

Beatdom

Created by Kirsty Bisset and David Wills

Edited by David Wills

Published by City of Recovery Press

We are again a beaten generation, suffering amid unrivalled prosperity... Lost in ignorance in a time of education... Confused and controlled and taught too many things... Tamed by a world of passivity and acceptance, obscured by pretensions and the illusion of revolution... We are tired of the benefits wrought by the Beats and the generations and movements they inspired... Ours is a generation looking to the past, like theirs, but lost in the present and uncaring for the future, I suppose, like them...

Beatdom examines the Beat Generation in depth, but looks at the world around us through eyes created by our predecessors, and exploits the talents of people learning from the artists of the past, struggling to survive in a world of apathy...

Beatdom is indulgence and sorrow combined and confused and seeking clarity and union and that sense of community that's garnered by something as simple as a label...

Beatdom is in good company, downtrodden all, and fighting for the preservation of the past and the highlighting of the failures and injustices of the present, though sceptical of even contemplating the future...

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Issue Four

Summer 2009

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www.beatdom.com

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Contents

Regulars

- 4 Letters from the Editor
- 5 Notes on Contributors
- 8 Modern Beat
- 52 Poetry

Features

- 15 HST & The Beats: Fleeting Encounters
- 18 Jack Kerouac's *Visions of Gerard*
- 26 Joan Vollmer: In the Eyes of her Contemporaries
- 33 Beats & the Sixties Counterculture
- 60 Alene Lee: Subterranean Muse

Articles

- 6 The Sea is my Brother, by Jack Kerouac
- 10 Kerouac & The Outsider: A Puzzle
- 13 The Breton Traveller
- 63 The Plurality of the Beat Spirituality

Interviews

- 46 Carolyn Cassady
- 48 Gary Snyder

Reviews

- 22 Hunter S. Thompson, Jack Kerouac and Ernest Hemingway
review *No Country for Old Men*
- 29 Required Reading

Fiction/ Art/ Memoirs

- 7 Woodcuttings of the Beats
- 24 First Encounters with Allen Ginsberg
- 30 The Gun and the New Dark Way
- 39 Deep Fried Ducktape and Sushi Knives
- 50 Jack & Edward

Letter from the Editor

Dear All,

This year is the fortieth anniversary of Jack Kerouac's death, and it seems necessary to reflect upon his life as a celebration for this special issue. Consequently, we have plenty of articles about Kerouac, including a look at the flurry of recent publications of his work, a guide to the search for his ancestry, a look at Visions of Gerard, and a puzzle about the changing lines in his poetry.

We are lucky enough to have the respected Kerouac scholar Dave Moore on board for Issue Four. Few people know more about Jack Kerouac than this man, and we are proud to print two of his fine articles.

We also have work by two Kerouac students from England, whose university recommended they read and submit to Beatdom. All across the world, universities are beginning to recognise Beatdom as a valuable resource for their students and professors, and Beatdom is eager to take their submissions!

But it's not just Kerouac we are interested in studying. We're also concerned with the role of women this month, as we profile Joan Vollmer through the eyes of her contemporaries, get an 'interview' with Carolyn Cassady, and look at Diablo Cody in our new Modern Beat section. We also have a fantastic article on Alene Lee – one of Kerouac's muses, and an almost forgotten Beat character.

Gary Snyder stopped by for another unusual interview... This time he wanted to interview me! Maybe next issue I'll get to ask him a few questions, but who knows...

As always, we're interested in the work of Hunter S. Thompson, who was of course neither a Beat, nor a Beatnik. But he took his literary influence from various sources, and made friends with several of the key members of the Beat Generation. We have an article about his fleeting encounters with the Beats.

But of course, we're not just interested in remembering the Beat Generation... We are

here to continue their legacy. We aren't so naïve that we would consider ourselves or our writers as 'Beat' or 'Beatnik', but we do take our influence from them and try to bring their ideas into the new century. As such, our fiction, art and poetry sections are still filled with Beat-inspired works of genius.

In the issue's special poetry section we are lucky enough to have three long poems by the British hip-hop star Scroobius Pip, who has long been a hero of Beatdom's. We also have old favourites, Nathan Dolby and Rodney Munch.

This is the first issue of Beatdom to be published by City of Recovery Press. Or rather, it will be owned by City of Recovery Press... The magazine will still be printed by Mauling Press, but the two companies have joined forces to expand their businesses.

Mauling Press focuses on short, non-fiction books, whereas City of Recovery Press deals more with fiction. But together they are attempting to wrestle some control from the giant publishing companies whose stranglehold on the industry is killing literature.

Currently it will be of interest to Beatdom readers to know that Mauling Press is seeking chapbooks about the Beat Generation and subsequent countercultures. At present, they are working on finishing two books: one on Hunter Thompson and one on Gregory Corso.

If you are interested in buying either, or submitting your own idea, please visit www.cityofrecovery.com or e-mail me at editor@beatdom.com for more information.

Yours Kerouacianly,

David S. Wills

Notes on Contributors

David S Wills – Founder and editor of Beatdom magazine, Mr. Wills lives in Asia and teaches for a living. He now writes for various publications, but still spends his free time drinking and reading. If there's no name on the article, he wrote it.

Steven O'Sullivan – Staff writer. Mr. O'Sullivan approached Beatdom as a fan, and soon become a chief writer after he made his passion for the Beats abundantly clear through he own unique style.

Dave Moore – Britain's Beat expert, Mr. Moore has edited Neal Cassady's letters, taught the world a thing or two about Kerouac, and wrote two magnificent essays for this issue of Beatdom.

Kristin McLaughlin – A passionate Beat reader and artist, who created the Beat Woodcuttings in this issue.

Alan Griffey – Beat expert and author of 'An Evening with Jack Kerouac'.

David Breihaupt – A former employee of Allen Ginsberg and Rolling Stone magazine, Breihaupt has submitted to Beatdom his priceless memoirs of meeting the legendary Beat poet.

Matt Gibson – Founder of Xpat magazine in Taiwan, Mr Gibson is a talented writer and photographer, who wrote the imaginary review of *No Country for Old Men*.

Jed Skinner – Student with an interest in the Beat Generation. Wrote 'The Beats and Sixties Counterculture'.

Lisa Brawn – Artist with a passion for woodcutting and Beat literature. Contributed portraits of Ginsberg, Kerouac, Burroughs and HST for this issue.

Eduardo Jones – Voice of the Doomed. Regular Beatdom fiction contributor. Hell, you already

know him and you're coming back for more...

Chuck Milbourne – An artist and associate of Eduardo Jones, who played Steadman to Jones' Thompson in creating amazing and warped illustrations.

Lee McRae – Student and Beat fan. Interested in the relationship between spirituality and the Beats, and wrote an article on the subject for this issue.

Scroobius Pip – British hip hop star, and future music legend. Mr. Pip is well known for writing the brilliant album *Angles* as one half of the world famous Dan le Sac vs. Scroobius Pip.

Nathan Dolby – Old Beatdom favourite and future poet laureate. Dolby is back by popular demand.

A Special Thanks...

Gary Snyder – You declined to be interviewed, but managed to interview me... Thanks for the time, old man. We'll see you in another issue.

Carolyn Cassady – You declined to be interviewed for issues one and two, but we got you...

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Jack Kerouac, *The Sea is my Brother,* The 'lost' novel



Since the fiftieth anniversary of *On the Road*, Kerouac has been somewhat revitalized. Despite being dead for forty years, Beat enthusiasts are still getting to read fresh material, as publishers trawl through his estate for unpublished material.

First there was the Original Scroll version of *On the Road*, which cast off the restraints necessary for the first fifty years of publication, and included the real names of characters as Kerouac famously wrote them in his legendary writing fit that produced a 120-foot long scroll manuscript. Next came *Wake Up: The Life of the Buddha*, which has been less successful, but still of great interest to Kerouac fans. It is a retelling of the life of the Buddha Siddhartha Gautama, who led perhaps the first Beat life. After that there was *And the Hippos Were Boiled in Their Tanks*, which Kerouac co-wrote with William Burroughs after the murder of David Kammerer, in 1944.

Now there is *The Sea is my Brother*, Kerouac's first novel, but one which has been lost in time. It was never published during his tragic life, but Kerouac wrote the book during his time at sea. It is the story of Wesley Martin, a man who 'loved the sea with a strange, lonely love.'

The Sea is my Brother appears to share the spirit of *On the Road* and Kerouac's early Beat philosophy. It is about loneliness and a search for love in an unpleasant world. According to Kerouac's notes on the book, it is about 'the vanishing American... the American Indian, the last of the pioneers, the last of the hoboes.'

Another note states that the book tells the story of a 'man's simple revolt from society as it is, with the inequalities, frustration, and self-inflicted agonies.' That sounds promising, indeed. Hopefully this will mirror Hunter S. Thompson's 'lost' *Rum Diary*, which found legitimate success when released in 1998. It will certainly be interesting to see a new emergence from the period that spawned Kerouac's greatest works.

Strangely, early references to the novel on the internet seem convinced that it will usher in a 'new Beat Generation', but I wouldn't hold my breath. Hopefully, Kerouac will continue to find fans for years to come, but I highly doubt this will have the same effect on society as *On the Road*.

Image © Tom Palumbo

BEAT WOODCUTTING



Lisa Brawn has been experimenting with figurative portrait genre woodcuts for almost twenty years. She has recently been working with century-old Douglas Fir beams salvaged from restoration projects.

Among her current projects is a healthy interest in the Beat Generation. While reading Ginsberg's *Selected Poems 1947-1997*, she has been applying her woodcutting skill to the image for famous Beat figures (and Hunter S. Thompson, for the pleasure of our Gonzo-loving fans...)



She is represented by AXIS Contemporary Art, Calgary, Stratus Gallery, Banff, The Front Gallery, Edmonton, and Van Dop Gallery, Vancouver. She has over two hundred woodcuttings available for your delight on her website, www.expeditionism.com



Modern Beat

Diablo Cody: Writer, Oscar Winner, Former Stripper

In Issue Three David knocked out a solid run down on Tom Waits, while at the same time managing to avoid saying anything that might get our asses kicked. Hopefully. This time around we managed to find a writer... screenwriter and former stripper: Diablo Cody. Let's hear it for the girls...

In the world of the Beats, women held a precipitous role. Men like Ginsberg, Kerouac, and Corso were not so much interested in the ladies as creative individuals as they were simply in them being ladies. Independents like Joan Vollmer and Elise Cowen had apartments, money from jobs, and thus, drugs and food. They were valued in their ability to cultivate social scenarios reminiscent of Parisian salons. Writers, musicians, junkies, and madmen of all types could gather in their pads till the wee-dawn hours ranting on and on.

Yet when one of the girls turned out to be a fantastic poet, no one really cared all too much (Cowen). Or when it came to pinning down these women in their rightful image for posterity, the lines tended to get blurred (see article on Alene Lee).

But if you're stuck in the freezing cold of Minneapolis and your daytime job is getting naked... you don't have too much time to be cultivating salons for the intellectual suede of your young generation. You're Diablo Cody and all you can think about is maybe, hopefully finishing that damn screenplay and not getting mauled every night at work by the large, intimidating Nigerian man that swoons over your ankles.

Perhaps you don't know Diablo Cody by name but more than likely you know her screenplay. She's responsible for the dripping-with-sarcasm comedy *Juno* that every 8th grade girl mimics and every 21 year old guy secretly loves.

But like I said, long before *Juno's* breakthrough, Diablo was stripping to make the bills and trying to fit in writing wherever she could. I managed to dig up her old, pre-fame blog (the aptly titled *Pussy Ranch*) that focused mostly on the bizzare aspects of life as a tease artist. One finds accounts of stripping till 4 a.m., stumbling home in the cold, getting drunk off a bottle of Boone's, crashing for maybe a couple hours, then lugging herself out of bed to beat up her screenplay some more.

And I think it's in those cheap-sheen annals that Diablo shows her brilliance. Forget her screenplay, I mean it's great and everything, but it's easy to see where she got it. Entry after entry is a knock-down riot. The girl's got a barbwire tongue and does everyone she

encounters justice. Nasty, gritty, honest-to-God justice.

You want to talk about embodying the counterculture (that same ideal the Beats lived out)? Just look at her, man. Shock of red, psychobilly queen hair, tattoos on her arms, and a crazy-eyed stare that could sucker-punch you in a second. She lived in a rundown apartment on the sketchy side of town working in sketchiest skin shacks around. There's one entry I remember where she and her man-at-the-time are so broke they can only afford 3 dollars in gas, generic-brand lunch loaf, a loaf of bread, cheap ass cigarettes, and a bottle of Boone's. And then that's it. But man, you read it the way she writes it and you know she loves it. She's okay with the down and out and dirty and broke.

And maybe we need a little more of that mindset. Not just with women either. With everyone. Scanning thru the backlog of her blog I noticed that she occasionally returned to straight jobs that operated in the daytime and not under the film of sweaty crumpled dollar bills. Yet she'd always end up bailing and slipping back to the underworld of glintzy stages and half-shock disco balls. She could get straight jobs easily. Cody worked for an insurance company for quite a while. Did great too. Steady paycheck, benefits... but really, what's the thrill of that? Just as her Beat brethren did, Diablo continually sacrificed the straight-laced comfortable life for the... well, the madness. After all, isn't there something thrilling about not being too sure when your next stack of cash is gonna appear? Hell yes.

In fact, Cody's unique lifestyle and experiences (transmitted via her blog that was growing steadily in popularity) managed to land her a book deal around 2004. The book was essentially a one-year memoir detailing her stripping experiences in the harsh cold of Minneapolis. The somewhat steady money of stripping helped to support her as she attempted to build a writing career. She became a regular contributor to *City Pages*, the local alternative paper. And of course work on the screenplay trudged on. But the experience paid off. Two years ago she scored a gig as the newest columnist for *Entertainment Weekly's* Backpage section. The position was a rotational one she shared with celebrated horror-mind Stephen King. And of course, you move on down the line a little bit more and she's winning an Oscar for her Best Original Screenplay (yes, it finally found completion). And

-- Continued on page ? --



Kerouac & The Outsider: A Puzzle

by Dave Moore

It was Horst who started it. Horst Spandler has been translating the 1971 Kerouac anthology *Scattered Poems* into German. Along the way he's been asking others their advice on the meaning of parts of Jack's poems. One such query I received, a few months ago, concerned Kerouac's rather fine "Sept. 16, 1961, Poem" (on page 29). Horst wanted to know whether the line which reads "sad today glad tomorrow: somber today drunk tomorrow" should really have "sober today" as that seemed to fit better.

As Ann Charters, the compiler of the anthology, notes at the back of the book, this poem was gathered from *The Outsider* magazine, 1962. A friend of mine had a copy of the relevant issue, #2, and provided me with a photocopy of the poem from page 68. Looking at this I could see that Horst's intuition was right – the words should indeed be "sober today."

I decided to check the remainder of the poem for possible typographical errors in the *Scattered Poems* version. I was surprised to find a major difference near the end. The line which in *Scattered Poems* reads:

"This is an attempt at the easy lightness of Ciardian poetry"

appeared in my xerox from *The Outsider* as:

"This is an attempt at the easy lightness of drawing room poetry"

This seemed too major a difference to be a mere typo. I asked others their thoughts, and whether they knew which was the correct version. A letter from a friend astounded me. He enclosed a photocopy from his copy of *The Outsider* #2, and in this one the line finished with "... of Beatnik poetry." He also enclosed

a xerox of the next page in the magazine, which was a drawing of two vultures observing a ship approaching some rocks. One bird is saying to the other: "So what if Kerouac is on board? You can't believe everything Ciardi says." This ties in with the mention of Ciardi in the *Scattered Poems* version, John Ciardi being a poet much opposed to the work of Kerouac and the other Beats.

But what was going on here? Three different versions of the poem from three different sources. I decided to cast the net wider, and contacted everyone I knew who might have a copy of *The Outsider* #2 and ask how their version read.

Over the following couple of weeks I was able to monitor the poem in over twenty different copies of *The Outsider* #2. Five more variant lines were discovered in the process, and the occurrence of each was as follows:

"... of Ciardian poetry"	4
"... of civilized poetry"	4
"... of chamber poetry"	4
"... of Beatnik poetry"	4
"... of drawing room poetry"	2
"... of Ciardi poetry"	1
"... of Chinese poetry"	1
"... of wellbred poetry"	2

The Outsider was a small literary magazine that ran to just five issues in the period 1961-69. It was edited by Jon Edgar Webb and produced by the Loujon Press, the enterprise of Jon and his wife Louise (Lou) in New Orleans. Jon Webb died in 1971, and the Loujon papers are now held by the Northwestern University Library in Evanston, Illinois. I wrote there for advice and guidance with this puzzle, and although the very helpful librarian was unaware of the multiple versions of the poem, he was able to send me a copy

of Kerouac's original typescript of his poem to the Loujon Press, together with Jack's accompanying note.

In Kerouac's original, the line in question reads "... of Chinese poetry" and Jack gave precise instructions to the editor:

Dear John --

Be sure everything is linotyped the way I wrote it -- There are no typos in my typewriter script -- I mean, the punctuation, fucktuation, capitalization and NON CAPITALIZATION & spacing, etc. -- I re-typed the poem twice to make every last spacing unsmudged as William the Conqueror's Record -- Yr. first issue of OUTSIDER was very valuable -- Fuck Colin Wilson & all anti Christ poets

Jack Kerouac

Despite this, on Kerouac's typescript the word "Chinese" has been circled in blue and a question mark placed near by. In pencil a line has been drawn towards the circled word "Chinese" and at the end of this drawn line the words "use alternate words" have been written, in a hand other than Kerouac's and probably Jon Webb's.

And alternate words were indeed used, as I had discovered. *The Outsider* #2 was published in the summer of 1962, but Kerouac was unaware of the alterations to his poem for at least two and a half years.

During 1964 the Italian translator Fernanda Pivano had been compiling an anthology of new American poetry and had been in touch with Kerouac for contributions of his own, and of his friends. The collection, *Poesia degli ultimi americani* finally appeared in November 1964 and included Kerouac's "Sept. 16, 1961, Poem" as well as several choruses from *Mexico City Blues* and *Some Western Haikus*. Fernanda sent Kerouac a copy of her book, and received the following letter:

January 11,

1965

Dear Fernanda --- Thanks for the Christmas card and the anthology in the mail --- There's a great mystery in it. I really am tremendously curious to find out and I wish you would tell me: on page 246 is the end of my poem

("Sept. 16, 1961 Poem"), the second line from the top reads: "This is an attempt at the easy lightness of civilized/poetry." But I had written

"Chinese" poetry and I go on to say that I shd. really "use my own way," ie., western instead of eastern. WHO CHANGED THE WORD CHINESE TO "CIVILIZED"? And why? How did you get that poem? Was it that printed page from The Outsider? And if so, was it already marked like that? This is a case of altering my poetry without my knowledge, and I'm sure it wasn't you, but somebody did it. Now you're going to think I'm mad at you again but I'm not: I only want to know, out of great curiosity, how this unauthorized change came about, and who did it, and why. As you see, it gives the suggestion that I don't consider myself civilized! Just think how James Joyce would have hit the roof! So long, Cara Nanda

Jack

It appears that Fernanda had used a version of the poem from a copy of *The Outsider* with "civilized poetry" (just as Ann Charters later used one from a copy with "Ciardian poetry"). Kerouac was naturally annoyed to learn that his poem had been altered by someone else without his knowledge or permission. I can't help imagining how further incensed he would have been if he had known that multiple changes had been made and were in circulation in different copies of *The Outsider* #2.

I have so far traced eight different variant lines in twenty-two different copies of the magazine. It is known that 3000 copies of the magazine were printed by the Webbs, on a hand press, in an operation which took almost a year. Being hand-printed, it would have been relatively easy to change a word or two of type at any time, but why would anyone want to?

Maybe Jon Webb was just having some fun at Kerouac's expense. Being of an older bohemian generation, he may have looked down on Kerouac and his buddies whom he possibly considered to be "the new kids on the block." Or maybe he was attempting to stir up further trouble between Kerouac and John Ciardi? It's maybe significant that no more work of Kerouac's appeared in other issues of *The Outsider*.

Why did Kerouac not learn of a change to his poem until 1965 – did the Webbs not send him a copy of *The Outsider* #2? It's probable that they did, and at least

one copy has been found which contains Kerouac's intended word "Chinese", so maybe that was the version they sent him in 1962.

In 2003 Jeff Weddle published his PhD thesis for the University of Tennessee: "The Loujon Press: An Historical Analysis." I contacted Jeff to ask if, during his research, he'd encountered anything about these unauthorized changes. Jeff replied that he had noticed a difference between Kerouac's typescript of the poem and its appearance in his copy of the magazine, where the word appears as "civilized," (and this is mentioned in his thesis) but he was unaware of the multiple variants.

In his thesis Jeff Weddle also notes that Jon Webb heavily edited and re-titled the piece by William Burroughs which appears in *The Outsider* #2 as "wilt

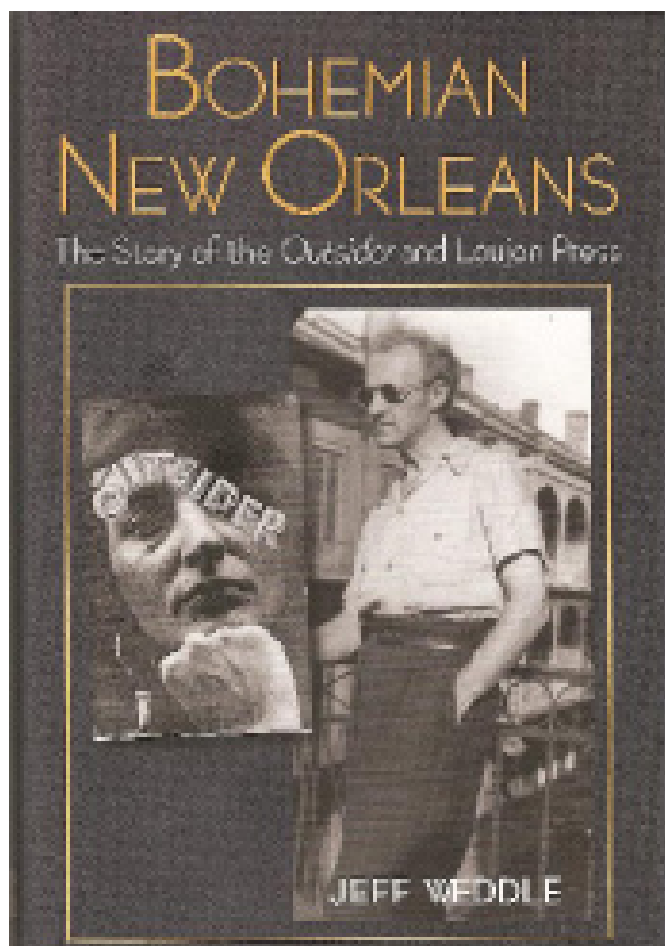
caught in time." According to Weddle, the published version "bears little resemblance to the author's original submission."

