



Pedagogická
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Jihočeská univerzita
v Českých Budějovicích
University of South Bohemia
in České Budějovice

Jihočeská univerzita v Českých Budějovicích
Pedagogická fakulta
Katedra anglistiky

Bakalářská práce

Allen Ginsberg and the Beat Generation

Allen Ginsberg jako básník beatnické
generace

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České Budějovice 2021

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JIHOČESKÁ UNIVERZITA V ČESKÝCH BUDĚJOVICÍCH

Pedagogická fakulta

Akademický rok: 2018/2019

ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

(projektu, uměleckého díla, uměleckého výkonu)

Jméno a příjmení: Karolína KOLÁŘOVÁ
Osobní číslo: P17766
Studijní program: B7507 Specializace v pedagogice
Studijní obor: Český jazyk a literatura se zaměřením na vzdělávání
Anglický jazyk se zaměřením na vzdělávání
Téma práce: Allen Ginsberg and the Beat Generation
Zadávací katedra: Katedra anglistiky

Zásady pro vypracování

Předmětem zkoumání bakalářské práce bude beatnická generace a její hlavní představitelé v oblasti americké poválečné poezie. Práce nejprve stručně charakterizuje beatnickou generaci od jejího vzniku v 50. letech a zmíní filozofické, myšlenkové a literární hodnoty jejich autorů (Kerouac, Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti, Snyder). Jádrem práce bude literárněvědná analýza poezie básníka Allena Ginsberga. Práce se soustředí na okolnosti vzniku, vydání a veřejné čtení Ginsbergových básní, které pod tlakem cenzury vycházely v nakladatelství City Lights, a dále zmíní okolnosti Ginsbergova pobytu v tehdejší Československu v roce 1965 a v literárním kontextu provede analýzu básně King Of May, která se k této události úzce vztahuje.

Rozsah pracovní zprávy: 30 – 50 stran
Rozsah grafických prací:
Forma zpracování bakalářské práce: tištěná/elektronická

Seznam doporučené literatury:

Campbell, James. This is the Beat Generation: New York, San Francisco, Paris. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
Charters, Ann, ed. The Beats: Literary Bohemians in Postwar America. 2 vols. Dictionary of Literary Biography. Detroit: Gale Research, 1983.
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Theado, M., Allen Ginsberg. 2012

Vedoucí bakalářské práce: PhDr. Alice Sukdolová, Ph.D.
Katedra anglistiky

Datum zadání bakalářské práce: 11. dubna 2019
Termin odevzdání bakalářské práce: 30. dubna 2020

V Českých Budějovicích dne 11. dubna 2019



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Poděkování

Ráda bych poděkovala vedoucí své práce PhDr. Alici Sukdolové, Ph.D. za pomoc při vybírání tématu a za odborné vedení mé práce. Děkuji také za mimořádnou trpělivost a cenné rady, které mi poskytla.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my thanks to PhDr. Alice Sukdolová, Ph.D. for helping me with choosing the thesis topic and her professional leadership. I am also thankful for the extraordinary patience and valuable advice I received

Anotace

Předmětem zkoumání bakalářské práce bude beatnická generace a její hlavní představitelé v oblasti americké poválečné poezie. Práce nejprve stručně charakterizuje beatnickou generaci od jejího vzniku v 50. letech a zmíní filozofické, myšlenkové a literární hodnoty jejích autorů (Kerouac, Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti, Snyder). Jádrem práce bude literárněvědná analýza poezie básníka Allena Ginsberga. Práce se soustředí na okolnosti vzniku, vydání a veřejné čtení Ginsbergových básní, které pod tlakem cenzury vycházely v nakladatelství City Lights, a dále zmíní okolnosti Ginsbergova pobytu v tehdejší Československu v roce 1965 a v literárním kontextu provede analýzu básně King Of May, která se k této události úzce vztahuje.

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the Beat Generation and its main representatives in the field of American postwar poetry. Firstly, the thesis briefly describes the Beat Generation from its origin in the 50's and mentions philosophical thoughts and literary values of the authors (Kerouac, Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti, Snyder). The core of the thesis is a literary analysis of Allen Ginsberg's poetry. The work focuses on the background of his artistic creation, publishing and public reading of Ginsberg's poems which were published under pressure of censorship in the City Lights publishing house. Furthermore, the thesis mentions Ginsberg's stay in former Czechoslovakia in 1965 and in the literary context analyses the poem called King of May which is closely related to this event.

Contents

INTRODUCTION	9
1 1950'S IN THE USA	10
1.1 CHANGES IN THE SOCIETY.....	11
1.2 AMERICAN POSTWAR LITERATURE	12
1.2.1 <i>Southern Literature and Drama</i>	12
1.2.2 <i>African American Literature</i>	13
1.3 COUNTERCULTURE OF THE 1960'S	13
2 THE BEAT GENERATION	15
2.1 GENESIS OF THE BEAT GENERATION (BEATS AND BEATNIKS)	16
2.1.1 <i>The Value of Friendship</i>	17
2.2 THE BEATS AND RELIGION.....	19
2.3 BEBOP	20
3 AUTHORS OF THE BEAT GENERATION	21
3.1 JACK KEROUAC	21
3.1.1 <i>Early Life</i>	21
3.1.2 <i>Columbia and New York</i>	22
3.1.3 <i>Life after the University</i>	23
3.1.4 <i>Death</i>	24
3.1.5 <i>Kerouac's Work</i>	24
3.2 LAWRENCE FERLINGHETTI	26
3.3 GARY SNYDER.....	28
3.4 ALLEN GINSBERG.....	30
3.4.1 <i>Early Life</i>	30
3.4.2 <i>Ginsberg and Religion</i>	31
3.4.3 <i>Columbia University and New York</i>	31
3.4.4 <i>Life after the University</i>	33
3.4.5 <i>The Rest of Ginsberg's Life</i>	34
4 GINSBERG'S WORK	35
4.1 HOWL.....	35
4.1.1 <i>The Howl Obscenity Trial</i>	40
4.2 KRAL MAJALES.....	42
4.2.1 <i>The Story Behind Kral Majales</i>	42
4.2.2 <i>The Poem</i>	46
4.2.3 <i>Analysis</i>	48
CONCLUSION	50
BIBLIOGRAPHY	52

Introduction

This bachelor thesis begins with a brief description of the postwar political situation in the United States and the changes in society which came with it. After the Second World War American economy thrived and the standard of living improved with it. Americans were not afraid of their economic future but still lived in fear. The apprehension came from the new coming conflict called the Cold War. The Cold War was a sort of a tension between two superpowers – The United States and The Soviet Union.

The second chapter refers to the main theme of this thesis and that is the Beat Generation. This movement originated in the 1950s in America and plays a huge role in the contemporary culture. In this chapter I will concentrate on the origin of this generation and describe the story about how some of the members met. Through that I would like to portray the university life in New York.

The next chapter is dedicated directly to four of the members and writers of the Beat Generation. I will start with bringing closer their life and philosophical thinking and concentrating mainly on the life and work of Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg.

The last chapter concentrates especially on the work of Allen Ginsberg. I will analyse two of his famous poems – *Howl* and *Kral Majales*. With *Howl* I will also mention peripetia behind the publication which escalated in the obscenity trial and I will focus on the story behind the poem *Kral Majales* which is closely related to the history of Czechoslovakia.

The Beat Generation is still very significant and relatable even though it reacts to the situation of the 1960s in America. I have chosen this theme because of the interesting stories of the author's lives and because of my fascination with Ginsberg's visit in Prague.

1 1950's IN THE USA

The Second World War devastated the whole world but mostly Europe and Asia where most of the battles were fought. America on the other hand might have seemed unaffected by the war since there was no direct fighting on the North American continent with the exception of Pearl Harbour, or Guam, American territories or states. The United States emerged and soon became a dominant nation in the post-war period. The economy was at its highest peak and the consumer goods were available to almost everyone. Thanks to the economic growth the standard of living also improved. People were not afraid of their economic future and started investing. Mostly they invested in houses especially into houses built in the new frontier – the suburbs. ¹

“With much of the world’s economy in ruins, America entered a period of booming economic growth and relative social peace, marked by expanded job opportunities, a high birth rate, migration to the suburbs, new upward mobility and, thanks to the GI Bill Rights, a vast expansion of higher education.” ²

This era was not only affected by booming economy and growing suburbs but during the 50s there was a conflict between the two world’s superpowers which were The United States and The Soviet Union. This conflict is well known as the Cold War and it lasted for decades. (narrative history) The Cold War escalated into Korean War which happened between 1950 – 1953. Under the influence of the tense relationship between the two superpowers and also the nuclear threat, the domestic policy of the United States started to sharpen. Being on the brink of the nuclear threat and the fear of communist espionage mirrored on the society. It resulted in the social and cultural conformism which lead to a suppression of one’s individuality. The Cold War, Korean War, Vietnam War and the fear of the Third World War evoked many protests. Young people protested at rebellious concerts or political demonstrations usually accompanied with substance abuse and free sex. ³

¹ SHI, D.,E., TINDALL, G., B. America: a narrative history. New York: W.W. Norton & Company 2016.

² BERCOVITCH, S. The Cambridge History of American Literature. Vol. 7, Prose Writing 1940-1990, New York: Cambridge University Press 2009. (p. 165)

³ SHI, D.,E., TINDALL, G., B. America: a narrative history. New York: W.W. Norton & Company 2016.

1.1 Changes in the Society

The 1950s in America were considered the times of affluence, prosperity and unity. The number of people who were able to afford the “middle-class” standard of living grew rapidly. America was becoming a society in which everyone was either already part of the middle class or soon to become a part of it. By 1960 sixty percent of people became homeowners. On the other hand, more than twenty three percent of Americans still lived in poverty and the poverty of African Americans was far higher.

For middle-class white Americans the 1950s were a golden era but for many others seemed as if the fifties were haunted. That was because the public culture was not open to alternative views and it was not a good time for dissent. The problems of this time often seemed hidden under bright and cheerful images of a prosperous and most powerful nation. Underneath all this glitter was another America. The critique of the society started building up and it would escalate in the 1960s. African Americans started demonstrating which would lead to the Civil Rights Movement. Women who attempted to release from their roles as wives and mothers came across many obstacles and with that the contemporary feminism was being born. Equally important to that was also the fear that the modern world threatened the autonomy, independence and authenticity of the individuals especially the white male culture. Men working at large corporate organizations tend to dress alike and to have similar values and life goals. Which explains the unity previously mentioned. People were afraid to take any risks and they feared to be different.

