Abstract:

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Atomic America And Ferlinghetti's Identity Poetics:
The Reclamation of Radical Innocence in an Age Less Charged, Less Mythic, and More Fallen.

(Under the direction of Professor Jon Thompson.)

For Ferlinghetti, individual identity was culturally determined. The first chapter of this essay defines what identity poetics were for Ferlinghetti, and what bodies of poetry were particularly crafted to address this philosophical preoccupation, ultimately finding that Lawrence Ferlinghetti valued both a writing identity and modus operandi for art that was constructed *intertextually* from modern literary precursors as well as by drawing upon the consciousness of his social contemporaries in the 1950's San Francisco counterculture. The second and third chapter of this essay explore the purposeful utilization of preceding modernist identity narratives, and what impact they bore on Ferlinghetti's writing consciousness at the time of his own personal identity crisis, catalyzed by America's use of atomic force in WWII. The fourth chapter of this essay seeks to understand the shifting role of the universal and the local in the mid-20th century American post-WWII social consciousness, and how that systemic shift in consciousness led to Ferlinghetti's individual resolutions offered in "Autobiography". The fifth chapter of this essay utilize a close-reading approach to examine the way in which Ferlinghetti's pastiche of modernist predecessors and American pop-cultures, as well as counter-cultures, repeatedly points to the inability of precursory epic traditions to tell his story of America and thus creates a means by which Ferlinghetti can comment upon America's fallen status. Finally, the conclusion examines how by becoming an anti-hero within his own anti-epic, one who replaced the naive innocence of childhood, lost in the aftermath of the atom bomb, with a rebellion against the forces of contemporary American social consciousness that caused his national and personal innocence to be lost, Ferlinghetti resolved his identity crisis.