Again, since Weddle has apparently seen only one copy of *The Outsider* #2, it is possible that different variants of the Burroughs piece were published. Jeff told me that, while he was investigating the Loujon Press for his thesis, he had come across other examples of Webb changing texts. This is evidently an area which requires further research.

Does anyone out there have access to copies of *The Outsider* #2 with yet different versions of that line in Kerouac's poem? Perhaps we can sample more than 22 of the 3000 copies known to have been printed.

Dave Moore is a respected Kerouac scholar, living in the UK, and the editor of the collected letters of Neal Cassady. If you have time, you can visit his website here: <http://www.books.rack111.com/>

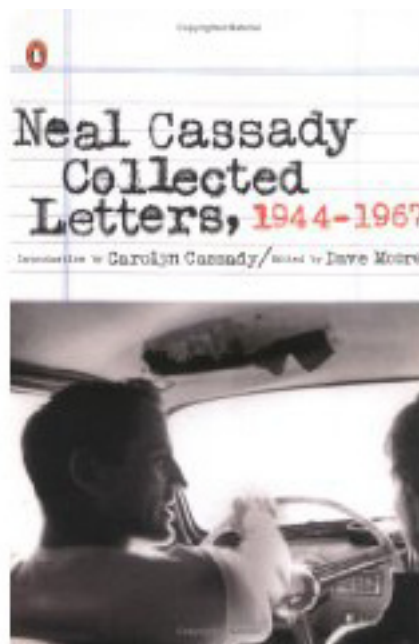
Jeff Weddle is an old friend of Beatdom. We reviewed his book for Issue Two, and very much enjoyed it!



Diablo Cody: Modern Beat

-- Continued from page ? --

now she's got a TV show and another screenplay on the horizon. She's been interviewed God knows how many times but she maintains a grounded ego it seems at least. And I'm more than sure that she'd be willing to give the cheesy lights and sweaty pole another go round in the near future, just for the hell of it. Once a stripper always a stripper? Maybe. Or maybe just beat and crazy at the least.



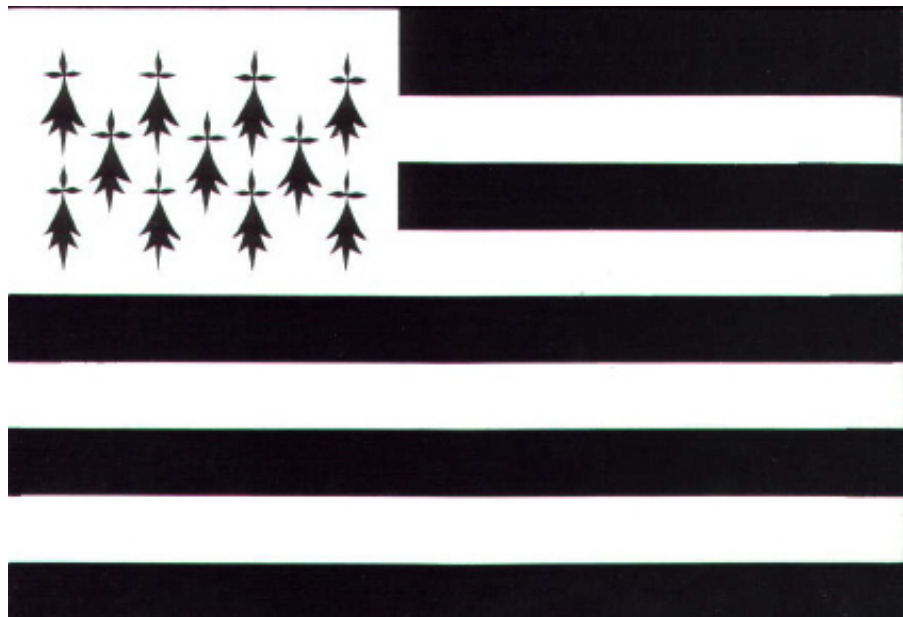
THE BRETON TRAVELLER

-- *Jack Kerouac's Search for his Roots*

by Dave Moore

Much has been written about Kerouac's apparent rootlessness being the driving force behind his travels and his writing. His search for his true roots was endless. In the final decade of his life it became desperate. Jack had learned, from his father and uncles, that their ancestor came from France to Canada in the 1700s. But Kerouac's quest was confused. In his 1952 novel, *Doctor Sax*, Jack named his ancestor as 'the honorable soldier, Baron Louis Alexandre Lebris de Duluoze [Kerouac],' and this became Alexandre Louis Lebris de Kerouac in 1960, in the introduction to *Lonesome Traveller*. By 1968, writing to genealogist Howard Valyear, Jack gave the different name of Francois-Edouard Lebris de Kerouac's, but a month later changed the first names to Francois Alexandre. His ancestor, he maintained, was a soldier in Montcalm's army who was also known as 'The Little Prince', since he was allegedly the son of the titular king of the Cornouailles district of Brittany, an area populated by Celtic people driven out of Cornwall, England, by Anglo-Saxons in the 6th century. A romantic myth, but, we now know, far from the truth.

The only evidence for the name of the ancestor was on his marriage certificate of 1732, where he signed it Maurice-Louis Le Bris de Kerouac. This implies a family name of Le Bris, originally from a place named Kerouac. But searches in France for such a family proved fruitless. When Kerouac was there in 1965 he learned that vital records held in Paris had been destroyed by bombing during the Second World War. As Jack described in *Satori In Paris*, he travelled on to Brittany and met a Pierre Lebris (called 'Ulysse' in the book) but discovered that he was part of another branch of a very large family, with no connection to Kerouac. Jack's quest for his roots had led him up a blind alley where he would remain until his death four



The Breton National Flag

years later.

The Kerouac families of Canada and the USA, now numbering some three thousand members, continued the search for their ancestor. Investigations by genealogists in the village of Kerouac, some 15 miles east of Quimper, in southern Brittany, curiously found no evidence of a Le Bris family coming from that area. In fact, there was no trace at all of the name Le Bris de Kerouac in France. It apparently did not exist. Then, in 1999, a breakthrough. Patricia Dagier, a French genealogist employed by the Kerouac families of North America, discovered records of an old family called Le Bihan de Kervoac. Kervoac being the Breton spelling of Kerouac, this caused some excitement. The hamlets of Kervoac are near the northern coast of Brittany, close to the port of Morlaix. In fact, there is a cluster of three hamlets, situated on the south-eastern outskirts of the town of Lanmeur: Kervoac Huella, Kervoac Izella, and Kervoac Creiz (or, translating from the Breton: Upper, Lower, and Central Kerouac. Kervoac itself means 'wet place' in Breton).

The research by Patricia Dagier revealed that a Henry Le Bihan, a notary, was living in Lanmeur in 1609, when he married. His son, a merchant in Morlaix, followed the Breton custom of attaching the place of the family's origins to his name, to become Auffroy Le Bihan de Kervoac, and his son, Laurens, maintained the tradition. Laurens Le Bihan de Kervoac moved some twenty miles south to become a procurator in the town of Huelgoat, marrying there in the 1660s and producing a son Francois-Joachim who became a rich notary in Huelgoat. This notary was the father of the Kerouac ancestor, Urbain-Francois Le Bihan de Kervoac, born in Huelgoat around the year of 1702.

In September 1720, Urbain, who was being trained to follow in his father's professional footsteps, suddenly found his world turned upside down. Attending the wedding party of a friend, he was accused of attempting to seduce and then of stealing money from one of the female guests. Whether the claims were true or false, Urbain, as the son of a famous notary, not wishing to bring disgrace upon his family, fled Brittany and sailed for La Nouvelle France -- Canada. On arrival, in an attempt to conceal his true identity, Urbain changed his name and became known as Alexandre. In Canada he travelled up and down the St. Lawrence river, making his living as a hunter and fur-trader. He seems to have adapted well to this new, hard life-style and to have had an aptitude for the exploration of his new country, acquiring the nickname 'Le Voyageur' ('The Traveller') at this time. His first appearance in official records was his signature as a witness to the wedding of a friend in 1727. This he signed as Hyacinthe Louis Alexandre Le Bihan de Kervoac, disguising his real first names, but preserving his original family name, presumably out of respect for his old friend. He also gave false names for his father and mother, in an apparent attempt to throw the curious off the true scent.

But Alexandre's free and easy existence was to change in 1732. Arriving back in the village of Cap St-Ignace, some 40 miles east of Quebec, he was approached by members of the family of an unmarried twenty-year-old woman, Louise Bernier, who had given birth to a son, Simon-Alexandre, eight months earlier. The baby, she insisted, was Alexandre's and so, a few days later, on October 22, 1732, he found himself being married to Louise. The records show that, presumably

to save his family from further embarrassment, this time he signed his name as Maurice-Louis Le Bris de Kerouac. The name Le Bihan had vanished, never again to appear in Canadian records. But why did he become Le Bris? One theory is that this was the name of one of his mother's cousins, and a close friend of the family. Whatever, this change of surname was responsible for the total genealogical confusion which masked the true origins of the Kerouac ancestor for nearly 300 years.

The couple settled into the home of Louise's parents, but his newly-found domesticity evidently did not agree with the flamboyant Alexandre, since he was missing, probably away on further travels, when his second son, Jacques was born in 1733. Shortly after the birth of his third son, Louis, in 1735, the couple left the Bernier home and settled in Kamouraska, a small village on the St. Lawrence river, a further forty-five miles east of Quebec. But Alexandre de Kerouac, as he was now known, was not to live there for long. He died in his mid-thirties on March 6, 1736. His wife Louise survived to the grand age of 91, and their eldest son, Simon-Alexandre, went on to father thirteen children of his own, becoming the main branch in the Kerouac family tree.

Some coincidences: one of Alexandre's acquaintances in Canada was Joseph Martin, the very same name that Kerouac unwittingly gave to the character based on his great-grandfather, Edouard Kerouac, in his 1950 novel *The Town and the City*. And, ironically, in Chapter 32 of *Satori in Paris*, the book based upon his 1965 journey to France, Jack reads the name 'Behan' in the genealogy of Ulysse Lebris, without realizing its connection to the ancestor he was so desperately seeking. The final irony is that Jack had to cancel another planned trip to Brittany in 1967 with his Breton friend Youenn Gwernig because of his publisher's demands that he completed work on *Vanity of Duluo*. Their intended destination? -- Huelgoat, the birthplace of Jack's North American ancestor.

Jack Kerouac died in ignorance of his true French ancestry, but would no doubt have been fascinated to know the correct story of his Breton forebears, from whom he seems to have inherited many characteristics, including the travelling gene, even if the true facts differ considerably from the long-standing myths.

Hunter S. Thompson & The Beats: Fleeting Encounters

Hunter S. Thompson was no Beatnik. For one thing, he was too late. By the time he was knocking out Gonzo journalism, Kerouac had died, the hippies had come to power, and Ginsberg had moved from Beat guru to counterculture superhero.

But Thompson frequently finds himself a place in the hearts of Beat readers, for he embodied a similar, although in some ways wildly different, ethos.

Thompson was a rebel hero for a generation. His books shocked readers, appalled critics, and inspired millions. He didn't seek to change the world in any grand way, but like the Beats, Thompson sought to point out its flaws, while working to create his own little place, a place where he could be free.

Thompson wasn't a particularly great reader of Beat literature, either. He admired Kerouac's discovery of Neal Cassady as a literary device, but disliked his style of writing. In Wenner & Seymour's *Gonzo: The Life of Hunter S. Thompson*, Paul Semonin, a childhood friend of Thompson's, claimed Thompson became interested in 'beat culture' in Puerto Rico, during the period Thompson later fictionalised in *The Rum Diary*.

A letter to Jim Silberman (his editor at Random House) gives evidence of Thompson's awareness of Beat literature, and some connection to it in his own work, as he talks about the Beats setting down a path that he could follow. It seems that he is suggesting that Kerouac and Ginsberg allowed him to write the way he did. In a 1965 letter to Carey McWilliams of *The Nation*, Thompson talks about his times around Columbia in '58 to '59, and says 'I believe we were called "bums," although "beatnik" quickly became popular.' So at one stage Thompson did honestly consider himself a 'beatnik'.

Yet, though one must look closely for these links, there are a few stories and connections that are less subtle. Thompson was a literary man, after all, and

he had an opinion on his predecessors. He also got to meet many of them, albeit briefly, at various stages in his life.

Ginsberg

The most obvious link Thompson had with the Beat generation was his connection to Allen Ginsberg. Although the two were hardly kindred spirits, they had a respect for one another, and came to half-befriend one another over many years. In a letter to William J. Kennedy, in 1968, Thompson described Ginsberg as "One of the few honest people I've ever met, for good or ill."

In his *The Book Report* interview, Thompson said:

Yeah. Allen was a particular friend, one of my heroes, really. I knew him almost as long as I've been writing... I was once arrested with Ginsberg. He was a big help to me. He was one of the few people who read unknown writer's work. Maybe he was just hustling me. He liked to flirt, Allen. They called him a monster but he was only falling in love.

In Douglas Brinkley's *The Art of Journalism: An Interview with Hunter S. Thompson*, Thompson tells of his first encounter with Ginsberg. They met in San Francisco, through a mutual weed dealer. Over several months, Ginsberg helped Thompson to edit a book he was working on at the time, *Hell's Angels*. Later, during Ken Kesey's legendary party for the unification of the Merry Pranksters and the Hell's Angels, Thompson met Ginsberg and Neal Cassady. This is the night of Thompson's 'arrest' with Ginsberg, as the two drove to buy booze for the party, and were stopped by the police. Apparently, all

Ginsberg could say to the police was, “I’m a poet... I’m a poet!”

In a 1965 letter to Murray Fisher at *Playboy*, Thompson explains that:

My tail-light lenses were cracked, so they cited me, and would have taken me and Allen Ginsberg to jail, I think, if I hadn't been sporting a tape recorder. Ginsberg was so enraged by the harassment that he might want to write an ode about it. If it interests you, I'll ask him. Anyway, neither my woody gard nor Ginsberg's foot-long beard made the right sort of impression...

In a 1966 letter to Ginsberg, Thompson asks permission to use the whole of the poem, ‘To the Angels’ in *Hell’s Angels: The Strange and Terrible Saga of the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs*. Thompson explains to Ginsberg how much he loves the poem, and how much it means to his book, and then promises that although he has no money, to give Ginsberg a percentage of the royalties of the book. However, according to Michael Soheim, in *Gonzo*, Thompson and Ginsberg seemed to have fallen out sometime around 1970. He tells the story of when Thompson was drinking in the famous Jerome Bar in Aspen, and deliberately avoided meeting Ginsberg. Apparently Thompson owed Ginsberg “some time together.”

Corey Seymour tells a story that perhaps elaborates upon this. In 1994, at a Beat Generation Conference in New York, Thompson told Seymour several stories about Ginsberg, and finished by saying that he needed to get in touch, as they hadn’t seen one another in a long time. Hours later, Seymour met Ginsberg and told him how to contact Thompson. Thompson then briefly explained to Seymour that Ginsberg had been too embarrassed to speak to him since a “lost weekend” in the late sixties. “It’s a little-known fact, Corey, that Ginsberg was a horrible drunkard.” Thompson and Ginsberg met later that day.

Johnny Depp tells the story of Ginsberg’s memorial service in Los Angeles. Thompson was unable to attend, but agreed to write something if Depp would read it at the service. However, Thompson delayed and cancelled, until a minute Depp before was about to leave, expecting to go onstage with nothing to say, and Thompson faxed him a eulogy that described Ginsberg as “a dangerous bull-fruit with the brain of an open sore and the conscience of a virus... crazy,

queer, and small...” and that he was looking forward to meeting the Grim Reaper “because he knew he could get into his pants.”

Kerouac

To Susan Haselden, Thompson wrote:

Certainly I've read The Subterranean: all his crap for that matter. The man is an ass, a mystic boob with intellectual myopia. The Dharma thing was not quite as bad as The Subterraneans and they're both withered appendages to On the Road – which isn't even a novel in the first place.

Doug Brinkley, the editor of Thompsons letters and his literary executor, knew better than anyone what Thompson thought of Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*.

Hunter never really liked Jack Kerouac's On the Road – he thought the writing was kind of sloppy and romantic and oversentimental – but he told me he thought Kerouac was a genius for two things: discovering Neal Cassady, whom Hunter thought was flat-out amazing, and using the literary construct of ‘looking for the lost dad I never had.’ Neal was never properly raised by a father. He didn't even know whether his dad was alive or dead, and the notion of a young son who never had a dad, looking for his biological father, appealed to Hunter a great deal.

In *Outlaw Journalist: The Life and Times of Hunter S. Thompson*, William McKeen says that Thompson admired Kerouac’s *On the Road*, but only in the political sense. He disliked Kerouac’s other books, and wasn’t enthusiastic about the Beats as a movement. In a 1962 letter to Paul Semonin, Thompson wrote ‘I have tonight begun reading a shitty, shitty book by Kerouac called *Big Sur*.’ But there are many references to his having read, and been influenced to some small degree, by *On the Road*. Granted, millions of people Thompson’s age at the time were influenced by the book, but nonetheless it seems to creep up when people talk about the young Hunter S. Thompson. Thompson took a cross-country roadtrip that was allegedly inspired by Kerouac, and arrived in San Francisco to

visit the areas made famous by the Beats. Semonin eluded to an influence Kerouac held over Thompson whilst in Puerto Rico, as the two young men read Beat literature and came to adopt Beat ‘personas.’ As much as anything, it seems Thompson was drawn to the same kind of thing as Kerouac. Thompson was intrigued by the bright lights and temptations of the city, but he was also drawn to wilderness. Both loved to get away from people. At different times, they ended up in Big Sur, a rugged wilderness that drew many Beat and counterculture artists to its magnificent crashing shoreline. When living in Big Sur and struggling badly for money, he submitted writing to Sterling Lord, Kerouac’s agent, and was rejected. This prompted one of Thompson’s many nasty letters in reply.

If we look at the authors’ two most famous works, we can see similarities. Both claim their works as both truth and fiction; both wrote travelling buddy stories; both detailed outrageous fun and drug use and youthful exuberance. In Thompson and Kerouac, the words just fly off the page at speed, as natural as thought. Their most famous novels were popular and critical successes, particularly long after the fact. Kerouac and Thompson sought critical success as serious writers, but lamented the fact that their fame largely extended to frat boys and wild youngsters with a rebellious streak. Both died feeling that they lacked recognition for their work and that their lives had spiraled into decline with the burden of fame. In 1995, Thompson was on the panel at the Jack Kerouac Conference in New York

Burroughs

We know that Thompson read William Burroughs and respected him, but not much else is clear. He certainly wished to be uttered in the same breath as Burroughs, and not because they both wrote explicitly about drugs or that they loved guns. In 1997, after Burroughs’ death, Thompson wrote an obituary that was essentially the story of when the two writers met and fired guns together. At this time, Burroughs was an old and frail man, but he managed to make a huge impression upon Thompson by firing a powerful handgun with some accuracy. Twice during the article, he manages to make a joke about Burroughs killing Joan Vollmer.

William had a fine taste for handguns, and later in life he became very good with them. I remember shooting with him one afternoon at his range on the

outskirts of Lawrence. He had five or six well oiled old revolvers laid out on a wooden table, covered with a white linen cloth, and he used whichever one he was in the mood for at the moment. The S&W .45 was his favorite. “This is my finisher” he said lovingly and then he went into a crouch and then put five out of six shots through the chest of a human-silhouette target about 25 yards away.

Later, in *Hey Rube*, Thompson refers to Burroughs as his friend, and says that the author was ‘robbed and badly beaten, many years ago, by a gang of paramilitary dope addicts who had never even heard of him’ in New York.

Neal Cassady

Early in his life, Thompson was apparently fascinated by Neal Cassady. According to Dou Brinkley, he thought the star of *On the Road* ‘was flat-out amazing.’

In 1966, Thompson decided he wanted to write a story about Cassady and Ken Kesey after the Merry Pranksters were arrested for marijuana possession. Thompson had become friends with Allen Ginsberg and was riding with the Hell’s Angels when the meeting between the Pranksters and the Angels occurred. There was a famous party that was written about by both Thompson and Tom Wolfe, and Neal Cassady was there. Sandy Thompson recalled that the party was wild, with everyone just ‘being high and silly.’

Gregory Corso

The connection between Corso and Thompson is neither obvious, nor easy to find. I only added it here because it stuck strangely in my mind and I spent a great deal of time, calling in many favours, to get the right reference.

In Paul Perry’s *Fear and Loathing: The Strange and Terrible Saga of Hunter S. Thompson*, there is a short story about when Thompson and Gene McGarr went to the Living Theatre on San Francisco’s 14th Street to watch Kerouac read from *Satori in Paris*. Kerouac was naturally drunk and slurred through the performance. When Gregory Corso stepped on stage to read his poetry, Thompson and McGarr were enraged by his shortness and femininity, and proceeded to kick beer bottles, ending the performance and getting themselves thrown out.

Jack Kerouac's *Visions of Gerard*

By Kristin McLaughlin

Without Gerard, what would have happened to Ti Jean? – Jack Kerouac

Visions of Gerard is Kerouac's prolonged meditation on his older, saintly brother Gerard, who died at the age of nine (Jack was four at the time) of rheumatic fever. As the cornerstone of the Dulouz legend, *Visions of Gerard*, along with *Maggie Cassidy* and *Dr. Sax*, deals with Kerouac's early life in Lowell, Massachusetts. Most biographers agree that though Kerouac left Lowell after high school, he never left it emotionally. That was where his heart remained. In 1963, six years before his death, he said, "I have a recurring dream of simply walking around the deserted twilight streets of Lowell, in the mist, eager to return to every known and fabled corner. A very eerie, recurrent dream, but it always makes me happy when I wake up."¹

Kerouac was born in March 1922 at 9 Lupine Road in Centralville, one of Lowell's neighborhoods on the north side of the Merrimack River. Lowell had its hay-day during the late 19th/early 20th century when the banks of the river were crowded with textile mills. By the time Jack was born, however, Lowell was already declining as the mills began to close.

He was the third child of Leo and Gabrielle Kerouac, both French-Canadian immigrants who had met and married in Nashua, New Hampshire. Leo owned a print shop in Lowell and was "a hearty, outgoing burgher"² and Gabrielle, known to everyone as Mémère, conducted the household in a Quebecois patois known as joul. For one of the most influential American writers of the 20th century, Jack didn't learn English until he went to school.

