of Ginsberg and the novels of Kerouac are certainly easier to grasp and therefore easier to identify with. Put simply, the focus of Czech academics is strongly influenced by the publication history of the Beats in Czechoslovakia, which also means Burroughs tends to be omitted from academic discourse.

Ginsberg's visit in 1965 had far-reaching consequences and as such it is commonly addressed in Czech scholarly publications. Petr Blažek's "The Deportation of the King of May" begins with Ginsberg's arrival in Prague from Cuba, and it is a comprehensive study of the poet's participation in the Majáles festival, his meetings and debates with Czechoslovak artists and students, and the way the secret police monitored Ginsberg's every step and later deported him from the country. By incorporating numerous files the secret service had on Ginsberg and the operations related to his stay in Prague, Blažek finally illuminates the circumstances surrounding Ginsberg's deportation. For instance, not only was the secret police bent on obtaining information about all the people Ginsberg met with during his stay, but the file also makes it clear that due to several secret police confidants the government managed to obtain detailed accounts of several gatherings and events originally deemed free of police presence (44). Making previously secret information regarding the government's involvement in Ginsberg's deportation available also inspired Andrew Lass to translate the final report documenting Ginsberg's interrogation and deportation put together by Karel Vodrážka, the Captain of the local secret police section tasked with monitoring Ginsberg.

Professor Josef Jařab was a personal friend of Ginsberg and met him on numerous occasions; what is more, he also invited Ginsberg to lecture at Palacký University on spontaneous poetry.[73] As such, he has not only acted as a vocal supporter of Ginsberg and other Beats, but also has a unique insight into their work when compared to other Czech scholars. In the preface to the Ginsberg anthology *Karma červená, bílá a modrá* (Red, White and Blue Karma), he criticizes the historical approach of their critics, because it leads to perceiving them as a social phenomenon rather than artists. This was especially the case with Ginsberg,

73 The notes and recordings of the lectures have been recently transcribed and made available in the form of a Bachelor's thesis by Jiří Zochr. See Jiří Zochr: *Allen Ginsberg in Olomouc: Allen Ginsberg's Lecture on Spontaneous Writing with Commentary*. In addition, it should be noted that Jařab played a vital role in negotiating the removal of Soviet troops from the city of Olomouc and was among the first elected university rectors after the Velvet Revolution.

Jařab points out, whose work is often "overshadowed by his political activism" (10). Instead of classifying him as a political activist or a countercultural icon, Jařab writes that one should follow Ginsberg's example and understand the difficulties of trying to classify phenomena into neat categories, therefore focusing on Ginsberg's poetic language instead. Furthermore, the revolt of Ginsberg and other Beats was not merely social or political; it was a revolt against a certain kind of thinking, thus promoting spiritual, cultural, and esthetic betterment. Ginsberg, Jařab argues, saw himself as a poet fully embedded in the physical reality of our world and his poetry as an instrument of positive change; after all, these are the reasons why Ginsberg tended to give a large number of interviews and poetry readings (10–11). Ginsberg's qualities, namely tolerance, spirituality, and open-mindedness, were also embodied in his poetry, which aimed to broaden one's horizon, challenge various preconceptions and taboos hindering human well-being (12–13). Jařab then concludes that Ginsberg was an "exemplary citizen of the world" and "a good human being" who had positively affected the plurality of the USA (14). Nevertheless, this did not stop the grossly overstated reports of Ginsberg's debauchery being released by both Czechoslovak and American regimes (Jařab, "Láska"). It was then the image of Ginsberg's caricature rather than the actual poet which was disseminated in public.

The translator Josef Rauvolf made a vast number of Beat texts available to Czechs, thus significantly contributing to the popularity of the Beats in the years after the communist regime collapsed. What is more, he on numerous times consulted on his translations with both Ginsberg and Burroughs, therefore his position is similar to – and perhaps even more significant than – that of Jařab. Since he is also a leading researcher on the Czechoslovak underground, several of his short studies, for example "Beat po česku" or "Prague Connection," focus on the interplay between the Beats and Czechoslovak and Czech society. In a telephone interview conducted by myself, Rauvolf mentions that upon reading Kerouac's *On the Road* in 1978, readers were struck by the novel's notions of freedom and the ability to make one's own decisions. "Looking around, one had to feel as if he were on Mars," Rauvolf remarked wryly. While *On the Road* was extremely successful, it was not the only Beat text to have an impact on the Czechoslovak readership. As Rauvolf claims, "Howl" was copied among its readers so often that it might have been the most copied literary text in Czechoslovakia.

Continuing the interview, Rauvolf states that Kerouac's writing is significantly easier to relate to than the bleak visions of Burroughs. Not only is Kerouac as a writer more forthcoming to his readers than Burroughs, but also the overall tone of his novels contains Romantic sensibilities, which make them substantially easier to follow and identify with. Importantly, the concept of relatedness is an overarching theme not only in terms of the Beats' popular reception, but also when it comes to critical responses. By highlighting the role the Beats had on

Czech society, these studies often indirectly raise the issues of acceptance of and identification with the new ideas and ideals represented by the Beats. As in the popular reception, the emphasis is not only on *reading* the Beats, but also – to a certain extent – on *being* one. By portraying the ideas of the Beats as vital for their writing, these essays not only show the way the interpretive communities of Czechoslovak and later Czech readers accepted the Beats, but also indicate that sharing these ideas is an important part of the reception. In other words, they hint at the fact that a crucial concept is at play when discussing the Beats – that of identity and the subsequent performance of such identity.

9 THE RECEPTION OF THE BEAT GENERATION: A DISCUSSION

A rather trite conclusion to the research presented in this book would state that different contexts lead to different interpretations, or, using Iser's terms, different contexts produce different works of the same text. Nevertheless, such a conclusion would be problematic for several reasons, though the main one should suffice: by stating that such a result was expected, one would ignore that it is often not the *what* but the *how* which ultimately matters and which can truly illuminate the intricacies and nuances of the subject analyzed. It would therefore miss the possibilities opened by a comparative approach to reception, namely the ability to comment on the subject from a new and distinct point of view and contrast it with dominant discourses. After all, it is frequently the perspective of the Other which leads to a new, previously unobserved image of the subject. As a result, the subject is reimagined and redefined, thus becoming something slightly different. Importantly, discussing these reimagined subjects not only emphasizes their interpretive potential, but also can help explain exactly why certain cultural artifacts resonate across cultures while others are mostly limited to their original context.