The disenchantment with the middle-class society did not come from the mainstream artists and intellectuals. Any dissent at that time meant censorship. The outrage came instead from a group of young writers and artists who originally came from the middle class but decided to stand outside of it. They despised the middle-class culture, ridiculed it and rejected it. Those young artists were men and women and they called themselves “the Beats”. They openly challenged the values of the society. Many of the Beats avowed alternative lifestyle which came with drug usage or sexual freedom, but it emphasized their rootlessness.⁴

⁴ THE GILDER LEHRMAN INSTITUTE OF AMERICAN HISTORY AP US HISTORY STUDY GUIDE: The Fifties [online] [cit. 21.1. 2021] retrieved from <<https://ap.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/fifties/essays/fifties>>

1.2 American Postwar Literature

American literature attained its maturity and rich diversity in the 1920s and '30s. Important works by major figures from those decades were published between the First and Second World War (W. Faulkner, E. Hemingway, J. Steinbeck). American postwar literary works differentiate and cannot be labeled with the term mainstream literature. A new generation came out of the war and also the ethnic, regional and social character differed from the one in the previous era. Even though the social climate of the years after war was conservative or even conformist, some of the most discussed writers were homosexual or bisexual (T. Williams, T. Capote, J. Baldwin) The experimental methods and dark themes of their work greatly influenced Beat writers.⁵

“American literature has always found new sources of inspiration – whether in thematic or formal terms – in regions, subcultures and ethnic and racial groups.”⁶

Among the new coming writers were children of immigrants, many of the Jews and African Americans. With the rise of feminism female authors used literature to be heard. In the postwar era we distinguish the literature of the minorities, that is African American literature and American Jewish literature.

The 1950's were times of the Cold War and this unfortunate situation helped developing the genre science-fiction. This genre was formalized in 1926 when Hugo Gernsback introduced the term 'scientifiction' in his *Amazing Stories* a magazine devoted to science-fiction. In the course of 1950's science fiction moved from magazines to novels. In 1950 was published Ray Bradbury's collection *The Martian Chronicles* which for example features an automated household that functions even long after its inhabitants were turned into ashes.⁷

1.2.1 Southern Literature and Drama

The Southern writers were influenced by the work of William Faulkner. He was followed by another generation of talented writers. Among them were three important women who contributed greatly to Southern fiction – Flannery O'Connor, Eudora Welty and Carson

⁵ PROCHÁZKA, MARTIN, QUINN, J., ULMANOVÁ, H., RORABACK, E. Lectures on American Literature. 3rd edition Praha: KAROLINUM 2016.

⁶ PROCHÁZKA, MARTIN, QUINN, J., ULMANOVÁ, H., RORABACK, E. Lectures on American Literature. 3rd edition Praha: KAROLINUM 2016. (p. 253)

⁷ PROCHÁZKA, MARTIN, QUINN, J., ULMANOVÁ, H., RORABACK, E. Lectures on American Literature. 3rd edition Praha: KAROLINUM 2016.

McCullers. In the center of O'Connor's works stands religion. Flannery saw herself as an outsider, she was physically handicapped, but also a Roman Catholic in the predominantly Protestant South. Most of her novels and short stories take place in the South, for example *Wise Blood* (1952) and *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960).

Other important authors were Truman Capote who published a piece of documentary realism *In Cold Blood* (1965) and William Styron with his famous *Sophie's Choice* (1979)⁸

As for the drama the two major playwrights of this period were Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller. Tennessee Williams wrote over twenty nine plays, two novels and numerous short stories. His most famous play *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) present a society defined by cruelty. The play was very controversial because of the sexual energy, which drives the plot.⁹

1.2.2 African American Literature

African American writers of this period pictured in their work the Black experience – segregated education, ghetto hustling, rural sharecropping and the ideologies. All of this appeared in Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man* (1952). Some of the most important postwar American fiction was published by two African American women – Toni Morrison and Alice Walker. Morrison dealt with the important phases of Black history – i.e., slavery and the Harlem Renaissance. For her work she received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. Toni Morrison's most famous pieces are *The Bluest Eye* (1970) *Beloved* (1987) and *Song of Solomon* (1977). Alice Walker was awarded Pulitzer Prize for her feminist novel *The Color Purple* (1982).¹⁰

1.3 Counterculture of the 1960's

In the 1960s the norms of behavior and values started breaking down especially among the young. Men and women in their twenties became political activists and were the driving force behind the civil rights and antiwar movements. Young people separated from the mainstream culture demonstrating that with their appearance and lifestyle. The iconic counterculture of the sixties were the hippies. Hippies were middle-class whites without political drive unlike The New Left which was founded at the University of Michigan. Hippies were characterized by particular style of clothing – jeans, tie-dyed

⁸ PROCHÁZKA, MARTIN, QUINN, J., ULMANOVÁ, H., RORABACK, E. Lectures on American Literature. 3rd edition Praha: KAROLINUM 2016.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

shirts, sandals and with their long hair and beards. The lifestyle of the hippies embraced sexual promiscuity and recreational drugs.

A landmark event of the counterculture was the Woodstock Festival which took place upstate New York in 1969. This Festival held 300,000 to 400,000 people and It was called “three days of peace, music and love”. The culture was reflected in the rock music. Performers like Janis Joplin or Jim Morrison were a part of this counterculture. ¹¹

¹¹ CLIFF NOTES: The Counterculture of the 1960s [online] [cit. 2.2. 2021] retrieved from <<https://www.cliffsnotes.com/study-guides/history/us-history-ii/the-new-frontier-and-the-great-society/the-counterculture-of-the-1960s>>

2 THE BEAT GENERATION

The Beat Generation is an American social and literary movement originated in the 1950s. In the leading positions of this group were American artists, writers and poets such as Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, William Seward Burroughs and many others. The word “beat” has two meanings. The first one is “weary” meaning tired of life, exhausted and the second meaning is “beatific” which is similar to blessed. These two explanations capture the grounds of this movement. They searched for more artistic and spiritual ways of thinking, living and creating which they drew from Eastern religions. There they found their expression in artwork and lifestyle. As the Beats became more famous, young people started imitating them. The youths were called “beatniks”. The “beatniks” expressed their alienation from the conventional society by embracing a particular style of dressing, manners or even a special “hip” vocabulary.

The word “beatnik” came from Herb Caen, a journalist. He put together the word beat as from Beat Generation and a suffix *-nik* from the word Sputnik which was a satellite launched by the Soviet Union. Caen said that he invented this word to make fun of the Beats since they acted way too seriously according to him. The word caught on very quickly but the Beats were angered by it.¹²

Some of the Beat Generation beliefs reject mainstream, middle-class values by exploring alternative life. They rebelled with alternate forms of sexuality, mainly homosexuality and also experimented with drugs.

“Although they were a loosely knit collective rather than an organized movement, the Beats shared a deeply felt disappointment with the shallowness and acquisitiveness of American culture.”¹³

Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs were the three most popular Beat writers, followed by poets such as Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Gary Snyder, Diane di Prima and Neal Cassady. The Beats organized in Los Angeles, New York City and San Francisco. By 1950s they settled in the Bay Area, especially near Beat poet, publisher and owner of the City Lights bookstore, Lawrence Ferlinghetti.

¹² STERRITT, D. *The Beats: A very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press 2013. (p. 22)

¹³ STERRITT, D. *The Beats: A very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press 2013. (p. 1)

2.1 Genesis of the Beat Generation (Beats and Beatniks)

Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs and a group of other writers and artists formed a movement which originates at the end of the Second World War. This movement became very famous during the 1950s got even stronger in the sixties and became a significant part of American culture. The Beat movement does not have any manifestoes but still the members came together as a literary group. In 1952 Kerouac wrote a letter to Ginsberg in which he listed the members of the movement. He also explained that the main reason for their union was the ability to confess their feelings to each other. Such revelation of the heart contradicted with the thinking of 50's society¹⁴.

The Beats found their roots in the 19th century American transcendentalism which is a philosophical movement derived from an emphasis on the sphere of thought. It deals especially with the problem of losing one's individuality and it says that people are at their best when they are independent. The movement is inspired by European scholars such as Immanuel Kant and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

The spiritual legacy of the Beats is connected with the names of Henry David Thoreau, who was an idealist with hatred towards machinery and industry, and with the name of a 19th century American poet Walt Whitman.¹⁵

In November 1948 Kerouac and Beat Generation's critic John Clellon Holmes had a conversation in which Kerouac remarked, "*So I guess you might say we're a beat generation*". Four years later in 1952 Holmes wrote an article for the New York Times titled *This Is the Beat Generation*, which introduced the word "beat" to the mainstream public. Ginsberg wrote that the point of beat is that you get beaten down to a certain nakedness where you are actually able to see the world in a visionary way which is the old classical understanding of what happens in the dark night of the soul. An element created out of hopelessness and formed by harsh experience pointed on the search for what was the bravest on the American life and that element for the Beats was the already mentioned nakedness. They used it to react on the decay of self-determination and it symbolized rebirth and regaining identity.¹⁶

¹⁴ TYTELL, J. *Naked Angels the lives & literature of the Beat Generation*. New York: McGraw-Hill 1977.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

At their time the Beats were considered madmen. This attitude of the society towards them was created with the hospitalization at psychiatry asylums, public derision, censorship and even jail time. They felt clearness and simplicity in the state of madness to which they got themselves through drugs, criminality or with lust for ecstasy and believed that they had found the right perspective.

With the birth of Ginsberg's poem *Howl* the Beat Generation received nationwide response and prestige. In 1955 Ginsberg organized an event in Six Gallery together with other poets like Kenneth Rexroth, Philip Lamantia, Michael McClure and Gary Snyder where they all recited their poems. During the reciting Kerouac pounded on wine pitchers to give it a jazz concert atmosphere. The crowd was amazed by Ginsberg's poem and the listeners identified with the message of his work. The poem painted a picture of the whole generation's despair and vowed for better future. ¹⁷

2.1.1 The Value of Friendship

The Beat Generation members met in the first half of the 1940s when young Jack Kerouac was a student at Columbia university in New York. Kerouac's girlfriend Edie Parker lived in an apartment off Amsterdam Avenue and that place became the birthplace of the Beat Generation. Here the Beats had their first encounters and they would fall in love in here, read books, discuss ideas and experiment with drugs. ¹⁸

Edie Parker later brought into this community her fellow Columbia student from Saint Louis Lucien Carr. Carr had an impressive knowledge of literature and talked about it with Kerouac. Columbia's halls of residence had been taken over by the Navy, so Carr moved to a different accommodation on 122nd Street. In December 1943 a young Jewish boy with glasses knocked on his door and asked him about the music Carr was listening to. The boy's name was Allen Ginsberg. Carr invited Ginsberg in and they developed a great friendship. Lucien suggested that Ginsberg should visit Kerouac and in May 1944 he showed up at his apartment.