Kerouac's mother played an important – perhaps unhealthily important – role in his life. He told biographer Anne Charters that his mother was the only woman he ever loved. She was devoutly Catholic, and wore religious medals attached to the strap of her

slip. After Gerard's death, she became fiercely protective of Ti Jean (as Jack was known), and that continued throughout his life. While his father seemed indifferent and occasionally hostile to organized religion and its messengers, Mémère instilled in the Kerouac children a religious sensibility that is apparent in all of Kerouac's writings. Religion, his mother, and his background as a child of working-class immigrants profoundly affected him, his writing, and his worldview. Though he did a lot of things that could be viewed as the antithesis of those influences, it's clear in his writing that those influences were always there.

In *Visions of Gerard*, Kerouac seamlessly blends dream and reality to create a "book of sorrows."³ Though evidence suggests that most of the scenes in *Visions of Gerard* do not stem from Kerouac's real memories, he manages to meld his few recollections, his dreams and visions, his mother's romanticized anecdotes and his own imaginings into a tribute to a dying brother. To Jack, Gerard really was angelic.

One story related of Gerard is that he once found a mouse in a trap that was still alive. Horrified that someone would do this to one of God's creatures, he brought the mouse home, bandaged it up and took care of it. Before long the cat found the mouse and ate it, leaving only the tail behind. Gerard scolded the cat, but not in the mean way you would expect from a child. Instead, Gerard gives the feline a lecture that it shouldn't harm others. Leo tries to explain to the boy that that happens in life – we eat things that are smaller than us. But Gerard wants none of it. "We'll never go to Heaven if we go on eating each other and destroying each other like that all the time! – without thinking, without knowing."⁴

As stated earlier, Gerard died of rheumatic fever, an

1 "Book News from Farrar, Straus, & Cudahy, Inc." Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac. Ed. Paul Maher, Jr. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2005. 223

2 Gifford, Barry and Lawrence Lee. Jack's Book: An Oral Biography of Jack Kerouac. NY: St. Martin's Press. 1978. 4.

3 Kerouac, Jack. Letter to Gary Snyder. 15 January 1956. Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters 1940-1956. Ed. Anne Charters. New York: Penguin Group, 1995. 358-359.

4 Kerouac, Jack. Visions of Gerard. New York: Penguin Group, 1991. 11.

inflammatory disorder affecting the heart, joints, skin, and nervous system that can develop after a Group A streptococcal infection such as strep throat or scarlet fever. Though he was in a great deal of pain, particularly towards the end of his life, Kerouac does not put the boy's suffering in the forefront. Gerard, in his saintliness, suffers quietly, without complaint. Despite his own pain, he brings home hungry neighborhood children for Mémère to feed. "Unceasing compassion flows from Gerard to the world even while he groans in the very middle of his extremity."⁵

Gerard oversees Jack, wanting him to be good. Kerouac writes of when he stabbed a picture of a murderess on the front page of the newspaper. Gerard scolds him, like he scolded the cat, and together they patched the newspaper back together, so the picture was as good as new. Though Gerard is mostly kind to Ti Jean (except when slaps him for knocking over his erector set), there is competition. Little Jack wonders why Gerard gets fed before he does, and states, "there's no doubt in my heart that my mother loves Gerard more than she loves me."⁶

The Gerard that Jack knows is otherworldly. He falls asleep in class and dreams that the Virgin Mary came to him with a white wagon pulled by two lambs. He tells his little brother about the color of God. He goes to confession where he tells the priest about a little boy whom he pushed when the child accidentally knocked over something he was making. The priest asks if the boy was hurt; Gerard says no, "but I hurt his heart."⁷ Near his death Gerard tells Ti Jean, "God put these little things on earth to see if we want to hurt them – those who don't do it who can, are for his Heaven – those who see they can hurt, and do hurt, they're not for his Heaven – See?"⁸ When the doctor tells the Kerouacs that it is time to call for the priest, the nuns from Gerard's school come as well, kneeling by his bedside, asking him questions and writing down the boy's answers. The whole portrayal is of a child who is more than a child – a child who understands something about the world and about Heaven that those around him do not. He tries to explain that "we're all in Heaven, but we don't know it."⁹ Kerouac puts the religious theme in the forefront here. All of his novels are religious novels at heart, but in some of them it's hard to discern.

Then Gerard dies. Jack runs down the street towards his father on his way home, "gleefully...yelling, 'Gerard est mort! as thou it was some great event...I

thought it had something to do with some holy transformation that would make him greater and more Gerard like...so when he wearily just said, 'I know, Ti Pousse, I know' I had that same feeling that I have today when I would rush and tell people the good news that Nirvana, Heaven, our salvation is Here and Now, that gloomy reaction of theirs, which I can only attribute to pitiful and so-to-be loved ignorance of mortal brains."¹⁰



After his death, the neighborhood women notice that the birds that Gerard had lovingly fed from his windowsill had gone and they did not return. "'They're gone with him!' Or, I'd say, 'It was himself.'"¹¹

In 1955, shortly after the famed Six Gallery reading in San Francisco, which featured Allen Ginsberg's performance of "Howl," Neal Cassady left Kerouac in charge of his mentally unstable girlfriend of the moment, Natalie Jackson. Jack spent the afternoon trying to calm her manic episode with Buddhist texts,

5 Ibid., 70.

6 Ibid., 71.

7 Kerouac, Jack. *Visions of Gerard*. New York: Penguin Group, 1991. 36.

8 Ibid., 104.

9 Ibid., 54.

10 Ibid., 109-110.

11 Ibid., 117

but to no avail. The next day she jumped from the window to her death. Kerouac was very disturbed by this and returned to his sister's home in Rocky Mount, North Carolina shortly before Christmas. Of course, his mother was there too. The experiences that would fill Kerouac's future novel, *The Dharma Bums*, were occurring at this time.

In January 1956, Mémère left Rocky Mount for New York to attend a funeral. It was then, in the absence of his mother, that Kerouac sat down to write what would become *Visions of Gerard*. "My sister and her husband weren't interested. They went to bed and I took over the kitchen, brewed tea and took Benzedrine. It was written by hand on the kitchen table. My sister wouldn't let me light candles, so I used the kitchen light. You got to live with your family, you know. Mémère wasn't there. She went to the funeral of her step-mother in Brooklyn. If she'd been there, I wouldn't have written it. We'd have talked all night. But that funeral reminded me of funerals, my brother's funeral..."¹²

At the time of writing *Visions of Gerard*, Kerouac was in the process of synthesizing his two religions – Catholicism and Buddhism; both are clearly represented in the novel, and Kerouac successfully harmonizes them to present his Catholic sensibility from his recently adopted Buddhist perspective. To say that Kerouac was a devout Catholic is to imply that he was a practicing Catholic, which he was not. But he continued to maintain his belief in Catholicism throughout his life. He was Catholic in his heart, and was devout in his own way. His beliefs at the time of writing the novel can probably be summed in the words he says that Gerard's "sad eyes first foretold": "All is well, practice Kindness, Heaven is Nigh."¹³

It only took Kerouac approximately fifteen days to write *Visions of Gerard*, though John Kingsland, who read the unedited original draft of Kerouac's *The Town and the City*, stated that some of the scenes that were edited out of that first published novel are included in *Visions of Gerard*.¹⁴ On January 15, 1956, Kerouac wrote to Gary Snyder that the novel was finished. In that letter, he called the work his "best most serious sad and true book yet,"¹⁵ and reiterated this in letters as

late as 1961, still two years before its publication. By late 1956, Kerouac had submitted the book to Viking Publishers, where Malcolm Cowley objected to its Buddhist influences; Cowley didn't see how it related to Jack's French-Canadian upbringing. In response to requests to revise the novel, Kerouac told his agent, "*Visions of Gerard* suits me as it stands. As it comes, so it flows, and that's literature at its purest."¹⁶ But by 1958, Kerouac was offering to revise the novel and substitute Catholic references for the Buddhist ones if Viking would buy the book. He really wanted the book to be published, mostly to counteract his ever-growing image as an encourager of youthful rebellion. He wrote that *Visions of Gerard* "is by far the wisest next book for me because of present screaming about my juvenile delinquent viciousness."¹⁷

The book, along with *Big Sur*, was eventually bought in January 1962 by Farrar, Straus and Cudahy for a \$10,000 advance. When it was sold, Kerouac's editor promised not to make changes to it, but it's unclear if any changes were made between its original writing, which was done in pencil, and its final, published version. In December 1962, he wrote to his friend Philip Whalen, "I'm proofreading *Visions of Gerard*...[it] will be published by Fall 1963 and will be ignored I guess, or called pretentious, but who cares..."¹⁸ Who cares? Jack certainly did. For all the coolness of that statement, Kerouac was crushed by negative reviews, which typically not only ripped his books to shreds, but Kerouac as a person.

Visions of Gerard wasn't exactly ignored, but the reviews were very bad indeed. The New York Herald Tribune stated that it was, "a text very much like everything else [Kerouac] has published in the past five years: slapdash, grossly sentimental, often pridefully 'sincere' that you can't help question the value of sincerity itself...In someone else's hands, it could have been moving. Even in Kerouac's own hands, it could have been good, if only he had made writerly demands of himself. As it stands, though, it just amounts to 152 more pages of self-indulgence."¹⁹ The review in the New York Times wasn't any better: "...the clangor we hear far too often is the narrator's jaunty, garrulous hipster yawping, and before its implacable onslaught

16 Kerouac, Jack. Letter to Sterling Lord. 7 October 1956.

Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters 1940-1956. Ed. Anne Charters. New York: Penguin Group, 1995. 589.

17 Kerouac, Jack. Letter to Sterling Lord. 29 November 1958. Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters 1957-1969. Ed. Anne Charters. New York: Viking Press, 1999. 169.

18 Kerouac, Jack. Letter to Philip Whalen. 13 December 1962. Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters 1957-1969. Ed. Anne Charters. New York: Viking Press, 1999. 353.

19 Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters 1957-1969. Ed. Anne Charters. New York: Viking Press, 1999. 370.

12 Charters, Anne. Kerouac: A Biography. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973. 252.

13 Kerouac, Jack. *Visions of Gerard*. New York: Penguin Group, 1991. 6.

14 Nicosia, Gerard. *Memory Babe: A Critical Biography of Jack Kerouac*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983. 500

15 Kerouac, Jack. Letter to Gary Snyder. 15 January 1956. Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters 1940-1956. Ed. Anne Charters. New York: Penguin Group, 1995. 358-359.

all feeling disintegrates. It is not enough to say that the style does not evoke or intensify the emotion. It betrays and debases it. The dead boy deserved better of his eulogist.”²⁰ Biographer Gerard Nicosia states that “critics seemed to be stirring for new lefthanded and underhanded ways of putting [Kerouac] down.”²¹ This further fueled Kerouac’s downward spiral – now he was not only the cause of juvenile delinquency, but he was desecrating his brother’s memory and exploiting his death.

In an October 1963 letter to friend and fellow writer John Clellon Holmes, Kerouac states, “everybody’s become so mean, so sinister, so hypocritical I can’t believe it. So I turn to drink like a lost maniac... They make me feel like never writing another word again.”²² So much for not caring. Kerouac’s entire identity was as a writer, and all he desired professionally was to be taken seriously. Since the publication of *On the Road*, he had been physically declining largely due to the notoriety it brought him. He was so self-conscious, and the press had turned him into everything he wasn’t, and didn’t want to be.

Visions of Gerard is almost a prolonged religious homily to his brother, who in his mind – and the mind of his mother – was a saint. But while this novel does have an overarching religious sensibility to it, it is a very sad tale. Jack was absolutely devoted to his brother – he worshipped him and emulated him in a way probably most boys would look up to an older brother. “For the first four years of my life, while he lived, I was not Ti Jean Dulouz, I was Gerard, the world was his face, the flower of his face, the pale stooped disposition, the heartbreakingness and the holiness.”²³ He was extremely jealous of Gerard’s friends, and when they would come to visit the bedridden boy, Jack would complain to Mémère and she would send the boys away, saying that Gerard belonged to Jack. Losing his brother appears to have been very traumatic for Kerouac – he grew frightened of the dark and often wondered how he could get into heaven to be reunited with his beloved brother. For a short time after his brother’s death, Jack even thought Gerard would return in some resurrected form, “huge and all-powerful and renewed.”²⁴

20 Maloff, Saul. “A Yawping at the Grave.” *New York Times*. 8 September 1963.

21 Nicosia, Gerard. *Memory Babe: A Critical Biography of Jack Kerouac*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1983. 648

22 Kerouac, Jack. Letter to John Clellon Holmes. 5 October 1963. *Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters 1957-1969*. Ed. Anne Charters. New York: Viking Press, 1999. 370.

23 Kerouac, Jack. *Visions of Gerard*. New York: Penguin Group, 1991. 2.

24 Kerouac, Jack. *Visions of Gerard*. New York: Penguin Group, 1991. 109.

Neighborhood playmates of Gerard remember him as a normal, but sickly, kid and suggest that Kerouac largely embellished the story of his brother’s holiness. In fact, in a letter to his sister, Caroline in 1945, Kerouac admitted all he remembered of Gerard was the slap over the erector set.²⁵ The myth of Gerard was most likely encouraged and reinforced by Mémère and greatly merged with the French tradition of child-saints. It is legitimate to wonder how much Gerard’s death – and his doting mother’s reaction to it – influenced Kerouac later in life. In the same letter to Caroline, he admits feeling guilty about Gerard and that he may have been responsible for the death. But imagine Jack’s position: as a child he believed his brother was favored over him, his parents view the boy as a saint. Gerard’s piety was used as a standard against which Kerouac often measured his own life, and he failed miserably against that standard. Gerard’s death has come to be seen by researchers as a potential source of Kerouac’s torments and turmoil, and *Visions of Gerard* has been described as being “told from the standpoint of a man looking from the dark torrents of a raging river at an unattainable peaceful shore.”²⁶ But though the boy’s death was clearly a tragedy, and served as a source of terrible guilt and anguish for Kerouac – and perhaps even was the original catalyst that eventually led to his alcoholism and death, we are also faced with the question of whether, had Gerard lived instead, Kerouac would have ever become a writer in the first place. As Kerouac asks in the novel, what would have happened to Jack without Gerard? “The whole reason why I ever wrote at all and drew breath to bite in vain with pen and ink...because of Gerard, the idealism, Gerard the religious hero – Écrivez pour l’amour de son mort.”²⁷

25 Kerouac, Jack. Letter to Caroline Kerouac Blake. 14 March 1945. *Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters 1940-1956*. Ed. Anne Charters. New York: Penguin Group, 1995. 87.

26 Simpson, Emily Patricia. “Religious Turmoil: The Conflict Between Buddhism and Catholicism in Jack Kerouac’s Life and Writing.” MA Thesis. North Carolina State University, 2003. 28.

27 Kerouac, Jack. *Visions of Gerard*. New York: Penguin Group, 1991. 112.

Hunter S. Thompson, Jack Kerouac Ernest Hemingway Review No for Old Men

by Matt Gibson, editor of Xpat magazine

Hunter S. Thompson

The theatre was dark and reeked with the stench of a hundred overfed accountants gorging on chemical drenched popcorn and syrup water. I'd been assigned to review *No Country for Old Men* for *Rolling Stone*, and was already a week past deadline, but had abandoned the assignment partly because when you eat as much mescaline as I had it's very hard to focus on a predetermined task, and also because I realized what a fleecing the operation was. Fifteen dollars for a ticket. Eight dollars for popcorn. Four dollars for soda. This wasn't art. It was a twisted perversion of the American dream, a herding of overweight suburbanites into giant pens with flashing pictures on the wall to stupefy them into paying outrageous prices for sickening foods.

I had brought my lawyer, a large hairy Samoan, and I explained this to him as we waited to purchase a package of Mentos, which is the only thing that will calm him in the throws of a powerful mescaline trip, but the mescaline was already batting his mind around like a squash ball. He kept looking around and talking about an agent and the 'incident' on his last trip to Batangas. Suddenly he muttered something about "the banana man" and ran down the up escalator, leaving a trail of sweatpants wearing housewives on the ground. I slipped into the theater.

The movie had started, but I was distracted by the raincoat-wearing pervert in front of me, who looked like the police sketch of a local pedophile. I was trying to get into position to snap his neck without drawing attention when I saw that a man further down in the theater kept turning to look at me. He was old and reptilian. Was this the agent that my lawyer had seen? Paranoia gripped me. Did I have any outstanding warrants? Was he an assassin? Or worse yet, a Republican? It was clear that I had to make a run for it and come up with an excuse for not finishing the article. I ran out the emergency exit hoping that it would sound the alarm and empty the theater, but the alarm

didn't go off. There was a fire extinguisher in a glass case on the wall. I broke the glass and the alarm screamed. I sprinted back into the theater using the fire extinguisher to create a smokescreen. I thought I was in the clear, but as I ran up the aisle the agent leaped in front of me like an orangutan and punched me in the face. I awoke to my lawyer explaining to the theater manager that I was autistic and threatening to sue him for discrimination against the handicapped if he didn't allow us to leave.

He pulled me to my feet and dragged me out my Cadillac, which we drove at top speed through the city, onto the interstate and headed for Vegas, where I had a friend who could give us some queludes to bring us back to our senses so that we could figure out who the agent was, and what he wanted.

Jack Kerouac

Neal and I had been planning to see *No Country for Old Men* because Neal and I always dug Cohen brothers movies and how they created such funny-sad characters that mirrored the funny-sadness of life, but when we were in the Royal having a beer before the movie Neal met a this beautiful little thin-hipped waitress who was almost finished work and decided to boost a car and drive her out of the city and make her in a field – Neal apologized profusely because beneath his animal sexuality he's really a golden hearted angel and I told him that it was OK and bought a bottle of port to keep me company and hid it under my raincoat but that was a bad idea because I got too drunk waiting for the movie to start and couldn't see clearly or understand the story so I started meditating on this crazy cat behind me who was moving around and mumbling a crazy dark monologue about pedophiles and agents and he kept getting more and more agitated like a tortured dark theater ogre un-

rouac and Country

til finally he stood up and bounded down the aisle on great long ogre legs and rushed out the door – then the fire alarm went off and he rushed back in shooting plumes of white foam across the theater while running up the aisle – but then suddenly a man stood up and punched him, which I hated because I hate to see anything hurt, and can't even bring myself to kill a mosquito, and because I came to think that he was a of mad angel here to save us all from ourselves so I ran out of the theater and kept running for two blocks before realizing that I'd left the port in the theater and that I didn't have money to buy more and that even after encountering a wild angel of the night, when your wine is gone and you're alone the city is a desolate place - so I sat down on and cried into my knees wishing that Neal and the waitress would pull up in a car blaring bebop on the radio and carry me off into the hopeless American night.

Ernest Hemingway

I sipped gin from the flask that Ezra had given me and I hid it under my coat whenever the usher walked past. The gin was cold and biting and helped to pass the time while I waited for the movie to begin. After a while the theater became dark and quiet. The movie began. It was *No Country for Old Men* by the Cohen brothers, who always made fine movies, so I expected to enjoy it.

The story followed a man who killed people for profit and fun, a cowboy who discovered a bag of money, and an idealistic policeman. The story was interesting and I liked it although it wasn't much like the brothers' previous movies. The writing was refined and the cinematography was good.



The experience was all very good except for a man several rows behind me who kept talking and moving around. I kept turning around to glare at him so that he would be quiet. Eventually the man stood up and ran out the emergency exit. A moment later the fire alarm went off and the man rushed back into the theater screaming “fire” and shooting a fire extinguisher into the crowd. I had been enjoying the movie a great deal and this made me very angry so, when he came near me I stood up and punched his face. I could tell he wasn't a boxer because he had no legs. He fell down and shouted for others to attack me because I was an “agent” and going to take him away for “water boarding”, so I punched him again and put him out. After that the movie was postponed until the police could come, and I had an appointment with Gertrude for aperitifs at the Royal, so I left. I can't say much about this movie except that the beginning is different from anything that the Cohen brothers have made, but it's probably as good as anything that they've made, and it may attract lunatics, but it's probably worth seeing if you're not afraid to box a lunatic.

Going To Meet The Man

First Encounters with Allen Ginsberg

by David Breihaupt

I live more and more in my head each day as my present circumstances leave little to be desired. I begin to think about the quirks and mishaps that have led up to this day, premeditated decisions and whims. Yes, whims, what in the hell are they? Random fork-in-the-road choosers or foundation of full-fledged pathways to destiny? It was one such whim that changed my life, a why-the-hell not decision that came to fruition several months after I initiated it. One day I decided to write to Allen Ginsberg and offer my services for aid in archives maintenance gratis and sat back to watch the results. A classmate in a writing class taught by Michael Brownstein had some vague connection to Allen and gave me his street address on East 12th Street. I wrote my proposal and dropped it in the mail. Days went by, then weeks. Oh well, I thought, nothing ventured. I forgot about it and moved on.

That is until one day I received a post card in the mail. It was from Bob Rosenthal, Allen's secretary. He apologized for the delay in answering my offer. Things had been busy. It was NY after all, NY with Allen Ginsberg mixed in. He gave me a number to call. I had Allen Ginsberg's phone number in my hand.

I circled the card for a day or so. Was it a trick? It looked real. This was a phone number to history. I was seven digits away from the guy that wrote *Howl*, who penned *Kaddish* to his looney mother, the visionary who rode with Cassady, Kerouac, Burroughs and Corso.

There was almost too much history packed into that phone number. Should I call?

I did.

I took the six train downtown and got off at Astor place. I walked north a couple of blocks up to 12th street and headed east. Allen's apartment was between First Avenue and Avenue A. This was the heart of the village, bordering Alphabet City. The streets were perforated with homeless bodies; paper bagged bottles were the beverage of choice and crack hos whispered propositions in parched whispers.

Nearby was St. Mark's Church in the Bowery, home to a couple of decades of legendary poetry readings including performances by Robert Lowell and W. H. Auden. The neighborhood was soaked in more history than I would ever know or comprehend. All I knew was that I was making my own history as I walked to Allen's apartment.

Bob Rosenthal told me to call from the corner when I came down. I dialed their number from a ratty pay phone on the corner of Avenue A. The buzzer in his building was broken and they said they'd throw the key down wrapped in a sock. I saw a flutter of movement on the 4th floor's fire escape. I waved my arms and a small cloth bundle came sailing down to my feet. I picked it up. Inside was the key.

Allen's building was one of the old originals of the neighborhood with stone stairways so wide you could

have driven a sub compact up them. The steps were worn in the middle from decades, maybe a century, of travelers walking treks up and down and down the stairway. I began the ascent and added my own footsteps to the long path of history.

I felt dizzy and was sweating more than usual. My tongue felt dry and I hoped my breath didn't stink. The alcohol from all the beer I'd drunk last night was streaming out my pores. I suddenly noticed my shirt was damp. I



looked like I'd just sprinted through a car wash.

Allen's door was painted a glossy dark brown - it looked as though an inch of paint covered it like cake frosting. I wiped the sweat off my forehead before I knocked.

