

Introduction to Global Beat Studies

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Recommended Citation

Harris, Oliver; and Mackay, Polina. "Introduction to Global Beat Studies." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 18.5 (2016): <<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2980>>

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Volume 18 Issue 5 (December 2016) Editorial 1
Oliver Harris and Polina Mackay,
"Introduction to *Global Beat Studies*"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss5/1>>

Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 18.5 (2016)**
Special Issue ***Global Beat Studies*. Ed. Oliver Harris and Polina Mackay**
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss5/>>

Oliver HARRIS and Polina MACKAY

Introduction to *Global Beat Studies*

Global Beat Studies—a special issue of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*—heralds a new phase in the evolution of Beat criticism and scholarship in two ways.

First, it is the result of a global network of critics and scholars researching individual Beat writers and Beat culture more broadly, building on the arguments first raised in *The Beat Generation and Europe* edited by Polina Mackay and Chad Weidner, a special issue of *Comparative American Studies* (11.3 [2013]). In *Global Beat Studies* contributors hailing from The Netherlands, Spain, Germany, Poland, Norway, Australia, Québec, Greece, and France together outnumber those who come from the traditional Anglo-American contexts of Beat criticism. The striking international range of its authors goes together with the international and comparative outlook of many of the essays. In this way, *Global Beat Studies* builds upon but takes in new directions the recent "transnational" shift in the field, helping to move the critical paradigm still further from the narrow US-American-centric focus that long dominated the field. Where Jimmy Fazzino's monograph *World Beats: Beat Generation Writing and the Worlding of U.S. Literature* (Dartmouth: UP of New England, 2016) explores how Beat literature contributes to an understanding of US's universality, and Nancy Grace and Jennie Skerl's edited collection *The Transnational Beat Generation* (New York: Palgrave, 2012) aims to use contemporary discourses of globalization and transnationalism to achieve a more nuanced reading of the Beats within the socio-political context of the United States, the essays in *Global Beat Studies* place greater emphasis on direct comparisons between Beat literature and other national literatures and contexts. The contributors thus intend to illuminate both the ways the Beats were shaped by other cultures and languages as well as how they, in turn, helped to reshape others beyond the borders of the United States.

Second, *Global Beat Studies* reveals the vitality of Beat Studies in terms of another striking demographic feature: the majority of scholars are in the earliest years of their careers. *Global Beat Studies* does feature the work of seasoned critics, such as Regina Weinreich, whose *The Spontaneous Poetics of Jack Kerouac: A Study of the Fiction* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1987) was a landmark in the legitimacy of Beat criticism, and A. Robert Lee, whose many books in the field go back to the mid-1990s, including *The Beat Generation Writers* (London: Pluto, 1996) which was one of the first studies to link the Beats to an international context; but most of the authors here represent a new generation. Across and beyond Europe, the quality and quantity of graduate work on the Beats confirms that the future of the Beat field looks very bright as well as quite different from its past.

Global Beat Studies starts with several essays that explore translation, perhaps the most challenging issue from the point of view of past paradigms. Translation is significant in the Beat context as the Beats have not only been translated into many languages, but also their work has been particularly influential both in English and in translation. For this reason, the analysis of the works here pays much attention to the transculturation which takes place during the translation process. The opening two essays—Erik Mortenson's "The Cultural Translation of Ginsberg's *Howl* in Turkey" (<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss5/2>>) and Eftychia Mikelli's "The Greek Beat and Underground Scene of the Sixties and Seventies" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss5/3>> demonstrate the international and enduring impact of the Beat Generation as a literature and as a culture, which reach far beyond the borders of the United States and the decade of the 1950s. More than that, however, by documenting and analyzing in detail how Beat writing was translated in Turkey and how it influenced underground writing in Greece, the essays by Mortenson and Mikelli show how much there is to learn about the Beats by understanding their reception according to agendas at work in other national and historical contexts. The second pair of essays—Maarten van Gageldonk's "Literary Creolization in Laachi's *A Life Full of Holes*" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss5/4>> and Benjamin J. Heal's "Authorship in Burroughs' *Red Night Trilogy* and Bowles' Translation of Moroccan Storytellers" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss5/5>>—is also concerned with a form of cultural influence or collaboration: however, rather than focusing on the reception of American texts in foreign societies, these explore collaborative and hybrid forms of Beat textual production. Drawing on rich archival materials, van Gageldonk documents the ways in which Paul Bowles and the publishing house of Grove Press effectively co-authored, rather than merely translated, the work of the Moroccan oral storyteller Larbi Layachi. Heal also interprets Bowles's collaborations with Moroccans, including Layachi, but does so by drawing on the work of Barthes and Foucault and in relation to the experimental work of William Burroughs, to raise the issue of Beat authorship in a more theoretical and comparative approach. And finally, in "Ginsberg's Translations of Apollinaire and Genet in the Development of his Poetics of "Open Secrecy" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss5/6>> Véronique Lane gives this focus on trans-

lation a dramatic turn. Taking a comparative Franco-American approach, her essay casts Ginsberg in an entirely new light by revealing, through detailed textual analysis of poems such as "Howl," that the origins of his poetics lie as much in French as in American poetry.