Ginsberg and Kerouac met in private and after a short walk around the Columbia campus they started liking each other. Ginsberg as an unexperienced homosexual was really

¹⁷ TYTELL, J. *Naked Angels the lives & literature of the Beat Generation*. New York: McGraw-Hill 1977.

¹⁸ TURNER, S. *Angelheaded hipster: a life of Jack Kerouac*. New York: N.Y.: Viking 1996.

attracted to athletically based Kerouac and they shared their spiritual thoughts and visions.¹⁹

Carr's former teacher and lover links Ginsberg and Kerouac with the third important member of the Beat Generation William Seward Burroughs. Ginsberg met him at his apartment on Morton Street where he got to meet a person who is fascinated with criminality, prostitution, drugs, guns and literature. Later Burroughs met also Kerouac. Both of them saw Burroughs as their mentor. He gave them lists of recommended books and access to his personal library.²⁰

Another important member of the Beat generation was Neal Cassady a young, energetic man from Denver with unfading desire for lust and experiences. This charismatic youngster who was stealing cars lived a wildlife. He grew up with his alcoholic father, slept in cargo trains, chased after girls and spent a lot of time in juvenile institutes. For the Beats he was something of an apparition and became a huge inspiration for their writing. With Cassady and other friends Kerouac wandered through the American East to the West and back and that was the time when the ideas for Kerouac's novel *On the Road* were born.²¹

2.1.1.1 Lucien Carr

Lucien Carr originally came from Saint Louis, Missouri. He was well-bred but he had been a difficult student. Lucien made it through two semesters at the University of Chicago, then he left and went on a road for two months. When Edie met him, he was already a student at Columbia University and they met at an art class.

His childhood teacher Dave Kammerer through which Ginsberg got to meet Burroughs was also Carr's lover. Kammerer pursued him for years even when Carr was moving from city to city. By the summer of 1944, Kammerer's obsession with young Lucien grew stronger. He made threats to Lucien's girlfriend and also threatened to kill himself. On August 13 at night Kammerer attempted to rape Carr, saying that he would prefer they both died than not having Carr for himself. Carr in defense pulled out his pocket knife and stabbed Kammerer. He tied Kammerer's legs and hands with shoelaces and threw his dead body into the Hudson river.²²

¹⁹.TURNER, S. Angelheaded hipster: a life of Jack Kerouac. New York: N.Y.: Viking 1996.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

Carr contacted Kerouac and Burroughs asking for advice. Burroughs told him to get a good lawyer and hand himself to the police. Kerouac advised him to get rid of the murder weapon and to bury Kammerer's glasses and so he did. Two days later Carr gave himself in to the police. By that time Kammerer's body has already been found. The police immediately arrested him and held him without bail. Burroughs and Kerouac were both material witnesses and ended up in jail. ²³

2.2 The Beats and Religion

The Beats considered themselves outcasts in the culture which despised them and at the same time they saw themselves as discoverers of the new attitude towards spirituality. One of the many ways of deflecting from the western thinking and selfishness was the inclination towards Eastern religion.

The Beats were seeking answers for their existential longing in alternative forms of religion, especially Buddhism. This religion offered them methods which helped each writer individually to reconnect with the lost sense of spirituality. Each writer chose different philosophy of Buddhism and achieved various results of his exploration. The compassion towards every living thing which is important for Buddhism seemed as a counterbalance to the damned materialism. The idea of immateriality attracted the attention of the Beats and taught them to simplify desires. The Buddhist thinking highlighted intuition, open-mindedness and inseparability of ego and soul which differs from the Eastern culture. The intuition is the most important because it is the opposite to rationality. The Beats were trying to get rid of the morality, dogma and orthodoxy and with that set aside all the artificial barriers between their lives and art. ²⁴

The understanding of ethics was possible through Mahayana Buddhism and Tantric practices encouraged the free sexual consort which the Beats admired. Breathing exercises used as a preparation for meditation allow to release a reservoir of energy and electricity in the nervous system.

Some of the Buddhist scholars interpreted the thinking too speculative and the Beats found it a bit uninspiring. Because of that they rather accepted the ideas of Zen Buddhism. ²⁵

²³ TURNER, S.: *Angelheaded hipster: a life of Jack Kerouac*, N.Y.: Viking, New York 1996.

²⁴ TYTELL, J. *Naked Angels the lives & literature of the Beat Generation*. New York: McGraw-Hill 1977.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

“Thomas Merton, in *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, defined Zen’s undifferentiated consciousness as the absence of all social or cultural categories, the refusal to believe in any artificially preconceived structures (such as the form of a poem or painting), or to judge beauty and ugliness according to canons of taste.”²⁶

The Zen Buddhist “mindfulness” pays attention to details. It is important to look at things without commenting them or interpretation or to even judge them which appealed to the Beats.²⁷

2.3 Bebop

Bebop is a kind of modern jazz which significantly influenced the work of Beat writers. Jazz of the 1930s has been dominated by Swing and both became the most popular genres of those times. Swing bands performed in a large number of musicians and because of that touring became quite uneconomic. The new generation of musicians sought for a change and came with a new kind of jazz – bebop. The Beboppers would gather in clubs to play music which was characterized by small groups jamming in the rhythms of Swing. For bebop improvisation is the key and that demands high levels of technical competence.²⁸

*“Its coupling of the need for expert knowledge of earlier musical forms and technical mastery based upon years of practice that would enable performance of highly complex pieces to appear ‘spontaneous’ is self-evidently mirrored in Kerouac’s habit of spending hours ‘sketching’, or writing descriptions of what he saw from a window or coffee shop in preparation for the ‘spontaneous prose’ of his novels.”*²⁹

Bebop offered a model for the compositional philosophy of the Beat writers such as Kerouac and Ginsberg. For Kerouac the model of spontaneity of composition and improvisation created a huge influence on his work.

²⁶ TYTELL, J. *Naked Angels the lives & literature of the Beat Generation*. New York: McGraw-Hill 1977. (p. 26)

²⁷ TYTELL, J. *Naked Angels the lives & literature of the Beat Generation*. New York: McGraw-Hill 1977.

²⁸ GAIR, Ch. *The Beat Generation A Beginner’s Guide*. England: Oneworld Publications 2008.

²⁹ GAIR, Ch. *The Beat Generation A Beginner’s Guide*. England: Oneworld Publications 2008. (p. 17)

3 AUTHORS OF THE BEAT GENERATION

3.1 Jack Kerouac

Jack Kerouac was the heart and impetus of the forthcoming literary generation. Deep inside of him he hid many contradictions. He was wild but also timid, his friends adored him for being a source of inspiration. His whole life he was searching for something, wandering to find freedom but in the end, he ended up in severe intoxication and complete seclusion.³⁰

3.1.1 Early Life

He was born on March 12th, 1922 in Lowell, Massachusetts into a Catholic, French-Canadian family as the third child to Leo and Gabrielle Kerouac. Jack had a strong connection to the city he grew up in and also to his older brother Gerard who died at the age 5 of rheumatic fever. In his memory he wrote *Visions of Gerard*. Growing up in a closed community where people spoke only French made him a stranger in his own country. He was not able to speak English until he was 5 years old and for a long time he struggled with his accent. The theme of alienation, of searching for his true home and the death of his brother would influence his writing. As he grew older, he became obsessed with finding his origins and the question of who he was and where he belonged always bothered him.³¹

During his high school studies, he became a Lowell celebrity because of his success on track and in football. Kerouac was very self-motivated because when he was told he did not make it to the football team he began training himself and it paid off very well. Once again, he showed his determination and sense of purpose just like when he was learning English. In his senior years Gabrielle urged Jack to attend Notre Dame Catholic School but Jack was lured by excitement and decided to apply for Columbia University in New York where was accepted thanks to his sports achievements.³²

³⁰ TYTELL, J. *Naked Angels the lives & literature of the Beat Generation*. New York: McGraw-Hill 1977.

³¹ TURNER, S.: *Angelheaded hipster: a life of Jack Kerouac*, N.Y.: Viking, New York 1996.

³² *Ibid.*

3.1.2 Columbia and New York

One of the conditions for accepting him to Columbia was to spend a year at Horace Mann preparatory school to improve his knowledge of French and math. Horace Mann was a New York's leading private school situated in the suburb of Riverdale. For Jack it was a completely different world. Expensive cars with chauffeurs were driving rich Jewish boys to school while Jack had to commute by two-and-a-half-hour subway ride from Brooklyn. Jack was doing very well at the preparatory school. He was perceived as a person in which intellect and physical strength was mixing. At the football team he played as quarterback and he wrote essays for money to other students.

Not only was Jack spending time with his teammates but he also started to experience the life of the parties. At jazz clubs he tried marijuana for the first time and with a prostitute from Manhattan he had his first sexual experience. His surroundings made him feel confused.³³ Jack's friend Joe Kennedy said: *"I think he was always looking for something which I'm not sure he ever found. He was always exploring instead of accepting what seemed obvious and right up against his face. If something appeared logical that was not good enough for Jack. He had to find something out there. He thought everyone else was in a rut and that he was smart enough to go out and find what was missing."*³⁴

In the first year of studies at Columbia just when the football season started, Kerouac broke his leg. Since early childhood he had spent some time writing and the unfortunate injury gave him free time to concentrate on it again.³⁵ He focused on his beloved reading, listening to jazz and he learned about Thomas Wolfe. Wolfe became his great inspiration in writing and also showed him the path of unconventional life.³⁶ Kerouac said about Wolfe's work: *"He just woke me up to America as a poem instead of America as a place to struggle around and sweat in. Mainly, this dark-eyed American poet made me want to prowl, and roam, and see the real America that was there and that had never been uttered."*³⁷ Jack realized that he did not want to live the life of his contemporaries who were born after the World War I and raised during the Depression. He could not see himself carrying briefcase, driving home every evening to a house with white picket fence in the suburbs to a perfect family. Wolfe changed his view on the American Dream. Jack

³³ TURNER, S.: *Angelheaded hipster: a life of Jack Kerouac*, N.Y.: Viking, New York 1996

³⁴ TURNER, S.: *Angelheaded hipster: a life of Jack Kerouac*, N.Y.: Viking, New York 1996. (p 49)

³⁵ TYTELL, J. *Naked Angels the lives & literature of the Beat Generation*. New York: McGraw-Hill 1977.