I heard footsteps and a hurried unlocking of the door. "Come on in." Bob waved me in as I entered into a narrow hallway lined on one side with coats hanging on hallway hooks. Bob disappeared around the corner and I followed him through what must have been Allen's kitchen. He ran into a room off from the kitchen which looked to be the main office and continued the phone conversation I'd interrupted. Suddenly a large man swooped into the kitchen, whom I instantly recognized as Peter Orlovsky, poet and Allen's long time companion.

"Give me a minute, canya?"

He waved me back into the hallway and I followed, not knowing what else to do. We turned left and entered Allen's small living room. Peter kept walking and climbed out the window unto the fire escape that had launched my sock. Across the street was a beautiful white stone church with green trim. I suddenly felt like I was in Europe.

"Come on, come on."

Suddenly I was out on the fire escape with Peter. This was the beginning of a very strange job interview. Peter was trying to unroll a sheet of polyethylene across the escape but was having trouble. I grabbed one end and helped stretch it out as Bob stuck his head out the window.

"Peter, what are you doing?"

"I'm spreading this out, yes, yes, gonna put the plants on it," he said defensively in his husky, somewhat manic voice.

"Gotta keep it covered, gotta keep it covered."

Bob reached out and pulled me back in.

"Sorry about that," he said. "I see you've met Peter."

"I guess so," was all I could utter. Peter was still outside, muttering and making adjustments.

"Peter? Why don't you come back inside," Bob coaxed. I took advantage of the lull to take in my surroundings. This was definitely one of the original lower east side tenements. Small rooms, crumbling plaster wooden floors, worn throw carpets. Book shelves lined the walls. I saw a hefty record collection, a Buddhist wall hanging and small pieces of original art. I could easily spend a few days here, it was exactly as I imagined a poet's apartment to be except that it was tidy, very tidy.

"Excuse the chaos, this is life at Ginsberg Central," said Bob. "Allen, this is David Breithaupt," Bob said by way of introduction. I was momentarily shocked to hear my name pronounced correctly. I was so impressed by this that I didn't notice Allen standing next to me, out of nowhere, dressed in a bright red shirt and bowing toward me slightly in what I would come to know as

one of his Buddhist habits. God knows what I mumbled back. When I came to NY I was hoping just to see him from a couple of hundred feet back at a poetry reading. Now here I was, standing in his living room, only inches away from him. I still wasn't sure this was really happening.

We spoke for awhile in one of his small side rooms, what looked to be his own personal Buddhist shrine with a red meditation cushion for sitting practice, a small stand with relics a large tantra hanging on the wall. Outside the window I could hear the traffic on east 12th street, the bells of the church and Peter rambling in one of the nearby rooms.

"Are you a man of leisure?" Allen asked.

"Hell no, I work for the NY Public Library but I have time to pitch in here and there..."

I noticed a large painting on the wall by Corso of Shelley. After years of reading these guys, I finally proved to myself that they truly existed. I sometimes felt all my favorite books were written by a small band of writers living in a large loft somewhere in Brooklyn or Queens. I didn't think of them as individuals with lives and histories, they were all larger than life. Now I knew better.

I was too nervous to remember little else of what I said; I can only hope I made some sense. We probably talked about books and writing and life. All that stuff. Whatever we spoke of, they ended up giving me the job. I accepted.

Bob showed me the ropes. There were boxes of cassettes and VHS tapes of Allen's performances and readings. All would have to be notated, assigned a code and cataloged before being sent up to Columbia where the bulk of Allen's hoard was stored. In time I would be fluent in Allen's loopy script, able to translate the volumes of script he managed to cram onto those tiny tape labels. I would assign a code to each tape, signifying the year it was recorded and what kind of reading or lecture it was and enter it into a master index. This was in the early 80s, mind you. No PCs, no internet, CDs or DVDs. There were still type writers and white out ruled. This was the beginning of an association with a poet whose influence on my life had been profound. It was also the commencement of friendships of Allen's staff, who were without exception, the kindest, most interesting people I would ever know. Bill Morgan, Juanita Leiberman, Peter Hale, Steven Taylor, all of them stars. It would become a segment of my life that certainly changed me forever, altered my thoughts on living and death, literature, politics and film, it was an education without a degree. Looking back on it all, I can't believe how lucky I was to have lived it. Overall, I'd have to say it's a good thing for whims. I hold onto those memories now more than ever. They keep me company on my sleepless nights.

Visions of Vollmer

VISIONS OF VOLLMER

In Issue Two of Beatdom, we ran a story about the women of the Beat Generation, and we obviously talked a little about Joan Vollmer. However, we didn't say enough to do her justice, for she was a fascinating character who became famous for all the wrong reasons.

Vollmer took a bullet in the head from her husband, William S. Burroughs, on September 6th, 1951, and went down in literary history as no more than a wife and a victim of a drunken attempt at William Tell... But Vollmer was the embodiment of Beat. She was ferociously intelligent and an incredible rebel. She loved drugs and sex, philosophy and chaos. She was privy to the creation of the Beat Generation, as her apartment in New York was the centre of the pre-history of the movement.

Ginsberg wrote 'Howl' after dreaming of Vollmer and Burroughs claimed to have only ever written because of her death. Every major participant of the movement agrees upon one thing – that she was intelligent and witty. Her influence upon the Beats was undeniable.

In histories of the Beat Generation, Vollmer is afforded far more importance than any other female member of the group or its associated movements and circles. She is treated almost like the men... But not quite. She is still denied her place.

Indeed, she was never the artist her male counterparts were. She was a muse and more, but she never wrote a book or a poem. Consequently, her memory continues through the literature of her contemporaries, who for some reason seem to deny her the respect we know they had...

We will take a look at some of the more significant references here, to get a grip on how she was viewed by her contemporaries.

Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*

Alias – Jane Lee

His relation with his wife was one of the strangest: they talked till late at night; Bull liked to hold the floor, he went right on in his dreary monotonous voice, she

tried to break in, she never could; at dawn he got tired and then Jane talked and he listened

Here Kerouac describes an interesting relationship between Burroughs and his wife, as well as inferring her importance to the rest of the Beats. Vollmer is seen as an active participant, and keen study. She listens and shows respect, but is ultimately allowed to speak, and has the attention of Burroughs, and of Kerouac.

However, in *On the Road*, Kerouac is describing Vollmer after the period of time she spent in New York, when her influence could be greater felt, and whilst in the sad and pathetic state of her addiction to bennies.

Although this is sadly the most famous reference to Vollmer in the Beat canon, it does her the least justice.

Jack Kerouac, *The Town and the City*

Alias – Mary Dennison

There's no doubt about the fact that Mary Dennison is mad, but that's only because she wants to be mad. What she has to say about the world, about everybody falling apart, about everybody clawing aggressively at one another in one grand finale of our glorious culture, about the madness in high places and the insane disorganized stupidity of the people who let themselves be told what to do and what to think by charlatans -- all that is true! ...There's only one real conclusion to be drawn. In Mary's words, everybody got the atomic disease, everybody's radioactive.

Here Ginsberg's character is speaking about Joan Vollmer. Despite her never getting a speaking part in this novel, her ideas are not only mentioned, but described. Her opinion so valued by Ginsberg and Kerouac, that it deserves a single paragraph. We can

see in her paraphrased idea, that she shared the Beat principals and world perception.

Jack Kerouac, *The Vanity of Duluo*

Alias – June

In this nearly non-speaking role, Joan is again referenced as a silent intellectual. Her home is the hangout, her intelligence is acknowledged, but she only gets one brief and dramatic paraphrased line:

I can never forget how June's present husband, Harry Evans, suddenly came clomping down the hall of her apartment in his Army boots, fresh from the German front, around September 1945, and he was appalled to see us, six fullgrown people, all high on Benny sprawled and sitting and cat-legged on that vast double-doublebed of 'skepticism' and 'decadence', discussing the nothingness of values, pale-faced, weak bodies, Gad the poor guy said: 'This is what I fought for?' His wife told him to come down from his 'character heights' or some such.

Jack Kerouac, *The Subterraneans*

Alias - Jane

This novel proves of little use in highlighting the role of Vollmer in the Beat Generation, except that she appears in memories that Kerouac has. Her ghost remains with him, a spectre of the past.

William S. Burroughs, *Junky*

In this novel, we barely get a reference to Burroughs' wife, and she isn't even mentioned by name. We are introduced to her when Burroughs is arrested, and he tells the police he has a drug-addict wife.

Later, Burroughs slaps her across the face twice for throwing his heroin on the floor. She tells him the drug is making him boring, but then backs down and tells him to do whatever.

John Clellon Holmes, *Go*

Alias – Liza Adler

Unhappily married to an officer still in Japan, she had an integrated insolence toward everything which made her insights

seem the more brilliant an audacious, and her insistence on the fragility of all human relationships profound. Liza was... a fascinating and sickly plant that thrived on the stifling atmosphere of argument over coffee and the student's tendency to analyze everything and reduce it to a "manifestation" of something else. She was, on top of this, a violent Marxist with a quick, destructive tongue and a mental agility.

She battled with him in class, mocked him to his face, asked him openly to have meals with her, attacked him for his "unconscious fascism," doused all his ideas in the cold water of logic, and finally made a class confederate of him.

Here we see the depiction of Joan Vollmer that is recognizable as the intellectual only briefly referenced by Kerouac. We see her charm the narrator with her brilliance. This is a character that one can imagine being held in high regard by the other Beats, rather than the silent girl in the shadows, portrayed by too many of her contemporaries.

Ted Morgan, *Literary Outlaw*

Though through his own writing, one barely notices he has a wife, the biography of William Burroughs, by Ted Morgan, presents a view of Vollmer that is more balanced and fair than that found in Kerouac or Burroughs. He presents Vollmer as an equal to Ginsberg, and as a truly revolutionary thinker. His depiction of Vollmer is drawn from the views held by Burroughs and Edie Parker.

Edie thought Joan was the most intelligent girl she had ever met. She had an independent mind, always questioning what anyone said, including her teachers at Barnard. In one of her marginal notes in her copy of Marx's Capital and Other Writings, there are echoes of Burroughs': "Maybe Marxism is dynamic and optimistic, and Freudianism is not. Is one more serviceable than the other? Why does it always have to be either/or?"

Indeed, from reading about Vollmer's notes, one does see the influence of Burroughs... Or perhaps it is not so much the influence of Burroughs that we note as the influence of Vollmer upon Burroughs...

If Burroughs respected and listened to his wife so much, perhaps some his wit and cynicism came from her. It sounds like that is a possibility.

Morgan also notes that Vollmer was remarkably well read. She seems to have similar influences to the men in the Beat circle, and seemed to enjoy reading and talking about these books and theories whilst in the bath. She also loved classical music and talking about philosophy whilst on 110th Street and Broadway.

But perhaps the most valuable quote comes from page 123:

Burroughs saw Joan as a woman of unusual insight. She was the smartest member of the group, he thought, certainly as smart as Allen, in many ways smarter, because there were limits to Allen's thinking, but none to Joan's. She started Burroughs thinking in new directions, got him interested in the Mayans, suggested that Mayan priests must have had some sort of telepathic control. She had an odd and original way of looking at things, and a great insight into character. For instance she said about Jack that he had a natural inborn fear of authority and that if the cops ever questioned him his mouth would fall and out would come the name they wanted.

Here is what we've felt but been denied through the works of the most famous Beats: a glimpse of the true estimation of Joan Vollmer. She was not a silent outsider, nor was she denied recognition. She was admired as an intellectual heavyweight, someone smarter than Allen Ginsberg. She even had opinions about the so-called King of the Beats, Jack Kerouac. But if Vollmer was so highly thought of, then why do her aliases take a side role in Beat literature? Sadly, it seems that Beat literature may have stemmed from the deep and dark thoughts of brilliant young minds, but it sold because of the wild antics. Vollmer was a woman, and she was above much of the juvenile delinquency that made the others famous. When she is referenced as a mysterious figure in Kerouac and Burroughs, it is because talk only carries so far. The action was carried out by the men, and consequently Vollmer was relegated to the history books. Her untimely death didn't help much, either.

Neal Cassady, *Collected Letters, 1944-1976*

Joan is brittle, blasé brittleness is her forte. With sharpened laughs and dainty oblique statements she fashions the topic at hand. You know these things, I need not elaborate. But you ask for an angle, well, Julie's hair is matted with dirt I told; oh fuck it, disintegration of continued habit patterns (child raising here) has Joan laboring in a bastardized world wherein the supply of benzedrine completely conditions her reaction to everyday life. ETC. I love her.

In his *Collected Letters*, which was of course not published during his lifetime (Cassady published nothing whilst alive), there are many references to Vollmer. Mostly, she appears as another character in the early days of the Beats, as she does in Kerouac's books. But the above quote shows a little more depth. It paints a sad portrait of Vollmer, but alludes to her intelligence.

Herbert Huncke, *Guilty of Everything*

The clique consisted Joan, Bill, Allen, who had a place of his own but spent a great deal of time there, myself, and later, Jack Kerouac... They were very witty with a terrific bite, almost vitriolic with their sarcasm. They could carry on these extremely witty conversations... I couldn't always understand them, and it used make me feel sort of humiliated because I obviously did not know what they were talking about.

Huncke was a close friend of Vollmer's. He was frequent visitor to her apartment in New York, and even came to visit her when she lived with Burroughs in Texas. He thought she was stunningly beautiful and extremely intelligent.

In 2000, Gary Walkow made a film called *Beat* that sounds as though it adds to the memory of Joan Vollmer, but rather perverts and distorts the story of her life. Walkow was happy to do an interview with Beatdom for Issue Three... until he realised that our questions all revolved around his shockingly poor filmmaking and truth-telling abilities. The interview never came to light...

James W. Grauerholz wrote an enlightening document on the infamous ‘William Tell’ incident, that shows Walkow’s representation as not so much a distortion or artistic interpretation of the facts, as a flat-out lie.

Grauerholz commented upon the film and the statement on the production company’s website that claims the film to be utterly true and based upon hard research and a collaboration with Burroughs. Funnily enough, Grauerholz recalls when he and Burroughs were approached by Walkow at an

airport, but dismissed him as ‘a creep.’ The film was surrounded by false representations, and exists only as a perversion of the history of the Beat Generation and an unfair portrait of Joan Vollmer.

Unfortunately, one has to dig deep to find a fair representation of Vollmer.

Required Reading

A collection of websites, blogs and other stuff on the internet (pertaining to the Beat Generation, of course).

Beatdom – www.beatdom.com

Of course, the best Beat Generation on the web is Beatdom! Here you can read our magazines and peruse our extensive archives.

The Beat Generation Dot Net – www.thebeatgeneration.net

Right now my favourite Beat link is this one. Every day there is a classic photo as a gateway to a blog that is frequently updated and always interesting.

The Beatific Generation – www.beatnews.jackmagazine.com

This site died for a long time, but it has been resurrected and offers links to stories about contemporary events relating to the Beat Generation.

Beatscene – www.beatscene.net

Another Beat magazine, with a great website. Constantly updated.

The Daily Beat – www.thedailybeatblog.blogspot.com

Rick Dale, author of 100 days of Kerouactions, writes regular updates (although not daily, as the title would suggest...) about all things Beat.

Empty Mirror Books – www.emptymirrorbooks.com

A great Beat resource, with the highlight clearly being the collection of Larry Keenan photographs.

Jack Kerouac Book Covers - <http://www.books.rack111.com/jkbooks/>

Dave Moore’s website, with an astonishing collection of Kerouac covers. There are covers from Kerouac books in various languages around the world.

The Subterraneans - <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/subterraneansgroup/>

This is the best Beat group online, and features Kerouac expert Dave Moore as a regular contributor.

The Gun and the Dark

New Way

By Tim Grondin

One thing I remember vividly about my senior year... was the night we needed a gun.

My brother Matt had felt himself vaguely threatened from a kid in school, so he wanted to buy one just to put the fear of God in him. And maybe to sell it. And maybe to look cool. But mostly: to put the fear of God into that poor wretched son-of-a-bitch. The right... to bear arms: The American way. One of the tenants of American life. And sometimes a sad prospect indeed.

Lord, I wish I'd have had the common sense to stop him. I guess I knew it was a bad idea, but Matt just had this way about him; he had a way of making you believe that what you were doing was right and just and the only way to do it. Matt was just like that... and in a matter of minutes I would be defending his plan instead of opposing it. So I knew that I would have to think long and hard to come up with a plan to actually make him stop.

In the end, I did come up with a plan.

I decided to help.

And so this was the beginning of things... and the end of things. The tale of two shitties; rocks and hard places... Or perhaps a hell of a lot more. But I mean, from then on, I would have to look at my life in two parts: before the gun... and after.

It's just the way things work. Bad ideas don't always seem so bad at the time they are born. Maybe it's because there aren't a lot of good ideas popping out, so there's nothing of which to make comparison? Or maybe it's stupidity.

Or maybe society is telling itself a bold new farce when they claim that rap lyrics don't have any effect whatsoever on children or young adults. As if music has no ability to motivate.

Oh well. Fuck it, so let's get a gun; what could happen?

These things start off simple enough...don't they?

We went to school; I drove so that we could both smoke some pot on the way there. I didn't like smoking alone and like I've mentioned: in my 'Senior Year,' studying wasn't much of a priority. Well, unless you mean low priority.

Things had progressively gotten worse since Matt had entered High School at the same time I was completing my tour of High School and its endless oddities. I guess there's no real way of explaining what it's like to have two hellions of similar mold wandering around the hallways and picking up recruits and causing chaos and ruin during one specific timeframe. It's a powerful, noticeable thing.

And it was about to get worse, man. A lot worse.

I went through the day as usual. Well, there was a moment where I'd accidentally wandered into the wrong 3rd hour class; I was supposed to be in 2nd hour class. It was weird, not just because it felt weird, but because all of the sober fuckers couldn't quite decipher this move; including the instructor. It was just enough to throw everyone off. They couldn't quite figure it out. This is because they aren't as familiar with pot as you might think.

I certainly wasn't any help; I had other things on my mind. I hadn't really looked around to see that, for some reason, the entire class looked a lot different this fine day.

Finally the instructor, who looked like a giant ghoul of sorts, offered her question's prelude to me and the rest of the class: "Can I help you Mr. Tim?" She was always using your gender... and then your first name like that... as if you were this inferior sub-humanoid being to her. She also seemed to speak using her eyes, which were these horrible, hideous sunken shells about the full size of a grade-A egg. She could just as well been a demon as a teacher... and that demon mouth whispered into my ear: "are you sure you're in the right place?"

I didn't have an answer. What was this ghoul talking about?

But I did think about it, smile, look at the class again, and it clicked. Whoops.

So I decided to wander out, trying to swallow any hint of embarrassment. I think there might have been laughter, but I'm not sure. It's all about the couth, baby. Do everything with style. That could have easily been a horribly embarrassing experience, but I had learned over the years that you only have an embarrassing

moment... if you let it be. You see, people react more to your reaction than to an actual event. This could have gone another way: I could have looked around, turned red in the face, and then left as I was mocked in a horror similar to being burned at the stake. But that simple "I could care less... oops!" mockery smile... that's what made all of the difference. It's weird that I was learning these things, because I'd been told that comedy was either natural or not. Well... I don't believe anything is natural. You have to learn it all. And this was something I was learning.

And it did come in handy when I was doing such weird and awkwardly strange things.

And I have to admit... I was freaked out a little bit to be in the wrong class. It was a stupid thing to do. Pot and school didn't seem to mix as well as I thought. At least not for me. Bummer, man.

The rest of the day had provided nowhere near such entertainment. Yet.

When school was over, and by this, I mean, when I felt like I was done learning for the day... we left. Matt wasn't interested much in staying past the fourth class and I certainly wasn't going to go against the logic of such a wonderful flowing wood grain.

And so it was that we set off to get the gun.

A gun apparently was not a hard thing to find in the Northern State of Michigan. I had the whole thing arranged from the previous night by a good friend. His dad had a weapon that he'd got from a friend or... hell, I don't even know the whole story; I didn't care...

But we drove there right in the middle of the day as instructed....

We met my friend Troy, who was home at the time, skipping school.

The experience of buying a gun should not be a very weird experience, I wouldn't think... but then we'd never owned one, and we certainly didn't know where else to get one.

We'd driven together, and watched the trees go by in solemn grief at the timeless and sad mistakes of the world, of our world. It was an odd moment and I can remember thinking of nothing but how I could make it end. The problem was that now things were too tied in together. I had committed to buying the piece and all parties were a go. God, this was the moment. This was the moment where I got the first taste of street smarts; where I first learned how to be calm and cool in an illegal moment – the kind of logic that every man goes through in due time. These skills would be ultimately honed, as I was learning what would later turn into easy drug purchases and backroom dark whiskey-bar activities time and time again. The first lesson was simple: You can renege on a lot of things

in life, but you cannot renege on a Dark Deal. And you definitely, most assuredly, absolutely for sure cannot renege on a gun deal.

When we got there, there was no doorbell and no need to knock. The door was cracked open and the television leaked its grim words into the air like a gaseous ignored and unknown stream. A voice inside was telling us to come in before we were on the last and third step to the trailer.

It was blue-black dark inside, lit mostly by skimmed light ebbing from gloomy curtains. Our friend's dad was there, saying little. And Troy himself was already home from school and brokered the deal to his dad, who could just as well been selling us drumstick chicken wings. But there was a sneer in his eyes... a sinister reminder that what we were doing... was a baleful deed.

So there we were, passing over 80 American dollars of my hard-earned money to get a small, black handgun. That was it. And it happened quick in that small trailer living room, smelling of tobacco and misty-aged rum mixed drink glasses and used sofa textures and roasting ashtray particles.

And so it was done.

We took the gun from the mysterious trailer and were on our way. It was something. We actually had a gun. Wow. All of the other fuckers... out there... talking this and that... and WE have a gun. We actually did. And we felt... powerful. It was more exciting than tube-sock masturbation. We were armed... and rolling...outlaws... kings, crowned by force.

We were both rocking insane with elation on the way home. Somehow we just felt real, like someone to contend with, like something bigger than life.

When we got home, mom and dad were not there, so we got excited and started to take pictures in my basement bedroom with my old Polaroid Picture Camera, each posing with the gun in our hands. It looked pretty fucking cool. Out of all of the fucking dirty things we'd done that year, this was by far the worst. But what was done... was done; we had already done it.

We both drank and smoked cigarettes and smoked weed until our parents came home and ignored us [ironically, oddly]. We called over our neighbor and childhood friend, Len I believe, and showed him the gun so that he'd laugh. He did think it was funny.

And that's how we ended the evening, smoking and joking... and playing... with a gun.

In dark, dank basements across the Midwestern United States of America, children looking for privacy and more space and something entirely of their own

were carving rooms out of their parents' concrete basement domains. Most Michigan basements were like those in the rest of the country: quite large and roughly the exact size of the house... and quite musty-filled with a lifetime of stored up... stuff.