The first impulse would be to say that the Beats are often understood to symbolize a whole generation of young people. As a result, the ideals and viewpoints of the authors of the Beat Generation are identified with those of the youth of the time and vice versa, the habits and behavior of the youth are said to be the same as those of the Beats. Yet the comparison of the American reception of the Beats with its Czech and Czechoslovak counterpart shows that this understanding has several gaps.

A more accurate statement would claim that this view of the Beats was common in the United States, which consequently played an important part in their reception. As Diana Trilling puts it, the audience at Ginsberg's and Corso's Co-

lumbia reading "*were* children, miserable children trying desperately to manage, asking desperately to be taken out of it all; there was nothing one could imagine except to bundle them home and feed them warm milk, promise them they need no longer call for mama and papa" (226). Therefore, the concretization of the Beats in the United States of the 1950s and 1960s explicates the Beats as a youth phenomenon and an indication of social unrest. This understanding of the Beats as the phenomenon of a generation reflects the emerging trend of sociological inquiry in the period through publications such as *The Lonely Crowd* or *Organization Man* and the decade's various "teen-issues" films such as *Rebel Without a Cause*, which eventually spawned numerous beatsploitation movies and books trying to satisfy the public demand invigorated by the frequently sensationalized reporting; in turn, these beatsploitation works affected the discourse surrounding the Beats even further. This reception was undoubtedly further facilitated by the complexity of the term "the Beat Generation" itself. Not only did nearly every major Beat figure provide their own definition of the term, but the word "generation" in it was simply begging to be understood as encompassing the whole generation of Americans. Eventually, the term represented substantially disparate concepts for its users (Belletto 2–3); naturally, this made discussing the Beats even more difficult. As the descriptions of various exhibitions or anniversaries by American universities show, a generational or at least a subcultural reading of the Beat generation is present in the reception of the Beats even today. In other words, an inherent part of the Beats' reception is the understanding of the Beats as heralds of a particular segment of society.

In contrast, the initial understanding of the Beats in Czechoslovakia does not significantly differ from the Czech understanding which followed: both periods view the Beats as a literary movement first, and the subcultural aspect is only faintly present. For instance, a 1965 article in *Mladý svět* (Young World), a publication targeted at the youth of Communist Czechoslovakia, published a short article on the Beats of France; the text describes the Beats as a generation of young, somewhat apathetic people whose largest "kicks" are sex and marijuana, though even these bring only temporary comfort (Gellé 6).[74] However, this article is in its treatment of the Beats as a whole generation quite a rarity in the overall Czechoslovak discourse on the Beats. The dominant image of the Beats, whether it is in the first Czechoslovak critiques or as one of the topics for the maturita examination, depicts them as a literary movement rather than a movement of rebellious youth. While the "vlasatci" of the 1960s somewhat resembled the Beats in their non-conformity, these have never been described as being the Beat Generation or

74 Unlike the sensationalist portrayals in the United States, the article also describes the Beats as being against violence and criminal activity in general. Thus the resulting image is not wholly negative, especially since the article is followed by a short text on British youth hitch-hiking across the country.

associated with them in any way.[75] This aspect of the Beats is further articulated by the controversies surrounding the Beats – or rather the lack thereof – in Czechoslovakia. For instance, American media frequently ignored Ginsberg's vision and determination and focused instead on the controversies surrounding him, thus opting to portray him as a rebellious troublemaker (Jařab, "Co Allen Ginsberg byl" 11). In contrast, the Czechoslovak reception is substantially less interested in the issues of sexuality and especially homosexuality. Granted, this is partly due to the relative scarcity of information regarding the Beats as well as to Ferlinghetti and Corso, both heterosexuals, being the first Beats to receive extensive coverage. That being said, Ginsberg's homosexuality was explicitly mentioned for the first time only after he was deported from the country; while this aimed at painting him as a "sick" individual, Ginsberg's sexual orientation was only raised when it was convenient to the regime. This ultimately serves as a reminder that the issue of sexuality was not a relevant factor for Czechoslovak readers in forming the popular discourse on the Beats.

Interestingly, Burroughs is mostly absent from Czech and Czechoslovak discourse on the Beats, which most likely helped the Beats to avoid significant controversy in the country. Unlike Ginsberg's or Kerouac's texts, Burroughs's novels were simply unavailable to Czechoslovaks. Even today Burroughs's cultural presence is rather minimal in the Czech Republic; this omission is further complemented by the idiosyncrasies of Burroughs's writing (Rauvolf, "Beat po česku" 24). As Rauvolf points out, translating Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* was at times a significant challenge and the later cut-up trilogy was even more daunting (Rauvolf, Interview). Not only is Burroughs's work thematically more challenging than that of Kerouac or Corso, but also his literary experiments such as the cut-up method further complicate the understanding of his work; these experiments are difficult to successfully translate into Czech because of the extensive case system in Czech grammar, among other things. Nevertheless, Burroughs's absence from the general discourse is again telling of the differences in reception, as it emphasizes the larger significance of Beat poetry in the Czechoslovak context. This, in turn, helps illustrate how publication history affects the canonicity of artists.

In the United States the Beats symbolized social protest, freedom of speech, but also a certain Otherness. Furthermore, morality was intertwined with the Beats due to the stereotype of beatniks, the obscenity trials, or their frank advocacy of homosexuality. Conversely, the Beats in Czechoslovakia represented individuality – rather than a communal or generational movement – unrestricted by the oppressive regime. In Czechoslovakia the immorality of the Beats, with the

75 It should be noted that "Vlasatci" and the underground artists resembled the social understanding of the Beats at least in the denunciation aimed at them. When discussing the Beats and the underground artists, Martin Machovec observes that both subcultures were at times described as "barbarians" in order to be discredited ("Podzemí" 7).

exception of Ginsberg's deportation, was never much of an issue, as the regime itself was inherently immoral. The Beats actually represented a strong moral stance even if the socialist realist critiques written by Zábrana or Hájek are read at face value. At worst, that is when scrutinized under the standards of socialist realism, the Beats represent a somewhat progressive literary movement in the United States, which eventually might find the correct answer to the immoral Capitalism of the West. At best, they represent the struggle of ordinary Czechoslovaks for self-determination and individual freedom. This, together with the absence of a negative beatnik stereotype, made it far easier for Czechoslovaks to identify with the Beats.

