

Ferlinghetti 'Nonsensical'

Hoover on Poetry

J. Edgar Hoover, in the unusual role of literary arbiter, blasted a "beatnik rabble rouser" named Lawrence Ferlinghetti for the San Francisco poet's 1950's broadside against President Dwight D. Eisenhower, according to recently released FBI files.

The late FBI director described a long poem, authored by the well-known poet and owner of City Lights bookstore, as a "nonsensical, difficult to understand dissertation" and deduced, "Upon reading this pamphlet, it appears Ferlinghetti may possibly be a mental case."

The negative review, along with references to poet Allen Ginsberg and actress Jane Fonda, forms part of about 50 pages of material released following a year-old Freedom of Information request, with the choicest bits reproduced in the recently published City Lights Journal Number 4.

Portions of the documents were blacked out by the FBI on grounds of protecting national defense, foreign policy or internal agency practices.

"Poets should be so honored," was Ferlinghetti's response to the excisions.

Ferlinghetti attracted the FBI's interest in August, 1958 when a copy of his tract, "Tentative Description of a Dinner Given to Promote the Impeachment of President Eisenhower," was discovered — apparently abandoned — in a Danbury, Conn., supermarket.

In an Aug. 29, 1958, letter to then-Secret Service chief U.E. Baughman, Hoover briefly criticized the pamphlet and requested any Secret Service information about Ferlinghetti's "credit and criminal records."

In a Nov. 30, 1959, memo to Hoover, the Los Angeles office of the FBI identified the poet as a "Beatnik Rabble Rouser" un-

der "Subject" and opened with the sentence: "Lawrence Ferlinghetti is reputed, in some dubious circles, to be a San Francisco poet."

Apparently referring to the pamphlet, the memo continued: "This type of trash, so readily available in widespread circulation, must surely be responsible in some measure to demoralization in America."

Hoover also sent an April, 1965, form letter to the Secret Service concerning Ginsberg.

According to the letter, the 1972 National Book Award winner in poetry displayed "evidence of emotional instability... or irrational or suicidal behavior; expressions of strong or violent anti-U.S. sentiment; and prior acts including arrests or convictions or conduct or statements indicating a propensity for violence and antipathy to-

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LAWRENCE FERLINGHETTI
FBI chief's negative review

ward good order and government."

The reference to Fonda came in a 1970 request to Hoover by the FBI office in Los Angeles to send a fictitious letter discrediting the actress to a Hollywood gossip columnist.