³⁶ TURNER, S. *Angelheaded hipster: a life of Jack Kerouac*. New York: N.Y.: Viking 1996.

³⁷ TURNER, S. *Angelheaded hipster: a life of Jack Kerouac*. New York: N.Y.: Viking 1996. (p. 54)

cut free from climbing the corporate ladder and his ambition was to explore America, gain knowledge, experience and insight.³⁸

After the injury his coach did not let him show his running skills and Jack decided to departure from Columbia. He went to New Haven where his parents currently lived and took a job at a gas-station. There he stayed very shortly and came back to Lowell where his friend helped him to get a position as a sportswriter on the *Sun*. Young Jack rather spent time learning about stream-of-consciousness from James Joyce than attending sports events, so he left the job after two months. It was not easy for him to stay somewhere for a long time and as proof of his impatience he enlisted in the marines and also coast guard and the next day he left. The ship returned right in time when classes at Columbia started and he came back. The couch did not let him on the team and that was a good enough reason for him to stalk out again and he enlisted in the Navy. Because of his inability to obey he had been sent under psychiatric observation where he spent six months. His discharge as a paranoid schizophrenic with antipathy towards authorities denoted the omen of unconventional behavior of the Beats. It expressed their resentment towards social submission.³⁹

Kerouac came back to Columbia, moved in with his girlfriend Edie Parker and met Ginsberg, Burroughs and Cassady. Neal Cassady was a charismatic young man with complicated upbringing lusting for experiences. He was a great influence for Kerouac's novel *On the Road*. Jack and Neal exchanged letters and the way that Neal wrote was for Jack very inspiring. He was not using any rules and he learned about the automatic process of writing.⁴⁰

3.1.3 Life after the University

It was 1955 and Kerouac was devastated because of the lack of money and recognition. The only money he had from writing was a thousand dollars advance payment. His addiction to drugs and alcohol struck his health and he started to wither. He kept on travelling and began to study Buddhism out of which *Dharma Bum* came. In 1957, two years after the literature of the Beat generation became famous, Kerouac's most popular novel was published and that is *On the Road*.⁴¹

³⁸ TURNER, S. *Angelheaded hipster: a life of Jack Kerouac*. New York: N.Y.: Viking 1996.

³⁹ *Ibid*.

⁴⁰ TYTELL, J. *Naked Angels the lives & literature of the Beat Generation*. New York: McGraw-Hill 1977.

⁴¹ *Ibid*.

3.1.4 Death

Jack hoped for a secluded hermitage in the woods where he would spend his old age with writing. Unfortunately, this dream of his never happened. On the 20th of October while watching television, he suddenly felt ill and rushed to the bathroom. He found blood in his vomit and was immediately transported to the hospital. He died the next day after twenty-six blood transfusions in the St. Anthony's Hospital. The cause of his death was haemorrhaging oesophageal varices.

The funeral was held in Lowell four days after his death. After an open casket ceremony his coffin was taken to the Edson Catholic Cemetery where the family members, Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, John Clellon Holmes and other his friends said their last goodbye.⁴²

3.1.5 Kerouac's Work

Kerouac wrote mainly about his life experiences and transformed the details into art through intensified language. His main sources of inspiration were his roots, his brother's and father's death, his explorations of Buddhism, wandering, alcoholism and drug usage.

In most of his books events from his past appear. For example in *Visions of Gerard* published in 1963 he writes about the first years of his life and focuses on the tragic death of his older brother Gerard. Jack grew up in a family where French was spoken more than English. *At Doctor Sax* (1959) he wrote that when he started attending school, he did not yet speak English fluently and even when he was eighteen, he spoke the language haltingly. French appears in a number of his books, but especially in *Doctor Sax* and *Visions of Gerard*. Jack once even confided in Ginsberg that English was not the language of his thoughts and when he was writing he wrote from French.⁴³

In 1950 Kerouac published his first fully developed novel *The Town and the City*. Jack felt torn between his small-town roots and the possibilities of the city life which were waiting for him. The opposite between the kind, neighborly life in Lowell and the immoral life in the city was the main theme of this novel. Jack began writing this book in 1946 and he hoped that it would show his father his seriousness about being a writer. Unfortunately, his father died from stomach cancer before Jack could finish the novel. In

⁴² TURNER, S. *Angelheaded hipster: a life of Jack Kerouac*. New York: N.Y.: Viking 1996.

⁴³ THEADO, M. *Understanding Jack Kerouac*. University of South Carolina Press, 2000.

The Town and the City he also wrote about his high school relationship with Mary Carney and explicitly he dealt with it later in the book, *Maggie Cassidy* (1959).⁴⁴

3.1.5.1 On the Road

The so called classic novel of the Beat Generation *On the Road* was published in the 1957 after almost seven years of rejection from many publishers. Jack started working on the novel in 1951 and had it written in the course of three weeks under the influence of Benzdrine and caffeine using a single scroll of paper. The publishers called it unliterary or loosely structured. And yet the book became very famous and is still popular with many readers especially among youth. Matt Theado wrote in his book *Understanding of Jack Kerouac* that *On the Road* is both a story and a cultural event. For American literary counterculture this book became a classic.⁴⁵

On the road is an autobiographical novel which tells the story of two young men. The novel itself does not contain a plot. It is more of a set of Kerouac's memories with depiction of nature, scenery, places, experiences and emotions from Jack's travels throughout the USA and Mexico. The main character's name is Sal Paradise and he represents Jack Kerouac. Sal in the narrator of the story, he is very calm and decent. Deep inside him he feels the need to experience the unfettered life and enjoy it more. This all happened when he got to meet the second important character Dean Moriarty. Dean is based on Jack's good friend Neal Cassady. The character of Dean just like Cassady comes from Denver and also had difficult childhood and problems with breaking the law. For Sal Dean became an idol because of his attitude towards life. He admired his ability to enjoy life to the fullest. Dean is the prototype of the Beat nature. In the story many other characters appear and they are also inspired by the people from Kerouac's life.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ THEADO, M. *Understanding Jack Kerouac*. University of South Carolina Press, 2000.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ KEROUAC, J. *On the Road*. London: Penguin Classics 2000.

3.2 Lawrence Ferlinghetti

Lawrence Ferlinghetti was born on March 24th, 1919 in Yonkers, New York. He spent his early childhood in France where he was raised by his relative. Shortly before Lawrence was born his father died and his mother was placed in a mental hospital. During World War II he worked as a naval officer and took part in the Normandy landings. After the war Lawrence studied at Columbia University and he got his PhD at Sorbonne in Paris.⁴⁷

In 1950 Ferlinghetti settled in San Francisco. Two years later he and his friend Peter Martin launched there the *City Lights Pocket Bookshop* which sold paperbacks. In 1955 Lawrence and Peter started *City Lights Publishers* which was a book-publishing venture that helped start careers of many alternative local and international poets. They published Allen Ginsberg's collection of poems *Howl and Other Poems* (1956) which brought up a trial for disseminating pornography. The publicity of the trial popularized the Beat Generation movement and also Ferlinghetti's publishing house and bookstore. His San Francisco bookstore became the center of poetic avant-garde.

The publishing activity started with Ferlinghetti's first collection *Pictures of the Gone World* (1955). In the 1958 came out his most famous piece of work *A Coney Island of the Mind*. In the 1960s Lawrence published his experimental novel *Her* (1960), a collection of poems *Starting From San Francisco* (1961) and two of his dramas written in the spirit of absurd drama *Unfair Arguments with Existence* (1963) and *Routines* (1964). In the second half of the 60's he pursued his travels around Europe.

Ferlinghetti spent some time living in a hippie commune in New Mexico where he experimented with LSD and psychedelic mushrooms and consistently devoting his time to Buddhism.⁴⁸

In the following decades he travelled a lot, attended various festivals and conferences for poets and almost every other two years published a new collection of his poems. Ferlinghetti started spending more time with the publishing, translating and also painting. In 1990 his first own art exhibition happened.

⁴⁷ ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA: Lawrence Ferlinghetti, American Poet [online] last revision 2021 [cit. 2.3. 2021] retrieved from < <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Lawrence-Ferlinghetti> >

⁴⁸ PECHÁČKOVÁ, I. S Ferlinghettim v Praze: rozhovory. Praha: Meander 1999. (my translation)

In the 1998 Ferlinghetti visited Prague for the Prague Writers' Festival. Lawrence performed on the 20th of April and his reading was accompanied with the music of Vladimír Merta. It was an exceptional experience and because of that Ferlinghetti devoted to the Prague audience his new poem *Rivers of Light*.⁴⁹

Lawrence Ferlinghetti died on February 22, 2021 in San Francisco in the age of 101.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ PECHÁČKOVÁ, I. S Ferlinghettim v Praze: rozhovory. Praha: Meander 1999. (my translation)

⁵⁰ ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA: Lawrence Ferlinghetti, American Poet [online] last revision 2021 [cit. 2.3. 2021] retrieved from < <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Lawrence-Ferlinghetti> >

3.3 Gary Snyder

Gary Snyder was born on May 8, 1930 in San Francisco. This author identified with the Beat movement in the early 1950s and later in the 60s he became a spokesman for the concerns of communal living and ecological activism. He is an American poet influenced by the work of Walt Whitman and Ezra Pound and for his poetry he received the Pulitzer Prize in 1975. Until his retirement in 2002 he taught at the University of California.

Gary was raised on small farms in Washington state and Oregon. His connection to the nature from an early childhood mirrored in his work and also his beliefs. The wanton destruction of the Pacific Northwestern forests distressed Snyder and he began studying Indian cultures. Snyder learned about survival techniques, during studying at university he worked as a lumberjack or firewatcher in the deep woods. The balance between physical labor and intellectual pursuit mirrors in his early writing.

Snyder studied at Reed College in Portland and then anthropology at Indiana University. He became friends with Ginsberg and Kerouac and participated at the historical reading at Six Gallery where Ginsberg presented *Howl*.