The apoliticism of the Beats is also a significant feature of their reception in Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic. Unlike in the United States, readers hardly viewed the Beats' apparent disinterest in politics as their unwillingness to engage with public issues. While the Beats often wrote socially conscious and critical poetry, they did not seem to follow any explicit ideology other than the critique of social norms that threaten the self. In other words, the social criticism of the Beats was a "novelty in the Czech lands," as the only available socially engaged art was explicitly pro-communist and controlled by the state (Kopecký, "Czeching the Beat" 99). As Inka Machulková argues, it was virtually impossible to ignore politics, because politics was present in every aspect of daily life, and being apolitical was therefore out of the question ("Já, beatnička"). Writing almost twenty years after the Warsaw Pact invasion, V. Žufan further explains the politicization of the mundane: "Everyone who lives in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic should realize that every apolitical act is fundamentally political under Socialism, and therefore act accordingly" (40, my translation). It is then the virtue of the communist regime itself which charged even the most meaningless acts with possible political explosiveness. This in turn charged the Beats with a strong social critique, which further emboldened the growing student movement and increased the efforts of many intellectuals to abandon strict Party lines dictating the lives of the country's citizens. Ginsberg's Prague visit emblematized the Beats as standing for personal liberties

These insights then lead to another conclusion: the Beats were – and still are – more canonical in the Czech lands than in the United States. In their home country, there were a few instances hinting at the change in the Beats' reception which would eventually take place, such as Donald Hall's gradual embrace of Ginsberg's poetry in his *Contemporary American Poetry*. Nevertheless, the interpretations of the Beats were significantly polarized, and it was not until the end of the 1990s that the Beats found a truly mainstream acceptance. This acceptance has at times grown to the point of mythologization, and frequently emphasizes the social aspect of the Beats over their actual writing. Granted, the Beats as individuals in many respects were larger than life, yet this mythologization is especially

noticeable with Ginsberg and Burroughs, the former often being hailed for his visionary or prophetic qualities, while the latter is often described as a subversive and countercultural icon. Importantly, this image was also cultivated by some of the Beat publishers. In other words, the Beat Generation authors are frequently viewed as individuals of considerable social impact, which then makes it a part of the appeal of the Beat Generation as a whole.

In contrast, the reception of the Beats in Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic shows a more stable pattern. Currently, "Howl" and especially *On the Road* are embedded in the Czech canon of American literature to a greater degree than in their actual country of origin. Importantly, this canonicity considers these Beat texts as literary texts rather than cultural artifacts of significant social impact. The Beats being featured in the maturita exams is only the tip of their canonicity iceberg. A recent overview of American culture prepared by Český rozhlas (Czech Radio Broadcast) greatly emphasizes the role the Beats had in American literature and in American culture in general. Titled "Americký rok" (American Year), the radio series aims at introducing "seminal works of art" of the United States to a Czech audience (Velíšek). Not only does its literature section, which includes Joseph Heller, Thomas Wolfe and Langston Hughes, begin with Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, but Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg are also the only artists who are mentioned by name in the article's title or featured in a photograph. Together with the constant high profile of the Beats and the lasting image of the Beats as important American writers, the conclusion is clear: The Beats are seen by Czechs as being more representative of American literature than they are by the Americans themselves.

Yet what is the cause of the differences in status of the Beats? A simple answer would suggest that the initial failure of the Beats in the United States was due to the overall *zeitgeist* of the period. However, such an answer warrants a more thorough discussion, as its logic leads to a rather paradoxical conclusion: totalitarian Czechoslovakia was ultimately more welcoming of the Beats than their own country.

What substantially hurt the reception of the Beats were the media theatrics and the very nature of the United States of the fifties. There was little willingness in the popular press to examine the Beat phenomenon in a somewhat neutral light without immediately dismissing it; in addition, media treatment often conflated the Beats and juvenile delinquency. Several factors contributed to such sensationalist treatment: the advocacy of drugs, support of homosexuals, disavowal of traditional authorities such as organized religion in favor of Eastern philosophies, or their romanticizing of outcast figures. These and others were in direct opposition to the values of the age, which advised one to get a job, follow conventions, and be a respectable citizen. In addition, Ginsberg's *Howl* and later Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* faced obscenity charges, which further fueled the sensationalist reporting. As Chester MacPhee, the customs officer responsible for confiscating *Howl*, com-

ments, "The words and the sense of the writing is obscene … You wouldn't want your children to come across it" (qtd. in Ferlinghetti, "Horn on *Howl*" 125).

Leslie A. Fiedler offers a psychoanalytic reading of American society: he first observes that in American literature there is a "predominance of the Gothic tradition, of terror and death and violence, in the works we loved best" ("Second Thoughts" 9). Importantly, American Gothic differs from its European counterpart: "European Gothic identified blackness with the super-ego and was therefore revolutionary in its implications; the American gothic … identified evil with the id and was conservative at its deepest level of implications, whatever the intent of its authors" (Fiedler, *Love and Death* 149). The id, housing the instinctual drives of a person, is then repressed, which in turn leads to serious consequences: American authors are unable "to deal with adult heterosexual love and [their] consequent obsession with death, incest, and innocent homosexuality," Fiedler further argues (xi). It then makes sense that any work of art emphasizing inner drives, as the Beat "barbarians" did, is understood on the innermost level as dangerous to the status quo.

In this reading, the Puritan background of the United States is one of the major factors in the American reception of the Beat Generation. The Beats, importantly, were certainly too freethinking for their time; as Joyce Johnson writes, Kerouac "had depicted rampant promiscuity, homosexual relationships, and young women who actually wanted and invited sex" in the era when Henry Miller's books were banned in the USA ("Kerouac"). Naturally, Kerouac and other Beats were not the only ones to challenge American normativity. Writers such as Henry Miller or Charles Bukowski reacted to the inherent Puritanism of American society and together with Gregory Corso or Allen Ginsberg, who aimed to provoke by their frank openness, have had a liberating effect on the writers that followed (Jařab, "Láska"). Yet this frank openness also provoked the popular media to connect the Beat Generation with juvenile delinquency, violence, or sex, which substantially affected their reception. Zima explains that in every context there are *intermediaries* who start the process of reception by notifying the public of the author and subsequently interpreting the author's work (196). While Zima explains the concept of intermediaries for foreign literature requiring a translation, this concept is also applicable to domestic works as well. Unfortunately for the Beats, the role of the intermediaries in the United States was mostly undertaken by the popular press, which did not shy away from a strongly sensationalized depiction.