The next four essays approach the intersection point of Beat writers and Morocco, specifically the North African city of Tangier, long a source of popular cultural fascination and, increasingly, a topic of significant critical scrutiny. In recent years and in particular since the Arab Spring, North Africa has shifted in the cultural imaginary of transnationalism. As the romantically named Arab Spring has spawned much bloodshed and misery for millions, it serves as a reminder of a rapidly changing world with the threat of violence spreading across much of North Africa being more visible now than ever. In this increasingly unstable geopolitical space, the Tangier and North Africa of Beat writing, with its celebration of cross-cultural experiences, may seem like a far-fetched romanticization of other cultures which, one might argue, deliberately ignores larger geopolitical issues and the defining role of imperial influences and interventions, principally in this case of the Americans, British and French. The first two essays focus in distinct ways on Jack Kerouac's brief sojourn in 1957, when he visited Tangier chiefly to help Burroughs on his manuscript of *Naked Lunch*. In "Kerouac and Burroughs's Interzone of Processes in Tangier" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss5/7>> Regina Weinreich considers how Kerouac's time with Burroughs triangulates the city and the two writers; that is to say, how their different experiences of Tangier related to their different working methods as writers. In "Tangier and Kerouac's Oriental Experience in Liminality" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss5/8>> Peggy Pacini advances a close reading of Kerouac's textual representations of the city, revealing crucial differences not only between his and Burroughs's versions of the city, but between his own initial and later accounts of it. Greg Bevan's essay, "Bowles's *Up Above the World* as Beatnik Murder Mystery" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss5/9>> deals less with the city, as Bowles's expatriate home, than with what his least-known novel reveals about his relationship to the Beat writers, and later their Beatnik followers, who came there. In "Burroughs, Arabic Music and *The Ticket That Exploded*" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss5/10>> David Holzer departs from the standard critical focus on Burroughs, Tangier, and the writing of *Naked Lunch*, to instead re-read one of his later cut-up novels in light of its recurrent allusions to Moroccan Joujouka music. Jaap van der Bent also gives a twist to the standard critical focus, by appraising the importance of Burroughs's "Tangier" novel for another Beat-related writer in "The Impact of Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* on Chester's *The Exquisite Corpse*" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss5/11>>. The focus on Tangier then gives way to an essay that opens up the area of critical study in a new direction by considering space in relation to movement and gender. In "The Road Trip as Artistic Formation in DeFeo's work, 1951-52" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss5/12>> Frida Forsgren associates both the Moroccan city and travel more generally with a female artist, rather than the questing male writer, demonstrating the crucial impact of DeFeo's experience as a traveller on her work and identity as a Beat painter.

The next six essays make substantial contributions to the processes of revision that have promoted both a broadening of the field and an attention to issues of race and, above all, gender, with a special focus on the work of Diane di Prima. Estíbaliz Encarnación Pinedo's essay, "Utopia in progress in di Prima's *Revolutionary Letters*" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss5/13>> examines the subtle ways in which the form as well as content of the text advance utopian space and identity, while in "The Politics of Feminist revision in di Prima's *Loba*" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss5/14>> Polina Mackay considers appropriation and resistance in a text that revises the work of both female predecessors (such as modernist poet Hilda Doolittle, known as H.D.) and male Beat contemporaries (Ginsberg). In "The Beat 'Pad'" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss5/15>> Heike Mlakar documents the importance within Beat culture of the social space organized by women. Raven See's "Fashion and Female Beat Identity in the Writing of Jones, Johnson, and di Prima" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss5/16>> also takes a feminist approach, arguing for the ways in which these and other Beat women used style choices as modes of expression in the context of subcultural as well as mainstream repression. In "Race, Gender, and the Beats in *Tan* Magazine's 'I Was a Victim of the Beat Generation'" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss5/17>> Chelsea Stripe expands the focus on women's experience by analyzing its point of intersection with racial experience, revealing an unsuspected as well as neglected source of conservative critique of the Beats in an African-American media context. Finally, in "Micheline, Sanders, and Kupferberg as Beat Contenders" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss5/18>> A. Robert Lee continues his work to enlarge the canon, arguing for how well a loose definition of "Beat" fits numerous neglected writers, including the three whose work he discusses here.