Snyder's poetry and prose deals with physical reality blending with inner insight received through the practice of Zen Buddhism. In the second half of 1950s he traveled to Japan to study Zen Buddhism. Japanese haiku was also an influence for his free verse. The emphasis on the celebration of the natural aspect kind of removed from the stream of Beat writing. In fact, he is identified more as a poet of the San Francisco Renaissance along with Jack Spicer or Robert Duncan.⁵¹

The experiences from his working as lumberjack and ranger are prominent in his first two collections of poems *Riprap* (1959) and *Myths and Texts* (1960). Snyder's interest in the Eastern religion and philosophies mirrored in *The Back Country* (1967) and *Regarding Wave* (1969). In 1974 he published his Pulitzer Prize winning piece *Turtle Island* a volume which deals with the theme of ecological consciousness. Later on, Snyder published *The Old Ways* (1977) which is a selection of essays about tribal life. In 2004 his volume of all-new poetry in 20 years came out. This collection is once again bringing nature

⁵¹ ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA: Gary Snyder, American Poet [online] last revision 2019 [cit. 2.3. 2021] retrieved from <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Gary-Snyder>>

closer to the reader's vision and it is called *Danger on Peaks*. Later collection *This Present Moment* (2015) deals with environmental issues.

Snyder built his own house along the Yuba River in the northern Sierra Nevada Mountains and he has lived there ever since.⁵²

⁵² ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA: Gary Snyder, American Poet [online] last revision 2019 [cit. 2.3. 2021] retrieved from <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Gary-Snyder>>

3.4 Allen Ginsberg

Only a few of Allen Ginsberg's literary companions contributed to the modern American literature and the mind set of the society in a way that the work of Ginsberg did. Nowadays, his voice is generally recognized as irreplaceable in the American poetry of the second half of the 20th century. Not everyone from the Beat movement was able and willing to accept the variety of life roles in which Ginsberg as a poet, society critic, activist, political extremist or even a visionary, indelibly signed into the postwar history. Unlike the other members of the Beat generation, Ginsberg stayed significantly more productive at the scene not stopping to raise attention not only with his continuous artistic progress, continuity of his thinking, but also with growing perception towards global issues and spiritual extent of life.

Ginsberg constantly fought with that the members of the Beat generation were considered primarily social or even political rebels in the context of postwar America which in their eyes was falling deeper into consumerism and cheap pseudo-patriotic optimism. The Beat revolt according to Ginsberg was supposed to be primarily spiritual, cultural and ultimately esthetic revolt.⁵³

3.4.1 Early Life

Allen Ginsberg was born on June 3, 1926, Newark, New Jersey and grew up in Paterson. His childhood years were hard because of his mother's hysteria and mental instability. Young Allen had to care of her and ease her outbreaks. Very often she highly feared assassination and believed that her mother-in-law wanted to poison her or imagined that she was spied on. During Ginsberg's adolescence she was hospitalized for three years and when she returned home, Naomi suffered from amnesia after electric and insulin shock therapy. Soon Naomi left her family to live with her sister in Bronx. Allen's visits to his mother burdened him with hopelessness. Ginsberg's father Louis Ginsberg was a contrast to his mother. Louis was a high school teacher, poetry lover, conservative but liberal person of Jewish origin.⁵⁴ Naomi was an active member of the communist party and very often she would take Allen and his older brother Eugene to party meetings. The contrast between the two parents mentioned Ginsberg in one of his interviews. He said that his

⁵³ GINSBERG, A. Karma červená, bílá a modrá: výbor z díla. Editor Josef Jařab. Mladá fronta, Praha 2001. (my translation)

⁵⁴ TYTELL, J. Naked Angels the lives & literature of the Beat Generation. New York: McGraw-Hill 1977.

mother made up bedtime stories about how the good king helped suffering workers whereas his father recited poetry.⁵⁵

3.4.2 Ginsberg and Religion

Ginsberg grew up in a Jewish family, but he saw his origin more as a matter of culture rather than religion. At the Jewish and also Catholic religious tradition he perceived very critically the element of monotheism. The solution to his personal crisis emerged during his studies at Columbia University when he learned about Buddhism. Studying Buddhism Ginsberg and other members of the Beat movement found thought openness, tolerance and meditateness. Practicing meditation was for Ginsberg a way of connecting physical world with the possibility of expansion of his consciousness.

Ginsberg preferred the tradition of Buddhism rather than his inherited tradition of Judaism. His cold and critical relationship towards Jewish tradition did not mean that he would have wanted to break ties with his family. Ginsberg was a devoted son, he kept close to his family and relatives, honored family ties as something sacred.⁵⁶

3.4.3 Columbia University and New York

In 1943 Allen began his studies at Columbia University at the age of seventeen. At Columbia he studied economics because he wanted to help by working within the labor movement, but after attending a course on great-book taught by a novelist and literary critic Lionel Trilling he already knew that his interests were somewhere else. One of his classmates at this course was Lucien Carr and it was him who encouraged Ginsberg to write poems. During that time Ginsberg's long struggle with self-determination and understanding of himself started and was accompanied by anxiety. He was also trying to find himself as a poet, but it was not easy, because he was not sure about the style in which he wanted to write and he had to deal with his father's criticism, which discouraged him to experiment. The distress and anxieties were strengthened by uncertainty of his sexual orientation.⁵⁷

“His early inclinations were homosexual – originally, he wanted to attend Columbia because of an unrequited infatuation for a former schoolmate who had enrolled there. The

⁵⁵ WIKIPEDIA THE FREE ENCYKLOPEDIA: Allen Ginsberg [online] last revision 2021 [cit. 1.4. 2021] retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allen_Ginsberg#Relationship_with_his_parents

⁵⁶ GINSBERG, A. Karma červená, bílá a modrá: výběr z díla. Editor Josef Jařab. Mladá fronta, Praha 2001. (my translation)

⁵⁷ TYTELL, J. Naked Angels the lives & literature of the Beat Generation. New York: McGraw-Hill 1977.

*authoritarian culture of the years after the war had categorized homosexuality as a diseased perversion bordering on criminality.”*⁵⁸

Ginsberg found solace with his friends. Jack Kerouac acted as a trusting figure in Allen's life and his tolerance and understanding diffused Ginsberg's guilt. William Burroughs offered him to try psychoanalysis by Wilhelm Reich which helped him to unveil his intimate inner feelings and brought light into his situation. Ginsberg's confusion was no longer so strong, but the feeling of disclosure to the outside world still persisted.

Allen also confided his problem with Lucien Carr, but did not receive such understanding as he did from Kerouac and Burroughs. Lucien mocked his idealistic aspirations and told him that his virginal naivety comes from his inexperienced life. Ironically, Carr's incident with David Krammer indirectly led to Ginsberg's suspension from Columbia. Carr had been expelled from the university and Kerouac had been asked to keep away from the campus, but they were discovered to be living in Ginsberg's dormitory room. A chambermaid had discovered offensive writings were inscribed on the dirty film of the window in Ginsberg's room – “*Fuck the Jews*” and “*Nicholas Murray Butler has no balls*”. Because of that Ginsberg was temporarily suspended. To be admitted again he had to undergo a psychiatric examination.

The relationship between Ginsberg and Neal Cassady could be considered a difficult one. Cassady was hungry for new knowledge and he could earn that by having a love affair with young Ginsberg. Despite Cassady's bisexuality he preferred women and was not able to offer Ginsberg the relationship he wanted which made him very disappointed and he chose to run away.

Ginsberg started wandering around the filthy part of New York, sucking in the argot of jazz and learning about how to communicate with ordinary people, hustlers and nonintellectuals. He even worked at a variety of jobs. About all that he wrote that he was allowed to “*fade into the landscape of the common world*”. The real encounter with the world came when he embarked on a voyage on a ship in the early 1946.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ TYTELL, J. *Naked Angels the lives & literature of the Beat Generation*. New York: McGraw-Hill 1977.(p 82)

⁵⁹ TYTELL, J. *Naked Angels the lives & literature of the Beat Generation*. New York: McGraw-Hill 1977.

3.4.4 Life after the University

After finishing the studies at Columbia university Ginsberg fell deeper into his despair because of the separation from his university friends. He felt isolated and disappointed in himself because he lacked the courage to change. Allen was drowning in depression, moving on the edge of madness and suffering from strange visions. For example, once during masturbation he saw William Blake. After a series of visions which helped him to understand the meaning of a number of poems he managed to get ripped out of the numbness. These visions also appear in many of his texts. The awakening layed in an uncontrolled life full of drugs, sex and questionable friends. It was Ginsberg's way of breaking away from his previous life of rationality and stupor. It all started when Herbert Huncke, ravaged by drugs knocked on Ginsberg's door. Huncke reminded him of the feelings he felt with Cassady and Ginsberg lured by the self-torture started taking care of devastated Huncke. Despite the warning of Burroughs Ginsberg decided to keep Huncke living with him. Huncke acted like a parasite, he kept on inviting his strange friends and even hiding stolen things. This problematic friendship resulted in Ginsberg's hospitalization at psychiatry.⁶⁰

During the hospitalization Ginsberg made friends with one of the patients who was a great influence. This patient's name was Carl Solomon. Carl introduced him to French surrealists and discussed literature with him. Ginsberg's poem *Howl* was dedicated to Solomon and his name appears there. "*Carl Solomon! I'm with you in Rockland; where you're madder than I am*"⁶¹. A poet William Carlos Williams wrote in his preface: "*Literally he has, from all the evidence, been through hell. On the way he met a man named Carl Solomon with whom he shared among the teeth and excrement of this life something that cannot be described but in the words he has used to describe it. It is a howl of defeat. Not defeat at all for he has gone through defeat as if it were an ordinary experience, a trivial experience. Everyone in this life is defeated but a man, if he be a man, is not defeated.*"⁶²

Williams was an inspirational friend to Ginsberg. He helped him to consolidate an opinion on his form and told him that a poet must create based on his original impulse in his mind.

⁶⁰ TYTELL, J. *Naked Angels the lives & literature of the Beat Generation*. New York: McGraw-Hill 1977.

⁶¹ POETRY FOUNDATION: *Howl* by Allen Ginsberg, [online] [cit. 14.4. 2021] retrieved from <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49303/howl>>

⁶² MODERN AMERICAN POETRY: William Carlos Williams: *On Howl* [online] last revision 2020 [cit. 14.4. 2021] retrieved from <<https://www.modernamericanpoetry.org/node/53735>>

When Ginsberg moved to San Francisco in 1954 Williams introduced him to key figures in the San Francisco poetry scene like Kenneth Rexorth or Michael McClure who helped him with the Six Gallery reading.

Another important milestone which shaped Ginsberg was meeting Peter Orlovsky. Orlovsky was a young man who helped Allen to finally get rid of his sexual shyness and confusion. Gradually, Orlovsky became a life partner to Ginsberg and filled his unfulfilled desire for love he was searching for his whole life. ⁶³

3.4.5 The Rest of Ginsberg's Life

Just like the other authors of the Beat Generation Ginsberg himself spent a lot of time travelling. He travelled through the United States and also visited European, Asian and African countries. When he was in Mexico, he tried various kinds of drugs then in India he learned about Buddhism. Ginsberg influenced many lives of the young people in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic in the late 1960s and there is no wonder that when he visited Prague, he was named the 'May King'.