For the parental homeowners, it made room where there wasn't room and made the teens happy. It also put them out of the way, which could be considered to be a good thing. It also put the teens in a position to where they couldn't be monitored as much. Or rather... at all.

In basements across the land, a standardized format seemed to occur: black curtains were hung up, things were recklessly and goofily stapled to the ceiling and cones stolen from construction sites were thrown around to make a basement room. There were grunge posters and Christmas lights and used furniture strewn across the reclaimed stale area.

My room, which I thought was unique, had somehow become just a normal staple of American X existence. Yes, even though I thought I was unusual and distinctive, I was somehow just like everyone else...down in the basement, smoking weed. Another lost soul in the land of milk and honey.

There were construction cones, stolen from a single night's rampage, with police tape covering the perimeter ("Crime Scene! Do NOT Enter!") and Christmas lights all over the ceiling, along with random stickers of varying levels of humor; some proclaiming that it was ladies night, some letting you know that 'Shoplifters will not be tolerated,' and others of such strange oddness.

Things that were a part of the real world were somehow funnier here. You know? Like a caution sign or an arrow pointing out where the bathrooms are located.

And it was an addictive endeavor: Manila used her thoughts of my basement room to construct her own version when her parents moved her closer to my parents' house. This was a great time for me. She was like my best friend and she was moving even closer to me, she was now my neighbor. What great news!

We hung out a lot in those days, spending a lot of time just talking and being close in the basement and she eventually helped me to stop revering girls like Shelia Spear at school and helped me remove crazy Comet from my life. And though somehow I was far too shy to make any moves, it was nice to be downstairs with her, in private and hanging out with

someone of which I now had deep interest. During most of this time she was actually dating someone else or doing it off and on, so I had just sort of thought of her as a no touch zone anyway; just a great friend to help guide me... through the Great Basement Room discussions.

Yes, the Michigan Basement room. It was just another standard issue grunge element that came with living in Swartz Creek Michigan.

We were so young, Matt and I. We spent a lot of time in the basement smoking and learning and talking and things like that. It didn't give me much time for personal peace, but it was like the only place in which we all could be living in secret. I'd pretty much given him the room upstairs because I simply didn't want it anymore. I'd built up the room and so this was my territory now.

Just this past year I had realized that life just wasn't good living in bunk beds with your 2 year younger brother. I wanted something different, wanted my own space, you know? So what I did was head down to our basement where there was just a packrat stockpile of weird shit anyway, and began to clean things up, move things around. I wanted to make a room down there, somewhere where I could do my own thing.

The first person to actually get to see the room and stay over was when I was 15 still. He came over and I got to test the success of the room by playing Dungeons and Dragons or some such shit.

We had the greatest time, him and Josh and I.

Though Josh moved along with me and became close, Michigan would eventually eat my other friend alive. The last piece of news he left us with was the news that he had hung himself after getting in a car accident and calling home for help. But I am getting ahead of myself. Times were still good and wild and reckless. And these young imaginative minds and I were having the time of our lives, just being ourselves in our own little world.

So there it was; it was official. I had created my own domain, my own place to live and reside and be who I need to be. The wispy magic wheels were turning far ahead of the road in front. Because I had little, if any idea what I was actually creating. Times were about to dive headfirst into the weird and unnatural. Let us not forget, as I went to sleep that night... buried in the corner under the bean bag... was a gun.

The Beats and Sixties Counterculture

by Jed Skinner

Jed Skinner considers the influence of the Beat Generation upon the the following literary and cultural movements.

The 1960s are associated with what Frank calls ‘the big change, the birthplace of our own culture, the homeland of hip’, a period of various shifts that have shaped our current society¹. This hints at an underlying consensus that the 1960s were a time of high artistic endeavour, the centre of countercultural resistance, and some of the cultural ripples that are still being felt today.

What factors influenced this period of time for this decade to be so prominent? The cluster of significant events that occurred in the late Sixties has led Gitlin to compare this time to ‘a cyclone in a wind tunnel’², and Rabinowitz argues that ‘the 1960s confound representation – or rather narrative – because words fail; image and sound [...] are what remain’³; events and figures that ‘stand out’ in these ways are those that are likely to receive the most attention. These two arguments enhance the point that, because there are many narratives of the Sixties, each one places emphasis on different aspects of the decade.

When one considers the notion of the Beat generation’s ideas of the Fifties contributing to aspects of the following decade’s culture, art and politics, it can be easy to focus solely on the prominent figures and events, and link them together. When this happens, an inevitable decision is being made: what is worthy of being called Beat, what is worthy of being called Sixties culture, and where such culture lies geographically as well as

historically.

A linear narrative where there are, in Negus’ words, ‘distinct breaks involving beginnings and endings or births and deaths’⁴ generates problems. This approach generally fails to acknowledge other perspectives, to account for the voices of people excluded from the narrative. A Vattimo argues, it is only from the ‘victors’ of history ‘that history is a unitary process in which there is consequentiality and rationality’⁵. What I would like to do in this essay is consider the notion put forward by Laibman, that ‘there was not one 1960s; there were many’⁶. This is not to say that the Beats did not influence anything, and I do not wish to undermine or trivialise their work and its importance. It is also impossible to go into detail about every aspect of Beat culture. However, by looking generally at some of the areas where the Beats’ influence occurred, what it influenced, and to what extent, this will expose other voices and locations, which I hope will better inform the argument I wish to make.

It is important to consider the social contexts of the Fifties to be able to understand why the Beats’ work was considered to be so significant. One of the central themes in historical narratives of the Beats is a description of a prevailing climate of conformity in post-war America. Following the end

4 Keith Negus, *Popular Music Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), p.136-7.

5 Gianni Vattimo, ‘Dialettica, differenza, pensiero debole’, in G. Vattimo and P. A. Rovatti (eds), *Il pensiero debole* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1983), in Iain Chambers, ‘Maps for the Metropolis: A Possible Guide to the Present’, *Cultural Studies* 1(1) (1987), 1-21, p.19.

6 David Laibman, ‘Editorial Perspectives: An Intense and Many-Textured Movement’, *Science & Society*, *ibid.*, 3-4, p.3.

1 Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), p.1.

2 Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York; London: Bantam, 1993), p.242.

3 Paula Rabinowitz, ‘Medium Uncool: Women Shoot Back; Feminism, Film and 1968 – A Curious Documentary’, *Science & Society*, 65(1) (2001), 72-98, p.73.

of World War II, the ideas and ideologies that were driving factors during the conflict were seemingly discredited. Woods argues that, in America, intellectuals began to focus their attention onto ‘the roots of totalitarianism, dissecting evolving notions of democracy and republicanism’⁷. What resulted from this was a more scientific, calculated approach of looking at how society should operate.

Herman argues that planners and policy makers had been convinced by their experiences during World War II that human beings could act very irrationally, because of a teaming, raw, unpredictable emotionality. The chaos that lived at the base of human personality could infect social institutions to the point where society itself would become sick.⁸

It was therefore perceived necessary for American society, if it wished to avoid a repeat of the horrors of the war, to be controlled and contained to some extent from the factors that could lead to such chaos. In the late Forties and early Fifties, the US Congress’ House Un-American Activities Committee held hearings that, as Holton describes, were ‘aimed at persecuting those who did not agree with a narrow definition of political reality’⁹: the most famous instance resulted in scores of Hollywood actors, directors, producers and screenwriters being ‘blacklisted’ from employment for alleged ‘subversive’ activities. What emerges from this climate is what Marcuse describes as ‘a pattern of one-dimensional thought’, whereby ‘ideas, aspirations and objectives that [...] transcend the established universe of discourse and action are either repelled or reduced to terms of this universe’¹⁰. This manifests itself through the pressure on individuals to behave as part of larger groups, to avoid any particular ‘individuality’. Riesman et al’s 1950 publication *The Lonely Crowd* describes the rise of the ‘other-directed man’¹¹,

a new figure, entirely the product of America’s rising managerial class and prosperous post-war economy¹²; a replacement of ‘the traditional “inner-directed”, self made American’. The other-directed man ‘suppressed his individuality, spurned conflict, and sought guidance and approval from the environment around him’¹³. This sort of figure was an ideal target for advertisers using the new medium of television¹⁴, which contributed to a large shift in the way people bought goods. Towards the end of the 1950s, the US economy had shifted from a ‘production economy’, based around meeting basic human needs, to a market-orientated, consumer economy¹⁵, which emphasised status over class¹⁶. This was a phenomenon that inspired Bell to proclaim in 1960 that Western society had reached ‘the end of ideology’¹⁷, that ‘ideology, which was once a road to action, has come to a dead end’¹⁸.

Allen Ginsberg’s famous poem *Howl* made its debut at a poetry reading in 1955, and, Holton argues, ‘seemed to offer the means to break out of the cultural enclosure [...] and into a dimension unrecognized in Marcuse’s analysis’¹⁹. Much has been written about this long poem, but the general consensus has been that *Howl* expressed a vocal frustration at a stifling, corporate, conforming America, with unrestrained fury and anger. Gitlin argues that *Howl* was ‘the first time in the American twentieth century’ that ‘poetry read aloud became a public act that changed lives’²⁰. In 1957, a year after publication, the work was the focus of an obscenity trial. Debates about the alleged ‘obscenity’ of the text in court helped to bring the poem to wider prominence among those who were outside of Ginsberg’s literary circle. The same year, Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* was published, and the two works ‘vaulted from anonymity’²¹ a small group of bohemians who would become

p.17.

12 Woods, p.134.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid, p.127.

15 Ibid., p.123.

16 Ibid, p.151.

17 Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000 [1960]).

18 Ibid, p.393.

19 Holton, p.17.

20 Gitlin, p.45.

21 Holton, p.11.

7 Randall Bennett Woods, *Quest for Identity: America Since 1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.151.

8 Ellen Herman, in *The Century of the Self* (dir. Adam Curtis), episode 2, broadcast 30.4.2002, BBC4.

9 Robert Holton, ‘Beat Culture and the Folds of Heterogeneity’, in Jennie Skerl (ed.), *Reconstructing the Beats* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp.11-26, p.12.

10 Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1964), p.12.

11 David Riesman, Nathan Glazer and Reul Denney, *The Lonely Crowd* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950),

known as the Beat Generation.

Why so? Gitlin argues that ‘if the true-blue Fifties was affluence, the Beats’ counter-Fifties was voluntary poverty’²². This mindset is best displayed in Norman Mailer’s influential 1959 essay ‘The White Negro’. Here, Mailer holds up a new kind of figure as a solution to the ‘bleak scene’ of society²³: ‘the American existentialist – the hipster’, who ‘exists in the present, in that enormous present which is without past or future, memory or planned intention, the life where a man must go until he is beat’²⁴. In this new world, there are only two options available: rebellion or conformity. ‘One is Hip or one is Square’, he argues, ‘one is a frontiersmen in the Wild West of American night life, or else a Square cell, trapped in the totalitarian tissues of American society’²⁵. If one is white (and one must be, to be able to have the choice), the appeal of being hip lies in its existentialist appeal, in its abandonment of a traditional family-centred lifestyle, and the adoption of social mores from a dangerous, excluded Other: ‘the Negro’. This, in Mailer’s view, is where the source of hip lies, in Negro music (‘jazz’), Negro life choices (‘a life of constant humility or ever-threatening danger’), and Negro philosophy (‘he kept for his survival the art of the primitive, he lived in the enormous present’). Therefore the hipster is ‘a white Negro’, having ‘absorbed the existentialist synapses of the Negro’²⁶.

Although grossly laden with racial stereotypes of a pre-Civil rights era America, Frank argues that ‘The White Negro’ ‘managed to predict the basic dialectic around which the cultural politics of the next thirty-five years would be structured’²⁷. However, there is a difference between two different kinds of ‘Beat’ sensibilities that have been established: the literary type epitomised by Ginsberg and Kerouac on one side, and the ‘hipster’/‘beatnik’ on the other. This is not to say that the ‘literary’ Beats did not have any of the

‘hipster’ qualities – far from it. Rather, as Starr argues, contemporary critics tended to argue that ‘true’ Beats such as Ginsberg and Kerouac made ‘literary creativity a focal point of their lives’, whereas others, who would qualify as ‘hipsters’ or ‘Beatniks’, merely attended jazz clubs and visited coffeehouses, and were insignificant²⁸. Furthermore, the prominent Beat figures, with a few exceptions (such as Bob Kaufman and Amiri Baraka), were white, and were overwhelmingly from middle-class families.

Consequently, Beats have generally been portrayed as a minority of generally white, literary articulate intellectuals; scholars ‘understand the Beat Generation in terms of a literary avant-garde and evaluate its historical significance accordingly’²⁹. The others – the Beatniks – were from differing socio-cultural and racial backgrounds³⁰, and were considerably larger in number than the ‘literary’ Beats. As Beat poet Diane di Prima recalls, that around the time of *Howl*’s publication, ‘there were only a small handful of us’. The traditional argument described by Starr – that Beats were ‘a small group of cultural radicals’ – generates a situation where ‘the broader parameters of the Beat Generation’ become ignored³¹.

When considering the notion of ‘Beat ideas’, it is important to consider the ideas of those from outside the pantheon of literary figures. Although Ginsberg, Kerouac and the like were obviously important to the Beatniks, which should not be underestimated, it is also the case that the Beatniks were equally important as the literary figures in connecting notions of Beat ideas with others from outside the scene. Starr notes that repeated police visits of coffeehouses in New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles and allegations of police bribery against owners, had resulted in marches, pickets and sit-ins against police harassment during the late 1950s through to the early 1960s³². As the Beats mobilized to defend themselves from police harassment, they ‘forged alliances with community leaders and civil liberties groups to

22 Gitlin, p.46.

23 Norman Mailer, ‘The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster’, in Mailer (ed.), *Advertisements for Myself* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992) pp.337-359, p.339.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., p.341.

27 Frank, p.246.

28 Clinton R. Starr, ‘“I Want to Be with My Own Kind”: Individual Resistance and Collective Action in the Beat Counterculture’, in *Reconstructing the Beats*, pp.41-54, p.41.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid., p.47

31 Ibid., p.43.

32 Ibid., p.50.

defend their position within the urban landscape'³³ in the process. It could be argued that the ideas expressed in literary form by the Beat authors were in turn acted on by a wider circle of many groups, whose significance is crucial to the Beats' continuing cultural standing. As these people gathered together in urban areas, 'enclaves' of Beat social networks began to be created, comprised of people with similar tastes and values.

The existence of a Beat enclave in North Beach, San Francisco, and a few years later, the large hippie community of Haight-Ashbury, can be constructed as a physical, direct line of influence from the Beats to the hippies – and therefore a demonstration of Beat influence on 1960s culture. I would argue that the Beats were influential in the culture of the Sixties, but their influence was predominantly on the construction of the 'counterculture'. What the counterculture entails is complex: it is, in Marwick's view, a term used 'to refer to the many and varied activities and values which contrasted with, or were critical of, the conventional values and modes of established society'³⁴; however, 'counterculture' also means different things to different people, and as Marwick argues, 'there was no unified, integrated counter-culture, totally and consistently in opposition to mainstream culture'³⁵. In addition, Marwick cites the first instance of the term in 1968 in the highbrow publication *The Nation*³⁶, whereas contemporary writer Thomas Albright uses 'underground' in a 1968 *Rolling Stone* article³⁷. What I mean by 'counterculture' is a rough amalgam of alternative ways of living, literary works, art, music and politics, but not a definable movement with a firm link to any ideology or political persuasion. Its origins lie in the Beat enclaves that were created by people moving to towns such as San Francisco and New York, where the Beat writers lived and worked. Certain areas, such as North Beach in San Francisco, Greenwich Village in New York, and Venice in Los Angeles,

were home to an infrastructure of coffeehouses, theatres, bars and spaces founded and frequented by these people, who all resided there in pursuance of 'alternative' life choices, separated from the all-encompassing 'mainstream' culture.

The hippie scene, which began in San Francisco and is almost universally portrayed as the 'image' of the counterculture (if not the Sixties), can be considered to be heavily influenced by the Beats primarily for geographic reasons. As Puterbaugh notes, when Beatniks began to move to San Francisco, the housing of choice was the old Victorian mansions of the Haight-Ashbury area, which were available for low rent³⁸. The Beat poet Michael McClure notes that the geographic proximity of the Haight-Ashbury area to North Beach meant that there were 'people overlapping each other from what had been a number of separate existences', creating a 'huge, fluid scene' of people with similar tastes and interests³⁹. As Shank notes, such scenes can be an outlet for creativity to move beyond 'locally significant cultural values' towards 'an interrogation of dominant structures of identification, and potential cultural transformation', through the exploration of new identities and collective involvement⁴⁰. In this case, the large number of people moving to San Francisco in the 1960s made it possible for resident Beats, Beatniks and their values to mingle with those who were new to the counterculture scene and city. Albright argues that 'certain major strands' of Beat values became infused in the development of the new scene: the Beats' self-conscious ethos of 'dropping out' of a perceived establishment lifestyle; the 'intense and programmatic' alienation of Beats from mainstream notions of society; a focus on Orientalism, Eastern mysticism and European existentialism; recreational drug use in pursuit of a 'total experience'; a 'worship of Art, in true romantic tradition'; and the elevation of music to an art form (jazz for the Beats, rock in the counterculture scene)⁴¹. These bohemian enclaves

33 Ibid.

34 Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c.1958-c.1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.12.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., p.11.

37 Thomas Albright, 'Visuals: How the Beats Begat the Freaks', originally published in *Rolling Stone*, 9, April 27, 1968, in Holly George-Warren (ed.), *The Rolling Stone Book of the Beats: The Beat Generation and the Counterculture* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999), pp.351-356, p.351.

38 Parke Puterbaugh, 'The Beats and the Birth of the Counterculture', in *The Rolling Stone Book of the Beats*, pp.357-363, p.357.

39 Michael McClure, ref. in Puterbaugh, p.362.

40 Barry Shank, *Dissonant Identities: The Rock'n'Roll Scene in Austin, Texas* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), p.122.

41 Albright, p.352-5.

established by the Beats ensured that a sense of community was able to exist.

As Cohen notes, some of the factors which unite people in the ongoing development of a music scene are 'age and gender, webs of interlinking social networks and a gossip grapevine'⁴², all of which could be found in these enclaves. The San Francisco scene allowed musical developments such as acid rock to develop: a type of music spawned partly from Ken Kesey's 'Acid Tests', where LSD-spiked Kool-Aid was freely distributed to people, often without their knowledge. (A direct beat connection lies in the fact that Kesey and his 'Merry Pranksters' travelled around the US on a 'magic bus', driven by Neal Cassady, the real life Dean Moriarty in Kerouac's *On the Road*). Gitlin notes that 'the Acid Tests evolved into Trips Festivals and scheduled concerts, with a new sound – spacy, unbounded whorls, not discrete songs: acid rock'⁴³. Acid rock bands that rose from this scene include the Grateful Dead, Quicksilver Messenger Service and others, all based in San Francisco. Fertile artistic grounds were also present in New York: three of the four Mamas and Papas met in Greenwich Village in the 1960s, and Bob Dylan resided there. However, the problem with reading the counterculture as Sixties culture is that its prime geographical locations and most fertile grounds were in these enclaves, in New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles and others; in the United States, in the Western hemisphere. 'Sixties culture' has various connotations depending on where one looks. A cultural 'revolution' in America is something very different to the Cultural Revolution that took place in China during the 1960s, where millions of people died. Even if one only looks at America, there are large differences in the late 1960s between the various areas of the country. The Civil Rights movement, with its figurehead Martin Luther King, fought against corrupt politicians, police and racists in the struggle for racial equality. There were no Beat enclaves in the Southern states of America, with segregation existing until (and even beyond) the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed it. Instead, to pursue a freer lifestyle, people were to travel away from

the South, to escape to these other places, else be excluded from having a choice. The consequence has been that the influence of the Beats upon wider areas of society in America is actually quite varied. In particular, the extent to which Beats were politically active is of interest.

In 1952, Beat poet John Clellon Holmes wrote of the hipster, 'there is no desire to shatter the 'square' society in which he lives, only to elude it. To get on a soapbox or write a manifesto would seem to him absurd'⁴⁴. Later, however, some Beats became more radicalised. Starr notes how Chester Anderson, editor of the Beat magazines *Beatitude* and *Underhound*, addressed a rally against police maltreatment in North Beach in 1960, advising the crowd to 'sue' the police and to 'fight back in every legal way' if treated unfairly⁴⁵. John Haag, owner of the Venice West Café in Los Angeles, was heavily involved with the Civil Rights movement in the mid-1960s, including the Congress of Racial Equality, the American Civil Liberties Union, and organizations fighting police harassment⁴⁶. However, it seems that because the enclaves were to some extent 'removed' from what could be considered the 'mainstream' of society, not all Beats actively pursued political involvement. The actual extent to which Beat ideas were able to shape aspects of society through politics was very much dependent on the individuals involved, and whether or not these ideas were taken up by others.

In the 1960s, student-led political organizations, comprised of people including Beats, were formed. These included the Student Non-Violent Co-ordinating Committee, founded in 1960, and Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)⁴⁷. It is possible that as these organizations grew, those Beatniks that were most politically inclined became more involved with these and other such groups. As the Vietnam War escalated from the mid-1960s, the SDS attracted new members. Sale

44 John Clellon Holmes, 'This is the Beat Generation', *New York Times Magazine*, November 16th, 1952, ref. in Gitlin, p.51.

45 Ibid, p.51.

46 Starr, p.52.

47 Jo Freeman, 'On the Origins of Social Movements', in Jo Freeman and Victoria Johnson (eds.), *Waves of Protest: Social Movements since the Sixties* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), pp.7-24, p.8.

42 Sara Cohen, 'Scenes', in Bruce Horner and Thomas Swiss (eds.), *Key Terms in Popular Music and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp.239-250, p.241.

43 Gitlin, p.207.

describes these people as non-Jewish, nonintellectual, nonurban, from a nonprofessional class, and often without any family tradition of political involvement, much less radicalism. They tended to be not only ignorant of the history of the left and its current half-life in New York City, but downright uninterested.⁴⁸

I do not wish to argue that SDS was ineffectual or apathetic, but as Miller argues, ‘many recruits were drawn to SDS not by left-wing ideology but by their opposition to the war and the draft [...] and their attraction to the counterculture’⁴⁹. This is interesting, because one of the criticisms of the counterculture, as Frank argues, is that it ‘is said to have worked a revolution through lifestyle rather than politics [...] through pleasure rather than power’⁵⁰. An example of such an argument is Puterbaugh’s claim that the Grateful Dead were ‘largely responsible for the spread of the counterculture and its perpetuation over time’⁵¹. Why? Because they were ‘primarily associated with Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, having provided an acid-blues soundtrack as the house band for the anarchic Acid Tests’⁵². It can be deduced that the counterculture was primarily an artistic outlet: a leisure-based lifestyle choice. This is queried by Harrington, who 1972 wonders if ‘the mass counterculture may not be a reflection of the very hyped and video-taped world it professes to despise’⁵³. The counterculture ultimately became a ready-made market for advertisers: the central countercultural notion of ‘hip’ was the capital most sought after in connection with a brand. Perhaps the most notorious example was Columbia Records’ advertisement in a 1968 edition of *Rolling Stone*: its slogan was ‘The Man Can’t Bust Our Music’⁵⁴: some distance away from the Beat venerations of existentialism, voluntary poverty, personal and spiritual release.