The last seven essays all focus on William Burroughs, a concentration that testifies to the unique creative force and critical appeal of a writer whose work has always belonged as much in a field of its

own as within a Beat or any other context. The essays focus mainly on the first two decades of the Burroughs oeuvre, the period of his emergence as a major experimental artist and political visionary, but otherwise reflect the wide diversity of approach he invites. In "Burroughs's Reinvention of the Byronic Hero" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss5/19>> Franca Bellarsi argues that the nineteenth-century iconoclastic Romantic poet was an important precursor, although the novelty of the essay lies not only in its case but in using Burroughs's own method—dubbed a "cartography of junctions"—to make it, rather than advancing more standard philological arguments of genealogical influence. Richard English, in "The Theories of Opiate Addiction in the Early Works of Burroughs and Trocchi" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss5/20>> reads Burroughs comparatively with one of his direct contemporaries, the Scottish addict-writer, Alexander Trocchi, to assess the validity of their quasi-scientific as well as metaphoric representations of the drug addict. The challenging politics of Burroughs's work are at the center of the next two essays. In "Burroughs's Postcolonial Visions in *The Yage Letters*" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss5/21>> Melanie Koemany also concentrates on an early work by Burroughs, arguing that in the 1950s he exploited his own racist and imperialistic tendencies as a traveler through South America for his fiction's radical satirical purposes. Directly posing the question in his title—"Burroughs as a Political Writer?" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss5/22>>—Alexander Greiffenstern, examines a little-known text from the following decade, an essay about the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago, to reveal how Burroughs's politics emerge precisely because rather than despite of his writing's constant intertextual self-reflection. The final two essays suggest what underlies the unique appeal of Burroughs to critics writing in a contemporary digital culture that was, in many ways, anticipated by Burroughs's own (analog) working methods. In "Burroughs' Folios as An Archival Machine for Artistic Creation" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss5/23>> Tomasz Stompór convincingly argues for the importance of the enormous archives of materials with and from which Burroughs worked in the 1960s, drawing a crucial distinction between their function as creative engines and the relatively inert version of them now entombed in the institutional archive. And finally, the obsessive character of Burroughs's most radical experiments leads to the comparable experience of obsession that they produce in the reader, as shown in detail by Anontio Bonome in "How Burroughs Plays with the Brain, or Ritornellos as a Means to Produce Déjà-vu" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss5/24>>.

Combining innovative textual and cultural criticism with traditional scholarship, and featuring both major and marginal writers, *Global Beat Studies* therefore brings together an international plurality of voices, many of them new, to demonstrate the rich possibilities for comparative work in a field that has the energy to continually refresh and reinvent itself. It includes a "Bibliography for the Study of the Beat Generation" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss5/25>> compiled by guest editors Oliver Harris and Polina Mackay. And, finally, this collection offers a combination of research that brings to light overlooked or misunderstood histories with work that confirms the influence and impact of Beat culture and creativity around the world and into the twenty-first century.

Guest Editor's Profile: Oliver Harris teaches US-American Literature at Keele University and is the founding President of the European Beat Studies Network (www.ebsn.eu). Harris's books publications include new editions of two trilogies of novels by Burroughs: *Junky: The Definitive Text of "Junk"* (2003), *The Yage Letters Redux* (2006), and *Queer: Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition* (2010); and "Restored" editions of the Cut-Up Trilogy: *The Soft Machine*, *Nova Express*, *The Ticket That Exploded* (2014). He is also the editor of *The Letters of William S. Burroughs, 1945-1959* (1993), and *Everything Lost: The Latin American Notebook of William S. Burroughs* (2008), the author of the critical study *William Burroughs and the Secret of Fascination* (2003) and co-editor of *Naked Lunch@50: Anniversary Essays* (2009). Email: <o.c.g.harris@keele.ac.uk>

Guest Editor's Profile: Polina Mackay teaches English Literature at the University of Nicosia and is the Vice President of the European Beat Studies Network. Mackay's publications include *Authorship in Context: From the Theoretical to the Material* (2007), *Kathy Acker and Transnationalism* (2009), *The Cambridge Companion to H.D.* (2011), "The Beat Generation and Europe" *Comparative American Studies* (2013), and *Feminism and Gender in Beat Women* is forthcoming with Routledge. Email: <mackay.p@unic.ac.cy>