The choice of lifestyle resulted in serious health problems. Ginsberg was suffering from hepatitis among other issues. In the spring of 1997, he was diagnosed with liver cancer and shortly after that on April 5, 1997, at his age of seventy, he died in his East Village loft surrounded by friends. ⁶⁴

⁶³ TYTELL, J. *Naked Angels the lives & literature of the Beat Generation*. New York: McGraw-Hill 1977.

⁶⁴ GINSBERG, A. *Karma červená, bílá a modrá: výbor z díla*. Editor Josef Jařab. Mladá fronta, Praha 2001. (my translation)

4 GINSBERG'S WORK

Throughout Ginsberg's long literary career (1960s till 1990s) he published numerous collections of poetry, including *Kaddish and Other Poems* (1961), *Planet News: Poems* (1961-1967) and *The Fall of America: Poems of These States* (1973). All of these named collections were published in Ferlinghetti's City Lights publishing house. His most popular collection *Howl and other Poems* (1956) became one of the most important pieces of the Beat movement.

4.1 Howl

The collection of poems *Howl and other Poems* which included Ginsberg's most famous poem *Howl* was published in 1956, but the poem was already introduced in 1955. It happened at the reading in the Six Gallery where Ginsberg read the excerpts from *Howl* with Kerouac pounding the wine pitcher in the background to give it a jazz concert atmosphere. This event became a crucial moment for the Beat Generation. The following year City Lights Bookstore published the collection, but this very controversial poem shocked American society and it had to undergo a trial for being obscene. Fortunately, *Howl* was declared to have literary merit and because of the publicity the trial brought it became immediately very well selling book and was translated into many other languages. The whole process of the trial will be described in the chapter The Howl Obscenity Trial (4.1.1).⁶⁵

The title itself is very important for setting the tone of the poem it has an onomatopoeic character and it indicates the cry for all the repression and asks to protest against materialism, conformity and mechanization leaning towards war which were the fear-creating problems of the 1950s. *Howl* represents a picture of a nightmare world of this generation. In the poem Ginsberg wants to describe the desperation and the persecution of a group of outcasts who have become naked and who are seeking transcendent reality.

Like most of the work of the Beat writers, *Howl* is grounded in autobiography. The poem is full of experiences of the writer himself and also his friends. *Howl* is dedicated to Ginsberg's friend Carl Solomon whom he met in mental institution and it is divided into three, alternatively four parts.

⁶⁵ ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA: The "Howl" Heard Round the World [online] [cit. 15.4. 2021] retrieved from <<https://www.britannica.com/story/harry-potter-and-the-much-anticipated-return>>

Ginsberg's great inspiration was Walt Whitman, which is very obvious in this poem, especially in the use of free verse and his long rhythmic lines. The free verse and illogical linking of the words is characteristic for *Howl*. The atmosphere of reading is underlined by the syncopated rhythm of the bebop jazz. Each line of *Howl* is conceived as a single breath unit. In the poem there are used elements of mysticism and naturalism for example "...who ate fire in paint hotels or drank turpentine in Paradise Alley, death, or purgatoried their torsos; night after night; with dreams, with drugs, with waking nightmares, alcohol; and cock and endless balls...".⁶⁶ Repetition is also key to this poem. Each part or section has a word which is repeated very often. In the first part the repetition is in the use of the pronoun 'who' which opens each line. In the second part the lines open with 'Moloch' and in the third part each line starts with 'I'm with you in Rockland'.

The language of the poem consists mostly of slang words. Ginsberg did not come a long way for obscene words such as 'cock' or 'cunt'. As for the composition of the poem it appears to be disorganized because of the loose structure. The text is not divided into stanzas but into the three sections. In the notes to the book *Howl and Other Poems* Ginsberg wrote that he was inspired with Kerouac's spontaneous and quick style of writing. The spontaneity is obvious in using the technique of stream of consciousness and to speed up the writing he probably used the symbol '&' instead of 'and'. Or he might have used it because of graphic reasons as it is not a rule. The first part of the poem is one very long sentence ending with a dot whereas in the second part he uses shorter sentences which are ending with an exclamation mark. "...Moloch! Moloch! Nightmare of Moloch! Moloch the loveless! Mental Moloch! Moloch the heavy; judger of men!...".⁶⁷ The exclamation marks show the anger and desperation he is venting.

The First Part

As previously mentioned, the first part of *Howl* is one long complex sentence and it is not divided into stanzas. The stanza consists of seventy eight lines. The poem opens with the main clause "*I saw the best minds...*"⁶⁸ continuing with subordinate clauses which all start with 'who' and followed by a verb.

⁶⁶ POETRY FOUNDATION: *Howl* by Allen Ginsberg, [online] [cit. 14.4. 2021] retrieved from <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49303/howl>>

⁶⁷ POETRY FOUNDATION: *Howl* by Allen Ginsberg, [online] [cit. 14.4. 2021] retrieved from <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49303/howl>>

⁶⁸ POETRY FOUNDATION: *Howl* by Allen Ginsberg, [online] [cit. 14.4. 2021] retrieved from <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49303/howl>>

In the first part Ginsberg wants to basically explain who the ‘best minds’ were, what they did and why. For Ginsberg and the whole Beat movement the best minds of the 50s were not lawyers, scientists or professors at universities but they saw them in dropouts, drug users, travelers and musicians. On one side he sees them being oppressed but at the same time they are in a state of vision and bringing salvation to the society.

*“I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked; dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix, ...”*⁶⁹

Ginsberg wanted to show what the situation in the 1950s did to people who would not succumb to the conformity. The speaker – Ginsberg is the witness of the destruction of these people. Because of their political beliefs the authorities abused them and they also were not able to earn for living. So, in the desperation they were wandering the dark filthy streets looking for something to fix them which were drugs. The ‘negro streets’ are also an allusion to the fascination of the African American culture and jazz.

*“...who passed through universities with radiant cool eyes hallucinating Arkansas and Blake-light tragedy among the scholars of war; who were expelled from the academies for crazy & publishing obscene odes on the windows of skull, ...”*⁷⁰

In these lines Ginsberg wanted to show that ‘the best minds’ have only passed through universities not leaving any kind of significant academic impact. He is trying to point out that the institutions would not accept their visions and work. Most of the Beat writers did not finish with a degree and Ginsberg was expelled for writing obscene words on windows of his room. Important phrase he used is ‘scholars of war’. That is an insinuation on how the scientist were using their intelligence to create powerful weapons.

Another important theme of the poem is location. Ginsberg mentions the places where the Beats were meeting and where they spent time. He is touring through the boroughs of New York like Bronx or Brooklyn, mentioning for example the Bronx Zoo or the iconic Brooklyn Bridge. The Beats are known for their passion for travelling which served them for their spiritual growth.

⁶⁹ POETRY FOUNDATION: Howl by Allen Ginsberg, [online] [cit. 14.4. 2021] retrieved from <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49303/howl>>

⁷⁰ POETRY FOUNDATION: Howl by Allen Ginsberg, [online] [cit. 14.4. 2021] retrieved from <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49303/howl>>

*“...who vanished into nowhere Zen New Jersey leaving a trail of ambiguous picture post-cards of Atlantic City Hall, suffering Eastern sweats and Tangerian bone-grindings and migraines of China under junk-withdrawal in Newark’s bleak furnished room, ...”*⁷¹

Most of the Beats were inclining towards Eastern religion and wanted to travel and learn from the masters. The eagerness is described with the use of the phrase ‘Eastern sweats’.

The first part of the poem ends with Ginsberg calling for God out of desperation and madness, but he is still full of hope that the work of the Beats will not be forgotten.

In this section of the whole poem he is raising a question of “Who or what is responsible for destroying the best minds?”.

The Second Part

The second part of *Howl* is in the same form as the first part but much shorter. There is again repetition and the word repeating is ‘Moloch’. As previously mentioned, he is using short statements ending with exclamation mark.

This part opens up with a question *“What sphinx of cement and aluminum bashed open their skulls and ate up their brains and imagination?”*.⁷² Ginsberg is asking what made his friends go mad and the answer comes right after. He is blaming Moloch. Moloch is a god from Middle Eastern culture to whom people sacrificed their children by throwing them into a fire. It is a metaphor for the American society of the 1950s which swallows the best minds and leaves them in madness.⁷³

*“...Moloch whose skyscrapers stand in the long streets like endless Jehovahs! Moloch whose factories dream and croak in the fog! Moloch whose smoke-stacks and antennae crown the cities!; Moloch whose love is endless oil and stone! Moloch whose soul is electricity and banks! Moloch whose poverty is the specter of genius! Moloch whose fate is a cloud of sexless hydrogen! Moloch whose name is the Mind! ...”*⁷⁴

⁷¹ POETRY FOUNDATION: Howl by Allen Ginsberg, [online] [cit. 14.4. 2021] retrieved from <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49303/howl>>

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ 100+1: Děti darované Molochovi: Barbarský zvyk potvrdily archeologické vykopávky, [online] 2019 [cit. 14.4. 2021] retrieved from <<https://www.stoplusjednicka.cz/deti-darovane-molochovi-barbarsky-zvyk-potvrdily-archeologicke-vy-kopavky>>

⁷⁴ POETRY FOUNDATION: Howl by Allen Ginsberg, [online] [cit. 14.4. 2021] retrieved from <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49303/howl>>

Ginsberg blames on Moloch all the problems of the society like materialism and conformity. He is also being very ironic using the words like 'love' and 'soul' to describe Moloch. The statement 'cloud and sexless hydrogen' deals with the problem of the society not accepting homosexuality and sending people for their sexuality into mental institutions to "heal them". With this statement he also points out the nuclear threat. Ginsberg is giving Moloch a name – the Mind. That is because Moloch represents the madness which devoured the best minds.

*"...Moloch who entered my soul early! Moloch in whom I am consciousness without a body!..."*⁷⁵

Almost at the end of this part Ginsberg admits that Moloch has entered his soul at his young age probably when he was struggling with his sexuality.

The Third Part

The third part of the poem is directly addressed to Carl Solomon whom Ginsberg met during his hospitalization at the Columbia Presbyterian Psychology Institute. In the poem Ginsberg refers to the institution with a fictional name 'Rockland' and the statement 'I'm with you in Rockland' repeats throughout the whole section. By repeating it he is showing his solidarity and compassion not only to Solomon but to all those who have been unfairly driven mad by the society. This part also describes how the patients at mental institutions are treated.