Miller notes that, by 1967, liberal-leaning politicians ‘were giving friendly speeches at antiwar rallies, defining moderate opposition as an acceptable part of the political spectrum’⁵⁵. When the new capitalist incarnation of ‘hip consumerism’⁵⁶, Harrington argues that ‘bohemia could not survive the passing of its polar opposite and precondition, middle class morality’. Once this had disappeared, ‘bohemia was deprived of the stifling atmosphere without which it could not breathe’⁵⁷.

However, what is important to consider is that the influence of Beat ideas, at the most basic level, offered an alternative way of living in American post-war conventionality, stemming from a time, Jameson argues, where ‘no society has ever been so standardized’⁵⁸. As Starr notes, the Beat communities, through the utilization of public space in urban, bohemian enclaves, had challenged racial segregation, homophobia and ‘created a vibrant counterculture which facilitated individual liberation and collective political action’⁵⁹. These achievements have been built upon by countless activists who have progressively challenged such discrimination from the Fifties, through the Sixties to the present. The Beats’ valuation of personal freedom through artistic expression resulted in the founding of enclaves and artistic scenes where this expression could be explored at a remove from the more ‘mainstream’ ways of living. This legacy has influenced not just the Sixties, but those wishing to pursue alternative ways of living through to the present day.

48 Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS* (New York: Random House, 1973), p.204-5.

49 Frederick D. Miller, ‘SDS and Weatherman’, in *Waves of Protest: Social Movements since the Sixties*, pp.303-324, p.313.

50 Frank, p.15.

51 Puterbaugh, p.360.

52 Ibid.

53 Michael Harrington, ‘We Few, We Happy Few, We Bohemians’, *Esquire*, August 1972, p.164.

54 See < <http://www.ibiblio.org/pub/electronic-publications/stay-free/archives/15/timeline2.html> > [accessed 7th May 2009].

55 Miller, p.312.

56 Frank, p.26.

57 Harrington, p.99.

58 Frederic Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p.17.

59 Starr, p.53.



DEEP FRIED DUCT TAPE AND SUSHI KNIVES *by Eduardo Jones*

"You can turn your back on a person, but never turn your back on a drug, especially when it's waving a razor sharp hunting knife in your eye."
Hunter S. Thompson

Fear has always been a huge factor in my life. Without it, I may have never accomplished half the things I've done in my life. I know this sounds absurd, but it's true. Fear is my best friend. I'd be lost without it. It has a way of pushing me through any circumstance. I've been on the verge of death countless times in my life, and if not for my good friend fear, I would have been done. My simple fear of death and bodily harm has kept me alive. It makes me fight harder, more brutally and vicious than the next man. A prime example of this is from a time I lived in Detroit, Michigan.

I'd been living in Detroit a couple months when I met Jen. She's one of my true friends now, but at the time of this tale, she was just a girl I wanted to mambo horizontally with like two jackrabbits in estro. I'd met her through a friend of mine named Freak.

Freak can be summed up just from his name. The kid never ate anything that wasn't pre-packaged. He was a methamphetamine smuggler. He'd smuggle in contraband from San Francisco and Los Angeles on a weekly basis, and distribute said narcotics throughout mid-western cities from Louisville, Kentucky all the way up to Detroit. Freak dwelled in a strange paranoia fueled fantasyland. He'd often concoct these outlandishly twisted conspiracy theories about strange outlaw jetski gangs who cooked amphetamines.

His psychosis had even induced an arch nemesis - a vicious crime boss he dubbed the "King of Detroit" - who made his residence in a fortified penthouse located in the tallest building in Detroit. According to Freak, the King had constructed a sadistic machine that generated electricity to power the kings building. The generation of power was fueled by the energy of the female orgasm. The king would bind multiple women into the contraption. Every orifice was violated viciously by an assortment of mechanical dildos for days. Every orgasm was converted into precious electricity for his urban palace. The things a mind in the throws of constant drug abuse, and too much bad television are capable of imagining are just as spectacular at times as they are sickenly lewd and disgusting.

Back to Jen, and our first meeting. I'd met her at this warehouse that was semi-converted into loft space. I say semi- converted because much of the space was used to store the veritable pack rat owner of the building's amassed belongings. Upon entering any one of the various rooms, one could find furniture strewn about. The walls were covered in various pieces of art with no rhyme or reason connecting them. Landscapes hung next to advertisements for cheap malt liquors. On another wall hung your typical 1970's velvet pieces along with still life paintings of fruit. Piles of broken lamps rested on the various dressers, end tables, and boxes that littered the buildings bowels. The building's interior decor looked like it was designed by a lunatic in the throws of a bad acid trip. The type of place you could see Michael Myers and Dr. Gonzo from Hunter S. Thompson's masterpiece of decadence "Fear and Loathing in

Las Vegas” sharing as living quarters. There were offices, and rundown rooms - even a barroom complete with a pool table and a bar that looked like it came from a 1970's porno set inter-linking in this strange eerie labyrinth of a building. Just being in this place made you feel like you'd just ingested a sheet of acid. It was basically people's last stop before rock bottom.

George, the owner of the building; was a man of about seventy who was tough as leather, but had a soft spot for derelicts such as myself. He had this ability to see the good in people, even if there wasn't much good left in said person. Labor was often a viable way to reside in the building in lieu of rent. George always needed strong backs to keep the monstrosity of a building in semi working condition. These duties included general maintenance; painting, cleaning the grounds, erecting walls, and an assortment of other odd jobs. The time of my meeting Jen was pre-living in the Bagley building.

It was called the Bagley building because it was located on Bagley road. About five blocks a way from Detroit's notorious out of commission Amtrak station. The building had been abandoned after the fiscal difficulties that nearly crippled the company in the eighties. The looters, arsonists, crack heads, whores, and members of the homeless epidemic plaguing Detroit had destroyed and stripped the building of its former elegance. It is now the primary symbol of the decay of Detroit's economy that came with the death of the automobile manufacturing business in the former capital city of American industry.

Freak and I had been punching the clock as usual when Jen had called to see if we could hook her up. She told us how she was at the Bagley building with her "friend" Ghost and this kid Junior who lived in the Bagley building. We agreed made our way to the Bagley building via a cab. When we arrived, we didn't think we had the right place. There was no way anybody could be occupying this building even by Detroit standards. I say this because Detroit's standards weren't very high. In case you've never visited this fine city, it could best be described as a third world city.

Its population consists of scum of every possible kind. At one time, its infamous claim to fame was that it hosted the highest homicide rate in the country. It's unusual in Detroit to turn on the evening news and not hear about multiple homicides being committed on a daily basis. On every corner there are burnt out buildings, junkies, whores, and an assortment of other godless types. I fit in perfectly.

Freak phoned Jen, she verified the address, and told us Ghost would meet us in the alley on the side of the building to let us in. As we made our way down the alley, the paranoid fantasies started. Jen was probably in cahoots with the king of Detroit, and we were being summoned there to be destroyed for not giving the King a cut of our profits. These were Freaks delusions on the situation anyways. About thirty feet down the alley, we saw Ghost - all ninety pounds of him - peaking out from the opening in this giant iron gate covered in razor wire.

As we made our way through the gate, I started to think Freak was right. The area we entered was obviously once used as a loading dock for the factory. It was now used primarily to house George's two junkyard dogs. The dogs, luckily, were on the upper deck above us. I knew this because the deck really wasn't a deck at all. It was more or less just a bunch of boards laid across the iron girders of the buildings frame. The dogs' snarling heads poked through the many gaps in the boards. I envisioned the beasts crashing through the deck and latching onto our throats at any minute.

"Jesus Freak this looks like the place they killed Robocop!" I began to feed into his paranoid fantasy. "I think you're right the king is pissed he's surely going to feed those dogs our balls if we don't cut him in!" I said to Freak in the tongue of our self-invented language Mumblese.

Mumblese is spoken in a very fast low tone with out opening ones mouth. Sentences run on to the point of breathlessness. This is caused by the fact amphetamine abusers jaws are always clenched tightly, often so tightly molars are shattered from

constant teeth grinding. I have shattered three of my molars completely down to the roots.

"I told you that but no you didn't believe me I'm just paranoid you said."

"Okay so maybe you're not that paranoid I really like my balls so what do you think we should do?"

"What are you two talking about - dog balls?" Ghost asked.

"Oh nothing just some random conversation you know on the importance of neutering your pet you know what I mean Bob Barker supports it so I figure hey, if the price is right why not do it after all Americas plagued by packs of feral dogs snatching up infants and toddlers fornicating in the streets say it's bout time we join Bob in the fight before it's too late you know what I mean and we're overrun by the fuckers." I replied.

With that comment, Ghost lost whatever thoughts on what he may have thought our conversation consisted of. His face was contorted in to this expression of total confusion. I could practically read his thoughts in a comic page bubble above his head. It read - this fucker's out of his mind.

We then began our ascent up a wobbly make shift stairwell into the bowels of the Bagley building. Dog feces littered the stairwell and the sent of stale urine. The scent clung to my tongue like insects to flypaper. Once out of the stairwell, we entered the main area of the building. It was filthy. Dust was the air and random furniture was strewn about. Jen was sitting at an office desk with Junior sniffing a line of speed.

She was a shining example of far eastern beauty. She was also cold as a Siberia. Traits like that, for some reason, cause my cock to twitch in my pants. Jen has this weird way of showing she likes you. I've figured out the meaner she is to you the more she likes you. It's really quite strange but like I said, oddly arousing at the same time.

Ghost sat fabricating tales about how he was a hit

man and spent most of his time doing "wet" work and disposing of bodies. He babbled on and on about gory details of body dismemberment and the proper techniques one needs to apply when disposing of various body parts. He claimed that at this moment he was hiding from drug cartels looking to assassinate him, for going to Columbia and offing a high-ranking member of the Ortega cartel in Cartagena. Most, if not all speed freaks live in the strange fantasy world Freak lived in. Delusions of grandeur seem to go hand in hand with amphetamine abuse. Because the chemical reaction in the brain during meth use is similar to the chemical make up of a schizophrenic's mind, psychoses always reign supreme. Users just end up believing these fantasies in their own mind after long-term abuse. It's their "reality" even if it's all fantasy.

Ghost's tales really didn't impress me much; everybody knows killers don't talk. Although he did tell them with much gusto, and the river of bullshit spouting from his lips did give me the chance to flirt with Jen. I looked for a pair of hip-waders to put on because the bullshit was so deep. While he was busy putting all his attention into the tales he was telling Freak and Junior, we flirted back and forth for a while. She then asked me for a light. I handed her this lighter with the astrological symbol for Pisces on it.

"You're a Pisces?"

"Yup."

That's all it really took. Jen is really into astrology and has always had a liking for Pisces males. She then made arrangements for Freak and I to go out to her house later that day. Well, we never made it to Jen's that day. Instead, we got caught up in extreme drug abuse. The rest of that day was spent sniffing speed and popping a virtual cornucopia of pharmaceuticals opiates, benzo's, and anti psychotics popped by the handful. At some point, I decided to go visit my friend Dean.

Dean was a rave promoter. He also had this really sadistic streak. He'd been known to get people he found out had did him wrong into drunk induced

stupors. Usually on some form of tranquilizer or opiate that was administered in a near lethal dosage. He'd then torture his victim for hours on end. I liked Dean. He was maniacal - so was I. So we got along fine, but never really trusted each other at all. That's the thing about extremists, you know just how far over the edge you're willing to go, so you never doubt some else's capacity to do the same. Because of this knowledge, Dean and myself never cross one another.

I had brought my friend B along as well. B was from Columbus. He was hiding out at Freak's loft while on the lam for a stabbing in Columbus. He was a young tough gangster. Not exactly, the brightest bulb on the Christmas tree, but the kid had the heart of a lion, and would shoot you just as soon as look at you. So the orgy of drug abuse continued at Dean's. The rest of the evening into the early morning was spent smoking speed. Then we decided it might be a good idea to go out and get some heroin - or landing gear as users call it - to come down with.

So what the hell? Nothing wrong with a little speed balling, I figured. Actually, I loved mixing the uppers with the downers. It always gave me this euphoric even keeled feeling, and made me really friendly. So, we made our way to the dope house Dean said had the best bags. After obtaining the three dime-bags of heroin, we made our way back to Dean's. He handed me the small Mylar bag with the letters DOA stamped on it. Heroin dealers often stamp logos on the bags of their product so users find it more easily identifiable. This stamp stood for dead on arrival. They weren't kidding. I sniffed half the ten-dollar bag and was nearly comatose within three minutes. My eyes were rolling deep into the back of my skull, saliva dripping from my chin like a slobbering St. Bernard. Dean, at this point decided to call it a night. Being the sadistic bastard he was, he told us we couldn't stay there, and we had to walk home.

I can't remember the walk home - it's a total black out. What I do remember is when I got home Freak had gone on one of his trips. I was locked out because one of the other loft dwellers

had barricaded himself in the loft in a paranoia-induced psychosis and wouldn't answer the door. Luckily, we had two couches in the hallway for such circumstances - remember how I'm resourceful - As soon as my head hit the moldy cushions, I was out like a light...

"Wake up ...This is the Police...What are you doing sleeping here?"

Those were the words I awoke to. Fear poured from my pores. I had no idea what was going on. I just knew I had heard "wake up" followed by the dirtiest six letter word in the English language to an outlaw P-O-L-I-C-E. It seemed one of the former residents of the loft who'd moved out had neglected to inform us the lease needed to be resigned in one of our names. So, since this was three months since the lease remained unsigned the landlord had decided to evict us. We later found out it was a carefully plotted coup d'État orchestrated by a couple of the roommates who were sick of Freak's lifestyle and friends. So, along with the landlord they evicted Freak, myself, and another roommate. They just moved out for a couple weeks and then moved back in.

In case you've never been evicted by a Sheriff's deputy, let me enlighten you on the process. They come and you move everything you own out of the residence and onto the street whether or not you have some place to move it, or the proper vehicle to move it with. So let's just say we had to empty a 3,000 square foot loft full of belongings as quickly as possible. The majority of us were drug dealers who lived in the loft so we had a lot of stuff. Big screen TV's, enough clothing to clothe the army of a third world country, every gadget, gizmo, and hi tech device that had come on the market in the past three years, and all kinds of furniture. So, once we had it out on the street we had to figure out exactly what the hell we were going to do with it, and fast. A sidewalk full of high-tech electronics, high-end furniture, and other assorted valuables was going to attract looters quicker than swarming Maco sharks after tossing a dumpster full of entrails into the waters.

A couple of the roommates went to try and find

vehicles and places to bring the stuff. B and I were left to guard all this stuff on the streets of Detroit. The would-be looters circled the block like sharks all day, just waiting for nightfall to loot, pillage, and probably shoot us if we were still there when the time came. It was Serengeti hot, and the lions were hiding in the tall grass waiting to pounce. The stress level was rising as quickly as the mercury in a thermometer on this blistering August day. My veins pumped pure fire. I was as paranoid as a gazelle tiptoeing into a lions den.

Every car that passed slowed to take inventory on our soon-to-be pillaged stockpile of high-end goods. Black Friday wasn't going to have shit on the shopper-madness about to happen on this particular street corner in Detroit. The violent scenarios played out in my head one after another, and not one ended well for B and I. I glanced down at my watch, which now reminded me of the doomsday clock advancing one minute at a time to the end of days. Nightfall was approaching rapidly. For some reason time was flying and believe me - we weren't having any fun. With every passing second, we were running out of precious daylight.

After several hours of trying, I'd finally located Freak. The number of expletives used in the five-minute conversation we had was higher than the total word count of this tale. So I won't get into the dialogue here. He was in Columbus and had to obtain a ride to come up and help us pack up whatever we could and bring it someplace. He arrived just before dusk with this kid Shelly, who we knew from Columbus. Yes - Shelly is a girls name, but this kid isn't worthy of a man's name as you'll find out later in this story.

Luckily, he arrived just as the looters began to congregate like marauding Visigoth warriors waiting for darkness to pillage the local village. We had arranged to store some of the bigger stuff furniture and TVs and such in the loft of a friend of ours who lived in the building. The rest we piled into cars, SUVs, and vans. Everything we couldn't fit in the first trip we offered to the looters. It was a sacrifice worth making. Surely if we hadn't offered up something, they would

have tried to take it by force from who ever was left behind to guard it. So, with all we could cram into the vehicles crammed in, we made our way to our various destinations. B was heading back to Columbus with his girlfriend to bring some of the stuff to a safe house we had there. I was heading to Jen's. Freak would accompany me. The other roommates - well, I don't really know or care where they went.

The only good thing that came out of this day was my destination - Jen's house. Freak had some more running around to do. So Shelly and I stayed there until he was done with his errands. Well Freak's errands ran well into the next day. Which was fine by me. I was having a fine time hanging out at Jen's. She'd gotten rid of Ghost, and we were getting to know each other much better. We joked, got high, and talked all night.

Part two will be published in Issue Five.





An Evening with Jack Kerouac

An interview, of sorts, with Carolyn Cassady
by Alan Griffey

An Evening for Jack Kerouac
Monday 17 September 2007
18.30 – 20.00
British Library Conference Centre

I was outside the British Library Conference Centre (which is over to the right of the main Library entrance) when Carolyn Cassady walked by. Carolyn was moving slowly with two very young girls apparently perched on her shoulder. In actual fact they were processing quietly with her one holding a microphone on a short pole, the other a largish movie camera. This sombre, almost Poe-like procession floated slowly round the British Library courtyard and I realised that Carolyn was being filmed and interviewed for posterity. Carolyn was decked in expensive light clothing, she's small as you know, the two girls were even smaller, both dressed in black.

I missed the screening of *Pull my Daisy* at 5-30pm (which Carolyn and the ravens floated in for) 'cos I was doing other things outside. I didn't mind 'cos good though it is I'd seen 'Pull' at a couple of other Kerouac events, and I've got it on DVD, so didn't mind missing it this time.

The guys at the main reception desk where I'd enquired earlier in the afternoon didn't know about the 'Pull' screening and apparently neither did many of the prospective audience, 'cos I only witnessed about 30 people go in at 5-30pm.

Whereas at 7-00pm people started centring in across the square for the main event in steady number. I was late getting to my seat at the back of the theatre, but enjoyed a good view from a sloping auditorium. I perceived that David Amram was on stage playing cool jazz on a keyboard with a bassist and drummer

accompanying.

The furnishings were comfortable the lighting was soft, I was pleased with Dave Amram who seemed a modest personable guy like a musical Harold Wilson. David introduced Mike McShane and American actor who replaced John Ventimiglia from *The Sopranos* who was picking up an award in LA. McShane read well, cuttings from Kerouac, starting with the "The only ones for me...." quote. I liked the way he said "Awwwwww..." at the end really restrained, very professional (if that means 'real'). Wish I'd whooped but we all clapped enthusiastically instead. The David Amram trio was accompanying Mike fittingly with jazz embellishment on these outings.

David Amram then introduced Carolyn Cassady to be interviewed by Englishman Steve Turner (author of *Jack Kerouac - Angelheaded Hipster*) Carolyn looked fine in (I think) a light cream coloured suit, she didn't look her 70 - odd years, but found it hard hearing all the questions asked her, though here Steve offered clarification. Steve's a tall debonair smart looking chap, and Carolyn's voice purred with a nice American accent. They relaxed on stage and got down to the interview. The bits that stuck with me were as follows:

Steve introduced Carolyn thanking her for helping him with his book – Published 1996 - and allowing him access to her photographs.

She said she never guessed at the time that Kerouac/Beat appreciation would get this big.

She said Jack was very shy and that the very outgoing Neal possessed qualities that he would like to have had himself.

However she said that Jack 'embellished' a lot in his books. For instance she said that Neal never came to the door naked, he just wouldn't. She said that she had had a strict upbringing and wouldn't have gone out with Neal if she had thought he was a tear-away. He struck her as a perfect gentleman - honest, charming, intelligent, thoughtful, considerate.

She said that Jack recorded in *On the Road* that Neal picked her up in a bar. She said that in those days she never went into bars.

She said modern fans forget the times that they were living in. The 'thirties and 'forties were strict, conventional times. They were a conventional group.

Steve Turner picked her up here, saying: "Sleeping with your husband's best friend is hardly conventional, Carolyn."

'Well, no.....' (laughter from the audience)

Why did she think that Jack didn't record their (his and Carolyn's) relationship in *On the Road*? Carolyn said 'because of the conventions of the time, the publishers wouldn't have entertained it.'

She said that she didn't think that there was a Beat Generation, in her experience they were a group of artist in various fields (writers, poets, musicians, painters, sculptors) who happened to know one another, and for the most part dig what each other did.

She said that Neal was a great writer in letters to his friends but never had the application to sit down and write a book. He would get wound up for hours over which word to use, etc.

Questions were thrown open to the audience and they were naturally reticent, to get the ball rolling I stuck my hand up, as did another brave soul. She got the first question:

Why did Carolyn chose to live in England: Carolyn said her grandparents were English, and she loved it here. In earlier life she'd worked in the theatre and for any theatre lover London was a honeypot. She loved the culture and the history of England.

The mike was thrust into my hand:

"Carolyn, to many of us fans Kerouac was the most honest of writers. He didn't make up detective sto-

ries, no, he wrote about his experiences and many of the facts can be checked and are generally found to be true. But you say he invented situations?"

'Sure, if he found a book was getting a little staid he'd put something in to enliven it.'

She said she puts the record straight in her book *Off the Road*. 'But nobody bothers to read it.'

She said she enjoyed reading the original *On the Road* which she found fresh and bright, but wasn't so keen on the un-censored scroll version. She said that generally she doesn't read the Beats.

She said that she and Neal done a lot of spiritual searching, looking for 'it', the 'reason why we're all here' reading through Edgar Cayce and others. I got the impression that they (She and Neal) leaned towards the idea of reincarnation in their beliefs. And she said that that was what Neal and Jack were searching for *On the Road* - they weren't just out there for kicks.

It was suggested that Neal was busted for possessing Marijuana because as a Beat Icon the police wanted to make an example of him and get him out of the way, but, said Carolyn, that is ridiculous, he and Jack were unknown at the time, nobody knew who they were, least of all the police.

As an example of how staid the times were Carolyn said that when her mother learned that Neal had been put into prison, she suggested that having brought such disgrace on the family, he should kill his children.

Unlike Jack, Neal never drunk much, strong spirits upset him.