Zima's concept of intermediaries also helps explain the overall positive reception of the Beats in Czechoslovakia. The most important intermediaries were Jan Zábrana and Igor Hájek and their role in the early 1960s was to present the Beats to the state in a palatable way in order to get them published; other intermediaries crucial for the success of the Beats in Czechoslovakia include Josef Škvorecký, Miroslav Kovařík, or the founder of Viola, Jiří Osterman. Since Zábrana and oth-

ers had a favorable view of Western literature and opposed the government-approved art of socialist realism, the Beats' initial position in Czechoslovakia was to their advantage. Ultimately, the Beats would hardly have been published if it were not for Hájek's careful editing of Beat texts and his double-speak commentary in his seminal "Americká bohéma." The careful selection of excerpts or the virtual exclusion of Burroughs also helped the Beats avoid the controversies they had to face back home. Nevertheless, the state also had an intermediating role by virtue of controlling every public discourse until the mid-1960s. While the Beats had to be carefully repackaged for the regime, which meant choosing the texts most likely to be published or adding an explanatory afterword denouncing their more controversial or defective aspects; the regime then further helped spread their works by approving the publication of new Beat texts or providing coverage of Ginsberg's visit in the press. Effectively, the controlled nature of the discourse in a totalitarian state led to another paradox – it made sure that the positive image of the Beats spread by Zábrana and others was not interfered with. The regime ultimately played a double role in the publication of the Beats in Czechoslovakia: it not only acted as the target of the Beats' critique in the eyes of their readers, but it also ensured that the intermediaries of the Beats were able to work relatively independently once the Beats as a publication topic had been approved.

The initial academic and critical reception in the United States strongly resembles its popular counterpart and shows the need for interpretive communities to reiterate their stances and identities. These comments overemphasize the threat to intelligence they see in the Beats; while Scott complains that the Beats are part of a larger trend that makes adults surrender their "once powerful authority symbols" in exchange for adolescent entertainment, Podhoretz claims that the Beats and their supporters are "against intelligence itself" (153; 318). Similarly to popular media, they frequently viewed the Beats as a social phenomenon, and overemphasized the more shocking aspects of the Beats, which was further compounded by Mailer's extremely influential "The White Negro." This treatment charged the Beats with even more sensationalism than they actually possessed, and it was this "beatnikized" image of the Beats that critics frequently responded to; when the poet W. H. Auden exclaimed that Diana Trilling should be "ashamed" for being "moved" by Ginsberg's poetry reading at Columbia, Trilling responded by saying "it's different when it's a sociological phenomenon and when it's human beings" (Trilling 230). For Trilling and others, the Beats were merely "a sociological phenomenon" most of the time and not much else. And while the Beats had some early supporters in academia, they were too few and far between to matter in the long run. So much for a formalist approach.

Curiously, the academics of New Criticism used the same rhetoric when denouncing the Beats as the Czechoslovak state-controlled media did when explaining Ginsberg's deportation in 1965. As the anonymous critic of Ginsberg said to *Rudé právo*,

the Beat's ideals "are not only inconsistent with the ideals of the current socialistic man, but they are also in direct contrast to the common sense and sentiment of all healthy and rational people" ("Kocovina"). When the status quo is challenged, appeals to decency and rationality thus manage to cross the divisive borders of ideologies.

The Czechoslovak critical reception was initially also extremely political, though naturally for completely different reasons. Socialist realism judged each writer on his or her ability to "properly" portray the real – that is portray it according to the ideology of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia – while formalist or structuralist readings were strictly forbidden as bourgeois. As a result, the early Zábrana and Hájek critiques read the Beats as not being sufficiently equipped to provide actual answers to the questions they raise, though these readings were not intended to be interpreted at face value, as the later criticism of Zábrana and Hájek shows. This changing criticism naturally corresponds to the waning influence of Ladislav Štoll and his ilk; in addition, this also shows the importance of interpretive communities and the interpretive "keys" they use to decode the content of a text, thus creating, in Iser's terminology, a work. The difference between a text and a work, and therefore the need to also read literary criticism as such, is most evident in the language of the literary critiques and its evolution throughout the 1960s. Reading the early critiques at face value, the Beats would be seen as proto-socialist writers who predicted the fall of American society as the direct result of its capitalist nature despite not possessing the right political ideology. In contrast, by the end of the 1960s the Beats were understood as being anti-authoritarian in general. While American interpretive communities saw the Beats as criticizing American society and its values, their Czechoslovak counterparts took their rebellious nature to represent an anti-consumerist as well as anti-authoritarian attitude. This reading is further cemented by Ginsberg's visit and subsequent deportation; from then on, the reception of the Beats in the Czech Republic includes a strong anti-totalitarian reading due to the historical role the Beats and Ginsberg in particular played in Czechoslovakia.

This historical role is further emphasized by Czech scholars; in contrast, American academia tends to slightly emphasize the social importance of the Beats over their actual writing. Whether it is the numerous Ginsberg stories or the seemingly never-ending list of Burroughs's monikers, a substantial amount of critical works helps disseminate the importance of the Beats as symbols representing certain values, attitudes, or ideals. The names of some Beat publications are already quite telling: for example, two important Burroughs biographies are titled *Literary Outlaw* and *El Hombre Invisible*, while an influential Ginsberg biography bears the title *American Scream*. Even though these titles are related to the writers – "literary outlaw" and "el hombre invisible" were some of the monikers Burroughs earned during his life, while "American scream" is a play on Ginsberg's *Howl* – they also further shape the overall discourse on the Beats. These monikers then not only promote Burroughs

as a subversive figure or Ginsberg as an American countercultural celebrity, but also shape the overall discourse of the Beats by reinforcing their status as cultural icons. Such a discourse then informs subsequent discourses on the Beats, as can be seen on the example of the Emory exhibition. The Beats are, in other words, a linguistic sign connoting a certain ethos, for example rebelliousness, an anti-authoritarian attitude, or sexual freedom. In a way, a substantial amount of scholarship indirectly supports the views of Norman Podhoretz or Harold Bloom in claiming that the writing of the Beats is secondary to their sociological importance. What Bloom or Podhoretz ignore is the tendency of readers to associate themselves with artists and cultural artifacts which embody an ethos they can identify with; this of course includes the critics themselves.