Solomon was a close friend to Ginsberg he was an inspiration for him as a writer and he also reminded of the struggles with insanity of his mother. *"...I'm with you in Rockland where you imitate the shade of my mother..."*⁷⁶ It may seem ridiculous, because Ginsberg mother's hysteria was not easy for him.

*"...I'm with you in Rockland; where you bang on the catatonic piano the soul is innocent and immortal it should never die ungodly in an armed madhouse ..."*⁷⁷

Solomon was also one of the best minds and the thought of his soul being treated in an inhuman United States' mental institution is unbearable for Ginsberg. The treatments used to treat insane people are beyond inhuman. The doctors used shock therapies to

⁷⁵ POETRY FOUNDATION: Howl by Allen Ginsberg, [online] [cit. 14.4. 2021] retrieved from <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49303/howl>>

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

change patterns of thinking in the human brain. For example, to “treat” homosexuality. Ginsberg describes the nurses as harpies.

At the end of this part and also the very end of the poem Ginsberg talks about a dream of his. The dream is about meeting Solomon again at his cottage in the Western part of America.

4.1.1 The Howl Obscenity Trial

*“Obscenity laws are concerned with prohibiting lewd or sexually charged words or pictured, and with determining what role the government should have in regulating what people should read and see.”*⁷⁸

The freedom of expression in America did not extend to any writing which contained obvious sexual references. No matter how ethically or beautifully written, if the work depicted sexual acts it was considered obscene and it was banned in the United States. The, beginning in 1957, a number of court decisions began to remove restriction on obscene literature.

After the Six Gallery performance, publisher and fellow Beat poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti decided to publish Ginsberg’s first collection of poems. When the paperback version was released, Ferlinghetti and his partner Shigeyosi Murao were arrested for obscenity charges. There was a long trial in which many poets, critics and academics testified whether is the poem purely obscene or if it does have any literary merit and social value.⁷⁹

Q. All right. Now then, let’s take this next sentence: “Who blew and were blown by those human seraphim, the sailors, caresses of Atlantic and Caribbean love.” Now, of course, you know what “blew” and “blown” mean, I hope...

A. Yes.

Q. They are words of the street, are they not?

A. I believe so.

Q. Now, are those words necessary to this “Howl”?

A. Those words are words that are intended to represent – let me start over. The essence of this poem is the impression of a world in which all sexuality is confused and corrupted.

⁷⁸ MORGAN, B., PETERS, N., J. Howl on Trial. San Francisco: City Lights Publishers 2006. (p. 5)

⁷⁹ MORGAN, B., PETERS, N., J. Howl on Trial. San Francisco: City Lights Publishers 2006.

*These words indicate a corrupt sexual act. Therefore, they are part of the essence of the picture which the author is trying to give us of modern life as a state of hell.*⁸⁰

These are excerpts from the trial with judge Clayton W. Horn. This is an example from the cross-examination by Ralph McIntosh, the Prosecution attorney, with the witness for the Defense Mark Schorer (1908-1977) an American writer and critic. Schorer is trying to explain McIntosh that *Howl* has a literary merit and that the words used in the poem are necessary for the essence of it.

After the long trial *Howl* was ruled not obscene and *City Lights* was exonerated. Judge Clayton W. Horn dismissed the case and decided that *Howl* was not without “redeeming social importance” and did not have a “substantial tendency to deprave or corrupt its readers by inciting lascivious thoughts or arousing lustful desires”. The enormous publicity of the trial brought national spotlight to the Beat Movement and inspired many other poets.⁸¹

⁸⁰ MORGAN, B., PETERS, N., J. *Howl on Trial*. San Francisco: City Lights Publishers 2006.

⁸¹ ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA: The “Howl” Heard Round the World [online] [cit. 15.4. 2021] retrieved from <<https://www.britannica.com/story/harry-potter-and-the-much-anticipated-return>>

4.2 Kral Majales

Kral Majales is a poem which Ginsberg wrote in 1965 on a plane after being deported from Prague. Despite not being welcomed by our political regime his stay left him a beautiful memory of being crowned as the King of May by students. Besides artistic value this poem brings interesting facts about real incidents which Ginsberg experienced in Prague like being followed and provoked by StB.

*“... a poem about the enthusiastic reception of Ginsberg by Prague students under the hostile surveillance of the Czechoslovakian police and secret agents who followed Ginsberg everywhere. The poem is a denial of the conspiratorial military-police closure on consciousness – communist and capitalist – and joyous recognition of the Dionysian “King of May” spirit which, as Plato warned, has always been the great catalyst for change.”*⁸²⁾

This is how John Tytell described the poem *Kral Majales* in his book *Naked Angels* (1976).

4.2.1 The Story Behind Kral Majales

In 1965 Allen Ginsberg got an invitation to participate in a literary contest as a juror in Cuba. His initial enthusiasm of visiting this country which attracted the western intellectual left wing quickly turned into disillusion and escalated in Ginsberg’s expulsion from Cuba. The reasons for expulsion were his public disagreement with the political situation and standing up for homosexuals.⁸³

Because of the blockade Ginsberg could not get straight back to his homeland and the plane had to land in Prague before flying to London. Waiting at the Prague airport he remembered he had two friends in our capital city – Jan Zábřana and Josef Škvorecký. Both of them helped him to legalize Ginsberg’s stay and he stayed in Prague from January 18th till half of March. Most of his time in Prague he spent in the poetic winery Viola where Czechoslovakian avantgarde artists and young people were meeting.

A month later, March 19th, Ginsberg travelled to the Soviet Union where he met with a couple of Russian writers. He came back to Czechoslovakia on the 29th of April to wait

⁸² TYTELL, J. *Naked Angels the lives & literature of the Beat Generation*. New York: McGraw-Hill 1977. (p. 246)

⁸³ BLAŽEK, P.: *Vyhoštění krále majálesu. Paměť a dějiny*. Praha: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online] 2011 [cit. 16.4. 2021] retrieved from <<https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/pamet-dejiny/pad1102/28-43.pdf>> (my translation)

here for few days before getting to London and back to America. While waiting to go back home, something incredible happened. A delegation of students knocked on his door and offered him a candidacy for the King of May (Král majálesu).

At the end of April the preparations for the student event – Majáles, which re-implemented after nine years, were culminating. Permitting the event again was very important for the Communist party because of the previous protests of young people against the regime. The Communist were trying to use this festival for their propaganda but in the end it all ended up very differently than they expected.⁸⁴

Originally the students of the Czech Technical University in Prague nominated for the King of May candidacy Josef Škvorecký who refused it and recommended to give it to Allen Ginsberg. Ginsberg was thrilled to accept it and headed with the students at the Old Town Square. Miroslav Kovařík, who is a publicist and pedagogue, said in an interview with Pavel Hlavatý at Český Rozhlas radio station that the nomination was a very big deal for Ginsberg and he was very proud of it. Kovařík had the opportunity to meet Ginsberg when he came back to Czechoslovakia in 1990.⁸⁵

The whole parade with students in costumes and allegorical vehicles started at the Old Town Square and continued to Stromovka where the coronation took place. This whole event was watched by more than 150 thousand people. Part of the parade were student police and a number of undercover members of StB. The bearded soon to be king was standing at one of the allegorical vehicles with colorful beads around his neck and a shiny crown. During the parade he was singing Buddhist mantras.⁸⁶

“I expected to find a small King of May celebration with a few hundred or a thousand skinny, badly dressed students at the park – instead there was a sea of faces. ... There was a covered stage for rock concerts. Everybody had to go up to the mic and deliver an agitprop speech. ... When I was at the mic, I couldn’t speak Czech at all so I solved the

⁸⁴ BLAŽEK, P.: Vyhoštění krále majálesu. Paměť a dějiny. Praha: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online] 2011 [cit. 16.4. 2021] retrieved from < <https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/pamet-dejiny/pad1102/28-43.pdf>> (my translation)

⁸⁵ ČESKÁ KRONIKA: Rok 1965: Králem je Ginsberg! Beatnický básník králem Majálesu [online] 2018 [cit. 16.4. 2021] retrieved from < <https://plus.rozhlas.cz/rok-1965-kralem-je-ginsberg-beatnický-basnik-kralem-majalesu-7623352>> (my translation)

⁸⁶ BLAŽEK, P.: Vyhoštění krále majálesu. Paměť a dějiny. Praha: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online] 2011 [cit. 16.4. 2021] retrieved from < <https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/pamet-dejiny/pad1102/28-43.pdf>> (my translation)

*problem by singing Om shri mantraja, Om shri mantraja, the whole time when it was my turn, maybe four minutes. ...”.*⁸⁷

From the interview it is visible that Ginsberg was very surprised or even shocked by the size of the celebration. In the interview he also explained why he had chosen this particular mantra. This mantra is about future and it perfectly suited the situation of Czechoslovakian society which was according to him slowly moving in the direction of open thinking. This moving forward escalated into the Prague Spring in 1968 but unfortunately quickly ended with the invasion of Soviet army and the dark era of normalization started.⁸⁸

The celebration moved from Stromovka to Hlávková dorms where the American poet lead discussion. Ginsberg expressed that he really liked the idea behind the Prague Majáles and he was not afraid to criticize the current regime in Czechoslovakia. The students asked him whether he feels that there is freedom in Czechoslovakia.⁸⁹ He said: *“In the West, I can say what I think. When I’m in Prague I have to think about what I want to say, and when I was in Moscow I didn’t speak at all!”.*⁹⁰ And he was right because in the group of student was one incognito member of StB.

Ginsberg was watched by the secret police during his stay in January and it was not different when he came back in April. Right after the coronation secret agent Karel Vodrážka followed him and his statement was the one of the reasons of Ginsberg’s expulsion.

Allen was carrying a notebook with him the whole time which mysteriously disappeared and reappeared in the hands of secret police. On the night of May 5th was Ginsberg attacked during his walk in the streets of Prague and mysterious man shouted at him that he is *“bouzerant”*. For sure it was another provocation which has the StB prepared.