Steve Turner pointed out that Neal was very unconventional at the end when he joined Ken Kesey's *Merry Pranksters*. Taking drugs and such.

'Yes, but by then I'd lost him, he was trying to destroy himself, he and Jack had a death wish'.

The Gary Snyder Interview

It's a big year for Gary Snyder, and somehow Beatdom snagged the shortest, weirdest interview he's given in his epic career as poet and environmentalist.

Shortly after the publication of the first issue of Beatdom, I entered into a short dialogue with Gary Snyder, the legendary Beat poet. I used an e-mail address that I never checked, and so did he. Consequently, the short exchange lasted for two years, as we both forgot to check our accounts.

The result of this correspondence was unclear for a long time. I'd learned nothing. I had gone into the interview with the intention of learning more about Snyder, and realised that while I would certainly speak to him again, the result of two years of 'interviewing' had been, well, zero. I had no words about Snyder. He had let on nothing about himself.

So then what is the point of this interview? Well, as you will see, there were questions asked and questions answered. However, the asking was all done by Snyder, and the answering was all done by me, David S. Wills...

Gary Snyder, I feel I must explain on account of nothing about him really emerging from this interview, was a key member of the Beat Generation. In some senses, one could argue he was not a Beat, but in others, he certainly was.

Snyder was friends with both Kerouac and Ginsberg, and many other members of the Beat Generation and the surrounding counterculture. He read his poetry at the famous Six Gallery reading, where Ginsberg changed the world with 'Howl'. He lived in Big Sur with Kerouac, and Kerouac wrote *The Dharma Bums* with Snyder in the role Cassady took for *On the Road*.

Snyder lived with Phillip Whalen and was friends with Kenneth Rexroth. Lawrence Ferlinghetti famously called him 'the Thoreau of the Beat Generation.'

However, there has always been a debate around Snyder's connection to the Beat Generation. Beatdom tries to ignore these arguments, and focuses on the artists connected to the Beats, but there is a revealing quote from *The Columbia History of American Poetry*, in which Snyder states:

The term Beat is better used for a smaller group of writers ... the immediate group around Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, plus Gregory Corso and a few oth-

ers. Many of us ... belong together in the category of the San Francisco Renaissance. ... Still, beat can also be defined as a particular state of mind ... and I was in that mind for a while.

Later, Snyder won the Pulitzer Poetry prize, became a noted environmentalist, and has translated poetry from Asian languages into English. He has been working at the University of California, Davis, for many years, and this year released a collaborative book with artist Tom Killion, called *Tamalpais Walking*.

Tamalpais Walking reunites the collaborating duo from *The High Sierra of California*, and is a biographical collection of art, poetry and stories about Mount Tamalpais, outside of San Francisco.

So there you go... A little information about Gary Snyder, just so you don't think I'm entirely remiss as a journalist after reading the following interview...



Gary,

I edit a small literary magazine called Beatdom, which focuses on the history of the Beat Generation, while promoting the writings of young authors inspired by Beat texts.

I would be honoured if you would consider engaging in a short e-mail interview with Beatdom, of perhaps just a few questions, regarding your involvement with the Beats, and your thoughts on the movement etc.

All the best,

David S Wills

David,

Sure, I'll do this, let's try 3 questions. Where are you and your magazine? What's your day job?

Best,

GS

Rainbow people
Shakamuni Buddha said
Even in the age of mappo
These people will not disappear
It is the rainbow bloodline

Gary,

Thanks for the reply...

1) I live in Dundee, Scotland, and I guess that's where the magazine is, too, although we have writers in America, Canada, Australia, England... Many places. It's this mad little city, though, where I'd say the heart of the magazine lies.

2) My day job doesn't really exist any more. I used to be a student, studying literature, and then I ran off to California to work on an organic farm. Farming was my favourite form of employment, but my visa ran out and I've never been able to afford the plane fare

back... And next month I'm moving to South Korea to teach English for a year, and to hopefully raise some funds to release a third issue of Beatdom. I guess then, that now Beatdom is my day job.

David

David,

Back to you. Are you in South Korea now? In Seoul? Teaching? I'll send you a few South Korea contacts.

yrz

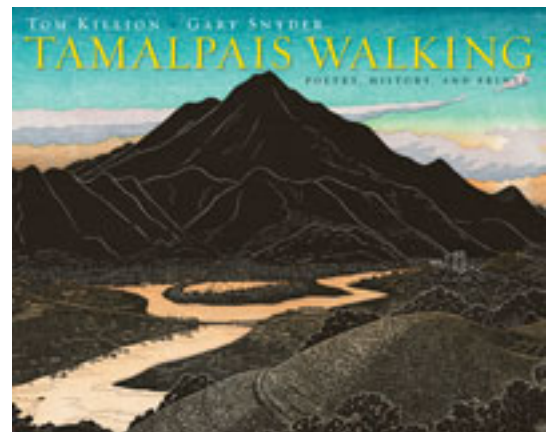
GS

Gary,

I'm in Korea right now and working as a teacher. Sadly this takes up most of my time. I actually live in Daegu, many miles South of Seoul. Seoul is an interesting city, though, and I go there once every few weeks. I'd love to meet some of your friends.

Let's continue this interview in Issue Five, and maybe then you could answer a few questions...

David



Now, if you somehow feel more compelled to read some Snyder after this mysteriously elusive interview, please check your local bookstore. However, for a copy of *Tamalpais Walking*, please consult the internet, as it's a limited item.

Tamalpais Walking is available through the publishers - Heyday Books - at their website, www.heyday-books.com

Jack & Edward

A short story by Rodney Munch, author of the forthcoming Poundland: The 'Novel'

The beach was almost empty, which was surprising given the warmth, and the fact that hours earlier there had been almost a million people crammed on to the little stretch of white sand. But now it was four in the morning and the sun had not yet begun to show. The temperature was perfect, though: not too hot, not too cold, and not threatening to go either way until midday pulled around. The moon lit the beach, and the water was perfect. For Jack and Edward, this was prime beach time in Busan. During the day there were too many freaks – Koreans in visors and surgical masks, cowering from the sun and terrified of the water, or paddling in shirt and tie, or moms spreading their children's cheeks while they shit on the sand... But now it was quiet. There were a few occasional shadows moving to suggest the presence of other people, but for the time being, Jack and Edward sat where the dry sand met the wet sand, in their swim shorts, and drank soju and aloe juice from the bottle. Both of them were wet from head to toe, yet warm in the heat. Both were drunk and ignorant of most of the previous twelve hours.

The water lapped on the beach quietly. The waves here never got bigger than on a lake with a small boat pulling around, casting ripples. The city was bright behind them, but out ahead was the darkness of water meeting sky, with only the few visible stars to separate them.

"It's not so bad out here," Jack said, staring into the distance. "We complain, but it's not so bad."

"Better than home."

"It is home now."

"Well, better than Scotland, anyway."

Jack didn't reply. There was no need to. They both thought the same and would have agreed with one another, so he took another drink of the surprisingly pleasant cocktail in his hand. It tasted of aloe and sea water, and felt grainy from the sand, but there was no trace of alcohol for the tongue to detect, in spite of the generous levels of soju.

"Would you ever consider going back?" Edward asked.

"You know I wouldn't."

"I don't mean to settle..."

"Oh, I'll go and see my parents and my grandparents. And as much as it drove me to leave, I wouldn't mind

a night out in Dundee. Just one."

"I miss it a bit."

Edward looked mournful, whereas Jack looked somewhat content. Even thinking of the past couldn't draw from the combination of life, his surroundings and the buzz that came from the soju and aloe.

"I love Busan," Jack said. "Every time I come it's such a relief to get out of Daegu. Hell, I love the beach, no matter where it is."

"I know you do, mate."

"I get crazy being land-locked, y'know?"

"I know."

"This is the first time I've ever been to the middle of a country. Scotland: by the sea. America: by the sea. Every vacation I've ever taken I've ended up by the sea. I love it. It takes my anger and grief and just disposes of it so easily. I put my feet in the water and it's washed from me like that."

Edward struggled to his feet and staggered to catch himself from falling. Then he lurched forward and stood in the water, his aloe bottle in hand. "Fancy washing some more grief away?"

Jack laughed a little and struggled to his feet. He dug a little pit and stuck his bottle upright in the sand, and then followed his friend into the water.

"I can't believe how warm it is," Edward said. He was ploughing further out, and even though there were no real waves, the movement of the ocean drowned his words a little.

"It's perfect."

They waded out until the water reached their nipples, and stood, looking back at the shore, now a long way off.

"You remember back in Dundee," Jack said. "On the bandstand last summer, after the Reading Rooms. And everything seemed to have gone to shit in life in the daylight, and there were people who didn't like each other and jobs were terrible and there was no money, and everyone was *so* bored... And then one night, pilled after the Rooms, we wandered to the bandstand: You, me, Craig, Olly... Singing 'Float On' as loud as we could... So happy it's impossible to recall, and skipping jumping like dumb school kids..."

"That was a night and a half, mate."

"We lay on the bandstand and stared at the roof. Not at the stars, though it was a clear night, and not on the

grass, though it was summer and it hadn't rained. We lay on the concrete and stared at the swirling wood, and swore we were never so happy."

"Aye right," Edward snorted.

"And we tried – like drug fiends do – to imagine all the turns of choice and fate that brought us together at that moment in time. Going back through the night was possible, but then through the years. Everything that made that moment, and everything that made everything was so fraught with the unlikely that we were convinced there was magic in the air. It kind of seems stupid now, without MDMA running through my veins, but in a way it's still relevant. I mean, how many unlikely things happened to bring us here this now, to experience this? And how many worse things could have happened?"

"I swear, mate, that my brain sleeps so peacefully because yours does all the work. I mean, you talk shite sometimes, don't get me wrong, but I don't think of anything. And if you thought half as much as you said, you'd be thinking more than I can imagine anyone's ever thought. And I imagine you think a lot more than you let on."

Jack thought about this, and started to wander back to shore.

"Let's go to Japan," he said.

Edward followed, laughing. "Fucking hell, mate, you're weird. But alright."

They pushed through the water and back to the beach, where Jack gathered his aloe bottle and the carrier bag full of beer, and started to walk along the beach.

"So what's the deal?" Edward asked.

"There's a boat along here. I saw it earlier but it didn't click."

"A boat?"

"A boat."

"You mean we're going to take a boat to Japan right now?"

"Uh-huh."

Jack was walking quickly on the hard, wet sand. Edward trotted along behind, desperate to keep up, but still confused as to why. When they arrived at the boat, they found it was a small rescue boat for the lifeguards to use. There were two oars inside, but no motor.

"Eh right," Edward snorted. "Pure shite."

Jack was already trying to untie the knots that helped keep it in place, and Edward overcame his caution to help because he was scared of someone seeing them. The quicker it got done, the less likely anyone would come along and ask them what they were doing.

Neither of them spoke for the two minutes it took to get the boat untied, and Edward assumed that at some

point Jack would give up the whole ridiculous thing, but he didn't. Once the boat was free, Jack started pulling at it. It was useless, and so Edward began to pull as well, and slowly the boat moved towards the water. As soon as part of it came in contact with the sea, the whole thing was as light as air and slid right in. Jack grinned, and Edward felt more confident. They were vulnerable to onlookers on the beach, but not so much in the water. Who'd notice a small floating boat?

"Row!" Jack whispered. Edward obliged. Together they rowed the boat quickly and quietly out into the bay. Every few seconds both nervously took a drink of their aloe and soju, and Jack could soon feel himself getting drunk and tired.

"I can't believe we're doing this," he said. Edward, however, was getting bolder and more excited. "Let's hold up here a bit."

"No no no," Edward shouted, getting frantic. "We're half way there, mate! Japan! Woo! Let's go let's go! Come on! Fuck this little Chinese province! Let's go to Japan! We're already come this far..."

Jack laughed at his friend's enthusiasm. Edward had always been a crazy bastard, and had only mellowed in recent times. This was classic Edward.

"No, I'm done. I'm going to bed." Jack played the bed card on account of his own proclivity towards falling asleep when drunk.

"Well good bye, mate! See you in Fukuoka!"

Jack laughed again, and this time tried to stand up. He got into a crouching position and took a swig of his soju and aloe, and then fell overboard. In the water, he kept laughing and waved at Edward as Edward pretended to row off away from shore.

Jack turned and swam back towards the shore. It was an incredible distance. They rowed through the swimming zone and through several lines of buoys into what was really just stupid and dangerous territory. But Jack was drunk. He had a head full of alcohol and now the buzz of excitement and stupidity intoxicated him further. He didn't care for distance because he was so sure of his own abilities, and he didn't look backwards because he knew his friend would be behind him, and that they'd meet on the beach and find their clothes, drink until lunch time, and then go home to Daegu as was the plan.

But Edward was nowhere to be seen when Jack stood on the sand. The sea was as still and calm as ever, and the sun was beginning to rise over the water, but the surface was unbroken by anything but the buoys.

Poetry

Scroobius Pip

The writing half of dan le Sac vs. Scroobius Pip is one of the world's brightest hip hop stars. They bring intellect to the genre, and use words and music intelligently to create brilliant modern art.

Their first album, *Angles*, is one of the best contributions to the world of music in recent years. The lyrics to two of the songs, 'Magicians Assistant' and 'Letter from God to Man', were submitted by Mr. Pip to Beatdom, along with a poem called 'Jack & Rosa'. These lyrics demonstrate the thought behind the songs, and place them as stand-alone poems worth of respect even without a beat.

Letter from God to Man

Hey there
How's it going?
Long
Time
No
See.

I know I haven't been around much but it didn't seem like you wanted me to be.

The last time I sent down a message, you nailed it to a cross.
So I figured id just leave you to it and let you be your own boss.

But I've been keeping an eye on you, I have. And it's amazing how you've grown.
All your technological advances and the problems you've overthrown.

And all the beautiful art you've created with such grace and such finesse.
But I must admit there are a few things that, I'm afraid, have impressed me less.

So I'm writing to apologise for all the horrors committed in my name.
Although it was never what I intended I feel I should take my share of the blame.

A lot of the good that I tried to do was corrupted when organized religion got into full swing.
What I thought were quite clear messages were taken to unusual extremes.

My teachings were taken out of context to meet the agenda of others.
Interpretations were taken in many different ways and hidden meanings "discovered".

Religion became a tool for the weak to control the strong.

With all these new morals and ethics survival of the fittest was gone.

No longer could the biggest man simply take what ever he needed,
Because damnation was the price if certain rules were not heeded.

Some of the deeds committed in my name just make me wonder where I went wrong.
Back at the start when I “created” all of this, the foundations seemed so strong.

See all the elements were already here long before I began.
I just kind of put them all together. I didn’t really think out a long term plan.

I made the sun an appropriate distance and laid the stars across the sky,
So you could navigate this globe or simply experience a sunrise.

I covered the earth with plants and fruits, some for sustenance and some for beauty.
And made the sun shine and clouds rain so there maintenance wasn’t your duty.

I tried to give each creature its own attributes. But without making them enveloped.
I gave you all space to grow and, in your own way, space to develop.

I didn’t know that such development would cause rifts and jealousy.
Cause you to war against each other and leave marks on this planet indelibly.

You see, I wasn’t the creator, more the curator of nature
And I want to set things straight with homosexuals right now: I DON’T hate ya.

I was a simple being that happened to be the first to yield such powers.
But I just laid the ground. It was you that built the towers.

It was you that invented bombs and fear that comes with them.
It was you that invented money, and corrupt economic systems.

You invented terms like “just wars” and terms like “friendly fire”,
And it was you that didn’t know when to stop digging deeper and when to stop building higher.

It was you that exhausted the resources I carefully laid out on this earth,
And it was you that even saw these problems coming but accredited them little worth.

It was you that used my teachings for your own personal gain
And it was you that committed such tragedies, even if they were committed in my name.

So I apologise for any mistakes I made and for when my words were misconstrued,
But this apology is to Mother Nature because I.....created.....you.

Magicians Assistant

Its tragic.
You try to cut yourself in half but this ain't magic
In fact its
Something far more dark and more dramatic.

Self harm
That's what they call it.
Because it just affects YOU
It's YOUR life
YOUR body
So YOU can choose what YOU do
And if one day you can't rein it in and of your last breath you are the only witness?
Then so be it because its YOUR last breath and its nobody else's business.

But...how about your little sister?
I mean you think your life's been bad
And by no means am I belittling that because I know the troubles you've had
But a teen finding out her big sister chose death over life.
Finding out that instead of turning to her with your problems, you turned to a knife.
That's a whole lot of pain to deal with, and a whole lot of damage
And the only roll model she has now is little more than words engraved in granite

But as you said before, this is just effects YOU
It's YOUR life
YOUR body
So YOU can choose what YOU do
And if one day you can't rein it in and of your last breath you are the only witness?
Then so be it because its YOUR last breath and its nobody else's business.

But...how about your parents?
God knows they've done all they can to support.
Yeah you didn't grow up in a mansion but they gave you the best life they could afford.
And the second that last bit of life trickles out and your lungs cease to breath
They have failed the most important task and test they will ever receive.
They have failed to give their child a life that's worth living
And that's a failure that, as long as they live, of themselves is unforgiving.

But as you said before, this is just effects YOU
It's YOUR life
YOUR body
So YOU can choose what YOU do
And if one day you can't rein it in and of your last breath you are the only witness?
Then so be it because its YOUR last breath and its nobody else's business.

But...how about your friends?
How did they fail to see this coming?
I mean you can only hold so much pain and recently it seems like the tap has been left running.
Families grow distant but it's meant to be your friends you can rely on
They shouldn't just be there for the fun and the drinks; they should also be a shoulder to cry on.
They should be the ones you go to when you can't talk to your family
But they've failed too, because although you didn't ask for it, there support should have been mandatory





Photo © Charlie Salazar

But as you said before, this is just effects YOU
It's YOUR life
YOUR body
So YOU can choose what YOU do.
And if one day you can't rein it in and of your last breath you are the only witness?
Then so be it because it's YOUR last breath and it's nobody else's business.

But then...what about me?
What kind of boyfriend am I?
Instead of living a life I was a big part of, you would rather die.
Instead of fighting through together and turning things around
You decided the grass was greener on the other side of the ground
Of our shared lives there was nothing worth living for as far as you could see
And if that's the case what is there left in this life for me?

But as you said before, this is just effects YOU
It's YOUR life
YOUR body

YOUR sister
YOUR parents
YOUR friends
And YOUR partner
So YOU can choose what YOU do.
And if one day you can't rein it in and of your last breath you are the only witness?
Then fuck everybody else, because that ain't something you've got to live with.

Jack & Rosa

Now here's a little story id like to tell
About two young lovers you know so well

It wasn't Romeo and Juliet or Casanova
The one was called Jack and the other Rosa

Rosa first encountered this new boy next door
When she moved house at the age of four

She was keen to make a friend in this new habitat
So she would play out in the streets and see who would react

Now in this particular neighbourhood, in this particular borough
Rosa's family were the only ones of different colour

This could be awkward when she met new kids
Coz at that age all know is the street where you live

But Rosa had been taught skin colour shouldn't effect
Who you choose to give your friendship and to give respect

Jacks Dad had passed away so he just lived with his mother
And Rosa seemed nice so they hung out with each other

They would meet at Mr Bronka's video shop every day
Whiling away the hours with all the different games that kids play

They'd play Commando, Run-outs, Rounders and Icky Sticky Glue
Pogs, Micro Machines and Ring Raiders to.

They'd watch Mask, Visionaries, Centurions and He-Man
Thundercats, Penny Crayon and the Get-A-Long Gang

They lived every single day in their own little world
Until Rosa was 10 and Jack was 12

From when he first started school Jack had always excelled
And due to this he was to be propelled

Into a private boarding school where his mind could flourish
The kind of school where creative minds like Jack's would be encouraged

So on Jack went towards a glistening career

Whilst Rosa was left on her own back here

Jack would visit Rosa at the end of each term
And share with her all of the new things he had learnt

Everytime Jack would visit it felt like nothing had changed
But in reality Rosa's life was no longer the same

Jack didn't see this because Rosa kept it from her friend
Because each visit made her feel like they were kids again

There still weren't many others kids with Rosa's skin
With Jack by her side she'd always felt she fit in

But, without Jack, Rosa felt isolated and detached
So if someone showed her attention she would show it right back

To feel loved Rosa was loose with her affections
Many a boy would grace her bed, with the occasional infection

A kind word was all guys needed as a prerequisite
To get the right to tide over Rosa till Jacks next visit

Jacks life, now at Uni, couldn't be more different
Of the perils of distraction he was always vigilant

Three girls came close, as did one boy
But Jack was focused on uni so they had no joy

Jack would often think of Rosa in that special way
But he just figured, with the distance, it wouldn't help to say

So he continued with his work until one rainy day
Like a bolt out of the blue a phone call came

Jacks mother had grown ill and she needed him there
So he was on the first train to administer care

On the journey home mortality was on Jack's mind
And the rarity of cases of true love that you find

This unfortunate event had made him think things over
And it made him face the feelings that he had for Rosa

He sent a text that said "Hi Rosa, its Jack
I'm coming home and need to talk to you when I get back

I'll be around for a while as my mothers grown ill
And I need to talk about us and the way that I feel."

Rosa didn't know how to feel about Jack's return
She missed him loads but what about the things he would learn?

When Jack heard about her long list of guys
Would he still look at Rosa through those same old eyes

Rosa decided it was best that it came from her
Instead of him hearing all the rumours, nicknames and the slurs

Rosa text "Meet me at Bronka's on your way to your mums place
Then we can walk home together at a leisurely pace."

When he saw Rosa, Jack couldn't hide the smile from his face
But Rosa feared that warm smile was soon to become misplaced

Jack said: "Rosa I need to tell you how I feel about you
Rosa said: "Jack that's fine, but before you do

I need to bring you up to speed on 1 or 2 stories
That I don't want you to hear from someone else before me."

Rosa proceeded to unravel tales of her previous conquest
She left nothing out electing to be painfully honest

Jack's reaction? Well that was one of sheer stunned silence
But Rosa figured that was better than tears or violence

Jack said: "Rosa I came to say I want to spend my life with you
But maybe you aren't the Rosa that I thought I knew..."

"Stop right there Jack" Rosa interrupted
"I'm still the same girl that you've fallen in love with

The same girl that was your best friend when we were growing up
And the same girl that regrets every single guy that i.....

I was lonely and confused but now that you are here
Everything I want from life has never been so clear"

Rosa stepped forward and tentatively kissed Jack
And to kiss her back was the only way for Jack to react

And with that they agreed to make a lifelong pact
To set their sites towards the future and never look back

Jack left then and went to his mothers bedside
In the same house and street in which he used to reside

When he saw his mum he realised just how much he had missed her
And he hoped the news he had, of him & Rosa, might lift her

He said "Mum I've got some news that will make you feel better
Rosa and I, after all these years, have got together

We are going to get married and we are going to have kids
We are going to start a life together and get some where to live

Jacks mother placed a hand on each side of his head
She looked her son in the eyes and softly she said

“Rosa is a lovely girl and she’s been a great friend
But all this silly talk of starting a family must end

Now I know its old fashioned but it must be known
Throughout this families great history we’ve always stuck to our own

Its not “racism”, its simply pride in our heritage
Where you come from is more important than where you currently live.”