The role criticism plays in establishing and maintaining a discourse is further illuminated by viewing it through the lens of Bourdieu's field of cultural production. A non-trivial amount of American criticism still feels the need to constantly remind the reader of the initial animosity of academia toward the Beats. While playing a significant role historically, this stance is hardly true anymore, yet a substantial number of Beat Studies scholars still proliferate this idea in the context of current academia and its publishing industry. Using Bourdieu's notion of established authors competing with the new voices in academic discourse, one might view these scholars entrenched in Beat Studies as vehemently opposing any changes, and therefore challengers, in their area. These academics then in a somewhat Romantic fashion defend their subfield against "invaders" threatening to subvert their notion of Beat scholarship. Nevertheless, academia is an industry, and the new scholars cannot occupy the same subfield as the established scholars without changing the overall academic discourse.

Yet perhaps something else might be at play here too, namely the notion of "Beatness" and Beat identity. By painting the Beats as opposing the status quo of 1950s America, Bruce Cook indirectly argues that there were two Americas, and the Beats represented the "Other America," the America of dissent and protest. This Other America existed long before the Beats, going back to Ralph Waldo Emerson or Walt Whitman; the Beats were then merely its most recent manifestation. Kerouac, it seems, would agree. Connecting "Beatness" with everything from his grandfather's defiant challenge to thunderstorms – "Go ahead, go, if you're more powerful than I am, strike me" ("Origins" 70) – to "the inky ditties of old cartoons"; in Kerouac's mind it embodies "wild selfbelieving individuality" which was always a part of America destined only to slowly disappear around the end of the Second World War (71–72). Beatness, then, is in this view a manifestation of something universally present in American culture, something that was given a specific shape and voice due to the cultural and social context of the era, yet also something that embodies the very Americanness it often challenges. Put simply, it is an attitude and a way of approaching the world.

Cook's explanation of Beatness shows that for many readers the Beats are more than just writers; instead, the Beats represent an idea. Consequently, the aspect of *performance* and *identity* present in several of the readings should be noted. Milena M. Marešová unknowingly touches upon this when she discusses the oeuvre of the Czech writer Jan Pelc. Pelc, an underground favorite ever since publishing his debut novel … *a bude hůř* (… *It's Gonna Get Worse*, 1985) depicting life in Czechoslovakia during the normalization period, is often hailed by his contemporaries; however, Marešová points out that this admiration is limited to a relatively close-knit group of readers. These readers either directly experienced what Pelc described in the novel or were drawn to Pelc's narrative due to their shared sensibilities. The novel, described by Marešová as being close to the novels of the Beat Generation, is celebrated by its readers due to the author's openness and authenticity. The author's actual experience creates a three-dimensional portrayal of life in communist Czechoslovakia, and readers can relive the era through the novel. Pelc's novel then represents a certain social group and its ethos by allowing one to experience the group's values through the act of reading; importantly, this experience further reinforces the group's identity and sense of belonging.

The emphasis on experience and identity is more than relevant for understanding the reception of the Beat Generation. While belonging to the same generation as the author might naturally be a contributing factor for appreciating a text, it is a common feature of Beat discourse to emphasize the Beat Generation as having a certain set of ideals and attitudes. Importantly, for some interpretive communities merely sharing such a reading is not enough; instead, as Marešová's reading of Pelc indirectly suggests, the reinforcing of an identity can be an important aspect of a literary text. As a result, reading the works of the Beat Generation allows one to identify with – and through the process of reading also acquire and perform – a Beat attitude. This notion is present not only in numerous popular interpretations of the Beats, but also in their academic reception, albeit in a less obvious manner.

As Kopecký explains, the Beats are popular because their notions are applicable even in today's world, which they achieved through their universal approach in promoting their ideals rather than a specific ideology (Kopecký, "Czeching the Beat" 101). After all, Kerouac himself explained the term "Beat" as an attitude standing for a "new *more*" ("Origins" 73).[76] In other words, since the Beats are often seen as important for embodying a certain viewpoint or ethos, a *performative* aspect of the act of reading is a vital part of the overall experience for some readers. Christopher Carmona's dissertation *Keeping the Beat: The Practice of the Beat Movement* indirectly provides an insightful commentary on the issue. Carmona starts by differentiating between the terms "the Beat Generation" and "the Beat Movement." The Beat Generation, usually centered on "The Beat Trinity" of Bur-

76 Notably, the identity of the Czechoslovak underground is defined as "new sensibility" (Vodrážka 16).

roughs, Ginsberg and Kerouac, is a term that delineates a relatively fixed group of artists who were in the spotlight in the 1950s and 1960s (3–4). Current scholarship understands the Beats as a "static literary and social movement," when in fact it is "a fluid social and poetical movement" with a certain philosophy and rhetorical elements, Carmona adds. While it is often thought of in terms of white men, the Beats were actually inclusive and included men, women, minorities and practicing Jews and Buddhists (4, 163). As Carmona continues:

> This is where the Beat Movement steps in: it is a continuation of the Beat Generation, as the Beats emphasized from the very beginning the importance of ideas and their evolution. In other words, the Beat Movement might be thought of as *the ethos of the Beat Generation applied to the current world*; the elements this ethos emphasizes is the notion of social change through focusing on the poor, the emphasis of performance, and the importance of small communities (iii-iv, emphasis mine).

Carmona later describes the Beat Movement as "a new entity with new ideas that blend together the ideology of the Beat Generation with the poetics and ideology of the cultures that the Beats represented in their early work" and as an expansion of the Beat Generation, which often includes women, African American, and Chicano writers and defines itself through poetry readings (220–21). Importantly, the Beat Movement is communitarian in nature and revolves around poetics, culture, and philosophies as well as the importance of freedom (11, 224, 240). Finally, Carmona concludes the following:

> There are many factors that have allowed the Beat to keep on going from creating a poetics that spoke for and from the underclasses of America, to capturing the sound of the current times, and finally to creating a community of artists. Each of these rhetorical elements may have helped foster and shape a Beat philosophy, but it is through the simple act of *practice* that has kept the Beat ideologies alive for over sixty years. The Beat Movement is merely the next name to the list of Beat titles from the Beat Generation to Beatniks to Hippies to Neo-Beats and to Post-Beats. (245, emphasis mine)

Carmona here defines the Beat Movement as the current iteration of practices and ideals promoted by the Beat Generation back in the 1950s. However, while Carmona is more interested in the current followers of the Beat ethos, attention should be drawn to his notion of practice. Both Carmona and Marešová point out that belonging to a community and sharing its ideals greatly affects one's sense of identity; importantly, this is also the basis of Stanley Fish's interpretive communities. As a result, identification with and practice of these attitudes should be seen as an important part of the appeal of the Beats for some interpretive communities.