The official reason for Ginsberg’s expulsion supposedly were complaints from parents of underaged children. According to them they suffered psychological harm when meeting

⁸⁷ LASS, A.: Allen Ginsberg – The King of May [online] [cit. 16.4. 2021] retrieved from <<https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/publikace/bic/bic0212/034-047.pdf>> (p. 42)

⁸⁸ BLAŽEK, P.: Vyhoštění krále majálesu. Paměť a dějiny. Praha: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online] 2011 [cit. 16.4. 2021] retrieved from <<https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/pamet-dejiny/pad1102/28-43.pdf>> (my translation)

⁸⁹ BLAŽEK, P.: Vyhoštění krále majálesu. Paměť a dějiny. Praha: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online] 2011 [cit. 16.4. 2021] retrieved from <<https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/pamet-dejiny/pad1102/28-43.pdf>> (my translation)

⁹⁰ BLAŽEK, P.: The Deportation of the King of May. Behind the Iron Curtain. Praha: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online] [cit. 16.4. 2021] retrieved from <<https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/publikace/bic/bic0212/034-047.pdf>>

Ginsberg. The positive media reaction which Ginsberg during his stay in January quickly disappeared and he was criticized in every ideological periodicals.

On the 7th of May Ginsberg left the Prague airport flying back to New York. On the way back to his home, overwhelmed with the emotions he experienced during the Prague Majáles the famous poem *Kral Majales* was created. During this event and his whole stay in Prague he inspired many young people and also the generation of artists.⁹¹

⁹¹ BLAŽEK, P.: Vyhoštění krále majálesu. Paměť a dějiny. Praha: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online] 2011 [cit. 16.4. 2021] retrieved from < <https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/pamet-dejiny/pad1102/28-43.pdf> > (my translation)

4.2.2 The Poem

*And the Communist have nothing to offer but fat cheeks and eyeglasses and lying policemen
and the Capitalists proffer Napalm and money in green suitcases to the Naked,
and the Communists create heavy industry but the heart is also heavy
and the beautiful engineers are all dead, the secret technicians conspire for their own glamour
in the Future, in the Future, but now drink vodka and lament the Security Forces,
and the Capitalists drink gin and whiskey on airplanes but let Indian brown millions starve
and when Communist and Capitalist assholes tangle the Just man is arrested or robbed or has his head cut off,
but not like Kabir, and the cigarette cough of the Just man above the clouds in the bright sunshine is a salute to the health of the blue sky.
For I was arrested thrice in Prague, once for singing drunk on Narodni street,
once knocked down on the midnight pavement by a mustached agent who screamed out BOUZERANT,
once for losing my notebooks of unusual sex politics dream opinions, and I was sent from Havana by planes by detectives in green uniform, and I was sent from Prague by plane by detectives in Czechoslovakian business suits,
Cardplayers out of Cezanne, the two strange dolls that entered Joseph K's room at morn
also entered mine and ate at my table, and examined my scribbles, and followed me night and morn from the houses of the lovers to the cafes of Centrum –
And I am the King of May, which is the power of sexual youth,
and I am the King of May, which is industry in eloquence and action in amour,
and I am the King of May, which is long hair of Adam and Beard of my own body
and I am the King of May, which Kral Majales in the Czechoslovakian tongue,
and I am the King of May, which id old Human poesy, and 100,000 people chose my name,
and I am the King of May, and in a few minutes I will land at London Airport,
and I am the King of May, naturally, for I am Slavic parentage and a*

Buddhist Jew

*who worships the Sacred Heart of Christ the blue body of Krishna the
straight back of Ram
yhe beads of Chicago the Nigerian singing Shiva Shiva in a manner which
I have invented,
and the King of May is a middleeuropean honor, mine in the XX century
despite space ships and the Time Machine, because I have heard the voice of Blake
in a vision
and repeat that voice. And I am the King of May that sleeps with teenagers
laughing.
And I am the King of May, that I may be expelled from my Kingdom with
Honor, as of old,
to show the difference between Caesar's Kingdom of the
May of Man –
and I am the King of May tho paranoid, for the Kingdom of May
is too beautiful to last for more than a month –
and I am the King of May because I touched my finger to my forehead
saluting
a luminous heavy girl trembling hands who said 'one moment Mr. Ginsberg'
before a fat young Plainclothesman stepped between our bodies – I was
going to England –
and I am the King of May, returning to see Bunhill Fields and walk
on Hampstead Heath,
and I am the King of May, in a giant jetplane touching Albion's airfield
trembling in fear
as the plane roars to a landing on the gray concrete, shakes & expels air,
and rolls slowly to a stop under the clouds with part of blue heaven still
visible.
and tho' I am the King of May, the Marxists have beat me upon the street,
kept me up all night in Police Station, followed me thru Springtime
Prague, detained me in secret and deported me from our kingdom by
airplane.
This I have written this poem on a jet seat in mid Heaven.⁹²*

⁹² GINSBERG, A. Karma červená, bílá a modrá: výbor z díla. Editor Josef Jařab. Mladá fronta, Praha 2001. (p. 155)

4.2.3 Analysis

As for the composition, the poem consists of one long stanza written in free form verse. Ginsberg is again using long sentences and repetition. The repetition is in using the conjunction 'and' with which he also begins the poem.

*"The poem depends on a sense of Blakean antithesis, the heavy industry and heavy heart of communism and the "shutdowns" of national statism in Cuba, America or Czechoslovakia, dominating the first half of the poem, then with a sudden violence, an utter lack of any transition, changing into an ebullient and soaring celebration of the May Day festivities - ..."*⁹³ This is a short summary of the poem by John Tytell.

The speaker is Ginsberg himself since he directly describes his experience. Right at the beginning of the poem he is comparing Communism and Capitalism. Before his visit at Cuba, Ginsberg was lightly sympathizing with the Marxian ideology, but after what he experienced there he lost his illusions. In the opening line *"And the Communist have nothing to offer but fat cheeks and eyeglasses and; lying policemen"*⁹⁴ he describe the looks of a communist and saying that communism may be an interesting idea, but the reality of it is different. Right after that he criticizes Capitalism which offers only money and uses the for creating bombs. The comparison between these two ideologies continues and getting to an end that both of the ideologies are wrong. *"... and when Communist and Capitalist assholes tangle the Just man is arrested or robbed or has his head cut off, ..."*⁹⁵ in this line he is showing that if an ideology with good intention is in the hands of a wrong person it can destroy people who disagree even a little bit with the authorities.

*"... For I was arrested thrice in Prague, once for singing drunk on Narodni street, once knocked down on the midnight pavement by a mustached agent who screamed out BOUZERANT, ..."*⁹⁶

Here is Ginsberg talking about his direct experience with the provocative actions of the StB. During his stay he had a shadow with him in the form of undercover policeman Karel Vodrážka who most likely stands behind the incident of Ginsberg being screamed at

⁹³ TYTELL, J. *Naked Angels the lives & literature of the Beat Generation*. New York: McGraw-Hill 1977. (p. 248)

⁹⁴ GINSBERG, A. *Karma červená, bílá a modrá: výběr z díla*. Editor Josef Jařab. Mladá fronta, Praha 2001. (p. 155)

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

offensive words. Then he continues writing about how he was followed at his every step and about the mysterious loss of his notebook.

“... also entered mine and ate at my table, examined my scribbles, and followed me night and morn from the houses of the lovers to the cafes of Centrum - ...”.⁹⁷

*“... and I am the King of May, which is old Human poesy, and 100,000 people chose my name, ...”*⁹⁸

In the second half of the poem the symbol ‘King of May’ is repeating and Ginsberg uses it to give himself the role of the main face of the Czechoslovakian youth rebelling against totalitarian regime. The youth chose him and put him to the front.

*“...And I am the King of May, which is the power of sexual youth, and I am the King of May, which is industry in eloquence and action in amour ...”*⁹⁹

Kral Majales is something like a utopia kingdom of love and happiness, without the totalitarian regimes lurking in the back, based on friendship, free sex and ecstasy. All of this he saw in the Majáles celebrations.

It is very obvious from the poem that Prague will always stay in Ginsberg’s heart even despite the unpleasant experience. One day he was the King of May and two day later attacked and held by police as a pariah and criminal. During his very short stay American poet experienced determination and hope gushing from the student celebrations but also the dark side of the regime in Czechoslovakia.

Twenty five years later in 1990 famous poet came back to Czechoslovakia which was still full of the euphoria from the end of totalitarian regime. At the airport current president Václav Havel greeted him together with other important people and artists. On the flight to Prague Ginsberg wrote another poem called “*Návrat Krále Majáles*”.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ GINSBERG, A. Karma červená, bílá a modrá: výběr z díla. Editor Josef Jařab. Mladá fronta, Praha 2001. (p. 155)

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ GINSBERG, A. Karma červená, bílá a modrá: výběr z díla. Editor Josef Jařab. Mladá fronta, Praha 2001.

CONCLUSION

This bachelor thesis focuses on the characteristics of the Beat Generation and its representatives, especially on the poet Allen Ginsberg. The aim of this thesis was to analyze the work of Allen Ginsberg and bring closer the circumstances of creating *Kral Majales*.

Firstly, I have chosen to write about the situation of the society and culture of the 1950s in America. I wanted to show the background of this era which was a part of life of the Beat writers and through their work they expressed the disagreement with the situation.

In the next part I described the events which were leading towards the birth of the Beat Generation outlining how the members met during their studies in New York. Then I spent some time on the chapter about the Beats attitude to religion, which was very important for them, especially Buddhism. Religion was a huge part of their life and it mirrored in their work. They have chosen an alternative life full of spirituality and they concentrated to find their own true self. Their lifestyle was very different from the mainstream one of that era and because of that they were considered outcasts and the society did not want to accept them. The Beat writers expressed their disagreement through art and the supporters of this movement – beatniks – showed it by demonstrating. A substantial part of the life of beatniks was jazz.

The next chapter is dedicated to creating profiles of the four members of the generation – Jack Kerouac, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Gary Snyder and Allen Ginsberg trying to include the principles and philosophy of their creating. Their work reflected the disagreement with the society of America at that time which for example refused their sexuality a sent them to mental institutions for being homosexual.

The last part is concentrating mainly on the work of Allen Ginsberg. I analyzed his two poems *Howl* and *Kral Majales* which is connected to our country. For a long time, I was fascinated by the presence of Ginsberg at the May student celebrations and thanks to this thesis I was able to learn more about it. Ginsberg stayed in our capital city for more than a month in 1965. Back then in the 1965 there was no freedom in our country and opinionated Ginsberg was a threat for the political system so they deported him. Going back to New York he thought he would never be able to come back but fortunately in 1990 he had the opportunity to visit our country again and this time it was a country full of freedom.

In my bachelor thesis I was trying to present a complete picture of one artistic generation. This generation extensively ties with our culture, because Ginsberg's appearance at the student celebration was something unbelievable and unimaginable in these times of the history of Czechoslovakia. He was an inspiration for the students and the students were an inspiration for him.

The work of this generation is still valid even though aimed at the society of the 1950s it inspires today's readers.

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