With that her head dropped, her eyes started to close
Jack held his mothers hand as a tear ran down his nose

But her last words really served to rip Jack in two
She said “Jack, I want my grandchildren to be black like you.”

Well that line right there put Jacks head into a spiral
He loved Rosa but surely his mothers dieing wish was final?

He understood his mother’s genuine Jamaican pride
But issues of the heart were surely his to decide?

Deep down he knew his aunts and uncles would feel the same
As his mother did and that just left him reeling with pain

He walked out of the house right there and then
And never saw another member of his family again.

Nathan Dolby

Nathan is an old favourite of Beatdom’s. He has been somewhat of a regular in our poetry section, and we will do whatever it takes to make sure this young poet is recognised as the next Ginsberg.

Nor wait with baited breath
For my inevitable slaughter

I wish for nothing
But wait for everything
And one day, my world
Will
Crumble

Disgust

It is my twentieth year
Beneath the sky
And I still have callous dreams
And I wait for the Earth
To burn

I pay no attention to
The cries
Nor care about bullets and mortar

The Destitute

They are calling me.
The destitute are calling
They need suffering to survive
They need nothing to prosper
They are everything that
They desire to be
They are ultimately,
Painfully and catastrophically free!

Alene Lee, a.k.a Mardou Fox

Subterranean Muse

Alene Lee is the real name of The Subterraneans' Mardou Fox, and of Irene May from Big Sur and Book of Dreams. Little is known about her, as she fell from the unwanted spotlight. She isn't even acknowledged in books devoted to the women of the Beat Generation.

We have seen photos of her, and we know part of her racial heritage – black & Cherokee. We know Kerouac met her as she typed manuscripts for Burroughs and Ginsberg in New York. But her words are lost. Her memory exists only in the macho boasts of Kerouac...

More than likely you're wondering, "Who the hell is Alene Lee?" And that, my friends, is exactly the point. We can look at pictures of Ms. Lee and see that she was dark, beautiful, unsure, and volatile. Yet this is only scratching the surface, presumably more lies beneath the surface. . . Right?

Granted, the above-mentioned are fantastic descriptors that I'm sure any woman would settle for, but Lee had to be more than that. Through one tabloid-esque fictionalization of her spontaneous relationship with Mr. Kerouac in the Beat classic *The Subterraneans* as the maddening Mardou Fox, Lee became the looming question mark of the Beat generation. By all accounts, an enchanting but volatile whirlwind of a woman.

Easily, *The Subterraneans* is a re-telling of the tumultuous thunder of Jack and Alene (Leo and Mardou respectively). Lee maintained however that upon reading the book she was stunned. Jack, she said, was so excited to show it to her and then, in her eyes, the manuscript turned out to be a harsh and unforgiving account that was maybe just a little too revealing of the personal side of their respective egos.

Apparently there's a problem on our hands now. Jack

writes a best-selling book that Alene claims is an absolute sham. So, who's got it straight? Did things really go down like Jack said or is he just another classic male bullshit artist? A slave of the ego. These questions can probably best be answered by first determining who she really was...

By all published accounts (the few that there are), Lee's essence was that of the queen of cool. A high priestess in the realm of that crowd Jack tagged infamously as the Subterraneans. She hit the trippiest drugs, drank the stiffest drinks, knew about and listened to the hardest bop, and did it all with a collected, smoky exterior. Men fell at her feet muttering drunken praises. Cup of wine in hand at Dante's. espousing the virtue of the *nouveau* cool.

At least, this is how he paints her in the beginning. As the novel progresses we see her devolving into an emotional train wreck. She's all ups and downs and binges into dark depression and hopeless emotional attachment to Jack. Things are much darker when you step behind the circus doors. Exteriors of shimmering cool are most often built on foundations of volatile instability.

Was this why Lee felt such a cold-water stun at reading the manuscript? Having one's soul bared open and critiqued is a moment of pain and vulnerability. Within the context of the novel she seemed aware of her emotional traumas and tendencies towards madness, yet that was a personal side of an experience she shared with Jack. Their moments together were shared in bed, with the lights off, amidst wine and dark-eyed companionship. They were shared in trust. To then have the contents of this trust betrayed into daylight for a public audience to view at will... that is a low-blow. Right into the gut. The kind of blow that gives you those cheese grater guts, and really, what are you supposed to do? It's like drinking bitter wine... a cold emotional slap. The relationship thrown back at her. There... Did it taste as good as you thought it might?

Of course, let's try to take this objectively. We'll presuppose Jack's painting of Lee is accurate. Lee really was just a fuming mass of unpredictable feminine wiles. Does he have the right to put these details in a book? We might immediately jump to a decisive no. It was a personal experience between two lovers that should have remained private. Well, sure that's all well and good, but what the hell is the whole basis of literature? Experience. Life. The muse. Inspiration comes from somewhere. Stories rot out from something. Let's not write this off as something to be vaulted and set aside. Propriety is an illusion.

Run right along, alone little dog.

Maybe the Beach Boys were right. Wouldn't it be nice if this were a completely different scenario? What if Jack was getting played? What if we were all getting played... The whole thing a mocking dirty sham. Lee's a brilliant scholar working on a sociological grant from Berkley to conduct a study on Frisco's underbelly. Roaring youth counterculture class mash. She's playing it up. The queen. The butterfly. Move in for the kill. Jack's the prey. Isn't it great? That tortured artist that he felt so strongly about embodying. Splitting time between home, mother, writing, work productivity. . . then booze, women, madness, dark, night, evil. Teetotalling between Catholicism and Alcoholism in a hail of madness. And Lee's just soaking it up. Loving it. Provoking him, creating him, watching and waiting and wrenching. Page after page of theory work being sent back to the school. The professor is laughing, tenure at his doorstep. A brilliant social statement. Capturing the essence of the solitary rebel. After all, there were those countless thru-the-night-into-dawn times she'd sit alone reading thru anthologies and classics and theory and again and again.

Of course, life is not quite so fortunate in its doling out, no matter how much you might read. Lee wasn't a shiny scholar from Berkley. She wasn't a scholar of anywhere. Lee was just a cold-water flat girl off Heavenly Lane. Running around in rags and raggedy windblown hair. Sure, the goddess of cool. Smoked out withdrawals and all.

They were both mad. Her and Jack. Mad for each other, for the kicks, for that salty coastal air that chaps your lips and spark jumps your heart full of shutter-closed closeness and disaster.

We're starving here.

Where are we going now?

Let's remember Lee's own words:

These were not the times as I knew them. . .

So why had Kerouac seen them as such? Perhaps his egocentric mindset blocked him from emotional connection. Sexual experience served only to stimulate his creative mind. Of course that would mean reducing all interaction with Lee to solely a sexual endeavor of experiential function. He had just read Reich's *The Function of the Orgasm* which sparked and nurtured this fleeting idealism about relations. Release of sexual energy and tension frees the creative mind. To run right out the door straight home to the typer for day upon day of firing off inkspot ammunition onto page after page into a cup of literary excellence. The forthcoming novel to end all novels. Bound up sexual tension constricts the wellspring. Alene Lee was a jungle-gym. Mark Twain's laughing all over again.

But let's not make her out to be a saint just yet. Granted, we can logically assume that, given Jack's egocentric stance combined with a slight tendency towards chauvinism, he may have blown some events out of proportion. Maybe even made up a few of them. It was a book, after all, so let's cut him at least a length of slack for a minute.

Even still, despite what he may or may not have whipped out of thin air. . . where does that leave us with the ending? What do we do about that? There's Lee's downfall. Sleeping with Yuri. The final turn of the screw in Jack's madness. One step over the line and such.

I'll tell you where it leaves us: It leaves us at the end of a story. And I'll tell you where it leaves Alene Lee: At the end of a story.

It seems that the "Lee Problem" is one of perception. It is quite and commonly possible for two people to be involved with each other and for each of them to be taking completely different elements out of the situation. To be seeing things under totally different lens. The two might agree the sex last night was great but they might have polar opposite reasons for thinking such. Come on, what's more vague than the term "great sex?" In fact, even more than that, they are probably coming from completely different

foundations for judging such situations. The night's events might have been great for the lady because she finally felt fulfilled and appreciated while the experience was great for the guy just because the lady was such a physical maelstrom; which could of course play a hand into why she felt fulfilled: He's operating on a pulsating level of intensity due to being so aroused by her physical attributes; this intensity translates in turn to an overwhelming work of sensory reception for the woman. Thus, it becomes the most cataclysmic event of her sensual and emotional life. The question is... where are we drawing the line? Is he just in for the kicks? Is she just in for the kicks? Was it a great big overwhelming kick for the both of them, or was it something more for her, something more for him?

This is, of course, a microcosmic example of problems involving perception. Yet it can still be applied to the Lee situation as a whole. Maybe they were just worlds apart. On completely different planes of thinking and experiencing life. But everything's got to intersect at some point. Some vector of divination juxtaposing two separate identities for a brief while. Suspending starvation and stability for a half-cocked shot at tranquility.

More death. This is getting swept away. Not under the rug, but out the door. It's been exposed to the elements too long. I'm losing it.

Where are we left now? Back to a dark and beautiful shade. The high priestess of hip looking down from wherever it is the hipsters go to die and reign eternally in those cyclical cultural waves. We're in a maze or a whirlpool and I'm getting less and less sure of what it is.

Maybe Jack, for all his allegations and insecurities, had Lee figured out. He had at least figured out a way to preserve her, you can argue in what light and reference, but she's there still. Locked in the amber of Jack's mind... page 42... gazing at Lee on the bed...

"...so Mardou seen in this light, is a little brown body in a gray bed sheet in the slums of Telegraph Hill, huge figure in the history of the night yes but only one among many. . ."

The Beat Generation may have been only one roaring night in the scheme of literature, and Lee was just the screaming distraction between drink six and drink seven. You know there was something there. You just

can't pin it down exactly.

That's the way it goes with nights like that. Nights like Alene Lee. And so she'll slip even further into the murky waters of literature's muses. Obscured by time.

And now, a closing word from our sponsor. . .

Letter from Ginsberg to Snyder. Dated January 1, 1991. Contains following excerpt:

Spent a day with old love black lady Alene Lee hospital bed dying of cancer, near expiration, the room space seemed calm, grounded -- extremely peaceful -- perhaps her mind in that state so open and gentle i sense it -- felt very good -- carried me for days. . .

End transcript.

There isn't a lot of additional reading available out there on the subject of Alene Lee. People are happy to write her out of history and move on. They don't need more than a fictional character in a book to be satisfied.

But here at Beatdom we always want to know more, and thanks to the following clues from Dave Moore (the Kerouac expert who brought you two articles in this issue), here is a list of places you can go to find out more:

Kerouac, Jack, *Book of Dreams*

Kerouac, Jack, *Big Sur*

Kerouac, Jack, *The Subterraneans*,

Knight, Arthur, *The Beat Journey* (p. 172)

Knight, Arthur, *The Beat Vision* (p. 208)

Morgan, Bill, *The Beat Generation in New York* (p. 125)

Sandison, David, *Jack Kerouac: An Illustrated Biography* (p. 106)

Saroyan, Aran, *The Street*

Turner, Steven, *Angelheaded Hipster* (p. 142)

The Plurality of Beat Spirituality...

'The world is holy! The soul is holy! The skin is holy! The nose is holy! The tongue and cock and hand and asshole are holy! – Allen Ginsberg

by Lee McRae

In the twenty-first century many do not find much need to cling so readily to a spiritually all-omnipotent, all-divine, transcendental figure. Nor do people need to. Our lives are spent conceptually designing our self-entertainment, our lifestyles and our loves. In the wake of modernity and the highly empirical nature of the twenty-first century, one is left with very little time to examine the nature of reality, the construct of life and the divine. It is here where we can learn from the Beat Generation. The Beats, with their opposition to the materialism of 1950s America, found time to awaken to the spiritual and the transcendental whilst moving away from the clinical. For me the spiritual side of the Beats is an important aspect and one which has not had the full recognition it so rightly deserves. I am going to look at several key spiritual movements and people who have inspired the Beats. Literature around this subject tends to be biased towards the area of Buddhism and in particular Zen Buddhism; I hope to show that this is not merely the case and there are in fact a plethora of spiritual influences which affected the Beats, most of which pre-date Buddhist urges and awakenings.

It was Jack Kerouac who, in 1953, whet his appetite with the spiritual teachings of the Buddhist faith. By accident he picked up a copy of Dwight Goddard's *A Buddhist Bible*, when in fact he was searching for information on the Hindu faith. He was inspired to do so after reading Henry David Thoreau's book *Walden*. Thoreau, a nineteenth century philosopher and transcendentalist, explains how 'Simple Living' is the key to the spiritual enlightenment. When it came to the Buddhist faith the Beats tended to factor several of the major teachings from different areas, including Mahayana, Tantric practices and Zen. Tantric practises gave the Beats sexual independence where Zen offered the Beats a

sense of freedom in their spontaneous expression, a freedom of free-thinking. So why Buddhism, why the reaction against the religious institutions of the West? In answering this we may as well start at the start and look towards the German philosopher Oswald Spengler.

Spengler compiled a two volume doctrine entitled *The Decline of the West*. This doctrine discusses the rise and fall of civilisations that, for the Beats, captured the spirit of their times. A copy of this text was first handed down to Jack Kerouac in 1945 as a present from William Burroughs and was to become important in several respects. Firstly, Spengler suggests that it is within the cultures of the East where a person may find their spiritual path and rescue them from the failing West, a notion that would have no doubt inspired Kerouac to see beyond the mono-cultural boundaries of 1950s America and to explore deep, both culturally and spiritually, into unknown territory. Secondly, Spengler suggests that it is those who are downtrodden and downbeat who will prevail when social structures collapse. Spengler denotes these as the 'fellaheen', a term originally ascribed to an Arabian peasant or labourer.

Ginsberg, Kerouac and Burroughs found that the 'fellaheen' were all around them in America; the underclass, the racially marginalised and the generally inferior were all considered to be part of this much darker but all the more real existence. Kerouac came to call these 'the subterraneans', where Ginsberg preferred the term 'desolation angels'. Kerouac would spend a great amount of time exploring African-American culture, detailing the music and finding his home amongst the late-night saxophonists in Harlem. For Burroughs his work is filled with dystopian passion, a deep and sordid look at the life of the underclass, a life he himself could profess to living, an existence formed around drug habits and

proletariat misgivings, un-publishable literature and homosexual desires.

In an article by Stephen Prothero entitled *On the Holy Road* he links the Spenglerian notion of the 'fellaheen' to two inspirational Beat figures, Neal Cassady and Herbert Huncke. Huncke was the embodiment of the 'fellaheen', the 'holy Creephood', who become the personification of Beat idealism. However, as Prothero tells us, by following the wayward instability of Huncke the Beats could have possibly turned their spiritual venture into an 'amoral, nihilistic apocalypticism'. It was only in the hedonism and voyeuristic stability of Neal Cassady where the Beats would begin a new route and move forward in their establishment of a 'New Vision'. What distinguished Cassady from Huncke was a criminality that was awash with pleasure, a larceny of delight regardless of economic reward. This led to Cassady being idolised as a free-thinking Beat contemporary, or as Ginsberg coins in his poem 'Howl', 'secret hero of these poems, cocksman and Adonis of Denver – Joy to the memory of his innumerable lays of girls'. So, was Spengler an important influence upon the Beats on their journey into the 'New Vision'? Possibly so, but as you probably have gathered, the Beats had a multitude of influence and inspiration from a range of movements, intellectuals and spiritual figures. Let us move forward to the movement known as transcendentalism.

So what is transcendentalism? Put simply it is the prioritising of the spiritual or intuitive over the material or empirical. American transcendentalism was a movement which began in the nineteenth century with writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. The catalyst for the movement was an essay written in 1836 by Emerson, entitled *Nature*. Inspired by German idealism and English Romanticism, the transcendentalists compiled a series of thought based on the nature of how we exist and view the world around us. Transcendental idealism, the term from which transcendentalism is derived, comes from the term applied to the philosophies of Immanuel Kant who proclaimed 'all knowledge transcendental which is concerned not with objects but with our mode of knowing objects'. John Tytell in his Beat book *Naked Angels*, tells us how, in many ways, the Beats paralleled the American transcendentalist movement of the nineteenth century.

The Beats' ideas of reformation, revolt and

revolution hold roots among the great thinkers of this period. Thoreau, as Tytell notes, had an 'essentially conservative distrust of machines and industry', a 'desire to return to the origins of man's relations to the land'. The poet and transcendentalist Walt Whitman, whom I have not yet mentioned, was also of great importance in the construction of Beat idealism. Whitman influenced much of Ginsberg's poetical work with the use of the long-line, as well as influencing the Beats spiritually with his connection to the American transcendentalist movement. Whitman was a true Beat ancestor: he had strong political views that sort to reform America, he refused to accept gender roles and he held an interest in the religions of the East. Like some of the Beats, Whitman's work was deemed obscene with overt sexual references and homosexual nuances.

Emerson, perhaps the most important practitioner in this movement, was a spiritual tactician who explored the inner spirituality of the self. During his lifetime Emerson investigated the Hindu scriptures in his attempt to make contact with the sacred on the nonverbal level, to be inspired on intuition alone and to find the divine within nature. Emerson taught that 'Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members'. In 1963, Timothy Leary, a writer, avid friend to Burroughs and advocate of psychedelic drugs, was fired from a teaching post at Harvard, yet for Leary this was something of an honour as Emerson, too, had once been fired from Harvard in 1838, after evangelically urging his students to renounce organised Christianity and to find God within.

So far I feel I have not spoken very much about the Beat writer William Burroughs and I think this is understandable, for Burroughs lacked the spiritual urges of his counterparts and had very little faith or interest in the Buddhist religion either. In Lawrence Coupe's book *Beat Sound, Beat Vision*, Burroughs is in fact dismissed entirely and focus is placed mainly on Kerouac and Ginsberg for the reason that Burroughs did not particularly have this spiritual side to him as did the others. Ted Morgan, in his biography of the writer entitled *Literary Outlaw*, speaks of an interesting meeting Burroughs had in 1975 at his time spent at the Naropa Institute, Colorado. The institute brought like-minded individuals together as well as cultivating the spiritual side using Buddhist philosophy. During his time spent there Burroughs

watched carefully the Tibetan monk known as Trungpa. Burroughs became more and more cynical about the holiness of this man and, as Morgan notes, 'Trungpa did not appear to be a model of ascetic behaviour, with his drinking, his chain-smoking, and his habit of asking his female devotees to become his concubines'. Perhaps rightly so Burroughs was weary about how devoted his Buddhist associates were to the religion and the lifestyle that was expected of them. After dinner one night Burroughs noted that 'in 3,000 years the Buddhists have not come up with the answer to the question: What is the real nature of the word?'

Burroughs was not the only person to doubt the Buddhist awakenings of the Beats either. Alan Watts, writer of *The Way of Zen*, who had a part in popularising Buddhism throughout the counterculture, famously said that Kerouac had 'Zen flesh but no Zen bones'. Even Gary Snyder, 'Zen lunatic' and prodigy in the Kerouac novel *The Dharma Bums*, believed that Kerouac had not taken much at all from the religion. He believed Kerouac had only taken the Buddhist idea of 'emphasis on compassion' and the extension of time and space. As for Ginsberg, Buddhism, with the help of Kerouac as a spiritual guide, became his life-love and his joy and would write and study a great deal around the subject, venturing into many different areas of practice. Where Ginsberg would continue his practice of the religion, Kerouac, in the years before his death, became dissatisfied with the teachings and returned his faith to Catholicism. In the last year of his life, in an interview for the *Paris Review*, Kerouac was questioned as to why he had written and placed his faith in Buddha and not Jesus; Kerouac retorted angrily at the question, saying 'All I write about is Jesus!'

Kerouac, in a scene from *The Dharma Bums*, asks the character Japhy – the real Gary Snyder – 'What's wrong with Jesus? Didn't Jesus speak of Heaven? Isn't Heaven Buddha's Nirvana?' To which Japhy replies 'According to your own interpretation'. In this same conversation Kerouac tells us how he feels 'suppressed' by this need to separate 'Buddhism from Christianity, East from West, what the hell difference does it make?' Later in the book Japhy makes a comparison between Kerouac and the Buddhist author Dwight Goddard. Goddard, like Kerouac, spent much of his life in celebration of the Buddhist faith but then, approaching the end of his life, devoted himself to the Bible and Christian teachings. What

I see in Kerouac is a conflict, this need to retain a sense of his childhood leanings toward Catholicism, his later love for Buddha, the transcendental divine, and the appreciation of nature, all of which is well documented in his novel *The Dharma Bums*.

So what can we assess from this conflicting, plurality of spirituality, other than that it cannot be reduced to a simple sentence declaring the Beats as Zen? For one thing we can appreciate that the area of spirituality, in particular, caused a great conflict of views between the principal Beat writers. What started off as an avid interest in spirituality, the divine and transcendentalism, soon filed off into several conflicting routes. Kerouac in particular was greatly influenced by nature and transcendentalist writings but found a conflict between the religions of East and West and found it difficult to so readily disregard Catholicism all together. Ginsberg's formal understanding and study of Buddhism came later on in the 1970s and was to become the basis for much of his influence both musically and lyrically. For anyone who has read Jane Kramer's *Allen Ginsberg in America* will note, the book seems structured mainly around the chanting of 'Om' at every appropriate occasion or Ginsberg opening a case to reveal a harmonium to which he begins to play. For Burroughs, there is much less emphasis in his life on religion. Most notably were his interest, appreciation, as well as criticism of Scientology, which he believed would be very useful but held a certain scepticism regarding the organisation itself.

This account can only act as an introduction to the Beats and issues of spirituality and there are many more ideas and areas that could have been discussed: Ginsberg's 'mystical visions and cosmic vibrations' which unveiled in the form of a hallucination of the English romantic poet William Blake and Gary Snyder's enthusiastic and influential study of Buddhism, are to name only two. I hope though this piece forms, at least, an invitation to the reader or scholar to discover more about a complex and intriguing web of relations and attitudes to the religious which underlie the Beat odyssey.

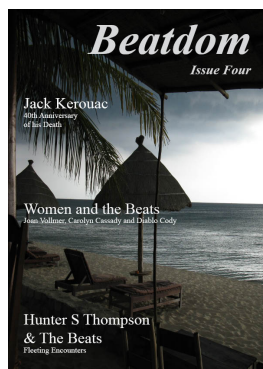
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