Importantly, this *performance* of an identity should not be understood as mere identification with the Beats' ideals. The performativity of Beatness requires an active endorsement and further practice of the ethos the reader identifies with; this is the "re-experiencing" and "sharing" that Marešová mentions when discussing Pelc's devoted fan base. Consequently, some readers emphasize the visions, ethics, and worldviews of the Beats as necessary for their interpretation. As Eco notes, "every reception of a work of art is both an *interpretation* and a *performance* of it, because in every reception the work takes on a fresh perspective for itself" (*Role of the Reader* 49). With "Beatness," however, one might not merely perform – that is create a specific reading of – a work, but also perform the work's ethos. In other words, some interpretive communities constitute their identities through a performative approach to the Beats, which not only demonstrates their adherence to the Beat ethos, but also helps validate their identity and a sense of belonging among other Beat readers.

For some, then, the appeal of the Beats lies in its performative aspect, hence the frequent emphasis on the various Ginsberg anecdotes or Burroughs monikers; these not only help constitute the nature of the Beat Generation author described, but ultimately also of the writer sharing the anecdote.

The performance of an identity or an ethos also ultimately helps explain why some Beat critics constantly reiterate that the Beats were for several decades excluded from serious academic inquiry. These are not merely factual statements or unconscious manifestations of the fears of established Beat scholars that their scholarly field is gradually changing. Instead, it is essentially a manifestation of their "Beatness," an ethos of individualism and protest, against the changing discourse on the Beats. By resisting the idea of academia's renewed interest in the Beat Generation, these comments unknowingly participate in the debate on the meaning of the Beat Generation; that is, what the Beats signify, by manifesting rhetorical qualities in line with the Beat ethos.

In other words, a sense of Beatness can be present in a discourse, thus in some cases emphasizing a performative reading of a text containing the ethos of the Beat Generation. Nevertheless, it can also be represented through the actual practice of the ethos of a given discourse; importantly, this practice can make itself apparent in indirect ways when visible in a discourse not directly related to the ethos in question. Whether performed through an actual practice of the Beat ethos, through the act of reading, or simply through identifying with the notion of Beatness in an advertising campaign, the ethos of the Beat Generation is for some interpretive communities a vital part of the Beats' appeal. The Beat Generation represents a set of ideals, attitudes, and ideas, and these are also the very properties surrounding and informing the discourse on the Beat Generation. As such, the Beats cannot be divorced from them without losing a substantial portion of their appeal.

CONCLUSION

The successes of Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems* and Kerouac's *On the Road* led to a highly publicized phenomenon known as the Beat Generation. Even though John Clellon Holmes used the phrase several years before the two texts were published as a rather broad term describing the feelings of his generation, popular media greatly changed the scope of the phrase. Anyone with a mild interest in poetry or jazz could be "beat" and Kerouac's lament that "beat" stands for "beatitude" was ignored. Soon the devout Catholic had been pigeonholed by popular media into a category which was portrayed in such a stereotypical fashion that it soon led to the creation of the parodying term "beatnik." The members of the Beat Generation caused outrage by their open homosexuality, history of drug use, or their disregard for conventions regarding taboos in general. Furthermore, they divorced themselves from the revered literary traditions of the era, thus representing a major stylistic as well as ideological shift from the mainstream. Even though they were part of a larger Bohemian scene in San Francisco or New York, the Beats were often singled out from this context and put into the public spotlight and accused of causing the sudden rise of juvenile delinquency, advocating drug abuse, being against intelligence itself as Norman Podhoretz famously said, or just being "nasty fellows" in general. As Parkinson points out, this publicity had a negative impact that tarred all experimental writers with the moniker "Beat" and that seemed to suggest that the only valid experimental writers were the Beats (280). Nevertheless, the Beats also had their supporters: individuals such as Lawrence Ferlinghetti of City Lights or Barney Rosset of Grove significantly supported the writers through the publication and subsequent defense of their work. The support from these and other figures further sharpened the divide between the generally-accepted culture and the emerging counterculture.

The Beats also made a serious dent in Czechoslovak society. While restricted in their ability to discuss the Beats at the beginning, the translators Igor Hájek and Jan Zábrana heavily affected the tumultuous 1960s by promoting the Beats whenever possible. One of the attractive aspects of the Beats was their critical yet not markedly ideological commentary on American society; for Czechoslovaks, who were living in a country where everything was explicitly political, this was not only a great novelty, but also a significant fount of inspiration. Thus poetry readings and cafés came into existence, and Beat poetry could also be heard on the radio. Ginsberg's presence during the 1965 Majáles festival was also a crucial event, since the American's election as the King of May became a significant political act of defiance which marked the growing disillusionment of people, and especially students, with the government. Ultimately, the Communist regime played a vital role in the reception of the Beats in Czechoslovakia: it served as an antagonist to readers, which in turn allowed them to identify with the Beats' social criticism and subsequently aim it at the regime. At the same time, it also helped spread the works of the Beats by controlling public discourse, thus effectively acting against its own best interests. Ultimately, this schizophrenic status emblematizes life in Communist Czechoslovakia, which Beat literature in the minds of Czechoslovak readers protested against.

The interpretive communities of today are less likely to produce readings in direct opposition to one another; the extremely divided and politicized discussion of the fifties is a thing of the past, as the concretizations of the Beats have become stabilized in both the United States and the Czech Republic. The current popular reception emphasizes the social impact the Beats had in both countries. This difference also goes hand in hand with a significant change occurring in American academia. New Criticism as a tool of academic inquiry was abandoned in favor of readings focusing on ideologies, and this change enabled a different, more revealing view of the Beats. The rise of scholarly as well as popular interest is compounded by a constant flow of new and revised editions of Beat literature, which in turn further engrave the presence of the Beat Generation in American consciousness. Albeit with difficulties, this interest proves that the Beats have become canonized writers in the literature discourse of both countries.

However, the approaches of readers to the Beats in the two countries differed, as they stemmed from different contexts and different initial impressions of the Beat Generation and what it stands for. For one, readers often decoded the texts in a different manner: while the Beats in the USA were often read in terms of social revolt, the Czechoslovak reading instead emphasized their resistance to any forms of oppression, namely the totalitarian practices of Communist Czechoslovakia. As a result, Beat texts and subsequently the Beats themselves manifest themselves as different works. Context cannot be divorced from the process of interpretation; ultimately, context not only shapes the initial reception of a work,

but through this reception it also forms the overall discourse surrounding its subject matter. The creation and subsequent proliferation of a discourse is especially impactful if the first intermediaries of a literary work operate in a context in which access to information is otherwise limited. Access to information does not necessarily have to mean censorship, but may also mean distribution of information or rather its limitations; relying on printed matter, early critiques such as Podhoretz's "The Know-Nothing Bohemians" or Mailer's "The White Negro" thus leave a substantial impression on the discourse as a whole and therefore on other texts that follow.

Yet these impressions are not fixed. Unless all copies of a text are destroyed, they remain in existence, and therefore can be reread and reinterpreted. Ultimately, the texts of the Beat Generation have not changed; the readers have. And many of them have found in these texts a set of practices to follow and live by.

SUMMARY

The book documents the reception of the Beat Generation writers and their work in the United States and the Czech lands, that is Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic, in two different time periods – the 1950s/1960s and from the early 1990s up to now. Subsequently, by analyzing the differences and similarities between the receptions, the text comments on how an understanding and subsequent interpretations of a text are formed.

The Beats initially elicited strong responses, both favorable and unfavorable. In their home country they were often seen as representing the ethos of the young generation, which also meant that many saw them as a dangerous threat to the whole society. The Beats, with their focus on the Other America and their portrayal of drug use or homosexuality, certainly stood out in the literary production of the time. Subsequently, this led to extremely polarizing views of the Beats in which their writing often took a back seat. As a result, the Beats were often viewed as a social phenomenon rather than writers. In contrast, their readers in Czechoslovakia saw in the Beats something extremely uncommon in their own society: critical voices uninhibited by overt ideological allegiance. The general critique of the Beats – the criticism of conformity, consumerism, oppressive behavior, or institutionalized thinking – was for many truly inspiring and has left a lasting impression in the country.

Despite various controversies and difficulties, the Beats are currently more popular than at the time of their writing. American audiences hail the Beats for standing against the conservative mores of McCarthy's America and for significantly altering the consciousness of future generations. They have become important cultural icons embodying various qualities and ideals such as non-conformity, anti-capitalism, or ecological advocacy. Similarly, the Beats have reached a similar

status in the Czech Republic, often being portrayed as embodying the American desire for freedom.

Nonetheless, the reception of the Beats in the two countries varies substantially, thus showing how context and existing discourse frame the subject. The discourse surrounding the Beats in the United States focuses on their history as voices of a generation, therefore emphasizing their impact on American society, which helps shape them into cultural icons as a result. In addition, the Beats were often read in the context of juvenile delinquency and teen culture, which negatively affected their reception. In contrast, the Czech reading of the Beats mostly lacks this generational reading, focusing instead on them as critics of both Capitalism and Communism; that is critics of ideologies and overt ideological representations. By employing a comparative approach to the study of reception, the book comments on the interpretive potential of literary works – the ability to manifest themselves in different cultural settings and on the different shapes the resulting manifestations can take.

The book consists of the following chapters. Chapter I introduces the Beat Generation, discusses the text's aims, and presents its structure. Chapter II provides an overview of the literary theory framing the research and the methodology used. Chapter III contextualizes the Beats by discussing the United States of the 1950s and 1960s. Chapter IV uses this context to document the initial reception of the Beat Generation in the United States; the chapter first focuses on reviews of Jack Kerouac's work, and then continues by discussing popular representation and the resulting stereotypes of the Beats. After commenting on the portrayal of William S. Burroughs, the chapter finishes by discussing academic poetry and the New Critics and their relationship to the Beats. The following chapter analyzes the current reception of the Beats by emphasizing popular representations, obituaries, and critical interpretations. By detailing some of the current scholarship, the text shows that a notion of "Beatness" is also present in some segments of contemporary Beat Studies. Chapter VI provides an introduction to the cultural and social life in Czechoslovakia, focusing mostly on the constraints imposed upon art by socialist realism and the historical developments of the period. Chapter VII provides a detailed account of the reception of the Beats in Czechoslovakia. It does so by first analyzing the essays in the literary journal *Světová literatura*, then continues by discussing the shift in rhetoric in these studies, and finishes with an overview of Allen Ginsberg's 1965 visit and the effects the Beats had on Czechoslovakia. The current reception of the Beats in the Czech Republic is the focus of Chapter VIII. The section first analyzes various introductory materials to Beat publications and then continues by focusing mostly on Lawrence Ferlinghetti's 1998 visit and a comparison between the Beats and the Czechoslovak underground. The nature of Czech scholarship is also discussed. Finally, Chapter IX summarizes and further elaborates on the findings of the preceding chapters; the major focus of the

chapter is the difference in popular reception of the Beats, the role of a "Beat" ethos in the enduring popularity of the Beats, and the paradox of the Czechoslovak reception – that the unfree conditions of Communist Czechoslovakia actually helped the Beats to obtain a substantially more positive early reception than they had in the United States.

The book provides an insight into the manner the discourses surrounding literary texts and their writers are formed based on cultural and historical background, existing discourses, or the reading strategies and assumptions of the audience.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die Publikation dokumentiert die Rezeption der Schriftsteller der Beat Generation und ihrer Werke in den Vereinigten Staaten und in der Tschechoslowakei und der Tschechischen Republik, und zwar in zwei Zeitperioden – in den 50er bis 60er Jahren des vergangenen Jahrhunderts und in der Periode ab den 90er Jahren bis zur Gegenwart. Durch die Analyse der Ähnlichkeiten und Differenzen in der Rezeption dokumentiert der Text auch die Art und Weise, wie man in dem öffentlichen und kritischen Diskurs das Verstehen der literarischen Werke gestalten kann.

Die Autoren der Beat Generation haben anfangs heftige Reaktionen ausgelöst, und zwar sowohl positive als auch negative. In ihrem Heimatland waren sie oft für die Vertreter des Ethos der jungen Generation gehalten, was folglich dazu führte, dass sie von vielen als Bedrohung für die ganze Gesellschaft angesehen wurden. Durch ihre Darstellungen des abgewendeten Gesichtes Amerikas und die offene Bejahung des Drogenkonsums oder der Homosexualität ragten die Beatautoren in der literarischen Produktion ihrer Zeit hervor. Dies führte folglich zu extrem polarisierenden Interpretationen der Beatautoren: weil sie eher als ein bestimmtes soziales Phänomen als literarische Schöpfer dargestellt wurden, galten ihre Werke und Aussagen in diesen Diskussionen für sekundär. Dagegen sahen darin die Leser in der Tschechoslowakei etwas unglaublich Ungewöhnliches bezüglich ihrer eigenen Gesellschaft: kritische, durch den ideologischen Ballast unbelastete Stimmen. Die gesellschaftliche Kritik, die von den Autoren der Beat Generation verlautete – Kritik der Konformität der Gesellschaft, des Konsumerismus, der Repression gegenüber den „unerwünschten Elementen" oder der verknöcherten Denkweise – war für viele tschechoslowakische Leser in der Tat inspirativ und beeindruckend.

Trotz verschiedener Streitigkeiten und Probleme sind heute die Autoren der Beat Generation populärer denn je. Das amerikanische Publikum feiert sie als Kritiker der konservativen amerikanischen Moral des Senators Joseph McCarthy und als Vorkämpfer großer gesellschaftlicher Umwandlungen. Sie wurden zu bedeutenden Ikonen, die Nonkonformität, Antikapitalismus oder das ökologische Denken verkörpern. Ähnlich ist es auch in der Tschechischen Republik, wo sie als die Verkörperung der amerikanischen Sehnsucht nach Freiheit dargestellt werden.

Obwohl diese Rezeption ähnlich ist, kommen hier auch unübersehbare Unterschiede vor, was auf die Wichtigkeit des Kontextes hinweist, nicht nur bei der Interpretation des einzelnen literarischen Werkes durch den Leser, sondern auch bei der folgenden Gestaltung des allgemeineren Diskurses hinsichtlich des gegebenen Werkes oder seines Autoren. Der amerikanische Diskurs konstituiert oft die Autoren der Beat Generation als Stimmen einer Generation, was schließlich ihren gesellschaftlich-historischen Einfluss betont und sie zu den Kulturikonen macht. Dagegen entbehrt in Tschechien der Diskurs dieser Generationswahrnehmung und stattdessen versteht die Autoren der Beat Generation als Kritiker des Kommunismus und Kapitalismus, also als Kritiker allzu extremer Ideologien. Durch die komparative Methode beim Studium der Rezeption der Literatur betont also dieses Buch nicht nur das Interpretationspotential der literarischen Werke, das heißt ihre Fähigkeit, sich in verschiedenen gesellschaftlichen und historischen Bedingungen unterschiedlich zu erweisen, sondern vor allem den nachfolgenden Diskurs, der diese Werke umgibt und der sich aus der offenen Interpretation erschließt und eine Reihe von Formen annehmen kann.

Das Buch besteht aus folgenden Kapiteln. Das Kapitel I definiert die Autoren der Beat Generation und diskutiert die Ziele und Struktur des Textes. Das Kapitel II gibt eine kurze Übersicht der Literaturtheorie, die als Ausgangspunkt zum Studium und zur Methodologie dieses Werkes dient. Das Kapitel III setzt die Schriftsteller der Beat Generation in den Kontext von Amerika der 50er und 60er Jahre, also in die Jahre ihres Durchbruchs in das allgemeine Bewusstsein. Das Kapitel IV dokumentiert die anfängliche Rezeption der Beat Generation in den USA: zuerst konzentriert es sich auf die Rezensionen des Werks von Jack Kerouac, weiter setzt es mit der Analyse der populären Darstellungen und der sich daraus ergebenden Stereotype der Beat Autoren fort. Nach der Diskussion über die Kontroverse um William S. Burroughs schließt das Kapitel mit der Diskussion über das Verhältnis der Beat Autoren sowohl zur akademischen Poesie, als auch zu der sich wandelnden Aufnahme der Poesie für sich, zu der sie durch ihre Werke wesentlich beigetragen haben. Das Kapitel V prüft ihre gegenwärtige Rezeption, indem es sich nicht nur auf die populären Repräsentationen der Beat Generation, sondern auch zum Beispiel auf die Nekrologe oder die heutigen akademischen Interpretationen konzentriert. Aus diesem Kapitel geht unter anderem hervor, dass in einigen Segmenten der Beat Studies ein gewisser Geist der Autoren der

Beat Generation vorhanden ist, das gewisse „Beatness“, das sich durch den Widerstand gegenüber den üblichen akademischen Verfahren äußert. Das Thema des Kapitels VI sind die kulturellen und gesellschafts-historischen Realien der Tschechoslowakei mit dem Schwerpunkt auf die Thesen des sozialistischen Realismus und die sich daraus ergebenden beschränkten Ausdrucksmittel der Kunst. Das Kapitel VII führt eingehend die tschechoslowakische Rezeption der Autoren der Beat Generation und ihrer Werke in den 50er und 60er Jahren aus. Es analysiert gründlich die Essays in den Literaturzeitschriften wie zum Beispiel *Světová literatura* (Weltliteratur), womit es auf die sich wandelnde Rhetorik hinweist, die allmählich die Grundlagen des sozialistischen Realismus verlässt. Das Kapitel wird mit einer übersichtlichen Analyse des Besuches der Tschechoslowakei von Allen Ginsberg im Jahre 1965 und der allgemeinen Auswirkung der Beat Generation abgeschlossen. Die gegenwärtige Rezeption in der Tschechischen Republik ist das Thema des Kapitels VIII. Es untersucht zunächst die Texte der Verleger, die die Beat Generation angehen, wie z.B. Einleitungen oder Nachworte, weiter konzentriert es sich vor allem auf die Analyse des Besuches von Lawrence Ferlinghetti im Jahre 1998 oder auf den Vergleich der Beat Generation mit den Schriftstellern des tschechoslowakischen Undergrounds. Und das Kapitel IX resümiert die Feststellungen und Schlüsse von den vorigen Kapiteln und entwickelt sie weiter: zu den Hauptthemen gehören die unterschiedliche populäre Rezeption der Beat Generation und die Rolle des „Beat“ Ethos in der unaufhörlichen Popularität der Beat Schriftsteller und ihrer Werke.

Das Buch deckt also die Prozesse auf, durch welche die literarischen Texte und ihre Schriftsteller in bestimmte Formen gestaltet werden. Diese Prozesse werden sowohl durch den kulturellen und gesellschaftspolitischen Kontext, als auch durch die bereits existierenden Diskurse oder Leserstrategien und Publikumserwartungen formiert.

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